

DYNAMICS OF POLITICAL INEQUALITY OF VOICE: ROMANIAN AND POLISH WOMEN'S PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION SINCE 1945

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ABSTRACT². Across Eastern Europe, despite radical changes to the political environment – including the postwar period, the revolutions of 1989, the post-Communist era and the rise in power of the European Union in the early 21st Century – in comparison with men, women always have had far fewer representatives in national legislatures. How can this be? In this article I compare Romania and Poland from the postwar period to now to critically examine the causes and dynamics of women's unequal political representation. While gender inequality in various forms has been a constant feature, the characteristics of its relationship to political inequality – its form, duration and magnitude – changed over successive eras. I argue that much more research needs to be done to properly understand dynamics of, and links between, the history and the present of women's political inequality in Eastern Europe; as such I also criticize the extant literature and suggest directions for future social science inquiry.

Keywords: political inequality, women's political representation, gender, Eastern Europe

Introduction

In Eastern Europe, the historical record from 1945 to the present contains a puzzling phenomenon: Despite radical changes to the political environment – including the postwar period, the revolutions of 1989, the post-Communist era and the rise in power of the European Union in the early 21st Century – in

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comparison with men, women always have had far fewer representatives in national legislatures. How can this be? In this article I critically examine the causes and dynamics of women's unequal political representation in Eastern Europe from the postwar period to now.

Exploring dynamism in social structure begs the question: If social stratification refers to enduring inequalities, how are stratification structures simultaneously enduring and dynamic? To address this question in the context of this study, I regard stratification structures as comprised of multiple, overlapping inequalities. These inequalities interact within dynamic social and political environments, such that the stratification structure in one era can be quite different in another. In this study, I am concerned with the overlap between gender and political inequalities. I use empirical evidence to demonstrate that the outcome of the interaction between gender and political inequality has been the under-representation of women in national legislatures. While gender inequality has been a constant feature, the characteristics of its relationship to political inequality – its form, duration and magnitude – changed over time.

The current boom in the women in politics literature remains surprisingly scant on Eastern Europe, and this scholarship situation has negative consequences for understanding dynamics of women in politics in Eastern Europe. Much of what we know about women's inequality of representation since 1945 is non-comparative and Western in outlook. With few notable exceptions of cross-national research into women's representation (e.g. Paxton et al., 2007; Caul Kittilson, 2006; Krook, 2009), the gender and politics literature consists mainly of single country studies, most of which focus on either the United States (e.g. Carroll and Fox, 2006) or Western Europe (e.g. Krook, 2009). The few social science books dedicated to gender politics in Eastern Europe are edited volumes comprised of single country case studies and have been very useful; like most of their kind, however, they are not explicitly comparative (Wolchik and Meyer, 1985; Rueschemeyer, 1998; Matland and Montgomery, 2003; Rueschemeyer and Wolchik, 2009). Even more problematic, current research is relentlessly focused on recent developments of the post-Communist era and beyond³. Most discussions of the present do not often contain detailed connections to the past, an approach which obscures the enduring quality of Eastern European women's political inequality. Too little attention to the Communist past is too little context to appreciate the dynamics of political inequality, and how political inequality could be perpetuated⁴.

³ This can be explained, in part, by the timing of the "women in politics" literature boom: it occurred during the late 1980s/early 1990s, rising fast as the Communist era fell. In a form of social science journalism, scholars rushed to apply theories, concepts and methods of social and political inquiry, telling the world what was happening as it was happening. The flow of literature featuring Eastern Europe has slowed considerably in recent years.

⁴ A note on terminology: I follow Brown (2009) when I make reference to the state socialist era 1945 – 1989/91: I use Communism with a capital C to signify that the era was dominated by the Communist Party, and small c when referring to the ideology in general. Post-Communism follows the same logic.

In this article, the main question is: *How is Eastern European women's political inequality of voice perpetuated across time?* This article is designed to be part of the beginning of the answer. I argue that much more research needs to be done to properly understand dynamics of, and links between, the history and the present of women's political inequality in Eastern Europe. Along the way I find it necessary to criticize the social science literature on this topic on which I base this study.

While the past can be linked to the present, questions of comparability across countries and eras – in essence, the problem of functional equivalence of measurement and concepts (Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Slomczynski, 1998) -- present many challenges. How can we compare postwar countries that, after the revolutions of 1989, disappeared from the world map? How can we compare eras as diverse as post-World War Two Eastern Europe with 21st Century European Union? These challenges are complex and thus I proceed simply, and with caution. I begin by defining political inequality broadly as structured differences between social groups in influence over government decisions. Noting that political inequality comes in many forms, I examine a subset of political inequality, that of political voice measured by representation in political institutions (Dubrow, 2010). I examine political voice in terms of (a) presence of representatives in legislative bodies at the national level and (b) legal rights to equal political participation. I draw on the literature on descriptive representation (Mansbridge, 1999; see also Manin et al., 1999) to define women's under-representation as a situation in which the gender composition of the national legislature is substantially disproportionate in comparison to that in the population; in this case, well below fifty percent. To address comparability of countries, I compare two countries, Poland and Romania. Since the former Soviet Union played such a large role in postwar politics in Eastern Europe, secondarily some of the comparisons include it and its successor state, the Russian Federation. I try to make best use of the differences between eras: The comparison of Poland and Romania demonstrate how dissimilar contexts lead to substantial political under-representation of women, though of different magnitudes.

Gender and Political Inequalities in Four Eras

I examine ways in which Eastern European women have remained politically unequal to men across four eras: the postwar period of the Communist past (1945 to 1989), the transition and its aftermath (1989 – 1991), the post-Communist era (1989 – 2000s), and the rise of the European Union (2000s and onward). The following is a brief overview of these different political eras; in the rest of this article, I focus on details of how gender and political inequalities mixed and changed.

During the postwar Communist-era, officials thought that one of the most important principles of Communist ideology was to empower groups that had been historically disadvantaged. Women were among the disadvantaged groups that the regime sought to liberate. This meant an increasing participation of women in all spheres of public life, from university education and occupational attainment to parliamentary membership. As such, Communist ideology – in which the Party played the “leading role” - idealized descriptive political representation, which can be defined as the extent to which the composition of the political elite resembles the demographics and experiences of the citizenry. In the Soviet Union, Poland, and Romania, the Communist Party both praised women and actively sought to maintain traditional gender relations (Buckley, 1989; Nicolaescu, 1994; Einhorn, 1993; Siemienska, 1985; Fuszara, 2005, 2010). Throughout the Communist era, as political equality was extolled, gender traditionalism remained the norm of the land.

During the transition (1989 – 1991), Poland and Romania focused on democratization and economic reform, and gender and descriptive representation was not prominent on the agenda (Matland and Montgomery, 2003; Rueschemeyer and Wolchik, 2009). The immediate post-1989 drop in Polish and Romanian women’s parliamentary representation was a result of the political resurgence of pre-existing gender traditionalist attitudes and the new priorities of the young governments that struggled with the transformation and consciously relegated the inclusion of women and women’s interests to some unspecified future date (Einhorn, 1993; Kunovich, 2003)⁵. As the post-Communist era got underway, the gender-politics relationship that emphasized equality of the Communist-era was viewed by many of the political elite and the public as artificially and forcefully imposed by illegitimate rulers, and thus viewed with resentment (Siemińska, 2003). For some, the new democratization meant that political recruitment would be blind to demographics and against policies of positive gender discrimination. As Poland and Romania prepared for entry into the European Union, their public stance was to align their gender policies with EU gender policies, e.g. gender mainstreaming, and has been influenced by the international women’s movement.

⁵ The emphasis on legislative priorities is illustrated well by a quote from Olga Krzyżanowska, MP during the years 1989-2001, Deputy Speaker of the Parliament and then Senator: “First, it was too early for women’s rights, and then it was too late. Immediately after 1989, many MPs were of the opinion that the economy and politics were more important. I thought so too, in spite of being a woman. Because the problems of the transformation concerned everybody, regardless of sex.”

See p. 40 http://www.boell.pl/downloads/Gender_Issues_2009_WWW.pdf (May 1, 2012).

Dynamics of Representation Inequality

Examination of trends in women's representation in the national parliaments of the USSR/Russian Federation, Poland and Romania from 1947 to the early 21st century reveals that women's representation has always lagged far behind that of men, and never reached close to 50 percent (Figure 1). For most of the Communist era, USSR, Poland and Romania managed to keep the percent of women in parliament below 35 percent. Romania rose quickly to 35 percent in 1985. The high was short-lived as the transition of 1989 brought a radical decline in women's already low political representation. In the outcome of the partly open National Assembly elections of 1989, Polish women took only 13.5 percent of seats in the Sejm and 6 percent seats in the Senat. Romania represented the worst-case scenario, dropping to below five percent in the first democratically free election. In the 2000s, Poland and Romania have seen a gradual increase in women's representation, with Poland reaching over 20 percent and Romania reaching about 15 percent by 2011.

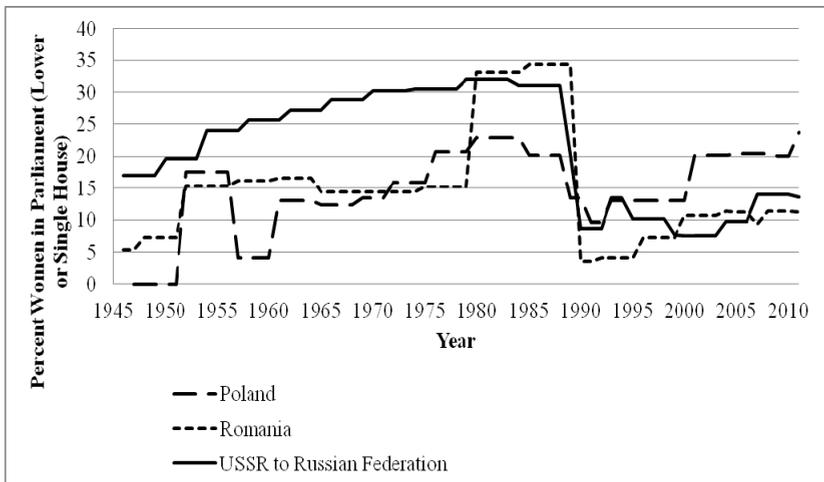


Figure 1. Percent Women in Parliament (Lower or Single House) in Poland, Romania and USSR/Russian Federation, 1947 - 2011⁶

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, the parliamentary representation of women remained low. Trend-wise, Poland and Romania are best characterized as slow rising with frequent plateaus. Between 1991 and 2007, women's parliamentary representation in Poland started at 9 percent of the Sejm, reached a plateau at 13 percent for two elections, and rose to a little over 20 percent in 2001, where it also remained after the elections of 2005 and 2007; in the elections of 2011, after the introduction of an electoral gender quota,

⁶ Author's calculations based on data from Paxton Paxton, Melanie Hughes, and Jennifer Green. 2009. *Women in Parliament Dataset, 1893-2003*, ICPSR data repository, and Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU) Women in Politics Database, 2004 - 2011.

the percentage rose to 24. Romania slowly climbed its way from below five percent to below fifteen percent, and since the 2000s has remained steady at about 12 percent. The Russian Federation vacillates between low and really low: they reached 13 percent in 1993, fell to 7.5 percent in the early 2000s, and reached above 13 percent again by the late 2000s.

Comparable data⁷ on the national level reveals that, on average, throughout the Communist era, women's representation in parliament in Eastern Europe was higher than the West⁸ (Figure 2). Immediately after the late 1940s, when there was no substantial difference between East and West, the average percent of women in Eastern Europe (measured here by Poland, Romania and the USSR) rose dramatically. This gap remained wide, and got even wider during the 1980s. Meanwhile in the West, after the 1960s, when the feminist movement in the West gained considerable strength, the West inched steadily upwards. The spectacular shift occurred in 1989, when the East fell sharply and the West continued its slow rise. By the early 21st Century, the gap was reversed.

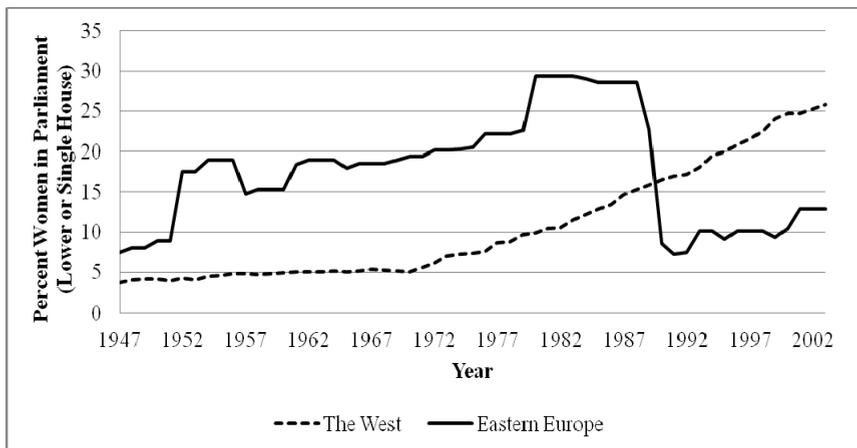


Figure 2. Percent Women in Parliament (Lower or Single House) in Eastern Europe (Poland, Romania and USSR/Russian Federation) and the West, 1947 - 2003⁹

⁷ It is worthwhile to point out a problem in the women in politics literature on this point. When discussing Eastern Europe, the implication is that during the Communist era, not just national, but also local governments featured a much higher percentage of women officials (elected and unelected) than local governments of the West. To my knowledge, however, there is no study that suggests that data on the local level in Eastern Europe under Communism are comparable to that of the West during that time. Such a study would be immensely useful.

⁸ I define the West as: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, and the United States of America.

⁹ Author's calculations based on data from Paxton Paxton, Melanie Hughes, and Jennifer Green (2009). *Women in Parliament Dataset, 1893-2003*, ICPSR data repository.

In studying Eastern Europe, it is important to make the distinction between descriptive and substantive representation (see also Celis, 2008). Substantive representation refers to advocacy and policy that reflects the diverse interests of the citizenry; such representation of interests comes from having one's voice heard in the legislature and translated into action (Mansbridge 1999). Women had lesser representation because (a) the parliament of which they were a part had very limited effective control over the legislative and policy process and (b) few women were members of the Communist party central committee, which was the main decision-making body under Communism. Data suggests that, in Poland and Romania, women's political representation followed Putnam's Law of Increasing Disproportion: "as the importance of the office increases, the proportion of women declines" (Wolchik, 1981: 458; for Poland, see Fuszara 2005: 293 and Chapter 4). From 1948 to 1976, women's representation in the Central Committee of Romania ranged from a low of 4,6 in 1965 to a high of 9,1; in Poland, the analogous numbers are 3,9 and 8,0. In Romania after 1976, the numbers jumped dramatically, but only because they had more room up than down: in 1979, women's representation climbed to 25 percent, and in 1984, to 28 percent (Wolchik, 1981; see also Olteanu et al., 2003). As a consequence, women still faced policy manifestations of gender traditionalism, such as pro-natal policies, restrictions on abortion, fewer positions in management and over-representation in low-skilled work (Buckley, 1997; Siemienska, 2003, 2009; Olteanu 2003). Thus, during the Communist era, a form of women's political inequality was under-representation not only in the relatively ineffectual Parliament, but also in key decision-making bodies whose decisions directly impacted women.

Dynamics of Legal Political Equality of Women and Men

To explain dynamics of representational inequality, we must make the distinction between formal rights, and the fulfilment of those rights (Dahl, 2006). A story from the Soviet era, as first told by Field (1968), begins to illustrate this point. On the eve of an election in March 1958, Khrushchev, General Secretary of the USSR Communist Party, gave a speech to prospective voters. In this speech he remarked on foreign visitors' amazement at seeing women engaged in snow and ice removal on the streets of Moscow.

"On this basis they maintain that our women are not honoured... It is hardly necessary to prove that Soviet women are held in great esteem, that they have not merely in words but also in fact equal rights with men in all areas of social and political life, as well as in production" (Field, 1968: 7, quoting from Pravda).

Khrushchev was likely paraphrasing Article 122 the USSR Constitution from 1936: "Women in the USSR are accorded all equal rights on an equal footing with men in all spheres of economic, government, political and other

social and cultural activity” (Field, 1968: 11). Khrushchev displayed either wishful or delusional thinking, for at the time (or any time after), women were not politically equal. True, by 1946, almost all countries of Eastern Europe had granted suffrage to women. However, legal political equality is far different from the actions taken to fulfil the promise of those rights.

In the Communist and post-Communist eras, legal political equality was enshrined in the constitution (Table 1). Due to Soviet domination of the region, the Romanian and Polish constitutions reflected the Soviet constitution, especially in the early versions. In all, at some point during the Communist era, women were guaranteed equal political rights, where the word “political” was specifically mentioned.

Table 1.

Constitutional Mentions of Women’s Political Equality in Romania and Poland, from Communist and Post-Communist Era

Country	Communist Era (1945 - 1989)	Post-Communist Era and Beyond (1991 - present)
Romania	<p>“Women have equal rights with men in all areas of the state, economic, social, cultural, political and private.” (Art 18, 1948; similar to Art 83, 1952)</p> <p>Changed to:</p> <p>“Citizens of the Socialist Republic of Romania, without distinction of nationality, race, gender or religion, are equal in rights in all economic, political, legal, social and cultural areas.” (Art 17, 1965)</p>	<p>“Romania is the common and indivisible homeland of all its citizens without distinction of race, nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion, sex, opinion, political affiliation, wealth or social origin.” (Art 4, 1991)</p> <p>“Public office or dignity, civil or military, may be filled by people who have only Romanian citizenship and domicile in the country.” (Art 16, 1991)</p> <p>Changed to:</p> <p>“Public office or dignity, civil or military, may be occupied, according to law, persons who have Romanian citizenship and residence in the country. The Romanian State guarantees the equality of chances between men and women to occupy such positions and dignities.” (Art 16, 2003)</p>
Poland	<p>“Women in the Polish People’s Republic have equal rights with men in all spheres of public, political, economic, social and cultural life.” (Art 66, 1952)</p>	<p>“All persons shall be equal before the law. All persons shall have the right to equal treatment by public authorities. No one shall be discriminated against in political, social or economic life for any reason whatsoever.” (Art 32, 1997)</p>

I argue that the post-Communist era was ruled by neoliberalism ideology that heavily influenced the relationship between gender and political inequality. Neo-liberalism is difficult to define, although many scholars have tried (e.g. Steger and Roy, 2010; Harvey, 2005). I use the term neo-liberalism in two ways: (1) as a belief that all social relationships occur in a market, in which we speak of “economic markets” and even “political markets;” (2) as a policy that these markets are most efficient and effective when they are self-regulating and mostly free from government intervention. In the first, the political market can be defined as an institution that governs the distribution of representation and other political goods (Dubrow, 2006a). In a political market, voters demand and parties supply demographic types of candidates under varying social structural constraints. This framework provides a spectrum of political market types, ranging from government interventions at one end to laissez-faire market solutions at the other. Government interventions include electoral quotas laws, reservations and other parity-inducing means; laissez-faire is the opposite of intervention. As a policy, neoliberal political market ideology entails a shift of emphasis from equality of outcome to equality of opportunities. Governments may formalize equality, but should be “anti-discriminatory,” defined broadly as not doing anything that would favour one demographic group over another for any reason whatsoever.

In the post-Communist versions of the Polish and Romanian constitutions, equal rights are maintained, but the “political” aspect has a different connotation: the focus is now on “anti-discrimination” in the context of a neoliberal ideology. The difference is meaningful. One could argue that in the constitutions of both the Communist and post-Communist eras, the focus is on equality of political opportunities, not equality of political outcomes. To understand these constitutions, we must place them within the context of the ideology of the era. In the Communist era the equality of rights guaranteed in the constitution was in the context of an ideology that, as socialist society progressed into communism, women would be equal in fact, i.e. outcomes, in all political aspects with men. In the post-Communist era, equal rights co-exist with neoliberal ideology, in which every group is left on their own to use the same formal rules afforded to them by law without any promises as to whether following these rules would eventually lead to equality. In the post-Communist era the right to stand for office is guaranteed – in Romania, in the 2003 version it is called, “the equality of chances” – but whether it would lead to women represented in parliament in proportion to their numbers in the population is not promised.

Under Communism, one prominent way to “fulfil” the promise of political equality of women – the so-called “women question” -- was through political groups formally run by women. The Women’s Department of the Russian Communist Party (Zhenotdel), established in 1919, was designed to amplify

women's voice in politics and make good on the promise of political equality; it was dissolved by Stalin in 1930, "declaring the 'women question' officially 'solved'" (Sundstrom, 2010: 233). Browning (1987) and Buckley (1997) emphasizes the gender division within the power structure of the USSR's Communist Party and gives a detailed description of the "Soviet Women's Committee" (SWC), or "zhensoveti." Comprised of women, the SWC's main role was to raise political consciousness and promote political participation at home and abroad. Olteanu (2003) reports on a similar group in Romania: She argues that "the strategic position of women in the party depended on their relation with the leader [Ceausescu], institutionalized through CNF (National Council of Women) and formalized base on kinship relations which those women had with the important members of the communist elite" (Olteanu 2003: 26). In Poland, this organization was called the National Council of Polish Women (Siemienska, 1985: 337), and it functioned in much the same way as in the USSR and Romania. While providing space for women to politically organize, the end result did not radically change women's descriptive or substantive representation.

Formal rights were occasionally matched by formal rhetoric, though the form and content changed over time. Buckley's (1989) landmark study of changes of gender ideology in the Soviet Union remains unsurpassed, and clearly shows that we should view Communist ideology as dynamic. Buckley argues that the extent to which the "woman question" was emphasized depended on the economic and political environment (for a summary, see pp. 12 - 16, and Chapter 7). According to Buckley, the political inequality of women was emphasized and discussed more openly in the 1920s (when women were needed to provide support for the revolution) and the 1950s (during another massive political upheaval following the death of Stalin in 1953), than in the 1930s and 1970s, when economic matters took precedence (rapid industrialization in the 30s, and the severe economic crisis in the 70s). In the 1980s, Gorbechev's reforms questioned everything, and naturally discussions of gender and political inequalities re-emerged.

To understand dynamics of the relationship between gender and political inequalities in Communist era Romania, Vese (2001) argues that there were two main eras: "the first lasted through 1945-1965, when the leader of the Romanian Communist Party was Gheorghiu-Dej and the second between 1965-1989 when the Party was led by the "ruling family", the Ceausescu" (268-9). There is surprisingly little in the English language literature about the political roles of women during the Gheorghiu-Dej era and most scholarship begin with Ceausescu era (Fischer, 1985, 1998; Kligman, 1992), perhaps because women's representation began its rise then.

Olteanu (2003) argues the first time Ceausescu starts to pay special attention to the role of women was in 1966, which included a landmark speech during the National Conference of National Council for Women. The National Council for Women was, according to Olteanu (2003), an institution used for propaganda of women role in the society that eventually promoted the “cult of Elena Ceausescu” (see also Fischer, 1985). A June 1973 speech given by Ceausescu¹⁰, in the same month when Elena Ceausescu was named to the Communist Central Committee, was entirely dedicated to the role and importance of women in the socialist society in three main fields: economic, political and social. The speech started by emphasizing the fact that few women are in the ruling bodies of the Romanian Communist party. Ceausescu continues by saying that the fault lies in both the Party and the women themselves, criticizing what he thought was low activism and participation.

I have something to admonish to women. They have to be more active and not to allow to be treated only as representatives in different committees, but to be more active in participation in social life... (Nicolae Ceausescu, 1973: 142).

Ceausescu argued that the key role women play in Romanian Communist society is in educating future generations and contributing to the general development of the socialist society, rhetoric that he had also applied to pronatalist policy.

Another big problem is that of the important role that woman has in the society, in giving birth, raising and educating children, the young generation, in ensuring the youthfulness of our entire socialist nation (Nicolae Ceausescu, 1973: 145).

According to Olteanu (2003: 29), “Nicolae Ceausescu understood the role of women exclusively from the perspectives of her reproductive functions and maternal capabilities” (see also Fischer, 1985, Kligman, 1992 and Keil and Andreescu, 1999).

Poland’s dynamics provide an interesting contrast with Romania and Russia. In Poland, women’s political participation began to build in the aftermath of World War One, and the reappearance of Poland on world maps (Zarnowska, 2004). Fuszara (2011) argues that periods of “thaw” in Communism, or the loosening of Party grip on politics and society, correspond with lower rates of women’s representation in the political elite:

¹⁰ Cuvintarea tovarasului Nicolae Ceausescu in plenara C.C al P.C.R. din 18-19 iunie 1973 cu privire la rolul femeii in viata politica, economica si sociala a tarii. (1973). In *Documente ale Partidului Communist Roman. Culegere sintetica. Rolul femeii in viata economica, politica si sociala a Romaniei socialiste*. Bucuresti: Editura politica. (pp.141-148). [Nicolae Ceausescu’s speech for the Plenary of C.C. of C.P.R. from 18-19 June 1973 regarding the role of women in the political, economic and social life of the country. (1973). In *Documents of the Romanian Communist Party. Synthetic Collection. Role of women in economic, political and social life of the socialist Romania*. Bucuresti: Editura politica. (pp.141-148)].

It is noticeable that the number of women in the Sejm decreased rapidly in the years of political 'thaw', that is, when the communist regime was slightly less oppressive. In 1956, the percentage of female MPs in the Sejm reached the exceptionally low level of 4 per cent. The percentage of women fell from 20 per cent to 13 per cent after the first free (in fact partly free) elections in 1989: this happened in all post-communist countries. One factor that seems to be important here should be mentioned: the percentage of women decreases when the Parliament wields real power. When the Parliament seemed to gain real power granted under the constitution (in 1956) or when it actually gained this power (in 1989), the percentage of female MPs fell sharply. (extract from the documents of the European Parliament, 2011).¹¹

As Fuszara (2011) intended, the hypothesis that, as parliamentary power rises, percentage of women MPs falls, applies to the Communist and post-Communist eras. What of the EU era? At the dawn of the early 21st Century, Polish women's representation outpaced that of Russia and Romania, and in February 2011, the President of Poland, Bronisław Komorowski, signed into law Act of 5 January 2011 amending the Law - Elections to municipal councils, county councils and regional councils, the Law - Elections to the Polish Sejm and the Senate of the Polish Republic, and the Law - Elections to the European Parliament¹². This gender quota law amends existing electoral law by stipulating that, for all political parties seeking office locally, nationally, or in the European Parliament, in each district 35% of their candidate lists must be comprised of women. The electoral law is largely silent about women's placement on the list, perhaps the major factor that drives quota effectiveness. Hence, the immediate impact has been small, as the next election saw a modest step-up to 24 percent. Meanwhile, Romania and Russia never fully recovered from the transition and has yet to build a coalition strong enough to introduce government intervention via gender quotas.

Dynamics of Political Elite Attitudes toward Gender and Political Inequalities

Scholars note that Eastern European parliamentarians and other members of the political elite resented Communism not only for the extreme political inequality between the Party and the masses, but that they felt the Party illegitimately forced equality (Fuszara, 2010). According to Vese:

¹¹ <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/document/activities/cont/201111/20111107ATT30766/20111107ATT30766EN.pdf> (May 1, 2012).

¹² *Ustawa z dnia 5 stycznia 2011 r. o zmianie ustawy - Ordynacja wyborcza do rad gmin, rad powiatów i sejmików województw, ustawy - Ordynacja wyborcza do Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i do Senatu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej oraz ustawy - Ordynacja wyborcza do Parlamentu Europejskiego.*

Gender equality proclaimed by the regime as well as special measures such as free day-care for children and maternity leaves were used to assist women in their double gender roles, rather than to reorganize gender responsibilities between men and women. This is why many Eastern Europeans women refer to previous state policies as 'false equality' and 'forced emancipation' (Vese, 2001: 269).

This image of the Communist past left an impression on the political elite as they tried to build democracy.

However, there are major questions about the Communist era and its impact on subsequent eras that need to be addressed. First, to what extent does the Communist legacy still influence today's political elite? While it is clear that Communism favoured rhetoric of political equality, it is also clear that political equality was never achieved. Next, if the collective memory of the political elite is faulty, and they do not know that women in the political elite never came close to parity with men, what has been the main object of their resentment? As argued below, much of their resentment has been based on an imagined Communist legacy and directed toward "gender quotas" (see also Gaber, 2011), but how, exactly, gender quotas influenced the political ascension of women during Communism is not well documented.

Communist Legacies

Some recent interviews with Romanian and Polish parliamentarians from both countries suggest differences in influence of the Communist era on the European Union era. In 2005, nine Romanian parliamentarians were interviewed -- seven men and two women, including at least one from each of the ruling parties -- on their attitudes toward implementing quotas and other strategies for instituting descriptive representation. While a small sample, their pre-EU accession attitudes are illuminating on whether they believe women's full political inclusion is necessary for building democracy.

While there was support for descriptive representation of women in principle, (a) it was not then a major concern for most parliamentarians and (b) most parliamentarians interviewed did not have a coherent idea as to how to increase the percentage of women in the Romanian parliament. When asked about the most pressing concerns facing Romania, most mentioned economic matters, such as reforming the pension system developing business enterprises. Based on the answers to the question, "what is the important problem or objective for your political party at the moment?", all nine listed many types of problems, however none thought that an increase in women representatives in the Parliament was a policy priority for their party. Note that the interviews were conducted before Romania entered the EU, and some of the interviewees underlined that the implementation of the EU legislation in Romania is important, including gender mainstreaming.

All but one of the interviewees had to be asked to comment specifically on the issue of women's representation in Parliament. None of the interviewees rejected the idea that women should be present in politics, though not all agreed it was necessary. Interviewees were asked: "Is it necessary to increase the percentage of women in parliament? How important is this idea to your party?" The following two quotes represent opposite stances on the importance of the democratic inclusion of women.

One said:

I don't have strong research on this... I just have life experience... Our pattern was that the woman was in back of the man, but it was hypocrisy. The woman is not in back of the man, she is on his side or in front of him.... But due to destiny, [men and women] are built for something... I am strong, but...I can't have children, for example... In a woman's life, you must put 2, 4, 6 years for child and child care. For this reason, I cannot say it is necessary. I think it's natural. The direct proportion 51% [women in society] to 51% [women in parliament], I do not know if it is natural.

Another:

If we want to be compared with the European and American democracies... to be normal, there has to be equality. But, differences build the democracy. In our political class, now, there are only 11 percent female [in parliament]. We want to destroy the old mentality, the barriers for a woman to become a decision-maker. Parliament is the highest political level of society. If in the parliament there are more women, the specific problems of the women will be better solved. In that moment, in our society, based on a partnership between men and women, we build a strong democracy.

The majority of the interviewees emphasized the negative impact of the legacy of the Communist past on the political situation at that moment. When asked about descriptive representation of women, all said that the "culture" of Romania is gender traditionalist, a situation that makes it difficult for the Romanian public to accept women in places of political power. Interviewees tended to say that there was a need to "change the mentality" or that the "the old mentality", or the "mentality of the past" was an impediment. Thus, while building a political class capable of continuing the new democracy into the 21st century was a concern, some Romanian parliamentarians did not think that an increase in women's parliamentary representation is a necessary part of that process.

Notably, the two women interviewed – one from a leftist party, the other a rightist - believed that increased representation is a foundation for building democracy in Romania. The leftist woman was active in support for quotas and was well-versed on a quota law for increasing the representation of women. When told that some parliamentarians interviewed in this study

(without naming who) say that a quota is already in place in the form of an electoral law, she said, with noticeable irritation, that this is not true. Thus, there was confusion among Romanian parliamentarians as to what has been done to increase women's representation, even to the point of being misinformed about existing law.

Interviews of Polish parliamentarians from the 1990s to the 2000s reveal certain similarities with the Romanian case, though with what seems to be a declining emphasis on the Communist past, at least in rhetoric. I draw on interview data contained in Kurczewski (1999), as well as survey data of Polish parliamentarians described in Dubrow and Woroniecka (2010) and Pawlowski and Dubrow (2011). Interviews of parliamentarians active in the 1990s illustrate the struggle between equality-generating legislation and imagined legacies of the Communist past Kurczewski (1999). Out of 155 interviewed, four were for gender quotas (Fuszara, 2005: 296). However, the Communist past was mentioned: "Particular communities should be represented by a person having roots in a given community, but this should not be legally compartmentalized – we had such things [at the time of] PRL [People's Republic of Poland]." Another said, "I do not consider a quota-democracy to be appropriate, either; this is how we had it under communism; well, except for national minorities...."

Under a different set of questions and a different survey format, these thoughts were echoed in 2005 (see Pawlowski and Dubrow 2011 and Dubrow et al., 2012) in a question as to whether gender quotas should be used¹³:

The Parliament is a legislative body whose aim is to create laws for all citizens, not for the special interests of any social, ethnic, religious, etc group. The state stands for all equally, whether they are red-headed or blond. If we accept the idea that the make-up of Parliament is to mirror that of society it would mean that we are returning to the time of socialist realism, where a 32-year old teacher with 3 children from a small town could become a representative. This is nonsense.

In 2005, I only found only the one explicit reference to the Communist era above, and in a 2009 survey (Dubrow et al., 2012), there was no explicit reference¹⁴. Perhaps the timings of the surveys are the reason why. They were

¹³ Attitude toward gender equality was measured with the following item: "How important is it that the composition of the *Sejm* reflects the composition of society according to proportions of men and women?" Respondents were given fixed-choice four category response set ranged from "very important" to "very unimportant;" after this was an item that asked them to explain their answer as an open-ended response. Attitude toward party gender quotas was measured by their response to the following question: "Some parties and other social groupings have established a specific threshold (bottom limit) for the proportion of women who, on their behalf, should seek *Sejm* membership. Is this initiative good or bad?" Respondents had a choice of two answers, "good" or "bad"; after this was an item that said, "Why?", and allowed an open ended response.

¹⁴ It is interesting to note that in 2009 emerged the first explicit reference to EU standards: "European standards urge to do so" (Dubrow et al., forthcoming).

conducted after Poland's ascension to the European Union and years after the 2001 parliament focused on the economic and political aspects of rejoining Europe. Perhaps the refusal to refer to the socialist past is a product of this increasingly relentless focus on the future. When asked about gender quotas in 2009, direct references to the Communist past were rare, and veiled. A single parliamentarian said, such a quota "can be used in regimes" [Może być stosowana w reżimach], with "reżimach" slyly referring to Communist era Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza.

Knowns and Unknowns about Gender Quotas in Eastern Europe

The issue of gender quotas looms large in the literature of women in politics and since the 1990s the knowledge of how it works is very advanced (Dahlerup, 2006; Krook, 2009). While rapidly accumulating research strongly suggests that quotas have great potential to reduce gender political inequality of voice, the relationship between quotas and this outcome depends on the form of electoral rules, the type of quota adopted, and the level of enforcement of the quota (Caul Kittilson, 2006; Krook, 2009; Matland and Montgomery, 2003b). There is strong evidence that, in the post-Communist and European Union eras, gender and party ideology within national and European contexts influences whether Eastern European parliamentarians support gender quotas (Dubrow, 2011; Dubrow and Woroniecka, 2010).

Yet, there is no work in English that details exactly women's political ascension to political bodies during the Communist era; how quotas or quota-like systems enhanced their representation, or what legislation or policy stipulated women's inclusion. Scholarship of women in politics frequently cites some version of the statement that "there were quotas" or that "there was a selection mechanism" but do not define what they mean by "quota" in that context or identify the selection mechanism¹⁵. For example, Siemienska (1985) writes that "... the electoral ticket in Poland is very carefully balanced, with specified numbers of places set aside for representatives of particular political and social organizations, age groups, the sexes, denominations, and so on" (335); similarly, Einhorn (1993) writes that, "Much has been made of the 'milkmaid' quota system designed to ensure representation across the social spectrum" (Einhorn, 1993: 151); but how these quotas worked in practice is not clear, or elaborated upon.

The definition of "quota" and how it applies to the political ascension of Eastern European women during Communism is difficult to establish because this definition fluctuates across scholars, countries and time. Although the word

¹⁵ For example, Gaber (2011) writes about Slovenia: "Different kinds of quota were used in socialist times as a means of equalising the position of women, peasants and young people in the spheres of decision making" (82).

“quota” is often used, it may not refer to official law or policy. It may be that the absence of official documents indicates informal policy. Unfortunately, if the quotas were “informal,” by their very nature there can never be a definitive answer to the question of how the political ascension of women worked. Informal rules are akin to any kind of unofficial discrimination; you see it after it happens, not while it happens, and rarely do discriminators leave a paper-trail. There is a feeling that maybe, somewhere, these documents exist: an internal memo, or a diary entry, or something tangible that may lead to further, possibly fruitless searches. The absence of Communist era documents – i.e. “smoking gun” empirical evidence -- complicates our efforts of identifying quota mechanisms.

We are left with fundamental questions about the political ascension of women during Communism: What, exactly, were the mechanisms of Eastern European women’s political accession during the Communist era? Was there quota codification, or was it all unwritten policy? In the end, all we can say is that (a) the rules within any given country may have been informal and (b) due to lack of systematic analysis of the existing evidence, we cannot make a generalization across the region.

Gender and Political Inequality in the European Union Era

The new EU era is too new to discern clear dynamics, but understanding it is a foundation for further study. With regard to the relationship between gender and formal political equality, the EU policy of gender mainstreaming is illustrative of both ideological continuities with the previous era and the West’s influence on politics in the region. Defined as “integration of gender equality considerations ‘in all activities and policies at all levels’” (Bretherton, 2001: 60), gender mainstreaming seeks to fundamentally alter gender relations. Institutionalizing gender mainstreaming is “a demanding strategy” whose achievements are few because it operates in a context of deeply entrenched gender inequality (Bretherton, 2001: 61). According to article 119 of the Treaty of Rome, “[e]ach Member State shall during the first stage ensure and subsequently maintain the application of the principle that men and women should receive equal pay for equal work” (Treaty of Rome, 1957, Article 119 as cited in Macrae, 2006, p. 531). Regulska (2001) argues that EU policies are mainly focused on “economic and work dimension of women's life”; that the EU focuses too much on “equality and equal opportunities” (Regulska, 2001, p. 86). In many European social and political circles gender mainstreaming is widely discussed and, purely in terms of EU rhetoric, staunchly supported. Yet, gender mainstreaming has been particularly slow to catch on in Central and Eastern Europe; such a fundamental change is difficult to accomplish in a region undergoing many simultaneous and consequential fundamental changes (Bretherton, 2001; Chiva, 2009; for a critique of EU’s gender mainstreaming from Romania’s point-of-view, see Miroiu, 2010).

Female parliamentarians across Eastern Europe argue that greater exposure to European pressures, especially that of gender mainstreaming, has encouraged pro-gender equality attitudes and legitimates quotas in their home countries (Rueschmeyer and Wolchik, 2009b: 259). Former Chair of the Women's Parliamentary Group, Senator Dorota Kempka, said that Polish ascension to the EU pressured Polish parliamentarians to seriously consider gender equality initiatives:

I think that the European Union has played an enormous role in raising many issues and the preparation of many solutions in Poland. The European Union knows that women have the right to make decisions concerning their lives. . . . I think it's great that the period of preparation to join the European Union was parallel to activity of the Parliamentary Group of Women, which won more support thanks to this fact (Kempka and Majcher 2009: 220).

Nongovernmental pressure in the form of gender interest groups, social movement organizations, and NGOs keeps gender issues in public debate and can influence dynamics of the relationship between gender and political inequality (Paxton, Kunovich, and Hughes, 2007). Empirical studies have shown that women's social movements increase the percentage of women in parliaments around the world (Paxton, Hughes, and Green, 2006). Women's political mobilization and the emergence of civil society after 1989 started slowly but have gained momentum (Einhorn and Sever, 2003). Meanwhile, women's international NGOs (WINGOs) have applied pressure to European governments to commit to gender mainstreaming (True and Mintrom, 2001). Many of these groups advocate for gender quotas.

Conclusion

The main argument of this article is straightforward: Despite changes to the political environment, Polish and Romanian women's political inequality of voice represents an unbroken chain extending from the Communist era to today. During the Communist era, official Party discourse consistently emphasized women's involvement in politics. With legal political equality enshrined in law, women advanced in the political sphere, but entrenched gender traditionalism severely limited their achievements as was evident by their low representation in decision-making bodies (Wolchik and Meyer, 1985). During the transition of 1989 and the post-Communist era, a new doctrine based in neo-liberalism, in which the disadvantaged are offered no substantial protection from unequal competition within a *laissez-faire* political market, dropped the level of women's representation (Dubrow, 2006a; 2007). Only recently has the political environment offered protection - gender quotas, mainly - from prevailing social and political norms that work against women's political equality (Chiva, 2005, 2009). Substantial differences in the magnitude of inequality are cross-nationally evident.

In this article I examined the causes and dynamics of women's unequal political representation in Eastern Europe from the postwar period to now. A major cause is, and has been, gender traditionalism. The ideas that women are not equal to men in ability or have different interests and skills that make them unsuited to politics are deeply rooted in Eastern Europe -- as elsewhere -- and have had enduring, stratifying effects. Gender inequality has a strong relationship to political inequality, and while the form, duration and magnitude of gendered political inequality of voice have changed over time, under-representation has been the outcome.

The ideology of the eras had a large impact on the form, duration and magnitude of women's political inequality. During the Communist era, women were promised political equality. That promise was broken and rendered moot after the revolutions of 1989. After this transition, this era of broken promises gave way to the era of no promises, in which equality of opportunities is lauded and outcomes is scorned.

Arguably, there has been progress in the modern era. In each of the countries of this study, women's parliamentary representation is rising. Poland introduced a quota law. The international women's movement continues to be influential. Yet, the perception of progress differs mightily from one's position on the political ladder.

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