

**Women in Local Parliaments – A Perfect Match?<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

The focus has traditionally been on the national level when studying women in politics. Local politics, however, are often assumed to be of more interest to women and more feasibly combined with home responsibilities. This paper addresses these points and investigates which factors determine female political participation at the local level and whether these factors differ between the national and the local levels. To answer these questions, I first identify the patterns of female representation at the local level in Germany and compare them to higher levels of government. The existing literature on national legislatures is then reviewed to generate testable hypotheses to explain the differences discovered at the local level. The comparative model of the recruitment process (Norris and Lovenduski 1995) serves as an analytical framework.

The empirical analysis includes more than one hundred major German towns in which women's representation rates range from just over 10% to nearly 50%. Across these towns, system variables, party contexts, and societal environments also vary widely. Results from regression analyses suggest that there are parallels between the factors that impact on the share of women in politics at the local and the national levels. Moreover, socio-economic factors, such as education and gross income, affect women's political inclusion, but they do so only up to a certain point. The electoral system also matters; however, in highly similar contexts like German towns, one needs to use a magnifying glass in order to get a detailed view of the differences between systems. Lastly, a clear pattern emerges from the effects of post-communism: Whereas the rhetoric of communism may have been purportedly egalitarian, in reality, these systems were rather patriarchal.

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*“Once we start looking around the world at this level, the lack of data on women becomes glaringly obvious [...]. Possibly it is the combination of two themes thought to be of little interest or relevance: local politics and women.”*  
Wendy Stokes

## **1. Introduction**

Local government is seemingly far removed from major political decisions, far away from international crises, oil prices, or negotiations over taxes and tariffs. If big politics take place elsewhere, why should we even care about local issues? And why should we be interested in the inclusion of women in local assemblies? Very straightforward answers exist for both of these questions. First, while local political issues may seem small, this is a matter of perspective. Looking specifically at Germany, local government accounts for 29% of the total public expenditure and for 64% of the total public investments (Vetter 2007: 102). Moreover, 37.1% of all public employees are employed by local authorities (John 2001: 38) and they implement between 70% and 90% of all the laws (Magin and Eder 2008: 197). As the local level indeed plays a significant role, it is important to include this arena in order to gain a complete picture of women in politics.

Another motivation for this study is that many political careers begin at the local level (Norris and Lovenduski 1993: 399) so that the composition of town councils also impacts the recruitment processes for sub-national and national parliaments. Not only is this ladder of recruitment empirically observable, but it is also relevant from a theoretical point of view. John Stuart Mill (1963: 186) points out that “it is only by practicing popular government on a limited scale, that the people will ever learn how to exercise it on a larger”. Mill (1977: 169) also refers to “local self-government as a means of instruction, by accustoming the people not only to judge of particular facts, but to understand, and apply, and feel practically the value of principles”. Similarly, his contemporary Alexis de Tocqueville (1969: 63) notes that “the strength of free people resides in the local community. Local institutions are to liberty what primary schools are to science; they put it within the people’s reach”. From this perspective, local government is one of the cornerstones of any democracy and as we want to understand women’s role therein, we must not ignore this foundation.

In addition to its general importance for politics as whole and its functions as a springboard and training centre for careers, local government is also said to be of particular relevance to women. One reason is that local issues directly affect women’s private lives as they address local infrastructure, public transportation, education, and social services. Furthermore, holding a local office is perhaps more logistically feasible, as many women manage families as well (Stokes 2005: 175).

While there are plenty of convincing reasons to study the inclusion of women in local politics, this topic has received little attention in the research community. As Matland and Studlar (1998: 118) note, “most analyses of representation by gender in democratic polities in recent years have been concerned with central-level legislatures”. This appraisal remains valid today, as the number of studies is but a handful and the evidence patchy (Stokes 2005: 175).<sup>2</sup> Particularly poorly studied are women in local assemblies in Germany. The few existing analyses are limited to only one of the *Länder* (German federal states).<sup>3</sup> Besides a lack of research, another reason to study the local level in Germany is the possibility to compare towns with a long democratic tradition to towns with a socialist legacy. This paper aims to provide an overview of the different levels of female representation in 113 major towns in Germany and to analyse the reasons for the detected inequalities. The paper is structured as follows: In the next section, an overview of the system of local government in Germany is presented. The situation of women in local councils is briefly discussed and compared to other levels of government in section 3. In section 4, the theoretical framework and the hypotheses are discussed and then are tested by means of regression analysis in section 5. The paper concludes with a brief discussion.

## **2. Local government in Germany**

Germany’s political and administrative system is vertically structured in three layers. Below the federal level (Bund), there is the subnational level, constituted by the 16 *Länder*, and the local level, comprising 436 *Kreise* or counties and more than 12,000 *Gemeinden* or municipalities (Magin and Eder 2008: 197). The counties can be further divided into two types: either rural counties, which comprise a number of municipalities (*Landkreise*, n=323), or urban counties, which consist of one single self-governed town (*kreisfreie Städte*, n=113).

The self-governed towns were chosen as units of analysis for three reasons: First, they simultaneously perform the functions of municipalities and counties, making them somewhat more important than the municipalities that belong to a larger county. Second, data on the local level is generally difficult to obtain: data for the self-governed towns, however, is more readily available. Third, their number is large enough to perform statistical analysis.

## **3. Female representation in Germany**

Local government, it is sometimes argued, is not as attractive to men because it entails less power than the national or the subnational levels. In turn, fewer men and more women are found at the

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<sup>2</sup> Exceptions include Bochel and Bochel (2005) and Bochel et al. (2003) for Japan; Schmidt and Saunders (2004) for Peru; Welch and Studlar (1988) and Bochel and Bochel (2000) for Great Britain.

<sup>3</sup> Baden-Württemberg, for example, is studied by Hin and Michel (2004), Infratest Burke (1995), and Wehling (2000).

local level (Bochel and Bochel 2005: 376). While this may be the case elsewhere, little variation is found in women's inclusion at the different levels of government in Germany. In 2004, the mean share of female councillors in the 113 towns in the sample was 30.9%; women comprised an average of 32.7% of the Länder legislatures (*Landtage*); 32.2% of the MPs in the Bundestag were female; and among the German MPs in the European Parliament, women's share was 31.3%.<sup>4</sup> The differences between the single towns, however, are remarkable. In the town council of Magdeburg in Thuringia in eastern Germany, only eight of the 56 councillors were women, bringing their share down to 14.3%. On the other hand, 24 out of 50 councillors (48%) in Fürth in Bavaria were female. If these two towns were countries, Fürth would have ranked second worldwide, ahead of Sweden, while Magdeburg would have come in at 62, just after Sierra Leone.<sup>5</sup>

#### **4. Theory and hypotheses**

Political recruitment is a complex process. The single voter ticks a box on a ballot and certainly plays an important role in deciding who gets in and who does not. However, voters can only choose from a list of preselected candidates and the decisions of who competes for candidacy and who becomes a candidate are at least as decisive as the voters' choices. In order to obtain a complete picture of political recruitment, one must imagine a multi-layered process, a game with many players and diverging interests, explicit rules, implicit norms, and, to some extent, elements of contingency. While the goal of the game is to become elected, the number of winners is very limited.

#### **Norris and Lovenduski's comparative model of the recruitment process**

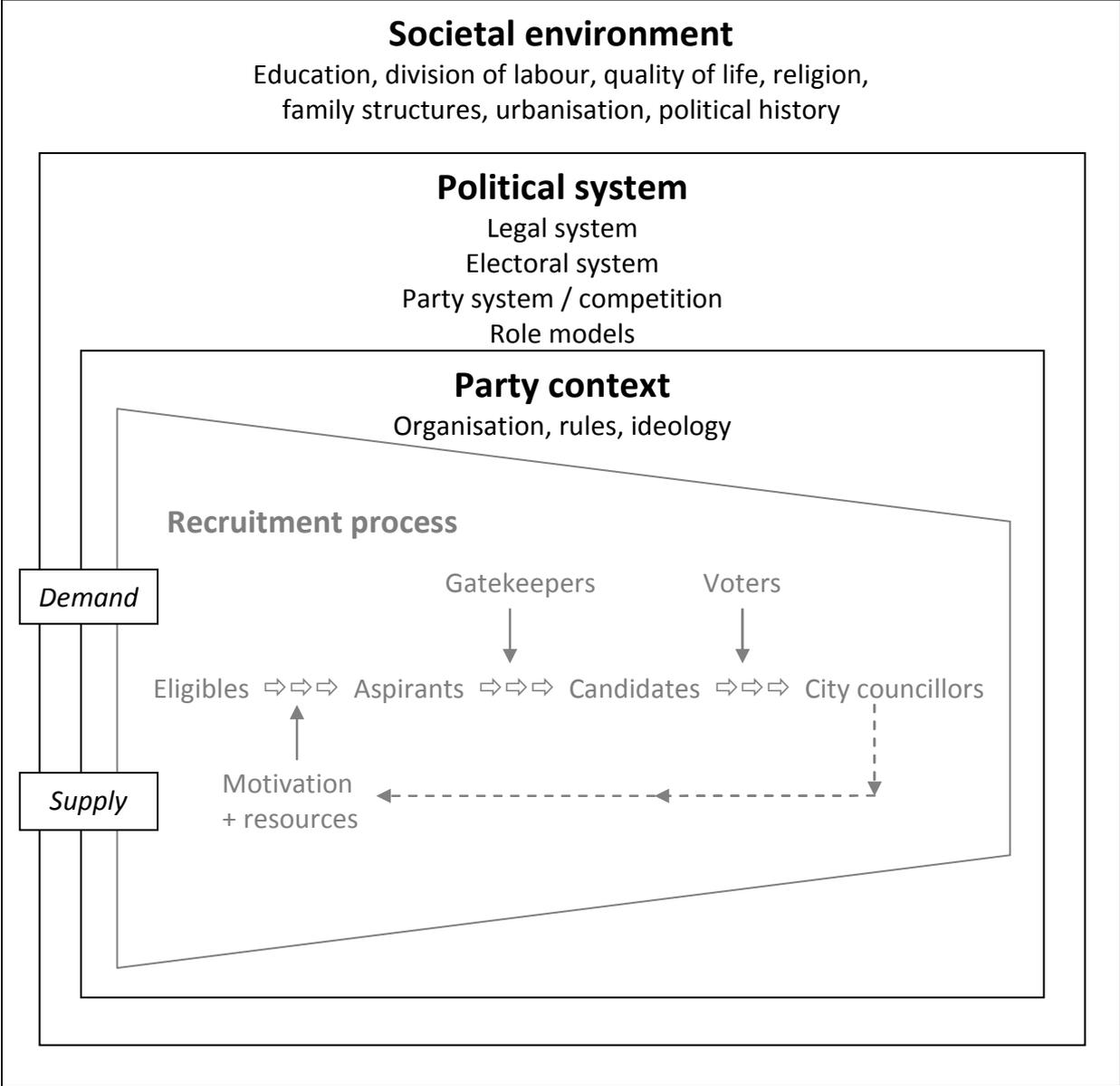
To structure the various factors that impact the recruitment of politicians, I draw upon the *comparative model of the recruitment process* proposed by Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski (1993; 1995). In this model, also referred to as the "main paradigm for recruitment" (Patzelt 1999: 243), it is assumed that a citizen who seeks office must first pass through a series of stages (see Figure 1).

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<sup>4</sup> Data sources: For the towns, see *Table 3* in the appendix; for the Länder, see websites and handbooks of the *Landtage*; for the Bundestag and the European Parliament, see [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org).

<sup>5</sup> Data for 2004; for country rankings, see [www.ipu.org](http://www.ipu.org).

Figure 1 – Comparative model of the recruitment process



Source: Norris (1993: 310; 2004: 183), Norris and Lovenduski (1993: 378; 1995: 184), own adaptation

Motivation and sufficient resources are all that is needed to enter the *recruitment process*. In the next step, selection procedures in each party serve to choose the candidates from the pool of aspirants. Here, gatekeepers usually play an important role. Finally, it is up to the electorate to cast its votes and to ultimately decide the composition of its representative assembly. The dashed arrow indicates a “feedback loop” (Norris and Lovenduski 1995: 15) from the electoral outcome back to the beginning of the recruitment process. The funnel form of the recruitment process in *Figure 1* illustrates that from a large number of eligibles at the beginning of the process, only a few become elected representatives.

This recruitment process is embedded in the *party context*, which refers to a party’s specific organisational structure, its set of rules, and its ideological background. Parties are not however stand-alone associations; they are themselves embedded in the *political system*. This system can be

described as the institutional environment in which parties operate when recruiting their personnel: The legal system determines the eligibility of candidates, the electoral system comprises the rules governing the electoral process, and the party system refers to the nature of competition between parties. With *societal environment*, I include cultural and socio-economic factors that potentially shape stereotypes of politicians and that encourage or hinder specific groups to actively enter politics. The concept of a society's degree of gendered modernisation (Inglehart and Norris 2003) serves as an analytical framework (see below). The reason for adding the societal environment to the original model is that the data used for this paper differs from Norris and Lovenduski's (1993; 1995) in one important aspect: Whereas the authors draw mainly upon individual data from surveys such as the British Candidate Study and the British Election Study, such data is not available for the local level in Germany. A direct analysis of individual candidates' motives and resources or voters' attitudes towards women in politics is thus not possible. Using aggregate data, I instead look at the societal environment that leads to the formation of individuals' preferences.

How exactly are all of these elements related to each other and how do they influence the recruitment of political personnel? Norris and Lovenduski (1993: 14; 1995: 377) suggest the analogy of a market place in terms of a supply and demand model: On the *demand-side*, it is assumed that applicants need certain abilities, qualifications, and experience in order to be chosen and to proceed on to the next step of the process. The *supply* of candidates is determined by the resources a person can invest (time, money, experience) and by his or her personal motivation (drive, ambition, interest). Both demand and supply can be seen as results of the interplay between the party context, the political system, and the societal environment.

By applying it to some stereotypical examples, I will briefly illustrate how the supply and demand model and its different components work: Imagine if you will, a Catholic woman who is interested in politics and favours the Christian Democrats. Her implicit view of a politician is that of a male person and therefore she would not imagine running for office herself. The local party leader "talks her into candidacy", for he needs a woman to fulfil his gender quota. On the supply side, the impact of the societal environment is obvious. On the demand side, as seen through the eyes of the local party leader, the party context, with its goal of a certain share of female candidates, matters. A further example: An organic farmer might be more inclined to compete for Green party candidacy, as the party reflects his or her ecological attitudes. Certain occupations might also encourage endorsement by the party's selectors, for people with those occupations may be seen as natural representatives of the party's goals. Here, party ideology affects supply *and* demand.

## **Recruitment in local politics in Germany**

In this section the *model of the recruitment process* with its specific adaptation to local politics in Germany will be presented in detail. As a starting point, I look at the most general elements of the model that are found within the societal environment of political recruitment and then go into the more specific factors that are part of the political and party systems. After a brief overview of the international research on these factors, their relevance for the study of the recruitment of women to German town councils is discussed, followed by the research hypothesis to be tested.<sup>6</sup>

### **Societal environment**

As politics was traditionally only the business of wealthy men, the degree of gendered modernisation should tell us something about the opportunities for women to enter politics. Inglehart and Norris (2003: 126) study different types of societies with regard to the various degrees of modernisation, value systems, and attitudes towards women in politics. They note that in agrarian societies the gender gap in political activism is at its widest; it is intermediate in modern and lowest in post-modern societies. The indicators used by Inglehart and Norris to classify societies are, however, too crude to analyse German towns, as all of them would be classified as post-modern. Nevertheless, the same authors suggest that other social trends accompany the transition from one type of society to another (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 13). We take those trends into consideration for which data is available and which offer a sufficient degree of variation. They include education, gender roles in the division of labour, living conditions, religion, family structures, and individualisation processes in urban areas. Another factor related to gendered modernisation is a society's political history. A long democratic tradition is likely to shape the values and attitudes towards women in politics in a different manner than a communist legacy would.

In studies of women in politics, *education* is one of the central explanatory factors (Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Kunovich and Paxton 2005; Matland 1998; Norris 1985; Rule 1987). Both interest in politics and political activity increase with educational achievement – something which holds true for both women and men (Norris 1985; Verba et al. 1978: 237ff.; Welch 1977). As extensive education equips people with the knowledge and skills necessary to enter politics, it can also be expected that a greater share of female politicians will be found where there are large numbers of women with higher levels of education (relative to men's average education achievement).

H1: *As the average educational level of women (relative to men's) increases, so too will the share of female councillors in a town.*

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<sup>6</sup> Table 3 in the appendix provides an overview of the hypotheses and data.

Another important factor is the share of *women in the labour force*.<sup>7</sup> Togeby (1994: 217) argues that not only does employment provide women with connections that might be useful in the political sphere, but with financial independence and organisational skills as well. These are all assets that could help to further a candidate's perspective. In the German context, it has been found that the higher social status associated with a paid occupation, in comparison to the status of a housewife, also increases a woman's chances of election (Infratest Burke 1995: 62ff.). Furthermore, there are indirect effects: A higher share of women in the labour force necessitates a redistribution of traditionally female tasks, such as child-rearing and housekeeping. By redefining the social role of women, the political opportunities for female aspirants should increase as well (Togeby 1994: 217). In addition to the theoretical plausibility, the empirical link between female economic and political activity is also well established (Andersen 1975; Darcy et al. 1987; Hoecker 1998a; Kunovich and Paxton 2005; Matland 1998; Rule 1987; Welch 1977). A similar connection for the German town councils can also be assumed:

H2: *An increase in female participation in the labour market corresponds to an increased share of female town councillors.*

From work we move on to *income*. Modern societies have reached unprecedented levels of economic wealth and prosperity. In the wake of this development, many women have gained material independence, which has served to further erode the traditional values and gender roles (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 17). These changes have also affected political participation: Women's increased economic independence has provided them with the resources necessary to make their political voices heard. Accordingly, high levels of gross income are seen as a factor that fosters the equality of women and men (Darcy et al. 1987: 39f.; Matland 1998: 120).

H3: *A positive link is expected between town wealth and the number of female councillors.*

Inglehart and Norris (2003: 49, 153) regard *religion* to be a major vehicle of traditional values. The Catholic Church in particular is often seen as a main agent of anti-modern tendencies in society, also with regards to the role of women. Its organizational structure seems to strengthen this tendency; it is characterised by a strict hierarchy and a complete lack of women, save at the very lowest levels (Lummis 1999: 609). In a Catholic dominated environment, it seems plausible that women might not

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<sup>7</sup> On the determinates of women's participation rates in the labour market, see Stadelmann-Steffen (2008).

see themselves as politicians, as such a role would not correspond to the traditional gender schema. Furthermore, it is unlikely that party officials would encourage women's participation due to the uncertainty about their ability to attract voters. The empirical evidence on the impact of Catholicism is fairly straightforward: Rule (1987) supports the hypothesis in an international comparison, as do Norris (1997); Kenworthy and Malami (1999); and Paxton et al. (2006); Kaiser and Hennl (2008) furthermore find a similar relationship in the German *Länder*.

H4: *More female councillors are expected to be found in towns that are less dominated by Catholicism.*

When it comes to *family structures*, Inglehart and Norris (2003: 14-16) stress that traditional societies are also characterised by traditional family values. These values gradually erode during the process of social modernisation. The prototype of the family transforms from the extended to the nuclear family and finally to loose relationships and an increase of the *divorce rate*. In terms of political participation, one can assume that regions with higher divorce rates are also characterised by a more egalitarian view of gender roles. Furthermore, because this development also signals a diminished material dependence of women on men, it seems plausible that women have increased resources available to enable their political participation.

H5: *An increase in female town councillors should be associated with a loosening of family ties.*

*Urbanisation processes* are often mentioned as one major source of modernisation tendencies (Inglehart and Norris 2003: 13). In growing cities, lifestyles become increasingly individualised and diversified at the expense of traditional values and beliefs that were sustained within rural societies. Moreover, social developments, it is argued, originate primarily from large urban areas, while the smaller communities are often viewed to be lagging behind. This observation also appears to hold true for women's political inclusion. Whereas the social network and status of a candidate is highly important in villages and small towns, this impact diminishes in bigger cities. Here, political activity is becoming increasingly professionalised (Reiser 2006) so that the impact of the traditionally powerful and male-dominated circles decreases (see Horstkötter 1990: 207; Infratest Burke 1995: 35; Wehling 2000: 208). Studying local councils in Germany, Hin and Michel (2004: 15) as well as Hoecker (1987: 59) find that the share of women increases with population. In the present sample, there are no rural areas, only towns; however, their sizes vary so much that different qualities of urbanity in terms of modernisation can be assumed.

H6: *The share of female councillors is expected to increase with town population.*

It is plausible to assume an impact of *political history*. Particularly the socialist heritage of eastern Germany should be of importance for the equality of women and men. Socialist regimes claim universal equality and the possibility of participation for every citizen. This aspect also explicitly refers to the inclusion of women in politics (Paxton et al. 2006: 904). The German Democratic Republic was by no means an exception. In addition to the inclusion of women in the labour force, the rulers drafted an image of the female citizen who is also socially and politically engaged (Nickel 1998: 23). Contrary to this official version, it is reported that the higher levels and positions persisted as a male domain (Dölling 1993: 29; Hampele 1993: 283; Montgomery 2003: 6). Kolinsky (1995: 97) notes that only about 3% of economic leadership positions were held by women and that only 7% of all female school graduates were admitted to university. Schenk and Schindler (1995: 184) go so far as to refer to the GDR as a patriarchal society and, according to Bühler (1997: 39), women were “systematically excluded” from politics.

However, it seems that women in the GDR did not feel discriminated against, as there was a safety net of day-care institutions and comprehensive social security which allowed mothers to pursue their careers and raise their children. Moreover, while the image of equality created by the regime was widely accepted, the actual inequality was not part of the public awareness (Schenk and Schindler 1995: 184). Eva Kolinsky (1998: 127) concludes that “the hidden inequalities had gone largely unheeded in a society where the state seemed to have instituted equality and women had come to believe that they were treated equally”.

How have these claims of equality and the contradictory reality of the GDR affected women’s participation in post-socialist society? If the idea of equality was well established and widely accepted, it might appear rather *normal* for women to enter politics. Party gatekeepers and voters should thus not be biased against female candidates and should instead treat them as equals.

The empirical record appears to be mixed: Brzinski (2003) stresses the similarities between both parts of the country. Hoecker (1996) reports that immediately after the reunification, the share of women in eastern German local and regional assemblies was higher than in the west. According to Westle (2001: 139), eastern German women do not lag as far behind men as their western German counterparts do when it comes to engagement in political parties. Against the background of these

findings, I assume a moderate positive impact of the socialist heritage on female political participation.<sup>8</sup>

H7: *The share of female town councillors is larger in eastern towns than in western ones.*

### **Political system**

When studying the recruitment of political staff, *who* is actually eligible for candidacy is a crucial question (Norris and Lovenduski 1995: 189). While the Länder are responsible for the *legal system* governing the local level, there are very few differences between them with regards to candidate eligibility (Meyer 2007: 397).<sup>9</sup> The same restrictions exist for potential candidates in all Länder with respect to nationality (Germans and EU-citizens only), age (minimum 18), and residency requirement (local). The only variation concerns in-patients of psychiatric hospitals, who are excluded from elections in some of the Länder.<sup>10</sup> For the purpose of this paper, however, the legal system is treated as a constant.

The *electoral system* is one of the cornerstones in comparative research on women's political participation. Beginning with Maurice Duverger (1955), most empirical studies on women in parliaments include or even centre on voting procedures.<sup>11</sup> Two key features of electoral systems can be differentiated in German towns. First, the *basic type of electoral system* appears to be the most important feature. While proportional representation systems (PR) with party lists for multi-member constituencies are seen as the most beneficial for women in parliament, the opposite effect is ascribed to majoritarian systems with single member districts (SMD). Mixed or combined systems, which use PR and the majoritarian system in two separate tiers, hold an intermediate position with respect to women's success rates (Norris 2006: 201). In Germany, the municipal electoral laws are issued by the 16 Länder. With towns from 13 different Länder represented in the present sample, 13 different sets of electoral laws are taken into consideration. Eleven Länder,<sup>12</sup> in which 86 of the 113 towns in this study are located, have PR systems. Pure majoritarian systems are not found in the

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted that the cited empirical literature on eastern Germany deviates from the international literature in one important aspect: Comparative studies find that the share of women in eastern European parliaments decreased sharply after the fall of communism (Kunovich and Paxton 2005; Montgomery 2003).

<sup>9</sup> There are two reasons for this similarity: First, the *Grundgesetz* (Federal Constitution) specifies the general principles for local self-government and municipal elections in Article 28 and leaves little room for variation. Second, where there is still room for manoeuvre, the *Länder* have issued largely similar provisions.

<sup>10</sup> These are Bavaria, Brandenburg, Lower Saxony, Rhineland-Palatinate, and Thuringia.

<sup>11</sup> While the studies are far too numerous to be all mentioned here, some are widely cited (Darcy et al. 1987; Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Kunovich and Paxton 2005; Lakeman 1976; Matland 1998; Norris 1985; 2004; Reynolds 1999; Rule 1987; Siaroff 2000).

<sup>12</sup> These are Baden-Württemberg, Bavaria, Brandenburg, Hesse, Lower Saxony, Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, Rhineland-Palatinate, Saxony, Saxony-Anhalt, and Thuringia.

sample. In the remaining two Länder with 27 towns, the electoral systems can be classified as mixed systems, as they have a PR tier and a SMD tier. The share of PR seats is around 50% in both Länder. These seats are used to correct the disproportionality of the seat allocation caused by the SMD tier.

H8: *The share of female town councillors is larger in PR electoral systems than in mixed systems.*

Second, *district magnitude* is another key element of electoral systems, which is defined as the number of seats per district (Matland and Brown 1992: 470). In SMDs the competition between the candidates is crucial and overcoming incumbents presents a formidable challenge. Women, still seen as the “weaker sex” in some parts of society, are explicitly or implicitly considered to be incapable of tough, face-to-face competition. As a result, more men become candidates and more men are therefore also elected in SMDs. With increasing district magnitude, the competition takes place more between parties and less between single candidates. It is argued that the proportion of women increases with district magnitude since parties will present more balanced tickets in order to increase their attractiveness by representing all groups of voters. It thus follows that more women will be elected when they are represented in greater numbers on the ballot.

H9: *There share of female town councillors will increase with the average district magnitude.*

The *party system*, or more precisely the structure of competition between the different political parties, is one of the key features affecting recruitment (Norris and Lovenduski 1995: 190). Two dimensions are relevant here: The ideological positions in left-right terms and the relative strength of parties measured by their number. Germany belongs to the category of *fragmented party systems*, characterised by a high degree of ideological polarisation and a large number of parties (Norris and Lovenduski 1995: 192). I take a closer look at ideological issues when addressing the party context in the following section. A positive effect on the share of women in parliament is expected from the number of competing parties. The latter is usually measured by Laakso and Taagepera’s (1979) concept of the effective number of parties (ENP), calculated as follows:

$$ENP = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^n s_i^2}$$

in which  $s_i$  is the seat share of the  $i$ -th party.

Seen from the supply side, a larger number of parties means a multiplication of access points for women (Norris 1993: 319; Norris and Lovenduski 1995: 192). On the demand side, the inclusion of women by one party may be a selling point in elections that could cause other parties to follow suit and to likewise increase their own share of women (Krook et al. 2006: 200). Women's representation should therefore be positively affected by increased party competition.

H10: *A positive relationship is anticipated between the number of parties represented in a town council and the proportion of female town councillors.*

Members of traditionally marginalised groups, such as women, need *role models* who encourage them to follow their example, take action, and get personally involved (Phillips 1995: 62). An exceptional persona in the political arena may fulfil this role, such as German Chancellor Angela Merkel or the Spanish Minister of Defence Carme Chacón. In addition to their function as a symbol for women's success, they may also actively mentor and promote women (Davidson-Schmich 2006: 223). The most central political character in a city is undoubtedly the mayor. It is plausible that a female mayor will not only motivate interested women to run for her own party, but also change the attitudes within other parties and among voters.

H11: *The share of female town councillors is higher in towns where the mayor is female.*

### **Party context**

It is not only the environment in which parties operate that impacts the nomination and election of women; the parties themselves play a crucial role. Depending on their specific *organisation of the recruitment process*, their *rules*, and *ideology*, parties may hinder or foster women who aim to hold office (Norris and Lovenduski 1995: 198).

As for the *organisation of the recruitment process* and the nomination of candidates, local party elites in Germany face a number of barriers. First, there are uniform rules for all parties enumerated by the municipal electoral laws of the Länder. These rules provide very strict guidelines on how candidate selection must be conducted. A meeting in which all party members or their delegates vote on the candidates is required. Moreover, detailed minutes of the meeting must be submitted to the election supervisor along with the list of candidates (Meyer 2007: 441, municipal electoral laws). The elite is further limited by the pool of aspirants, which tends to decrease with town size (Holtkamp 2008: 126). There are also frequent records of so-called "Kampfabstimmungen", or crucial votes, over list positions, or SMD candidacies. While there are accounts of hierarchical party structures (Berkemeier 1999: 72), local party elites in Germany seem rather constrained. Given this

general view and the fact that one would have to separately analyse the internal structures of all 764 local branches of national parties, or even entirely local parties and voter associations, on which very little research exists, the variable *party organisation* will not be further considered.

*Party ideology* is an important factor for the political inclusion of women and in Germany it is directly linked to parties' *rules* on the inclusion of women. As left parties are more open to the ideas of a balanced and egalitarian representation, they introduced the highest quota requirements (Davidson-Schmich 2006; 2007; Hoecker 1998b; Kolinsky 1993a; 1993b; 1995; Krook et al. 2006; McKay 2004). The Green party paved the way in 1985 by implementing a 50% quota, with the first and each subsequent odd list position being reserved for women.<sup>13</sup> The same rule was adopted in 1991 by the socialist PDS, the successor of the former eastern German national party. The Social Democrats (SPD) introduced a quota in 1988, requiring at least a third of the representatives to be female. This proportion was raised to 40% in 1994 and has remained at this level ever since. The Christian Democrats (CDU) followed in 1996, also with a quota of one-third. In contrast to the other parties, the CDU rule is a soft quota (Krook et al. 2006: 200). If not enough women are nominated for an election list in the first round, the list is then deemed to be invalid and new candidates can be nominated. The list resulting from the second round is valid even if the quota requirement is not fulfilled. The Christian Social party (CSU), the Bavarian branch of the CDU, and the Liberals (FDP) do not use any quotas. Apart from these major parties, there are also many smaller parties and voter associations that seek office at the local level. Looking at the sample, these groups have produced three women-only lists; however, these account for only six out of nearly 6000 total seats.<sup>14</sup> As for all the other small parties and local voter associations, be they right-wing, liberal, ecological, or socialist, etc., no information on quota arrangements could be found in the literature.

To capture the impact of quotas on the share of women in the town council, the quota index (QI) proposed by Kaiser and Hennl (2008: 174) is used. This index calculates the theoretical quota of the elected assembly given the seat shares of the elected parties and their quota requirements. QI is calculated using the following formula:

$$QI = \sum_{i=1}^n (s_i * q_i)$$

where  $s_i$  corresponds to the seat share and  $q_i$  to the quota of the  $i$ -th party.

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<sup>13</sup> The so-called 'zipper system'.

<sup>14</sup> These lists gained two seats each in Frankfurt, Cottbus, and Kempten.

As the Christian Democrats only have a soft quota, the question upraises as to whether this regulation is as effective as the regulations in other parties and whether this soft quota should be included in the above quota index. To answer this question, the compliance records of the various parties are examined.

*Table 1 – party quotas and compliance record in German town councils*

<b>party</b>	<b>quota</b>	<b>average share of female councillors</b>	<b>compliance record (quota - share of women)</b>
Socialists (PDS)	50%	30.6%	-19,4%
Greens	50%	43.2%	-6,8%
Social Democrats (SPD)	40%	36.2%	-3,8%
Christian Democrats (CDU)	33.3% (soft quota)	25.5%	-7,8%

Note: all data stems from the period between 2001 and 2004.

While none of the parties fulfilled their quotas, the CDU was not lagging as far behind as one might think it would due to the non-binding nature of its quota. While the average difference between a party's quota and its actual share of women was 9.5%, the Christian Democrats missed their quota by *only* 7.8%. The party with the worst compliance record is the PDS, with a difference of nearly 20%. Moreover, the Socialists only rank third in terms of female representation. To sum up, simply because their regulations are non-binding, there seems to be no reason why one should exclude the Christian Democrats from the calculation of the quota index.

H12: *Town councils with a greater total share of parties that employ quotas will also be characterised by a greater share of female town councillors.*

## **5. Data and methods**

Having reviewed the literature and formulated the hypotheses, I now turn to the empirical analysis of the data. The dependent variable in this study is the share of women in the town councils of 113 German towns. The first election after the year 2000 was chosen so that all of the analysed elections occurred during the period between 2001 and 2004. Earlier or later elections could not be considered as data for the dependent or some of the independent variables were not obtainable. All data stems from the respective election year, apart from the data on Catholicism, which was only available for 2001. *Table 3* in the appendix shows the operationalisation of the variables, summary statistics, the theoretically expected relationships, and the data sources.

To study the independent influence of the predictor variables, multiple regression analysis (OLS method) is employed. Three models are estimated: Model 1 includes all of the 12 variables; in Model 2, only the variables for the societal environment are considered; and Model 3 only contains the

variables for the political and party systems. Insignificant heteroscedasticity was found in all models, as detected by the Cook-Weisberg test. Multicollinearity was tested for by the computation of uncentred variance inflation factors (VIF). VIF values markedly below the critical threshold of 10 were found in all models (Schnell 1994: 247). All models were tested for outliers by computing the Cook's *d* statistic. Excluding all cases exceeding the critical threshold of 4/n did not alter any of the signs; the significance level of only one coefficient in Model 2, namely, family structures, changed. This will be further discussed below. Standardised regression coefficients are displayed in order to compare the effects of the independent variables found in *Table 2*.

*Table 2* – Determinants of the local representation of women, multiple regression models (OLS)

independent variables	regression coefficients		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
education	-0.20 (-1.15)	-0.12 (-0.72)	
women in the labour force	<b>0.38***</b> <b>(2.79)</b>	<b>0.34***</b> <b>(2.69)</b>	
income	0.05 (0.47)	0.11 (1.11)	
Catholicism	<b>-0.27**</b> <b>(-1.99)</b>	<b>-0.38***</b> <b>(-3.32)</b>	
family structures	-0.13 (-1.37)	-0.14 (-1.55)	
town size	<b>0.28***</b> <b>(2.87)</b>	<b>0.34***</b> <b>(3.91)</b>	
political history	<b>-0.36*</b> <b>(-1.95)</b>	<b>-0.53***</b> <b>(-3.19)</b>	
electoral system type	-0.14 (-0.92)		<b>-0.31***</b> <b>(-2.70)</b>
district magnitude	<b>0.34***</b> <b>(2.62)</b>		<b>0.59***</b> <b>(5.16)</b>
party strength	-0.06 (-0.54)		-0.06 (-0.62)
role models	0.06 (0.76)		0.06 (0.74)
gender quotas	<b>0.22*</b> <b>(1.73)</b>		<b>0.26***</b> <b>(2.68)</b>
F-Test	5.70***	7.81***	6.30***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.41	0.34	0.23
n	113	113	113

Note: Dependent variable = share of female town councillors. The reported values are standardised regression coefficients (t-values in parentheses). \*coefficient with  $p < 0.10$ ; \*\*coefficient with  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*\* coefficient with  $p < 0.01$ . For data sources and descriptions, see *Table 3* and text.

The empirical results show that variables from all three contexts in which the recruitment process is embedded are associated with the local representation of women. Looking at the societal environment, the share of women in the labour force, Catholicism, town size, and the political history

are found to be significant factors. For the first three of these variables, the signs of the coefficients point in the theoretically expected directions, thereby confirming the initial hypotheses. Higher shares of women are found in municipal councils in comparatively large towns with high female participation rates in the labour market and smaller relative Catholic populations. The association of the political history variable clearly contradicts the initial assumption: While a democratic legacy fosters female representation for German towns, a communist heritage poses as stumbling block. It seems that the actual inequality during the 40 years of socialism in East Germany has left deeper traces in the political culture than the propagated, but never realised, ideal of universal equality. These findings, however, clearly corroborate the results of previous comparative studies with an international focus, namely, that female representation took the form of tokenism and was part of socialist regimes' "directive emancipation" (Montgomery 2003: 1). The collapse of these regimes led to a marginalisation of women in the post-socialist democratic parliaments and thereby revealed the actual state of gender equality in socialist societies.

Three other societal variables—women's level of education, gross income, and family structures—were not found to be significantly associated with female representation rates. Whereas the coefficients for the income variable were of the expected signs, for the level of education and family structures, the associations found were counter to the hypothesised directions. The coefficients were negative in all models for the family structure variable; when outliers were tested for, as noted above, a significant negative association in Model 2 was found. These findings indicate that the erosion of traditional family structures does not further the political participation of women, but rather impedes it. Correspondingly, Lukoschat et al. (2008: 5) state that the majority of female city councillors are married, have children, and are actively supported by their partner.

Of the two electoral system variables, only one is significantly associated with women's representation. As expected, I found district magnitude to correlate strongly with the inclusion of women, indicating that larger districts do indeed improve women's prospects. The basic type of electoral system did not make a significant difference in Model 1, although it did in Model 3. Moreover, the signs of both the coefficients reveal that mixed systems tend to perform better than PR systems. This is a surprising effect as it contradicts the findings of many others, namely, that PR systems yield the highest shares of women in parliament (see text above). There is one possible explanation for this phenomenon. Out of the 86 towns in the sample with a PR system, 85 towns employ an open list system, whereas all the towns with mixed systems have closed lists. In open list systems the voters can change the rank order on the ballot so that candidates can get elected even though their original position was not sufficiently high. Correspondingly, there are no safe list positions. How does list design impact female representation? Pippa Norris (2006: 211) claims that list design should have "little, if any, systematic effect upon women's election". For municipal

elections in Germany, however, there is contrary evidence. It is reported that in many places male candidates benefit from open lists at the expense of female candidates (Wehling 1994). The reason for this is seen in the persisting predominant stereotype that the politician should be male. It is, however, not possible to include a dummy variable for open lists in the analysis above, as the electoral system type and list form correlate with  $r=0.98^{***}$ , so that apart from problems with multicollinearity, nothing would be gained. In order to estimate the impact of open list systems, I chose a different strategy. For 37 out of the 85 towns with open lists, I was able to obtain the original paper ballots. Using these ballots, a hypothetical share of women in the town council was calculated that would result from a closed list system.<sup>15</sup> Upon first glance, the list form seems to have a visible, albeit slight, impact, as the mean of the hypothetical shares was 33.83%; the mean of the actual shares was 32.44%, lower by 1.39%. I then conducted a *t*-test and found that this difference is highly significant at the 5%-level, indicating that it is indeed a systematic one. The impact may appear marginal, but it is large for a technical detail and for the entire sample; an increase of 1.39% would translate into 83 more women on the councils.

The strength of parties measured by their relative number may not be significant, but its negative sign reveals that a relationship inverse to the one hypothesised exists. One reason why the share of women might decrease with an increasing number of parties might be that most of the larger parties have gender quotas, even if they are not entirely fulfilled. Smaller parties and local voter associations, which cause a fragmentation of the party system, are lacking this sort of measure, thereby rendering less party competition as beneficial to women. The last political system variable, female role models, may not contribute significant explanatory power, but the presence of a female mayor does seem to have a slightly positive effect.

Finally, the quota index showed a significant association in both models where it was included. The coefficients and their theoretically expected signs corroborate the contribution of quotas to the increase of the share of women in elected assemblies. However, as outlined in the previous section, defining a quota can only be the first in a series of steps. Without securing compliance there is always the danger that the enormous potential of this instrument is reduced to a sign of political good-will.

## **6. Conclusion and Discussion**

Not only does the inclusion of women vary widely *between* nations, but also *within* nations. The local arena has a vital function in any political system and if we strive to understand women's participation in politics it is indispensable to study their involvement in local affairs. This study attempts to build an understanding of the factors that encourage or hinder women from seeking public office in their municipalities. Building on the comparative model of the recruitment process by Pippa Norris and

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<sup>15</sup> It is assumed that voters' party preferences would remain constant in open and in closed list systems.

Joni Lovenduski (1995), three sets of explanatory factors are reviewed and adapted to the conditions in local German politics. The paper reaches several important conclusions: First, while recruitment processes at the local level may have been rarely studied, they seem to function in ways similar to their national-level counterparts. Factors that have long since been known to impact the inclusion of women, like Catholicism, district magnitude, or gender quotas, work in their familiar ways. This is good news, for the wheel need not be re-invented when it comes to the design of measures that would potentially increase the share of female councillors. Second, it appears that beyond a certain threshold, further socio-economic development does not necessarily result in more gender equality. In this study, I found insignificant associations between gross income and women's political participation and a weak but negative relation between women's educational levels and their participation. This is certainly not to say that we need less educated women; rather, from a certain high level of attainment on, other factors might increase in relevance. Other modernisation tendencies, like the erosion of traditional family structures, may even hinder women from becoming involved in politics. Again, this is a conclusion based on a very high level of societal development and should not be interpreted as an argument in favour of archaic social values. Third, when analysing variables as similar as the local German electoral systems, attention must be paid to the details. Elements that seem rather unimportant on a large scale, like open list systems, may very well play an important role on a smaller one. My last conclusion refers to the political history. Seen from a gender perspective, liberal democracy is, and has thus far been the only political system that truly allows for equality between women and men. Even though the rhetoric and the appearance of socialist regimes may be more egalitarian, the reality in these systems, as well as the mark they are able to leave on future generations, are often of a different nature. In Germany, this situation is evidenced not only by significantly lower shares of women in local offices in the eastern part of the country, but by also the successor of the former socialist state party, the PDS: Despite its strict 50% quota, it has the worst compliance record of all of the major parties.

The study of women's involvement in local politics should by no means end here. While the analysis presented in this paper highlights some of the factors that impact female participation, it reveals nothing about women's actual role in politics. Here, further research is needed. The local level, with its multitude of responsibilities, again offers a broad pool of possibilities.

## APPENDIX

Table 3 – variables, operationalisations, and data description

variable	operationalisation	summary statistics	expected relationship	data source
		- minimum ( <i>name of town</i> ) - maximum ( <i>name of town</i> )		
representation of women	% of female town councillors	- 14.3% ( <i>Magdeburg</i> ) - 48.0% ( <i>Fürth</i> )	<i>dependent variable</i>	statistical offices of the Länder
education	% women of all employees with at least high school degree	- 24.0% ( <i>Salzgitter</i> ) - 58.0% ( <i>Hoyerswerda</i> )	+ (positive)	Federal Statistical Office and statistical offices of the Länder (2006), own calculations
women in the labour force	% of women participating in the labour market	- 38.2% ( <i>Emden</i> ) - 52.5% ( <i>Greifswald</i> )	+ (positive)	Federal Statistical Office and statistical offices of the Länder (2006), own calculations
income	GDP per capita	- 15.174€ ( <i>Bottrop</i> ) - 73.740€ ( <i>Wolfsburg</i> )	+ (positive)	Federal Statistical Office and statistical offices of the Länder (2006), own calculations
Catholicism	% of all taxpayers who contribute to the Catholic Church	- 1.9% ( <i>Chemnitz</i> ) - 76.1% ( <i>Passau</i> )	- (negative)	Research Data Centres of the Federal Statistical Office and the statistical offices of the Länder (income tax database)
family structures	number of divorces per marriage	- 0.27 ( <i>Passau</i> ) - 0.96 ( <i>Leverkusen</i> )	+ (positive)	Federal Statistical Office, own calculations
town size	number of inhabitants	- 35.000 ( <i>Zweibrücken</i> ) - 1.232.072 ( <i>Munich</i> )	+ (positive)	Federal Statistical Office and statistical offices of the Länder (2006), own calculations
political history	dummy-variable: democratic / West (0); post-socialist / East (1)	- western German towns: 87 - eastern German towns: 26	+ (positive)	Federal Statistical Office
electoral system type	dummy-variable: mixed system (0); PR (1)	- towns with mixed system: 27 - towns with PR: 86	+ (positive)	municipal electoral laws of the Länder
district magnitude	average number of seats per electoral district	- 1.75 ( <i>Kiel</i> ) - 93 ( <i>Frankfurt</i> )	+ (positive)	statistical offices of the Länder and the towns
party strength	effective number of parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979)	- 2.1 ( <i>Salzgitter</i> ) - 5.9 ( <i>Halle</i> )	+ (positive)	statistical offices of the Länder and the towns
role models	dummy-variable: sex of mayor male (0); female (1)	- towns with male mayor: 95 - towns with female mayor: 18	+ (positive)	town websites
gender quotas	quota index with CDU quota = 1/3 (Kaiser and Hennl 2008)	- 21.7% ( <i>Kaufbeuren</i> ) - 41.6% ( <i>Erfurt</i> )	+ (positive)	statistical offices of the Länder and the towns

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