

Theorizing Women's Political Leadership: Cross-National Comparison

Minjeoung Kim

Abstract—Since women obtained the right to vote in 1893 for the first time in New Zealand, they have tried to participate actively into politics but still the world has a few women in political leadership. The article asks which factors might influence the appearance of women leadership in politics. The article investigates two factors such as political context, personal factors. Countries where economic development is stable and political democracy is consolidated have a tendency of appearance of women political leadership but in less developed and politically unstable countries, women politicians can be in power with their own reasons. For the personal factor, their feminist propensity is studied but there is no relationship between the appearance of women leaders and their feminist propensity.

Keywords—Women political leadership, political context, slow track, transitory countries, feminist propensity.

I. INTRODUCTION

SINCE women obtained the right to vote in 1893 for the first time in New Zealand, they have tried to participate actively into politics but still there are very few women in politics. In 1945, women constituted only 3.0% of all MPs (based on data from 26 countries). That figure rose to 7.5% in 1955(61cases) and 8.1% (94cases) in 1965, 10.9% in 1975(115cases), 12.0% in 1985(136cases), and 11.6% in 1995(176cases). In 2005, this figure arrived at 16.2% based on the data from the IPU (187 cases). It is quite striking that despite every effort which international organizations such as UN, national governments and worldwide women' organizations have made this figure does not increase that much. While steady, the progress has been slow. If current incremental rates continue, it will not be until 2025 that an average of 30 percent will be reached and not until 2040 that parity will be achieved [1]. At the executive level, there have 302 women ministers out of 3486 ministers in the 180 countries [2]. It is about 8.7%. There is a big regional variety in the numbers of women ministers. Western European countries have much more women ministers than other regions, and Oceania and the Middle East have women ministers less than 4%. In the top level of politics, Austria was the first country to have elected a woman to the presidency of one of the Parliament's Chambers. In 2007, only 28 women preside over one of the House of the 188 existing Parliaments. This is only 10.7% of the total number of 262. The number of women leading their nations (as presidents or prime ministers) at any one time has never reached double figures. Since Sirimavo Bandaranaike became prime minister of Sri Lanka in 1959,

Minjeoung Kim is with the University of Seoul, Seoul, Korea (phone: 82 2 6490 2042; fax: 82 2 6490 2039; e-mail: mjkim@uos.ac.kr).

This study is supported by the National Research foundation of Korea Grant funded by the Korean government (NRF-2013S1A3A2054311).

now 53 women find themselves in political top leaders. If these women are distinguished by their continents, Europe is a more advanced continent in this point and Africa less advanced. This paper asks why several countries have a rich experience to have women political leaders that other countries don't. Many researches try to make clear the reasons or conditions which influence the number of women MPs. But there is a scant attention given to women political top leaders. This gap is due to the relatively small number of female presidents or prime ministers. Small cases are hard to be theorized. Despite of this difficulty, there can be found important results of researches in this field [3].

As from above data is the difference between continents regarding to the number of women politicians, each continent or country has their own condition which promotes women to succeed in politics or to arrive at the position of head of state. This article asks the favorable conditions to affect the coming to stage of women politicians. Secondly, women politicians differ from themselves. Some women are may be more male than male politicians. They have tough character. Other women have a more feminine propensity. When this point is regarded as a personal character, this study investigates about their gender perspective. Some female politicians are interested in women's issues. They try to enhance women's social status and push their colleagues to pass women friendly laws. Other women are indifferent from women's issues at all. They think that women's issues are one of the issues that politicians can handle so they want to take other issues. Sometimes there are women MPs who vote against women friendly laws. The gender perspective is important issue because the argument that politics needs more women may assume that women are representatives for women's interest. Therefore, whether women politicians have gender perspective or interested in gender issue is an important question. When someone has gender sensitive perspective, this perspective may come from his or her background of education, experience of their younger period or their parents' perspective. The most important factor that influences politicians' gender perspective is their career path. Therefore, this article focuses on the career path which leads women politicians to a top political position. First question is about the political context and second question is about the female politicians' personal side.

Here twelve female top political leaders who occupied in 2008 presidential position or prime minister's position are studied [4]. Actually we have 13 female heads of state, but because of the scant of information for President Borjana Kristo of the Federation of Bosnia-Herzegovina, here are investigated 12 female current heads of state except her.

II. THEORETICAL APPROACH

Usually researchers mention the barriers which block women to participate in politics. But it would be said adversely the favorable conditions which affect women's participation in politics because they are a sort of representation that they have overcome these barriers or they have favorable conditions which help to overcome or to offset these barriers. These favorable conditions and offsetting conditions might be their reason to succeed in political life. Therefore if it is found out some similar cultural, political and social characters in a society to these favorable and offsetting factors, it is said that a woman candidate for a presidency or a prime minister position will succeed. In this reason, it will be discussed favorable or offsetting factors to lead women to top political position.

Powerful socioeconomic, cultural and institutional factors could help women's success. While Rule sums up narrow gender roles, restrictive religious doctrines, unequal laws and education, discriminatory socioeconomic conditions, male-biased party leaders or other political elites and 'women-unfriendly' electoral systems are the obstacles [5]; woman friendly social, cultural context may be a favorable factor. This may be a prevailing sex equal culture, equal education, and electoral system favorable to women. It is ready to have a female leader in a society where the number of women in the legislature is high. Many researchers point out the fact that the cultural barriers to the representation of women are drawn from the religious inclination of the country. Rule notes that most non-democratic countries' cultures have dominant religions such as Islam, philosophies such as Confucianism that generally confine women to a subordinate role which is still controversial [6]. It has to be mentioned that Roman Catholicism was negatively related with the recruitment of women candidates in the early 1970's.

Politically, three factors are important to influence women's participation in politics. First is the ideology of a party. Norris argues that in candidate recruitment social democrat and green party are far more likely to believe intervention in the recruitment process is necessary and appropriate [7]. In Western Europe, women were particularly successful in socialist and green party. It is assumed that their egalitarian ideologies are likely to give rise to more women candidates and MPs. Secondly; party fragmentation may also affect the number of women. In this point, some argue that a fragmented multi-party system provides more chance for women to participate in electoral politics or to be nominated as a candidate for an election [8]. It would be right in the Scandinavia cases. However, in a single member district system, a system where a few strong parties dominate the legislature is more likely to see women elected than a system where many parties win a substantial number of seats each. In fact, party fragmentation may increase the number of women nominated as candidates but to actually win seats the fragmentation needs to be lower. Thirdly, historical experience often leads to gender advancement and political liberalization enables women to mobilize within the public sphere. Therefore, it might be expected women politicians in established democracies than in transitional or fledgling democracies.

Sometimes authoritarian regimes recruit female professionals as token women in politics for showing the legitimacy of the regime but this is not for the high level of position but a position only with a nominal power.

Women politicians divide three career paths. One path is that they begin their political career at the party membership in their earlier age. They go up the party ladder to arrive at the top political leader position. In the past, in this type, women politicians had a sort of male leadership which was not interested in women's issue and of which the style is like male leaders. Second path is that they are not in politics; they are professionals outside politics such as economist, professor, jurist or journalist. When they are renowned in their field, they are recruited in politics by the appointment or by the patronage of a male politician unless they decide to devote themselves in politics lately. They appeal to electorate with their professional knowledge and experience. As politics gets complex and needs specific knowledge, this sort of politicians can be demanded in politics. Third track is a subrogation. Women with father or husband who was a very renowned politician succeed in politics with their family tie.

For examining social and cultural condition, this study uses GDI ranking and value to see the country's social, cultural conditions. Additionally, it is compared also the percentage of women MPs of a concerned country. For the political factors, it is used the data from the Freedom house and also women politicians' party affiliation. Finally with close investigation with their biography and study of their country's situation, it will be analyzed the track of 12 women politicians.

III. ANALYSIS

A. Political Context

As it is investigated closely 12 female top political leaders, the countries where they are from quite vary. Mostly they are from free countries based on the data from the Freedom House. But surprisingly Arroyo, Grecianii, Diogo and Johnson-Sirleaf are the president or prime ministers of a partly free country. Their countries still have suffered a severe violation of human rights and sometimes troublesome disorder just after the political transition. In the history of gender advancement and political liberalization, their countries are categorized into two groups. One is a group of countries more advanced of which degree of gender advancement is fairly high, and the other group is a group of countries where women's social status is quite low. The GDI ranking of Ukraine of Tymoshenko is 69, and the GEM of this country is 75. The GDI ranking of India of Patil is 113, and that of Mozambique of Diogo is 150, one of the lowest countries.

From the investigation above, the clarification of female heads of state is divided into two categories: one is female leaders of western democratic countries; the other is those of non-western countries. Non-western countries have several negative factors that influence to emerge female leaders and are usually ranked low HDI, GDI, with partial freedom. It has to be found out offsetting factors to help women leaders emerging.

First each non-western country which has female head of state has its own political situation that may be helpful for women leaders to be chosen. Six out of eight countries except Argentina, India are in an important political transition period when women leaders are elected or appointed. Chile and Philippines experienced political turbulences after military rules, Ukraine and Moldova passed transitional period of de-Sovietization after the dissolution of Soviet Union. Mozambique and Liberia suffered a long lasting civil war and after these civil wars, women leaders are chosen as a sort of reconciliatory of torn country. The fact that political situation is important to rise up female political leader has been proved also in western democratic countries. In New Zealand, Helen Clark was chosen as prime minister when the labor party won the general election after the consecutive failure of 10 years in general elections. Angela Merkel is chosen as Chancellor by the Grand coalition in a political crisis where any of bigger parties could not constitute a ruling coalition.

Secondly, two out of eight non-western countries have female leaders who succeeded their family tie. Arroyo of Philippines is a daughter of the former president and Cristina Kirchner is wife of the former president. India of Patil is also known as a country where women politician are successful with their family tie.

TABLE I
 POLITICAL SITUATIONS OF COUNTRIES

Name and country	Level of Freedom	Remarks
Tarja Halonen Finland	Free	
Mary McAleese Ireland	Free	country having another woman president
Helen Clark New Zealand	Free	After defeated for 10 years, when the Labor party came into office as part of a coalition, she became the prime minister.
Angela Merkel Germany	Free	With a grand coalition, after three weeks of negotiations, Merkel became Chancellor
Cristina Kirchner Argentina	Free	Wife of the former president, country having another female president even though not elected
Michelle Bachelet Chile	Free	After Pinochet regime, the political democratization has proceeded
Yulia Tymoshenko Ukraine	Free	After taking to pieces of the Soviet Union, the country experiencing "Orange Revolution"[9]
Gloria Arroyo Philippines	Partially Free	Daughter of the former president Diosdedo Macapaga
Zinaida Grecianii Moldova	Partially Free	Country having another female president After the independence, the country tried to cut the relationship with Russia which caused an economic difficulty. The country is in transition after the de-Sovietization.
Pratibha Patil India	Free	Country having female prime minister and politics influenced by big political families
Luisa Dias Diogo Mozambique	Partially Free	After the end of 16year-long civil war, the country has still difficulty to establish democratic political procedure.
Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf Liberia	Partially Free	Johnson-Sirleaf won in the first presidential election after the long lasting civil war. The country suffered the civil war of ethnic groups.

TABLE II
 SOCIAL STATUS OF WOMEN

	GDI rank	GDI value	% of Women MPs	GEM Rank	GEM Value	Female legislators, senior officials and managers
Tarja Halonen	8	0.947	42%	3	0.887	30
Mary McAleese	15	0.940	13.3%	19	0.699	31
Helen Clark	18	0.935	32.2%	11	0.811	36
Angela Merkel	20	0.931	31.6%	9	0.831	37
Cristina Kirchner	36	0.865	35%	17	0.728	33
Michelle Bachelet	40	0.859	15%	60	0.519	25
Yulia Tymoshenko	69	0.785	8.7%	75	0.462	38
Gloria Arroyo	77	0.768	22.5%	45	0.590	58
Zinaida Grecianii	97	0.704	21.8%	55	0.547	39
Pratibha Patil	113	0.600	8.3%
Luisa Dias Diogo	150	0.373	34.8%
Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf			12.5%			

GEM=Gender Empowerment Measurement

B. Personal Factors

Personally, women political leaders are mostly affiliated in a progressive party. They usually are a member of socialist party except Angela Merkel of Germany. As many researchers notice, the egalitarian ideologies of left wing parties are likely to give rise to more women candidates and also to accept a female political leader. And also the egalitarian ideologies of a left wing party are favorable for a female politician to go up to the highest level of party ladder. Many female political leaders who are affiliated in a left wing party have arrived at the top political position through diverse positions of party and of national elective positions. Halonen of Finland began her career as a parliamentary secretary and then she experienced a number of public offices. Clark of New Zealand also joined the Labor Party when she was young and then she had actively participated party activities. She was nominated several times as minister. With this propensity, the female political leaders share their gender perspective. Mostly they have gender sensitive perspective. They are eager to develop women's social status and women friendly policies.

TABLE III
WOMEN LEADER'S PERSONAL FACTORS

	Party affiliation	Political orientation	Gender perspective	beginning of political career
Halonen	Social Democratic Party	progressive	sensitive	Politician
McAleese	Fianna Fail	progressive	sensitive	Journalist
Helen Clark	labor party	progressive	sensitive	Politician
Merkel	Christian Democratic Party	conservative		Spokesman by the appointment
Cristina Kirchner	Front for Victory party	progressive		deputy of a provincial legislature
Michelle Bachelet	Concertacion Coalition	progressive	sensitive	Minister appointed
Yulia Tymoshenko	BYUT Block for Yulia Tymoshenko	progressive nationalist		MP
Arroyo	LDP			Economist, Senator
Zinaida Grecianii	Communist			Minister
Pratibha Patil	Indian National Congress	progressive		deputy of a provincial legislature, governor
Luisa Dias Diogo	FRELIMO The Front of Liberation of Mozambique	progressive		Economist
Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf	Unity party			Economist

From this examination, it may be drawn the typology of female. When their career path is closely investigated, a tendency may be found out that female leaders can take by the type of their country.

TABLE IV
CAREER PATH OF WOMEN POLITICIANS

	Entering politics	Their perspective on gender
Western Countries (High ranking of GDI, GEM)	Member of a socialist party	Gender sensitive
Non western countries	Social Professional (Economist or lawyer)	
	transitional period	
	Family tie	Gender blinding

Female leaders from western countries began their political career with joining a socialist party. They usually pursue gender sensitive policies if not feminist policies [10]. They usually struggle in party politics with their male colleagues and they may experience male dominant politics, and then finally they become to be gender sensitive.

Female leaders from non-western countries divide two groups: one is from a country in a social transition period and the other is to do politics with family tie. The first type is usually recruited in politics with their professional career. Bachelet is pediatrician and actively participated in civil movement. She was appointed to a minister with her professional experience. Tymoshenko started her political career with the position of president of big oil company. Grecianii is an economic professional who knows well Russia. Diogo and John-Sirleaf are also economic professional who worked for World Bank. It is hard to find out a clear tendency about their gender perspective because they are chosen as specialist.

The second type enters usually into politics with their family tie. They are raised in a political environment and began their political career with political halo of their father or husband. They don't have opportunity to be conscious about the gender inequality.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, economic stability and development can influence women's political success and political democracy may help women to win political struggle. However, even in less prosperous and less democratic countries, women can be political leaders if they belong to important political family. Additionally the career path of women top leaders discerns three different types. One is in western democratic countries which have experienced a gradual path to increase women politicians and finally reached to arrive to top leader. In non-western countries, an appearance of women leaders with family tie is quite usual. Third type for political context is an appearance of female leaders with drastic political transition. After or during the drastic political transition, it is needed a caring, healing leadership and a compromising leader who is free from any existing power group. In Africa and in Balkan countries after internal war, some women politicians are elected as president or as prime minister with this reason.

REFERENCES

- [1] www.ipu.EGM/EPWD/2005/BP.2
- [2] Andrew Reynolds, "Women in the Legislative and Executives of the World: Knocking at the Highest Glass Ceiling" *World Politics*, 1999, vol. 51, no.4
- [3] Michael A. Genovese, "Margaret Thatcher and the Politics of Conviction Leadership" in Michael Genovese, ed., *Women as National Leaders*, London: Sage, 1993 ;Olga Opfell, *Women Prime Ministers and Presidents* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1993; Marcia Lynn Whicker and Leonie Isaacs Hedy, "The Maleness of the American Presidency" in Lois Duke Whitaker, ed., *Women in Politics: Insiders or Outsiders*, Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1999;Farida Jalazai, 2004, "Women Political Leaders: Past and Present" *Women in Politics*, vol. 26(3/4)
- [4] <http://www.guide2womenleaders.com/Current-Women-Leaders.htm>. Based on this information, it is ruled out the hereditary queens and non political appointee
- [5] Wilma Rule, "Parliaments of, by, and for the People: Except for Women?" in Wilma Rule and Zimmerman, eds., *Electoral System in Comparative Perspective: their Impact on Women and Minorities*, Westport, Conn.:Green1994, p.15
- [6] Rule, *ibid.*, p.26
- [7] Pippa Norris, "Conclusion: Comparing Legislative recruitment" in Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris, eds., *Gender and Party Politics*, Thousand Oaks, California: Sage, 1993, p.319
- [8] Lovenduski and Norris, *ibid.*, pp.317-19

- [9] Lucan A. Way, "Rapacious Individualism and Political Competition in Ukraine, 1992-2004," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol.38, 2005
- [10] Jalalzai, Farida, "Women Political Leaders: Past and Present" *Women & Politics*, Vol.26, 2004

Minjeoung Kim, Ph.D.in Political Science, Professor of University of Seoul, Department of International Relations, received her B.S. and Master in Political Science from Yonsei University, Seoul, Korea in 1984 and 1986 respectively and Ph.D. in Political Science from Université de Paris 2, France in 1993. She works for University of Seoul since 2001. She is member of Korean Political Science Association (KPSA) and for 2014 is serving the chair of Research Committee of Women and Politics of KPSA. She is also member of Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA) and International Political Science Association (IPSA). Her research interests are including Gender analysis about the political phenomena and comparative politics. She published many articles about women's political participation in Korea and France.