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LET US IN, LET US IN:
A STUDY OF FEMALE REPRESENTATION
IN POST-COMMUNIST LEGISLATURES

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Research Honors
Dr. Kathleen Montgomery
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There is no dispute that women are grossly under-represented in the world's legislatures. However, there are several explanations for this under-representation and for the variation that exists between regions and between countries. The prevailing literature points to institutional, developmental, and cultural variables. This study uses the post-communist context in order to control for aspects of culture and current attitudes associated with the legacy of communism. Given the common experience of state socialism and the re-traditionalization of social values associated with a backlash against directive emancipation, culture cannot be the main factor in determining the wide variation in levels of female legislative representation in the new democracies of East-Central Europe. In testing for both institutional variations and levels of modernity, this study suggests that socioeconomic development explains variation across the region while institutions explain variations within countries over time. Furthermore, low socioeconomic development may place a ceiling on the extent to which "woman-friendly" institutions can increase female representation.

Introduction

Women are under-represented in legislatures throughout the world. Only 13.9 percent of all legislators are women (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000). The presence of female faces does not, by itself, guarantee political equality. In the post-communist legislatures, the decrease in the number of female members since communism does not necessarily entail a decrease in women's political influence, because descriptive representation was achieved through the use of quotas in single candidate races (Wolchik, 1998). Arguably, however, female parliamentarians are necessary to get women's issues on the agenda, and the absence of women in the decision making process has negative repercussions for the quality of democracy (Rueschemeyer, 1994; Matland and Taylor, 1997; Zimmerman, 1994). Women in post-communist countries stand to lose substantial rights during the dual economic and democratic transitions (Einhorn, 1993).

While no country in the world has achieved gender equity, Sweden is close with 42.7 percent of the seats in the legislature held by women (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000). On the other end of the spectrum, advanced industrial nations, such as the United States, Ireland, France, and Japan, range from 7 to 13 percent (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000). The post-communist cases generally fall into this lower category, declining from a communist era average of around 30 percent to levels as low as 3 to 5 percent in founding elections in Ukraine, Macedonia, and Albania. Several countries have seen the level of

female representation improve over the decade since democratization began. Croatia in 2000 posted 20 percent female representation. The regional average, however, remains below the levels found in much of Western Europe. This raises a two-fold question: Why is there so much variation among post-communist countries; and what explains change over time within post-communist cases?

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Three Barriers to Female Representation

According to the extant literature, the variation in female legislative representation can be explained by cultural, socioeconomic, and institutional variables (Kostova, 1998 and 1994; Matland, 1998; Norris and Inglehart, 2000; Reynolds, 1999; Kenworthy and Malawi, 1999).

Political culture affects female representation in three ways: it affects whether or not women are willing to enter the political arena; it affects the degree to which women are willing to place pressure on party gatekeepers to recruit women and finally, it determines whether or not the electorate will support female candidates (Norris and Inglehart, 2000; Jaquette, 1997; Etzioni-Halevi and Illy, 1993). Norris and Inglehart find that culture, measured through responses to attitudinal survey questions, has a significant and independent affect on the recruitment of women. Others have operationalized culture using socio-demographic proxies, such as female illiteracy rates, the ratio of the female work force compared to the male work force, and level of female education. These factors are expected to indicate the degree to which the prevailing political culture is egalitarian or traditional.

Matland (1998) sees a more direct role for socioeconomic development or modernity. He argues that, without some basic level of socioeconomic development, women simply lack the cognitive and material resources necessary to mobilize. They must focus instead on issues of family survival. This contention is not without critics, however. Empirical research notes that high levels of socioeconomic development are

neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for high rates of female representation and institutional scholars emphasize that the “rules of the game” are gendered in crucial ways (Norris and Inglehart, 2000; Jaquette, 1997).

The institutional argument usually focuses on the electoral system. In established democracies, electoral systems have been estimated to explain almost 30 percent of the variation in female representation (Norris and Inglehart, 2000). The literature generally supports the idea that proportional representation provides better opportunities for female candidates than single-member district plurality (Norris and Inglehart, 2000; Kostova, 1998; Chowdhury and Nelson, 1994; Etzioni-Halevi and Illy, 1993; Jaquette, 1997; Zimmerman, 1994). Proportional representation benefits women because it encourages ticket balancing (Matland, 1998; Matland and Taylor, 1997). Parties can reach out to particular constituencies in a PR system without displacing powerful intra-party interests or taking the risk of "losing votes." In an SMD system, the "zero sum" nature of competition leads parties to choose safe, entrenched party interests who usually happen to be male. How much a PR system benefits female legislative representation depends on the district magnitude, the number of seats filled by a given constituency, and the party magnitude, the size of the delegation a party can expect to send to the legislature (Matland, 1998; Matland and Taylor, 1997). This, in turn, depends on the relevant number of parties in the system (Matland and Taylor, 1997). The greater the party magnitude, the more likely a party is to balance its ticket. Hence, electoral systems that reduce the number of parties through the use of thresholds ought to favor female candidates.

There is growing acknowledgement that variables from the three approaches probably work together in complex ways. Socioeconomic development affects cultural norms; and institutions, while important, do not exist in a vacuum. Political and social pressures are necessary for institutions to produce high levels of female legislative

representation (Chowdhury and Nelson, 1994; Kenworthy and Malawi, 1999; Reynolds, 1999).

The Post-Communist Culture

The "F" Word

The post-communist context is so interesting because it is widely agreed that post-communist women have rejected Western feminism (Wolchik, 1998; Matynia, 1994; Goldfarb, 1997; Funk, 1993; Meznaric and Ule, 1994). This common cultural "allergy" to feminism is a reaction to the communist experience. In Eastern Europe, socialist regimes strongly encouraged women to participate in the public sphere, while downplaying their achievements in the private sphere (Einhorn, 1993). For women coming out of this communist experience, the tenets of Western feminism, such as emancipation and equality, are too close to the communist rhetoric (Jaquette and Wolchik, 1998; Funk, 1993; Fodor, 1994; Rueschemeyer, 1994). Additionally, there is a myth that Western feminists are spoiled man-haters who have the luxury of indulgence (Funk, 1993). This myth only serves to perpetuate the negative feelings toward Western feminism in post-communist Europe.

The Double Burden

The state socialist models made full employment a priority. Women suddenly found themselves in positions outside of the private sphere. However, there was no movement for gender equity in the private sphere to parallel the movement for equality in the public sphere. Therefore, the new pressures of full-time occupations, and often several part-time jobs, combined with the old expectations of raising a family contributed to a heavy double burden (Regulska, 1994; Siemienska, 1998; Meznaric and Ule, 1994; Szalai, 1998). The communist parties also expected at least a minimum level of political participation, creating a triple burden (Einhorn, 1993; Jaquette and Wolchik, 1998).

Women saw the transition as an opportunity to shed at least one of their burdens. Family duties cannot be shed and, for most, leaving work was not economically feasible.

Therefore, politics was the burden most easily and quickly shed (Rueschemeyer, 1994; Regulska, 1994; Jaquette and Wolchik, 1998; Einhorn, 1993).

Return to Tradition

The only perceived relief of most burdens is a return to homelife. There has been little consideration of men taking on more responsibility at home in order to ease the burden on women (Fodor, 1994). This is a direct result of the disproportionate emancipation of women in the public sphere, while ignoring the gender inequality in the private sphere. Women in East-Central Europe feel that the communist regimes "overemancipated" them (Siemienska, 1998; Matynia, 1994; Havelkova, 1993; Fodor, 1994). In rejecting communism and its basic principles, such as secularism and gender equality, the traditional role of women as homemakers has resurged (Regulska, 1994; Funk, 1993; Siemienska, 1998 and 1999; Kostova, 1998; Einhorn, 1993). The rise of traditional values is linked with the rise of nationalism in East-Central Europe since the fall of communism. Women are seen as the protectors of the nation against "dirty" politics and familial degradation (Einhorn, 1993; Siemienska, 1998).

Women's Issues

Women played an important role in the dissident movements and the transitions of the late 1980s, but their issues are emerging as secondary in the new democracies (Matynia, 1994). Essentially, the new governments see women's issues as a "luxury" that can wait until the economic and institutional problems of a dual transition are solved (Jaquette and Wolchik, 1998; Havelkova, 1993; Fischer and Harsányi, 1994; Fodor, 1994; Tarifa, 1994; Kostova, 1994; Einhorn, 1993).

The relegation of women's issues to second status is part of the rejection of communism and Western feminism. Post-communist women are trying to differentiate themselves from the communist women's organizations and Western feminism (Matynia, 1994). Fortunately, women are beginning to realize the limitations placed upon them both in the past and the present (Matynia, 1994). Now, it is even more important that

there are women in the parliaments of East-Central Europe, so that when women are ready to mobilize, they will have passionate advocates.

Research Design and Methodology

The main hypotheses of this study are (1) The more “woman-friendly” the electoral system, the higher the level of female representation and (2) The higher the level of socioeconomic development, the higher the level of female legislative representation. These hypotheses are tested in the post-communist countries of East-Central Europe. This allows for some control over current attitudes about traditional gender roles. The allergy to feminism, exit of women from political participation, return to tradition, and relegation of women’s issues to lesser importance are all symptoms of the legacy of communism shared throughout the former communist bloc. Much of the former Soviet Union, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina are excluded from the analysis due to lack of available data. The unit of analysis is country election for all available post-communist elections in Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine. This yields an N of 43.

The dependent variable of this study, female legislative representation, is measured through the percentage of females elected to the lower-house of parliament in each election, as reported by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2000). The independent variables used to measure economic modernity in this study are GDP per capita (as an overall measure of affluence), agricultural versus service shares of GDP, and infant mortality rate (Putnam, 1993). Graphs 1 and 2 illustrate the variation in GDP per capita and infant mortality rates within the region. While the graphs depict the most recent data, later data analyses include statistics from each election year. These graphs are arranged from the highest levels of female representation in Croatia to lowest in Albania.

While GDP per capita may not be the most desirable measure of affluence, due to the volatility of the post-communist economies, it was the best measure available for all cases. The composition of GDP may be even more telling. Heavy and rapid industrialization was a core element of all communist centrally-planned economies. As a result, all of the countries in this study are industrialized; however, heavy “metal eating” industry is not profitable in the modern economy. The post-communist countries which have been able to overcome the rapid communist industrialization and move on to service industries are considered the more economically modern. With the collapse of agricultural productivity and the virtual abandonment of villages by the central government, there is evidence that rural areas in Eastern Europe are becoming increasingly backward. Therefore, countries with higher dependence on agriculture are less modern and less likely to recruit women. Graph 3 illustrates the vast difference in composition of GDP. As with GDP per capita and infant mortality rate, the most recent data is used for Graph 3, but data analyses include each election year. Again, the graph shows composition of GDP from highest female representation to lowest.

All of the graphs discussed above are somewhat suggestive of trends. Graph 1 indicates a rough relationship between GDP per capita and female representation, but that relationship is by no means clear-cut. The expected pattern, that female representation will increase with socioeconomic development, is more evident in Graph 2 and Graph 3. However, the possible relationship between female representation and socioeconomic development is a complex one and probably mitigated by other factors. This study will, therefore, test socioeconomic development against the remaining explanation: political institutions.

[Insert Graph 1, Graph 2, and Graph 3 about here]

The institutional independent variable, electoral system, will be operationalized through the number of relevant parties,¹ mean district magnitude, and a composite scale of “woman-friendliness.” Fewer relevant parties should result in a higher party magnitude and more women getting into the legislature (Matland and Taylor, 1997). Both Poland and Ukraine have experienced sharp decreases in the number of relevant parties. The number of relevant parties in Ukraine dropped from 24.33 in 1994 to 9.91 in 1998. In Poland, the number of relevant parties dropped from 8.3 in 1991 to 3.88 in 1993. A higher mean district magnitude should also be more “woman-friendly” (Matland and Taylor, 1997). Several features of electoral system are captured in a rough scale of 0 (SMD) to 3 (PR with threshold).² The most woman-friendly is a PR system that reduces party fragmentation through use of a threshold. This measure does not take into account the size of threshold, size of legislature, or method of translating votes into seats – all factors that should affect female recruitment – but it provides a sense of the overall tendency of the electoral system. Figure 1 depicts which cases fall into each category.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Putting It All Together

Using the measures discussed above, this study tests the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: *GDP per capita and the percentage of female legislators are positively correlated.*

Hypothesis 2: *The percentage of GDP from agriculture and the percentage of female legislators are negatively correlated.*

Hypothesis 3: *The percentage of GDP from services and the percentage of female legislators are positively correlated.*

¹ The number of relevant parties is obtained by squaring each party’s percentage of seats and summing across all parties. The number of relevant parties is the inverse of this sum (McGregor, 1993).

² An SMD system was coded as “0,” a mixed system as “1,” a PR system without a threshold as “2,” and a PR system with a threshold as “3.”

Hypothesis 4: *Infant mortality rate as an indicator of development is negatively correlated with female representation.*

Hypothesis 5: *The number of relevant parties and the percentage of female legislators are negatively correlated.*

Hypothesis 6: *High district magnitude and the percentage of female legislators are positively correlated.*

Hypothesis 7: *The more “woman-friendly” the electoral system, the higher the level of female representation.*

Results

Socioeconomic Variables

Association between the socioeconomic variables and the percentage of females in parliament is tested using Pearson’s correlation coefficients. All of the socioeconomic variables are statistically significant at the .01 level. Data analyses allow us to reject the null hypothesis of no relationship between developmental factors and the percentage of female legislators. All of the relationships are in the expected direction, but the degree of post-industrialization (percent of GDP from services) displays the most robust relationship.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

Institutional Variables

Mean district magnitude³ and electoral system are in the expected direction, statistically significant at the .01 level, and strongly correlated with the dependent variable. In systems with many relevant parties, fewer women make it into parliament. As with the other institutional variables, the relationship is in the expected direction, but it is neither strong nor statistically significant. This is not surprising given that the number of relevant parties changes dramatically in only a few cases. In countries that

³ Correlation between mean district magnitude and the dependent variable was measured using Spearman’s rho. All other institutional variables were measured with Pearson’s correlation coefficients.

have seen a drastic reduction in the number of parties, e.g. Ukraine in 1998 and Poland in 1993, there has been a significant increase in female representation. In the Polish case, the measures used in this study are probably not quite capturing the nuances of the changes in electoral system and the extent to which all features of an electoral system can work together to improve conditions for female recruitment (Gibson, 1999). As with the socioeconomic variables, the null hypothesis can be rejected.

[Insert Table 3 about here]

Linear regression is used to measure socioeconomic variables and institutional variables against each other. Percentage of GDP from service and mean district magnitude are used in the model since they produce the most robust bivariate correlations. The adjusted R square is .407 and the significance for the model is .006. The standardized Beta coefficients, displayed in Table 4, are .509 for GDP from service and .502 for mean district magnitude. These two variables have roughly the same weight in this model.

[Insert Table 4 about here]

What Does This Mean?

The results of this study certainly suggest that, when aspects of culture are controlled for, socioeconomic development and institutions affect female legislative representation. In countries with the lowest levels of socioeconomic development - Ukraine, Macedonia, and Albania - female representation is also lowest. In each of these countries, however, a change in institutions, namely the shift from SMD elections to hybrid rules including some element of PR, resulted in a rough doubling of female representation. Table 5 illustrates the improvement in female representation due to electoral rules changes in these three countries. The regression model supports this. When socioeconomic development (measured through GDP from service) is held constant, mean district magnitude, as a proxy for institutions, helps women.

[Insert Table 5 about here]

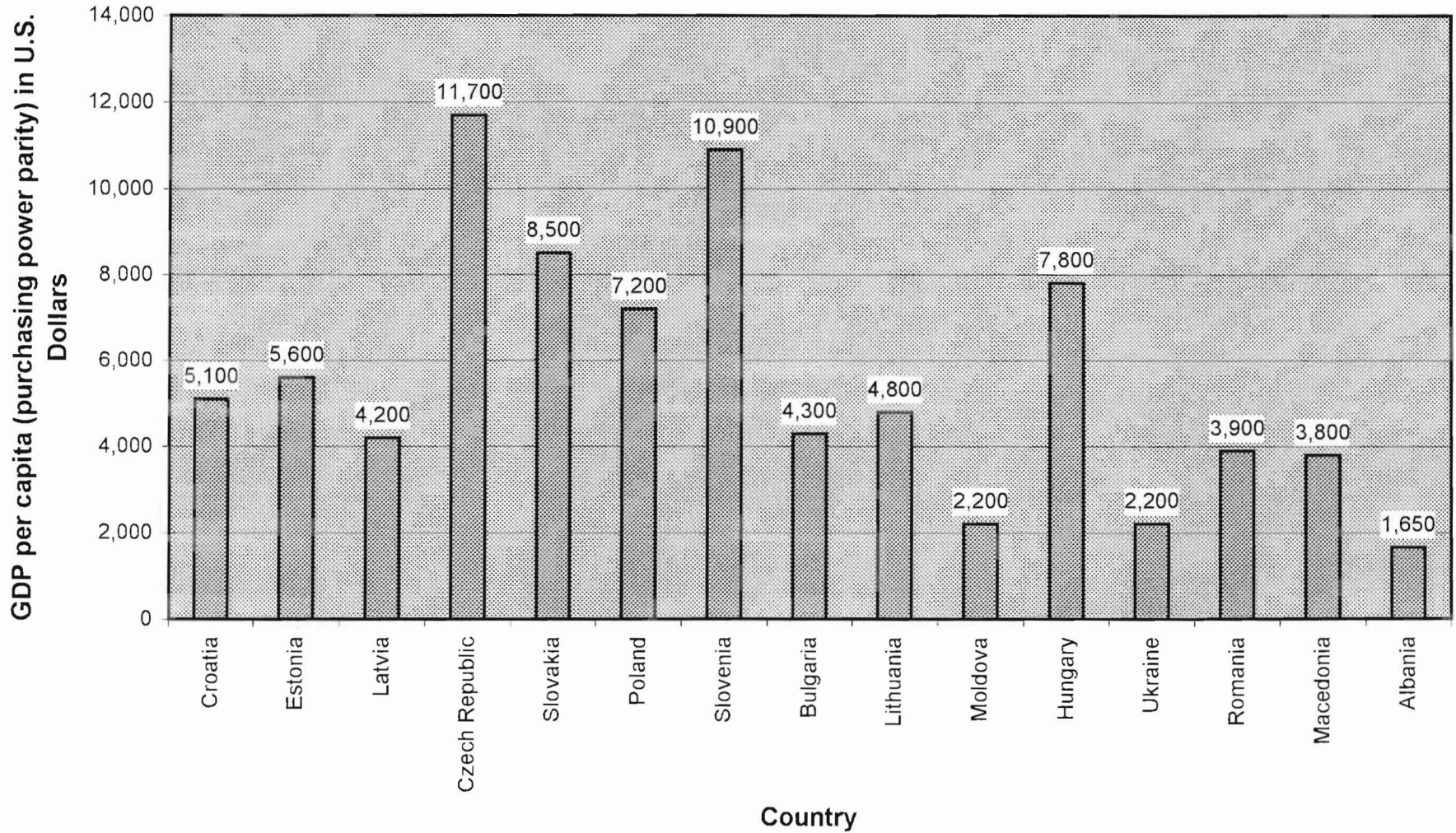
Matland and Taylor (1997) argue that some minimum threshold of socioeconomic development must be achieved before institutions begin to matter. That contention is weakened by the significance of the institutional variables in this study. Of course, further research is needed. The existence of a pre-communist era feminist movement, religiosity and other indicators of “old culture,” and the ideology of the party in power are all variables which could help explain the variation in female representation across the region.

In this study, however, lower levels of socioeconomic development seem to place a ceiling on female representation. Institutions do matter, but they can only do so much. Albania, Macedonia, and Ukraine remain among the least representative of the countries in this study, despite electoral rules changes that doubled levels of female recruitment. The literature suggests that women in those countries lack the social and economic capital necessary to come forward as aspirants and place pressure on party gatekeepers to recruit and promote women (Matland, 1998). Instead, they must focus on matters of family survival. It would seem, therefore, that any recipe to improve women’s representation must include both favorable institutions and concrete measures to ensure family survival.

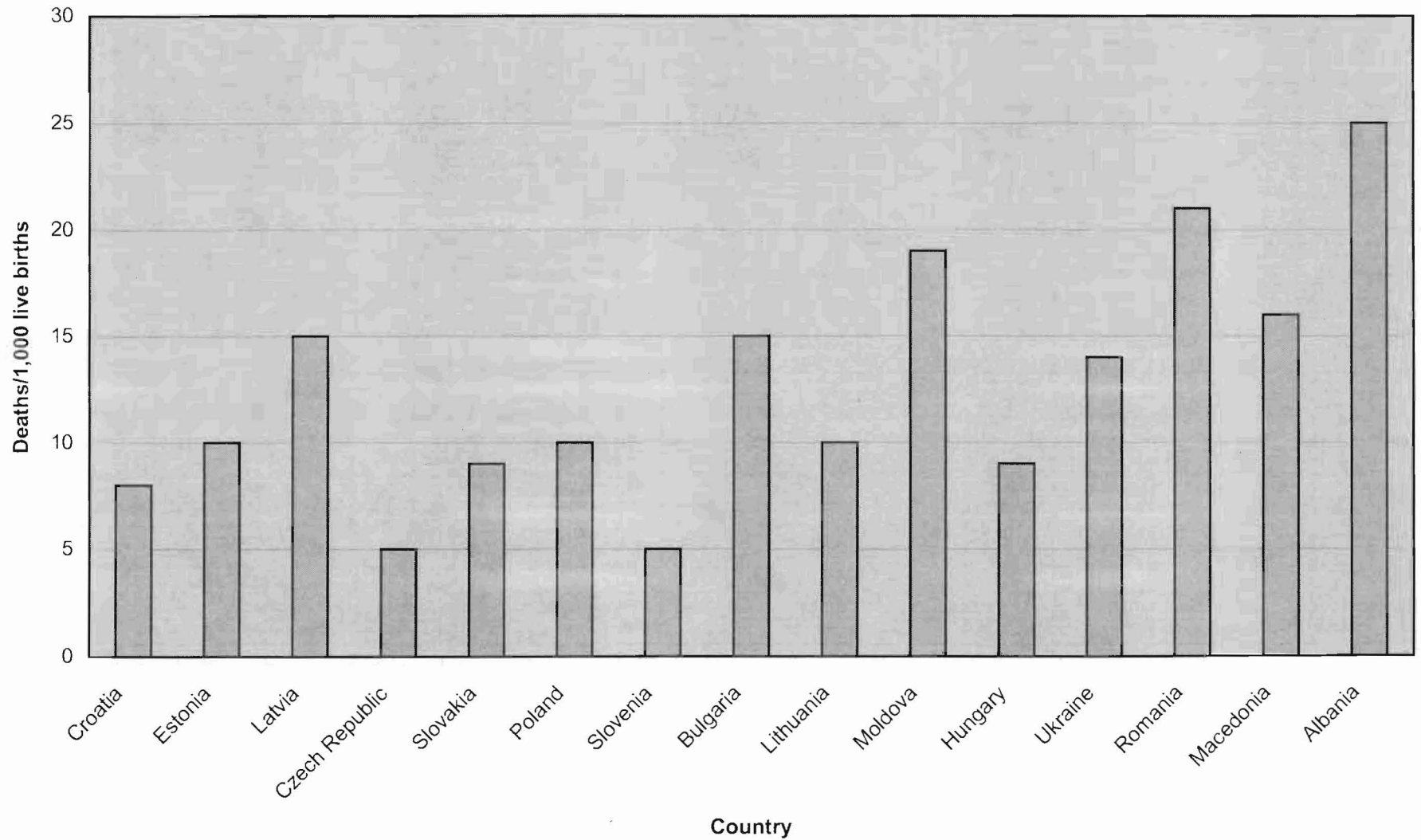
Table 1 – Female Legislative Representation in Post-Communist Legislatures

Case (country & election year)		% women	Case (country & election year)		% women
Albania	91	3.6	Moldova	94	4.8
	92	5.7		98	8.91
	97	5.16	Poland	89	13.5
Bulgaria	90	8.5		91	9.6
	91	12.9		93	13
	94	13.3		97	13
Croatia	97	10.8	Romania	90	3.6
	92	5.8		92	4.1
	95	7.87		96	7.3
00	20.5	00		10.7	
Czech Republic	96	15	Slovakia	94	14.7
	98	15		98	14
Estonia	92	13.7	Slovenia	92	14.4
	95	12.9		96	12.2
	99	17.82		00	12.2
Hungary	90	7.3	Ukraine	94	3.8
	94	11.4		98	7.8
	98	8.29			
Latvia	93	15			
	98	17			
Lithuania	92	7.1			
	96	17.52			
	00	10.64			
Macedonia	90	4.2			
	94	3.3			
	98	6.67			

Graph 1: Measure of overall affluence



Graph 2: Infant Mortality Rate



Graph 3: Composition of GDP

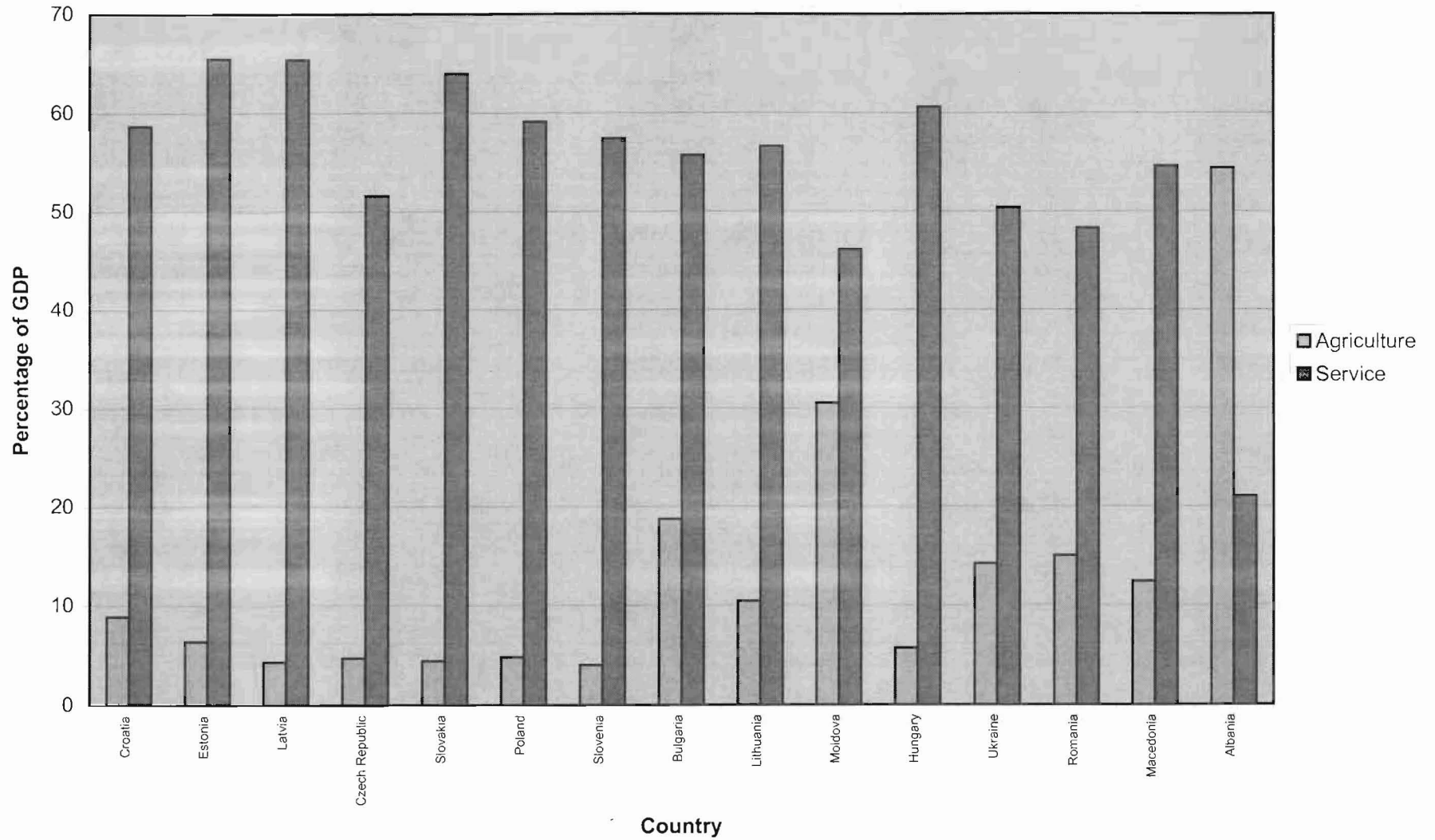


Figure 1 – Classification of electoral systems

0	1	2	3
Albania 91 Macedonia 90 Macedonia 94 Ukraine 94	Albania 92 Albania 97 Bulgaria 90 Croatia 92 Croatia 95 Estonia 92 Estonia 95 Estonia 99 Hungary 90 Hungary 98 Lithuania 92 Lithuania 96 Lithuania 00 Slovenia 92 Macedonia 98 Ukraine 98	Poland 91 Romania 90 Slovakia 98 Slovenia 96 Slovenia 00	Bulgaria 91 Bulgaria 94 Bulgaria 97 Croatia 00 Czech Republic 96 Czech Republic 98 Latvia 93 Moldova 94 Moldova 98 Poland 93 Poland 97 Romania 92 Romania 96 Romania 00 Slovakia 94

Table 2 – Correlation of socioeconomic variables with dependent variable

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient	Level of Significance
H ₁	GDP per Capita	.508**	.000
H ₂	% of GDP from agriculture	-.567**	.002
H ₃	% of GDP from service	.638**	.000
H ₄	Infant mortality rate	-.488**	.000

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (1-tailed).

Table 3 – Correlation of institutional variables with dependent variable

Hypothesis	Independent Variable	Correlation Coefficient	Level of Significance
H ₅	# of relevant parties	-.084	.300
H ₆	Mean district Magnitude	.503**	.005
H ₇	Electoral system	.457**	.001

** Correlation is significant at the .01 level (1-tailed).

Table 4- Post-industrialism versus Electoral System: OLS Regression Model

N	Adjusted R Square	Significance
25	.407	.006

Variable	Standardized Beta Coefficient	Unstandardized coefficients	T	Significance
GDP from Service	.509	.209	2.795	.013
Mean District magnitude	.502	.284	2.759	.014

Table 5 – Drastic changes in female representation due to changes in electoral rules

Country	% women before electoral change	% women after electoral change	improvement
Albania	3.6	5.7	2.1
Macedonia	3.3	6.67	3.4
Ukraine	3.8	7.78	4.0

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