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Croatia's Leap toward Gender Equality in the Parliament: The Role of the Electoral System Design

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Abstract

A number of political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors have been identified as having an effect on the level of parliamentary representation of women. Studies concentrating on the most prosperous longstanding democracies accentuate the importance of political factors, whereas most of the studies that include less developed nations suggest a more pronounced role for socioeconomic and/ or cultural factors. Conclusions about the relevance of a particular group of factors become much less clear-cut when tested on a sample of nations such as the postcommunist bloc, which does not clearly belong to either the most affluent longstanding democracies or the less developed nations. This study examines the effects of the electoral system design- the most prominent of the political factors, using what Lijphart calls the controlled comparison method in a single post-communist country: Croatia. Since Croatia represents a single cultural and developmental 'container') changes in its levels of women's parliamentary representation must be attributed to some other factors. The conclusion of this study is that the gradual increase in the proportion of female representatives in Croatia cannot be wholly attributed to the changes in its electoral system. Identifying all of the reasons for that increase would require further party-level research.

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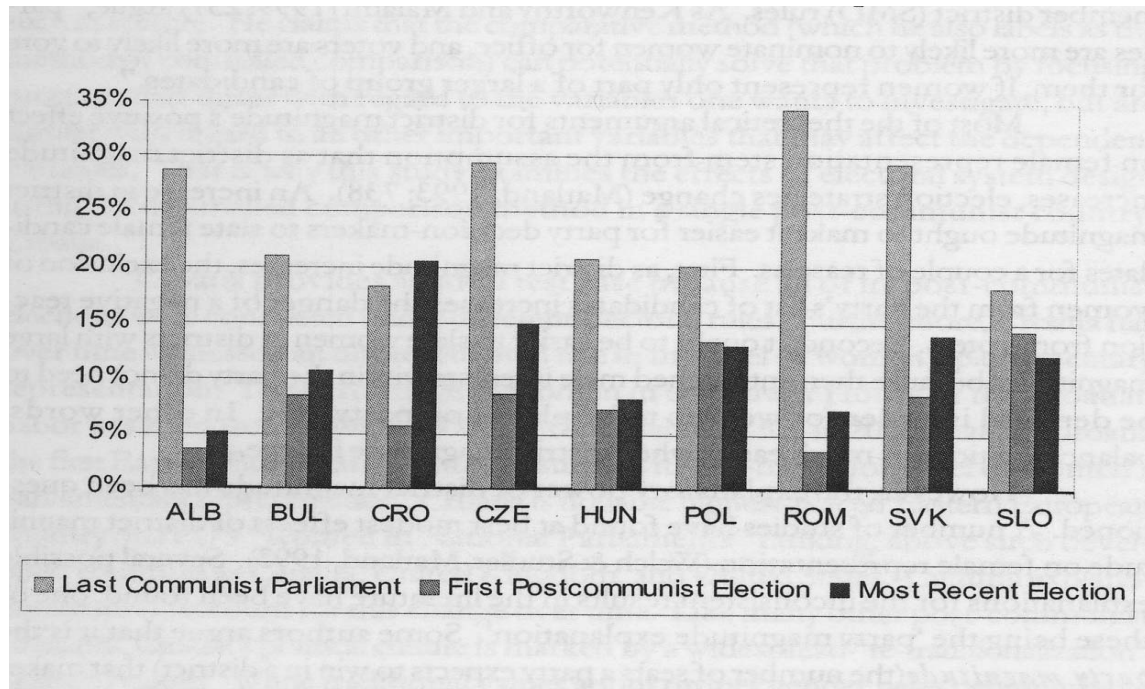
A number of political, socioeconomic, and cultural factors have been identified as having an effect on the level of parliamentary representation of women. Studies concentrating on the most prosperous longstanding democracies accentuate the importance of political factors, whereas most of the studies that include less developed nations suggest a more pronounced role for socioeconomic and/ or cultural factors. Conclusions about the relevance of a particular group of factors become much less clear-cut when tested on a sample of nations such as the post-communist bloc, which does not clearly belong to either the most affluent longstanding democracies or the less developed nations. This study examines the effects of the electoral system design- the most prominent of the political factors, using what Lijphart calls the controlled comparison method in a single post-communist country: Croatia. Since Croatia represents a single cultural and developmental 'container') changes in its levels of women's parliamentary representation must be attributed to some other factors. The conclusion of this study is that the gradual increase in the proportion of female representatives in Croatia cannot be wholly attributed to the changes in its electoral system. Identifying all of the reasons for that increase would require further party-level research.

Contrary to recent trends seen in most Western democracies, newly democratic Eastern European nations have witnessed a decline in levels of women's parliamentary representation in the period after the fall of communist rule. The decreases range from the extreme case of Romania, which saw its level of women's parliamentary representation initially shrink by 30.8 percentage points, to the less pronounced example of Poland whose level initially shrunk by 6.7 percentage points (Figure 1 provides a more detailed description of these dynamics). Though subsequent elections have in many cases reversed the trend, the region-wide average remains below the levels seen in many of the established Western democracies (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2000).

In Eastern Europe, where parliaments have been the center of democratization and political life, the failure to include women has important ramifications for the quality of the emerging democracy. As Darcy, Welch, and Clark (1994,15-17) indicate, increasing the representation of women can affect the quality of the democracy in a number of ways. Firstly, it is questionable how well a male-dominated parliament can truly represent the interests of women and address the issues that tend to be of greater importance for them. This argument appears to be supported in the context of Eastern European parliaments since it can easily be suggested that throughout the process of transition lawmakers have not appropriately addressed what are generally considered "women's issues" (education, social security, health care, etc.). Secondly, due to their different professional experiences, women have knowledge and insights into some matters that men do not have. Not utilizing that expertise by fostering greater parliamentary representation of women weakens the scope of the legislature's decision-making powers. Thirdly, it is argued that the quality of political leadership will necessarily improve if women fully enter into political competition simply due to the larger pool of individuals competing for office. And finally, more equal political representation of women contributes to the legitimacy of the political system because it increases its ability to represent all strata of the society, which is particularly salient in the context of fledgling democracies. Given the importance of these issues,

scholars have tried to identify the factors that encourage or inhibit women's access to political power.

Figure 1. Proportion of Women in Some Eastern European Parliaments



A number of political, socioeconomic and cultural factors have been identified as having an effect on the level of parliamentary representation of women. Studies concentrating on the most prosperous longstanding democracies accentuate the importance of political factors, whereas most of the studies that include less developed nations suggest a more pronounced role for socioeconomic and/or cultural factors. Conclusions about the relevance of a particular group of factors become much less clear-cut when tested on a sample of nations such as the post-communist bloc, which does not clearly belong to either the most affluent longstanding democracies or the less developed nations and has a very particular cultural and socio-demographic legacy. That is why the purpose of this study is to expand the literature dealing with the bloc of newly democratic countries by examining the effects of the most prominent of the political factors on the level of women's parliamentary representation- the electoral system design.

Electoral System Design: Previous Findings

Although some studies do attribute a formidable level of importance to such political factors as the time of women's suffrage (Rule, 1981) and the degree of political democracy (Paxton, 1997), electoral and party system features have received most attention from researchers examining the effects of political factors on the level of women's legislative representation. One of the implications of that research has been that women can expect greater success in electoral competitions conducted under party list proportional representation (PR) rather than single-member district (SMD) rules. As Kenworthy and Malami (1999:237) argue, "parties are more

likely to nominate women for office, and voters are more likely to vote for them, if women represent only part of a larger group of candidates."

Most of the theoretical arguments for district magnitude's positive effect on female representation stem from the assumption that as district magnitude increases, election strategies change (Matland, 1993: 738). An increase in district magnitude ought to make it easier for party decision-makers to slate female candidates for a couple of reasons. First, as district magnitude increases, the exclusion of women from the party's list of candidates increases the danger of a negative reaction from voters. Second, it ought to be easier to slate women in districts with large magnitudes because then entrenched male interests within the party do not need to be deposed in order for women to be placed on party lists. In other words, balancing a ticket is much easier when district magnitude is large.

However, the explanatory power of district magnitude has been questioned. A number of studies have found at best modest effects of district magnitude on female representation (Welch & Studlar, Matland, 1993). Several possible explanations for the inconsistent results in the literature have been found, one of these being the 'party magnitude explanation'. Some authors argue that it is the *party magnitude* (the number of seats a party expects to win in a district) that makes a difference in the levels of women's representation. As Matland and Taylor (1997: 189) point out, it is possible to have a system with high district magnitude, but where many parties win just a few seats, as in Israel. Briefly put, the availability of ticket-balancing dynamics primarily depends on the number of seats parties have a realistic chance of winning.

Naturally, parties' expectations about electoral results depend on the number of effective competitors. One electoral system feature that has consistently been found to limit the number of electoral competitors is the threshold. Thresholds basically set a lower limit for parliamentary entry, thereby blocking legislative representation of smaller parties and consequently increasing party magnitude for major parties. From this brief literature overview we can infer that electoral system factors potentially have a decisive effect on the level of women's parliamentary representation and consequently warrant ample scrutiny.

Designing the Application of the Controlled Comparison Method: The Simulation Approach

In the context of newly democratic nations, exploring the effects of factors such as electoral system design on the level of women's parliamentary representation becomes a matter of simple practicality. Quantifying and testing cultural and socio-economic factors in a highly volatile environment such as Eastern Europe has proven to be a formidable challenge. Arend Lijphart (1994: 78) outlines probably the best way to deal with the problem of controlling for factors such as culture. He claims that the comparative method (which he also labels as the method of controlled comparison) can potentially solve that problem by focusing on cases that differ with regard to the variables one wants to investigate, but are similar with regard to all other important variables that may affect the dependent variables. That is why this study examines the effects of electoral system design using the controlled comparison method in a single post-communist country: Croatia.

Croatia provides an ideal test case because all of its post-communist elections were conducted under different electoral rules. Furthermore, Croatia has over time witnessed an unprecedented rise in the level of women's parliamentary representation. The percentage of women in the Lower House of the Croatian Sabor has risen from 7.9% in 1995 to a formidable

20.5% in 2000, making Croatia the first Eastern European country to surpass its pre-transition level of women's parliamentary representation. Croatia is now the highest-placed Eastern European country on IPU's "Women in National Parliaments" ranking, above such developed countries as Canada, United Kingdom, and United States. Cultural explanations cannot account for this change over time. Like many other post-communist countries, Croatia's political culture is marked by a widespread "re-traditionalization" of social values. While traditional values about proper gender roles certainly have an impact on women's access to political power, political culture is a relatively stable attribute and therefore cannot explain the dramatic rise in female representation. Likewise, Croatia's level of socio-economic development (particularly the level of female workforce participation) has not shifted radically over the ten years since the fall of communist single party rule. Having controlled for these "usual suspects," it becomes possible to isolate the effects of electoral institutions,

The role of the electoral system factors such as district and party magnitude, threshold size, and general design (PR vs. SMDs) in Croatia's leap toward parliamentary gender equality is tested through a series of electoral simulations. Briefly put, all three electoral laws are applied to all three elections in order to identify their potential effects on the level of women's parliamentary representation. The basic purpose of the simulations is to identify the potential effects of different electoral system features on the level of women's parliamentary representation by answering series of questions that can be formulated as: What would have been the level of women's parliamentary representation as the result of the ___ (1992, 1995, or 2000) election if the ___ (1992, 1995, or 2000) electoral system was in place?. In order to be able to grasp the practical implications of all simulations, we need to be familiar with the main features of electoral systems used for Croatia's three post-communist elections.

Table 1. Features of Croatia's Three Post-Communist Electoral Systems

'60+60' (1992) System	- size of the Lower House: 120 - 60 MPs elected from national party lists - 60 MPs elected from single -member districts - 3% threshold for national lists
'80+28' (1995) System	- size of the Lower House; 108 - 80 MPs elected from national party lists - 28 MPs elected from single-member districts - three-level threshold system: 5% for single-party lists, 8% for two-party coalitions, 11% for 'three and more'-party coalitions
'10*14' (2000) System	- size of the Lower House: 140 - 10 multi-member districts with 14 seats each - 5% threshold
Note	- for all elections minority and diaspora votes not considered

In 1992, Croatia used a hybrid electoral system for electing 120 members of Sabor's Lower House. Half of MPs were elected from party national lists, whereas the other half were elected

from 60 single-member districts. The national list party threshold was three percent. A hybrid electoral system was used in 1995 also. However, this time 80 out of 108 MPs were elected from party national lists, whereas the remaining 28 were elected from single-member districts. A three-level threshold system was used for the 1995 election: the barrier for single parties was 5%, for two-party coalitions 8%, and for 'three and more'-party coalitions 11 %. Finally, the 2000 election saw the introduction of the multi-member district system. Croatia was divided into 10 electoral districts, which elected 14 MPs each, (Table 1 concisely presents the features of all three electoral systems) It is important to note that all three elections had special provisions for the election of minorities and participation of Croatia's diaspora in the electoral process. However, for the purposes of this study, those particular provisions were not addressed because they would have unnecessarily skewed the results.

The simulation approach rests on two basic assumptions. The first assumption is that party gatekeepers have full control of the candidate nomination process. If that was not the case and the nomination process was decentralized, it would have been impossible to predict candidate placements because the balance of influence of different nomination centers would have changed depending on the electoral system in use. The second assumption is that parties are good predictors of electoral results. This assumption enables us to infer that parties are well aware of the type of nominations they are bestowing upon their candidates (for a practical example of the simulation process, consult the appendix). If we accept these simplifying assumptions, we can relatively easily predict candidates' identities (or at least their gender) in our simulations depending on the type of their nomination. Knowing the nature of nomination processes of most major Croatian parties and the level of attention they give to public opinion makes these assumptions appear reasonable.¹

The Effect of Electoral System Factors Uncovered

As a first stage in the simulation process, all nominations were classified according to the widely accepted nomenclature as mandate, fighting, or ornamental² depending on the level of competitiveness associated with them. In the second place, since it was assumed that parties are good predictors of electoral results (and that they form their tickets accordingly), those electoral results, being very similar to party predictions, were used in determining party intentions in nominating certain candidates. For example, if a certain candidate received a mandate nomination in the 1992 election conducted under the original '60+60' electoral system, that candidate was assumed to have received a mandate nomination in the same election conducted under the '80+28' (1995) or the '10*14' (2000) electoral system. Other assumptions regarding the simulation process depended on the design of particular simulations.

Simulations for the 1992 Election

The party scene for the 1992 election was extremely fragmented. In total, members of nine parties and one independent candidate were represented in the Lower House of the Sabor as the result of the 1992 election (Consult Appendix Table 1 for the basics about major Croatian parties). However, the great majority of the seats was reserved for only one party: Franjo Tudjman's Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ). HDZ won 31 out of 60 national list seats with 44.71% of the popular vote. It also won 54 out of 60 SMD seats, bringing its parliamentary majority to formidable 85 out of 120 seats or 70.83%. Next in line was the Croatian Social Liberal Party (HSLP), whose 17.72% of the popular vote won it 12 out of 60 national list seats.

HSLs also won 1 of 60 SMD seats, bringing its total to 13 out of 120 seats or 10.83%. All other parties attained representation through their national lists, barely crossing the 3% threshold barrier. One notable exception was the coalition of regional parties, which won 4 out of 60 SMD seats in the Istria region.

Table 2a, 1992 Election Simulation Results: Percent of Seats by Party

Party	Original '60 + 60' Electoral System	'80+28' (1995) Electoral System	'10*14' (2000) Electoral System
HDZ	70.83	64.81	55.00
HSLs	10.83	15.74	22.86
HSP	4.17	6.48	5.71
HNS	3.33	5.56	6.43
SDP	2.50	5.56	3.57
HSS	2.50	0.00	1.43
Regional	5.00	1.85	4.29
Independent	0.83	0.00	0.00

As we can see from Tables 2a and 2b, although there is no *extreme* variation between the impacts of electoral systems on the level of women's representation, having a '10*14' electoral system in place for the 1992 election would have probably yielded the highest proportion of female representatives to the Lower House of Sabor, most likely because of increased proportionality resulting from a relatively large district magnitude. An '80+28' electoral system would have most likely yielded the lowest proportion of female representatives, partly because of a high threshold system and partly because of a smaller number of seats overall. What is interesting to note is that the HDZ, which implemented all three of these electoral systems, appears to have chosen wisely in 1992: their majority was the greatest exactly under the original '60+60' system.

Table 2b. 1992 Election Simulation Results: Number of Women in Sabor

Party	Original '60+60' Electoral System	'80+28' (1995) Electoral System	'10*14' (2000) Electoral System
HDZ	3	1	2

HSLs	0	0	3
HSP	0	0	0
HNS	1	1	1
SDP	0	1	1
HSS	0	0	0
Regional	1	0	0
Independent	0	0	0
TOTAL	5 (4.17%)	3 (2.78%)	7 (5.00%)

Simulations for the 1995 Election

As in 1992, the party scene for the 1995 election was also extremely fragmented. Members of ten parties were represented in the Lower House of Sabor as the result of the 1995 election. However, five of those ten parties participated in the election as a coalition, thereby lowering the number of effective 'electoral players' to six. Furthermore, all opposition parties, apart from HSP, joined forces in slating SMD candidates. That attempt to jointly overthrow HDZ resulted in some opposition SMD candidates being backed by bizarre groupings of parties, ranging from extreme left to extreme right. However, in spite of the collective opposition effort, HDZ once again emerged as the winner with 63 out of 108 seats or 58.33%. Forty-two (out of 80 possible) of those seats were won through the national list, whereas the remaining 21 (out of 28 possible) were won through SMDs. The five-party opposition coalition was next in line with 18 seats, 2 of which were won through SMDs, HSLs won 12 seats, 2 of which were won through SMDs. The 1995 election saw a moderate improvement for SDP (direct successors of the former League of Communists), which won 10 seats (2 through SMDs) or 9.26%-a significant improvement compared to 2.5% of the seats in 1992.

Table 3a. 1995 Election Simulation Results: Percent of Seats by Party

Party	'60+60' (1992) Electoral System	Original '80+28' Electoral System	'10*14' (2000) Electoral System
HDZ	50.00	58.33	56.43
Coalition	20.83	15.74	22.14
HSLs	14.17	11.11	10.00
SDP	7.50	9.26	8.57

HSP	2.50	3.70	2.14
SDU	1.67	0.00	0.00
HND	3.33	0.83	0.00

Table 3b. 1995 Election Simulation Results: Number of Women in Sabor

Party	'60+60' (1992) Electoral System	Original '80+28' Electoral System	'10*14' (2000) Electoral System
HDZ	3	3	5
Coalition	0	0	0
HSLs	1	1	1
SDP	2	3	4
HSP	0	0	0
SDU	1	0	0
HND	0	0	0
TOTAL	7 (5.83%)	7 (6.48%)	10 (7.14%)

As can be seen from Tables 3a and 3b, although there is again no drastic variation between the impacts of electoral systems on the level of women's representation, having the 2000 electoral system in place for the 1995 election would have probably yielded the highest number of female representatives to the Lower House of Sabor, just as in the case of 1992 election simulations. Furthermore, it appears that keeping the 1992 electoral system for the 1995 election would have probably not changed the number of female representatives. What is interesting to note is that HDZ appears to have chosen an electoral system sensibly in 1995 as well as in 1992. Their majority was greatest, again, exactly under the original system.

Simulations for the 2000 Election

The 2000 election marked the end of HDZ's decade. An opposition coalition of six parties was formed prior to the election with the intent of dethroning HDZ from power. However, immediately prior to the election, major coalition partners SDP and HSLs decided to run together and separately from other four coalition members. New SDP/HSLs alliance won 71 out of 140 seats or 50.71%. Roughly two thirds of those seats belonged to SDP and one third to HSLs, in accordance with their pre-election agreement. The other opposition coalition won 24 out of 140 seats or 17.14%. HDZ, for the first time since it came to power in 1990, became an

opposition party, winning 40 seats or 28.57%. The remaining 5 seats went to the rightist coalition of HSP and HKDU.

As we can see from Tables 4a and 4b, there is again no significant variation between the effects of electoral systems on the proportion of women in parliament, although their numbers do change depending on the number of seats available overall. Once again, the HDZ appears to have chosen an electoral system shrewdly, since the proportion of seats they won was greatest under the original system used.

Table 4a, 2000 Election Simulation Results: Percent of Seats by Party

Party	'60+60' (1992) Electoral System	'80+28' (1995) Electoral System	Original' 10* 14' Electoral System
SDP/HSLs	60.00	53.70	50.71
HDZ	24.17	25.00	28.57
Coalition	13.33	16.67	17.14
HSP/HKDU	2.50	4.63	3.57

Table 4b. 2000 Election Simulation Results: Number of Women in Sabor

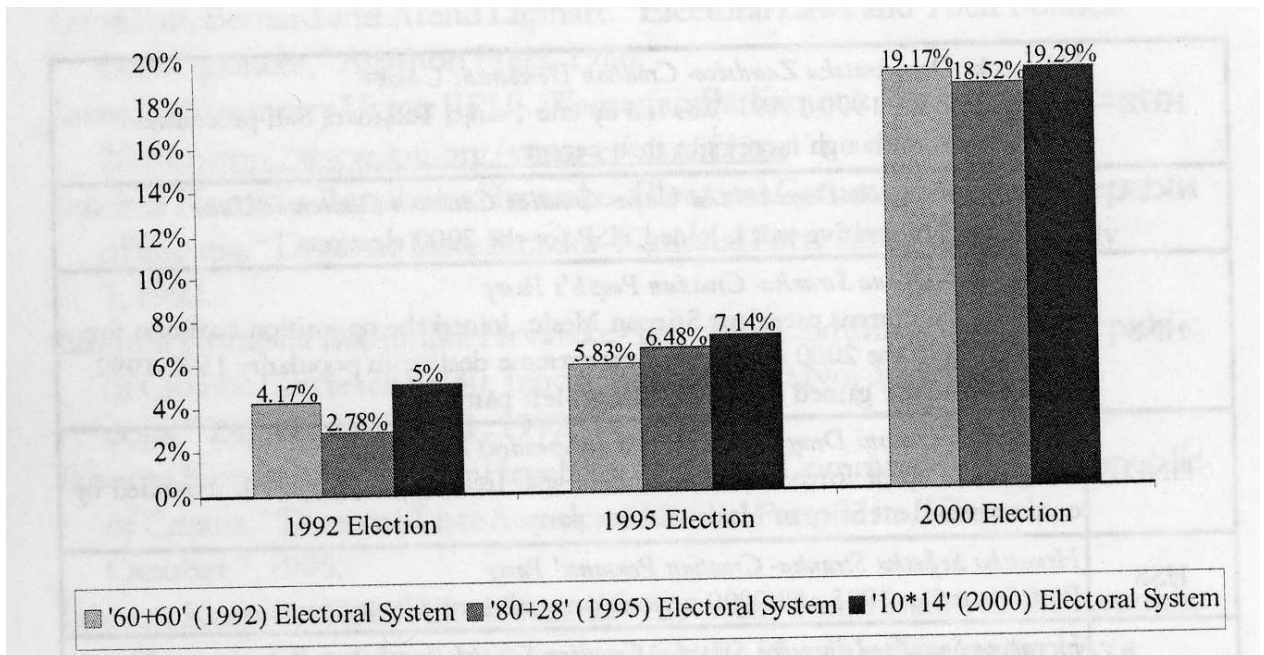
Party	'60+60' (1992) Electoral System	'80+28' (1995) Electoral System	Original '10*14' Electoral System
SDP/HSLs	18	15	18
HDZ	3	3	7
Coalition	2	2	2
HSP/HKDU	0	0	0
TOTAL	23 (19.17%)	20 (18.52%)	27 (19.29%)

Simulation Results: Limited, yet Suggestive

It is important to understand the limitations of the simulation approach. Most importantly, although simulations yield numerically defined answers, those have to be taken with caution due to obvious imperfections in the overall simulation process. In the context of a small legislature and a low number of female MPs, a single questionable step in the process of design or execution could result in different final outcomes. Consequently, conclusions drawn from simulation results have to be carefully made and interpreted.

However, great care was taken at each stage to follow stated assumptions (that party gatekeepers have full control of the candidate nomination process and that parties are good predictors of electoral results). Those assumptions were given further credence by the HDZ's apparent success at electoral engineering, as it was consistently able to control its nomination procedures and predict electoral outcomes. Furthermore, while it is difficult to predict the size and nature of electoral coalitions, in Croatian politics coalitions have formed **well** in advance of electoral changes. HDZ had maintained firm control of electoral system design and changed it, to a great extent, in response to political balance alternations. It is therefore safe to assume that parties have not shifted their coalition strategies in response to changing electoral rules. The results, as shown in Chart 2, are suggestive of a slight positive effect of the '10*14' (2000) electoral system on the proportion of female representatives, particularly in the case of simulations for the 1992 election. Reasons for that lie primarily in the higher proportionality of the '10*14' system. Opposition parties continuously nominated more women than the ruling HDZ, hence the positive impact of increased proportionality on the level of women's representation is understandable. Additionally, the overall number of representatives elected under the '10*14' electoral system is higher than in the other two systems. The greater number of available seats usually implies greater possibility for female candidates to be nominated and consequently elected. Even if the greater number of female candidates elected does not necessarily translate into their greater overall proportion, '10*14' electoral system would still be regarded as more favorable to women than the other two systems because of its beneficial long-term effect on the supply of experienced female candidates.

Figure 2. Final Simulation Results: Percent of Women in Sabor



However, the impact of the '10*14' electoral system on the level of women's representation in the Lower House of the Sabor should not be exaggerated. The '10*14' system alone cannot be credited with the surge in the level of women's representation in the 2000

election. As Figure 2 demonstrates, the proportion of women MPs would have been virtually identical after the 2000 election no matter which electoral system was used. Though certain aspects of the system may have been relatively woman-friendly, we must look to other factors in explaining the success of women in Croatian 2000 election.

Appendix

Simulation 1992 / 1995 Design

The difference in the number of single-member districts provided for by the original '60+60' and the '80+28' (1995) electoral systems presented the greatest problem in simulating the 1992 election with the '80+28' electoral system. In order to adjust for that difference, the pertaining electoral laws for the parliamentary elections (Sabor Republike Hrvatske, 1992, Ured Predsjednika Republike Hrvatske, 1995) were consulted to determine the correspondence between the original 60 SMDs and 28 'new' ones. That made the identification of the level of support for a particular party's candidates in each of the 'new' 28 single-member districts possible. Naturally, the underlying assumption here was that parties would not have changed the way they participated in the election (by forming coalitions, for example). The original popular vote from the 1992 election was used to identify the number of seats each party won through national lists because voters' preferences most likely would not have changed with an increase in the size of national lists from 60 to 80. Then the number of mandate, fighting, and ornamental seats for the original and simulated 1992 elections was compared to determine which candidates would have been bestowed with which kind of nominations.

Appendix Table 1. Major Croatian Parties 1992-Present

HDZ	<i>Hrvatska Demokratska Zajednica- Croatian Democratic Union</i> Party in power 1990-1999. Was led by late Franjo Tudjman. Self-proclaimed center-right, although more right than center
HKDU	<i>Hrvatska Krscansko-Demokratska Unija-Croatian Christian Democratic Union</i> Rightist, conservative party. Joined HSP for the 2000 elections.
HNS	<i>Hrvatska Narodna Stranka- Croatian People's Party</i> Party of the current president Stjepan Mesic. Joined the opposition coalition for the 1995 and the 2000 elections. Saw extreme decline in popularity 1992-1999, but has recently gained in power. Center-left party.
HND	<i>Hrvatska Nezavisni Demokrati- Croatian Independent Democrats</i> Party made up of former HDZ members who left the party in 1994. Founded by current president Stjepan Mesic. Center party.
HSS	<i>Hrvatska Seljacka Stranka- Croatian Peasants' Party</i> Participated in 1995 and 2000 opposition coalitions. Center party.
HSLs	<i>Hrvatska Socijalno-Liberalna Stranka- Croatian Social liberal Party</i> Major opposition party 1990-1999. Won the 2000 election in coalition with SDP. Led by Drazen Budisa who lost the 2000 presidential election to Stjepan

	Mesic of HNS Center party.
HSP	<i>Hrvatska Stranka Prava- Croatian Rights Party</i> Far -right party.
SDP	<i>Socijaldemokratska Partija- Social Democratic Party</i> Direct successor of the former Croatian League of Communists. Saw extreme decline in popularity 1990-1996. Won the 2000 election together with HSL. Currently the leader of the ruling coalition Leftist party.

1 Croatian Democratic Union's nomination process for the 2000 election basically consisted of a 2-day party executive board meeting. Nomination processes for opposition coalitions were no different. As far as the level of parties' attention to public opinion is concerned, it suffices to say that most of them employ a number of independent resources to track voters preferences throughout the pre-election period.

2 Mandate seats are essentially as good as a direct ticket to the legislature; fighting seats are contested by two or more parties/candidates, the outcome of that contest being highly uncertain; ornamental seats are those where a candidate has virtually no chance of winning.

Josip Glaurdic graduated from Illinois Wesleyan University in 2001 with Political Science and International Business Majors. Honors awarded to Glaurdic include the Yale University Sterling Prize fellowship and the Yale University Graduate Fellowship. A member of Pi Sigma Alpha, Phi Kappa Phi, and Phi Beta Kappa, he will attend Yale University in the Fall of 2001.

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