United Kingdom, 1910: A pro-suffrage poster from Brighton, England reads “Justice Demands the Vote.”
Chapter 2

Politics

The 2007 Kenyan general elections saw a record number of women – 269 women out of 2,548 candidates, compared to just 44 in the 2002 elections – vying for a Parliamentary seat. These elections also saw unprecedented levels of violence. One woman, Alice Onduto, was shot and killed after losing her nomination bid in South Nairobi, and another woman candidate, Flora Igoki Tera, was tortured by a gang of five men. In spite of this hostile environment, many women candidates persisted in building their campaigns on a platform of women’s rights and gender equality. Lorna Laboso stood on an explicit agenda to promote the rights of women in her constituency in the Rift Valley, promising to address female genital mutilation and other harmful cultural practices, improve girls’ access to education and promote women’s participation in decision-making. Lorna’s gender issues-based campaign was politically risky. But her track record of delivering on women’s rights in her constituency stood her in good stead and she was eventually elected.

Women are running for public office in growing numbers. They have currently reached an average of 18.4 per cent of seats in national assemblies, exceeding 30 per cent of representatives in national assemblies in 22 countries. A core element of women’s organising worldwide has been the focus on political processes in order to shape public policy-making and democratize power relations. Women are using their votes to strengthen their leverage as members of interest groups, including groups with an interest in gender equality.

The violence experienced by women candidates in the example from Kenya is emblematic of obstacles to women’s political participation that limit their effectiveness in making political accountability systems work for gender equality in many parts of the world. Nevertheless, more and more female candidates are running on a gender equal-
ity platform, and women voters are asserting themselves as a distinct constituency. Women are seeking to transform politics itself and to reinvigorate political accountability.

This chapter shows that increased political accountability to women comes not only from increasing their numbers amongst decision-makers, although this is necessary and important. It must also be linked to improved democratic governance overall, understood as inclusive, responsive, and accountable management of public affairs.

This chapter poses two questions:
- How have states advanced in their obligations to create an enabling environment for women’s political participation as voters, candidates, elected representatives and office-holders?
- What factors enable women and men in public office to change the public policy agenda and ensure delivery on promises to women?

The structure of this chapter follows the cycle of political accountability (Figure 2.1), where stronger political participation leads to better representation and accountability, and gradually to a transformation and deepening of democratic politics.

**The cycle of political accountability**

While the experience of women varies across countries, regions and political systems, and according to class, race, age or ethnicity, we know that political accountability to women is increasing when women’s engagement in politics results in a positive feedback loop, whereby the process of articulating interests and seeking representation of those interests in public decision-making leads to more gender-balanced resource allocation and policy implementation.

For democratic accountability to work for women, they – particularly the poorest women, who have the least power – must be the drivers of the accountability process, and the process itself must aim to achieve greater gender equality. A significant political success for women in many parts of the world has involved recasting concerns once thought to pertain only to women – such as violence against women – as issues that affect communities as a whole. This means that the questions of who answers to women and how effectively abuses of women’s rights are remedied are seen as concerns to all.

The political accountability cycle does not always work as a forward progression. Movement in the reverse direction is possible when women’s rights are denied, women’s access to public decision-making is obstructed, and policy implementation reinforces women’s unequal status. Reforms aimed at strengthening democracy will only be successful if they acknowledge the challenges faced in particular by the poorest and most marginalised women in realising their rights and participating in all public decision-making processes.

**Mobilising around women’s interests**

Building political accountability to women, like any accountability project, begins with
women and their allies identifying and mobilizing around an issue of common concern. This is the first step in the cycle of accountability, essential in order to formulate a mandate upon which public decision-makers can act. ‘Women’ are of course not a single category. In reality, the interests of some, often upper-class, educated, urban women tend to be better represented than those of poor, uneducated, rural women. It cannot be assumed, therefore, that all women share the same political interests (see Box 2A).

In recent years, the emergence of a ‘gender gap’ in voting behavior — that is, women as a group voting differently from men, especially in developed countries — and the increasing importance of this ‘women’s vote’...
suggests the emergence of an identifiable female constituency in some contexts. In the United States, women demonstrate a higher preference than men – between 7 and 10 percentage points – for left-leaning options. In Australia, by contrast, the gender gap has worked in the other direction, with women favoring more conservative options. Political parties are catching up to these voting patterns by shaping political platforms to appeal to women voters and by recruiting more women members. Women themselves are recognizing this potential for increased political leverage by formulating Women's Manifestos prior to elections and asking parties to sign on to these (see Box 2B).

Women's organisations and movements derive much of their political legitimacy from their efforts to represent women's interests. National, regional and international women's movements have been highly effective in exposing gender-based injustices and triggering responses. Important examples include the role of women's movements in challenging authoritarian regimes in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Nepal, Peru, and the Philippines; in building pressure for peace in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Uganda, Sudan, Burundi, Timor-Leste, and the Balkans; in contemporary protests around the world at high commodity prices (see Chapter 4); and in seeking to eliminate violence against women (see Chapter 5). Women have joined together in Senegal and Burkina Faso to press for changes to the law on female genital mutilation, organized for inheritance rights in Rwanda, and promoted rights in marriage in Brazil and Turkey. In Andhra Pradesh, India, women have fought against the impact of alcohol on men's behavior and income and turned their anti-alcohol campaign into a pivotal electoral issue, as illustrated in Box 2C.

**Box 2B: Women's Manifestos**

Women voters in a growing number of countries across all geographic regions are agreeing to a basic list of policy priorities to present to political parties prior to elections. These ‘Women’s Manifestos’ call for parties to sign on and reflect women’s demands in their campaign platforms.

For example, the 2007 Irish Women’s manifesto ‘What Women Want from the Next Irish Government’ had five cardinal demands:

- More women in positions of decision-making;
- Zero tolerance of violence against women;
- Sharing of childcare and household work;
- Economic equality between women and men; and
- Equal respect and autonomy for all women, irrespective of diversity and difference.

The first women’s electoral manifesto in Africa was drawn up in Botswana by a women’s organization called Emang Basadi (Setswana for “Stand up, women!”) in 1993. The Women’s Manifesto was launched while political parties were developing their election manifestos for the 1994 general elections. While this initially met with resistance from parties, women used the Manifesto in political education programs and popularized it widely. As a result, by 1999 all parties had changed their primary election procedures to allow for broader participation by members in candidate selection and for more women contestants than ever before. Women’s wings of political parties now regularly monitor their own parties for progress in meeting Women’s Manifesto demands, and report to the annual Emang Basadi conferences.

**Accessing power: The challenges of representation**

The second step in the cycle of political accountability relies on elections that permit voters either to renew mandates of parties and politicians or to vote them out of power. Elections also ensure that political representatives are authorized to act upon the interests of citizens in general, and specific constituencies in particular.

Women’s numerical presence in public office has received increased attention over the past ten years. It represents an indicator for Goal 3 of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – “to promote gender equality and empower women.” A 30
per cent minimum for women in representative assemblies is also a target of the Beijing Platform for Action. Indeed, the rate of increase in the proportion of women in national assemblies has accelerated over the past decade: from 11.6 per cent in 1995 to 18.4 per cent as of May 2008 (see Figure 2.2). Previously, the rate of increase had been much slower, rising less than one per cent from 1975-1995.

Even at the current rate of increase, the ‘parity zone’ where neither sex holds more than 60 per cent of seats will not be reached by developing countries until 2045. Moreover, the current rate of increase is unlikely to be sustained unless countries continue establishing quotas or other temporary positive action measures. The new generation of quotas used by countries such as Spain and Norway is worth highlighting as particularly effective in building women’s numbers in politics (see Box 2D). These quotas follow the principle of balanced gender presence and apply to both men and women, seeking to limit the dominance of either sex in parliaments to a maximum of 60 per cent.

How have states met their obligations to create an enabling environment for women’s participation in electoral contests? They have had to address structural factors, such as the electoral system (how votes are translated into seats in parliament), and cultural challenges, such as voter hostility to women and electoral violence. Political parties play a determinant role in changing attitudes to women’s leadership. Quota systems (from voluntary to legally required), party and media codes of conduct, and campaign finance controls have also been effective in leveling the playing field for women candidates.

Electoral systems are a strong predictor of the numbers of women in representative politics (Figure 2.3). Proportional representation (PR) often allows more women to compete and win than simple majority systems do because they tend to have multi-member constituencies where seats are assigned in proportion to the percentage of votes won by the parties. This encourages more diversity in party platforms and candidates. Simple majority systems in which one candidate alone represents a constituency tend to discourage parties from fielding women because of presumed voter hostility. Out of 176 countries for which data were available in 2007, PR systems had a global average of 20.7 per cent of their parliamentary seats held by women, compared to 13.3 per cent in non-PR systems. The contrast is most striking within certain regions as seen in Figure 2.4. In East Asia and the Pacific, for instance, an average of 19.1 per cent of seats were held by women in countries with PR systems, compared to 6.3 per cent in non-PR systems.

Constitutional or electoral law quotas are the strongest means of increasing women’s engagement in political competition regardless of political system, and are used in 46 countries. As of May 2008, the

**BOX 2C | The 1990s Anti-Alcohol Movement in Andhra Pradesh, India**

In 1991, women from the rural Dubuganta district in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh sought to address growing alcohol dependency among men and the consequent problems of domestic abuse and squandered household income by staging protests aimed at forcing out local liquor traders. The protests quickly spread across the whole state. The struggle catalyzed a larger social movement, known as the Anti-Liquor Movement, leading ultimately to a state-wide ban on alcoholic beverages, passed in 1995.

The Anti-Liquor Movement was a significant political achievement because:

- It forged a coalition between rural and urban women of different castes and religions, and
- It transformed a ‘women’s issue’ into a campaign platform issue that significantly determined the outcome of the 1994 state election.

In 1992, the movement entered the domain of electoral politics, asking that parties declare their positions on the prohibition of alcohol. In 1994, the Telugu Desam Party, which had campaigned on a platform of prohibition and received support from women’s groups, won state-level elections. The party passed the prohibition law a month after taking power.

Although the prohibition was partially abandoned in 1997, the anti-liquor movement helped increase the participation of women in the public sphere and empowered women to mobilize effectively.

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average representation of women was 21.9 per cent in countries that used these types of quotas as opposed to 15.3 per cent for the rest of countries, regardless of electoral system. Other types of temporary positive action measures, such as quotas at the sub-national level or political party quotas for electoral candidates (which can be voluntary) raise the number of countries with quotas to 95 (see Annex 3). The majority of countries with women in 30 per cent or more of national assembly seats applied quotas in some form (see Box 2D).

In democracies, political parties are the main route to political participation and the representation of particular interest groups. Around the world, however, political parties have been slow to respond to women’s interest in political participation. According to the UK-based Fawcett Society, political parties often fail to adequately respond to significant barriers encountered by women standing for parliament, which they have summed up as the “four Cs” of confidence, culture, childcare and cash. “Confidence” problems stem in part from women’s relatively late entry to party politics and consequent limited apprenticeship. “Culture” barriers stem from the aggressive confrontational style of political competition. “Childcare” refers to the competing demands on the time of women candidates due to their domestic responsibilities. And “cash” refers to the relative under-investment in women’s campaigns by political parties.

Women’s access to political parties, therefore, is often circumscribed by gender role expectations. This is especially true with respect to leadership positions, affecting women’s ability to influence or shape party platforms. As a woman politician in Brazil put it: “What has happened inside political parties is similar to what happens inside the home. We argue for equality, we say that we should equally share tasks, but we end up doing mostly domestic chores. In political parties, the situation is the same. We argue for equality, but we end doing the practical tasks and men dictate...”
the rules and make the decisions.” As a result, women’s numbers amongst party members and leaders are rarely proportional to their membership presence – and membership itself can be low (Figure 2.6, see page 25).

Data on female membership in political parties is difficult to obtain, but a 2008 study in Latin America indicates a systematic discrepancy between member numbers and leadership positions. The study examined countries in which women’s membership of political parties is relatively high. In Paraguay, 46.5 per cent of party members are women, while 18.9 per cent of executive posts in party leadership are held by women. Forty-five per cent of party members in Panama are women, yet women occupy only 18.8 per cent of leadership positions. Mexico has an average rate of 52 per cent women membership in the two main political parties, but only 30.6 per cent of executive posts are filled by women. An exception is Costa Rica, with women holding 43.9 per cent of party leadership positions, bringing women into the parity zone. This is the result of an Electoral Code amendment in 1996, requiring Costa Rican parties to fill at least 40 per cent of their leadership posts with women in “electable positions”.16

To address this disparity as well as the challenges of placing gender equality on the legislative agendas of parties, gender equality advocates in several countries have established women’s parties or parties with a specific gender equality agenda. Iceland’s all-women party was represented in the legislature from 1983-99 and received about 10 per cent of the votes.17 Other countries with women’s parties include Sweden, India, the Philippines, and, most recently, Afghanistan.18 Electoral system reforms in some contexts have facilitated the representation of interest groups that tend to be underrepresented by mainstream parties. This was the intention of the 1995 ‘Party List System’ law in the Philippines described in Box 2E (see page 25).

Campaign financing deficits, violence, and hostile media coverage have been
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>Quotas for women</th>
<th>% women in lower or single house</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rwanda</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 1: Constitution establishes women should be granted at least 30% of posts in decision-making bodies and the Senate. Quota types: 24 seats out of 80 (30%) are reserved for women in the National Assembly. Type 3: 20% district councilor seats are reserved for women. There are legal sanctions for non-compliance.</td>
<td>48.8 (34.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 4: 50% quota for women in the Swedish Social Democratic Labour Party, the Left Party and the Green Party of Sweden.</td>
<td>47.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuba</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>43.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>41.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 1: Constitution establishes quota for women. Type 2: 30% of party lists must include women in elective positions. Type 3: The capital and provincial laws include quotas. Type 4: Most parties have a 30% quota for women. There are legal sanctions for non-compliance.</td>
<td>40.0 (38.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 4: Labour Party has 50% quota for women; Green Left has a quota for women also (% not confirmed).</td>
<td>39.3 (34.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Used to have Type 4. Quotas were abandoned in the mid-1990s.</td>
<td>38.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 2: 40% quota for women in all public elections, national and local. Type 3: see Type 2. Type 4: 40% quota for women in the National Liberation Party and the Christian-Social Unity Party; 50% in the Citizen Action Party. There are legal sanctions for non-compliance.</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 2: Following the principle of balanced presence, party electoral lists are required to have a minimum of 40% and a maximum of 60% of either sex among their candidates in all elections (general, regional, local). Type 3: see Type 2. In addition, several Autonomous Communities have adopted quotas in regional elections. Type 4: Most parties have a 40% quota for either sex. There are legal sanctions for non-compliance.</td>
<td>36.3 (30.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 4: Most parties have a 40% quota for either sex.</td>
<td>36.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belgium</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 2: One-third minimum quota for either sex; two consecutive positions on party list cannot be held by members of the same sex. Type 4: Various types of quotas, the most frequent are: 1 candidate of each sex in 3 top positions; zipper principle for each sex for local and provincial lists; equal number of each sex for provincial lists (or first positions on provincial lists). There are legal sanctions for non-compliance.</td>
<td>35.3 (38.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mozambique</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 4: The Front for the Liberation of Mozambique has a 30% quota for women.</td>
<td>34.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nepal</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 1: Constitution establishes that at least 5% of the total candidates contesting in the Lower House election must be women and 3 out of 60 seats are reserved for women in the Upper House. Type 2: See type 1. Type 3: 20% of all village and municipal council seats are reserved for women. There are legal sanctions for non-compliance.</td>
<td>33.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceland</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 4: Some parties have a 40% quota for women.</td>
<td>33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 3: The Municipal Structures Act specifies that parties should seek to ensure that 50% of candidates at local level are women, but no penalties are imposed. Type 4: The African National Congress has a 30% quota for women and a 50% quota for women on party lists at local level.</td>
<td>33.0 (40.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 4: The Green Alternative Party has 50% quota for women; the Austrian People’s Party has 33.3% quota and the Social Democratic Party of Austria has 40% quota for women.</td>
<td>32.8 (24.6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 4: The Left Party and the Greens have 50% quota for women; the Christian Democratic Union has a 33.3% quota and the Social Democratic Party of Germany has a 40% quota.</td>
<td>31.6 (21.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 1: Constitution determines that the parliament shall consist of one woman representative for every district. Type 2: In addition to 214 constituency representatives, there are 61 women representatives, 56 for each district and the rest as part of quotas for other groups such as defence forces representatives, persons with disabilities, workers, and youth. Type 3: One third of local government councils seats are reserved for women.</td>
<td>30.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burundi</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 1: Constitution stipulates a 30% quota for women in parliament.</td>
<td>30.5 (34.7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Republic of Tanzania</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 1: Constitution establishes at least 20% but no more than 30% of special seats for women in parliament. Type 2: 75 out of 319 seats in parliament were special seats for women. There are 25% of seats must be held by women at local level.</td>
<td>30.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedonia (TFYR)</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>Type 2: A minimum of 30% of each sex should be represented on party candidate lists. Type 3: 30% of each sex on lists of candidates for the county council and city of Skopje; half of these among the first half of the list. Type 4: The Social Democratic Union of Macedonia has a 30% quota for both sexes. There are legal sanctions for non-compliance.</td>
<td>30.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: The numbers in parenthesis refer to the percentage of women in the Upper House of legislatures, where applicable. Available data as of 31 May 2008. Refers to Figure 2.5 for description of quota types.
addressed unevenly by governments. Where controls on campaign financing are weakly enforced, women are at a disadvantage because they often begin their races with less access to money than men. In the United States, for example, programs providing the same public funding to both candidates and limiting their spending have increased the number of women in office in states like Arizona and Maine. Some countries have addressed this challenge by linking public campaign finance to party compliance with quotas for women candidates, but public funds rarely contribute enough money to overcome women’s campaign financing deficits or to act as an incentive for parties to front more women candidates. Women in some countries have addressed this deficit through nationwide mechanisms to mobilise resources for women. An example of this is ‘Emily’s List’

**FIGURE 2.6**  
Political Party Membership: Significantly More Men than Women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Women in Women’s Groups</th>
<th>Men in Political Parties</th>
<th>Women in Political Parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rest of Countries</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed Countries</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEE/CIS</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Calculations are based on self-identification as members of political parties and/or women’s groups in the World Values Survey. Only countries with information from the fourth wave (1999-2004) were included. Source: World Values Survey database.

**BOX 2E**  
**GABRIELA Goes to Congress**

GABRIELA is the biggest alliance of women’s organisations in the Philippines. It is a progressive women’s alliance dedicated to promoting the rights of women and indigenous people. It has also campaigned against the disappearances and killings of suspected rebels; waged militant opposition to the influence of international financial institutions over the Philippine economy and politics; and denounced corruption.

In 2001, GABRIELA entered the political arena when its Secretary General, Liza Maza, ran as a Party List Representative under the *Bayan Muna* (Country First) Party. With the enactment of the ‘Party List System’ Law in 1995, excluded groups such as women, workers and farmers were able to supersede some of the entrenched barriers to their participation and form ‘sectoral’ parties to contest 20 per cent of the 250 seats in the Philippine House of Representatives.

Under the law, each voter has two votes when electing Members of the Lower House, one for the individual district representative and another for the ‘sectoral party’ of her/his choice. To win a seat, a party should at least obtain two per cent of the total number of votes cast in the entire country, and can be awarded a maximum of three seats in Parliament.

GABRIELA’s representative won in 2001 and was re-elected in 2004. In 2007, GABRIELA ran again and earned 3.94 per cent of total votes, winning seats for two representatives. The election of GABRIELA’s representative in 2001 greatly advanced the women’s rights agenda in the Lower House. She played a major role in the passage of pro-women legislation such as the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act and the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act. In 2007, the two GABRIELA representatives filed legislative proposals regarding the work benefits of Filipino women and migrant workers, divorce, marital infidelity, prostitution, protection of women and children in conflict areas, and the welfare of female prisoners.

Reforming the electoral system through the introduction of the party list system gave women and other excluded sectors the opportunity not only to be represented in the legislature but to advance a legislative agenda that directly addresses women’s issues. The party list system broadened the public space for women, particularly rural women, whose voices can now be heard as GABRIELA goes to Congress.¹
in the US, a body independent of party control that provides financial and moral backing to Democratic women candidates who support a gender equality agenda.23

Governments still have a long way to go to find effective means of addressing election violence and other forms of intimidation targeting women. Some have found it effective to work with media to prevent hostile coverage of women candidates. In Sierra Leone’s peaceful 2007 election, this issue was of particular concern to the Election Commissioner, Christiana Thorpe, who ensured that gender equality issues were covered in the codes of conduct for political parties and media.24 Where access to television and the Internet is scarce, for example in sub-Saharan Africa, talk radio and community radio allow women to get news and technical information and in some cases to act as citizen journalists, empowering them to be more active in the economic and political life of their communities.25

Worldwide, there are more women in government today than ever before.26 But women’s presence may not be enough to change public policy and resource allocation patterns. Other institutional and informal mechanisms are needed to build skills and leverage behind a gender equality agenda. These include women’s caucuses that reach across party lines, parliamentary committees on gender equality, support from the ruling party, and coordination among different government departments.27

Women in public office tend overwhelmingly to be clustered in ‘social’ policy-making positions (see Figure 2.7) Whether by choice or by force of unexamined assumptions about women’s contribution to public decision-making, this concentration in the social sectors can inhibit women’s potential contribution to other critical decision-making areas, notably security, the budget, and foreign policy.

Nevertheless, higher numbers of women in parliament generally contribute to stronger attention to women’s issues. A large-scale survey of members of parliament undertaken by the Inter-Parliamentary Union recently found that over 90 per cent of respondents agreed that women bring different views, perspectives and talents to politics, and an equally large percentage of male and female respondents believed that “women give priority to those issues believed to be women’s issues.”28 In the words of one member of parliament, “It’s the women in politics who put women’s rights and violence against women and children on the political agenda.”29

One of the anticipated effects of women in public office is a decrease in corrupt practices in public office. Certainly corruption is a mat-
national accountability for meeting commitments to gender equality. The influence of these bureaucratic units over national decision-making and their ability to hold other parts of the government to account on gender equality issues depend upon their staff and budget resources, institutional location (such as a ministerial cabinet posi-

A 2008 study of UK politics confirms that as the number of women in formal political institutions has increased since the 1997 election when women's representation doubled to 18.2 per cent, issues of particular concern to women have been increasingly mainstreamed into policy and political debate. Women in public office have another very important effect in building accountability to women: they encourage greater political engagement by ordinary women. Research on the 2001 election by the Electoral Commission in the UK, for example, has revealed that women voters turn out in slightly higher numbers than men (there was a gender gap of four percentage points) in elections for seats with a female candidate.

Research on women’s policy impact at the local level is much more limited, but suggests that local women decision-makers tend to have a positive impact on the delivery of services to women and children, as outlined in Box 2G.

Parliamentary caucuses can offer women in parliament the opportunity to work across party lines and build collective political clout. They can also be a linking mechanism to the women’s movement because they offer a point of engagement for non-partisan initiatives from civil society. For example, the women’s caucus in Brazil’s Congress is known as the *bancada feminina*. With the Feminist Centre for Research and Advice, a feminist lobbying group, they secured the approval of numerous laws advancing women’s rights, including laws against domestic violence and sexual harassment, a new civil code, and legislation concerning women’s health and maternity benefits.

Women’s machineries also provide a mechanism for coordination in policy implementation. The Beijing Platform for Action recommended that all countries establish national machineries for women to support national accountability for meeting commitments to gender equality. The influence of these bureaucratic units over national decision-making and their ability to hold other parts of the government to account on gender equality issues depend upon their staff and budget resources, institutional location (such as a ministerial cabinet posi-

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**BOX 2F | Gender and Corruption**

In 2001, the World Bank report *Engendering Development through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice* suggested that societies where women enjoy greater participation in public life have “cleaner” businesses and governments. Cross-national comparisons showed that the higher the number of women in parliaments or the private sector, the lower the level of corruption. While depicting these findings as merely suggestive, *Engendering Development* called for “having more women in politics and in the labor force—since they could be an effective force for good government and business trust.”

Although this argument was backed by statistical associations, it did not take into account an alternative explanation. A 2003 study pitted indicators of the ‘fair sex’ hypothesis (i.e., women in parliament, women in ministerial positions, and women in sub-ministerial positions) against measures of liberal democracy (i.e., rule of law, press freedom, and elections) for a sample of 99 countries. Results showed that both women in government and liberal democracy were significantly and inversely related to corruption when they were isolated from each other. But when put into the same model, the effects of women’s political presence on corruption became insignificant, whereas liberal institutions remained very powerful predictors of low corruption. Freedom of the press showed the strongest influence on corruption, followed by the rule of law. The gender-corruption link was refuted in this test as a largely spurious relationship, and the liberal democracy hypothesis received very strong empirical support.

In other words, more women in politics are not the cause of low corruption, but rather, democratic and transparent politics is correlated with low corruption, and the two create an enabling environment for more women to participate in politics. In a society characterized by free elections, rule of law, and separation of powers, the protection of basic liberties facilitates women’s entry into government. At the same time, more competitive and transparent politics minimizes opportunities for corruption.

To elect or appoint more women to leadership positions is a noble and just goal in itself, but would not on its own “clean up” government. Effective checks and balances on power are needed, whatever the gender of politicians.
contrast to the ‘high politics’ of creating a greater demand for accountability, the huge, painstaking and often enormously complex task of improving the ‘supply’ of accountability unfolds out of the public eye. Implementation involves the translation of policies into directives, procedures, doctrine, budget allocations, recruitment patterns, incentive systems, reporting, monitoring and, finally, oversight systems. As a result, perhaps the most critical part of a functioning system of democratic accountability – implementation – remains the most challenging.

Even when the political will does exist, many governments do not have the capacity, resources, or know-how to ensure that gender equality policies are carried out. In weak or fragile states, corruption and inefficiency can have a devastating effect on ordinary citizens of both sexes, but they often take a gender-specific form that undermines the cycle of political accountability to women in particular (see Chapter 3). Thus, as policies are translated into procedures, resources, incentives, and action, they are often embedded in administrative processes that do not take women’s needs into account. As one analyst explained in the context of India, “Overall, administrative reforms have lagged and continue to lag far behind political empowerment.”

Special windows of opportunity for challenging entrenched interests sometimes emerge in post-conflict contexts. In Liberia, for instance, President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf took the unusual step of laying off the entire staff of the Ministry of Finance in early 2006 in an effort to tackle corruption. In Timor-Leste, the United Nations-supported transitional administration endeavoured to engage women in rebuilding public institutions from scratch, as shown Panel on page 30.

An important measure for institutional change advocated by women is simply more socially representative bureaucracies – in other words, more women and more diversity in administration. A survey of 1,000 members of the United States government’s Senior Executive Service (high-level civil servants) found a direct relationship between
the number of women working in an agency and that agency’s willingness to advocate for women’s issues. It also showed that institutional factors were important, such as whether an agency has an office dedicated to women’s issues. For example, executives throughout the Department of Labor, which has a Women’s Bureau, are more likely to be responsive to women than executives in other U.S. government departments. Other studies have found that bureaucracies that mirror the patterns of diversity in the public they serve are more likely to be attuned and responsive to the specific needs of a variety of marginalised social groups, including women. As Chapter 3 shows, women at the ‘front line’ of service delivery bureaucracies – including public health workers and the police – contribute to improving responsiveness to women.

If increasing the number of women in civil service is likely to produce more responsive governance for women, this insight has yet to be reflected in most public sector reforms. On the contrary, efforts to cut state costs through outsourcing administrative and service delivery functions often result in thinning the ranks of ‘front-line’ workers in government services where women tend to be concentrated. In public sector downsizing programmes in the 1990s in Vietnam, for instance, 70 per cent of the employees of state-owned enterprises who were laid off were female. Efforts to professionalise the senior civil service rarely include ‘fast tracking’ to bring women into managerial roles. In the few countries that have civil service quotas for women, such as Bangladesh and Timor-Leste, efforts concentrate primarily on placing women in entry-level positions, where the quota can rapidly become a glass ceiling. In Afghanistan, the government recently committed to fast tracking the increase of women’s participation in the civil service at all levels to 30 per cent by 2013. Currently, only 22 per cent of all regular government employees are women and only nine per cent of these are at the decision-making level.

Much more needs to be learned about approaches to governance reform that result

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<th>BOX 2G</th>
<th>Women Representatives and Policy Outputs</th>
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Two particularly striking cases show that women often have a different set of demands than men, and a more representative assembly will lead to a different set of policy outputs.

In one case, political scientists assessed whether the proportion of the municipal council seats held by women affected the level of public childcare coverage offered in Norwegian municipalities from the 1970s to the 1990s. They controlled for characteristics such as party ideology, proportions of single-parent families, and the percentage of women of childbearing age. An unambiguous pattern was detected: there was a direct causal relationship between the proportion of the city council that was female and childcare coverage.

In the second case, a 1992 constitutional reform in India introduced gender reservations at all tiers of local governance, including the local panchayat village council system, which is responsible for local government activities such as public works projects. One-third of all council seats were reserved for women-only competition as were one-third of council heads (pradhan). Specific panchayat councils were randomly designated to have a female leader.

Political scientists examined panchayat councils in a sample of West Bengal and Rajasthan villages and coded requests and complaints that came to the councils by the sex of the person making the request. Systematic differences were found in the complaints depending on the sex of the complainant. For example, in both states women were more likely than men to make requests and complaints concerning water resources, reflecting their role as managers of domestic water supplies.

There were no differences in the pattern of requests to male-led and female-led councils, but there were striking differences in the response. The number of drinking water projects was more than 60 per cent higher in female-led councils than male-led panchayats. In West Bengal, where jobs building roads are more likely to go to women, there were more road projects in female-led panchayat councils, while in Rajasthan, where road-building jobs were more important for men, there were more road projects in districts with male-led councils.

Both of these cases suggest that local politics can provide an opportunity for personal experiences to influence the decisions being made, thus building a strong case for ensuring greater parity in the numbers of women and men in elected and appointed political decision-making bodies.
in stronger government accountability to women. Most current governance reforms are designed with little regard for specific gendered elements or impacts. A review of the World Bank’s programmes on public administration, law and justice since 2002, for example, shows that gender is mentioned as a sub-theme in only a few areas of governance programming (Figure 2.8). This does not necessarily mean that these programmes are not incorporating gender issues, but rather than gender equality objectives are not indicated amongst the primary thematic focus areas of these programmes.

Transforming politics:
A new cycle of democratic accountability

When implementation is effective, political accountability comes full circle because it feeds into more effective and broader mobilisation on the part of women – and in some cases a transformation of politics as other interest groups take up women’s concerns. Furthermore implementation of laws and policies can lead to recognition of other needs around which to mobilize. Alternatively, implementation failures create an incentive for women to mobilize in protest. Either way, state actions and the ways in which they are evaluated, explained, justified, and, if necessary, corrected can trigger broader and more effective political engagement.

Today, as a result of women’s mobilization over many years, women’s rights and gender equality are a part of most political debates. Women’s advocacy has played an enormously important role in creating a politics of gender equality, whether by providing politicians committed to women’s rights with the grassroots support required to exert political leverage, by challenging entrenched biases against women in party politics, or by making a gender equality issue – such as violence against women – a political issue of concern to all. In the process, gender equality advocates have done much more than

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State-Building for Gender Equality in Timor-Leste

As elections approached in Timor-Leste in the spring of 2007, the Timorese people and the international community looked on with both anticipation and trepidation. Would Timor Leste, one of the world’s youngest nations, continue on its path to democracy and the consolidation of democratic institutions, which began with the independence referendum of 1999? The remarkable voter turnout quickly assuaged the anxiety of observers: 81 per cent of registered voters went to the polls, 47 per cent of them women. They elected 65 new members of parliament, including 20 female MPs. During the election, women candidates signed on to a Women’s Political Platform, emphasizing their common goal of giving women’s issues a prominent place on the political agenda, and the General Election Monitoring Commission (KOMEG), a group of men and women advocating for women’s political participation, closely monitored the commitments of political parties to gender equality.

Today, women in Timor-Leste are represented in significant numbers at the highest levels of political decision-making and increasingly at the local level: they constitute close to 30 per cent of MPs, hold three out of nine cabinet posts including three key ministries — Justice, Finance and Social Solidarity — and an increasing number of seats on village councils. Numeric representation, furthermore, is reinforced by a strong public commitment to gender equality: among other mechanisms devoted to women’s rights and empowerment Timor-Leste has a women’s parliamentary caucus; a parliamentary committee devoted to Gender Equality, Poverty Reduction and Rural and Regional Development; a Secretary of State for the Promotion of Equality under the Office of the Prime Minister; and, most recently, a Prime Ministerial Commission for Gender Equality.
open up political spaces for women. They have succeeded in changing the meaning of the political by exposing how power relations work in the private sphere and by demanding the democratisation of all social relations.

Accountability in Timor-Leste, however, as in all other countries emerging from the trauma of prolonged violent conflict, remains an enormously complex political and institutional project. In the new state of Timor-Leste the public administration literally had to be built from scratch. In 1999, for example, there were only 70 lawyers in the country, no formal judicial system, no civil service, and no political institutions to ensure citizen’s access to justice in the emerging independent state.4

Unlike in many other post-conflict contexts, Timorese women were able to participate in nation building from the start. In this they were assisted by the United Nations peacekeeping missions that sought to support national accountability to women. The first United Nations mission (2000-2002), for example, promoted gender equality in policy, programmes and legislation in the East Timor Transitional Administration. This eventually evolved into a policy-making mechanism strategically integrated into the new government. With the support of a representative network of women’s organisations and a critical mass of women in high-level decision-making positions, this work provided the foundation for the comprehensive institutional framework for gender equality that exists today. As the Special Representative of the Secretary General, Atul Khare, has pointed out, “Women are strong advocates for justice and accountability. Therefore, the alliance between peacekeeping operations, women, and women’s organisations is crucial for promoting long-term stability in any country.”

In the absence of political accountability, when aspirations to advance women’s interests can find no expression, and when representatives are unable to advance legislation or see it enacted, the result can be a loss of faith in democratic participa-
tion or in engagement with the state. This can contribute to the growing appeal of other forms of mobilization, such as identity groups or religious movements. Women have found an important source of support in these associations, which often provide services and social recognition to women in areas where the state does not deliver. However, some of these associations take decidedly restrictive perspectives on democratic participation, and recruit women as spokespersons of conservative interpretations of women’s social roles. This is a matter of concern to gender equality advocates, and in some contexts it threatens to reverse democratic political developments. This speaks to the urgent need to ensure that political accountability systems engage women as equal participants at every stage of the accountability cycle.

Conclusion: Accountability to women in the political cycle

Today, accountability to women is an issue that is on the agenda of governments around the world. Women have not only demanded state accountability for ensuring that more women can compete for public office; they have also sought ways of improving the accountability of public authorities to women. Issues once seen as mainly women’s issues – such as violence against women, lack of childcare and social protection, environmental protection, and the care burden of HIV-positive family members – are now matters for mainstream political debate.

- Women’s movements have been critical to advancing the democratization of public and private power relationships. In this process they have been most effective when they succeed in translating a ‘women’s issue’ into a matter of general public interest.

- Electoral system reforms that afford voters a broader range of choices and a multiplicity of representatives can help return more women to public office.

- Political party reform to ensure internal democratization improves women’s chances
of competing for public office. Women in many contexts are asserting their leverage as a voting group, for instance by using Women's Manifestos to assert their policy interests. A small gender gap in voting preferences is becoming evident and parties are responding with policies attuned to women's preferences.

- **Internal party quotas to bring more women into party leadership** have proven indispensable to ensuring not only that women's issues are on party platforms, but that there is a stronger pool of women candidates in electoral contests.

- **Temporary affirmative action measures** such as quotas and reservations are an important means of breaking through voter resistance and other constraints on women's access to office. States that do not endorse these measures should be held to account if they do not take alternative steps to enable more women to attain representative office.

- **A new generation of quotas that apply for both men and women** is emerging. These follow the principle of balanced gendered perspective and limit the dominance of either sex to a maximum of 60 per cent.

- **Increasing the number of women in elected and appointed public office** can enhance accountability but must be accompanied by efforts to build state capacity to respond to women's needs. Policy-making must be matched with resource allocation, procedural reform, new performance measures, and incentive system change so that governance reforms bring results for ordinary women. In this regard, an indicator of accountability to women can be found in the resources, institutional location, and authority given to women's units within the national bureaucracy.

In short, a politics of accountability requires much more than increasing and amplifying women's voices amongst policymakers. It requires governance reforms that equip public institutions with the incentives, skills, information and procedures to respond to women's needs.