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
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
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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 Sweden18, India,19 the Philippines,20 and, most recently, Afghanistan.21 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...
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Campaign financing deficits, violence, and hostile media coverage have been
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 mobilize 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></th>
<th>Membership, 1999-2004 (% of total men and women surveyed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%  3%  6%  9%  12%  15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest of countries</td>
<td>12% 6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed countries</td>
<td>9% 5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEE/CIS</td>
<td>6% 2%</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.


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

GABRIELA is the biggest alliance of women’s organizations 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.

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.

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.

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. 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.

Worldwide, there are more women in government today than ever before. 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.

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.”

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.”

One of the anticipated effects of women in public office is a decrease in corrupt practices in public office. Certainly corruption is a mat-

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FIGURE 2.7 | Women in Ministerial Positions: 1 in 3 at Best

Women hold between 7.7% to 28.1% of ministerial posts. Five regions include countries with no women in government.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Lowest value in the region (1 or more countries)</th>
<th>Average value in the region (all countries of region)</th>
<th>Highest value in the region (1 or more countries)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developed Regions</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEE/CIS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America &amp; Caribbean</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia &amp; Pacific</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East &amp; North Africa</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Information includes Deputy Prime Ministers and Ministers. Prime Ministers were also included when they held ministerial portfolios. Vice-Presidents and heads of governmental or public agencies have not been included.


Translating presence into policies: Do more women in politics make a difference?

Representation ➔ Legislation & Policy

Mobilisation ➔ Implementation

Transforming Politics

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One of the anticipated effects of women in public office is a decrease in corrupt practices in public office. Certainly corruption is a mat-
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 participation. 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. 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-
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’

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**BOX 2A | Definitions**

**Women’s interests:** Women have as wide a range of interests as any other other social group. Women’s interests often, but not always, include both gender and gender equality interests.

**Gender interests:** This term denotes interests that women have because they are women. These include issues related to pregnancy and childbirth, nourishing and educating children, and building a safe community environment.

**Gender equality interests:** These are interests derived from an analysis of inequality based on gender differences, and aim for a lasting transformation of gender relations in order to ensure full achievement of women’s rights.¹

**Women’s movements:** This term describes the collectivity of women’s organisations and their allies in a particular context. Women’s civil society activism makes significant demands on their time and resources, and therefore in many contexts the proportion of women in civil society organisations can be low. While women’s movements have at times acted with marked determination and shared purpose, the term ‘women’s movement’ in the singular can also exaggerate the level of solidarity and cohesion within and between women’s organisations. For this reason, the term ‘women’s movements’ is used in this report to indicate the plurality of women’s mobilizing.

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**FIGURE A | Women’s Groups: Membership Varies Greatly Across Regions**

Membership to women’s groups (%), 1999-2004

Notes: Calculations are based on respondents who self-identified as members of women’s groups according to the World Values Survey (1999-2004).