

The Equal Presence of Women in Politics from a Party Programme Perspective

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Abstract

Political parties, like other organisations, pursue established strategic and operational goals, their primary aim being to maximise election support, but they do not operate in a vacuum; rather, they are surrounded by a range of different environments. Their success rests on their ability to adapt to these environments, which varies across parties due either to difficulties rooted within the parties or to the complexities of their environments. However, many political parties try to take an active approach rather than a reactive one, tailoring and fabricating their various environments to fit themselves rather than the other way around. Our paper focuses on Slovenian parliamentary political parties and their ability to (re/pro)act in relation to various environments—primarily the general public. By applying quantitative text analysis, we utilised party programmes as indicators of adaptation to the beliefs and attitudes of the general population, which was examined by analysing public opinion surveys. The text analysis demonstrated that the political parties are not reactive to the beliefs and attitudes of the general population but rather to expectations coming from the international environment—primarily the European Union.

Keywords: gender, political parties, party programmes, Central and Eastern Europe

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1. INTRODUCTION

Political parties, like other organisations, have several goals they try to fulfil. One of the most important goals of parties is to gain as much electoral support as possible. Again, like other organisations, parties do not operate in a vacuum but are surrounded by different sorts of environments. Parties try to adapt more to some environments than to others. The reasons for the specific forms and levels of parties' accommodations to their environments may lie within the parties but can also arise from the complexity of the environments. It is also possible that parties try to form and adjust the environments within which they operate in order to make them better fit the party.

This paper will focus on Slovenian parliamentary parties and their adaptation to the environments within they operate. As indicators of their adaptation to their environments, an analysis of party programmes, a party's main programmatic documents, will be done. The main environment that we will use as a determinant of these party programmes will be citizens' values. Hence, an analysis of public opinion polls will be employed to determine these values. The main idea of the paper is to analyse whether we can observe a connection between, on the one hand, the salience and importance among the public regarding the topic of the equal presence of women in politics and, on the other hand, the salience and importance of this equality in party programmes over time. Assuming that parties need to adapt to their environments (for their survival or/and electoral success), we expect to find a link between an increase/decrease in the salience and importance among the public of issues concerning the equality of women in politics and an increase/decrease of salience and importance in party programmes of issues concerning the equality of women in politics. Two periods will be studied in order to analyse party programmes: a) the period from the establishment of political parties in the democratic transition until 1994 and b) the present period, looking at party programmes currently in use.

2. POLITICAL PARTIES AND THEIR ENVIRONMENTS

Panebianco (1998: 5) stated that political parties are the only organisations which operate in the electoral arena.³ Several authors have stressed that the main goal of parties is to survive in electoral and organisational sense, and only later can they also perform other functions. Thus, parties try to survive via adaptation to the environments in they operate. As noted by Panebianco (1988), parties have to operate simultaneously in several environments, which can be roughly divided into categories of external and internal environments (Panebianco, 1988; Wilson, 1994).

³ Since some parties do not necessary recognize political regimes or have doubts regarding the legitimacy of elections in a particular country, they can decide not to enter the electoral arena; therefore, this characteristics is not always necessary for parties (Fink-Hafner, 2001: 15).

As pointed out by Panebianco (1988: 11) every organisation has a myriad of relationships with its external 'environment'. These relationships can be heterogeneous, but two of the most common patterns are a) that the organisation tends to 'adapt' itself more or less passively to its environment and b) that the organisation tends to 'dominate' its environment, to adapt and transform it in accordance with its own needs (Panebianco, 1988: 11). According to Panebianco (1988: 11), the party that attempts to achieve the best electoral result tries to dominate its environment, while the party that only attempts to survive in the electoral market tries to adapt itself to its environment. Since parties operate in several environments simultaneously, they may decide to adapt to one environment and to dominate other environments. The choice of strategy is not solely dependent upon parties but is also determined by the characteristics of the environment (Harmel and Janda, 1982; Panebianco, 1988).⁴ Often, parties perceive that some changes are necessary and yet the implementation of these changes fails because certain characteristics of the environment did not accommodate them.

Parties are usually faced with such difficulties when dealing with their external environments and, to a lesser extent, when they are dealing with their internal environments (Harmel and Janda, 1982). Environments are potentially variable (Panebianco, 1988: 208), and it is often the case that different parties evaluate the relevance of a single environment differently; as well, the relevancy of a particular environment can change over time. Evaluating the relevancy of a certain environment for an individual party is the party's own concern, but in such an evaluation, the most important role is that of the party leader (Wilson, 1994). They are, in fact, responsible for detecting challenges faced by their parties, with evaluating the importance of these challenges for their parties, with making decisions regarding their parties' responses and their implementation of strategy (Wilson, 1994: : 263). According to Wilson (1994), parties usually adapt to their environments via changes in their party programmes and party organisation as well as by means of their activities. He adds that it is often easier for parties to change their programmes than their organisation and activities.

In the last several decades, environments that parties operate in have changed significantly. For example, there have been changes in socio-economic situations, in cultural and institutional areas and in technology, not to mention the establishment of new supra-national systems (e.g. the EU), etc. (Wilson, 1994; Strøm and Svåsand, 1997; Dalton and Wattenberg, 2000; Mair, Müller and Plasser, 2004). Parties have adapted more or less to

⁴ Almost as old as the history of political parties is the history of the attempts to change them, to make them 'better' (Harmel and Janda, 1982: 1). The question is why many of the planned changes are not implemented. One of the most important reason for implementation failure, according to the two authors, can be traced to the characteristics of environments.

these changes, but indeed parties have also brought about some of these changes by means of decisions they made and activities they performed; at the very least, parties have made some of these changes possible (Strøm and Svåsand, 1997; Mair, Müller and Plasser, 2004). In political science, attention has focused on identifying changes in environments and their dimensions, while less attention has been paid to asking how parties have perceived these changes and how they have responded to them (Mair, Müller and Plasser, 2004: 2). Parties usually adapt to a lesser extent when they conclude that the abovementioned changes in their environments are not relevant or important enough or when they fail to respond to changes in their environments (Mair, Müller and Plasser, 2004).

3. PARTY PROGRAMMES

One of the functions parties have is also to form party programmes. Party programmes are formal documents that are presented to voters and party members (Klingemann, Hofferbert, Budge et al., 1994). Usually, parties not only identify very clearly their strategic goals, values, ideology, priorities and policies in their programmes but also offer an opportunity for party members and sympathisers to identify themselves with the party (Klingemann, Hofferbert, Budge et al., 1994). Despite some authors (e.g., Budge, 1987; Bara, 2006a) are convinced that only a small number of voters read party programmes, they are still important because they attract the attention of mass media. Mass media present party programmes to the public, and consequently these programmes shape public opinion. Since parties usually are careful to follow the interests, demands and expectations of the public, they are able to adapt their programmes adequately⁵ and offer them to voters again (Klingemann, Hofferbert, Budge et al., 1994; Caul and Gray, 2000; Bara 2006b). By following the interests, demands and expectations of the public, parties not only are able to adapt their programmes but indeed can also add relevance to the public's interests, demands and expectations. According to this perspective, parties are primarily supposed to reflect public opinion (be reactive) in their programmes and only try to form public opinion to a limited extent (be pro-active). In line with this view, such parties are expected to take a stance on topics that have already been introduced to the public, while they will only occasionally introduce new topics in their programmes.

Two theories of party competition should be noted here: a) one is spatial theory, or the classic theory of party competition (Downs, 1957), and b) the alternative is saliency theory (Robertson, 1976). The first stresses the idea that all parties, with an aim to get as

⁵ Parties are inclined to transform their programmes, but rarely do they radically change programmes (Mihailović, 2005: 32).

much electoral support as possible, take a stand on the same topics or issues, while the second's main idea is that parties introduce new topics and issues of party competition.

Some recent studies (see Caul and Gray, 2000) have confirmed findings from the mid-1970s and 80s. The tendency towards the classical theory of party competition has been confirmed. In addition, the thesis regarding the diminishing of differences among mainstream parties as regards to the topics and issues with which they engage proved correct as well. Therefore, the findings that especially new and/or non-prominent parties have been inclined to introduce new topics and issues have not come as a surprise. Such parties in need of innovation have to be cautious because new topics and issues that they introduce have to be (at least partly) relevant to the public; otherwise their potential electoral success can be seriously threatened (Caul and Gray, 2000). If new⁶ and/or non-prominent parties succeed in elections because of their introduction of new topics and issues, soon mainstream parties also allude to these topics and issues in their programmes (Klingemann, Hofferbert, Budge et al., 1994). In the past especially, questions over environmental protection and the rights of various minorities became so relevant that even mainstream parties were forced to accommodate them into their existing reference frameworks (Caul and Gray, 2000). In this case, new and/or non-prominent parties were successful in establishing a new line of competition, and mainstream parties had to seriously adapt to it.

4. THE SALIENCE AND IMPORTANCE OF EQUAL WOMEN PRESENCE IN POLITICS IN SLOVENIA

In the next sections, we will analyse the salience and importance of the equal presence of women in politics both among the public as well as in party programmes. Following the predominant belief that parties are mainly reactive and that they try to adapt themselves to their environments rather than dominate them, we expect parties will reflect the interests, demands and expectations as well as the values of the public in their programmes. Consequently, in the case of an increasing/decreasing salience and importance regarding the equal presence of women in politics among the public, we expect to observe (with some delay) an increasing/decreasing salience and importance regarding the equal presence of

6 The divide between new and old parties corresponds to the structural differences of two clusters of parties at the beginning of democratic pluralism (see Fink-Hafner 1997; Krašovec 2000; Millard 2004; Ágh 1994; Lewis 2001). New parties represented movement initiatives originating mostly from civil society, which protested against the communist regime. Their organizational capacity was embryonic, their actions were uncoordinated and their operation was pervaded by difficulties concerned with their attempts to widen their membership base and with their lack of resources (Millard 2004, p. 47–8). On the one hand, the old parties transformed from socio-political organizations that were already institutional and societal actors. They inherited organizational knowledge, networks and resources (Vehovar 1994, p. 52–3). On the other hand, the destiny of the new parties rested on the number of “new” politicians succeeding in entering the parliament (Fink-Hafner 1997, p. 142).

women in politics in party programmes. In the paper, we will therefore: a) analyse public opinion and evaluate the salience and importance of the equal presence of women in politics and its related values among the public (from the period 1990 to 2009); b) analyse the party programmes of parliamentary parties from two periods (the period from the establishment of political parties during the democratic transition until 1994 as well as the present period) with an aim to establish whether party programmes have responded to the salience and importance of the equal presence of women in politics as recorded among the public. A research method connecting the values of the public and party-programme content has already been used by some political scientists (see Bara, 2006a and 2006b).

We expect an increase in the salience and importance among the public of the equal presence of women in politics and values related with it. Following the idea that parties adapt to their environments, we consequently expect a related increase in the presence of this topic/issue in party programmes in Slovenia for the 1990 to 2009 period.

In the last two decades, two external environments have gained a high level of relevancy in Slovenia, such that these topics are continuously put on political agendas. The first environment, is presented by civil society organisations and their activities. Here, two organisations should be noted, namely the Coalition for implementation of equilibration of women and men in public life and the Women's lobby of Slovenia. Both organisations have, since 2001 and 2006 respectively, introduced the public to the need for the equal presence of women in politics, and by means of their activities, they have continuously maintained an organised presence of the topic. The other environment that has continuously put the issue on the agenda was the EU and its institutions (Krašovec, 1999).

Along with abovementioned civil society organisations and the EU, two other influences from external environments should be mentioned. The civil society organisations in Slovenia have not been the only external environments exerting pressures on parties. From 1992 to 2001, a government office called the Women's Policy Office was active in this regard (Antić, 1998). The office activities were focused on ensuring women's interests, equality and representation only. In 2001, the office was renamed as the Office for Equal Opportunities and remains active. The change of its name was a consequence of a change in the concept of gender-related equality. Namely, in 1997 the United Nations Development Programme introduced the terms 'gender mainstreaming' and 'gender equality' as its main thematic component instead of 'women's equality'. The term, as well as the concept, has been adopted by the EU and, with some delay, also by Slovenia (Jogan, 2000). Following our focus on parties' adaptation to their environments, we therefore expect to identify an adaptation of party programmes to the public's preferences over time. Therefore, we expect the concept of women's equality in the first investigated period and the concept of gender equality in the second investigated period to be included in party programmes.

As mentioned earlier, political parties have their own internal environments. Specific environments in our case are represented by women's interests organisations within parties. In general, we can expect higher levels regarding the salience and importance of the equal presence of women in politics within parties where such bodies are established as well as active. Some Slovenian parties established such bodies (expert bodies that work in the field of women's equality in politics) already at the beginning of the 1990s, parties such as the Slovenian People's Party, Social Democrats, Slovenian Democratic Party, Liberal Democracy of Slovenia and Slovenian Christian Democrats (Antić, 1998: 196). New Slovenia established such a body in 2000 alongside the establishment the party itself. On the other hand, some parties, for example Zares and the Slovenian National Party, have not established internal women's interests organisations. The Youth Party of Slovenia established one, but the organisation simply did not work. One special case is that of the Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia, in which such an internal party organisation has been established on a local level.

4.1 THE SALIENCE AND IMPORTANCE AMONG THE PUBLIC OF THE EQUAL PRESENCE OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

In the period from 1990 to 2009, longitudinal and representative public-opinion polls called Slovenian Public Opinion (SJM) were used to analyse public opinion. In this section, we present data that (in)directly reveal to us the public's level of salience and importance concerning the equal presence of women in politics. The frequency of questions that can (in)directly reveal to us attitudes towards the equal presence of women in politics was used to analyse the salience of the topic/issue among the public. To reveal the importance of the equal presence of women in politics among the public, answers to questions (in)directly connected with the topic/issue in the public-opinion polls were analysed.

Regarding the salience of the equal presence of women in politics, we found several questions (in)directly connected with the research topic, some of which were repeatedly asked throughout a number of years.⁷ In the public-opinion poll, there was a question—concerning the most important problems in Slovenia—that continually appeared during the 1990 to 2009 period (in 1995, 1996, 1997, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2006 and 2009). It was an open question each time, except in 2006. Analysis of the data shows us that the equal presence of women in politics was never the most important issue. In 1995 and 1996, only 0.1 percent of respondents evaluated this problem/issue as being the most important. Later, this issue was no longer included as a distinct category. During the investigated periods, the most important problems/issues continued to be the unemployment rate, economic

⁷ Here we have to take into account that several factors usually influence the formation of a survey.

problems, political crisis, low wages, the EU and economic recession (Toš, ed. 1999, 2004 and 2009).

As a potential indicator of the importance of the equal presence of women in politics, we also selected a question that appeared in the SJM in 1990, 1999, 2001 and 2009. The question referred to issues for which it would be worth taking risks.

Table 1: Issues for which it would be worth taking risks (in %)

	1990	1999	2001	2003	2007
Gender equality	34.6	61.2	50.1	42.1	23.3
Protection of environment	66.1	73.1	66.5	67.0	59.2
World peace	76.0	76.2	67.2	65.2	60.1
Fighting racism	34.8	56.9	45.0	36.9	23.9
Defence of Slovenia	60.1	66.5	51.0	43.8	30.0
(My) religious belief	23.1	29.3	22.0	19.1	7.7
Unification of Europe	47.2	38.3	30.6	29.7	11.8
Fight against poverty	59.9	72.3	71.9	73.4	66.3
Liberty of individual	51.2	71.9	59.8	52.2	39.7
Human rights	73.4	83.1	73.2	73.6	66.6
Revolution	7.7	/	/	/	/
None of this / Can't say	3.5	5.1	7.3	1.7	2.7

Source: Toš, ed. 1999, 2004 and 2009

Question: For which of the following issues is it worth taking risks and making sacrifices? (Several answers are possible.)

SJM 1990/3, 1999/1, 2001/3, 2003/3, 2009/1

Table 1 reveals that gender equality is important to the respondents to a degree. It is at the bottom of the scale, and only a relatively small number of people would be willing to take risks for it. The peak of its importance was reached in 1999, though even at this point it was not the most important issue.

The question regarding one's attitude towards (selected) values or words can also be used to reveal the importance of the equal presence of women in politics. This question was continually raised in the period from 1994 to 2009 (the exceptions were the years 1997, 2004 and 2008). Each time, the wording of the question was very similar, but the number of words/conceptions altered significantly over time. For example, in 1994 'liberty' was the word/conception towards which the largest share of respondents had a very positive attitude, followed by 'gender equality'. Later, 'gender equality' became the word/conception towards

which the biggest share of respondents had a very positive attitude (the exception being in 2007, when it was in second place, right after the word/conception 'internet'). Nevertheless, between 1994 and 2000, the word/conception 'gender equality' faced a continuously decreasing level of support (from 50 percent of respondents having positive attitudes towards it in 1994 to 27 percent of respondents in 2000). Later, the share of respondents who had very positive attitudes towards 'gender equality' stabilised to around 30 percent. The exception was 2007, when this share was only 24 percent (Toš, ur. 1999, 2004 and 2009).

Although the issue of women and men as political leaders was in the SJM raised only twice (in 1995 and 2005), it can be useful for our analysis.

Table 2: Men and women as political leaders (in %)

	1995/ 2005				
	Strongly agree	Agree	Don't agree	Don't agree at all	Don't know / No answer
In total, men are better political leaders than women.	8.6	33.1	41.0	10.4	6.9
	7.2	21.5	47.0	18.8	5.5

Source: Toš, ed. 1999, 2004 and 2009

Table 2 reveals a partial change in the respondents' attitudes towards men and women as political leaders in the middle of the first decade of the 21st century compared to the mid-90s, a change towards a more equal evaluation of men and women as political leaders. In 1999, an interesting question appeared regarding the increase or decrease in the share of women in leading positions. It is necessary to stress that the question was not related to positions in politics specifically. However, the answers can presumably be used for our research as well. The question was, "Do you think there will be more or fewer women in leading positions in the next 30 years?" Almost 60 percent of respondents answered that there would be more women in such positions, twenty percent thought that the number of women in these positions would be the same and only five percent of respondents answered that in the next 30 years there would be fewer women in leading positions (fifteen percent of the respondents could not decide or did not know) (Toš, ed. 1999, 2004 and 2009).

Attitudes of the public towards the exaggerated equation of the rights of both genders were revealed in the SJM in 1995, 2001 and 2002.

Table 3: Exaggerated equation of rights of both genders (in %)

	1995/		2001/		2002	
	Agree entirely	Agree	Neither agree, nor disagree	Don't agree	Don't agree at all	Don't know
Exaggerated equation of rights of both genders is usually not good.	12.6	12.3	18.1	14.0	37.4	5.6
	7.1	22.3	14.2	33.9	17.2	5.3
	9.7	23.7	23.2	27.4	11.8	4.2

Source: Toš, ed. 1999, 2004 in 2009

Question: Exaggerated equation of rights of both genders is usually not good.

SJM 1995/3, 2001/1, 2002/1

In 1995, the continuum was from 1 (agree) to 5 (don't agree).

The results presented in table 3 reveal relatively big differences between the answers recorded in 2001 and 2002 on one hand and the answers in 1995 on the other. Despite a different scale being used in 1995, the attitude of respondents during a longer period can be seen.

Another question in the SJM is of interest to our research as well, despite it having been asked only in 2003 and 2005. It was related to evaluation of party programmes as the basis on which the electoral decisions of voters are made. The statement was, 'Personally, I always decide upon electoral support for particular party just before elections on the basis of the party programmes' content'. Answers were relatively equally distributed on all of the values offered, although altogether a few more respondents agreed with the statement than disagreed (Toš, ed. 1999, 2004 and 2009). The conclusion to be made here can be that party programmes and topics, as well as the issues they contain, are not the most important factors when voters make decisions but neither are they unimportant.

Regarding the salience and importance of the equal presence of women in politics among the public, it is difficult to conclude that the topic/issue is very salient and/or important, but neither it is unimportant or irrelevant. Also, the data presented in the section do not allow us to make an unambiguous conclusion concerning its increasing or decreasing salience and importance in the public and, consequently, concerning expectations about content of party programmes. Therefore, we can expect that a greater deal of explanatory

power will rest with other factors, some of which we have already mentioned, such as the existence and activities of parties' internal women's interests organisations and a necessity for new, alternative party competition lines. The latter is supposed to be especially true for new and/or non-prominent parties.

4.2 THE SALIENCE AND IMPORTANCE OF THE EQUAL PRESENCE OF WOMEN IN THE PROGRAMMES OF PARLIAMENTARY POLITICAL PARTIES

4.2.1 General overview

To analyse the salience and importance of the equality of women through the lens of political parties, we have chosen relevant political parties. We define the relevance of parties by their ability to have entered either the national (2008 to 2012) or European parliament (2009 to 2014) in the last term. We justify the importance of the European level and its consequent inclusion as a selection criterion for parties by virtue of its influence on the national level in terms of the equality of women. In accordance with the described criteria, we selected the following political parties in our analysis: the Slovene People's Party (SPP), New Slovenia (NS), Youth Party of Slovenia – European Greens (YPS),⁸ Social Democrats (SD), Slovenian Democratic Party (SDP), Liberal Democracy of Slovenia (LDS), Democratic Party of Pensioners of Slovenia (DPPS), Slovenian National Party (SNP) and Zares – New Politics (Zares). The focus of our attention is the programmes of the selected parties and their inclusion of issues related to the equality of women. We analysed the party programmes in two periods (see Table 4): a) in the initial era of democracy and political pluralism in Slovenia (1991 to 1994) and b) the present time (an analysis of the current programmes). The programme selection of the first period contains some party programmes that were predecessors of those of the current parties due to intensive evolution of the party system during that period.⁹ For parties established between the periods being investigated, we analysed their initial programmes in addition to their current ones (e.g. NS, YPS and Zares).

8 The Youth Party of Slovenia – European Greens and Slovene People's Party presented a common list for the elections to the National Assembly of 2008.

9 For the first period, we therefore included programmes from the United List of Social Democrats (ULSD) as predecessors of the SD and from the Socialdemocratic Party of Slovenia (SPS) as predecessors of the SDP. The programme of Slovenian Christian Democrats (SCD) was included in the analysis due to the party's influential role in the 90s, while the programme of the SLS+SKD Slovene People's Party presents a point of departure for programmes of the successor parties of the same party family (SPP and NS).