

RESEARCH

REPORTS

RECOMMENDATIONS

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INVISIBLE LEADERS

WOMEN AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN POLAND AND CHILE

**INSTITUTE OF
PUBLIC AFFAIRS**

Liberty, Equality and Justice – three values that are crucial for democracy – are also those which are oppressed and diminished to a greater extent under authoritarian regimes. Those who fight against totalitarianism, are widely acknowledged as defenders of freedom, equality and fairness. Opposition to an authoritarian regime is also frequently founded on the notion of being a representation of the people towards the authorities that are detached from society and its problems. The opposition leaders tend to become a voice of the suppressed nation united against the dictatorship. Yet, the voice that arises seems to be mostly the male voice. Although, while analysing democratic transitions at the end of 20th century, we can observe a vivid women’s movement occurring in Latin America and South Africa, the third wave of democratisation is still perceived as a male achievement. As Staffan I. Lindberg notes: “*In much of the mainstream literature on the third wave of democratization, gender issues are not a major concern, and when women are discussed, they are given fleeting reference.*”¹ Why is this the case? The democratic process is a great opportunity for minority groups to stand up for equal rights and equal chances. For this reason, women in Argentina, Spain, Italy, Chile and many other countries have united in order to strengthen female participation in democratic transition. This was not the case so much in the Central and Eastern European region, which does not mean that women did not play an important role in political transformation of post-communist countries; only they weren’t visible.

In this policy paper I will present the women’s movement in Chile and Poland during the 1980s and 1990s, and evaluate the participation of women in setting the political agenda and decision-making process in two democracies of Europe and Latin America. Comparative analysis of women’s role in democratic transition in both countries is justified by the completely different status of the feminist movement in Poland and Chile before 1989 and 1990 respectively, while the situation of Chilean and Polish women at the beginning of 21st century was not particularly different. The paper is aimed at providing the reader with some remarks on this fact and good practices of linking women’s issues with democratic transition.

¹ Staffan I. Lindberg, *Women’s Empowerment and Democratization: The Effects of Electoral Systems, Participation, and Experience in Africa* [in:] *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Spring 2004, Vol. 39, No. 1, pp. 28-53.

Women's role in democratic transition in Chile

Women won the right to vote in Chile in 1949 as a result of a political women's movement which emerged at the end of 19th century.² An important fact to be highlighted is that the movement gathered women from both the right and left, which made it stronger and more effective in its endeavours. In addition, an interesting rule of the electoral procedure in Chile states that women and men vote in separate places, which, according to Lisa Baldez, made Chileans "*perceive politics as a gendered activity and has contributed to the establishment of women as an important electoral constituency*".³ The emancipation among women sympathising with right-wing parties⁴ resulted in strong female opposition against Salvador Allende and his socialist government reigning in Chile between 1970-73. Allende represented the leftist parties, although his views over gender roles and women's position in society were very much conservatively stereotyped. He declared to value women as mothers above all other social roles that they might play. Despite the fact that right-wing women approved his attitude towards the family, they were obviously frustrated with the economic crisis that Chile was suffering from at the beginning of 1970s. "*When the artificial scarcities were engendered and long lines began to form, it was the women's time which was used up and their days which thus automatically became much harder.*"⁵ Women played an important role in bringing down Allende's government. The March of Empty Pots, which took place in December 1971, showed the determination of Chilean women to act against the government and made opposition parties cooperate.

This cooperation resulted in a coup d'état and the accession to power by Augusto Pinochet, although this does not mean that Chilean women were totally convinced about the new authorities. Indeed, right-wing women supported the new

2 As we may read in *Discourses On Women's Suffrage in Chile 1865-1949* by Javiera Errázuriz Tagle: *The defence of the Church's interests and later, the so called "Social Question" played a main role in incorporating women into the public sphere. High class women, mostly catholic, were in charge of welfare and charity and from that position advocated for better conditions for women. Middle and lower class women had to become part of the work force to sustain their homes and from there they began to vindicate their rights. It is in this context that the feminist struggles arose, first for civil rights and later political. (...) All in all, it must be noted that the feminine movement that fought for the women's right to vote was an elite. Asunción Lavrín explains that in Chile, women organizations born after 1915 were created by educated women to promote among middle class women the interests in feminine education, equality before the law and other rights. Nevertheless, not all Chilean women were interested in the right to vote; this is reflected in the slow registration in the electoral registers and in the low participation level in elections once the political rights had been obtained. Thus, Chilean suffragettes had to defeat not only masculine opposition but also the feminine lack of interest in political matters. It was a hard and very long job which lasted for decades.*

3 Lisa Baldez, *Why Women Protest: Women's Movements in Chile*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p.26.

4 Analysis of this phenomenon may be found in: Dworkin, Andrea. *Right-wing Women: The Politics of Domesticated Females*, (London: The Women's Press, 1983); Baccetta, Paola and Margaret Power (ed.), *Right-wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists Around the World*, (New York: Routledge, 2002).

5 Townsend, Camilla. "Refusing to Travel *La Via Chilena*: Working-Class Women in Allende's Chile", *Journal of Women's History*, vol.4, no.3, 1993, pp.43-63.

regime, “because it secured their privileged position within Chile’s existing gender and class hierarchies that may have otherwise been disturbed by left-wing government policies”.⁶ But many of their fellow Chileans suffered at the hands of the military regime. Thousands disappeared and were tortured. The violation of human rights was part of the government’s policy. Additionally, it turned out that the situation of ordinary women did not change much in comparison to Allende’s times. “Pinochet’s economic policies caused widespread unemployment and underemployment, which led to many women assuming the role of the primary breadwinner of the family, a development which undermined the assumed gender roles enforced by the Pinochet dictatorship and placed more economic pressure on women to challenge the regime.”⁷ The fact that many husbands, partners and sons had been sent to jail made Chilean women more conscious of their social situation and forced them to act out an important role in the opposition movement. As a result, “the extremely repressive and closed Pinochet dictatorship in Chile produced a broad-based opposition movement with one key goal: the return of democracy. A fairly unified and multi-class women’s movement emerged within the broader pro-democracy movement and succeeded in gendering the political discourse of the democratic opposition by claiming that democracy would be incomplete without attention to women’s citizenship goals.”⁸

The Catholic Church, being aware of the tough financial situation of most Chilean families at that time, organised craft workshops for women with all the materials and necessary tools provided, during which they could make *arpilleras* – hand-sewn textile pictures of scenes from everyday life. It was a way of allowing women to earn an income, but also became an opportunity for them to gather in one place and articulate their discontent with the situation in Chile at the time. The so called *arpilleristas* became a social movement of women, who had never participated in activities outside the home before. Female political participation during protests, marches and other acts of civic resistance was possible thanks to the mobilisation and empowerment of women embroidering the lights and shadows of their daily lives. However, other groups of feminist activism should be also mentioned. Feminism started to be recognised as an important intellectual stream at the universities during the late 1970s, and was reinforced with the views imported from European countries

6 Amelia Guy-Meakin, *Augusto Pinochet’s (1974-1990) Most Loyal Supporters: The Case of Chilean Right-Wing Women*, <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/09/17/augusto-pinochet-and-the-support-of-chilean-right-wing-women/>

7 Kelley Boldt, Timothy J. White, *Chilean Women and Democratization: Entering Politics through Resistance as Arpilleristas*, *Asian Journal of Latin American Studies* (2011) Vol. 24 No. 2: 27-44.

8 Laura MacDonald and Susan Franceschet, *Hard Times for Citizenship: Women’s Movements in Chile and Mexico*, Paper prepared for the 2003 Canadian Political Science Association Annual Meeting Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS May 30-June 1.

by women coming back to the country from the exile. As Lisa Baldez mentions, the financial support of international organisations, mainly the Ford Foundation, for research on women's rights, was also an important factor in mainstreaming a feminist perspective among Chilean intellectuals. On the other hand, working class women had to start cooperating on a very basic level of joined shopping collectives or microeconomic organisations, which allowed them to negotiate lower prices. All these elements enabled women to gather around two interests – democracy and women's rights. Female activists, therefore, became a crucial part of the resistance against Pinochet's regime, but at the same time fought for women's rights and gender equality. The best example of such an approach is the establishment of a group called Mujeres por la Vida (MPLV – Women for Life) in 1983. A rally organised by MPLV in Santiago de Chile gathered quarrelling and divided political opposition parties. One of the participants of the events described the role of the group as aimed at inspiring *“the spirit necessary to unify the opposition, to overcome the ineffectiveness of the men”*.⁹ As a result, Pinochet was defeated in 1988 and stepped down in 1990, allowing democratic transition to begin. In the first democratic elections after the Pinochet regime, Patricio Aylwin became president and promised to include women's issues in the policy agenda. However, women formed only five per cent of parliament in the early 1990s. Gender matters were not a priority for future governments, which rather saw women back in the household than on the political scene.

Women's role in democratic transition in Poland

The figure of the “Polish Mother” as a guarantee of heart and home during the partitions of Poland, its occupation, many wars and battles, is a classic stereotype of a woman in Poland. She should be devoted to the fatherland and had to preserve Polish traditions, language and customs in the hearts and minds of her sons, who in the future would fight for the sovereignty of the country, and her daughters, who would take care of day-to-day life, while their husbands would be fighting against the Russians, Germans or other invaders. On one hand, the role of women was very important for the sovereignty movement, while on the other, it was limited to only the private sphere of the family, which, as one may note, has been a public institution of preserving national identity in Poland since 1772. The history of the Polish social movement is a topic for a completely different paper, but it is worth noting that gender roles in Poland are very much influenced by the history of civic resistance,

⁹ Women for Life leader Fanny Pollarollo in *La Epoca*, 4 January 1988, according to: Lisa Baldez, *Women's Movement and Democratic Transition in Chile, Brazil, East Germany and Poland*, Comparative Politics, April 2003.

which placed women in a rather ambiguous position of both strong actors in the national movement and silent housewives. This ambivalence casts a shadow on women's political participation in Poland in many different ways.

Women had very important role in coordinating the opposition movement under the communist regime, especially after the imposition of martial law in Poland in 1981. Most male leaders of Solidarity¹⁰ were held in detention, and the reorganisation of the democratic underground became women's work; work, which was incredibly well done. *"(...)women from Warsaw, Wroclaw, and Lublin created a clandestine network to feed information and move equipment into all regions of Poland. They pulled together unions and publications; they reestablished connections with the Western press and supporters. They persisted in nonviolent resistance. Above all, for almost seven and a half years, from December 1981 to April 1988, they inspired the Poles to keep Solidarity alive."*¹¹

Women did not become a part of the opposition movement in the 1980s; they actually were the movement itself. They did not perceive themselves primarily as representatives of women, as was the case in Chile, but as leaders of society as a whole. As Shana Penn discovered in her research on women involved in Solidarity, most female activists of the day decided to withdraw from politics after 1989. Only Barbara Labuda stayed on the political scene, and Helena Łuczywo was active in public life as the managing editor of the main Polish daily newspaper. The invisibility of women in public life after the transformation can be explained by the fact that they remained invisible during the communist regime in order not to be infiltrated. It was secure for female oppositionists to be behind the scene and it allowed the underground operations to go smoothly and without disturbances. As Shana Penn states, *"according to Joanna Szczęsna, one of the Tygodnik Mazowsze editors, women exploited this oversight to their advantage by using the female stereotype of the 'Good Polish Mother' – The Matka Polka- to camouflage their activism. They smuggled petitions and manifestos between cities by stuffing the papers under their dresses and feigning pregnancy when in transit. They concealed stacks of newspapers inside washing machines or under refrigerators – in other words, wherever the police never thought to search. 'The police treated me like an ordinary housewife and I thought to myself, 'Let them think this way. It will be safer'" – editor Anna Dodziuk explained.*

¹⁰ Solidarity was an independent labour union instrumental in the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union, and the primary catalyst that would transform Poland from a repressive communist satellite to EU member democracy. It became a broad social movement – at the peak of its popularity gathering around 10 million members (one-quarter of the Polish population).

¹¹ Shana Penn, *The National Secret*, Journal of Women's History, Volume 5, Number 3, Winter 1994, pp. 55.

*Sexism became the wild card to their success.*¹² This quote from the book on the women who built the Polish dissident press tackles the ambiguity of women's involvement in the Solidarity movement – using sexist stereotypes as a tool to combat the communist regime turned against women themselves after democratic transition.

The situation of women in democratic Chile and Poland

The participation of women in gaining democracy and making political transformation in Poland and Chile real, was undoubtedly effective and essential for the transition process. Is it reflected in the policies and regulations created within the framework of democratic rules? Definitely not. After almost 25 years since the authoritarian regimes collapsed in Poland and Chile, both countries still struggle with inequalities between men and women. According to the Global Gender Gap report from 2012, Poland was ranked 53rd and Chile 87th among 132 countries. Both of them suffered a considerable decrease in the ranking. As we may read in the report, “*Chile experiences the biggest drop in the overall ranking of the region (from 46th to 87th position) due to a substantial decrease in the percentage of women holding ministerial positions. Chile is also part of the five lowest performing countries on the perceived wage equality indicator.*”¹³ Poland on the other hand, “*loses eleven places due to a drop in wage equality, decreases across the education subindex and in the percentage of women holding ministerial positions categories*”.¹⁴

The situation of both countries, comparing them with the other countries in their respective region, is a bit different. Chile, according to the Global Gender Gap Report 2012, held 21st place out of 26 countries from Latin America, and Chilean women suffer much more gender inequalities than other women from the region. Poland on the other hand is in 24th position among 44 European and Central Asian states, which places it in the middle of the regional listing.

Apart from Chile's and Poland's regional position in the ranking, we may collate their results using respective sub-indices. The gap between them, to Chile's disadvantage, may be explained with substantial differences in two areas: “economic participation and opportunity” and “political empowerment”. The first chart shows the comparison between two countries, which have a similar (very well in regard to

12 Shana Penn, *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland*, University of Michigan Press 2005.

13 The Global Gender Gap Report 2012, World Economic Forum:
http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2012.pdf

14 ibidem

their overall achievement) situation in the field of education and health standards. Differences occur while analysing economic and political participation. Poland seems to cope better in these areas, but Polish results, especially in the “Economic participation and opportunity” section, does not exceed the average level.

Table 1. Global Gender Gap Report 2013. Economic participation and opportunity. Comparison of Chile and Poland

	Economic participation and opportunity		Educational attainment		Health and survival		Political empowerment		Overall Score
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	
Poland	72	0.6503	34	0.9981	34	0.9791	46	0.1786	0.7015
Chile	110	0.5475	32	0.9986	1	0.9796	64	0.1448	0.67

Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2012, World Economic Forum

Overall, 56 per cent of Polish women able to work have an occupation, in comparison to 47 per cent in Chile. This rate decreases when we focus on the non-agricultural sector. In Chile, 38 per cent of all workers outside of agriculture are women. This number is higher in Poland and reaches 48 per cent. Polish women reveal exceptional entrepreneurial skills, 48 per cent of firms in Poland are owned (completely or partially) by women, yet only 30 per cent of Chilean firms have female participation in ownership. However, it needs to be added that in Poland so called “self-employment” is a very popular way of avoiding the high economic costs of employment, and many women are forced to establish their own “one-man firms” to stay in their jobs. There are considerably more Polish female legislators, senior officials and managers than Chilean ones. But the numbers are not impressive in any of the analysed countries. In Poland, the share of women in top economic positions reaches 36 per cent, while in Chile it is only 24 per cent. From the perspective of women themselves, their chances of rising to positions of enterprise leadership are below average in both countries. On a scale of 0 to 7, Chilean women marked their chances at point 4, while Polish women scored 3.92.

If we look deeper into the political empowerment section, we can see differences between Poland and Chile in three areas. The disproportion between female MPs in Poland and Chile is very high (ten percentage points), and a bit lower in the executive branch. It is worth noting that Chile once had a female president (four years in office) and Poland was governed by a female prime minister, although just for one year.

Table 2. Global Gender Gap Report 2013. Political Empowerment. Comparison of Chile and Poland.

	Years with female head of state	Women in parliament	Women in ministerial positions
Poland	1	24%	22%
Chile	4	14%	18%

Table 2. Source: The Global Gender Gap Report 2012, World Economic Forum

The better performance of Poland on the political empowerment scale may be explained with the introduction of a quota mechanism to Polish electoral law in 2011. This fact is strictly connected to Polish women’s participation in democratic transition. In 2009 Poland celebrated 20 years of democratic transformation. Fighters for freedom were officially decorated, receptions at the Presidential Palace praising opposition activists took place, and conferences and speeches about the brave men who stood against the communist regime were held. In this cordial atmosphere of happiness and victory, women suddenly realised that they had been erased from this story. Although half of the Solidarity members were women, none of them was invited to celebrate the triumph of democracy after 20 years. This made Polish women angry and frustrated, and they decided to look at their participation in public life more thoroughly. As a result, a huge movement of women from different backgrounds, of different education, different experiences and interests was formed, in order to introduce gender quotas into politics. In June 2009, all of them gathered in the biggest Congress Hall in Poland under the slogan “20 years of transformation 1898-2009” and evaluated the public policy towards women during last 20 years. The Women’s Congress, as they called themselves, prepared 135 postulates aimed at improving the situation of women in Poland, among which the introduction of parity on the electoral lists (50 per cent female and 50 per cent male candidates) and the zipper system (women and men are placed at alternate slots on the party lists) were the most important. The enthusiasm of women was enormous and very soon a Civic Committee of Legislative Initiative called “Time for Women” intending introduction of parity on electoral lists was created. The Committee managed to gather the required amount of signatures under the Bill prepared by Civic Initiative and on 21 December 2009 it was sent to the Sejm (Lower Chamber of the Polish Parliament). In the course of the political games and attempts to undermine the idea of equalising the opportunities of men and women in public life, the Parity Bill evolved into the Quota Bill without

a zipper system. The introduction of the quotas was nevertheless a great success for the women’s movement in Poland. It was enacted on 5 January 2011 and the first “test” came in October of the same year. Despite the complaints of various political parties that they would not be able to find an adequate number of women properly qualified and willing to run for office, the percentage of female candidates doubled in comparison to previous elections and reached 42 per cent of all candidates. However, the number of elected female MPs only achieved the level of 24 per cent due to various factors, among which the most important would be the lack of a zipper system in the quota mechanism.¹⁵

The quota mechanism is popular in many democracies the world over. According to www.quotaproject.org, 119 countries have some kind of constitutional, electoral or political party quotas, and the average number of female representatives in parliaments of countries with quotas is 22.6 per cent. In Chile this number is much lower – female MPs only make up 14 per cent of parliament. This proves that voluntarily party quotas, which are allegedly applied by three parties in Chile (see table 3), are not sufficient in developing democracies. Such measures are efficient in Scandinavian countries, where gender equality and women’s rights have become a part of public policy in every aspect of law-making. It is clear from the table that the provisions applied by political parties were either weakly enforced or not adhered to in practice. In fact, Polish quotas turned out to be successful due to the sanctions which are written in the law. If a party list does not include at least 35 per cent of candidates of an underrepresented sex, it cannot be registered.

Party	Acronym	Official Name	Quota provisions
Party for Democracy	PPD	Partido por la Democracia	Neither men nor women should be represented on the electoral lists by more than 60 per cent (party statutes, article 7). However, this provision has been weakly enforced.
Socialist Party for Democracy	PS	Partido Socialista de Chile	Since 2003, the quota has been twofold: neither of the sexes shall be represented on the electoral lists by more than 60 per cent; neither sex shall occupy more than 70 per cent of the seats in parliament (party statutes, Article 40). However, this provision has not been adhered to in practice.
Christian Democratic Party	PDC	Partido Demócrata Cristiano	According to article 105 of the party statutes, PDC has a 20 per cent quota for women on the electoral lists. This provision was adopted in 1996 but has been weakly enforced.

¹⁵ See more: Małgorzata Druciarek, Małgorzata Fuszara, Aleksandra Niżyńska and Jarosław Zbieranek, *Women on the Polish political scene*, Institute of Public Affairs, Warsaw, 2012.

Table 3: Quota project. Global Database of Quotas for Women. Country Overview. Chile

In October 2007, the former Chilean president, Michelle Bachelet, introduced a Bill in the Lower House called “Equal Political Participation of Men and Women”, commonly known as “Ley de Cuotas” (Quota Law). The Bill aims to establish rules to ensure the balanced participation of men and women in political life, with special regard to the internal positions of political parties. It also provides more fiscal support to female candidates who are elected, as well as a larger amount of resources than what applies according to the law to the political parties that include a greater number of women in their lists of candidates.¹⁶ The approach of Michelle Bachelet was not one of a stick, but rather of a carrot. This is different than in the Polish case and meant that parties which decided to augment the number of female candidates would be rewarded with financial bonuses.

“The Bill aims to facilitate access of women to positions of political representation by setting that either gender (male or female) may not exceed 70 per cent of the internal positions of the political parties, of the lists of candidates and of the municipal and parliamentary elections. The issue has been discussed in Chile many times before this Bill, but the motions were filed. So far the Bill has not made progress in parliament.”¹⁷

The fact that the women’s movement for the quota mechanism succeeded in Poland and not in Chile may be paradoxically the result of lack of recognition of Polish women’s role in gaining democracy. Women in Poland were frustrated and angry that the new authorities and democratic establishment did not take into account female participation in the transition during the 1990s. In Chile women were perceived as an important part of the opposition movement; nobody questioned that. And after 1990, nobody questioned the traditional gender roles. This example shows that anger is perhaps sometimes the best starting point for social movements. And Chilean women have right to be angry, for example with respect to the radically strict anti-abortion law which prohibits termination of the pregnancy even if the health or life of a woman is in danger. According to data gathered in the Global Gender Gap Report, the maternal mortality ratio is five times higher in Chile than in Poland.¹⁸ Anger is not enough to succeed, however. Demonstrations in front of and inside the cathedral in Santiago de Chile organised in July 2013 were not successful and reinforced the

¹⁶ Quota project. Global Database of Quotas for Women. Country Overview. Chile <http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/countryview.cfm?id=45> (accessed: 17 October 2013)

¹⁷ ibidem

¹⁸ MMR (per 100,000 live births) amounts in Chile to 25 and in Poland to 5.

perception of feminist activists as aggressive and unpredictable creatures.¹⁹ The Polish case shows that after anger, a very careful and wise political strategy of lobbying and advocacy has to be implemented in order to gain success. Both Chile and Poland are on the long road to more gender-equal societies. Gaining democracy was just the first step on the path to equal rights and opportunities for men and women.

¹⁹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-latin-america-23474638>;
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/27/chile-cathedral-vandalize_n_3659964.html

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