

The Status of Women's Political Empowerment Worldwide

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INTRODUCTION

How does women's security constrain or encourage women's political empowerment (henceforth referred to as WPE in this chapter)? How does incorporating women's security variables help us develop a more comprehensive approach to assessing women's political empowerment worldwide? Melanie Hughes summarized the main challenges related to our research: The rise of women to political power in non-Western and less-developed countries is difficult to explain, mainly because women's representation

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does not operate the same way in less-developed states (Hughes 2009). And yet, our goal is to determine the status of WPE globally.

With a view to capturing the situation of women's empowerment worldwide, one must consider factors that enable women to feel or become empowered. We argue that, firstly, women's security often remains invisible in traditional studies on women's empowerment. Secondly, insecure women will neither feel nor become empowered. Alexander et al. previously discussed how the concept of women's political empowerment has emphasized that "women's empowerment starts from a place of *disempowerment*" (2016, 432). We argue that the condition of *disempowerment* is the starting point, and that this is related to insecurity that prevents women from becoming empowered. We also consider that insecurity is a product of prevalent male dominance hierarchies as the primary source of social organization. As researchers for the WomanStats project, we contend that a more equitable treatment of women overall will provide higher opportunities of political empowerment. This is what we demonstrate in this chapter.

Traditionally, global studies focusing on the empirical analysis of women's political empowerment have concentrated on women legislators' analysis, quotas, and an understanding of women's elite office holding (Alexander et al. 2016). In this chapter, we seek to contribute to WPE studies using a broader vision. We argue that since measuring WPE may not be conceived through a unidimensional approach, we need to include new intervening variables if we want to provide helpful inputs to build a comprehensive approach on this subject. We believe new testing is required to relate new variables that may positively impact women's empowerment and that a broader understanding of women's global political empowerment will provide women with greater chances of becoming empowered.

Given Alexander et al. (2016) have stated that inequalities in political empowerment cut across multiple statuses and other sources of inequality, this chapter addresses an empirical understanding of these multiple statuses and sources of inequality that urge us to explore and test intervening variables related to women's security status, with security being considered as a holistic concept. For this reason, we have selected variables on physical, economic, and legal security, as well as women's security in family and education and women's political participation. In this first testing, we related and compared this first set of variables with the more traditional perception of WPE, that is, the one dealing exclusively with the proportion of women holding ministerial positions. To accomplish our objective,

we used the Principal Component Analysis (PCA), a statistical tool used for extracting information from complex datasets: “It presents a roadmap for how to reduce a complex data set to a lower dimension to disclose the hidden, simplified structures that often underlie it” (Liton et al. 2013). We believe that this methodology is more efficient than others because it allows us to determine empowerment from variables related to the women’s security status in an orderly and linear fashion.

Since this research is based on the WomanStats project, we explore direct linkages between the women’s security status and the probability of women becoming empowered. For example, in *Sex and World Peace*, Hudson et al. discuss the boundedness of different measures, such as the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) and the Gender Development Index (GDI). The authors assert that, “pioneering” as the work may be, they are limited because they depend on only a few most commonly used statistics and disregard any measures about violence against women (Hudson et al. 2012). The purpose of this chapter is to expand WPE measures more comprehensively, to include statistical data on factors affecting the security of women to build a more accurate situation of women’s empowerment.

Using this methodological procedure we intend to contribute to the research on women’s political empowerment, by adding a new dimension related to security and equality issues. Potential linkages from socio-economic variables could arise from this study, providing an innovative approach for scholars studying new cases regarding women’s equality and for practitioners engaged in public policy design and decision-making for social development contexts.

TRADITIONAL MEASUREMENTS

How has women’s political empowerment been identified and assessed? For years, several methodologies have been used to measure women’s political empowerment, which can be divided into three categories: measurements used by the United Nations (UN), measurements used by other national and international agencies, and measurements used by academics and universities. The measurements used by the UN are especially important because they are among the earliest. So far, UN agencies have developed three indexes: the Gender-related Development Index (GDI), the Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM), and the Gender Inequality Index (GII). All these have been widely used by academics and, the GDI and GEM are also valuable as they are the first of their kind. However, they have also been widely criticized because of conceptual, measurement, and methodological

limitations (Klansen 2006; Permyer 2013; Schüler 2006). The GDI and the GEM in particular do not accurately capture sex disparities around the world and are weak in terms of measurement (Klansen 2006; Schüler 2006; UNPD 2015, 2). On the other hand, the GII has a broader scope because it measures women's disadvantages. It also has problems with its functional form and conceptual foundations (Alsop and Heinsohn 2005; Permyer 2013). The GEM is a measurement of gender empowerment within a political context. UNICEF (2006) defines five key measures for political empowerment cross-nationally: (1) improving girls access to education; (2) men's involvement and support, especially from male parliamentarians and political leaders; (3) the introduction of quotas for dramatic changes in women's political participation; (4) party politics that actively promote women's candidacies; and (5) participation of women in peace negotiations and post-conflict resolutions (Ogato 2013, 368).

Turning now to the measurements used by national and international agencies such as the Canadian International Development Agency, Social Watch, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), or the World Economic Forum, these widely adopt quantitative approaches employing a set of variables that either measure the percentage of women in decision-making positions or women's relative position in comparison to men on other issues such as education or health (European Institute for Gender Equality 2012; Lopez-Claros and Zahidi 2005; Oxaal and Baden 1997; True et al. 2012). All these measurements have also been criticized because of measurement errors or limitations caused by their indicators.

When cross-national empowerment measurements are considered, the lack of data availability is frequently the primary obstacle both at the national and individual levels (Zupi 2015, 8). Secondly, commonly used quantitative indicators, such as the number of voting women, or the number of women holding public offices pose a methodological problem because they tell us little about the substance of women's political empowerment. Thus, qualitative research methods such as expert interviews or in-depth case studies are often suggested as the best approaches to understanding the real status of women's empowerment (O'Neil et al. 2014).

Because of the above criticisms, some scholars have developed gender *empowerment* measurements (e.g., Aguayo and Lamelas 2012; Ertan 2016; Harper et al. 2014; Sundström et al. 2015). Most of these studies are noteworthy as they attempt to develop better measurements of women's empowerment by adding new indicators or new measurement patterns. Harper et al. (2014), for example, added uncommon indicators such as the existence of quotas and gender egalitarian attitudes. In doing

so, the authors capture not only the status of women's political empowerment but also the perceptions of future voters and their change of attitude towards female participation in the political spectrum. The V-Dem Project of the University of Gothenburg differs from all other existing datasets on women's political empowerment because it involves assessments from over 2500 local and cross-national experts to rate the countries (Sundström et al. 2015, 11). The UJAT (Universidad Juárez Autónoma de Tabasco) conducted a project in 2005 to measure the process of women's empowerment in Mexico at different stages and from various perspectives. The Instrument for Measuring Women's Empowerment (IMEM) is designed as a questionnaire that can be applied to individuals or groups and involves other aspects than extant global indexes, such as participatory empowerment, external influences, independence, equality, and satisfaction with the Social Security system (Hernández and García 2008).

The traditional measurements described above deserve recognition because they evidence progress in measuring women's political empowerment. However, these measurements are limited in terms of suggesting new tools for innovative analyses testing possible linkages between WPE and other variables. Acknowledging the essence of WPE is understood, in general, as women at decision-making positions. Notwithstanding, in this chapter we argue that considering security variables is an essential step in order to fully comprehend the factors that enable women to become politically empowered. The research also aims to pave the way for further attempts to develop global and international measurements that reflect the women's political empowerment as a multidimensional and multifaceted phenomenon.

FACTORS AFFECTING WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT

An extensive corpus of literature has shown that women's political empowerment worldwide is determined by a complex interaction of factors. Many studies pool these factors into various categories such as political, ideological/cultural, and socio-economic (Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Kivoi 2014; Viterna et al. 2008; Tripp and Kang 2008). It seems that the common indicators of institutions include variables such as level of democracy, electoral systems, or ideology of political parties.

Many studies have examined the relationship between democracy and women's empowerment. A free and liberal atmosphere for the involvement of a pluralist civil society is one of the key factors enhancing the adoption of gender equality policies (Guzman et al. 2010; Waylen 2008).

The structures of a democratic government promote gender equality by improving women's representation in the political sphere and in public institutions. Democratization promotes the integration of women's policy agencies into state institutions and, therefore, leads to the infusion of gender equality issues into institutions. However, those machineries might also be symbolic in some cases, which leads to no or weak policy changes (Waylen 2008). Additionally, it is widely argued that democratic political systems and institutions enable all citizens, including marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities or women, to participate in the governance of their countries through civil society movements. Political liberalization allows civil society groups, including women's groups, to mobilize and demand more gender equality, and, therefore, promote the responsiveness of governments to women's issues.

The discussion on the association between the type of electoral system and women's political empowerment has mostly argued that a proportional representation (PR) system fosters women's representation in politics (e.g., Darcy et al. 1994; Duverger 1955; Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Lijphart 1994; Matland 1998; Norris 1987; Paxton 1997; Reynolds 1999; Rule 1987, 1994; Tripp and Kang 2008). The main argument is that a PR system creates more opportunities for women's representation (Rule 1987; Matland 1998). PR systems give more incentives to parties because the number of seats tends to be higher than in plurality-majority systems. Plurality-majority single-member district systems are restrictive for women's chances of being elected to office (Reynolds 1999), because they allow only one party nominee per district, and thus they restrict the entrance to minorities or women into the candidacies.

The structure and ideology of political parties is important for women's empowerment. Concerning the ideological relevance of the party, the literature mostly suggests that leftist ideologies are keener on gender equality issues than right-wing ideologies. Firstly, leftist parties generally espouse more liberal ideas on gender roles and on women's involvement in politics, and are sensitive to social problems. Secondly, women's movements tend to be linked to left-wing parties. When the left holds the power, women's policy agencies are more persuasive and successful than when the right does (Lovenduski et al. 2009; Waylen 2008). On the other hand, some institutional political party structures enhancing women's participation in politics are lacking in most of the parties (Oduol 2011). However, political parties have party rules and doctrines that are a barrier against women entering into politics and holding policy-making positions.

Secondly, socio-cultural factors include mostly social and cultural impediments including the role of religions on the gender egalitarian attitudes of society. Religion, including such dimensions as religiosity, secularity, and religious denomination, is seen as an important determinant of women's empowerment. First, religion is a source of anachronistic cultural beliefs in many communities, and most religious beliefs exclude women from leadership positions (Kivoi 2014). All major world religions such as Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and so on include arguments about women's inferiority, and religion has long been used to exclude women from social, political, or religious life around the world (Paxton and Hughes 2007; Sweeney 2006). It has also been argued that it is not religion but the patriarchal interpretation of religious texts that cause women's oppression. Comparisons between different religions demonstrate that predominantly Muslim countries are less likely to promote women's rights (Hudson et al. 2011; Inglehart and Norris 2003; Kenworthy and Malami 1999; Paxton 1997; Sweeney 2006; Tripp and Kang 2008), whereas Protestant countries are more women-friendly than others (Tripp and Kang 2008; Viterna et al. 2008). Given all the above discussions on gender equality in religions, countries with a high level of religiosity are expected to have lower government responses to gender equality policies. This, because the public demand for those rights would be lower.

Many scholars argue that it is not religion but the prevailing patriarchal culture that leads to the oppression of women in the world. The rigid understanding of gender roles held by patriarchy, such as men equal breadwinners and women equal homemakers, determines the rights and status of women in society and the division of labor at home and at the workplace (Inglehart and Norris 2003). Thus, in many parts of the world politics has been associated with masculinity and is accepted as "men's only" (Kivoi 2014). Social rules, cultural beliefs, and practices rooted in the patriarchal order have almost always worked against women's empowerment. These factors also block countries' willingness to improve women's situation and to foster the success of various gender equality protocols (Nyanjom 2011). Moreover, "macho" attitudes might be also associated with higher levels of violence against women and to resistance against policies addressing violence against women (Buckley and Anderson 1988; Weldon 2002). Some studies have confirmed that gender egalitarian attitudes foster women's representation levels in the whole world (e.g., Norris and Inglehart 2001; Paxton and Kunovich 2003).

Thirdly, economic factors include indicators such as women's economic status, distribution of wealth, women's participation in the workforce, and level of economic development. Economic status is important because access to means of production and finances has a direct relationship to and influence on women's ability to participate in political institutions and electoral bodies such as senates, national assemblies, and county assemblies (Kivoi 2014). Parties draw their candidates from a pool of those who have high access to financial resources. Thus, improving women's economic conditions would also improve their potential to becoming involved in politics. The distribution of wealth has an impact on poverty levels and health conditions of society, so its inequality creates significant disadvantages for women (Hudson et al. 2011; Jamal 2010). Furthermore, some studies have linked female work to women's political opportunity (Gardiner 1997, 12). The theory underlying this association stems from the argument that women who work outside home would be more self-confident and independent, so they would be brave enough to participate in politics, and to take part in civil society activities. Moreover, they would have more networks and linkages to political parties, business groups, and unions (Kenworthy and Malami 1999, 240).

As we have seen so far, women's political empowerment is a very complex matter. Not only is it problematic in theory, but also in practice. It is not only about the lack of unanimity over what it means, or how it is gauged, it is also about how it reflects on the lives of women, and the external factors that hinder them from being politically empowered. Its multidimensional nature and the reasons why WPE needs to be addressed from a macro-level perspective are now clear. Bearing in mind the multiple obstacles WPE face, a proposed methodology to depict the status of WPE is in order.

AN INDEX FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT: MODEL JUSTIFICATION AND GOALS

Considering that WPE cannot be understood without taking into account the situation of women's security, we propose a measure of WPE that uses a single index built from several women's security dimensions. This single index facilitates comparisons among different states, and provides an understanding of how different factors related to the status of women could produce different results on the status of WPE within a country.

Developing an index that provides country performance is increasingly recognized by public policy analysts and public communicators as a useful tool for making comparisons about the most relevant socio-economic issues (Vyas 2006). The case for measuring WPE is a special and challenging one, because for this particular analysis a variety of dimensions referring to the women's security status were considered as determinants of WPE: Women's physical security, economic security, legal security, security in family and education, and political participation.

The general goal of this index is to demonstrate that empowerment is neither linear nor limited to a single measurement. Therefore, we wish to have a first understanding of possible determinants of women's political empowerment and its relationship with specific contexts of women within each country.

As previously explained, through this methodological procedure we intend to contribute to research on women's political empowerment, adding a new dimension related to security and equality issues. Potential linkages from socio-economic variables could arise from this study, providing an innovative approach for scholars studying new cases regarding women's equality and for practitioners engaged in public policy design and decision-making for social development contexts.

Data Description and Overview

As inputs for this study, we used data from the WomanStats database (WomanStats 2015) and the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Database (WEF 2014). We gathered information from 175 countries from 2010–2014, which was the period with the greatest amount of data. The variables and scales are related to the following dimensions of security:

- Women's physical security:
 - Female life expectancy (id: DACH-SCALE) (WomanStats 2015)
 - Differences between women's and men's health (id: Score_HEAL_SURV) (WEF 2014)
- Women's economic security:
 - Economic participation and opportunity: Sub-index containing three concepts: the economic participation gap, the economic remuneration gap, and the economic advancement gap between men and women (id: ECON_PART) (WEF 2014)

- Women's legal security:
 - Existence of legal contexts and enforcements against violence against women in family. Inversed values (id: MULTIVAR_SCALE_3)¹ (WomanStats 2015)
- Women's security in family and education:
 - Gap between women's and men's current access to education (id: EDUC_ATAIN) (WEF 2014)
 - Births per 1000 population (id: BR-SCALE-1) (WomanStats 2015)
- Women's political participation:
 - Political participation: Ratio of women to men in minister-level positions and ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions (id: POL_PART) (WEF 2014)
 - Ordinal ranking of the degree of representation by women in national government. Inversed values (id: GP_SCALE_1)² (WomanStats 2015)

Table 3.1 summarizes the general trends and contexts on representative variables from each category, for each geographic region. General aspects of each variable are explained in the following part.

- **Life expectancy:** A measure of physical security of women, this variable was extracted from WomanStats Database (WomanStats 2015) and revised with data from the World Bank's World Development Indicators (WB 2016). Studies have shown that women's life expectancy could be determined by factors related to the status of women in a society, including economic, education, and equality aspects, among others (Novak et al. 2015). In turn, life expectancy could have important consequences for a country's economic performance due to its relationship with retirement costs, and it is also related to the aging of population. Regions like North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa have the lowest life expectancy values for women.
- **Educational attainment** (WEF 2014): This variable shows the ratio of female to male literacy rate, where values closer to 1 show a greater situation of equality in literacy opportunities. Values are quite homogeneous, showing the greatest values for countries in the Baltic, Eastern Europe, Latin America, North America, Oceania, and Western Europe regions.

Table 3.1 Status of indicative variables for WPE by geographic region

<i>Region</i>	<i>Life expectancy</i>		<i>Educational attainment</i>	<i>Economic participation and opportunity</i>	<i>Political participation (ministers)</i>	<i>Political participation (parliament)</i>	<i>Legal security</i>
	<i>Ratio</i>	<i>female</i>					
Asia	1.059	74.2	0.944	0.618	0.150	3.087	2.348
Baltic	1.142	80.1	0.998	0.746	0.199	1.333	0.333
Commonwealth of Independent States	1.120	75.3	0.985	0.731	0.108	3.083	1.500
Eastern Europe	1.090	80.2	0.993	0.681	0.167	2.000	0.909
Latin America	1.079	77.2	0.993	0.647	0.203	1.800	1.960
Near East	1.050	77.3	0.959	0.483	0.066	3.643	2.714
Northern Africa	1.057	75.9	0.938	0.429	0.115	3.200	2.400
Northern America	1.049	84.1	0.999	0.81	0.204	1.500	0.500
Oceania	1.070	79.0	0.998	0.686	0.204	2.400	1.800
Subsaharan Africa	1.060	63.1	0.859	0.68	0.191	2.463	3.049
Western Europe	1.056	84.0	0.998	0.725	0.360	0.895	0.474

- **Economic participation and opportunity** (WEF 2014): This variable presents the gap between women and men in economic participation, remuneration, and economic advancement. Values closer to 1 suggest equality, while lower values show greater inequality. While the highest values are typical of the Baltic, CIS, North America, and Western Europe regions, the situation in Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Oceania indicates an important contrast: Although there are important conditions for gender equality in education, this circumstance does not necessarily translate into greater economic opportunities, remuneration, and specialization for women, probably explained by asymmetries in labor market conditions and access.
- **Political participation** (WEF 2014): This measures the gap between men and women regarding political decision-making processes, participation, and years of experience. Again, greater values show gender equality is more likely to happen in Latin America, North America, Oceania, and Western Europe. We highlight the low results obtained for the Middle East region, a situation that could be explained by the lack of liberties, civil rights, and restrictive freedom for women among countries in this region, also characterized by low democracy rankings.
- **Women's representation in national governments (GP-Scale-1)** (WomanStats 2015) shows an ordinal ranking of the degree of representation of women in national parliaments. As for political participation, countries from the Middle East show a higher value in the scale, which translates into low or very low representation of women in national legislatures. In this region, as well as in Asia Pacific, and North Africa, men usually dominate the political arena, giving very little or no opportunities for women to stand out on this field.
- **Legal security of women (Multivar_Scale_3)** (WomanStats 2015): It is a scale built from several variables capturing how inequitably family law is conceptualized according to gender. From the average values of this scale, we highlight the cases of sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East as areas with insufficient laws and weak enforcement for the protection of women from domestic violence, rape, or femicides.

Methodology of the Index

Since this chapter focuses on measuring WPE based on a multivariate set of data regarding the status of women's security in several categories, we

identified the need to design a single variable that reunites the main statistical characteristics of our original dataset. According to the Handbook on Constructing Composite Indicators (OECD 2008), the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) is a construct of a single variable, obtained from a statistical procedure that performs a linear combination of the original information, and therefore explains the variance of the original data.

The PCA uses several variables as inputs, aggregating them to perform a linear transformation (also called dimensionality reduction) to create a single output, a one-dimensional result referred to as an “Index”. Because all the variables considered are reduced to one, and since the index retains the most important statistical characteristics of the original variables, the results are much easier to interpret, making this method frequently used for predictive analysis and to explain behavioral trends.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Suitability

After executing a Principal Component Analysis procedure on Math Lab® Software, based on the dataset built with variables from the WomanStats, World Economic Forum, and World Bank databases, we estimated the common variance of the PCA Index. This procedure is the first step in determining the suitability of the result of the PCA Index to represent or explain the statistical characteristics of the original data, mainly its variance. The final single-factor model obtained is associated with a common variance of 60% of the original data, a solution that in social sciences is usually considered satisfactory (Hair et al. 2014).

Index Composition and Interpretation

Table 3.2 shows the weight obtained for each variable used on the composition of the index.

After obtaining the main component scores for each variable, we notice that the highest contributing factors for the WPE Index are legal security, education attainment, and life expectancy. From this result, we can conclude that physical and educational categories, supported by regulatory contexts that protect women, are the most important prerequisite for women's political empowerment.

Table 3.2 WPE Index variable weights from the Principal Component Analysis

<i>Category</i>	<i>Variable ID</i>	<i>PCA weight result</i>
Physical security	DACH-SCALE	0.3803
	Score_HEAL_SURV	0.1608
Economic security	Score_ECON_PART	0.2745
Legal security	MULTIVAR-SCALE-3	-0.4745
Security in family and education	Score_EDUC_ATAIN	0.381
	BR-SCALE-1	-0.0429
Political Participation	Score_POL_PART	0.2868
	GP-SCALE-1/DATA	-0.3178

Moreover, this result could motivate further analyses aimed at determining whether economic security and political participation, which also have a positive correlation with the WPE Index, could be a consequence of physical, educational, and legal security.

Country WPE Index Output

Having estimated the specific values for the WPE Index, it is possible to obtain the corresponding results of WPE for each country analyzed from our database, which are plotted on Fig. 3.1. The lightest color represents countries that exhibit a low performance on the variables used for estimating the multivariate WPE Index common in Africa and some Asian countries including India and Pakistan. In contrast, the darkest color countries on the map represent a high performance, common in Western Europe and Canada.

Figure 3.2 shows the relationship between the WPE Index (represented by the curve) and a variable that has a dimension similar to the original data. In this case, we wished to analyze the relationship between the WPE Index and a variable from the World Bank Database representing proportion of women in ministerial positions (World Bank 2016). Observations for every country are plotted and identified by their corresponding region.

Traditionally, the variable to evaluate political empowerment among women has been the level of political participation. However, from the graph we can observe that the relationship between the WPE Index and the variable “Proportion of women in ministerial positions” is not linear. This is because the WPE Index does not solely evaluate the political dimension, but it includes other scopes such as economic, social and

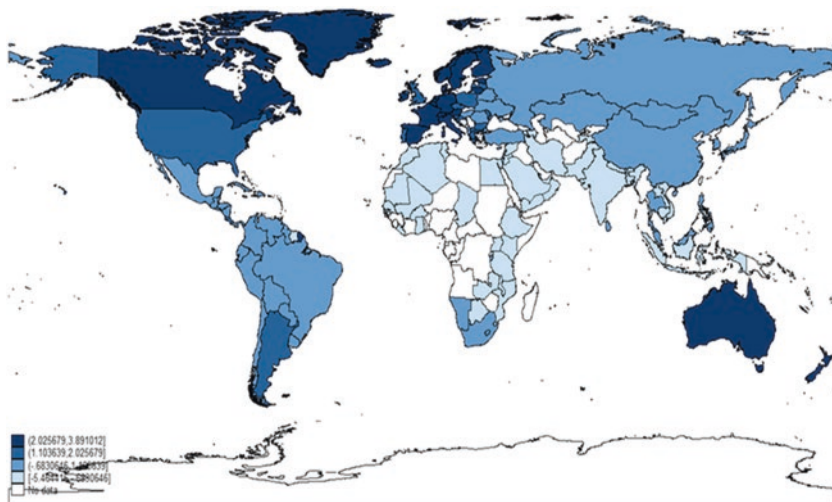


Fig. 3.1 WPE values for each country

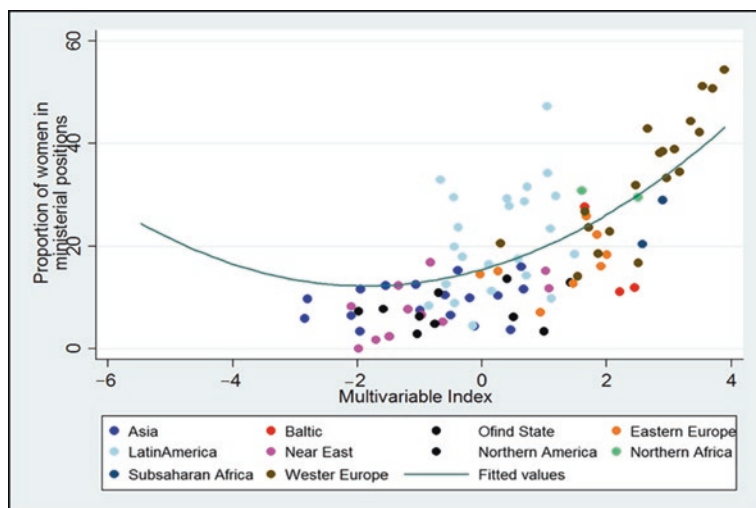


Fig. 3.2 Relationship between the WPE Index and proportion of women in ministerial positions

security. We conclude that even though the increase in the number of ministerial positions occupied by women could have a positive impact on the level of empowerment, this is not enough to assure that a specific country would have higher levels of political empowerment.

An interesting result from this model is the heterogeneity of results on the index between regions. For example, data from Latin American countries reflect that for a country having higher political participation rates of women does not necessarily mean that women are more empowered. Gender quotas could have an important effect on the presence of women in high political positions, but it does not ensure that institutional, socio-cultural, or economic factors promote empowerment among women, a contrast that can be observed when comparing the cases from Brazil and Bolivia, or Chile and Nicaragua.

Some Asian countries (India, Pakistan) and most countries in the Middle East have negative WPE Index values, meaning that they must make important efforts on improving the status of women's security to improve political empowerment. In these countries, as with other negative values from the index such as Chad, Yemen, Mali, or Ethiopia, the proportion of women in ministerial positions does not exceed 15%.

Finally, we highlight the fact that the WPE Index, represented with the curve, has both an indirect and a direct relation with the ratio of ministerial positions occupied by women. This demonstrates that political representation by itself is not an appropriate or indicative measure of political empowerment, and as we have stated, it is determined by other elements of the status of women's security.

CONCLUSIONS

From a global perspective there are a large variety of social, political, and economic aspects that could determine women's political empowerment. However, there is still great controversy about the meaning of the concept of women's political empowerment and even more about how to measure it. Throughout this chapter we proposed a definition of the concept of WPE, highlighting the factors that could result in greater political empowerment of women as well as its socially constructed barriers. Considering gender equality as the main driver of this study, we based our analysis on the rights and liberties women have for achieving a secure environment, with the purpose of demonstrating its linkages with women's political empowerment.

The analysis of the data and the assessment of the several dimensions of women's security prompted us to design a Multivariate Index of Women Political Empowerment, as a methodology that allows for cross-national comparisons. From this model we conclude that the index adequately synthesizes different aspects that explain WPE. This result not only requires gender parity in political participation but also a set of social, cultural, economic, and institutional factors that create sufficient conditions for female political leadership. Although highly correlated, even though not in all cases, greater participation of women in government positions reflect a more empowered group of women in society. For example, factors such as gender quotas do not necessarily translate into a more inclusive democratic process. Accordingly, countries with middle and lower levels in the WPE Index such as African, Middle-Eastern, Asian, and even some Latin American countries deserve special attention from their policy makers in terms of women's security. Exploring different aspects of factors that might affect the status of women's political empowerment worldwide deserves more attention in order to achieve a better understanding of the circumstances in which women may actually achieve more political power. Therefore, it is important to examine and adapt practices of countries that perform better in the index, such as Western Europe or Canada, to identify potential opportunity areas and strengths.

NOTES

1. Womanstats (2015). Multivar-scale-3: (0) Family law is equitable between men and women, and the law is respected. (1) Family law is generally equitable between men and women, with few exception. (2) Family law is somewhat inequitable, and those laws which are equitable may not be enforced. (3) Family law is largely inequitable, and/or there maybe state recognized enclaves of inequitable family law. (4) Family law is grossly inequitable towards women.
2. Womanstats (2015). GP_SCALE-1: (0) Excellent representation of women. (1) Good representation. (2) Mediocre representation. (3) Poor representation. 4 Very poor representation.

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