# The Parliament Election 2010 as a Test of Women's Political Leadership[*]

Dana Hellová

**Abstract:**  *Historically, all avenues of public power had been controlled by males and those men have continuously structured institutions, created laws and established moral codes in society. In political area this situation has been mirrored in low participation of women in politics and consequently low level of women's political leadership. The goal of this analysis is to appraise the impact of different recruitment methods of the Slovak political parties on the creation of the candidate list and consequently on the final result of the 2010 general election from the perspective of women candidates. Unlike the general expectation, the analysis has shown that more decentralized process of recruitment in a party is not positively related with better outcome for the women candidates. Thus, it is likely that other determinants than party structure play a major role in "success" of female members in election.*

**Keywords:**  *Recruitment Process, Women Candidates, Slovak General Election*

In the 2010 election, 23 women were elected to the Slovak Parliament. Female MPs thus comprise 15.3 per cent of 150 total MPs. In comparison with the rates in the other two Visegrad countries, where elections in 2010 were held, Slovakia is second place before Hungary, where the rate is below 10 per cent (9.06 %)[1]. The share of women politicians in the Slovak legislative body is in the long term very low, which could be the result of the political system as well as institutional structures of the political parties, some of which create barriers to the higher representation of women in the Slovak Parliament.

**Table 1: Female MPs in CEE**

|  | Number of Female MPs | Rate of Female MPs |
|---|---|---|
| Czech Republic | 44 | 22 % |
| Slovakia | 23 | 15.3 % |
| Hungary | 35 | 9.06 % |

Source: Author

**Table 2: Rate of Female MPs in Slovak Parliament**

|  | Number of Female MPs | Rate of Female MPs |
|---|---|---|
| 2002 | 22 | 14.7 % |
| 2006 | 24 | 16.0 % |
| 2010 | 23 | 15.3 % |

Source: Author

The main aim of the paper is to interpret the outcome of the 2010 general election from the perspective of women's legislative recruitment by political parties. For the purpose of analysis the data and information about four political parties — the SMER-Social Democrat (SMER-SD), the Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party (SDKÚ-DS), the Christian Democratic Movement (KDH), and the Slovak National Party (SNS) will be elaborated. Because of the fact that all parties were part of the Slovak Parliament after the 2006 election and won seats also in 2010 election, it is possible to compare not only results but also candidate lists presented to voters before both electoral contests.

For the comparison of the mechanisms of recruitment we use the classification proposed by Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski (1995), which works with two

dimensions — the degree of centralization and the degree of formalization. This concept was used by Miki Caul Kittilson in the multivariate analysis, where she scrutinizes the mechanisms that influence changes in the proportion of women in national executive committees of fifty parties in ten Western European countries in the period between 1975 and 1997 (2006: 47). Based on her findings from the research we assess whether a more centralised party with formalised selection methods creates better conditions for women in the competition for seats.

We understand the recruitment process as a twofold process — namely nomination and approval of candidates. We have to ask: *Who can nominate or built the candidate list? Who approves it?* The theory of political recruitment suggested by Norris and Lovenduski (1995) offers enough indicators (the overview is found in the Table 3) which help as to assess to what extent the whole recruitment process of Slovak political parties is centralized or formalized. For the purpose of the study the data from the candidate lists will be used.

## Institutional Barriers for Women's Leadership

One of the most cited conclusions of previous research on women's representation in legislative bodies is that the main characteristics of the women's recruitment are formed by the political system (Norris 1992; Norris and Lovenduski, 1995; Reynolds and Reilly, 1997; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1999, 2009; Matland, 2002; Ballington, 2004; Kittilson, 2006). Mona Lena Krook, in her approaching *feminist-institutionalist* theory, has mentioned three levels or institutions — systemic, practical and normative (2010: 711). At the systematic level there are electoral and party systems, which she has identified as "one of the most important factors explaining cross-national variations in women's representation" (ibid: 712). Equally important are formal and informal criteria of parties' recruitment (age, party membership, skills, money, etc.), and party structure internally connected with method of ballot composition (Ashe *et al* 2010; Kittilson 2006; Krook 2010). Finally, it is a party's ideology that may play an important role by responding to women's candidate effort.[2]

### Electoral System

The general assumption is that "the party gatekeeper, who must consider which aspirants to choose as candidates, will have a different set of concerns and incentives depending upon the electoral system" (Matland 2002: 6), simply said that an electoral system of a particular country set the rules of a female nomination game. It is undoubted that a proportional electoral system is in general more positive for women candidates.[3] The system is a clear guide for selectors if they have to nomi-

nate one candidate for an election fight (majoritarian system) or can create a ballot where a female candidate can be accepted without fear of losing votes (proportional system, PR). Pippa Norris adds district magnitude (the number of seats per district) as a conventional determinant for women's recruitment. Women tend to be more successful under an electoral system with multi-member constituencies than under systems with single-member districts (1992: 136, 139).[4] Last but not least, it is the extent of openness of a ballot which helps or derogates women candidates. The more open the ballot, i.e., that a voter can theoretically "create" the final constitution of the legislative body from the candidates across the parties, the more favourable is the system for a female candidate. This attribute of an electoral system is also connected with preferential voting. Again, this mechanism generates two possibilities for a female candidate. On the one hand, a voter's attitude can directly change the results of the election and shift a female candidate from the lower ranks of a candidate list among the MPs. Otherwise, in a less successful case, it can be, at least, the sign for politicians to change the recruitment strategy for the very next election, in the case of a significant share of preferential votes for women's candidates.

## Party Structure

As mentioned above, the recruitment process of a political party is influenced by different components of its structure. From the perspective of ballot composition Norris and Lovenduski have defined various methods of a selection of women candidates, which are based on the combination of two dimensions: the degree of centralisation and the degree of formalisation (1995: 4).[5] A centralised selection is more patronage-oriented, which means that the main decision about candidates or candidate list depends on a strong party leadership or concretely on a dominant party leader. The internal party democracy is insufficiently developed, which means that the members play little role in the process of recruitment (ibid.). An example of a decentralised selection (regional or local) is primaries in the party. In a formalised system candidates are selected according to detailed and explicit rules, for example through a quota system[6] (Kobova 2007: 15; Matland 2002), informal recruitment is, on the contrary, led by unofficial rules and secret agreements. As Norris and Lovenduski mention the *formal-localised* method is the most common pattern in European parties, based on a fairness system "ensuring all applicants are treated alike, rests on the implementation of clear, transparent and equitable rules" (1995: 4–5). Paradoxically, the research conducted by Kittilson has shown that the more centralised party with some formal internal instruments creates more opportunity for women in party leadership (2006: 49). For our analysis it will be important to find some of these characteristics in the party structure of selected cases.

# Results of the Elections to the Slovak Parliament: Shifts and Changes

The Slovak electoral system is highly proportional with single district and semi-open ballots. No legislative quotas are used and none of the Slovak political parties (considering relevant parliamentary parties) uses a quota system in its nomination process. This legal framework should be extremely favorable for female candidacy in the Slovak political parties. The outcome of last general election has shown, conversely, that the women's representation has remained low, thus far behind the prospective result. Essential responsibility for this situation lies on political parties and higher women's political participation depends consequently on the parties' structure itself and selection methods.

## Party Recruitment Process before the 2010 General Election

The basic rules or methods of recruitment are usually described in the inter-party documents such as an election order or an order for candidate's nomination. Naturally, there are also informal processes, which could be initiated by a concrete powerful person in a party or outside a party, or party leaders themselves. This analysis is based on the facts from the official documents of the parties, mainly on their statuses. Attention is focused on those processes which are somehow connected with women candidates, however, we can assume, that the general rules themselves reveal the degree of centralisation or formality in the recruitment process (see Table 3).

**Table 3:  Indicators of Two Dimensioned Recruitment Methods**

| | | Degree of Centralisation | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | CENTRALISED | DECENTRALISED |
| **Degree of Formality** | FORMAL | • party leader decision<br>• quota system<br>• clearly described mechanism of recruitment | • decision made by factional leaders at local or regional level<br>• primaries<br>• constitutional rules or national guidelines |
| | INFORMAL | • leadership patronage<br>• no internal democracy<br>• without established guidelines | • no clear mechanism of recruitment<br>• power of local elites |

Source: Norris, and Lovenduski (1995), modified by author

All four parliamentary parties included in this analysis have more or less formalised recruitment processes. The most sophisticated system is used by the party SDKÚ-DS, its statute describes in detail both the process of candidates' nomination as well as approval of the candidate list. It is a natural effect of the presence of primaries in this party. Another important indicator of the degree of formality is the availability of the documents. The Statute of SMER-SD has referred to the additional Organizational order in many places; however, this document belongs to internal directives of the party and thus it is not public. Therefore we can assess the degree of formality of SMER-SD' recruitment process as less formal.

The degree of centralism is much more difficult to determine (see Table 4). What we may claim with certainty is a fact that the most decentralized methods of recruitment have appeared in the Statutes of SDKÚ-DS. Primaries, the clear indicator of decentralisation, regulate not only the process of approval of the candidate list, but also it is very clearly described who can nominate the candidates. It is not only official bodies of the party (as is typical in the statutes of other parties), but also any member who can support the candidacy of any party co-member by inter-party petition. Moreover, this party is the only one, with a representative of the women section in the Presidium, one of the central bodies of the party. Let us focus on the primaries from the women candidates' point of view.

he closed primaries, where only members of the party have a right to vote, is a process of pre-nomination made by the central and regional bodies of the party, and two associations — The Association of Women of the SDKÚ-DS, The Association of Youth of the SDKÚ-DS, Next Generation. According to the Amendment of the Primary election from 2009, the voters could circle 15 candidates from the candidate lists of regional structures, and associations. The member-voter is obligated to circle at least one candidate from each region and association. It means that female candidates have a guaranteed position on the final candidate list; however; yet, they do not have a guarantee of a winnable place.

In the KDH the candidate list is approved by the Council representing national as well as regional and local structures' leaders, which might suggest that the structure is more decentralised. The Christian Democratic Movement is the only party, which has a so-called *Permanent list of candidates* valid for the period of four years between Council's sessions. The Council is also that body which sets the rules for managing the list. We can still discuss how open and distant this process is of recruitment for ordinary members and consequently we should assess it much less decentralised in comparison with primaries.

The role of regional politicians is less visible in the SMER-SD at the expense of party leader Robert Fico. His position in the recruitment process is irretrievable when he introduces the list of candidates individually and approves it as a member of the party Presidency. It is obvious that party members have a clearly limited voting right.

We can observe a similar distribution of power in the Slovak National Party, where the candidates are nominated by members of regional and local structures, however, the 'last word' belongs to the leader, who "makes final revision of the candidate list [...] and closes it definitely by his/her signature" (Stanovy SNS).

It can be argued that the primary election ought to be more favourable for women than any other centralised recruitment. With this instrument the party may provide for greater input from grass-root structures, and give women "more points of access to enter the party ranks" (Kittilson, 2006: 46). A centralized party structure, on the contrary, gives the political party leadership exclusive authority to decide who will be chosen and where on a candidate list he or she will be placed. But is it really so in the Slovak case? Isn't it better for women when the central elite have the power to impose change upon the party units on the ground? We will try to find the answer comparing candidates' lists and actual results as far as women candidates are concerned.

**Table 4:  Recruitment Strategy of the Slovak Political Parties before the 2010 Election**

|  | Centralised | Decentralised |
|---|---|---|
| Formal | SMER-SD<br>SNS | KDH<br>SDKÚ-DS |
| Informal | / | / |

Source: Norris, and Lovenduski (1995), modified by author

## Candidate Lists

The "product" of the nomination process is a candidate list of the party, which should reflect the selection methods of the party. Women's chances of being elected depend ultimately on the final placement on the candidate list. Concerning this, it is important to distinguish between winnable and unwinnable placement, when we want to assess the real effort of a party to increase the number of women MPs in general and in the legislative party in particular. There are at least two options how to set the number of these winnable seats. First of all, the result of previous (or last two) general election can highlight the border of party's success. Secondly, in case that a party did not candidate in last election, the surveys of voting preferences might serve as an indicator of potentially gained seats.

Evaluating the candidate lists of the Slovak political parties[7], we can trace expressionless changes as far as total number of female candidates in the 2006 and 2010 elections is concerned. The Slovak Democratic and Christian Union – Democratic Party demonstrated the largest decrease in the number (by 11 percentage points) of female candidates on 2006 election but two of them were ranked in the top five

(Iveta Radičova as a leader and Lucia Žitňanská, the former Minister of Justice in the second Dzurinda's government). On the other side the SNS has continued in the trend from the last election and its rate of women on the candidate list is again severely below average (see Table 4). Additionally, the comparison of candidate lists of the parties only from the 2010 election generates interesting observations. Firstly, the poor outcome of the primaries in the SDKÚ-DS for women candidates (their share on the candidate list was 1.8 percentage points below the average) has shown that this institute which determines the character of recruitment method can be disadvantageous for women. Secondly, more centralized recruitment in case of the SMER-SD and SNS has a mixed effect. The proportion of SNS's women candidates was very low; the rate of women in the SMER-SD did not exceed the average significantly. Thirdly, the Christian Democratic Movement, the traditional conservative party, has surprised us in this election, when we can see the increase in the number of nominated women up from 26 to 34; that is a 5.4 percentage point increase over 2006. Finally, all parties placed an overwhelming majority of female candidates in its unwinnable seats. In case of the KDH, MOST-HÍD and SaS it was more than 90 per cent of all women candidates (see Table 5 and Table 6).

**Table 4:  Women Candidates and MPs – Change 2006, 2010**

| | 2006 | | 2010 | | Change on the candidate list |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | candidates | MPs | candidates | MPs | |
| SMER-SD | 25 <br> 16.6 % | 12 <br> 24 % | 27 <br> 18 % | 10 <br> 16.1 % | **+1,4** |
| SDKÚ-DS | 35 <br> 23 % | 6 <br> 19.4 % | 24 <br> 16 % | 6 <br> 21,4 % | **-11,0** |
| SaS | – | – | 27 <br> 18 % | 4 <br> 18.2 % | **–** |
| KDH | 26 <br> 17.3 % | 2 <br> 14.3 % | 34 <br> 22.7 % | 2 <br> 13.3 % | **+5,4** |
| MOST-HÍD | – | – | 29 <br> 19.3 % | 0 <br> 0 % | **–** |
| SNS | 20 <br> 13.3 % | 3 <br> 15 % | 18 <br> 12.7 % | 1 <br> 12.5 % | **-0,6** |
| Average | – | – | 17.8 % | 15.3 % | – |

Source: Author, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

**Table 5: Women Candidates by Type of Seat 2010 (according to the 2006 election's result)[8]**

| | 2006 | 2010 | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | seats won | winnable | unwinnable |
| SMER | 50<br>29.1 % | 6<br>22.2 % | **21**<br>**77.8 %** |
| SDKÚ-DS | 31<br>18.4 % | 6<br>25 % | **18**<br>**75 %** |
| KDH | 14<br>8.3 % | 2<br>5.8 % | **32**<br>**94.2 %** |
| SNS | 20<br>11.7 % | 2<br>11.1 % | **16**<br>**88.9 %** |

Source: Author, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

**Table 6: Women Candidates by Type of Seat 2010 (according to surveys from Feb 2010)[9]**

| | Feb 2010 | 2010 | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | expected seats/<br>preferences | winnable/<br>share of total number of<br>women candidates | unwinnable/ share<br>of total number of<br>women candidates |
| SMER | 62<br>38.3 % | 7<br>26 % | 20<br>74 % |
| SDKÚ-DS | 20<br>12.8 % | 3<br>12.5 % | 21<br>87.5 % |
| SaS | 14<br>9 % | 2<br>7.4 % | 25<br>92,6 % |
| KDH | 17<br>10.8 % | 3<br>8.8 % | 31<br>91.2 % |
| MOST-HÍD | 9<br>5.6 % | 0<br>0 % | 29<br>100 % |
| SNS | 9<br>5.6 % | 1<br>5.5 % | 17<br>94.5 % |

Source: Author, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic

## Conclusion: Success of Women Candidates?

The 2010 general election did not confirm the positive trend in the increase of women in the Slovak Parliament. Despite good preconditions in the form of electoral system, the political parties have demonstrated only weak intention to increase the proportion of women in politics. This article tried to explain this outcome as a consequence of the different recruitment policies of the Slovak parties. We assumed that the more centralized the recruitment process, the better chance for women candidates to be selected as a party's candidate on a ballot and afterward win a seat in the election. Nonetheless, as it has turned out, the triumph of women candidates depends not only on their share from all candidates on a candidate list, but more on the number of them in winnable placements on a ballot. Therefore when we want to assess the influence of different recruitment strategy, we have to take this fact into account.

The most successful in the election from the perspective of women candidates was the SDKÚ-DS. Although, the percentage of women on the candidate list was below the average, 17.8 per cent in this election, the party was able to offer one quarter of all winnable seats to women. Additionally, they offered well-known women with credibility and experiences on these places. Zora Bútorová argues that this is the key fact alongside with received preferential votes (45.8 % from all candidates), which was also the significant determinant of the relatively prevalent success (*Političiek je...*). Considering all facts about recruitment methods, final version of the candidate list, and the result of the election, we claim that, however, the party had the second lowest proportion of women candidates, which may be the result of decentralised selection; it placed 6 from 24 women in winnable seats and now constitutes 21.4 per cent of their parliamentary party.

In the case of the SMER-DS, we can argue that more centralized recruitment has not brought expected results from the perspective of women candidates. The total number of women on the candidate list as well as their share in winning places have not exceed the average, therefore, we cannot conclude that this way of selection is more favorable for women as has been set forth in our assumption.

On the contrary, the case of the KDH has shown that less centralized recruitment could indicate better results for women, at least from the perspective of the candidate list. However, as far as the result is concerned the opposite opinion could be expressed. The KDH has been unable to maintain the share of women's MPs and lost 9.4 percentage points on the candidate list which might be the effect of preferential voting when the electorate demonstrated only a weak will to empower the position of female candidates (4 percentage points below the average 18.7 %).

The Slovak National Party nominated the least women on the candidate list from all four parties. Likewise for the SMER-SD the centralized method of selection (on the

level of candidates' approval) has not been favorable for women candidates. The 2010 election's result confirms some trends which had already been seen four years ago.

To conclude, we argue that the degree of centralization and formalization of the recruitment process is not a decisive factor, which influence the participation of women in politics and leadership in Slovakia. We can suppose that other factors, such as preferential voting or stationing well-known women on the ballot might influence electoral success of women.

## Notes

[1] It is a 20 per cent drop in the number of female MPs compared with previous period. The extreme increase experienced in the Czech Republic, where the rate of female MPs reached 22 % (after the 2006 election it was 15.5 %). The Czech scholars from the NGO Forum 50%, which persistently monitors the situation of women's participation in Czech politics, concluded that this historical success is the outcome of more factors, which will not repeat again (Forum 50%). Generally, it was not only preferential voting (before the 2010 election the change of the Election Act increased the number of preferential votes from two to four), but also the emergence of new smaller parties (TOP 09, Public Affairs) with more favorable nomination processes, and last but not least, a weakening of the traditional major parties (Civic Democratic Party, Czech Social Democratic Party).

[2] As Kittilson has proved in her research the leftist ideology of a party is more promising for women candidates than ideologies of parties of the Center and of the Right (2006: 45, 49).

[3] When we look at the first 15 countries in the world with the highest representation of women in parliament (35 per cent and over), there was only one country, Cuba, which does not have proportional representation in 2009 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2009).

[4] For more information see also Norris and Lovenduski (1995).

[5] For a more detailed analysis it is suitable to work with six types of recruitment methods: formal-centralized, formal-regional, formal-localized, informal-centralized, informal-regional, and informal-localized. For the purpose of our research, it is sufficient to work with two dimensions offered by this concept.

[6] The quota system is a typical measure of formalized selection of candidates, which is also much more clear and open, even when there are no such explicit rules. In the area of unwritten rules it is much harder for women to enter the male caucus.

[7] We take into account only parties with parliamentary experience in a previous or last term.

[8] We identified the number of winnable seats according the results of last elections held in 2006. When the party won 50 seats in this election, we looked at the first 50 places on the candidate list from 2010 and determined the proportion of women in winnable places to unwinnable.

[9] In the case that some political parties had not stood in the 2006 election, but also due to changing preferences of the electorate, we have created a model where we used data form surveys of electoral preferences made by three agencies (Focus, Polis, and MVK) in February 2010. Based on the average preferences we calculated seats for each party provided that the turnout would have been equal to what was then in the election 2010. Afterwards we used the same practice that it is described in the note 8.

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