

Why So Slow: A Comparative View of Women's Political Leadership

PAULA A. MONOPOLI*

There will never be a new world order until women are part of it.

—Alice Paul¹

INTRODUCTION

It is fitting to begin this reflection by noting the pivotal role of an American woman, Eleanor Roosevelt, in the birth of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Universal Declaration)² and the role of American activists like Alice Paul in efforts to secure equality for women in the international arena.³ The Universal Declaration explicitly includes political rights among the human rights it seeks to

* Marbury Research Professor of Law and Founding Director, Women, Leadership & Equality Program, University of Maryland School of Law. J.D. 1983 University of Virginia School of Law, B.A. 1980 Yale College. The author would like to thank Susan G. McCarty for her research assistance.

1. Alice Paul was the architect of the movement that succeeded in passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution granting women the right to vote. Amelia R. Fry, *Alice Paul and the ERA, in* RIGHTS OF PASSAGE: THE PAST AND FUTURE OF THE ERA 8, 10–11 (Joan Hoff-Wilson ed., 1986). After ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment, Alice Paul turned her attention to the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA). *Id.* at 12. Facing challenges in the struggle to find support for an ERA, she “took her battle for equal rights to the League of Nations.” *Id.* at 20. In 1938, she formed the World Women’s Party, which worked to have an Equal Rights Treaty signed by members of the League of Nations, and after World War II lobbied for the inclusion of equality provisions in the United Nations charter. *Id.* “Paul and her . . . allies . . . ultimately succeeded in persuading Eleanor Roosevelt . . . to substitute the word *people* for *men* in the phrase ‘All men are created equal’ . . . [in the] Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” *Id.* at 21. Paul later helped “get the word *sex* added to Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act.” *Id.*

2. See MARY ANN GLENDON, *WORLD MADE NEW: ELEANOR ROOSEVELT AND THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS* (2001).

3. Fry, *supra* note 1, at 20–21.

protect.⁴ Political rights—the right to vote and stand for election and to be fully and fairly represented in a democratic state—are an essential part of the vision embodied in the Universal Declaration itself. Universal suffrage and access to positions of political leadership are integral to the Universal Declaration’s overarching goal of dignity and justice for all. Such rights are particularly important in ensuring equality for underrepresented groups like women. Political representation itself is both a mechanism to ensure that equality and a manifestation of it.

Given the centrality of political rights to equality, it is striking that the United States has made slow progress as compared to other countries in women’s access to political office.⁵ Being part of a new world order, as Alice Paul envisioned it, included ascending to positions of political leadership. In 1920, Paul succeeded in the long quest to grant women formal political rights in the form of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Formal political equality had been achieved. So the subject of this essay is why, more than eighty years later, the United States lags behind many countries in the world in fulfilling the promise of the Nineteenth Amendment in terms of fully including women in its political leadership, particularly when it comes to executive office.⁶

Before delving into the reasons why women have been slow to assume (or be given) political power in the United States, it is important to note that this resistance to having a woman ascend to the

4. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, G.A. Res. 217A (III), U.N. Doc. A/810 (Dec. 10, 1948). Article 21 states:

- (1) Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
- (2) Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country.
- (3) The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

5. Marie Cocco, Editorial, *Political Glass Ceiling Remains Firmly in Place*, CHI. SUN-TIMES, Nov. 24, 2008, at 24; see, e.g., Inter-Parliamentary Union, Women in National Parliaments World Classification, <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif301108.htm> (last visited Mar. 24, 2009) (placing the United States 69th out of 189 countries ranked by the percentage of women in their lower or unicameral legislative body).

6. The Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution states: “The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.” U.S. CONST. amend. XIX.

2009] A COMPARATIVE VIEW OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP 157

presidency is echoed in the reluctance on the part of the United States to fully embrace international efforts to secure women's rights. The most striking example of this is its failure to become a party to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).⁷ The United States has lagged behind the international community in embracing conventions like CEDAW. Adopted in 1979 by the United Nations:

The Convention provides the basis for realizing equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life—including the right to vote and to stand for election—as well as education, health and employment. States parties agree to take all appropriate measures, including legislation and temporary special measures, so that women can enjoy all their human rights and fundamental freedoms.⁸

One hundred and eighty-five members of the United Nations (over 91% of the countries) are party to the Convention. However, the United States is not among them.⁹ This resistance to embracing international norms and efforts to advance the status of women reflects the slow progress of women to positions of political power in the United States. The impact of this resistance is significant. As Human Rights Watch notes:

Although the United States has long claimed to be at the forefront of the women's rights movement, failing to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) hurts women in the U.S. and diminishes the U.S.'s credibility when it critiques other countries' records on women's rights. By ratifying CEDAW, the U.S. would send a strong message that it is serious about the protection of women's human rights around the world. Ratification would also enable the U.S. to nominate experts to

7. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, *adopted* Dec. 18, 1979, 1249 U.N.T.S. 13.

8. U.N. Division for the Advancement of Women, Overview of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw> (last visited Mar. 24, 2009).

9. The U.S. has signed, but not ratified, the Convention. See U.N. Division for the Advancement of Women, States Parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/states.htm> (last visited Mar. 24, 2009).

the CEDAW Committee, and thereby be in a position to take part in interpreting CEDAW.¹⁰

EXPLAINING THE LACK OF PROGRESS

During the recent University of Maryland School of Law conference, *Reflecting on the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, a panel of scholars analyzed what factors might explain this resistance in the United States. The call of the question for the panel was to explore, in a comparative context, the social, political, and cultural conditions that give rise to women being able to ascend to the office of president or prime minister and how those conditions may be different in the domestic sphere. The panel featured President Mary Robinson, former President of Ireland and U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, now President of Realizing Rights: the Ethical Globalization Initiative, and Chair of the Council of Women World Leaders. President Robinson was joined by three prominent political scientists, Dr. Jennifer Lawless, an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Brown University; Dr. Eileen McDonagh, Professor of Political Science at Northeastern University and Visiting Scholar at the Institute for Quantitative Social Science at Harvard University; and Dr. Karen O'Connor, Jonathan N. Helfat Distinguished Professor of Political Science, and Founder and Director of the Women & Politics Institute, School of Public Affairs at American University. This author moderated the panel.

Constitutional Design as a Barrier

The gendered nature of the allocation of power between the legislative and the executive branch is a significant barrier to women ascending to the highest position of political leadership in the United States—the presidency. The more expansive the executive, the more masculine or agentic it becomes in the eyes of citizens. This author has explored the question of whether allocating more or less power to the executive affects the likelihood that women will ascend to that office.¹¹ Similarly, one might characterize the system of checks and

10. Human Rights Watch, CEDAW: The Women's Rights Treaty, <https://199.173.149.140/campaigns/cedaw> (last visited Mar. 24, 2009).

11. See generally Paula A. Monopoli, *Gender and Constitutional Design*, 115 YALE L.J. 2643 (2006).

balances laid out in the United States Constitution as peculiarly masculine, with clashing branches in structured conflict with each other as the manner by which each is constrained and held in check. Finally, the Constitution includes the role of Commander-in-Chief, a particularly masculine role, in the duties of the President. These structural choices affect whether voters match women to the role.

In addition, the Framers' original vision of what constituted an effective executive has an impact on the political progress of women. For example, executive activism has become a contemporary phenomenon in American politics. In *Federalist 70*, Alexander Hamilton described traditionally male attributes like decisiveness, dispatch, and unilateral action as positive attributes in the executive.¹² Such attributes interact with voter preferences to hinder women's ascension to this position. Thus, women in the United States have fared better in the branches most associated with feminine or communal attributes like consensus, i.e., the legislative and judicial branches. However, a number of other countries—some that appear far more culturally conservative than ours—have had women heads of state.¹³

Government Policies as a Barrier

Dr. Eileen McDonagh posits that, in addition to policies that enhance individual equality, public policies that replicate communal concerns that are traditionally the realm of women are necessary for women to ascend to such politically powerful positions. McDonagh notes that the United States has a long equal rights heritage. However, American women's political representation lags far behind other comparative democracies as well as countries that do not have a democratic form of government. In her research, she documents the fact that eighty-five countries have elected a woman president or prime minister or vice or deputy. The United States has not yet nominated a woman from a major party as a candidate for the presidency.

12. In *The Federalist* No. 70, Hamilton wrote, "Energy in the executive is a leading character in the definition of good government. . . . Decision, activity, secrecy, and dispatch will generally characterize the proceedings of one man in a much more eminent degree than the proceedings of any greater number." *THE FEDERALIST* No. 70, at 392 (Alexander Hamilton) (Clinton Rossiter ed., Mentor 1999) (1961).

13. See generally EILEEN MCDONAGH, *THE MOTHERLESS STATE: WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND AMERICAN DEMOCRACY* (forthcoming 2009).

In 2006, the United States ranked eighty-third out of the world's nations in terms of electing women to national legislatures. By 2008, the United States had dropped to eighty-fifth place. McDonagh suggests that, in addition to factors offered by political scientists including the lack of multiple parties or parliaments or proportional representation, she would add one more. The United States is also lacking another feature that most comparable democracies do have: national state policies that replicate maternal traits. In her work McDonagh emphasizes that when a government adopts policies, it is teaching the public about the nature of the government. In other words, a government engages in a feedback mechanism, giving the public information about what the government stands for and what traits it carries. For better or worse, it is empirically established in all of the countries studied that the public associates maternal traits with women.¹⁴ The two traits most associated with women are social maternalism and carework, and the public views women as more interested in peace and social welfare than men.¹⁵

McDonagh observes that women, as members of the female sex, are identified as the group with the capacity to bear children. To bear a child is a biological form of maternalism associated with all women, whether individual candidates wish to affirm this identity or not. If a government adopts social policies that have maternal traits, it teaches the public that women are suitable not just for the private sphere of home or the service sector of the market but also that women are also suited for the public sphere of government. Thus, when the government acts in a way that people associate with women, people will associate women with government.

The first kind of policymaking that will have a positive impact is welfare legislation. When the state adopts policies that are oriented to caring for its people, it links itself to women's social maternalism. This link with the welfare state and maternalism is well-established in many fields of study.¹⁶

The second kind of policy that teaches that women are suitable for

14. *Id.*

15. *Id.*

16. *See, e.g.*, ROBYN MUNCY, CREATING A FEMALE DOMINION IN AMERICAN REFORM: 1890–1935 (1991) (history); THEDA SKOCPOL, PROTECTING SOLDIERS AND MOTHERS: THE POLITICAL ORIGINS OF SOCIAL POLICY IN THE UNITED STATES (1992) (sociology); U.S. HISTORY AS WOMEN'S HISTORY: NEW FEMINIST ESSAYS (Linda K. Kerber et al. eds., 1995) (history).

government is gender quotas or parity legislation. These types of policies grant a legislative advantage to a candidate solely because of gender. McDonagh notes that gender quotas have been predominantly studied in terms of their instrumental role in moving women into public office. But McDonagh is interested in their symbolic effect. In other words, such policies reinforce the idea that this trait—being female—makes one appropriate for government by virtue of the fact that one is female. Her thesis is that voters learn that association and that they thus view women as suitable for government and political leadership. As a result, public attitudes improve in terms of how they view women as leaders, and this association has an electoral payoff. In addition, she posits that women themselves will be more likely to see themselves as suitable for public office and, if they are in an environment where few women are choosing to run, there will be a significant increase in the number of women who choose to stand for office.

McDonagh's empirical work supports her hypothesis as to the relationship between the types of policies that governments adopt and the number of women elected to executive and legislative office. There is a clear pattern. If a democracy affirms the individual rights to vote and hold office, and in addition adopts public policies that replicate maternal traits, the percentage of women who hold executive office (defined as president, prime minister, vice president, or deputy prime minister or acting head of state) is 70%, while it is only 39% for those democracies that do not. The United States is in the latter group. The members of this latter group have not adopted welfare provisions at a level to qualify as a welfare state—one which affirms the duty of the state to address these needs. As for the United States, it is also very far from adopting any form of gender quotas.

The same pattern exists in terms of women holding legislative office. There, the average percentage of women in national legislatures in countries who do not come within the definition of a welfare state is only 10.2%.¹⁷ However, among those countries who do adopt policies that replicate maternal traits the average is significantly higher, at 27.3%.¹⁸

Thus, when it comes to a female candidate's electoral success, her

17. MCDONAGH, *supra* note 13.

18. *Id.*

individual ability to combine caring or feminine traits with more masculine traits is only one part of the picture. Also important is whether the state itself represents this kind of hybrid. In other words, the teaching function of public policymaking impacts electoral outcomes. McDonagh notes that this perspective reinforces the observation that different types of rights are tied together. Welfare provisions as social rights are thus necessary to implement political rights.

Disparity in Care-giving Duties and External Recruiting as Social Barriers

Dr. Jennifer Lawless suggests that the lack of women in positions of political leadership is largely a function of women's failure to run for office in the first place.¹⁹ She posits three major impediments that come out of her research on 4,000 similarly situated men and women in the four professions that are most likely to lead to a run for public office: law, business, education and politics. Of the equally matched groups of 2,000 men and 2,000 women that she surveyed, 50% of the people in the pool had considered running for public office. However, women were one-third less likely to ever have considered running for office or to take steps likely to lead to running, such as inquiring about how to get on the ballot or talking to family or potential donors. Of those 50% who considered running, women were one-third less likely to have done it. The interesting finding was that among those who did, women fared as well as their male counterparts. They win races when they run as often as men and are able to raise as much money. So Lawless found no overt bias at the ballot box. However, she notes that gender parity in outcomes obscures a very unlevel playing field.

The first disparity or impediment she found was family responsibilities. Women still do most of the work at home, even in this group of very professional men and women. Though they worked the same hours at the office, they were not similarly situated at home. Women were ten times more likely to be responsible for the

19. See generally JENNIFER L. LAWLESS & RICHARD L. FOX, *IT TAKES A CANDIDATE: WHY WOMEN DON'T RUN FOR OFFICE* (2005). See also JENNIFER L. LAWLESS & RICHARD L. FOX, *BROWN POLICY REPORT, WHY ARE WOMEN STILL NOT RUNNING FOR OFFICE?* (2008), available at <http://www.brown.edu/Departments/TaubmanCenter/Pdf/Why%20Are%20Women%20Still%20Not%20Running%20for%20Office.pdf>.

2009] A COMPARATIVE VIEW OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP 163

housework and seven times more likely to be responsible for childcare. In essence, women had three full time jobs and faced gendered patterns of responsibilities at home. It was thus not surprising that it did not occur to women to consider running. Even if they were to consider it, it was likely not possible to successfully navigate the process of running with these additional hours of family responsibility.

The second impediment was the assessment of what it takes to be a qualified candidate. The men and women had comparable resumes in survey groups. Yet, 60% of men considered themselves qualified to run for public office while only 40% of women did. Women who did not think they were qualified did not even consider running. However, even men who did not consider themselves qualified had a 40% chance of thinking about running. Women seemed to set the bar higher for themselves in thinking about running than did the men. They likely were cognizant of the fact that in an election, the media and voters scrutinize women much more closely and are willing to be critical of women in areas where they do not even measure men. Lawless posits that women may not run because they do not want to withstand that kind of personal scrutiny at a constant level. This is not a factor for men. For example, a man's appearance is not relevant unless it is truly ridiculous. Unlike women candidates, men do not have to think about appearance on a daily basis.

The third impediment is political recruitment. Women are one-third less likely to receive a suggestion to run for office from anyone, including family members or party leaders. However, Lawless finds that when women are recruited to run, they are just as receptive and just as likely to act on the suggestion as men. Therefore, women are not being encouraged to run and they do not perceive a suggestion to run in the same way. Lawless has anecdotal evidence that a woman who was asked by the mayor to run for the city council dismissed the suggestion as not serious while a man who was told by a bartender in an airport lounge that he knew a lot and should run for office characterized that as a serious suggestion to run.

Lawless concludes that with 500,000 elective offices in the United States, the most likely way to overcome too few women in political leadership is to encourage women to run. It is an easier barrier to overcome than disparate housework and care-giving responsibilities and social norms that result in women not considering a run for

office. She stresses the need to fill the pipeline, otherwise there will be no broad change.

Disparate Media Coverage as Cultural Barrier

Dr. Karen O'Connor noted the disparities in media coverage in the recent United States election cycle. She observed that there is a more hostile media environment for women running for office. The influence of television on campaigns and candidates is well documented in the political science, social psychology, and communications literature.²⁰ If the media plays such a critical role, then it follows that how candidates are portrayed in the media and which aspects of a candidate's persona the media chooses to focus on will have a tremendous impact on their success or failure.²¹ The research

20. See generally Daron R. Shaw, *The Impact of News Media Favorability and Candidate Events in Presidential Campaigns*, 16 POL. COMM. 183 (1999), which states that:

Although campaigns are the most obvious means by which American voters receive information about candidates and issues, there is strong resistance to the notion that they influence presidential elections. Recent analyses, however, argue that campaign events can produce statistically significant alterations in the aggregate distribution of voters' preferences. This study examines presidential campaign effects in the 1992 and 1996 U.S. elections and features three departures from previous studies: (a) a clearer understanding of campaigning and candidate events, facilitating a more precise idea of what is being tested; (b) detailed data on television and newspaper coverage of the campaign, allowing the measurement of news media effects; and (c) time series data on candidate support that have been purged of undesirable statistical properties. The main hypothesis is that the interaction between events and the favorability of news media coverage drives much of the change in voters' preferences. The data show that these interactive effects were often significant, especially the favorability of television coverage. They further suggest, however, that other factors also influenced voters, including, most probably, other types of media effects.

Id.

21. There is a famous story about Hillary Clinton recounted in VIRGINIA POSTREL, *THE SUBSTANCE OF STYLE: HOW THE RISE OF AESTHETIC VALUE IS REMAKING COMMERCE, CULTURE AND CONSCIOUSNESS* (2003). In 2001, Clinton was asked to give an address at Yale to the graduating class. She said:

The most important thing that I have to say to you today is that hair matters. . . . This is a life lesson my family did not teach me, Wellesley and Yale failed to instill in me: the importance of your hair. Your hair will send very important messages to those around you. It will tell people who you are and what you stand for. What hopes and dreams you have for the world.

Id. at 72. While Clinton was speaking tongue-in-cheek, Postrel elsewhere has noted that "[p]eople like politicians to look good, to be settled, not fickle in the way they look. . . . We expect them not to look like actors per se, but to look as polished as if they were cast in the roles that they play." Booth Moore, *Wanted: A Look*, L.A. TIMES, Aug. 19, 2003, at E-1 (interviewing Postrel about the candidates in the California governor's race).

2009] A COMPARATIVE VIEW OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP 165

clearly demonstrates the disparate media coverage of women candidates and its impact on elections.²² This disparate treatment continues to have a negative impact on female candidates both in how the public perceives them and in their reluctance to be subject to this kind of personal scrutiny.²³

Why Women's Political Leadership Matters

President Mary Robinson describes her personal experience in being encouraged to run for the office of President of Ireland. She analyzed why women's global leadership is unique and essential to effectuating the goals of the Universal Declaration, dignity and justice. She was initially asked to stand for election by the Labor Party in Ireland. As a constitutional lawyer, Robinson considered why there was not a more expansive role for an office that was the result of a direct election by the people of Ireland. She analyzed why it was not more relevant. There was nothing in the Irish Constitution that kept it so "hide-bound." It was simply tradition. She was

22. See JAMES DEVITT, FRAMING GENDER ON THE CAMPAIGN TRAIL: WOMEN'S EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP AND THE PRESS (1999), available at http://198.65.255.167/v2/researchandreports/framinggender/Framing_Gender_Report.pdf. Devitt notes:

This study found daily newspaper reporters in 1998 treated female and male gubernatorial candidates equitably in terms of the quantity of coverage. But there were qualitative discrepancies in news content that added up to create contrasting images of women and men running for governor. While these differences were small, they occurred consistently across elements of news stories. Newspaper readers were more likely to read about a female candidate's personal life, appearance, or personality than that of a male candidate. By contrast, they were more likely to read about a male candidate's stand or record on governmental issues than about a female candidate's. Finally, in reading quotes from the candidates, newspaper readers were more likely to see a male candidate than a female candidate backing these statements with evidence or reasoning.

Newspaper coverage in this study suggests that male candidates were more prepared and qualified for the governor's mansion than were their female opponents. In sum, the difference in the type of coverage of female and male candidates may hinder women's opportunity to lead.

Id. at 5 (citations omitted). See also PIPPA NORRIS, WOMEN, MEDIA AND POLITICS (1997); MARCIA BRADEN, WOMEN POLITICIANS AND THE MEDIA (1996).

23. See *supra* text accompanying note 19 (regarding Jennifer Lawless' panel remarks); see also Cynthia Harrison, Book Review, H-NET REVIEWS IN THE HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES, Jan. 1997, <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showpdf.cgi?path=12225862320012> ("Braden observes that the media report about women in stereotypical ways, emphasizing their femininity and highlighting family relationships, appearance, and clothing—aspects infrequently mentioned when reporting about men. Although Braden sees improvement, in part because of the increasing numbers of women in journalism, she notes that lapses frequently occur.") (reviewing BRADEN, *supra* note 22).

challenged by the idea of expanding the role. After significant consideration as to how to find the space in a non-executive presidency to fully represent the Irish people, she ran as an independent so she could best represent them as she saw fit. She won the election against long odds and was the first Irish woman to assume the role of President.

Robinson felt that there was no greater privilege than to be elected leader of a country and to be its public face. She felt that as a woman she found unique ways to lead, for example, using symbols and stories to carve out that space. For example, Robinson placed a light in the window of the president's official residence to represent all the Irish that had to emigrate because they had no choice.²⁴ This symbolic step took on an enormous emotional appeal and when she traveled, Irish émigrés would greet her with the fact that they knew about the light. It had great significance for them.

Similarly she extended the hand of friendship to Northern Ireland—not through traditional channels—but by inviting to meet with her those brave Protestant and Catholic women in the Shankill and Falls Road neighborhoods of Belfast who came out of their homes to talk to each other when the men would not. Robinson was explicitly interested in exercising the office of president as a woman. She felt there would be a new richness to the office because she intentionally performed her duties “strongly as a woman with learned experiences” by having grown up a woman in Ireland, as a member of the women's movement, by listening and learning and by not being so hierarchical. She notes that it was very conscious on her part.

Robinson observes that Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, a president with executive powers, is a remarkable example of a female president who is leading differently than male leaders. President Johnson Sirleaf invites major foundations and NGOs to bring resources to Liberia but they must do it on her terms and be aligned with her government's policies. Robinson noted that no other African leader that she knows of is disciplining those who come from outside to help her.

Robinson concluded by arguing that women leaders must demonstrate that it matters to have a critical mass of women with

24. Robinson noted that the light was actually in the kitchen of her private quarters, visible from the road, giving it even more symbolic and perhaps maternal connotations.

political power. She posits two important ways in which they can have that impact. In her work with the Council of Women World Leaders, she has concluded that women leaders must be prepared to go to ground level, where women are suffering the brutalities of war and feminization of poverty, and amplify the agenda of the women they meet there.

The second way is to come together at conferences that focus on issues like human security and link women's faith communities with development organizations. At these conferences, women leaders can find common ground while still respecting their different approaches to topics like reproductive rights. Women leaders have an important role to play in raising the profile of concerns unique to women, such as maternal mortality. For instance, one in eight women in Sierra Leone and Afghanistan die in childbirth. Women leaders can bring resources and global attention to this unacceptable situation. Robinson suggests that women's leadership at the international level is beginning to have a positive impact. But in order to make that impact greater, women in all countries must have access to political office at the highest levels so that they can have this kind of global reach. Robinson feels that the United States—long a world leader in other areas—will not long lag behind the rest of the world in having a woman as the head of government.

CONCLUSION

The common theme that emerged from the panel's analysis is dominantly one of non-legal barriers; in other words, formal equality is necessary but not sufficient to guarantee women's political rights both here and abroad. But it is important to add that there is a resistance in the United States to use certain legal mechanisms like formal parity provisions—either voluntary or involuntary—to create progress in this arena. One notes that while the United States strongly supported parity provisions in the new Iraqi Constitution, it would be anathema to many Americans to suggest such a solution to the lack of full participation in domestic politics by American women.²⁵ Such an approach would violate norms of equal treatment and individual achievement so embedded in the American psyche.

From a comparative perspective, there exists a confluence of

25. See generally Darren Rosenblum, *Parity/Disparity: Electoral Gender Inequality on the Tightrope of Liberal Constitutional Traditions*, 39 U.C. DAVIS L. REV. 1119 (2006).

social, political, and cultural conditions in the United States that hinder women's assumption of political power. Even though women in the United States have secured formal equality in terms of political rights, there is much work to be done in terms of substantive equality. If women in the United States are to fully realize political rights as envisioned in the Universal Declaration, then clearly law as a mechanism is necessary but not sufficient to do so.