

# WOMEN'S ORGANIZING AND ELECTORAL BREAKTHROUGHS IN CROATIA AND SERBIA

*An NCEEER Working Paper by*

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## **Executive Summary**

This article investigates the role of women's organizations and activists in the electoral breakthroughs in Serbia and Croatia in 2000. When, how, and to what effect, it asks, did women organize during transformational moments to promote their goals of political liberalization and gender equality? I argue that political opportunities—shaped by the domestic constellation of forces and international assistance programs—are essential to explaining political success. I identify what I call the insider/inclusionary strategy that characterizes women's organizing in Croatia and the outsider/oppositional strategy that characterizes women's organizing in Serbia. These strategies resulted in different immediate outcomes for women's political equality in the electoral breakthroughs in Croatia and Serbia.

A further conclusion of this study focuses on the impact of US assistance programs. The US government has funded women's organizations and gender equality activists to the tune of millions of dollars a year throughout the world. A main purpose of this article is to evaluate the impact of such assistance as part of the larger effort to assist democratic transformations in Croatia and Serbia. This study suggests that the overall purpose of democracy assistance programs during electoral breakthroughs produced favorable conditions for women's organizing on behalf of women's increased political participation. By focusing on building movements, rather than on funding NGOs for limited projects, which has been the operation mode of international assistance in such neighboring areas as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, these programs had the potential for strengthening women's organizing. This, in turn, appears to have had a larger impact on women's status through the legislative process in the months and years after the electoral breakthroughs.

## **Introduction**

This article investigates the role of women's organizations and activists in the electoral breakthroughs in Serbia and Croatia in 2000. When, how, and to what effect, it asks, did women organize during transformational moments to promote their goals of political liberalization and gender equality? A great deal has been written on the negative impact on women of the political transformations that occurred after the collapse of state socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union from 1989 to 1991. Although political change in these post-socialist countries followed different trajectories, they appeared to share the common feature of women's declining status. Women's representation in the formal political sphere plummeted, at the same time that they were pushed out of the labor force at greater rates than men. Meanwhile, the social safety net that had allowed women to bear the double burden of work and home care vanished, along with at least a formal ideological commitment by state authorities to promoting women's equality. Instead, women were subjected to nationalist and neo-liberal ideologies, which simultaneously re-imagined women's role as purveyors of national culture through the bearing and raising of children and held out the promise of individual choice in ways that masked how women's choices were structured and constrained in the new social, economic and political environments (Einhorn, 1993; Einhorn and Sever, 2003; Gal and Kligman, 2000; Jaquette and Wolchik, 1998; Rutschmeyer, 1998).

While women's role in the initial postcommunist political transformations has been well explored, very little has been written about women's role and its impact on the second round of political transformations beginning in 1997 (Hrycak, 2007, 2010). This second round was ushered in by a series of electoral breakthroughs, or what have also been dubbed electoral or color revolutions, in numerous post-socialist countries beginning with Romania in 1996

spreading to Bulgaria in 1997 and Slovakia in 1998, Serbia and Croatia in 2000 and then heading northward to Georgia 2003, Ukraine in 2004 and Kyrgyzstan in 2005 (Lane, 2009). These electoral breakthroughs involved an electoral model of regime change including fair elections, substantial popular involvement, and the replacement of authoritarian or semi-authoritarian regimes by ones committed to democratic reform (Bunce and Wolchik, 2006, 2010, 2011; Carothers, 2004; Kalandadze and Orenstein, 2009). What role, I ask, did women's organizations play in these revolutions? To what extent were they able to promote their goals of political liberalization and gender equality? Did international assistance help or hinder their efforts?

A comparison of the electoral revolutions in Croatia and Serbia offers a good way to address these questions. At first glance, the similarities between the two cases are striking. Women's organizing in both Serbia and Croatia in the previous decade occurred under conditions of ethnic mobilization, war, semi-authoritarian governments, and corrupt and partial liberalization of the economy. Despite some tensions, ties between women's rights activists in the two countries remained strong throughout this period, and they shared goals, strategies and tactics. In addition, the political and institutional contexts in both Croatia and Serbia shared significant features. Finally, international assistance programs in both cases followed a similar model (Bunce and Wolchik, 2011). Nevertheless, the electoral revolutions in these two post-Yugoslav countries produced very different immediate outcomes for gender quality. In Croatia, women's parliamentary representation jumped by more than 15%, the largest gain in any postcommunist country; by contrast, in Serbia the unfavorable situation for women's representation remained largely unchanged. How to explain this puzzling difference?

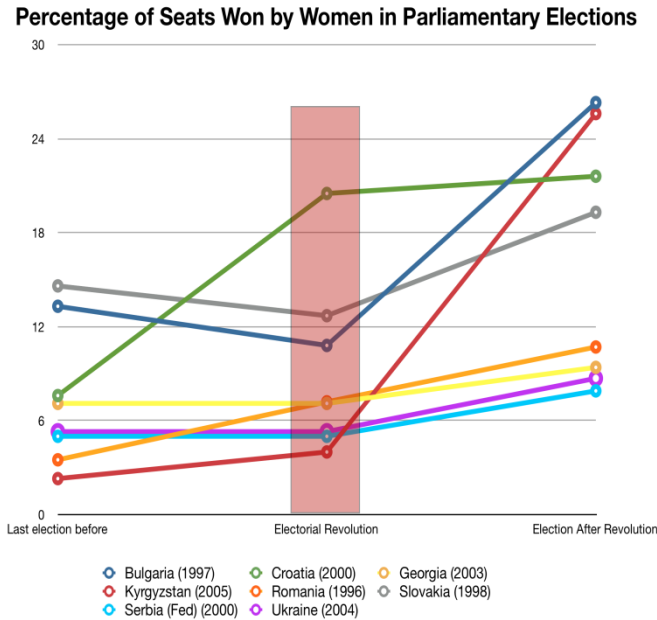
This article begins by providing a brief overview of recent studies on gender and democratization and what they can tell us about women's organizing in electoral breakthroughs.

Drawing upon these studies I argue that political opportunities—shaped by the domestic constellation of forces and international assistance programs—are essential to explaining political outcomes. Additionally, in promoting political change, I argue that women’s organizations must create capacity, find voice, and forge alliances, and I next turn to considering these elements of women’s organizing in Serbia and Croatia. I identify and describe what I call the insider/inclusionary strategy that characterizes women’s organizing in Croatia and the outsider/oppositional strategy that characterizes women’s organizing in Serbia. I find that a lack of viable political allies and greater skepticism of the political process, as well as the shorter time frame of international assistance in Serbia, accounts in large part for the less favorable outcome there. I conclude with a brief discussion of the conditions under which women’s organizing can produce gender equality during periods of political transformation.

## **WOMEN’S ACTIVISM AND ELECTORAL BREAKTHROUGHS**

An examination of the eight successful postcommunist electoral breakthroughs suggests that while overall they have had a positive impact on the level of women’s representation, there is considerable variation concerning the timing and extent of this increase. While women’s level of parliamentary representation dropped during the electoral breakthroughs in Bulgaria and Slovakia, it increased slightly in Romania and significantly in Croatia. In several other cases, it remained flat. Some improvement in virtually all cases occurred in the next round of elections; however, this improvement varied widely with significant increases in Kyrgyzstan and Bulgaria and very modest increases in Serbia, Ukraine and Georgia (see Table 1). Because the initial postcommunist transitions resulted in a dramatic decrease in women’s representation in virtually all cases, it is important to understand what factors account both for the overall positive trends

after the electoral revolutions and the significant variation among them.



The electoral breakthroughs in Serbia and Croatia, sometimes called their second transitions, provided new opportunities for women’s political mobilization. After nearly a decade of war and government repression, popular opposition to the ruling regime coalesced around the 2000 elections, providing a transformational moment for social, economic and political change. Elements of civil society joined with opposition political parties to mobilize voters to “throw the bums out, ” and in Serbia the election results were upheld by massive street protests. (Pop-Eleches, 2010). As a significant element of civil society, women’s organizations participated centrally in efforts to get out the vote, craft campaign messages, engage in election monitoring, and mobilize popular protest. Nevertheless, the constellation of domestic political forces and the character of the opposition crucially shaped opportunities for women’s rights advocates to promote their political goals.

While the shift in domestic political forces during the electoral revolutions provided the

opportunity for women's organizing, international assistance was a key factor shaping it. Numerous European and American foundations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international organizations (IOs) and national governments provided funding, training and other assistance to women's organizations and other social and political actors with the goal of promoting regime change. The American government was a particularly important funder, and I will focus on American assistance programs in this article. The democracy assistance program deployed in Croatia and Serbia consisted of four main elements: political party development and support; strengthening civil society including women's organizations; increasing the capacity of independent media, and strengthening the rule of law, including election laws and monitoring (USAID, 1997). While such aid may not have precipitated the electoral breakthroughs, it undoubtedly fueled them in essential ways (Bunce and Wolchik, 2006, 2011; Carothers, 2004).

The modes of women's organizing in Serbia and Croatia leading up to the 2000 elections can be compared along several dimensions. Drawing upon studies of social movements and political change, I identify three components key to effective political action: creating capacity, finding voice, and forging alliances. Creating capacity draws upon resource mobilization theory of social movements that stresses the resources—organizational, financial, administrative, and leadership—necessary to build an effective movement (McCarthy and Zald, 1987, 2001). Creating capacity for women's activists involves establishing a robust network of urban and rural organizations that pursue both practical and strategic aims, what one eminent Croatian activist has called an ethic of care and an ethic of politics (Baldez, 2003; Borić, 2003; Brand, 1998; Fitzsimmons, 2000). Strong leaders and leadership structures are also essential to the organizational capacity of women's activism. Finding voice draws upon cultural theories of social movements that stress identity formation and issue framing (Johnston and Klandermans,



1995; Rose, 1997; Ryan and Gamson, 2006). For gender equality activists, this involves forging a collective identity around shared gender interests and framing issues that can shape and inspire action (Luciak, 2001; Okeke-Ihejirika and Franceschet, 2002; Razavi, 2001; Vincent, 2001). Political process theories of social movements stress the importance of political opportunities, political allies and coalitions (McAdam et al., 2001; Meyer, 2004; Tarrow, 1998). Such alliances may involve other social movements and civil society organizations as well as political groups and actors in the formal political sphere. In forging alliances women's organizations must balance the risk of being subordinated to the strategies and goals of other political actors with the need for political support (Friedman, 2000; Seidman, 1999).

The different ways in which gender equality activists in Serbia and Croatia approached the challenges of creating capacity, finding voice and forging alliances resulted in different strategies of political action with different political outcomes. The insider/inclusionary strategy women's organizations adopted in Croatia focused on inclusion in the formal political sphere while the outsider/oppositional strategy women's organizations adopted in Serbia propelled them on to the streets. These different strategies resulted in different political outcomes for gender equality, at least in the short term. In considering the extent to which women's organizations and activists achieved their political goals through these strategies, I will focus on the immediate aims of women's organizing during the electoral breakthroughs in Serbia and Croatia including their ability to get their issues included in the programs of the opposition political parties, to increase the number of women elected to political office, and to facilitate the passage of gender equity legislation and the establishment of gender agencies within the newly elected governments.

## **THE ELECTORAL BREAKTHROUGH IN CROATIA**

The 2000 elections were viewed in Croatia and abroad as a pivotal moment in the attempt to get democratization back on track; removing the ruling party of President Franjo Tudjman, the Croatian Democratic Union (CDU), from power was considered essential to this task. Throughout the 1990s, democratic political change in Croatia had remained stalled somewhere between electoral and liberal democracy, in what Carothers (2002) has labeled the phase of “dominant power politics.” During its early years in power, the CDU had garnered considerable popular support as it was perceived as the political party most capable of achieving state-building goals (Cohen, 1997; Irvine, 1997). While many of these goals had been achieved by the second half of the decade, the ruling party faced growing opposition due to its mismanagement of market reforms and its repressive political practices. The diminishing popularity of the ruling party was indicated by the CDU’s relatively poor showing in the 1995 elections to the lower house and the 1997 elections to the upper house of the Sabor.

If the theme of the 2000 elections was the declining popularity of the ruling Croatian Democratic Union, their outcome lay in the ability of the opposition to overcome its ineffectiveness and fragmentation and join with forces in civil society. The first sign that opposition forces would finally be able to do so came in the summer of 1998, when the leaders of the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the Croatian Social Liberal Party (CSLP) announced the formation of an electoral coalition. After undertaking a program of internal reform in the mid-1990s, the SDP had recovered much of its popular support and, along with its coalition partner the CSLP, it potentially represented a good portion of the electorate (Zakošek, 2002). Together with international advisors, they crafted a campaign message focused on economic corruption, the eroding standard of living, and pensions and other benefits (Carter et al., 2002).

Meanwhile, at the strenuous urging of international advisors, they strengthened their ties to organizations and activists in civil society (Carter et al., 2002; Ekterović, 2001). By the beginning of 1999, they were cooperating with one another in diverse ways with the common purpose of defeating the ruling party in the upcoming elections (Bunce and Wolchik, 2011; Irvine, 2007).

American and other democracy assistance programs provided an important impetus for this increasing cooperation among opposition political parties and between political parties and civil society. The American government had supported the Tudjman government earlier on in the war but had increasingly come to see it as an obstacle to further reform (Cohen, 1997; Gagnon, 2002, 2004; Gow, 1997). After the Dayton Peace Agreement brought the conflict formally to a close in the fall of 1995, American assistance shifted from largely humanitarian aid, through the Office of Foreign Disaster Relief to democracy promotion through the Office of Transition Initiatives and the USAID Regional Bureaus. Democracy assistance funds increased from roughly 5 million USD in 1996 to 7 million in 1998 to roughly 9 million in 2000 (Carter et al., 2002). By the end of the decade, the overwhelming focus of this aid was on defeating Tudjman and the ruling CDU in the 2000 elections. US democracy assistance programs in Croatia targeted women's groups as one of the strongest forces in civil society, whose interests in promoting fundamental political liberalization reflected their own priorities. Through the highly regarded international non-governmental organization, STAR, in Zagreb, and other local NGOs, the United States government invested heavily in women's leadership training and organizational capacity (Benderly, 2011; Gagnon, 2002).

This international assistance to the opposition forces, along with the waning political fortunes of the CDU, resulted in a decisive defeat for the incumbents. The CDU's share of the

vote plummeted from 43% to 24.5%, while the opposition coalition received over 56.3% of the vote. Members of the democratic opposition were ecstatic that they had finally been able to break the CDU's stranglehold on political life and to offer a program that could compete effectively with the nationalist vision of the ruling party. This sense was particularly strong among members of women's groups, who had helped elect the parties now in power along with 31 female candidates. Through creating capacity, finding voice, and forging alliances, they crafted an insider/inclusionary strategy that translated their strong position in the opposition into direct political gains for women at the polls.

### **Creating Capacity**

By approach of the 2000 elections, women's organizations with a feminist/non-nationalist orientation constituted one of the most dynamic actors in civil society with considerable organizational capacity. The emergence and activity of women's organizations during the 1990s can be roughly broken into two periods: the first period from 1991 to 1995 when they focused on providing relief to war victims, and the second period from 1995 to 1999 when some of these organizations began to operate in the electoral and policymaking realms more broadly (Irvine, 2007). The outbreak of war produced a boost in women's organizing, as women's organizations increased from 5 to 22 in a little over a year (Borić, 2003). During the war years from 1991 to 1995, women's organizations eschewed the "high politics" of the 1992 and 1993 electoral campaigns, concentrating instead on providing care and support to individual victims of the war. After the Dayton Peace Accords brought the fighting to a halt, women's organizations began to turn their attention to the formal political realm. Their grass-roots work during the previous several years had afforded these groups the skills, experience, and

organizational capacities they needed to play a central role in political life (Barilar et al., 2000).

In anticipation of the 1995 parliamentary elections, a number of women's organizations came together to form the Women's Ad Hoc Coalition. The aim of the Ad Hoc Coalition was to promote women's political participation. The Coalition pledged to analyze the ways in which women's issues were represented (or not) in political party programs and in the media, to promote the presence of female candidates on party lists and among their ranks, and to urge women to pay attention to the issue of gender equality in the campaign (Belić and Bijelić, 2001; Dubjević, 1999). The Coalition of dozens of groups formed again for the 1997 elections (for the presidency and the upper house of parliament) and again in 1999 for the 2000 presidential and parliamentary elections. A second network of women's organizations, the Croatian Women's Network, was formed in 1996. Encompassing numerous local and regional women's organizations, it began to work closely with the Ad Hoc Coalition in promoting gender equality through the electoral process. Due in part to an increase in foreign assistance, by 1999 the Ad Hoc Coalition had established central and regional offices with paid staff (Dubjević, 1999). Thus, in the period leading up to the electoral revolution, women's activists in Croatia established a dense network of organizations, linked strongly to local constituents with considerable support from international donors, whose interests coincided with their own.

### **Finding Voice**

Women's organizations and activists in Croatia faced considerable challenges in creating a sense of collective identity around which to formulate interests and issues. Perhaps more than any other region of ex-Yugoslavia, the rising salience of ethnic identity and its relationship to gender caused sharp disagreement among women's rights activists. This led, ultimately, to a

split in the women's movement between what are usually labeled patriotic feminists and disloyal feminists (Korac, 1998; Tripp, 2006). Disloyal feminists adopted, along with other Yugoslav feminists in 1990, a highly critical attitude toward the newly elected nationalist governments and their programs of ethnic mobilization. Privileging their gender identity and analysis, they explicitly linked nationalism, militarism and patriarchy, understanding the former as an outgrowth of the latter. With the outbreak of war in Croatia, patriotic feminists rejected this position. Identifying themselves as part of a "victimized Croatia," they drew a parallel between "woman as victim" and "nation as victim" and moved, in the words of one activist scholar "toward a sort of feminist nationalism or the patriotism of the victimized" (Batinić, 2001; Benderly, 1997). While the patriotic feminists eventually withdrew from political life, disloyal feminists went on to form the core of activists around which the Ad Hoc Coalition and the Croatian Women's Network after the end of the war in 1995 (Irvine, 2007). A main goal became the greater inclusion of women in the political process, and they were able to unite supporters around this theme.

Once united around the importance of increasing political participation, women's organizations and activists placed it within a larger human rights framework. According to most scholarly accounts, the framing of women's rights as human rights, which emerged in the 1980s, provided a particularly effective device around which to galvanize action on behalf of gender equality worldwide (Ferree and Tripp, 2006; Hawkesworth, 2006; Keck and Sikkink, 1998; Merry, 2006). Part of its effectiveness had to do with the fact that it was inclusive enough to be included in more general human rights campaigns and flexible enough to be adapted to local circumstances, as it was in Croatia and Serbia. While Croatian activists had used the language of women's rights as human rights even before the outbreak of war, this framing of women's

activism gained ground, locally and internationally, after the UN Conference on Human Rights in Vienna in 1993 and the UN 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 (Barilar et al., 2000). For Croatian activists who attended these conferences, women's rights as human rights provided a frame for emphasizing the fundamental right of women to be included in the political sphere, and this message was reinforced by international democracy promoters. The human right of political inclusion became the voice of women's activism in Croatia in the lead up to the electoral breakthrough.

The issues relating to political inclusion were spelled out in a number of documents, slogans and demands, beginning with the Ad Hoc Coalition's election platform for which it ultimately gathered 40,000 signatures. The Platform called for 40% of women in decision-making bodies, in executive bodies of political parties and on candidate lists, as well as the formation of a parliamentary body on gender equality (Barilar et al., 2000). Women's rights activists therefore campaigned heavily for the election of women to political office, where it was believed their impact on the system would be quick and profound. The Platform also called for an end to biased or distorted presentation of women in the media and the introduction of "measures to combat sexism, prejudice and stereotypes" (Belić and Bijelić, 2001). Emphasizing the need for a significant social transformation, the Coalition's election slogan demanded that men "share responsibility in the home and power in the state (Belić and Bijelić, 2001).

Thus, despite profound splits among women activists in the early part of the decade concerning the relationship between ethnic and gender identities, by the latter half of the decade the voice of women's activism focused on promoting women's inclusion in a reformed political sphere. The struggle for human rights, especially full political rights, became the predominant discourse of the 2000 elections, and women's organizations were central to articulating and

promoting it.

### **Forging Alliances**

Women's organizations pursued a strongly coalitional strategy during the electoral breakthrough in Croatia. In the months leading up to the elections, weekly seminars, training sessions, conferences, and other activities sponsored by democracy assistance programs brought together women's organizations and activists with party leaders, women members of the parliament, foreign consultants and trainers, and election monitoring groups. They also encouraged linkages between women's organizations and other civil society organizations. For example, the Ad Hoc Coalition and the Croatian Women's Network played a crucial role in Glas (Voice) '99, an organization of 148 NGOs dedicated to getting out the vote, and GONG (Citizens Organized to Monitor Elections), an election monitoring organization (Jasić, 2002; Fisher and Bijelić, 2007). They also established close ties with women's sections of the trade unions, which were growing in strength during this period (Ekterović, 2001). The women's section of the largest trade union, Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Croatia (UATUC), was particularly active not only in fighting against discrimination on the job and within the UATUC leadership, but also in putting gender issues on the union agenda and developing women trade union leaders (Conclusions of the International Trade Union Conference, 1998). Moreover, union advocacy for women's issues had a multiplier effect in the political arena, where female trade unionists campaigned for female candidates (Ženska seksija SSSH, 1999). Mindful of the large number of union voters (the four largest trade unions claimed more than half a million members total), political party leaders paid attention when UATUC leaders spoke (Carter et al., 2002).



An important difference between earlier elections and the elections of 2000 was a shift in the balance of forces that allowed women's organizations to find compatible election allies. Women's organizations established effective alliances with opposition political parties in large part because of their own growing strength, but also because of changes in the opposition itself, which united around a program of political reform. Moreover, the opposition political parties were now committed to establishing close links with civil society actors, including women's organizations (Knežević and Zaborski-Čunović, 2000). This shift was strongly encouraged by American democracy assistance programs, especially those run by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI). The NDI provided extensive training to political parties in the run-up to the 2000 elections, emphasizing the need to recruit women to the party leaderships and to respond to the demands of women's organizations in their party platforms. NDI trainers encouraged political parties to recruit women at the local level and to include them in leadership bodies (Gainer, 2002; Gray 2002, NDI Report, 1999). The IRI provided political parties with a way to incorporate women's demands by focusing on pre-election polling and issue framing (Gainer 2002). In their almost weekly encounters with one another in workshops, seminars, and strategy sessions sponsored by American and other international organizations, women's rights and political party activists came to know each other well, and to develop a measure of trust and understanding (Gainer, 2002; Gray 2002; Knežević and Zaborski-Čunović, 2000).

The reemergence of a strong Social Democratic Party, with its history of support for women's issues and candidates, reinforced these links between opposition parties and women's groups. The SPD was the first parliamentary party to institute internal gender quotas and the SPD's women's section, "Forum for SDP Women," figured visibly in pre-election events

(Leaković, 2004; Lokar, 2009). At the same time that female SDP candidates held frequent press conferences on issues relating to women in politics. The head of the party and prime minister after the 2000 elections, Ivica Račan, also highlighted women's political equality, calling for the institutionalization of government bodies to promote women's rights and gender equality and the adoption of the main demands of the Ad Hoc Coalition (Novosel, 1999). SDP lists had the highest percentage of female candidates, at 26.6%. While this was far from the SDP's proclaimed quota of 40%, it nevertheless had a significant impact on the election since the SDP received the highest percentage of votes. Political parties such as the SPD included messages concerning gender equality in their party platforms and party leaders frequently spoke about the need to elect women candidates and to enact measures to promote gender equality in the event the opposition won the elections (Novosel, 2002). Moreover, agitation on behalf of gender quotas prompted political parties, including the ruling CDU, to establish women's sections and to adopt internal party quotas, though there was some variation on how strictly the parties adhered to them (Cigelj, 2001; Nikolić, 2002). While it is difficult to establish the extent to which political parties were influenced by women's organizations, it is clear that they had a significant impact on the propensity of political parties to pay attention to women's political equality.

### **Acting Politically**

As we have seen, the constellation of domestic political forces and international assistance programs shaped the political opportunities for promoting women's political equality. In response, key activists and organizations adopted what I have called an insider/inclusionary strategy (see Table 2). In creating capacity, women's organizations were able to remain

responsible to their base, which had moved toward an emphasis on women's political inclusion already in the mid-1990s. When democracy assistance programs developed, they reinforced this goal. In finding voice, women's organizations stressed how women's rights as human rights meant full inclusion in the political sphere. Finally, the key role of women's organization in the opposition coalition gave them an insider position from which to influence the discourse and goals of the opposition. As Philomina Okeke-Ihejirika and Susan Franceschet (2002) have pointed out, when women's organizations draw on the prevalent political discourse and make gender-based demands from within its parameters, they are more likely to realize their political aims in the process of democratization. This proved true in the Croatian case where, as political insiders, women's organizations were able to promote gender equality successfully during the mobilizing moment of the electoral breakthrough.

The impact of acting politically "in the government" during and after the electoral revolution can be seen in several areas. First, the Ad Hoc Coalition's platform circulated widely and many of its demands were adopted in the party platforms of several political parties. Second, in response to political pressure from women's organizations and a desire to garner the female vote, political parties adopted women's sections (in some cases) and internal party quotas (in most cases), and placed women candidates in viable positions on party lists, significantly increasing women's representation in parliament. Finally, the new SPD-led government kept its promise to pay attention to women's issues after the election, moving quickly to establish a Parliamentary Committee for Gender Equality in 2000, and to pass a Law on Gender Equality and a Law of Protection from Domestic Violence in 2003.

**TABLE 2: Strategies of Women’s Organizing in Serbia and Croatia**

<b>Electoral Strategies</b>		
	<b>Croatia: Inside/Inclusionary</b>	<b>Serbia: Outsider/Oppositional</b>
<b>Creating Capacity</b>	Networks; ties to base; ties to donors and strong coinciding interests	Urban; low networks among women’s organizations; weak donor control of priorities
<b>Finding Voice</b>	Women’s rights as human rights = political inclusion	Women’s rights as human rights = opposition to regime; “the politics of antipolitics”
<b>Forging Alliances</b>	Coalitional politics: alliances with political parties especially SPD; unions	Autonomous, weak ties to parties, unions, and Otpor
<b>Acting Politically</b>	In the government	In the streets

## **THE ELECTORAL BREAKTHROUGH IN SERBIA**

The electoral breakthrough in Serbia, also known as the bulldozer revolution in reference to the single bulldozer that stormed the Parliament building on October 6<sup>th</sup>, was a result of a several main causes. First, and most importantly, it was a result of a grassroots campaign of popular opposition to Slobodan Milošević’s rule led by the student group OTPOR (resistance) formed in October 1998 (Jennings, 2009; Bieber, 2003; Cevallos, 2001; Stojanović, 2008; Bujošević and Radovanović, 2003; Paulson, 2005). OTPOR founders devised a strategy of protest based upon a commitment to nonviolence and a use creative tactics, which they honed through training with American democracy promoters (Bunce and Wolchik, 2011; Carothers, 2004). The success of OTPOR’s organizational and activist strategy was reflected in its

phenomenal growth from a handful of organizers in the fall of 1998, to 10,000 members in January 2000 to 80,000 members by the September elections. Together with a coalition of forces from civil society, including women's organizations and activists, and an alliance of opposition political parties, the grassroots opposition was instrumental in convincing the public that a real alternative to the Milošević regime existed, that it was electable if people would go to the polls, and that OTPOR and its allies could and would respond if Milošević tried to steal the election again (Bieber, 2003; Bujošević and Radovanović, 2003; Cevallos, 2001; Jennings, 2009; Paulson, 2005; Stojanović, 2008).

The second major factor in the electoral revolution in Serbia was the ability of opposition political parties to offer a viable and coherent alternative to the Milošević regime. Throughout the 1990s, the opposition had proved incapable of offering real resistance to Milošević, who in any case was a master of divide and conquer. Numerous, ideologically ill-defined and often formed around the political ambitions of a particular leader, these parties were ill suited for sustained political cooperation and easily manipulated by Milošević's well-oiled machine. It took sustained popular and international pressure and the departure of the ineffective but key politician, Vuk Drašković, from the scene for a viable united opposition to emerge around the DOS coalition (Bieber, 2003). Formed in advance of the 2000 elections, DOS offered the moderate nationalist leader of the Serbian Democratic Party (DSS), Vojislav Koštunica, as presidential candidate and the reform-oriented leader of the Democratic Party, Zoran Djindjić, as prime minister.

The third factor driving the electoral revolution was international assistance. The electoral breakthrough model had already taken shape with its successful implementation in other postcommunist countries, including neighboring Croatia at the beginning of 2000; its

diffusion to Serbia was assisted by combination of “collaborative networks among international democracy promoters, local opposition and regional exporters of democracy” (Bunce and Wolchik, 2006). During 1999, five separate meetings on democracy promotion in Serbia, hosted by the German Marshall Fund, convened in Washington, DC, attended by Serbian as well as other international actors. Over that period of time, American democracy assistance aid increased dramatically, reaching a total of \$50 million in 2000 of which the lion’s share went to OTPOR (Bunce and Wolchik, 2011). As in Croatia, democracy assistance included training of political parties, political party campaign messages, get out the vote, election monitoring, opposition forces and civil society initiatives. Women’s organizations were funded in order to increase political participation among pro-opposition portions of the electorate and as part of the larger commitment to women’s political equality (Carter et al., 2002; Stojanović, 2008).

Elections proved to be extremely effective events around which to galvanize the opposition, as Romania, Bulgaria, Slovakia and Croatia had already demonstrated, and Serbia was no exception. The opposition won the elections for the Federal Parliament and presidency in September, which Milošević only recognized after massive street protests. These gains were solidified by the results of the elections to the Serbian Parliament in December. Nevertheless, while the elections were an exhilarating victory for the opposition, many women were disappointed that their consistent resistance to Milošević’s nationalist policies and their participation in the electoral breakthrough had not translated into gains for women at the polls (Stojanović, 2008). Of the 178 candidates elected to the federal parliament, only 8 were women. In order to understand why the outcome of the electoral breakthrough was less favorable for women’s representation than in Croatia, it is necessary to examine the ways in which domestic and international forces shaped women’s opportunities and strategies for creating capacity,

finding voice, and forging alliances during Milošević's rule.

### **Creating Capacity**

In Serbia, the first multiparty elections in 1990 prompted an explosion of women's organizing in Belgrade as it moved from primarily practical organizations focused on addressing victims of violence against women to more strategic organizations, including the Belgrade Women's Lobby; the women's political party, ZEST, and the Women's Parliament (Cockburn, 1991; Hughes et al., 1995; Imširović, 1998). These organizations endorsed a platform of fundamental political change, greater gender equality and opposition to the nationalist ideologies and policies of Milošević's Socialist Party and other nationalist political parties (Ćetković et al, 1993; Ćetković, 1998). As war loomed on the horizon, women's organizations and activists turned their attention increasingly to peace activism. Members of the women's party helped found the Anti-War Center in the summer of 1991, with some breaking away to form a separate "non-sexist" anti-war organization, Women in Black, that fall; other women's organizations formed in the upcoming months to provide aid to women's refuges and victims of wartime violence (Božinović 1998, Blagojević 1998). Several of these participated in the larger waves of anti-Milosevic protests that erupted in 1991, 1992, and 1996/97 (Blagojević, 2006; Čičkarić, 2006; Korac, 1998).

Despite the considerable presence of women's organizations in Belgrade, they faced significant obstacles in attempting to increase their capacity in the countryside. Milošević's stranglehold over rural areas and the lingering popularity of the nationalist platform he championed made organizing on behalf of gender equality in rural areas a difficult task. As the decade progressed, women's rights activists did establish a strong presence in such towns as Niš

and Novi Sad. Women's organizations in towns throughout Serbia were drawn increasingly into loose networks through the Women's Network established in 1994 and other forms of cooperation (Drljević, Stojanović, and Minić, 1998). Nevertheless, the pervasiveness of nationalist views and the repressiveness of Milošević's rule hindered the Women's Network from unifying around a political platform of electing women to office until 2000. Indeed, although women's organizations published material denouncing the treatment of women politicians in the several years before the 2000 elections, a call for more women to enter politics was noticeably absent (Ćetković, 1998).

As aid increased in the months before the 2000 elections, women's organizations began to widen their capacity and channel it toward the formal political sphere. A new women's organization, Glas Razlike (Voice of Difference) was formed in Belgrade in the fall of 1999 with the purpose of increasing women's political participation and representation in the formal political sphere. In the summer of 2000, with NDI training and funding, Glas Razlike launched a door to door campaign that reached tens of thousands of mostly rural women, soliciting their political opinions and encouraging them to vote (Stojanović, 2008; Glas Razlike 2000, 2001). This work appears to have been successful in getting out the vote as, according to some analysts, the opposition could thank the larger number of women voters in part for their success (Stojanović, 2008). Nevertheless, despite the scope of this effort, it was simply too short a period of time to establish strong organizational capacity throughout the country. In short, the repression of the Milošević regime hindered the ability of women's organizations and activists to create capacity.

Finally, as we shall see, the priorities of women's organizations and activists did not always correspond with their donors. Although both wished to see Milošević removed from



power, and to mobilize women to vote against him in the elections, women's organizations did not always agree with the emphasis democracy assistance programs placed on increasing women's representation in the formal political sphere and on building coalitions with opposition political parties and politicians, particularly those who had failed to oppose Milošević during the previous decade (Stojanović, 2008). Rather, in finding voice, women's organizations and activists remained deeply skeptical of "politics as usual" and of promoting women's presence in the formal political arena.

### **Finding Voice**

In the rapidly shifting circumstances of ethnic mobilization, the collapse of state socialism, and war, women's organizations and activists in Serbia also faced difficult questions concerning the relationship between the ethnic and gender identities. Nevertheless, they quickly unified around opposition to the nationalist policies of the Milošević regime and the "patriarchal nationalism" that fueled it. Women in Black became a strong voice of women's activism in Belgrade during the 1990s, with its highly symbolic (and often dangerous) public opposition to the Milošević regime, its emphasis on peace activism, and its insistence on patriarchy as the root cause of militarism and war (Zajović, 2003; 2008). Women in Black activists were not interested in joining a regime they perceived as irredeemably corrupted; rather their activism was aimed at exposing and opposing it. For them, the women's rights as human rights framework meant the opposition to patriarchal militarism and the promotion of peace. Other women's organizations generally shared this focus on opposing militarism and the Milošević regime (Ćetković et al, 1996, 1997, 1998).

This position reflected the attitude of women's rights activists and women in Serbia more

generally, who expressed a much higher level of skepticism than men of the political process (Blagojević, 1999). Indeed, they remained deeply suspicious of opposition politicians and political parties, which they believed were corrupt and easily co-opted. Thus, despite the visibility of women's organizing during the 1990s, they remained largely outside the formal political arena in contrast to Croatia where they heavily promoted women's political participation. Feminist organizations in Serbia fiercely opposed the Milošević regime and its nationalist policies but they also opposed the very idea of participating in formal politics. While they deplored the treatment of women in politics, they did not actively promote the entrance of larger numbers of women into the formal political arena. Indeed, according to activist and sociologist Marina Blagojević, even politically active women remained detached from political parties and formal politics, "thus affirming a new form of political action, nonparty, supra-party, extra-institutional political action--actually a new form of political activism close to civil society" (Blagojević, 1999, p. 123).

The new round of organizing in anticipation of the 2000 elections led some activists to endorse the goal of increasing women's political leadership and engaging in the political sphere. For example, women's organizations convened under OSCE auspices in Palić in January 2000 to produce an election platform that specifically focused on increasing women's participation in the formal political sphere. The Palić Platform called upon women to vote and to run for political office and for political parties to pay more attention to women's concerns (Palić šest godina kasnije). Nevertheless, the goals of the Palić Platform remained outside the experience and aims of most groups. Even leaders in Glas Razlike, which officially supported quotas for women, shied away from promoting them seriously during the 2000 elections campaigns. According to Glas director, "...that came later, after. We were happy if women were not there with SPS and

SRS” (Stojanović, 2008). Rather, instead of seeing the political arena as potentially changed by the election of women, activists in Serbia tended to assume that women would be corrupted by the political arena, and they resisted efforts by international donors and trainers to focus on this goal (Mršević, 2008). As Slavica Stojanović put it: “There was that pressure from many parts to cooperate. Partnerships, partnerships were pushed and we knew that it would ruin everybody” (2008). They remained equally skeptical of the idea, promoted by American democracy assistance programs that they should cooperate closely with a wide spectrum of political parties and politicians even as their first priority remained electing the opposition. This made the task of finding political allies a difficult one indeed.

### **Forging Alliances**

In contrast to Croatia, women’s organizations faced serious challenges in finding allies among political parties and in civil society, and they consequently pursued a strategy of disengagement rather than coalition building. Women had participated in roughly equal numbers to men in the student and community protests against Milošević in 1996/1997, playing an active role in “creative” leadership functions (Blagojević, 1996, 1998). Although they continued to play an active role in OTPOR, their leadership role appears to have declined as the 2000 elections approached (American Bar Association, 2003). Indeed, in an analysis on its tenth anniversary, only one woman was listed among ten prominent founding members of OTPOR (B-92, 2008). Women’s organizations participated in street protests and actions during the electoral breakthrough, where they attempted to insert feminist messages into the discourse. But these were never endorsed by OTPOR, which was in any case a single-issue organization. The relationship between women’s organizations and OTPOR can best be described as one of fellow

travelers, rather than as a coalition with common aims (beyond overthrowing the government) and interests. Moreover, despite the impressive work of such labor union activists as Vesna Bajić in the labor union Nezavisnost, women's organizations struggled to find close allies among the trade unions, which remained resistant to women's leadership and issues throughout this period (Americana Bar Association, 2003). In short, civil society allies, so important in the Croatia case, were harder to find in the Serbian case.

The situation proved no more propitious in the formal political arena. Forging alliances among civil society, the public, and political parties was a major emphasis of NDI and IRI assistance (American Bar Association, 2003). Nevertheless, close cooperation between women's organizations and political parties did not materialize in Serbia, although some credit women's organizations, along with OTPOR, for working hard to keep DOS coalition intact (Benderly, 2011; Stojanović, 2008; Ruzdić, 2008). Political parties and opposition leaders sometimes paid lip service to including women, probably in order to appease international donors, but they took little concrete action. According to research conducted by Glas Razlike before the election, virtually no political parties addressed the issue of women's status and political equality in their party platforms and other documents (Glas Razlike, 2000, 2001). Moreover, women's sections were not a feature of the political party landscape as they were in Croatia. Finally, there was no equivalent to the Social Democratic Party in Croatia, which commanded large popular support and drew upon the history of social democratic support for women's rights. Whereas the Social Democratic and other political parties in Croatia adopted internal party quotas, and increased the number of women candidates offered on their lists, Serbian political parties failed to do so. Former Parliamentary representative Lejla Ruzdić describes how even after opposition political parties in Serbia pledged their support for such internal quotas most of them failed to include a

significant number of female candidates on their electoral lists (Ruzdić, 2008). Indeed, although 14 of the 18 parties in the opposition DOS coalition signed an agreement to include 30% female candidates on the coalition list, only 14% of DOS candidates were women (OSCE, 2001). At the same time, women continued to be excluded from the internal decision making bodies of the opposition political parties (American Bar Association, 2003).

### **Acting Politically**

Contextual factors thus shaped the political opportunities to which women's organizations and activists responded in adopting an outsider/oppositional mobilizing strategy in Serbia. The logic of this strategy caused them to act in the streets rather than in the government. Political conditions, especially outside the capital city, hindered the ability of women's organizations to create capacity, and this in turn hindered their ability to play a central role in the unfolding second transition. It also hampered their ability to forge alliances. Although strongly supportive of OTPOR, women's organizations were not able to insert their political demands into OTPOR's own goals; nor were they able to make headway with the opposition political leadership, who appear to have viewed them as irrelevant at best. Despite strong messages from democracy promoters about the importance of increasing women's political participation and representation, many women's rights activists distrusted the political process and remained wary of focusing on increasing women's representation in parliament. In any case, their priority was promoting the opposition coalition, not advancing women in politics. Thus, they remained outsiders in the electoral breakthrough, focusing their political action primarily on opposing the regime "on the streets."

The outsider/oppositional strategy, adopted in response to situational constraints,

hindered the ability of women's organizations and activists to increase women's political participation in the short term. The demands of the Palić Platform were not adopted in any party platforms nor did it become an important part of the discourse of the electoral breakthrough (Glas Razlike, 2000, 2001). Moreover, few women's candidates were placed on opposition party lists and therefore few were elected to office. Finally, in the months after the election, little action was taken to introduce gender equality legislation or gender mechanisms in government. It would take the better part of the decade for women's activists in Serbia to achieve this goal with the establishment of a Gender Equality Directorate in 2007 and the passage of a Gender Equity Law in 2009. The process of drafting a law on protection from domestic violence was underway in 2010.

## **CONCLUSION**

In 2000 both Croatia and Serbia experienced electoral breakthroughs that removed their repressive regimes from power and replaced them with liberal opposition forces committed to fundamental reform. These breakthroughs were the result of domestic political developments but also of strong external support from democracy assistance programs geared toward mobilizing the populace around critical turn-over elections. Women's organizations were an integral part of this effort to build an oppositional coalition and to galvanize voters perceived as most likely to vote for reform. To this end, democracy assistance programs offered opportunities for women's organizations and activists to promote the goal of increased political participation. They helped women's organizations increase capacity by encouraging urban-rural networks of women's organizations and by reaching out to rural constituents through their get out the vote campaigns. Moreover, these programs focused on building alliances between women's

organizations and other forces in civil society and in the political arena. Finally, they assisted in bolstering women's organizations ability to voice their interests and demands within the larger frame of women's rights as human rights.

Thus, while many studies have rightfully pointed to the dangers of international assistance for women's organizing, this study suggests that the overall purpose of democracy assistance programs during electoral breakthroughs produced favorable conditions for women's organizing on behalf of women's increased political participation. By focusing on building movements, rather than on funding NGOs for limited projects, which has been the operation mode of international assistance in such neighboring areas as Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, these programs had the potential for strengthening women's organizing. This, in turn, appears to have had a larger impact on women's status through the legislative process in the months and years after the electoral breakthroughs.

Nevertheless, women's organizations and gender equality activists were not simply passive recipients of international aid. Rather, they shaped their mobilizing strategies in response to local political opportunities and constraints. In Croatia, favorable conditions existed for promoting women's political participation and, especially, the election of women representatives; women's organizations possessed the capacity to play a central role in the electoral breakthroughs; the unified voice demanding political inclusion and the alliances that gave them an insider seat. Rather than being subsumed by these allied forces, they succeeded in shaping their discourse and actions. The insider/inclusionary strategy of women's organizations corresponded with the interests of their international donors in promoting political inclusion. In Serbia, women's organization experienced less favorable conditions for promoting women's participation in the formal political sphere. Due to the repressive conditions under the Milošević

regime, they had weaker country-side capacity and therefore played a less central role in the electoral breakthrough. Their voice spoke more to issues of peace and the anti-politics of civil society than to electing women to office. Finding few acceptable allies among politicians and political parties, they remained outside the opposition political coalition. And, while they shared the goal of removing Milošević from power, they experienced more tension in balancing their goals and values and the priorities of international democracy promoters. The outsider/oppositional strategy they adopted as a result of conditions in Serbia did not result in immediate significant gains for women's representation in the federal or republic elections. Nevertheless, it did contribute to the strength of the oppositional coalition and result in the immediate goal of removing a repressive regime from power.

In conclusion, women's organizations played a significant though varying role in the electoral breakthroughs in Croatia and Serbia. Mobilizing strategies in the two cases, based on the interplay of context and choice, ultimately resulted in gains for the opposition and for gender equality. Indeed, women's organizations in Serbia were successful in strengthening capacity, voice and alliances in the decade after the electoral breakthrough that ultimately resulted in greater political inclusion. This suggests that the electoral breakthroughs, while they produced different immediate outcomes in these two cases, did create more propitious circumstances for women's political inclusion in the long run. Drawing upon the framework outlined in this article, further comparative work is necessary to understand the range of strategies of women's organizing and outcomes for gender equality in other countries that have experienced electoral breakthroughs.



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