

How do female deputies differ from male deputies?

von Adéla Seidlová, Prag

Members of Parliament,¹ especially in countries undergoing the post-Communist transition to democracy, can be categorized as a body that has been acquiring new political experience in a whole spectrum of areas, and has become more professional in its outlook, as its members become politicians. The politicians have been forming, and the majority of them are periodically adding to, a new political elite.

The "Political System Changes" team of the Institute of Sociology, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, has been studying the issue of the highest elected representatives for a long time, not only in partial short-term projects but especially in two basic developing elements, questionnaire surveys² and a database of the highest elected representatives, which is being created at the Documentation and Information Center on Central European Parliaments³. I have drawn data for this study from these sources.

Members of Parliament by gender between 1986 and 2000

The number of women in Parliament in the course of this period has changed, falling from the original 27.5 % (the Czech National Committee, hereinafter the ÈNR) and 29.4 % (the Federal Assembly, hereinafter the FS) in 1986 to 15.0 % (the House of Deputies, hereinafter the PS) and 11.1 % (the Senate) after the elections in 1998 (see Table 1). The ratio of men to women in connection with the change of the political regime has changed dramatically especially due to the fact that at the time of Communist Parliaments there were quotas for women in the electoral candidate lists. In this period (5th electoral term of the FS ÈSSR as well as ÈNR), there were also "female workers and agriculturalists"; out of the total number of 55 women (i.e., 27.5% of the Parliament) elected to the ÈNR in 1986, there were four women (i.e., 7 % of women) who had completed a university degree. For the sake of comparison: 46% of men in this House of Deputies had completed a university degree; among women elected in the 1998 elections to the House of Deputies, 24 out of the total 30 elected women had completed a university degree (i.e., 80 % of the total number of elected women).

Table 1: Members of Parliament and Senate members by gender

	ÈNR 86	FS 86	PSP 94	SP 96	PSP 98	Senate 98	Senate 00
No. of men	145	247	181	173	170	72	71
No. of men (%)	72.5	70.6	90.5	86.5	85.0	88.9	87.7
No. of women	55	103	19	27	30	9	10
No. of women (%)	27.5	29.4	9.5	13.5	15.0	11.1	12.3

Source: Archives of the House of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic (PSP ÈR)

At a glance, the number of women in the Houses throughout the nineties seems rather low compared to 1986. According to the statements of female deputies, however, this ratio is completely natural and women are not discriminated against in any way by the political parties.

Relationship of male to female deputies in Committees

We can derive the attitude of male deputies to female deputies from the composition of Parliamentary Committees and the prestige these Committees have among male deputies. Data available to us pertains to the composition of the Parliamentary Committees of the House of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic in the second electoral term (1996–1998), the prestige of individual Committees among Members of Parliament as stated in this survey at the end of this electoral term and the composition of the Parliamentary Committees of the House of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic in the third electoral term (since 1998 until now).

In the second electoral term, an average male deputy worked in 1.95 committees, commissions and delegations, and an average female deputy worked in 2.11 committees, commissions and delegations. In the third electoral term, an average male deputy has worked in 1.83 committees, commissions and delegations, and an average female deputy worked in 1.93 committees, commissions and delegations (see Table 2).

In the survey, Members of Parliament answered the question which three Parliamentary Committees have, in their opinion, the highest and which three Parliamentary Committees the lowest prestige. We obtained the resulting index – the prestige of a parliamentary committee – as a difference in the number of respondents who stated that a given committee is one of the three committees with the highest prestige, and the number of respondents who stated that a given committee is one of the three with the lowest prestige.

According to this index, the most prestigious committee is the Budget Committee (the prestige index equals 79.3 %), followed by the Constitution and Legal Committee (index

55.1 %) and the Economic Committee (index 37.9 %). In the second electoral term, there were 6 female deputies, i.e., 9.7%, out of the total number of 62 members working in these three committees (all six were Members of the Constitution and Legal Committee); in the third electoral term, out of the total 63 Members there were 6 female deputies, i.e., 9.5% (1 female member of the Budget Committee and 5 female Members of the Constitution and Legal Committee).

Table 2: Average membership of Members of Parliament in committees, commission and delegations of the House of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic in the second and third electoral terms, by gender.

	A	B	C	D
Male deputies in PSP ÈR 96	1.27	0.40	0.28	1.95
Female deputies in PSP ÈR 96	1.37	0.44	0.30	2.11
Male deputies PSP ÈR 98	1.21	0.29	0.33	1.83
Female deputies PSP ÈR 98	1.37	0.23	0.33	1.93

A=Committees, B=Commissions, C=Delegations, D=Total

Source: Archives of the House of Deputies of the Parliament of the Czech Republic (PSP ÈR)

Among all the Parliamentary Committee the prestige index of which is positive, female deputies were represented significantly only in one committee, namely, the Social Policy and Health Care Committee with 8 women in the 19-member committee in the second electoral term and 9 women in the 21-member committee in the third electoral term. Other committees where female deputies were represented to a larger extent were the Mandate and Parliamentary Privilege Committee, the Petition Committee and the Committee for Science, Education, Culture, Youth and Sports (3 committees with the lowest prestige index value); in the third electoral term, these were the Petition Committee (traditionally, a committee with the lowest prestige; in this electoral term the portion of women reached 47.1 %) and the Agricultural Committee (with a negative prestige index value).

Relationship between Members of Parliament and voters

The relationship of Members of Parliament to voters is illustrated by the issue of to what extent Members of Parliament agree with the use of various (even by means of pressure) tools to enforce the will of citizens if the will of Parliament opposes it. The suggested tools were as follows: submitting petitions to the Parliament, writing letters to deputies, threats of strikes / strikes, organization of demonstrations, personal visits to deputies, participation in the meetings of Parliamentary Committees and commissions, negotiations with political clubs, negotiations with party leadership, opinions published in the media and telephone negotiations with deputies. Members of Parliament were most open to letter writing, personal visits and participation in meetings of the Parliamentary Committees and commissions.

Furthermore, it is possible to divide these mechanisms into those with which female deputies tend to agree more and those with which male deputies tend to agree more. Female deputies agree more with the distribution of petitions to Parliament (female deputies "absolutely agree" by 14.9 % more than male deputies), letter writing (female deputies "absolutely agree" by 9.9 % more than male deputies), personal visits to deputies (female deputies "absolutely agree" by 5.1 % more than male deputies), co-participation of citizens at meetings of Parliamentary Committees and commissions (female deputies "absolutely agree" by 9.4 % more than male deputies) and opinions in the media (female deputies "absolutely agree" by 17.5 % more than male deputies).

Only one instrument of pressure found more support among male deputies than female deputies, and that was the threat of a strike/strike. Male deputies "absolutely" agreed by 8.7 % more than female deputies, and "absolutely" and "rather" agreed by 13.1 % more than female deputies. On the other hand, 20.1 % male deputies "absolutely" disagreed (compared to 8.3 % female deputies).

Table 3: To what extent do you agree with the use of the following tool: threaten to strike/ strike to express citizens' will if this will does not find a response in Parliament?

	Male deputy	Female deputy
Absolutely agree	25.4%	16.7%
Rather agree	12.7%	8.3%
Neither agree nor disagree	14.9%	37.5%
Rather disagree	26.9%	29.2%
Absolutely disagree	20.1%	8.3%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Source: Survey of Parliamentary Deputies conducted by SoÚ AV ÈR

Another question that pertained to this issue was the referendum. This issue was explored in two versions. The first asked whether Members of Parliament considered a referendum that would function as a final vote on bills already passed by the Parliament, to be desirable; the second whether Members of Parliament considered a referendum that would be an auxiliary vote on the bills prior to their discussion in the Parliament, to be desirable. In both cases, female deputies were more open. 54.2% of female deputies (but only 40.9% of male deputies) considered the consultation referendum to be desirable, 30.4% of female deputies (and 16.2% male deputies) considered the referendum as a final vote on an already passed bill to be desirable.

Conclusions

We can state that female deputies are seen, both by voters and their male colleagues, as less professionally defined by field and tend to be classified generally by humanitarian fields, such as social policy, healthcare, education, culture or regional issues. No female deputy in the PSP ÈR (i.e.,

since 1993) has ever been a member of the Economic Committee. In the Budget Committee, Committee of Foreign Affairs, Agricultural Committee and the Committee for Defense and Security (formerly the Armed Forces and Security Committee), female deputies appear only sporadically, in some electoral terms not at all. Moreover, there are only 2 female deputies in the new Committee for the European Integration (established in the third electoral term).

Although it appears that voters approach female deputies more than male deputies (as evidenced from the frequency of personal dealings with voters) and although female deputies generally agree more with various instruments of citizen/voter pressure than male deputies, it is not true that female deputies are more voter-oriented than male deputies.

When asked whether they feel to represent first and foremost "members of their party", "voters of their party", "all citizens of the constituency" or "all citizens of the Czech Republic", female deputies selected the alternatives "all citizens of the Czech Republic" and "all citizens of the constituency" more than male deputies. No female deputy stated that she felt first and foremost be a representative of "member of her party" (but 5.2 % male deputies did) and female deputies also selected the answer that they felt to be representatives of "voters of their party" less frequently than male deputies.

Another issue where such a strong attachment to voters could be revealed was the question how a deputy should vote if s/he held a different opinion than that of voters. When asked whether s/he, in such a case, should vote "in agreement with the voters' opinion", "in agreement with the party line" or "in agreement with their own opinion", female deputies, unlike male deputies, were always able to make a decision. With comparable values for both genders as to the option "in agreement with the voters' opinion", more female deputies opted for the answer "in agreement with the party line of their party". This difference is, however, not substantial enough to become statistically significant in relation to the size of the sample (161 deputies).

Adéla Seidlová is a member of the research team "Political Sociology" at the Institute of Sociology of AV ÈR.

¹ For the purposes of this text, I have used the appellation "male deputy" for men and "female deputy" purely for women. If deputies of both gender are involved, I opted for the term "Members of Parliament". Similarly, for general appellation of female and male Senators I have used the term "Senate members". (Translator's Note: the Czech language has a female and male gender noun for a member of the Parliament. The male gender is often, however, used to cover both male and female deputies).

² The project "Deputies and Senators of the Parliament of the Czech Republic in its third term", GA ÈR grant No. 407/00/0747.

³ The project "Information and Documentation Center on Central European Parliaments", GA AV ÈR grant No. S7028003.

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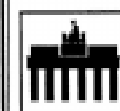
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