Between strategic political power and a daunting task

Exploring Dimensions of Women`s Political Participation in Hybrid Regimes

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# Abstract

Hybrid regimes combine elements of both democratic and authoritarian governance, with potentially flawed democratic processes, suppressed civil liberties and uneven political playing fields. Increasingly, scholarship signals the longevity and resilience of hybrid regimes, especially within broader discourses on rising authoritarianism and democratic decline around the world. The lack of gender perspectives in hybrid regimes research is notable. This oversight largely neglects women’s roles and their impact in such regimes and fails to focus on the potential implications these regimes may have on women’s opportunities for effective participation. However, recent research has increasingly highlighted the gendered aspects of policymaking in hybrid regimes, such as shrinking and changing civic space and democratic backsliding. Moreover, women also face challenges in hybrid regimes that are tied to contested norms and less access to important social networks.

This dissertation explores women’s political participation (WPP) in hybrid regimes. It proposes a framework that conceptualizes WPP as occurring in two interconnected dimensions, civil society and formal political institutions. Therefore, it draws on three previous and emerging research fields: feminist institutionalism (FI), women’s organizing research, and gender and democratization research. Each of these perspectives solely and taken together provide entry points to conceptualize the mechanisms that illustrate how women participate in and across both dimensions – despite and because of the challenges to WPP experienced in hybrid regimes.

The dissertation asks the following research questions: first, what is the association between women’s political participation in formal institutions such as parliaments and civil society across different hybrid regimes and over time? Second, what opportunities for political participation in formal political institutions and civil society do women perceive in hybrid regimes? Finally, what obstacles to their political participation in formal political institutions and civil society do women experience in hybrid regimes?

In this article-based dissertation, a mixed-methods approach is employed to study the dimensions of WPP, combining a quantitative study of hybrid regimes over time with three qualitative studies focused on the empirical case of contemporary Turkey. Turkey is a typical example of a hybrid regime with both democratic and authoritarian characteristics, and the incumbent government’s strategic targeting of gender politics and its actors makes Turkey a significant case to better explore challenges and opportunities for women’s political participation in hybrid regimes.

The dissertation’s findings suggest three main aspects of women’s political participation and political influence in hybrid regimes. First, exploring women’s political participation across civil society and formal political institutions illustrates the interlinked nature of both dimensions and the relevance of these linkages for women’s opportunities to participate in hybrid regimes. Second, hybrid regimes pose complex contexts for women`s political participation, where opportunities to exert influence may change but where incumbent government actors retreat to different strategies targeting women and (anti-) gender equality claims. Hence, women’s political participation across both dimensions must be dynamic to adapt and resist such changing circumstances. Last, the dissertation illustrates the importance of exploring how informal structures, such as norms or gendered practices, interfere with women’s political participation in hybrid regimes. In sum, the dissertation advances gender perspectives in hybrid regime research and illustrates insights from the Turkish case that are relevant for other regime settings.