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## Democratization

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### Democracy assistance and women's political empowerment in post-conflict countries

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## Democracy assistance and women's political empowerment in post-conflict countries<sup>†</sup>

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Democracy promoters around the world cling to the hope that assistance given to civil society organizations decreases the risk of civil war and will lead to democracy in post-conflict societies. A particularly promising segment of civil society in peacebuilding is women. Inspired by Welzel and Inglehart's "human empowerment: path to democracy" this study places democracy assistance to women in a broader mechanism which forms a theoretical foundation of this study. The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the author's insights from the fieldwork demonstrate that in order to assess the impact of democracy assistance on women's political empowerment the comprehensive women's political empowerment mechanism should be employed. The statistical examination, however, reveals that women's political activism is largely the function of legal empowerment and a country's political and socio-economic characteristics. The study also shows the limitations of current impact evaluation methodologies, and suggests better evaluation tools.

**Keywords:** democracy assistance; democracy promotion; NGOs; aid; peacebuilding; women's political empowerment

### Introduction

This study is motivated by the question whether democracy assistance that goes to support women in post-conflict countries has a positive impact on their political empowerment. Democracy assistance, which is a specific type of aid for democratization purposes, has become a fundamental objective of international peace building in post-conflict countries. Many governmental, international, and multi-lateral donor agencies, as well as private donors, international organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have been helping build democracies in societies emerging from violent conflict. Since civil society is known for its

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democratizing potential much democracy assistance has been channelled to support civil society organizations.

Apart from numerous studies focusing on the impact of democracy assistance on civil society, we still have little systematic knowledge whether this type of aid works. This study disaggregates the impact of democracy assistance by looking at a specific type of aid and I match this with a desired outcome: women's political empowerment. There are strong theoretical explanations for focusing on women. Women's participation in post-conflict decision-making can be essential for raising broad support for democracy and peace. Gender equality in public life means women's greater participation in politics and this in turn contributes to better representation of society, which is one of the main characteristics of consolidated democracies.

Given new opportunities for women in the post-conflict period for changing their existing position and improving their political status, women are often targeted by international donors. However, we do not know much about the effectiveness of this aid, that is, whether it contributes to women's political empowerment. Therefore, in this study I aim to establish this by applying both quantitative and qualitative methodology. Inspired by Welzel and Inglehart's "human empowerment: path to democracy"<sup>1</sup> this study places democracy assistance with women in a broader mechanism which forms a theoretical foundation of this study. In order to test this theoretical framework, first I focus on the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), which as a post-conflict country was at the centre of the international community's attention for a long time. The findings from this case are based on my fieldwork and interviews with representatives of civil society organizations that have been receiving external funding for their projects to support women. Then, I test the theoretical framework with a large-n analysis.

The findings from the statistical analysis show that legal empowerment of women, their education levels as well as a post-conflict country's political and economic factors have a positive impact on women's political empowerment. However, the case study of BiH demonstrates that aid has a facilitating impact on women's motivation to practice their rights and is closely related to changes in a legal framework that allows women to practice their rights. Therefore, the study suggests that in assessing the impact of international assistance to support women, the comprehensive women's empowerment mechanism should be employed. The study also demonstrates the limitations of current impact evaluation methods in democracy assistance. The conclusion contains some suggestions and possibilities for research extension regarding the evaluation of democracy assistance.

## **Theoretical background**

### ***Why women matter for democratization and peacebuilding***

Unlike democracy assistance to (semi-)authoritarian states or transitional democracies, societies emerging from violent intrastate conflict face exceptional difficulties – high risk of conflict recurrence, mistrust, and destroyed societal links – thus scholars agree that peace should be given priority, and it will be more likely to

be achieved and sustained if it involves civil society.<sup>2</sup> A particularly promising segment of civil society for peacebuilding is women. Various initiatives by international and regional organizations like United Nation (UN) Security Resolution 1325, which calls for the inclusion of civil society-based women's groups in peacebuilding,<sup>3</sup> as well as the European Union (EU) Policy on Women, Peace and Security<sup>4</sup> or the common initiative of European Commission, together with the UN Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women as well as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) endeavour to enhance women's participation in peacebuilding.<sup>5</sup> Given the focus of the international community on gender equality in post-conflict societies, it is important to provide the arguments for the link between women and peace.

Scholars find that domestic gender equality has a pacifying effect on state behaviour on the international level.<sup>6</sup> Also, more equal societies, measured either in terms of female representation in parliament or the ratio of female-to-male higher education attainment, are associated with lower levels of intrastate armed conflict.<sup>7</sup> In order to explain the link between women and peace the authors draw on public opinion literature, which shows that women's attitudes towards the use of force differ from those of men, to argue that the more women have access to the political process the more constrained will be the state in its use of force.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, because of attitudinal and behavioural differences between men and women that result from social conditioning into stereotypical gender roles,<sup>9</sup> men and boys assume dominant roles that incline towards warlike behaviour, while women and girls are more subordinate and thus more likely to display greater empathy in conflicts.<sup>10</sup> Finally, women have an aversion to violence, owing to their reproductive role and their biological predisposition.<sup>11</sup>

For the post-conflict countries that may face the recurrence of war, the possible positive impact of women for the sustainability of peace mentioned above is crucial. Scholars and practitioners also see that women's participation in post-conflict decision-making can be valuable for a variety of reasons.<sup>12</sup> First, women make up one half of the world's human capital. Without the participation of women in political decision-making, women's needs, concerns, and contributions may be overlooked, and women are usually the group that is very much affected by war. Second, women constitute a significant part the population and their participation in post-conflict decision-making can be essential for raising a broad popular mandate for democracy and peace. Their participation in the political decision-making process more accurately reflects the composition of society, which may enhance the legitimacy of the political system, thus making it more democratic. Also, women can contribute to broadening political debates by providing different opinions on political issues, as some studies have shown.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, women's ability to voice their concerns and be heard as well as to improve their political states increases the legitimacy of the government and thus increases the possibilities for peace and reconciliation.<sup>14</sup>

Finally, scholars also stress a mutually reinforcing relationship between women's empowerment and economic development,<sup>15</sup> which may be pivotal for

economically devastated post-conflict countries. Recognizing the importance of women for developmental goals, a recent policy research report by the World Bank<sup>16</sup> identifies gender equality both as a development objective in itself, and as a means to promote growth, reduce poverty, and promote better governance.

Given this close link between the role of women in politics and democracy, as well as peace and growth, empowering and educating girls and women and leveraging their talent and leadership became an important priority for the international community. Much of this aid has been channelled through domestic NGOs that play an active role in advocacy and aim to improve women's status by promoting good practices in the area of gender equality, as well as increasing awareness of gender discrimination. Civil society aid became an important aspect of democracy assistance; however despite the enormous interest and good will of donors in supporting civil society in recipient countries, scholars criticized the strategies used by donors which contributed to failure or limited results.<sup>17</sup> One of the most frequent critiques that appears in research on democracy assistance is that donors have done little to adapt the projects to local circumstances, neglecting the historical, cultural, and institutional legacies and trying to apply the same assistance patterns in each country in which donors intervene.<sup>18</sup> Especially, some scholars argue that donor-driven building of NGOs was undertaken without consideration of the knowledge, political environment, norms, beliefs, and practices that exist in the local societies and also local ideas and strategies were not encouraged while civil society was being promoted.<sup>19</sup>

This criticism is also applied to aid given to women's organizations in post-conflict settings for the purpose of peacemaking.<sup>20</sup> A strong critique also comes from scholars analysing gender issues in international law.<sup>21</sup> Otto, for example, argues that feminist engagement with international law highlights paradoxes, and shows that feminist ideas in some countries, despite international support, can become the tools of powerful actors committed to maintaining the gendered status quo, and are instrumental in serving institutional purposes.<sup>22</sup>

However, there are also findings that put international assistance to women's organizations in a positive light.<sup>23</sup> Scholars find that the vitality of women's organizations is an important indicator of how well democratic institutions are working.<sup>24</sup> Women's movement through changing women's voting behaviour and increasing women's role in legislatures contributes to sustainability of democratic institutions and building of democratic political culture.<sup>25</sup>

As it has been demonstrated, there is a substantial and growing literature on democracy assistance to post-conflict countries that includes studies that focus on democracy assistance in a particular country<sup>26</sup>; there have also been works that have looked at multiple countries to try to draw broader findings about programme impacts.<sup>27</sup> However, the results that come from this research present interesting insights, but are far from being conclusive, and there are few systematic studies of the impact of these projects on the major target group: women. Regardless of some efforts to evaluate international influences, we still know little about whether all the money that donors are putting into civil society organizations

matters, and about the effectiveness of specific democracy assistance projects implemented by NGO projects, like those supporting women's political empowerment. Since very little empirical work focuses on the impact of aid to women's organizations (the effectiveness of aid) on women's political empowerment, this article aims to fill this gap.

The article also uses a more comprehensive theoretical approach that allows for better understanding of how international efforts to support women on the ground should be evaluated. That democracy assistance is a very important component in women's empowerment mechanism, often the component that sets the machine in motion, evaluation of its influence should take into account its complex relationship with other components, and the Welzel and Inglehart model applied in this study captures this phenomenon.

### *The women's political empowerment mechanism*

Many factors have been proposed as determinants for when, where, and why democratization happens. Several of these factors are synthesized into a broader framework<sup>28</sup> that describes human empowerment as an evolutionary force channelling the intentions and strategies of actors towards democratic outcomes. Welzel and Inglehart's "human empowerment: path to democracy" is not the only path to democracy, but it is the only path producing socially embedded, and hence sustainable, democracy. According to this path, growing action resources empower people materially by making them more capable of struggling for freedoms. In addition to material empowerment, rising emancipatory beliefs empower people mentally by making them more willing to struggle for freedoms. Finally, legal empowerment allows people to practice freedoms. As human empowerment advances in its material, mental, and legal dimensions it makes people more capable and more willing to practice their freedoms. In doing so, human empowerment creates social capital as a by-product.<sup>29</sup>

I adopt Welzel and Inglehart's "human empowerment: path to democracy" to construct women's political empowerment mechanism (Figure 1) presented below and I argue the following:

Hypothesis 1: Material empowerment in the form of democracy assistance has a positive effect on women's political empowerment in post-conflict countries through mental and legal empowerment.

*Material empowerment* in this model is international aid that is spent on targeting women in post-conflict countries. The post-conflict context opens new opportunities for changing the existing status of women in post-conflict societies,<sup>30</sup> especially political status. Many international donors channel aid through different programmes and projects run by domestic civil society organizations, often women's organizations. Participation in different projects, such as voter-education training programmes and training for increasing women's participation in politics

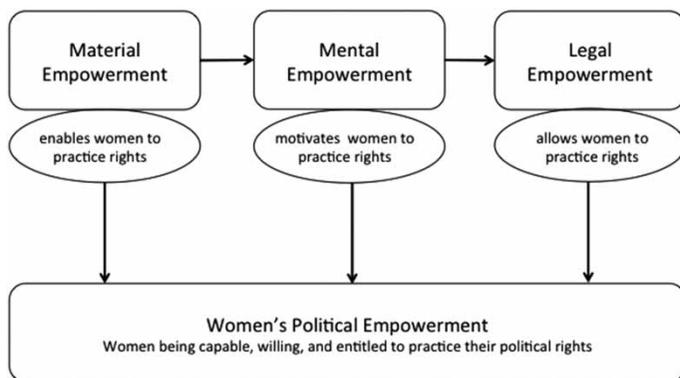


Figure 1. The women's political empowerment mechanism.

run by women's organizations, provide, above all, mental support (*mental empowerment*). These organizations engage in lobbying, advocacy, and education efforts to improve women's status in society and increase their participation in the political arena.

Participation in projects organized by NGOs is meant to improve women's awareness and knowledge, and facilitate their engagement and involvement in community, which should motivate women to practice their rights. However, these activities should also lead to the *legal empowerment* that allows women to practice their rights. The creation of a solid foundation leading to better inclusion of women in politics starts with the legal system. In some countries women's entitlement to full participation in political processes is not recognized – women are often marginalized in elections as a result of gender discrimination. Non-discrimination and the equal rights of women and men are fundamental principles of international human rights law, and are promoted in post-conflict countries. The marginalization of women in the political sphere in post-conflict countries becomes often more acute owing to volatile security situations, the prevalence of well-entrenched military factions, large numbers of women refugees, and other circumstances. However, changes in legal frameworks regarding gender equality rarely take place without women's involvement and they should be the most interested in implementing those changes. Therefore, I argue that without democratization aid (*material empowerment*), the organizations supporting women (*mental empowerment*) will not be able to advance their goals, which include furthering legislation on gender equality and enhancing women's rights (*legal empowerment*). If we observe a positive impact of legal frameworks on women's political empowerment, we have to bear in mind that this success is rooted in extensive changes in attitudes and activism, which can be attributed to democracy assistance that aims to support civil society engagement. In the next section, I test this mechanism using BiH as the case study.

### **Women's political empowerment mechanism in Bosnia and Herzegovina**

In my research I examine the particular type of democracy assistance that targets women and the impact of this assistance on women's political empowerment. I place this impact in the women's political empowerment mechanism discussed in the previous section. In order to test this theoretical framework I use a case study of BiH, which is a good illustrative case study for two reasons. First, since the 1992–1995 conflict, which broke out after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, BiH has been in a post-conflict transformation phase of peacebuilding and democratization. Second, there has been a great deal of democracy assistance coming to the country that has been channelled via civil society organizations.<sup>31</sup> This part is mainly based on the materials gathered during my fieldwork in BiH, and interviews conducted with representatives of BiH's civil society organizations that inform women about their legal rights, support their social inclusion, familiarize them with politics, and educate them about gender equality in every aspect of their lives.<sup>32</sup>

#### ***Legal empowerment of women***

Bosnia and Herzegovina has adopted many legislative measures to improve the status of women and their inclusion in socio-political processes. This part provides a brief overview of major international documents that are in force in BiH, and some other national legal initiatives.

Legal provisions guaranteeing women's rights and gender equality are in place. In 1993 BiH ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and signed the Optional Protocol. Provisions of the convention are included in the legal system of BiH, based on BiH's constitution ("General framework agreement for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina" from Dayton). Other international documents in the fields of gender equality, the empowerment of women, and non-discrimination promulgated by the United Nations, the Council of Europe and European institutions include<sup>33</sup>: (1) Vienna Declaration and Program of Action (1993) (2) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993); (3) Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995); (4) European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; (5) Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (1998–2007); (6) EU Framework Strategy for Gender Equality (June 2000); (7) EU Convention on the Political Rights of Women (2009); (8) EU Declaration on Achieving True Gender Equality (2009); and (9) Resolutions and Recommendations of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council Europe (2004–2009).

Bosnia and Herzegovina formally and legally adopted all relevant international documents relating to gender equality, and many of them are incorporated into the legislation of the country. Domestic legislation relating to the field of gender equality includes the constitution of BiH, the constitution of entities

(the Constitution of the Federation of BiH, and the Constitution of Republika Srpska), and cantons. These constitutions guarantee all citizens of BiH the right of participation in the public sphere, equality in access to public services, and the right to be elected. Additionally, the Law on Gender Equality in BiH and the Law on Prevention of Discrimination were adopted, which prescribe the equal representation of both sexes in the management and decision-making processes. The Law on Gender Equality in BiH stipulates a 40% quota for women within the public administration.<sup>34</sup> Some quotas were also introduced in the Electoral Law of BiH.

Other domestic documents for the advancement of women in BiH include the National Action Plan (NAP)<sup>35</sup> on the implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 regarding Women, Peace, and Security. The NAP includes fields related to implementation of UNSCR 1325; however, the plan identified all commitments of BiH in the field of gender equality, as they arise from United Nations, European Union, and Council of Europe documents. It refers to 15 areas, institutions, and partners.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the Government of the Federation of BiH established the Gender Centre of the Federation of BiH. The objective of the Gender Centre is to promote gender equity and equality in the Federation of BiH, and to implement principles contained in international conventions and agreements. The Gender Centre also monitors and examines the position of women and the implementation of their rights in local and international legislation, and cooperates with respective institutions in BiH.

Does the legal framework facilitate the political empowerment of women in BiH? Undoubtedly it allows women to be an important actor in public life, and women do become more active in politics. In the general elections held on 3 October 2010 for the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH, which represents both entities, 36.8% of endorsed candidates and 50.3% of those registered in the electoral lists were women. Among the elected members, 19.0% were women, an increase when compared to the 2002 (16.7%) and 2006 elections (9.5%). In the House of Representatives of the Parliament of the Federation of BiH women constituted 17.3%, and in the National Assembly of Republika Srpska, 20.5% of representatives were women after the 2010 general elections. As the numbers demonstrate, in both legislative institutions the participation of women is steadily increasing but still remains low.<sup>37</sup> For example, despite an increase in the number of female members in Parliamentary Assemblies established following the last elections, the 40% quota for women within the public administration, as stipulated in the Gender Equality Law, has not been reached.<sup>38</sup>

Women's representation in executive positions is also negligible. There are no women in the Council of Ministers of BiH. Out of eight deputy ministers, only two women have been appointed.<sup>39</sup> Women's representation is rather concentrated at the lower echelons across government organs. Women also are less likely to be ambassadors and general consuls in diplomatic-consular offices of BiH. In 2011 only nine women held these positions compared to 47 males.

The question remains why expectations with respect to a balanced participation of women in public and political life have not yet been fulfilled in BiH.<sup>40</sup> Why, despite the institutional framework for promotion and monitoring of a balanced participation of women and men in all fields of public and political life, is there exclusion of women from public decision-making in BiH? According to my interviewees, who were asked this question, the underrepresentation and insufficient participation of women in politics and public life is affected by three major factors.

First, women became political objects but not the agents of political change. For example, political parties recruit women only because they are obliged to consist of one-third of women; however, they are more likely to choose women that do not have strong political ambitions and who after elections “will remain silent”.<sup>41</sup> Political parties do not promote their female candidates, and do not support them when they are running for positions in legislative institutions. Therefore, many women do not have well-prepared electoral programmes that would make them distinguishable to voters.

Second, there are no opportunities to exhibit the skills and abilities women possess due to the disparity between the sexes that is deeply rooted in the private and public spheres of life.<sup>42</sup> In other words, an obstacle to women’s full and active participation in political life is the traditional approach to the position of women in society in BiH. Data on the position of women in the country have shown that women have less private property, less often occupy powerful position in society, and are less likely to get a job, etc. Particularly marginalized are Roma women, women with disabilities, rural women, women refugees and internally displaced persons, returnees, or single mothers.<sup>43</sup> One of the major obstacles to women’s empowerment is their position in the job market. According to the Agency for Statistics of BiH, in 2011 around 33% of women and 56% of males were active in the labour market.<sup>44</sup> The employment rate for women was only 23% whereas for males this was almost 42%, which indicates that gender-based discrimination is evident in the labour market. The numbers have remained the same for many years and show that limited progress has been made towards increasing female participation in the labour market. Unemployment is one of the main factors leading to poverty and social exclusion for the population in BiH and is especially present among women, who are considered to be one of the vulnerable groups.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, related to the problem of employment, BiH continues to be a country of origin, transit, and destination for trafficking in women and girls.<sup>46</sup>

Thus, despite some progress being made in democratization and peacebuilding, and a legislative framework that guarantees women’s rights and gender equality, there is a need to boost women’s status in society, their engagement, and participation. Otherwise, the social exclusion of women will further result in their weak social position and this will lead to deepening, already visible, unequal gender relations in which women are in a disadvantaged position. These relations include public spaces, political processes, and employment. Therefore, mental empowerment is crucial to support legislative efforts, and this role is being fulfilled by civil society organizations in BiH.

***Mental and material empowerment of women***

It is well recognized among organizations interviewed for this study that their role is to empower women. Many organizations were founded to improve the position and status of women and to advocate for women's human rights in all areas of private and public life. Some of these organizations have the status of women's organizations and specialize in specific fields of women's support.<sup>47</sup> Other women's organizations provide not only support to women but also strongly promote good practices in the area of gender equality and increase awareness of gender discrimination among the wider population, as well as provide assistance to key actors in the struggle against gender inequality.

Recognizing the importance of legal empowerment for women's overall political and social empowerment, some organizations, like the Centre of Legal Assistance of Women (Zenica), engage in offering legal and psychological support to women in exercising their rights, educating and informing women about fundamental rights and mechanisms of self-protection in the cases of violation of their rights, advocating increased participation of women in decision-making bodies, and developing a legal mechanism that facilitates that, and finally monitoring domestic and international legislation.

Many women's organizations, took an active role in monitoring the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and lobbying for the development of an NAP in BiH.<sup>48</sup> Women to Women (interviewed for this study) published regular reports on UNSCR 1325 implementation prior to the adoption of the NAP and has played an important role in advocacy, education, training, and promotion of the NAP and other international documents.

Since the organizations involved in advancing women's legal rights are funded by external donors, the close link between legal empowerment and democratization aid becomes more apparent. The profile of donors as well as the type of projects funded by them suggest that the legal empowerment of women is seen as an important factor on the democratization agenda. A Center of Legal Assistance for Women Zenica project on the promotion of gender equality for the development of a democratic society funded by UNWOMEN is an example of this, or similar projects funded by the Open Society Institute, a foundation that is well-known for its democracy assistance profile.

There are also organizations in BiH that do not have the status of women's organizations but their activities include empowering women and women's organizations. The Social Inclusion Organization (interviewed for this project) has foundation status and has financed many projects whose beneficiaries were women. Some organizations have added another pillar to their activities that focuses on women, like the Civil Society Promotion Center that initiated mentoring programmes (Women to Women) in order to promote cooperation and improve networking between women, and thus make them more powerful. Also, the founders of the Foundation of Local Democracy, recognizing local needs, decided to open a shelter and a centre for women. The shelter provides support

for women who have been the victims of domestic violence, also women with children who struggle financially and whose essential, existential needs are not fulfilled. The centre for women, however, provides legal support, trainings, and psychological support, as well as helping women to finish education that was interrupted for, and to find, employment. It also aims at empowering women by providing the opportunity for networking between women.

Whereas the initiative to establish NGOs, especially women's organizations, comes from local needs, many of these organizations could probably not have survived without the assistance of international agencies. The programme orientation of many organizations in the period after the war opened up great possibilities for receiving international funds. Therefore, the link between democratization aid and mental empowerment seems to be straightforward, but the question is about the effectiveness of this aid. Here comes the difficulty with the evaluation of aid.

There was agreement among the interviewees that international aid contributed greatly to the development of infrastructure and the adoption of new skills and knowledge and to the overall strengthening of the civil society sector. Thus, when evaluating aid at the *macro level*, international aid was of an immense help and it is thanks to this aid that many parts of BiH society have reached the development levels they are at today.<sup>49</sup> Of course there are many problems with aid already well-reported and researched by scholars and which were also acknowledged by my interviewees. Representatives of NGOs identified a number of difficulties they have had with donors, such as the problem with donor agendas, duration of funding, and the delay between acceptance of project proposals and the distribution of funds. Some of these donors offer funding through the call for proposals for specific projects that are usually short term and prevent organizations from predicting their financial sustainability. Another factor is that this international support is slowly retreating from Bosnia, because some major work in the fields of peacebuilding, reconciliation, and democratization has been achieved, and other regions of the world require the donors' attention. However, at the same time, many donors are initiating transition from international donations to local resources. The others are of the opinion that although international support dries up they will still do what they do, and the difference will be that the workload and working hours devoted to projects will decrease.

Despite the reduced aid and some procedural problems, there was no doubt among the interviewees that international aid contributed greatly to the development of organizations supporting women. Indeed, the growth of women's organizations should be seen as a positive trend, since it indicates a higher level of social awareness and an interest by citizens to get involved in gender equality, community dialogue, and decision-making through organizations.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, a link between mental and material empowerment in the model of women's empowerment is apparent. However, it still tells us little about whether it matters what women's organizations do. In other words: how do we know that democratization aid that is channelled through NGOs supporting women leads to women's greater political empowerment? The answers I received during the interviews were not satisfactory

for two reasons. First, all NGOs devote a significant amount of effort and resources to evaluating the implementation phase but not to the impact of the project. The evaluation usually starts and often ends at the implementation phase of the project: donors or foundations monitor money spending, organize trips to organizations, and talk to beneficiaries, requiring reports and pictures at this stage of project development to find out whether a project has been implemented as intended.

Second, the impact evaluation lacks rigorous methodology. The impact evaluation after the project entails direct field visits, feedback from the participants in the form of a written evaluation in order to establish whether the goal of the project was achieved, as well as collecting numbers of participants, which are later presented in the final report of the project as well as in the annual report of the organization. Some organizations also try to keep in touch with beneficiaries after the end of the project in order to collect stories about how their status improved and how project affected them. All the results of impact evaluations carried out by organizations present efforts to empower women in a very positive view. However, because the impact evaluation lacks rigorous methodology and is not undertaken in a systematic way, we cannot reach the conclusion that externally funded NGO projects focusing on women have a positive impact on women's political empowerment, even in the case of BiH explored here. Moreover, the real participation of women in political parties and their sporadic entrance into the political arena is not sufficient to conclude that the position of women is wholly equivalent to the position of men in the BiH society. Despite the years of international funding, the exclusion of women from public decision-making is a reality and a part of an incomplete democracy in BiH. These facts put the assistance in a negative light.

The case of BiH has just taught us that the legal, mental, and material measures in the women's empowerment mechanism are closely related and they need to work together in order to achieve a goal, which is women's political empowerment. Without democratization aid (*material empowerment*), the organizations supporting women (*mental empowerment*) will not be able advance their goals, which include furthering legislation on gender equality and enhancing women's rights (*legal empowerment*). Funding should be well channelled and targeted at beneficiaries, which is in donors' interest; therefore aid goes through local NGOs. Participation in projects organized by NGOs is meant to improve women's awareness and knowledge, and facilitate their engagement and involvement in the community, which should motivate women to practice their rights. However, these activities would be useless if they did not lead to the legal empowerment that allows women to practice their rights. Simply put, if a legal framework is not built then women's gender empowerment projects will be insufficient to empower women politically, as one of my interviewees concluded.<sup>51</sup> Moreover, we have also learnt from this case that the effectiveness of international aid is more complex to assess and requires more systematic analysis. Therefore, in the next section I turn to large-n analysis.

### **Findings from the statistical analysis**

For the purpose of statistical analysis, I have selected 101 post-conflict countries that ended their conflicts through peace agreement, ceasefire, and victory, or in an inconclusive way. In order to determine post-conflict countries I relied on the UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset.<sup>52</sup>

In order to measure the dependent variable, women's political empowerment, I used Global Gender Gap reports by the World Economic Forum. This variable is a subindex that measures the gap between men and women at the highest level of political decision-making through the ratio of women to men in minister-level positions and the ratio of women to men in parliamentary positions.<sup>53</sup> The Global Gender Gap (GGG) provides this data for the period between 2006 and 2012 for 73 post-conflict countries. The GGG index was selected against other measurements used in the empirical literature because it offers a very narrow and precise measure of political empowerment, which is political participation of women in cabinet positions and women's level of representation in parliament. The best indicator of women's political empowerment, as it was highlighted by my interviewees, is greater women's participation and visibility in the political arena.

#### ***Material empowerment: Democracy assistance***

In order to test the impact of democracy assistance the study relies on data collected by AidData. The database allows for filtering aid that goes for promotion of and support to women's groups and networks through education, training, or institutional capacity building.<sup>54</sup> The results of data collection identified 1059 aid projects supporting women in post-conflict countries between 1980 and 2011.

#### ***Mental empowerment: Participation in women's organizations***

It is argued in this study that women's participation in women's groups and movements gives them mental empowerment. It means that although this type of support is not always sufficient, it is often critical in ensuring that women are capable of and willing to practice their political rights. I rely on World Survey Value data, especially on the Confidence in the Women's Movement variable.<sup>55</sup> If the percentage of women who demonstrated their confidence in women's groups, by providing an answer 1 – A great deal and 2 – Quite a lot, was higher than the percentage of women not being confident (answers 3 and 4, meaning Not very much confidence or None at all), the variable was coded one, otherwise it was coded zero.

#### ***Legal empowerment***

Legal framework is another facilitating factor that may empower women politically. This is a very important factor because it entitles and enables women to practice their rights. I have chosen two indicators of legal empowerment and both refer

to constitutional provisions: (1) Guaranteed equality, and (2) Non-discrimination clause covering gender/sex from the Women, Business and the Law (WBL) database, World Bank 1960–2011.

It is reasonable to expect that if a country is politically, economically, and socially advanced, one may expect that women in such countries will have greater opportunities to participate, associate, and to express their opinion, and to practice their political rights. Therefore the variables measuring social and economic development are included in the analysis as alternative explanations for women's political empowerment. I measure education as "per cent" of females among pupils in secondary education in a given year. Using a common practice I operationalize economic development as gross domestic product (GDP) per capita. For both these variables I use data from the World Development Indicators (WDI) database from the World Bank. As an indicator of the country's regime type, I use Polity IV score data.

The results of bivariate analysis (Table 1) show that although aid to support women in post-conflict countries demonstrates the positive impact on women's political participation, this relationship is not statistically significant. Similarly, mental empowerment measured here as a confidence in women's organizations is not a strong predictor of women's political engagement. However, legal empowerment in the form of constitutional provisions that guarantee gender non-discrimination or constitutional equality before the law shows a positive and statistically significant impact on women being entitled and thus willing to practice their political rights. Moreover, the political, social, and economic developments of the post-conflict country have a strong positive impact on women's political empowerment, as expected. Naturally, in emerging democracies women will have a chance to vote, which is the basic foundation of democratic regimes, and will have a greater chance to hold positions in decision-making bodies, and to participate in public protests and political campaigning than in other type of regimes. Moreover, democracies are more likely to respect gender equality and ensure such accommodations in their constitutions. Economic prosperity increases the utility of democratic freedoms for all, regardless of their sex. Therefore one may expect a positive relationship between economic development and women's political empowerment. Scholars have always emphasized that human capital matters for democratization and modernization of the country. It is reasonable to expect that the better educated the women are, the greater the chances they will be politically empowered.

We have to be very careful how we interpret the results of "no effect of aid". Knowing from the case study presented here that aid is a facilitating factor behind NGOs' work to support women and promote good practices in the area of gender equality, including the promotion of a legal framework, it becomes apparent that legal empowerment is a result of those efforts. Therefore, legal empowerment in the form of constitutional provisions that guarantee gender non-discrimination or constitutional equality before the law cannot be considered as a factor that emerges in isolation, but rather as a product of other processes that contribute to the creation and promotion of a legal framework. The fact that women

Table 1. Bivariate regression (dependent variable: women's political empowerment).

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Aid (logged)	0.00232 (0.0037)						
Confidence in women's movement		0.0341 (0.0366)					
Guaranteed equality			0.0614* (0.0325)				
Non-discrimination clause				0.0399** (0.0161)			
GDP pc					0.0000017*** (0.00000047)		
Education						0.00548*** (0.00115)	
Regime type							0.00626*** (0.00077)
Constant	0.108** (0.045)	0.097*** (0.031)	0.102*** (0.031)	0.134*** (0.013)	0.132*** (0.006)	-0.119** (0.055)	0.0502*** (0.01248)
<i>N</i>	133	31	185	185	400	322	407

are active in the political arena in some countries is because the law allows them to be so; however, for the essential implementation of gender-sensitive laws, changes in attitudes and recognition of the gendered nature of politics in post-conflict countries are required, and this is because of the tremendous work of NGOs, whose work in turn would not be possible without funding that comes from donors. Moreover, many donors, for example USAID Democracy and Governance funding, specifically target constitutional provisions for equality and non-discrimination. Therefore, to say that aid does not have an impact but the legal environment does would mean disregarding the impact of this type of aid.

Also, the mere existence of laws facilitating political empowerment of women, as the case study demonstrated, is not sufficient without the rise in consciousness of women to practice their rights. The disparity between de jure law and de facto practice may be present and women may be given seats that are proxies for men who hold the real decision-making powers. Therefore, every state should be allowed first to understand and accept certain rights as a part of their values. Changing opinions, behaviours, and customs is a long process, and NGOs aim to raise people's awareness of their rights. However, the impact of their work (mental empowerment) on political empowerment is even more difficult to capture through statistical analysis, because of difficulties with the precise measurement; therefore, by no means should we neglect the possible positive impact of mental empowerment in women's political empowerment.

## Conclusions

The aim of this article has been to establish the impact of democracy assistance on women's political empowerment in post-conflict countries. The analysis has placed this assistance within a broader mechanism that scholars theorized may lead to human empowerment and thus democracy. Based on this mechanism, I have suggested the women's political empowerment mechanism consisting of legal, mental, and material empowerment, which I argue reinforce each other in order to empower women politically. Specifically, I argue that material empowerment in the form of democracy assistance has a positive effect on women's political empowerment through mental and legal empowerments. In other words, democracy assistance is channelled through domestic NGOs that strengthen women's social, economic, and political status and thus motivate them to practice their rights (*mental empowerment*), and to facilitate gender equality and incorporation of laws that strengthen women's role and thus enable them to practice their rights (*legal empowerment*). This relationship was tested both qualitatively and quantitatively.

The case study and interviews with organizations in BiH provide support for the model. The findings from the case study support the claim that in assessing the impact of democracy assistance on women's political empowerment the comprehensive mechanism should be employed. International donors provide funds to domestic organizations in BiH for the various projects to inform, train, and educate

women about their rights, to activate them to take social roles, and to facilitate networking between them. Representatives of organizations interviewed for this study agree that without this support their financial sustainability and thus the realization of many projects would be impossible. BiH formally and legally adopted all relevant international documents relating to gender equality, and many of them are incorporated into the legislation of the country, which was an effort of many of the organizations directly involved in the promotion and monitoring of a balanced participation of women in public and political life.

The quantitative analysis carefully matched the aid which is going to civil society organizations for the purposes of supporting women with indicators of political empowerment. The findings demonstrate no statistically significant impact of democracy assistance, and a strong impact of legal empowerment as an enabling factor for women's political empowerment. They have also demonstrated that we should not neglect a country's political and socio-economic characteristics if we want to understand women's general political engagement in politics. Of course statistical analysis is not free from its limitations: missing data reduced the number of observations, the operationalization of variables could always be better, and other models capturing the complex relationship could be employed. However, even though there is no direct impact of aid on political empowerment observed in the statistical analysis, we have to bear in mind that aid is a catalyst for activities taken by organizations engaged in supporting women, including their direct and indirect impact on changes in the legal framework. Therefore, a significant impact of legal empowerment on political empowerment provides support for the model suggested in this study.

The study has also revealed limitations of impact evaluation methods employed in democracy assistance. The findings from the case of BiH show that there are no good impact evaluation methods employed by the organizations and donors that would help definitely establish whether key outcomes can be attributed to democracy assistance projects. NGOs tend to focus more on process evaluations, that is, how the project aimed at women is implemented. The statistical analysis, however, will always be subject to criticism of operationalization of variables and weakness of the models adopted. Therefore, the best way to answer the questions whether, when, and how aid works could prove to be an analysis of specific projects implemented by NGOs that support and train women to make them more politically engaged. Such analysis would require the adoption of carefully designed impact evaluation methodology from development assistance, which may turn out to be challenging in the field of democracy assistance but may have potential for successfully tackling this really important question of whether aid spent on empowering women by donors in post-conflict countries falls on fertile ground.

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## Notes

1. Welzel and Inglehart, "The Role of Ordinary People in Democratization." See also Welzel "Theories of Democratization."
2. Barbara, "Nation Building and the Role of the Private Sector"; Belloni, "Civil Society in War-to-Democracy Transitions"; Forster and Mattner, *Civil Society and Peacebuilding*; Paffenholz and Spurk, "Civil Society, Civic Engagement, and Peacebuilding"; Raffaele and Tocci, "Conflict Society."
3. For more on examination of this resolution see for example Anderlini, *Women Building Peace*; Falch, "Women's Political Participation"; Olonisakin, Barnes, and Ikpe, *Women, Peace and Security*.
4. [http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms\\_data/librairie/PDF/WPSnew032011\\_EN.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/librairie/PDF/WPSnew032011_EN.pdf)
5. "EU Supports Women's Participation in Peacebuilding and Post-Conflict Planning," available at [http://eeas.europa.eu/ifs/docs/20120201\\_pressrelease\\_eu-undp\\_en.pdf](http://eeas.europa.eu/ifs/docs/20120201_pressrelease_eu-undp_en.pdf)
6. Caprioli, "Primed for Violence."
7. Melander, "Gender Equality and Intrastate Armed Conflict."
8. Skjelsbaek and Smith, *Gender, Peace and Conflict*.
9. Goldstein, *War and Gender*.
10. Melander, "Gender Equality and Intrastate Armed Conflict," 698.
11. See for example Caprioli, "Gendered Conflict"; Regan and Paskeviciute, "Women's Access to Politics and Peaceful States."
12. Bouta, Frerks, and Bannon, *Gender Conflict and Development*; Cheldelin and Eliatamby, *Women Waging War and Peace*; Kumar, *Women and Civil War*; Meintjes, Turshen, and Pillay, *The Aftermath*; Porter, *Peacebuilding*; Sjoberg, *Gendering Global Conflict*.
13. Porter, "Women, Political Decision-Making, and Peace-Building," 250; Mayanja, "Armed Conflict and Women"; Skjelsbaek and Smith, *Gender, Peace and Conflict*.
14. Gizelis, "Gender Empowerment and United Nations Peacebuilding."
15. Duflo, "Women Empowerment and Economic Development"; Jaquette and Summerfield, *Women and Gender Equity in Development Theory and Practice*.
16. World Bank, *Engendering Development*.
17. Henderson, "Importing Civil Society"; Henderson, *Building Democracy in Contemporary Russia*; McMahon, "International Actors and Women's NGOs in Poland and Hungary"; Quigley, *For Democracy's Sake*; Richter, "Promoting Civil Society?"; Wedel, *Collision and Collusion*.
18. Carothers, *Critical Mission*; Bernard, Helmich, and Lehning, *Civil Society and International Development*; Ottaway and Chung, "Debating Democracy Assistance."
19. See for example Sundstrom, *Funding Civil Society*.
20. Kumar, *Women and Civil War*.
21. Orford, "Feminism, Imperialism and the Mission of International Law"; Otto, "The Exile of Inclusion."
22. Ibid.
23. For example see Fitzduff and Church, *NGOs at the Table*.
24. Jaquette, "Regional Differences and Contrasting Views"; Seidman, "Gendered Citizenship."
25. Corrin, "Developing Policy on Integration and Re/Construction in Kosova."

26. For example, Challand, *Civil Society, Autonomy and Donors*; Dessalegn and Ayenew, "Democracy Assistance to Post-Conflict Ethiopia."
27. De Zeeuw and Kumar, *Promoting Democracy in Postconflict Societies*.
28. See for example Haerpfer et al., *Democratization*, 74.
29. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*.
30. As argued by Anderlini, *Women Building Peace*; Sørensen, "Women and Post-Conflict Reconstruction"; Tripp et al. *African Women's Movements*.
31. SIF in BiH, *Who, How, Why?*
32. List of interviews conducted: Centre for Legal Support for Women, Zenica, Selma Badzic (Coordinator), Meliha Sendic (Assistant), 14 May 2013; Why Not? Zašto ne? Sarajevo, Darko Brkan (President), 14 May 2013; Social Inclusion Foundation in BiH (SIF in BiH), Sarajevo, Ranka Ninkovic-Papic (Director), 14 May 2013; Civil Society Promotion Centre, Sarajevo, Aida Daguda (Director), 14 May 2013; Women to Women (Žene Ženama), Sarajevo, Zorana Savic (Project Manager), 15 May 2013; Foundation of Local Democracy, Sarajevo, 15 May 2013; Norwegian Helsinki Committee (NHC), Sarajevo, Naida Huskanović (Regional coordinator of the programme on the role of universities in peacebuilding), Adela Galesic (A coordinator of the Human Rights Education Program), 15 May 2013.
33. BiH is part of the European Union enlargement process and a member of the Council of Europe. The member states of the Council of Europe have the responsibility to ensure that the legislation in their institutions contains elements related to gender equity and equality.
34. European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council*.
35. Sometimes referred to as the Gender Action Plan of BiH (GAP).
36. NAP (National Action Plan). Available at the website ([http://arsbih.w1.daj.ba/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/GAP\\_BIH\\_ENGLISH.pdf](http://arsbih.w1.daj.ba/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/GAP_BIH_ENGLISH.pdf)) of the Gender Center of the Federation of BiH, 2006.
37. Agency of Statistics of BiH, *General Elections 2010*. Data on general elections in BiH are published using data from the Central Election Commission of BiH. Agency for Statistics of BiH, Sarajevo, March 2011.
38. European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council*.
39. Agency of Statistics of BiH: General Elections 2010.
40. Žene Ženama. Annual Report Zene Zenama 2012. Available at <http://www.zenezenama.org/zene/>
41. Interview with Civil Society Promotion Center, Mrs Daguda (Director), 14 May 2013. See also Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of BiH, *Action Plan for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in BiH 2010–2013*.
42. Žene Ženama.
43. Causevic, *Gender-Inclusive Community in BiH*.
44. BHAS, *Women and Men in BiH*.
45. SIF in BiH, *Who, How, Why?*
46. European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council*.
47. It should be mentioned that women and women's organizations called for peaceful resolution to political tensions before the war, and following the outbreak of war, organized to support refugees and victims of rape, and provide shelter, medical services, and emergency supplies. In the post-conflict landscape, women's civil society organizations an play important role in advocating women's human rights.
48. A wide range of civil society organizations had input into the NAP, including Women to Women (Žene Ženama) who were interviewed for this study.

49. SIF in BiH, *Who, How, Why?*
50. In 2008, the number of registered NGOs in BiH increased significantly to 12,189. However, this does not mean that there are 12,189 associations in BiH. Due to the existence of four laws on associations and foundations, and the absence of a single registry of associations for the whole of BiH, there is a real possibility that many associations have double registrations (for example, at the cantonal and entity levels). This information comes from *ibid.*
51. Interview with Centre for Legal Support for Women, Zenica, Selma Badzic (Coordinator), Meliha Sendic (Assistant), 14 May 2013.
52. Kreutz, "How and When Armed Conflicts End." For more information see UCDP Conflict Termination Dataset Codebook, available at [http://www.uu.se/digitalAssets/55/55056\\_UCDP\\_Conflict\\_Termination\\_Dataset\\_v\\_2010-1.pdf](http://www.uu.se/digitalAssets/55/55056_UCDP_Conflict_Termination_Dataset_v_2010-1.pdf)
53. Hausmann, Tyson, and Zahidi. *The Global Gender Gap Report 2012*, 4.
54. Specifically, data from the following aid classification was chosen: 42010: Women, and 15150.09: Government and Civil Society: Women's Equality Organizations and Institutions.
55. Survey question WSV: E069\_15. Confidence: The Women's Movement: I am going to name a number of organizations, for each one could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence, or none at all?

### Notes on contributor

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