

Using a theoretical framework that combines public policy and feminist theories, this thesis examines the low representation of women in parliament and in the leadership of political parties. It contends that women as a group are discriminated against in the arena of political parties, which in turn is a contributing factor to their under-representation in high-level politics.

The thesis consists of two main analytical elements. The first examines the rhetoric used by the five main political parties in the Czech Republic as regards their policies on the equal representation of women and men. It contrasts this rhetoric with the reality as demonstrated by the latest statistics on women's representation on candidate lists (Parliamentary Elections 2010) and in the leadership of political parties.

The second analytical element consists of a case study of the Czech Social Democratic Party (CSSD). It analyses the conditions (feminist activism, internal party dynamics, permeability of party leadership) that the CSSD should meet in order to become an example of good practice as regards parity of representation. An analysis of where the party currently stands in relation to these objectives supports the conclusion that there is a discrepancy between rhetoric and practice. This discrepancy, in addition to the prevailing disbalance of power between men and women in senior positions, serves to undermine the credibility of political parties and leads to a poor political culture.