

# Conditions Pertinent for Overcoming Gender Inequality in Political Leadership: A Comparative Analysis of Angela Merkel and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf

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## Abstract

This qualitative study of Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany implements a most different systems design (MDS) as the basis for its comparative analysis. A cross-examination of Johnson Sirleaf's and Merkel's personal backgrounds, their leadership styles in their political careers before they became the heads of their governments, and their level of political participation in democracy or liberalization movements prior to their rise to power is conducted in this study. Key strands of feminist approaches in IR, such as liberal feminism, difference feminism, and postmodern feminism add to this study's discourse on Johnson Sirleaf's and Merkel's rise to political power. The basis for this study is that women comprise an underrepresented minority in the field of politics worldwide. Still, women like Johnson Sirleaf and Merkel have both prevailed in times of political hardships and managed to overcome gender stereotypes. As the role of women in political leadership is more prevalent in times of crisis around the world, it is exceedingly important to understand the conditions under which women political leaders may attain their country's highest political office, in both foreign and domestic contexts. This study reaffirms that more women in leadership within politics is needed for equitable gender representation in politics. More so, this study identifies some key similar conditions with which Angela Merkel and Ellen Johnson Sirleaf overcame gendered obstacles in politics to reach their country's highest political offices.

**Key Words:** women, politics, leadership, Angela Merkel, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf



## Argument

Merkel and Sirleaf Johnson are women who hail from very different countries and government systems. Despite these fundamental differences, they both rose to political leadership around the same time and have been in power for the same amount of time.

Women who have attained top leadership positions, who currently hold their country's highest political office, provide examples through which we may better learn what it takes for female political leaders to reach the highest levels.

## Literature Review

Roadmap:

- liberal, postmodern, and difference feminism approaches
- Angela Merkel
- Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
- Primary Sources: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf 2009 memoir; Angela Merkel's 2009 speech before U.S. Congress



## Methods

Qualitative and comparative analysis via a Most Different Systems Design (MDS)

-Adam Przeworski & Kenry Teune's 1970's MDS (most different systems design)

Dependent variables:

1. Merkel and Johnson Sirleaf are female heads of government

Independent variables:

1. Johnson Sirleaf and Merkel's personal backgrounds
2. their leadership styles in their political careers before they became the heads of their governments
3. their level of political participation in democracy or liberalization movements prior to their rise to power.



## Data Analysis

### Personal Backgrounds

**E.J.S.**-father in Liberian legislature, mother a travelling Christian pastor, grew up middle class in a poor country, domestic violence in marriage, motherhood

**A.M.**-father a Protestant pastor, mother a language teacher, doctorate as nuclear physicist, fall of the Berlin Wall and Communism

### Leadership Styles

**A.M.**-strategic, intelligent, prowess at leadership, background in Russian, math, religion, authoritative & determined, early-weak public speaking skills

**E.J.S.**-was honest, hardworking, and dignified throughout her career in politics, connection with Liberian people, helping abused women, tenacious public speaking skills

### Activism

**E.J.S.**-returned to Liberia from U.S. job at Citibank to help challenge Doe dictatorship, good speeches that drew attention despite being a woman, helped Liberia overcome the Doe regime (187), the Charles Taylor War (165), 1994's mass genocide in Rwanda [as head of the Africa bureau] (198), being an exile (221), among other obstacles.

**A.M.**-35-year-old physicist, was keen on starting a political career after the fall of Communism and the fall of the Berlin Wall, volunteered to work for the organization [Democratic Awakening (DA)], started her political career by distributing leaflets in Marienstraße in the center of Berlin, steady progression of increase in political leadership within DA party, until leaving DA for CDU (Christian Democratic Union, quickly rose to leader of CDU.



## Conclusions

Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and German Chancellor Angela Merkel are examples that it is possible to overcome fear, gender stereotypes, bias, and so many other negatives.

Their success may be qualitatively analyzed to having been attributed to their personal backgrounds, their leadership styles, and their activism in democratic and/or liberation movements prior to achieving their country's highest political office.

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