

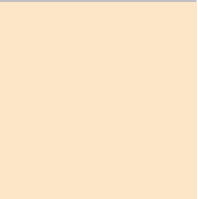
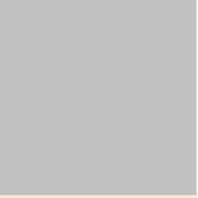
Empowering Women's Political Participation

*Historical Contexts,
Contemporary Trends,
and Challenges*

Edited by

SUZANA KOŠIR

ToKnowPress



Empowering Women's Political Participation



EWA Project partners:

- University of Maribor
- Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
- University for Adult Education Celje
- IPM – Institute for Political Management



**Co-funded by
the European Union**

Project EWA (101086788 – EWA – CERV-2022-GE) is co-funded by the European Union – Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV). Views and opinions expressed are, however, those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.



Empowering Women's Political Participation

Historical Contexts,
Contemporary Trends,
and Challenges

Edited by
Suzana Košir

*Empowering Women's Political Participation:
Historical Contexts, Contemporary Trends, and Challenges*

Edited by Dr. Suzana Košir

Reviewers Dr. Jana Goriup, Dr. Sr. Stella Mary K fmm, and Prabha Sridevan

Published by ToKnowPress

Bangkok · Celje · Lublin · Malta

2024

Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Nada Trunk Širca

Editors

Dr. Pornthep Anussornnitisarn

Prof. Luigia Melillo

Dr. Zbigniew Pastuszek

Editorial Board

Dr. Michele Corleto

Dr. Valerij Dermol

Dr. Dušan Lesjak

Dr. Radosław Maćik

Dr. Haruthai Numprasertchai

Dr. Anna Rakowska

Dr. Bordin Rassameethes

Dr. Agnieszka Sitko-Lutek

Senior Adviser

Dr. Kongkiti Phusavat

Managing and Production Editor

Alen Ježovnik

ToKnowPress is a Joint Imprint of

Kasetsart University, Bangkok, Thailand

International School for Social and Business Studies, Celje, Slovenia

Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Lublin, Poland

Pegaso International – MedEA, Malta

www.toknowpress.net

© 2024 Authors

ISBN 978-83-65020-51-2 (printed)

ISBN 978-83-65020-52-9 (pdf)

Distributed free of charge

Contents

- Forewords · 7
Introduction · 11
- 1 Navigating the Path to Gender Equality: A Global Perspective on Women's Rights and the Slovenian Women's Movements
Suzana Košir · 15
 - 2 Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women in Politics: An Overview
Rudi Klanjšek · 37
 - 3 Balancing Family Obligations with Political Ambitions: Strategies, Challenges, and Influence on Youth
Danijela Lahe and Suzana Košir · 61
 - 4 The Role of Education and Media Representation in Women's Active Political Participation
Suzana Košir and Tina Tomažič · 83
 - 5 Strategies and Campaigns of Women's Rights Organisations for the Encouragement of Women's Political Participation
Lucija Dežan and Suzana Košir · 109
 - 6 The Impact of Targeted Interventions on Political Empowerment and Gender Stereotypes Among Young Women and High School Students in Slovenia
Andrej Naterer and Miran Lavrič · 133
 - 7 Women, Politics and the Gulf Cooperation Council States: Emerging Trends
Radhika Lakshminarayanan · 159
 - 8 Iron Ladies: Evaluating the Struggle Against Hegemony for Political Empowerment of Women in India
Dolly Thomas and Cinthia Jude · 173
 - 9 Promoting Education and Mentorship for Women in Politics
Maja Bizjak and Rebeka Dečman Podergajs · 189
 - 10 Recommendations for Stakeholders Promoting Women's Political and Civic Participation and Gender Equality
Andrej Naterer and Maja Mezeg · 199
- Contributors · 213

Forewords

Women have often been portrayed as weak, fragile, and unfit to lead, especially in politics. This perception has carried over into the present day, resulting in society's assessment of women's character as weak when leading. In some parts of the world, there is still a belief that 'educating women is not important because they will return to the kitchen, and women should not lead men.' Consequently, women's participation in politics or public affairs is indeed limited or inhibited by the patriarchal structures of society. However, the present monograph provides an in-depth analysis of women's participation in politics across history and different territories, foregrounding the significance of the theme in a globalised, rapidly changing environment. As women's representation in politics and other fields has been a long-standing issue, the monograph highlights contemporary women's vital role in building the capacities of policymakers. It addresses the challenges and opportunities presented as policies aimed at empowering women's role and their participation in political processes have become fully integrated in several state's agendas and in governments' social, economic, and organisational planning. The monograph focuses on gender equality and the empowerment of women in politics, emphasising cultural and social expectations as important factors for participating in politics. It addresses certain stereotypes and expectations which persist in several postmodern societies, the barriers preventing women's entry into politics, balancing family obligations with political ambitions, and the strategies and challenges involved. Additionally, it explores the influence on youth, the role of education and media representation in women's active political participation, and the strategies and campaigns of women's rights organisations that encourage women's political participation. In doing so, it includes not only 12 exclusive articles but also the implementation of several recommendations, promotions, and encouragements.

The monograph raises a number of central themes under each priority area, setting objectives and making recommendations linked to each theme. It is essentially an exceptional quality academic work intended to assist countries, policymakers and especially women – regardless of their level of development – in achieving an inclusive society

for all. In such a society, women could participate as active policymakers fully and without discrimination in all social subsystems.

Therefore, policymakers, policy experts, educators, managers, researchers and university staff, journalists, practitioners involved in women's political participation and leadership, and university and college students should be identified as the target audience for educating the global society to overcome persistent stereotypes and the male-centric political scene. These factors include social structures, such as social and political systems, as well as the power dynamics that can exert pressure, such as excessive authority in the family, media environment, and political market conditions that are a source of income.

The monograph calls for the readiness to consider and accept new initiatives, explore new approaches, to traverse hitherto untrodden paths. This resolve is something for which not only India and Slovenia but also the global community will remain thankful. It also calls for constitutional reforms that transition from government to governance and from governance to civil society to build social capital and effective institutions. This includes promoting women's independent political participation, fostering a preference amongst politicians and citizens for relative equality instead of vertical structures, and encouraging a willingness among political leaders and citizens to compromise. Additionally, it emphasises the importance of not just blind trust but the ability to predict that the behaviour of women will be law-abiding and based on reciprocity, established habits of order, and mutual confidence in many countries around the world.

Finding a correlation between the presence and absence of these qualities and the success or failure of societal institutions adds an instrumental aspect to the normative demand for equality and participation by all, regardless of gender. Thus, the question to be asked is whether the new (desired) forms of women's role in politics and political cultures are likely to meet such expectations and enable new approaches to flourish. These considerations are highly relevant. The monograph as a whole systematically addresses these issues as they affect women.

Prof. Emeuritus Dr. Jana Goriup
Head of Department of Social Gerontology
Alma Mater Europaea University
Maribor, Slovenia

It is indeed an honour to be invited to write the foreword for this monograph, *Empowering Women's Political Participation: Historical Contexts, Contemporary Trends, and Challenges*. I am grateful to Dr Suzana Košir of the University of Maribor, Slovenia, for this opportunity. Through its chapters, this book examines the position of women in seats of power, particularly in politics. It explores how authority is gendered, the tools that can help change the gender equation, and the successes in breaking the stonewall. The contributors have achieved this with robust data and with the help of pre-test and post-test results.

From ancient times, the societal framework has been men-dominated, as exemplified by the position given to women in major world religions. It is an uphill task to dislodge convictions founded on faith. So, change is slow, but hearteningly, that change is happening. This book addresses the urgent need to increase women's representation in the political space. It is the skewed gender balance among policymakers that entrenches the status quo, and this imbalance needs to be addressed. Education is a crucial tool in levelling the ground, but another important factor is societal expectations. Women are often expected to bear the burden of family obligations while parallelly addressing professional demands. Recently, I heard a prominent woman sportsperson in India discuss the trolling she faced when she and her partner decided to undergo fertility treatment. It was poignant. Her partner, also a prominent sportsperson, shared the same desire for children, yet the world accused her of abandoning her sports career. This anecdote is just an example of the uneven terrain women navigate socially, economically, politically, and in the personal space.

Media, literature, and even language constantly embed stereotypical content and portrayals, transferring the imbalances to the next generation and making the struggle even more difficult. The default mode tends to favour men, necessitating a concerted effort to change this. 'Articulating a woman's standpoint is a political activity,' said an Intellectual Property scholar. This book seeks to do that very effectively and with clarity.

Prabha Sridevan
Judge of the Madras High Court
Chairperson of the Intellectual Property Appellate Tribunal
India

As the Head of an all-women institution of higher education, I was delighted to learn that faculty members of Stella Maris and those from the University of Maribor, Slovenia, have collaborated in organising a conference and have brought out a monograph entitled *Empowering Women's Political Participation: Historical Contexts, Contemporary Trends, and Challenges*. The publication offers in-depth analyses of women's participation in politics across history and territories, foregrounding the significance of the theme in a globalised environment.

The studies, based on systematically collected and analysed data, reveal many interesting findings on the role and activism of women in various communities across the spectrum of women's political activism and involvement in multiple political and geographical contexts. With its particular focus on women and the socio-economic and political contexts of their lived experiences that form the backgrounds of the analyses, the treatise offers an excellent source of information for researchers and scholars in related and interdisciplinary fields of study.

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, in its report titled 'Women's Political Participation and Leadership,' observes that 'Women's leadership in political spheres is shown to be socially beneficial (World Economic Forum, 2017), and is a matter of women's right to equal opportunity and access.' (No. 2019/03, Social Development Policy Briefs). The articles presented in the monograph testify to the beneficial impact of women's participation and the transformative forces at work in the social order.

Dr. Sr. Stella Mary K fmm
Principal
Stella Maris College
Chennai, India

Introduction

The present work is part of the CERV (Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme) research project 'EWA – Empowering Women in Active Society,' co-funded by the European Union. This book systematically analyses critical issues related to gender equality, political representation, and the importance of women's empowerment in the active political sphere.

Different perspectives and numerous studies highlight the main milestones of women's movements and the important link between intergenerational political socialisation, women's education, socio-economic status, gender representation in the media, and the effectiveness of education and training for the political empowerment of women and young girls. With the participation of various stakeholders, including young people and civil servants, project EWA aims to promote gender equality and balanced representation of women in different political structures.

The book's first part presents the complex and multifaceted history of women's rights. It highlights essential milestones and the challenges women have faced and continue to face in Slovenia and globally. From the subordinate roles women played in ancient societies to contemporary movements demanding equality, the struggle for gender equality is a key theme. Advocacy for women's rights has consistently focused on ensuring women's inclusion in the political, economic, and social spheres. Despite significant progress, obstacles stemming from patriarchal structures, cultural norms, and institutional biases still impede the path to gender equality.

One of the key themes explored in this book is women's political and civic participation. Women tend to show less interest in conventional politics but are more involved in unconventional political activities. The findings underline the importance of strengthening women's political participation to promote a more democratic and just society. The growing presence of women in Western parliaments has led researchers to study gender in politics more intensively, with a particular focus on the balance between professional and private life. Research shows that women who choose a career in politics face more difficulties than men when it comes to managing parenthood and family responsi-

bilities. Despite recognising the need to support families and working women, institutional and policy adjustments remain insufficient to develop the political careers of women and mothers.

Understanding the intergenerational transmission of political attitudes and behaviours is crucial to fostering active citizenship among young people. This book explores how parental education, socio-economic status, and gender influence the transmission of political attitudes and behaviours from parents to children. Families with higher socioeconomic status provide more resources and opportunities for young people's political engagement, and indirect communication through the observation of political action plays an important role in political socialisation, increasing the likelihood of intergenerational transmission of political interest.

The next topic is the role of education and the media in empowering women for active political participation. The underrepresentation of women in politics undermines democratic principles and the development of inclusive policies. Education empowers women with the knowledge, skills, and confidence needed to engage politically, promote critical thinking, and develop leadership abilities. At the same time, the media influence public perceptions and attitudes, offer women politicians visibility, highlight gender bias, and advocate for gender equality. The political education of women and gender-balanced media representations change social norms and promote women's political careers.

By exploring the barriers that prevent women from entering politics, the project identified several challenges. From low political interest among young people due to gender stereotypes and lack of political knowledge to fear of public exposure. Based on these findings, the book's final part presents interventions, including educational manuals, workshops, and online tools designed to promote gender equality and women's political participation.

Recommendations emphasise the importance of gender equality in curricula, training for public administration, partnerships between NGOs and government, youth participation, gender-sensitive policies, positive media representation, and supportive legislation. The project's findings underline the critical need for comprehensive education, initiatives to raise awareness and reduce gender gaps, and incentives for active citizenship. This book aims to provide a thorough understanding of the complex factors that influence women's political empowerment

and offers effective strategies to increase women's political representation and influence, thereby contributing to a more just and democratic society.

Dr Suzana Košir
University of Maribor, Slovenia

Chapter One

Navigating the Path to Gender Equality: A Global Perspective on Women's Rights and the Slovenian Women's Movements

Suzana Košir

University of Maribor, Slovenia
suzana.kosir1@um.si

The present text explores the complex and multifaceted history of women's rights globally, spanning various epochs and geographical regions. From ancient civilisations where women occupied subordinate roles to contemporary movements demanding equality, the journey towards gender parity has been marked by significant milestones and challenges. Advocacy for women's rights has been a consistent theme, with ongoing struggles to secure women's inclusion in political, economic, and social spheres. Despite substantial progress, persistent barriers rooted in patriarchal structures, cultural norms, and institutional biases continue to hinder full gender equality. The women's movement in Slovenia exemplifies this broader narrative, reflecting local contexts within the framework of European feminist discourses. Through activism and solidarity, this movement has shaped Slovenia's social trajectory, contributing to ongoing efforts to address gender disparities and advance women's rights within evolving political landscapes.

Keywords: women's rights, women's political movements, political participation, gender equality, Slovenia, global movements

Introduction

Throughout history, women have consistently faced inequality linked to their gender. The global history of women's rights is a complex narrative spanning epochs and geographical regions, marked by milestones, challenges, and transformative movements. From ancient civilisations where patriarchal structures dominated to modern-day struggles for gender equality, women have continuously fought for recognition and inclusion in political, economic, and social spheres.

In ancient civilisations like Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, patriarchal norms relegated women to subordinate roles. Legal sys-

tems, religious doctrines, and cultural practices reinforced gender hierarchies, limiting women's agency and participation in public life. Despite these constraints, glimpses of women's agency emerged through figures like Sappho and Cleopatra, who challenged societal norms through literary and political endeavours.

The medieval and early modern periods saw further entrenchment of patriarchal norms, heavily influenced by religious doctrines such as Christianity in Europe. Women were predominantly confined to domestic roles, and their relationships with men defined their moral worth. Despite these restrictions, women like Christine de Pizan and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz pushed against societal expectations through intellectual pursuits and advocacy for women's education and equality.

The Enlightenment era of the 18th and 19th centuries brought intellectual ferment and social transformation, laying the groundwork for modern feminist thought. Thinkers like Mary Wollstonecraft and Olympe de Gouges advocated for women's rights and challenged prevailing notions of gender inequality. The Industrial Revolution drew women into emerging economies while reinforcing gendered divisions of labour and unequal access to economic opportunities.

In the 20th century, global feminist movements advocated for suffrage, legal reforms, and broader societal changes. The first wave of feminism secured voting rights in many Western democracies. In contrast, the second wave expanded the agenda to include reproductive rights, workplace equality, and awareness of gender-based violence. Legislative reforms and international commitments, such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and conventions like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979), underscored the global effort towards gender equality.

Contemporary challenges persist despite legislative gains and international frameworks. Cultural norms, stereotypes, and institutional practices continue to hinder progress towards gender parity. Women face disparities in economic opportunities, political representation, and access to education and healthcare. Gender-based violence remains pervasive, demanding comprehensive legal protections and support systems.

Global feminist solidarity has been pivotal in advancing gender equality agendas. Intersectional approaches recognise the interconnectedness of gender with race, class, sexuality, and disability, advocating for inclusive policies and social justice. Educational reforms,

cultural interventions, and media advocacy play crucial roles in challenging stereotypes and fostering gender-sensitive societies.

Collective action is imperative to address entrenched barriers and achieve substantive gender equality. Governments, civil society, and international organisations must prioritise intersectional approaches that dismantle systemic discrimination and promote inclusive policies. By learning from historical struggles, societies can forge pathways towards a future where gender equality is a reality for all individuals.

The history of women's rights globally reflects an ongoing struggle for equality, justice, and social change. Women's resilience and solidarity across diverse communities have been instrumental in advancing legal reforms and raising awareness of gender issues. However, achieving gender equality requires a sustained commitment to dismantling barriers and creating inclusive societies where everyone can thrive without gender-based constraints.

Women's Rights throughout the History

However, this march towards equality has been far from linear, often encountering formidable obstacles rooted in patriarchal structures and cultural norms.

The Code of Hammurabi in Babylon (2000 BC) is the first written code by the Babylonian king Hammurabi (the 6th king of the Babylonian dynasty, reigning between 1792 and 1750 BC). It states that the king's task is: 'to enable justice to rule the kingdom, to destroy the wicked and violent, to prevent the powerful from exploiting the weak... to enlighten the state and promote the welfare of the people.' (Council of Europe, 2012). Hammurabi primarily aimed to introduce reform in the social sphere, asserting that all people are equal before the law, whether they are farmers, artisans, or day labourers. Of course, the code distinguished three social strata: freemen, the court circle, and enslaved people. The Code recognised certain rights for women, such as entitlement to a share of their father's inheritance and receiving a dowry upon marriage (Beauvoir, 2013).

In ancient Egypt, around 2000 BC, the pharaoh was quoted when giving instructions to his subordinates: 'When a petitioner arrives from Upper or Lower Egypt [...] ensure that the law does everything, that the customs and rights of every person are respected.' During this period, women held the most favourable position in Egypt, as they had the same rights as men and the same legal power, allowing them to in-

herit and own property. However, since most property was owned by the rulers, the clergy, and the army, there was limited private property available for women to maintain the dignity of an independent person.

Ancient civilisations such as Greece and Rome began to witness women's voices challenging societal norms and laying the groundwork for future advocacy. Women were largely excluded from public life, although some, such as the Hetaeras and the Vestal Virgins, achieved a degree of influence and independence.

Hetaeras (Beauvoir, 2013; Dillon, 2003; Kurke, 1991) were educated attendants in ancient Greece, especially in Athens. Their role differed from that of other women in Greek society, as they were known for their education, wit, and cultural achievements. Hetaeras were often involved in intellectual and artistic circles and had influential relationships with prominent men. They were more than prostitutes; many were valued for their conversational and artistic skills. The Vestal Virgins (Staples, 1997) were priestesses in ancient Rome who served the goddess Vesta, goddess of the hearth and home. Their primary duty was to maintain the eternal fire in the sanctuary of Vesta, symbolising Rome's permanence. Vestal virgins were chosen as children from noble families and had to remain virgins and serve for 30 years. Their celibacy and service were vital to the safety and prosperity of Rome. Vestal women, highly valued in Roman society, also had special privileges, such as property rights and protection from corporal punishment. Early examples of advocacy for women's rights were limited. However, individual women, such as Aspasia of Miletus, a courtesan, a Hetaera, a teacher of Socrates, and a political adviser to her lover Pericles, transcended traditional roles in classical Greece and participated in philosophical and political debates. Figures such as Sappho (Powell, 2019) opposed patriarchy and advocated for women's social empowerment. Christine de Pizan's best-known works include *The Book of the City of Ladies*, which addressed questions about the role and value of women in society, defended women's intellectual and moral capacities, and challenged negative stereotypes about women at the time. *The Treasure of the City of Ladies*, a continuation of the first book, focuses on women who have achieved greatness in history. In her writing, De Pizan presented women as capable and worthy of equal social recognition, which was revolutionary in her time (Brown-Grant, 2003).

In the Middle Ages, women's rights and role in social and political engagement were usually limited. Nevertheless, the differences depended

on time, place, and social status. Women from higher social classes or those in the church hierarchy had more influence and power. Most women in the Middle Ages were confined to traditional female roles such as looking after the household, raising children, and caring for the family. Few women were involved in public life or political activities. In political terms, women were rarely included in decision-making processes or appointed to high political positions, as political institutions were strongly male-oriented, excluding women from political power. The exception was mainly nuns, who had some power and influence within church institutions. Nuns could lead monasteries, be educators, and play an essential role in religious life. However, there was also a female social elite, where some women from the upper social classes could have some influence and power in social and political affairs. Their influence was often based on their social status, wealth, and connections to political or church leaders.

During the Renaissance period, several strong women played essential roles in shaping the political events of their time. Eleanor of Aquitaine, Matilda of Tuscany, Isabella I of Castile, and Catherine de' Medici were among the most influential women.

Eleanor of Aquitaine, Duchess of Aquitaine, Countess of Poitiers, and later Queen of France and then Queen of England played a crucial role in politics and social life. Matilda, Countess of Tuscany, was the daughter of King Henry I of England and became Empress of the Holy Roman Empire after her first marriage to Henry V. After her husband's death, she returned to England, where she launched a war for the throne against her cousin Stephen to assert her rights as heir to Henry I, an event known as the Anarchy. Her role in this war was crucial for subsequent political events in England. Isabella I of Castile was the queen of Castile and León, who, together with her husband Ferdinand II of Aragon, united the Spanish kingdoms and significantly influenced political events in Spain and Europe. Catherine de' Medici, wife of the French king Henry II and later the mother of three French kings, held an influential political position as Queen Mother. She played a vital role during the Wars of Religion in France in the 16th century.

In the 18th century, two important socio-political and intellectual phenomena appeared in Europe and America, accelerating the growth and spread of feminist ideologies: the Enlightenment and the revolution in America and France. The Age of Enlightenment was a period of progress in the fight for women's rights. Women in different parts of

the world defined and studied the unequal status of women. By writing and discussing, they highlighted their unequal position and began to express their opposition to the subordinate position of women, who desired greater rights and equality with men. The Enlightenment, such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Denis Diderot, criticised entrenched social hierarchies based on the inherited privileges of monarchs, nobility, and church institutions. They stood for the fundamental principles of freedom and equality in the Declaration of Man and the Citizen from 1789, although women were often excluded from these rights. Despite this exclusion, women actively participated in the revolutions that secured American independence from Britain in 1783 and sparked the French Revolution in 1789. Against the backdrop of calls for freedom and civil rights, women began articulating their demands for equality. Above all, Abigail Adams, the wife of the second president of the United States, persuaded the designers of American democracy to consider including women's interests in revolutionary changes. Similarly, in France, the playwright and activist Olympe de Gouges wrote *The Declaration of the Rights of Women and the Female Citizen*, where she highlighted the shortcomings of the French Revolution in terms of gender equality and demanded equal rights for women. On the other hand, Mary Wollstonecraft's seminal work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, laid the foundation for modern feminist thought by advocating for women's education and equality.

The late 19th and early 20th centuries were watershed periods for women worldwide as they began lobbying their governments for suffrage. Among the pioneers of these movements were Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Emmeline Pankhurst, whose steadfast defence of women's rights paved the way for many legislative changes. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, an American suffragette, was one of the leading figures in the fight for women's suffrage. As a co-founder of the Women's Loyal National League, she was active in gender equality and was instrumental in creating arguments for women's right to vote. The passage of the 19th Amendment to the US Constitution in 1920 was an important legislative act that guaranteed women the constitutional right to vote.

In Europe, reforms were also implemented in voting rights, enabling women to participate actively in the political process. Emmeline Pankhurst, a British suffragette and founder of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), drew attention to the fight for women's suffrage with her militant tactics and helped to pass legislative changes in

Great Britain. Many movements were characterised by activism, triggering a wave of changes across many countries. These movements highlighted the importance of equal participation of women in the political process and strengthened their influence on social and political events.

In the late 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century, women worldwide began lobbying their governments for voting rights. Their methods and arguments varied. Women's suffrage organisations were often associated with pressure groups advocating for other agendas, such as racial equality or self-determination. In 1983, New Zealand became the first country in the world to grant voting rights to women, including Maori women.

Between the 1960s and 1980s, with the rise of the second wave of more radical feminism, the discourse on women's rights expanded to include issues such as reproductive autonomy, equality in the workplace, and violence against women. The distinction between biological sex and social gender as a social construct, first expressed by Simone de Beauvoir in 1949, strongly influenced second-wave feminist thinking. Feminists developed ideas about how culture and society could be changed to liberate women. As new ideas took shape, feminist political activism and campaigns intensified. A key concept of second-wave feminism was that women are not born but created - a product of social conditioning. In this context, second-wave feminism shed light on the more profound social and economic inequalities women faced and promoted comprehensive reforms in legislation and social policies.

CEDAW (1979) was adopted by the United Nations, marking a key international milestone that emphasised the global commitment to promoting women's rights and eliminating systemic inequalities.

The CEDAW Convention, which entered into force in 1981, is the result of long-term efforts by women's movements and the international community to recognise women's fundamental rights. Its acceptance reflected the global effort to ensure equal opportunities and treatment for women around the world. CEDAW has become an essential document of international human rights law, outlining the obligations of states to eliminate discrimination against women and promote gender equality. According to the CEDAW Convention (1979), signatory countries must take measures to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women, including in legal, political, social, and economic aspects of their lives. This includes adopting appropriate legislation, es-

establishing effective institutions to promote gender equality, and implementing preventive measures to prevent discrimination against women in all spheres of social life. CEDAW, which 189 countries have ratified, requires member states to incorporate the principles of gender equality into their laws and policies, implement measures to eliminate inequality in all areas of life, and define the comprehensive rights of women in civil, political, economic, social and cultural fields. The Convention marked an essential step towards institutionalising gender equality by establishing legal frameworks to address structural inequalities.

Modern feminist movements continue the work of early pioneers by advocating for equality in all areas of life. In contemporary times, women's rights movements also engage in digital feminist activism. Global campaigns such as the #MeToo movement highlight issues of sexual harassment and violence, emphasising the need for systemic change. #TimesUp, which started in the entertainment industry in response to sexual harassment revelations, has grown into a broader movement to combat gender discrimination and inequality in the workplace. Another notable campaign is #HeForShe, launched by the United Nations to encourage men to support gender equality and actively engage in feminist movements. Women's organisations and movements worldwide are essential in raising public awareness, advocating for policy changes, and promoting gender equality. Organisations such as the International Alliance of Women (2024) and local non-governmental organisations act as engines of change by promoting women's rights and empowerment. They strive to eliminate legislative and cultural barriers that hinder gender equality (Hassim, 2006).

In addition, the cooperation of international organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union is essential to strengthen the global movement for women's rights. Initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially Goal 5, which focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, provide a global framework for promoting gender equality. These goals call on Member States to take action to eliminate all forms of gender-based discrimination, violence, and inequality.

Despite international efforts and national policies, cultural norms and stereotypes have often hindered and continue to hinder real progress. Deeply rooted patriarchal patterns that permeate society still influence gender roles and society's expectations of women's behaviour.

Legal measures must be supported by educational programs and campaigns to raise awareness of gender equality. These initiatives can change the social perception of gender roles and reduce gender discrimination or sexism. Such initiatives are crucial in changing perceptions and reducing stereotypes, as they create space for greater involvement of women in all spheres of social and political life. Achieving substantive gender equality requires legislative reforms and social changes focused on education, awareness, and behaviour change.

Women's Rights and Women's Political Movements in Slovenia

The women's movement in Slovenia is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon shaped by a myriad of institutional, social, and cultural influences. While it shares commonalities with women's movements in other European countries, it also exhibits distinctive features, particularly its intertwined relationship with national defence activities. This unique characteristic underscores the movement's deep-rooted connection to broader societal and political contexts.

In Slovenia, the latter half of the 19th century represents a pivotal epoch in the emergence of women in public life and the articulation of the 'woman question,' a discourse that evolved into an authentic women's movement advocating for equality by the advent of the new century. Slovenian historiography, analogous to global historiography, has predominantly centred on male experiences and contributions. Despite the substantial impact of women's contributions throughout history, historical scholarship has traditionally failed to afford them adequate recognition. Throughout the 19th century, women were predominantly depicted as literary heroines rather than acknowledged as active and influential participants in public and political spheres. Their contributions and legacies were primarily preserved and transmitted through oral traditions, literary works, and creative expressions, which often romanticised their roles rather than providing a comprehensive account of their societal contributions. This period marks the beginning of a significant transformation in the recognition and documentation of women's roles and achievements, laying the groundwork for future feminist historiography and the broader acknowledgement of women's impact on societal development. Significant changes began in the latter half of the 19th century, challenging the prevailing societal norms that largely confined women to the traditional roles of homemakers, devoted wives, and nurturing mothers. Despite the

persistence of these ideals, the actual influence and responsibilities of women within the family unit expanded considerably. Women wielded substantial influence over their husbands and played a critical role in child-rearing, often surpassing the recognition afforded by societal norms, contemporary journalism, and the perceptions of men themselves (Jogan, 2017; Šafarič, 2016; Selišnik, 2012).

This phenomenon was particularly pronounced within the burgeoning bourgeoisie. In these social strata, an inversion of traditional power dynamics was observed. It was often remarked that the higher a man's status in the elite hierarchy, the more his role within the family was reduced to that of a 'financial minister.' In such households, women were not merely passive figures but actively involved in crucial domestic decisions. These decisions encompassed various aspects of family life, from the upbringing and education of children to managing household affairs, thus indicating a more complex and nuanced reality than the superficial adherence to traditional gender roles suggested. The period marked a transitional phase where the contributions and influence of women began to assert themselves more prominently, laying the groundwork for the gradual evolution of gender roles and the eventual quest for women's rights and equality. The shift in the domestic power structure within bourgeois families is a testament to the evolving perception of women's roles, highlighting the gradual but significant changes in societal attitudes towards gender and family dynamics during this era (Šafarič, 2016).

Certain critics argued that this dynamic negatively impacted the Slovenian national movement, suggesting that bourgeois women exhibited a diminished enthusiasm for nationalism and consequently imparted this indifference to their children. Nevertheless, considering that in the ensuing decades, the Slovenian movement produced numerous staunchly nationalistic figures, many of whom were nurtured by these ostensibly 'lukewarm' mothers, such criticism appears unfounded. The evolving role of women in Slovenian society during this period reflects broader socio-political transformations. It underscores the gradual yet profound shift towards gender equality and the recognition of women's contributions beyond the private sphere (Šafarič, 2016).

Throughout its historical trajectory, the women's movement in Slovenia has navigated through four distinct phases of state formation. It emerged during the era of the Austro-Hungarian Empire when women

began organising and advocating for their rights within the confines of imperial governance. Subsequently, the movement persisted and adapted through the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in 1918, later renamed Yugoslavia, lasting until 1941.

The tumultuous mid-20th century marked another pivotal period for the women's movement as it operated within the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia following World War II. This era saw significant socio-political changes, including the establishment of socialist principles that influenced the movement's goals and strategies. The subsequent transformation into the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia further shaped the landscape for women's activism, fostering both challenges and opportunities amidst evolving state policies. The movement's resilience and evolution continued into the late 20th century, culminating in Slovenia's declaration of independence in 1991 and its subsequent establishment as an independent nation-state. This new-found political landscape provided a fresh framework within which the women's movement could redefine its objectives and priorities, now operating within the context of a sovereign Slovenia (Jogan, 2017).

In the initial phase of Slovenian national development, leaders recognised the imperative of integrating women into the burgeoning national movement, particularly evident during the revolutionary climate 1848. This era saw concerted efforts to encourage women's participation in various social gatherings, national commemorations, and communal activities, underscoring their emerging role in public life. In Slovenia, within the broader Austrian context, female taxpayers gained the right to participate in municipal elections from 1849 onward, subject to the same census qualifications as their male counterparts. However, this right was exercised indirectly through a proxy system: women were required to authorise a male proxy to cast their votes on their behalf, a practice that persisted until significant electoral reforms.

Between 1861 and 1884, female taxpayers in Slovenia further secured the right to vote by proxy across all curiae (representing corporate bodies such as great landownership, cities and towns, chambers of commerce, industry, and rural communities) within the Carniolan diet. Subsequently, from 1884 onward, women's suffrage was limited to the curia of great landownership and the chamber of commerce and trade. Notably, despite these advancements, women remained excluded from voting for the parliament (Reichsrat), although they could participate in elections within the curia of great landowners.

The electoral landscape underwent additional transformations in 1896, with the introduction of a general curia granting suffrage exclusively to men, while the existing curiae continued to function separately. It was not until 1907 that the curial system, along with the fractional suffrage allotted to women, was entirely abolished with the establishment of universal and equal suffrage for men. This milestone marked a significant stride towards democratisation and electoral equality within Slovenia, reflecting broader socio-political changes in the region during the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Selišnik, 2012).

The democratisation process facilitated the establishment of numerous societies that incorporated women as members. Despite these developments, women continued to face political participation barriers. In the early 1870s, women briefly engaged with the Sokol gymnastics movement, which played a prominent role in national endeavours. Earlier, during a provocative rally by their adversaries, the German Turners, in Janče and Vevče, residents responded with physical confrontation, resulting in clashes with law enforcement. This incident led to the legal prosecution of several women involved in the confrontation (Šafarič, 2016).

Calls for greater independence among women, advocating for their education and employment opportunities, began gaining prominence, even as their traditional roles as mothers and homemakers prevailed. This shift in societal attitudes towards women, often called the 'woman question,' evolved beyond its national implications to encompass wider social dimensions, prompting active engagement from women. Notably, poet Pavlina Pajkova emerged as a leading voice in this movement, arguing that societies which marginalise women from public life are destined for 'slavery and demise.' Pajkova garnered recognition during her lifetime as one of the pioneering advocates for women's emancipation in Slovenia (Jevnikar, 2013).

This period was marked by a significant and nuanced transformation in women's perceptions and societal roles within Slovenian society. Their participation in nationalistic activities underscored their substantial but often marginalised contributions to the broader socio-political landscape of Slovenia during this era. Despite societal constraints and legal barriers, Slovenian women actively contributed to national movements, demonstrating resilience and a steadfast commitment to civic engagement (Jogan, 2017).

The shifting social dynamics at the beginning of the 20th century

fostered the rise of a cohort of Slovenian female artists, including poets, writers, painters, and other creative professionals. By decree, the Ministry of Science 1871 establishes a state women's teacher training school in Ljubljana (Statistični urad Republike Slovenije, n.d.). The inception of the women's movement in Slovenia can be traced back to the establishment of the first women's branch of the Cyril and Methodius Society in Trieste in 1887. A significant objective of this branch was national defence activities. In 1897, the first Slovenian women's journal, *Slovenka*, began publication in Trieste and continued until 1903. In response to the increasingly radical organisation of the working class—exemplified by the founding of the Social Democratic Party in 1896, which officially recognised gender equality—Janez Evangelist Krek established the Catholic Society for Female Workers in 1894. This organisation was renamed Krek's Enlightenment in 1919, and it incorporated several other women's organisations, including the Union of Female Workers, the Union of Female Office Workers and Commercial Employees, and the Union of Female Servants (Jogan, 2017). In a notable milestone of academic achievement, Marija Urbas attained distinction as the first Slovenian woman to earn a doctorate in philosophy from the University of Graz in 1906 (Mlad.si, 2019). Despite these advancements, the professional landscape for women during this period was characterised by a notable increase in employment, albeit predominantly in occupations that required minimal formal education or specialised skills, resulting in comparatively lower wages. This disparity was evident even within comparable professions, where women earned less than men (Jogan, 2017; Šafarič, 2016).

In 1901, the establishment of the Christian Women's Union in Ljubljana marked a significant milestone in advocating women's rights and equality. Franja Tavčar, the wife of prominent liberal politician Ivan Tavčar, emerged as a key figure in this movement. She notably led the Women's Gymnastics Society, which achieved independence from the Ljubljana Sokol after four years of operation. Subsequently, women's gymnastics gained widespread popularity and successfully proliferated across other Sokol societies. Interestingly, despite the generally conservative stance of the Catholic camp on women's issues, the Catholic physical education organisation Orel also embraced and promoted women's gymnastics a few years later (Vodopivec, 1994).

The literary magazine *Vesna* frequently addressed these evolving developments, although its contributions to the discourse were not

groundbreaking. More influential in shaping the debate was the journal *Slovanski svet*, which prominently featured contributions from leading Slovenian female intellectuals. Despite this platform, the reception of new ideas was gradual, with even the liberal press occasionally expressing caution and scepticism. Concerns were voiced about the potential politicisation of the ‘woman question,’ underscoring the complexities and hesitations surrounding the adoption of progressive viewpoints during this period (Vodopivec, 1994).

In 1919, the Slovenian Women’s Union was established within the Slovenian Christian Social Union framework. By 1922, it underwent a restructuring to form the Slovenian Christian Union, aimed at consolidating ‘organisations of Christian-minded women’ under the auspices of Catholic social doctrine. Central to its mission was advancing women’s education across religious, social, household, and legal domains. The organisation fostered vibrant women’s and girls’ circles and commenced publishing the newsletter *Vigred* through the Orel sub-association from 1923 onwards. Notably, it annually commemorated Mother’s Day on March 25. In 1926, the Christian Women’s Society was established in Ljubljana, further enriching the landscape of organised women’s advocacy within Slovenia (Jogan, 2017).

These initial initiatives signalled the onset of organised women’s activism in Slovenia, characterised by a fusion of nationalistic, religious, and social goals. The formation of these groups was indicative of the broader socio-political climate of the time, shaped by influences from socialist ideologies and Catholic social teachings. These movements encompassed a range of ideological perspectives, advocating for national defence, social equity, and the propagation of Christian values and social doctrines (Jogan, 2017; Ramet, 2002).

The Union of Working Women and Girls (ZDŽD – Zveza delavskih žen in deklet), established in 1924 in Ljubljana, emerged as a significant force within organised women’s activism. Rooted in socialist and feminist principles, the ZDŽD’s commitment was evident through its publication of the *Ženski list*, active from October 1924 to 1935. It was underscored by a resolution adopted during International Women’s Day observance in 1926. This resolution demanded universal, equal, and secret voting rights, equality for legitimate and illegitimate children, the legalisation of old-age insurance for all workers (including domestic workers), and the responsibility of capitalist enterprises for ‘children’s homes,’ among other reforms. Initially influenced by social democrats,

the ZDŽD later increasingly aligned with the Communist Party's goal of forging a 'united front of the working class' under its leadership (Jogan, 2017).

Within the ZDŽD, there was a strong Communist fraction, including notable members such as Tončka Čeč, Anica Lokar, Poldka Kos, Štefka Zbašnik, and Milena Mohorič. These women played integral roles in combating gender-based discrimination against female labourers and championing broader workers' rights. Their activism extended to organising and endorsing labour strikes throughout the 1930s. However, due to its association with Communist activities, the ZDŽD faced prohibition and was disbanded in 1935 (Jogan, 2017; Šelih et al., 2007).

In the 1920s, the goals initially set by the ZDŽD were later adopted by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (KPJ) and the Communist Party of Slovenia (KPS). This alignment was prominently articulated during the 5th National Conference in 1940 in Zagreb, where Vida Tomšič presented a comprehensive report. The conference distinguished between bourgeois feminist movements, which focused on reforms within the existing class structure, and the proletarian women's movement, which integrated women's rights advocacy with the broader struggle against class exploitation and imperialism (Jogan, 2017). Building on strategies developed throughout the 1930s, the conference outlined a proactive approach to expand the revolutionary women's movement under communist leadership. This approach emphasised mobilising women at every opportunity and utilising legal and, when necessary, clandestine methods to organise and disseminate revolutionary ideas among women, navigating the challenges posed by state surveillance of women's groups (Jogan, 2017).

Until the outbreak of World War II, the women's movement in Slovenia was characterised by divisions along class-political and religious lines. The socialist era marked a significant shift towards political unity within the movement, predominantly defined by a working-class ideology.

The Communist Party, collaborating with various organisations, fought for women's total voting rights, the realisation of the principle of equal pay for equal work, against high prices and exploitation, for women's access to all types of education and professions (as women could not, for example, become judges), for the equal status of legitimate and illegitimate children, for social protection of motherhood, for the legalisation of abortion, and for the abolition of the legal status

of the husband-father as the head of the family. The 5th Conference of the Communist Party, in particular, emphasised the significance of women's issues within the party, marking a departure from previous practices in mixed political groups where such concerns were often marginalised or paternalistically addressed (Batinić, 2015; Jogan, 2017).

Simultaneously, the 'most progressive bourgeois women's society', Ženski pokret, established in 1926 and led by Angela Vode from 1927 to 1937, pursued an expansive agenda on various fronts of women's rights. Vode's active participation in international women's organisations like the International Alliance of Women¹ and the International Council of Women² extended the society's advocacy reach. Ženski pokret advocated for women's suffrage, opposed the dismissal of married women from public service, campaigned against enforced celibacy of female teachers and civil servants, and championed abortion rights on social grounds, collaborating closely with the Union of Working Women and Girls (ZDŽD). However, the society's activities were curtailed under police surveillance in 1937, diminishing its impact and influence (Jogan, 2017)

The Slovenian Anti-Fascist Women's Association (Slovenska protifašistična ženska zveza SPŽZ) prominently featured *Naša žena* as its central publication from 1941 onward, alongside the publication of *Slovenka* in the Littoral region. The SPŽZ aimed to mobilise women in organised support of the Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation and the broader national liberation struggle while also fostering political consciousness among women (Batinić, 2015). Within the National Liberation War (NOB), women assumed multifaceted roles, particularly in rural areas, functioning as political activists, couriers, and intelligence agents. Their contributions were pivotal in securing provisions, providing care for the injured, and mobilising aid for the partisan forces. Furthermore, women played a crucial role in educating children within partisan schools. They progressively assumed positions in the local leadership structures of the Liberation Front and the Communist Party in the final phases of the conflict (Bernik Burja, 2002; Deželak - Barić, 1999).

In alignment with the strategy of advancing gender equality alongside national and social liberation efforts, Slovenian women were grant-

¹ <https://womenalliance.org>

² <https://www.icw-cif.com>

ed active and passive voting rights through a decree issued by the Executive Committee of the Liberation Front (IO OF – Izvršni odbor Osobodilne fronte) on May 17, 1942. These rights applied to women residing in liberated territories under partisan control during the occupation. At the assembly of Slovene representatives held in Kočevje in October 1943, women constituted 10.8% of the delegates (62 out of 572), marking their active participation in parliamentary affairs as they comprised 10% of the members of the Supreme Plenum of the OF. Subsequently, these voting rights were formally enshrined in the constitution of 1946, culminating in a struggle spanning nearly half a century for Slovenian women to attain suffrage. Before this, during the Austro-Hungarian era, limited municipal voting rights were granted to a few women in 1907 based on their economic status as taxpayers, albeit exercised through male proxies. In the subsequent Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (later Yugoslavia), these rights were initially promised but not fully realised (Jogan, 2017).

Following liberation, substantial strides towards gender equality were enshrined in the inaugural constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (FLRJ) in January 1946. Article 24 of the constitution unequivocally declared: 'Women are equal with men in all state, economic, and social life domains. Women have the right to equal pay for equal work and benefit from special safeguards in employment. The state specifically safeguards the interests of mothers and children by establishing maternity hospitals, children's homes, and care facilities, and by granting mothers the entitlement to paid leave prior to and following childbirth.' This constitutional provision marked a significant commitment to gender parity and social welfare, affirming comprehensive rights for women within the post-liberation Yugoslav state (Jogan, 2017).

In the immediate post-liberation years, amidst challenging economic circumstances, the Anti-Fascist Women's Front (AFŽ – Antifašistična fronta žena or SPŽZ – Slovenska protifašistična ženska zveza) played a pivotal role in mobilising support for the nascent authority and advancing an emancipatory agenda. As an integral part of the Liberation Front, the AFŽ educated women politically and addressed specific practical challenges women face. The introduction of self-management policies in 1950 and the subsequent transformation of the Liberation Front (OF) into the Socialist Alliance of Working People (SZDL – Socialistična zveza delovnega ljudstva) led to the reassess-

ment of the necessity of a distinct women's organisation. This reconsideration was articulated during the 4th Congress in 1953 by Vida Tomšič, who argued against the misconception that women needed to engage in a separate struggle from the broader society to secure their rights, a potentially divisive notion. Consequently, the AFŽ underwent a reorganisation into the Association of Women's Societies of Yugoslavia, integrating various women's groups under the auspices of the SZDL. The dissolution of the separate albeit largely symbolic women's organisation was underpinned by the recognition that addressing the 'women's issue' – including combating pervasive gender discrimination – was not solely the responsibility of women but a matter of broader societal concern (Jogan, 2017).

The necessity for meaningful political engagement of women within the new self-managing framework was underscored by calls for the acknowledgement of women's education and expertise in facilitating their integration into political spheres from the outset of the Association of Women's Societies. Nevertheless, the idea that women should participate in politics solely based on gender was firmly dismissed (Jogan, 2017).

In 1961, the Association transformed the Conference for the Social Activity of Women, and starting from 1976, its functions were assumed by the Council for Socioeconomic and Political Status of Women within the Presidency of the Socialist Alliance of Working People (SZDL). Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, these organisations focused on instituting policies that would primarily enhance material conditions to better facilitate the balance between professional work and personal life, with a particular emphasis on improving conditions for women. However, it was explicitly recognised that this objective fell under men's and women's jurisdiction and responsibility (Jogan, 2017).

However, with the establishment of an independent state of Slovenia, this unity fragmented once more along the lines of class, political affiliation, and, to some extent, religious orientation. The post-independence period witnessed divergent priorities and strategies among various women's groups, reflecting broader societal divisions and ideological differences that continue to shape the contemporary landscape of women's activism in Slovenia. The development of the women's movement in Slovenia reflects broader European trends while responding to specific national contexts. The intertwining of the movement with national defence efforts is a distinctive characteristic, setting it apart from its counterparts in other European nations. Further-

more, the transition from gender discrimination to gender egalitarianism marks significant ideological shifts that parallel broader socio-political changes in the region (Allcock, 2000; Ramet, 2002).

Conclusion

Throughout history, women have persistently confronted gender inequalities. The global trajectory of women's rights spans diverse epochs and geographical contexts, characterised by significant milestones, persistent challenges, and transformative movements. From ancient civilisations where patriarchal norms entrenched women in subordinate roles to contemporary struggles for gender equality, women have tirelessly advocated for their rights and reshaped societal attitudes towards gender roles. This journey towards gender equality reflects a narrative of progress, setbacks, and ongoing challenges necessitating sustained commitment and collective action from governments, civil society, and international organisations.

Women's resilience and the solidarity of feminist movements worldwide have been instrumental in advancing legal reforms, raising awareness about gender issues, and fostering solidarity across diverse communities. Despite these efforts, achieving substantive gender equality remains an unfinished agenda, evident in persistent disparities across various spheres of life, including economic opportunities, political representation, and access to justice.

Moving forward, initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality must prioritise intersectional approaches that address challenges faced by women from diverse backgrounds and identities. Educational reforms, cultural interventions, and policy initiatives are essential components of a holistic strategy to dismantle barriers to gender equality and create inclusive societies where individuals can thrive irrespective of gender.

The journey towards gender equality in Slovenia exemplifies the complexities of women's activism within specific historical, cultural, and political contexts. Since gaining independence, Slovenia's women's movement has navigated societal norms, legal frameworks, and shifts in the political landscape, reflecting broader European trends while retaining distinct national characteristics.

Initially unified by aspirations for gender equality and political representation, Slovenia's women's movement soon encountered fragmentation along lines of class, political ideology, and religious affiliation. These divisions underscore the multifaceted nature of women's

activism in Slovenia, where varied priorities and strategies emerged among different women's groups. These developments mirrored broader societal divisions and ideological differences, influencing feminist advocacy and policymaking in the country.

The integration of Slovenia's women's movement with national defence efforts distinguishes it from other European contexts, highlighting women's roles in safeguarding national sovereignty and advancing gender equality amidst societal transformations. Slovenia's evolution from addressing overt gender discrimination to advocating gender egalitarianism reflects significant ideological shifts coinciding with broader socio-political changes following independence.

Despite strides, challenges persist on the path to gender equality in Slovenia and globally. Deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, cultural norms, and institutional practices continue to impede women's full participation in social, economic, and political spheres. Addressing these barriers requires sustained efforts to dismantle gender biases and promote inclusive policies empowering women across all life aspects. While legal reforms have been pivotal in advancing women's rights, they must be complemented by educational initiatives and awareness campaigns challenging stereotypes and transforming societal perceptions of gender roles.

Internationally, initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 5 on gender equality, provide a critical framework for global efforts to advance women's rights. These goals urge governments and stakeholders to take decisive action to eliminate all forms of gender-based discrimination, violence, and inequality. The involvement of international organisations, including the United Nations and the European Union, is crucial in supporting national efforts and fostering global cooperation towards achieving gender parity.

In Slovenia, initiatives aimed at empowering women in politics and beyond have shown promise. Organisations like the Slovenian Women's Lobby and political parties' programs dedicated to women's political participation have increased women's visibility and influence in decision-making processes. However, ongoing efforts are needed to address remaining gaps, including achieving more balanced representation in leadership roles and providing enhanced support for women's leadership development across sectors.

Education emerges as a pivotal arena for driving societal change towards gender equality. By integrating gender perspectives into school

curricula, promoting inclusive educational practices, and fostering critical thinking about gender norms from a young age, Slovenia can cultivate a future generation equipped to challenge stereotypes and advocate for gender equity. University programs are crucial in advancing gender studies and preparing students to engage critically with gender equality issues in professional and academic spheres.

Slovenia's experience with its women's movement offers valuable insights into the complexities of achieving gender equality within a dynamic and evolving societal landscape. By learning from both successes and challenges, Slovenia can continue to lead efforts in promoting gender equality regionally and globally, fostering a future where all individuals, regardless of gender, can realise their full potential and contribute meaningfully to society.

In conclusion, the ongoing struggle for women's rights is integral to broader social justice and human rights movements, underscoring the interconnectedness of gender equality with the pursuit of a more just and equitable world for future generations. Sustained commitment from all sectors of society is essential to overcome remaining barriers and achieve substantive gender equality. This includes addressing gaps in legal protections, challenging discriminatory practices, and promoting inclusive policies that enable women to thrive economically, politically, and socially. The journey towards gender equality is continuous, requiring steadfast advocacy, solidarity among women and allies, and unwavering support for advancing women's rights as integral to the broader human rights agenda.

References

- Allcock, J. B. (2000). *Explaining Yugoslavia*. Columbia University Press.
- Batinić, J. (2015). *Women and Yugoslav Partisans: A history of World War II resistance*. Cambridge University Press.
- Beauvoir, S. de. (2013). *Drugi spol* (2nd ed.). Krtina.
- Bernik Burja, V. (2002). Ženske v slovenski partizanski vojski (1941–1945). In L. Jelušič & M. Pešec (Eds.), *Seksizem v vojaški uniformi* (pp. 106–125). Fakulteta za družbene vede.
- Brown-Grant, R. (2003). *Christine de Pizan and the moral defence of women: Reading beyond gender*. Cambridge University Press.
- Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW). (1979). <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>

- Council of Europe. (2012). *Compass-manual for human rights education with young people*. Council of Europe Publishing.
- Deželak - Barić, V. (1999). Vloga in položaj žensk na Slovenskem v narodnoosvobodilnem boju in revoluciji 1941–1945. In M. G. Antić (Ed.), *Naše žene volijo* (pp. 21–40). Urad za žensko politiko.
- Dillon, M. (2003). *Girls and women in classical Greek religion*. Routledge.
- Hassim, S. (2006). *Women's organizations and democracy in South Africa: Contesting authority*. University of Wisconsin Press.
- Jevnikar, M. (2013). Pajk, Pavlina (1854–1901). In *Slovenska biografija*. Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Znanstvenoraziskovalni center SAZU. <http://www.slovenska-biografija.si/oseba/sbi403407/#primorski-slovenski-biografski-leksikon>
- Jogan, M. (2017). Pregled zgodovine ženskega gibanja na Slovenskem. In *Nevarna razmerja: poroke in razveze marksizma in feminizma* (pp. 125–155). Založba Sophia.
- Kurke, L. (1991). *The traffic in praise: Pindar and the poetics of social economy* (1st edition). NCROL.
- Mlad.si. (2019, 8 March). 8. marec – mednarodni dan žena. <https://www.mlad.si/8-marec-mednarodni-dan-zena>
- Powell, J. (2019). *The poetry of Sappho: An expanded edition, featuring newly discovered poems*. Oxford University Press.
- Ramet, S. P. (2002). *Balkan Babel: The disintegration of Yugoslavia from the death of Tito to the fall of Milosevic* (4th edition). Routledge.
- Šafarič, A. (2016, 6 August). Začetki emancipacije žensk na Slovenskem. Zgodovina na dlani. <https://zgodovinanadlani.si/zacetki-emancipacije-zensk-na-slovenskem>
- Šelih, A., Antić Gaber, M., Puhar, A., Rener, T., Šuklje, R., & Verginella, M. (2007). *Pozabljena polovica: portreti žensk 19. in 20. stoletja na Slovenskem*. Tuma; SAZU.
- Selišnik, I. (2012). Female suffrage in Slovenia. In B. Rodriguez Ruiz & R. Rubio Marín (Eds.), *The struggle for female suffrage in Europe: Voting to become citizens* (pp. 339–355). Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004229914_021
- Staples, A. (1997). *From Good Goddess to Vestal Virgins: Sex and category in Roman religion*. Routledge.
- Statistični urad Republike Slovenije. (N.d.). *Kronologija pridobivanja pravic žensk oziroma pomembnejši dogodki v zgodovini žensk na Slovenskem*. <https://www.stat.si/doc/Kronologija.doc>
- Vodopivec, P. (1994). Kako so ženske na Slovenskem v 19. stoletju stopale v javno življenje: prispevek k zgodovini žensk v slovenskem prostoru (1848–1900). *Zgodovina za vse*, 1(2), 30–45.

Chapter Two

Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women in Politics: An Overview

Rudi Klanjšek

University of Maribor, Slovenia
rudi.klanjsek@um.si

This study investigates issues surrounding women's empowerment in society and politics, focusing on the persistent gender disparities and the importance of striving for gender equity in politics. Various perspectives, including the gender power model, are used to explain the inherently gendered nature of power, with men generally having greater access to multiple types of resources, including favourable cultural norms. The research references various studies that highlight the positive correlation between women's education, economic opportunities, political representation, and empowerment. The document also examines women's political and civic participation, noting their lower interest in conventional politics but higher involvement in unconventional political activities. The findings emphasise the significance of enhancing women's capabilities and political representation to achieve gender equality and empowerment.

Keywords: gender/sex differences, society, empowerment, political participation, inequality, policy issues

Introduction

Throughout history and across nations even today, there remains a notable discrepancy in power dynamics favouring men, as documented by various scholars (e.g., Brown, 1991; United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2016). According to the gender power model proposed by Pratto and Walker (2004) and further elaborated upon by Pratto et al. (2011), power is inherently gendered. Men, in comparison to women, typically possess greater access to the use of force, exert more control over resources, experience fewer social obligations, and benefit from more advantageous cultural norms and beliefs. This gendered disparity manifests in various facets of daily life, including but not limited to inequalities in educational opportunities, access to employment, and control over economic resources (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2016).

There is widespread agreement on the significance of striving for gender equity, as evidenced by the stance of organizations like UN Women (2011). To strengthen the status of women worldwide, a range of interventions have been put into action, including initiatives focusing on health, education, and financial empowerment (for a comprehensive review, see UN Women, 2016). Central to these efforts is the concept of empowerment, which serves as both a framework and a process geared towards rectifying gender inequities.

Women's empowerment in society is a multifaceted topic often explored through various theoretical frameworks. For example, feminist theory examines power dynamics, gender inequality, and social structures contributing to women's subordination. It highlights the importance of challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for gender equality. The capability approach (Sen, 1979; Nussbaum, 2000), focusing on individuals' capabilities and freedoms to lead valuable lives, emphasizes enhancing women's capabilities through access to resources, education, and opportunities.

The issue of resources and related challenges is also highlighted by the intersectionality framework developed by Crenshaw (1991), who acknowledges the intersecting systems of oppression (such as race, class, gender, and sexuality) that shape women's experiences. This framework emphasizes the unique challenges faced by women with multiple marginalized identities.

Relatedly, the social capital theory explores how social networks, relationships, and community connections influence individuals' access to resources and opportunities. It underscores the role of social support and collective action in empowering women. Evidence from the existing literature reveals that different domains of social capital can potentially affect all constructs of women's empowerment (Ikhar et al., 2022). Lastly, empowerment theory stresses the importance of processes through which individuals gain control over their lives, resources, and decision-making. It examines psychological, social, and structural factors facilitating empowerment, such as self-efficacy, agency, and participation.

Guided by these analytical frameworks, numerous studies have tested what 'works' regarding women's empowerment. For example, research has consistently indicated that women's education is positively associated with their empowerment in society and politics. Increased educational attainment correlates with higher employment levels, po-

litical participation, and decision-making autonomy for women (e.g., Kabeer, 2005). Second, studies demonstrate that economic opportunities, such as access to microfinance, entrepreneurship training, and employment programs, can enhance women's financial independence and decision-making power within households and communities (e.g., Duflo & Udry, 2004). Third, research indicates that women's representation in political institutions, such as parliaments and local governments, is crucial for advancing gender equality and addressing women's issues. Countries with higher levels of women's political participation tend to have more inclusive policies and greater attention to women's rights (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995).

These are just a few examples, and there's a wealth of literature available on each of these topics, providing further empirical evidence and nuanced insights into factors of women's empowerment in society and politics.

The Issue of Women in Politics

Political Participation and Gender

The possibility of political participation is a reflection and a cornerstone of democracy, as it allows people to have a say in decision-making and, thus, in society's governance (Bessant & Grasso, 2019). There are many forms of participation, depending on whether the concept of political participation also includes holding political positions or exercising political functions (i.e., political representation as political participation, see Rai, 2017), as well as on how the concept of politics is understood. Suppose the latter is understood as something that includes all activities that influence the life of a community. In that case, political participation includes political representation (e.g., holding political office) and activities that go beyond 'classical political participation' (e.g., voting). In this case, political participation includes charity work, protesting, lobbying, signing petitions, being involved in trade unions, NGOs, voluntary associations, and civic initiatives. The distinction between conventional/formal (e.g., participation in elections, political rallies, contacting politicians, active participation in a political party) and unconventional/informal/civil-society political engagement (e.g., signing petitions, boycotting products, participating in protests) is often discussed (see van Deth, 2021).

The importance of the conceptualization and operationalization of political participation is clearly highlighted by one of the seminal

studies on gender and political participation (Schlozman et al., 1995). Namely, it is argued that gender differences depend on whether informal, unconventional, and more local forms of participation are also taken into account, as well as on whether the concept of politics includes 'all activities that affect the life of the community, including those related to charity and various organizational activities' (Schlozman et al., 1995). Understanding gender differences must, therefore, take into account different forms of political engagement, the attitudes and resources involved, as various types of actions require different types of resources, which people also understand differently (Coffé & Boldenzahl, 2010; Dalton, 2013; Pattie et al., 2003). Otherwise, gender differences may be underestimated or overestimated (Grasso & Smith, 2022).

Research has shown that women are relatively less politically active than men (e.g., less interested in politics than men, less likely to contact politicians, less likely to participate in parties, etc.) (Carreras, 2018), except when it comes to electoral participation (Carreras, 2018; Coffé, 2013). As Carreras (2018) explains, this is partly because women perceive voting as a duty towards others, which is more pronounced in women as a personality trait. Their otherwise low political engagement is a consequence of cultural forces that traditionally portray politics as a male domain.

Part of the explanation of said differences also stems from the fact that women subjectively rate their knowledge of and interest in politics lower (although there is an issue of subjective bias in this regard, i.e., it is questionable whether women objectively know less about politics; see Pfanzelt & Spies, 2019).

However, elections are not the only domain where the gender gap is small or non-existent. Studies show that the gap disappears when one moves beyond conventional political participation. Thus, women's political participation is much higher in unconventional or informal political participation (Sarvasy & Siim, 1994; Siim, 2000; Stover & Cable, 2017). Coffé's (2013) analysis of the 27 EU Member States thus found that in the 'old democracies' (Western Europe), there are no gender differences when it comes to political activism (as an aspect of protest-based, unconventional political participation; see also Grasso & Smith, 2022).

Similar differences are found in younger generations. Young men dominate when it comes to more institutional forms of political par-

TABLE 2.1 Political Engagement of Young People, 2010–2020, According to Gender

Item	2010		2020	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Interested in politics	33,0	37,0	22,0	27,0
Voting	52,2	56,0	63,0	69,5
Signing a petition	23,0	33,0	37,0	51,0
Participating in protests	15,0	16,4	11,3	15,2
Contacting politicians	3,2	2,5	5,7	3,3
Boycotting election	8,1	4,7	3,8	2,5
Boycotting products	5,3	7,2	9,1	13,4

NOTES Adapted from Lavrič et al. (2011) and Deželan & Lavrič (2021).

ticipation, linked to organisations and political parties, different types of online political participation, and following politics in the news. It is worth noting that young men are more sceptical about some aspects of democratic practices, confirming that women are, on average, more liberal and more sympathetic to democracy (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993).

A study in Italy (Polish Association of Social Psychology, 2021) has shown that young men are more likely to directly engage in politics, such as joining a political party, acting to influence government policy, or contacting a politician. On the other hand, young women would instead opt for civic activities, such as volunteering, charitable work, religious-based initiatives, or boycotts.

The results of the Slovenian Youth 2020 study also align with those of the Italian study. Young men are much more inclined to participate in political party activities (30% of men vs. 24% of women) or contact a politician (36% of men vs. 27% of women). Young women, on the other hand, would rather opt for civic activities, such as peaceful protests (55% of women vs. 46% of men), volunteering (76% of women vs. 66% of men) or boycotting (48% of women vs. 45% of men). Generally, the data suggest that young Slovenian women demonstrate less interest in politics than men, but they are more likely to vote and are more active in unconventional political participation (Table 2.1).

As can be seen from the data and in line with past studies elsewhere, young Slovenian women are less interested in politics than men. Still, they are more likely to vote and participate in unconventional political participation.

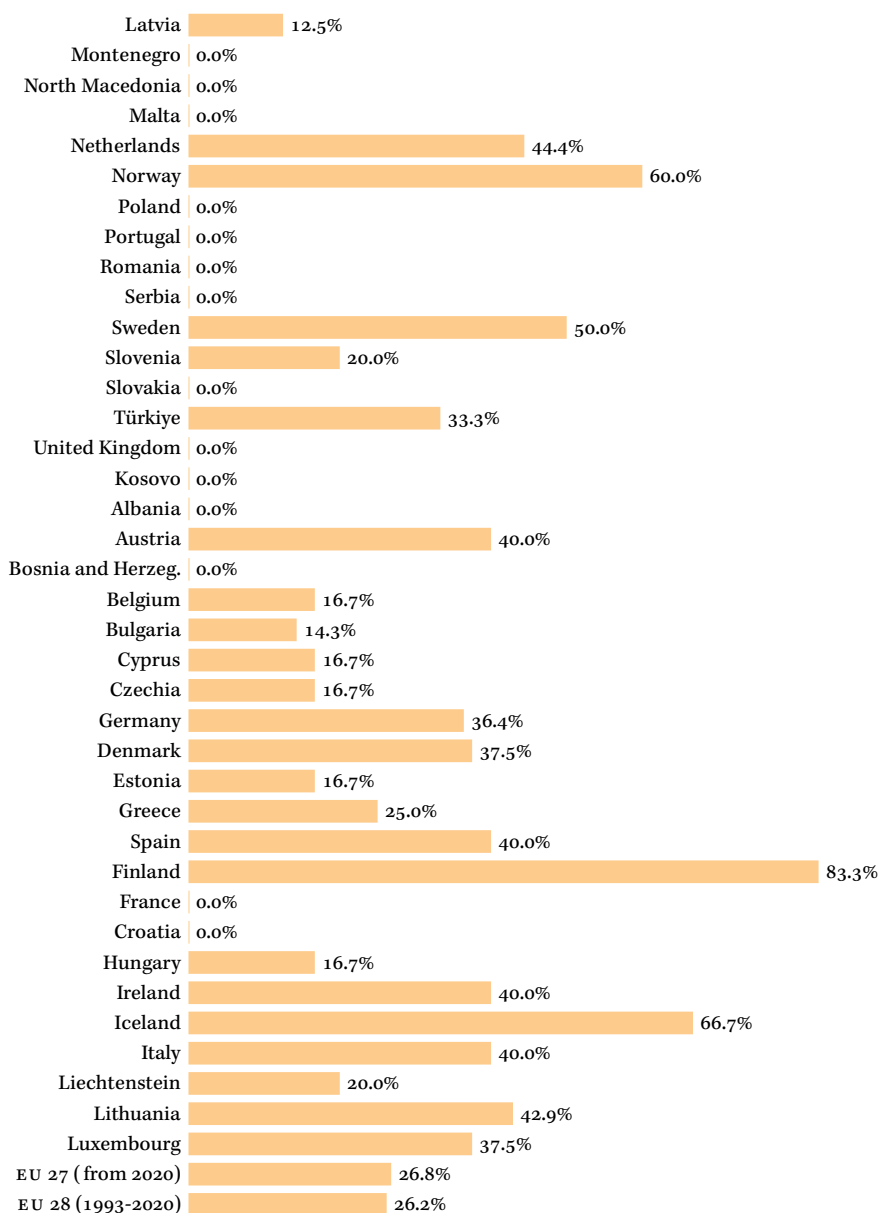


FIGURE 2.1 Share of Women among Party Leaders (based on data from EIGE, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs>)

Still, it is essential to emphasize that the differences are much more pronounced regarding women's representation in politics, i.e., holding

political office. When it comes to party leadership within the EU, for example, the average is around 25% (Figure 2.1).

The same applies to membership of national parliaments (about a third of women) and membership of the European Parliament (about 40% of women), while among the 28 EU Member States, there are only six governments led by women.¹

This unequal participation of women and men in political decision-making thus remains one of the main challenges of today's democratic societies. It is not only a clear indicator of the so-called democratic deficit and a sign of the lack of credibility of institutions but also an indicator of how societies lose valuable human capital and, thus, the potential to solve critical social issues and improve societal well-being. Namely, women's limited experience and participation in decision-making have far-reaching consequences across various dimensions of society.

Some of these critical consequences include:

- *Economic Inefficiency and Growth Impediments.* Women's limited participation in decision-making can result in suboptimal use of the labour force, ultimately hampering economic growth. A study by McKinsey & Company found that closing gender gaps in labour markets could add \$12 trillion to global GDP by 2025 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2015).
- *Inequitable Resource Allocation.* When women are excluded from decision-making processes, resource allocation may not reflect the needs and priorities of the entire population, leading to inefficient use of resources and reduced economic efficiency (Duflo, 2012).
- *Poor Governance and Policy Outcomes.* The absence of women's perspectives in leadership roles can lead to policies and decisions that do not adequately address the needs of women and children, contributing to less effective governance (World Bank, 2012). Policies developed without women's input are often less effective in addressing issues like maternal health, education for girls, and gender-based violence (Kabeer, 2005).
- *Social and Health Consequences.* Limited decision-making power among women is associated with poorer health outcomes for

¹ <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-statistics/dgs>

women and children. For instance, women's limited control over household resources can negatively impact child nutrition and health (Smith et al., 2003).

- *Increased Gender Inequality.* When women are excluded from decision-making, it reinforces existing gender inequalities and perpetuates a cycle of disadvantage and marginalisation (UN Women, 2015).
- *Impact on Education and Skill Development.* Societies that restrict women's roles in decision-making are less likely to prioritise education for girls, leading to lower educational attainment and skill development among women (King & Hill, 1993).
- *Limited Career Advancement.* Women's restricted participation in decision-making can hinder their professional development and career advancement opportunities, perpetuating gender gaps in leadership positions (*Women in management (quick take)*, 2020).
- *Violence and Security Issues.* Women's limited involvement in decision-making processes, particularly in conflict and post-conflict settings, can increase their vulnerability to violence and reduce their protection under the law (True, 2012). When women are not part of the decision-making, responses to gender-based violence can be insufficient, and policies may fail to address the root causes and prevention of such violence (Htun & Weldon, 2012).
- *Environmental and Sustainability Challenges.* Women often play a crucial role in managing natural resources. Their exclusion from decision-making can lead to environmental policies that do not fully consider sustainability and the effective management of resources (Agarwal, 2000). Gender-inclusive decision-making is also vital for effective climate change adaptation strategies. Excluding women can result in less comprehensive approaches to addressing environmental challenges (UNDP, 2016).

These consequences highlight the importance of inclusive decision-making processes that leverage the full potential of both women and men to foster sustainable development and equitable societies. In other words, women's limited experience and participation in decision-making impoverish societies in various domains. Therefore, understanding the obstacles to women's participation in decision-making and politics in general is essential for finding solutions.

Causes, Limitations, and Structural Barriers for Women in Politics

Cultural and Societal Norms

Traditional gender roles and societal expectations often limit women's participation in politics. These roles view women primarily as caretakers and homemakers, not as leaders or decision-makers (Paxton & Hughes, 2014). Relatedly, patriarchal structures and beliefs perpetuate male dominance in political spheres, discouraging women's involvement (Inglehart & Norris, 2003).

Traditional gender roles and patriarchy are often associated with gender stereotypes, which together form a nexus of interrelated conceptions, beliefs, and attitudes that rationalise and legitimise discrimination. This discrimination is another factor that limits women's participation in politics. Women thus often face sexist attitudes and stereotypes that question their capabilities as leaders, which can deter women from pursuing political careers (Alexander & Jalalzai, 2020).

When it comes to gender stereotypes and prejudices, the most frequently problematised attitude is that politics is considered a male domain. Such a stance is regarded as a relic of a pre-modern, conservative/traditional cultural matrix marked by patriarchy, directly resulting in a lower representation of women in political positions. Women candidates are not perceived as equal *ceteris paribus*, especially regarding positions associated with defence or the economy (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993).

According to Bauer (2019), there are three primary ways that feminine and masculine stereotypes can affect political decision-making. The first is represented in candidate strategies within political parties, whereby masculine qualities (and, therefore, men) still tend to be preferred. At the second level, campaign news coverage favours candidates with more masculine traits. More specifically, studies have shown that the media use masculine stereotypes more frequently to describe both women and men candidates (e.g., Hayes & Lawless, 2015). Finally, voters themselves are strongly influenced by gender stereotypes when making their decisions. Furthermore, the alignment between masculine stereotypes and political leadership frequently pressures women candidates to emphasize masculine qualities over feminine qualities in campaign messages. This, in turn, further strengthens the association between political leadership and masculine traits.

Cultural stereotypes that portray women as less competent or less suited for leadership roles can discourage women from entering politics and undermine their credibility if they do (Alexander & Jalalzai, 2020). Societal beliefs that men are inherently better leaders perpetuate gender biases and discrimination against women in politics. These perceptions can lead to voter bias and a lack of support for women candidates.

As indicated, these perceptions are linked to gender stereotypes at the level of personality traits – women are thought to be warm, expressive, and empathetic, while men are considered to be assertive, determined, and rational (Broverman et al., 1972) – and with gender stereotypes at the level of beliefs, where women are perceived as more liberal and democratic and therefore more suited to specific areas within politics such as social issues and education (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993). However, stereotypes related to personality traits presumably play a more critical role (Huddy & Terkildsen, 1993).

Media Representation

Media complex is closely tied to culture, representing an essential part of the cultural milieu in contemporary society. It significantly shapes an individual's worldview and how social reality is represented and reproduced. It represents the most invasive and, simultaneously, the most influential force in forming (and reproducing) public opinion, social norms, and values.

Being simultaneously an object and subject of culture, it reflects a dominant worldview and is thus often a biased information transmitter. The media often portrays women politicians in a biased manner, focusing on their appearance or personal lives rather than their policies and competencies. Women politicians also receive less media coverage than their male counterparts, leading to lower public recognition and support (Sreberny-Mohammadi & Ross, 1996).

Media thus contributes to what might be identified as gendered socialisation, which can influence how women are perceived by themselves and by society. Namely, as research indicates, from a young age, boys and girls often socialise into different roles and expectations. Boys are encouraged to be assertive and ambitious, while girls are taught to be nurturing and compliant, affecting their confidence and interest in political careers. Later, this is reinforced in schools and education in general, as in many countries and regions, girls have less access to edu-

cation than boys, limiting their opportunities to develop the skills and knowledge necessary for political engagement (Ballington & Karam, 2005).

Lack of Support Networks

Gender stereotypes, patriarchal thinking, male allies within politics, an unfriendly electoral system (stereotypes in leadership positions and lack of gender equality values in programs), and lack of regulatory mechanisms present another set of factors that significantly impact women's decisions to engage in politics. However, Jalušič and Antić Gaber (2020) pointed out some less visible obstacles women face. Among them is a greater need for women to receive external encouragement and support, especially from the local community and party leaders. According to their research, politically active women missed (more) party support during the candidacy process, which supports studies highlighting that women often have less access to mentors and political networks that can provide career guidance and support (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

As the key to increasing the number of elected women, women politicians identified placing women in positions where they can be elected. Political parties play a decisive role here, as their leadership acts as a gatekeeper, determining whether women will be placed in a specific position. Past research on parliamentary elections, for example, shows that women candidates were often placed in less desirable constituencies or less electable places (Pleš Murko et al., 2015). Likewise, with their programs, activities, and ideological orientations, political parties provide space for political activity and contribute to the perception of politics and party activity. Put differently, women's opportunities to connect and advance are shaped by the fact that political and professional (support) networks are frequently male-dominated (McBride & Mazur, 2010).

Financial, Educational, and Institutional Barriers

Studies identify various barriers that limit women's ability and access to politics. For example, Thames and Williams (2013) state that women typically have less access to the financial resources necessary to run effective political campaigns. Relatedly, broader economic disparities mean women often have fewer personal resources to invest in political careers (World Bank, 2012).

There are also educational barriers. In many regions, women still have less access to education, limiting their qualifications and confidence to enter politics. Lack of targeted political education and training programs for women also reduces their readiness for political engagement (Ballington & Karam, 2005).

Next, the challenge of balancing political careers with family responsibilities disproportionately affects women, discouraging many from participating in politics. Insufficient parental leave and childcare support further exacerbate the difficulty for women in sustaining political careers (O'Brien, 2013). The established methods and organization of work in politics are not inclined to the coordination of political and private life. When deciding to participate in politics, opportunities for balancing professional and private life are especially important to women; family plays a crucial role in the decision to run for office. The asymmetric division of household and caring work poses a problem; studies (e.g. Silbermann, 2015) show that despite being employed, women still take on a greater role than men in caring for the family and household chores. Consequently, these inequalities take their toll on professional careers. On the other hand, women who put more effort into shaping their careers have a more challenging time deciding to interrupt it and switch to risky politics.

Other structural barriers include institutional barriers tied to political party structures, electoral systems, and other legislative obstacles. For example, Krook (2010) found that many political parties have internal structures and processes that favour male candidates, including informal practices and patronage networks. Second, certain electoral systems, like majoritarian systems, can disadvantage women more than proportional representation systems, which tend to be more inclusive (Norris, 2004). Third, quota systems implemented to tackle unequal participation of women in politics vary significantly in terms of their design and enforcement, often limiting their effectiveness (Dahlerup, 2006). Lastly, the lack of comprehensive policies to promote gender equality in political participation further entrenches women's underrepresentation (Waylen, 2007).

Violence, Harassment, and Safety Concerns

Security concerns are another critical issue that can deter women's participation and impact their performance. Namely, women in politics often face gender-based violence and harassment, both online and offline, that deters women from political participation (Bardall, 2011,

2013). The threat of violence against women politicians and their families is a significant barrier to their political engagement (Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2016). As noted by Piscopo (2016), empirical evidence and anecdotal reports indicate the seriousness of the phenomenon, making violence against women in politics an urgent topic of reform.

Discussing Different/Unequal Realities for Women (and Men)

As indicated, various social/cultural causes, spanning from family, education, media, and institutions, jointly create differential realities for men and women, including those related to politics. Discussing these different realities leads to at least three important questions: (1) is the attribution of specific traits to gender factually based (i.e., whether women and men exhibit the attributed traits); (2) do these traits impact the performance of specific tasks; (3) are these gender-specific traits valued differentially when it comes to politics.

There are various studies showing gender differences, including some that confirm gender stereotypes. For example, a meta-analysis by Hyde (2014) indicated that when it comes to cognitive abilities, there are gender (albeit minimal) differences in mathematics and science performance. Studies also show differences in verbal and spatial abilities – girls generally outperform boys in verbal skills, whereas boys tend to have an advantage in some spatial tasks. More importantly, there are also differences in social and personality traits. Specifically, boys and men exhibit higher physical aggression (verbal aggression shows smaller gender differences), and women tend to be more expressive and better at reading nonverbal cues. There are also minor gender differences in leadership styles – women often adopt more democratic and participative styles, while men may be more autocratic. Lastly, differences in personality traits, like agreeableness and neuroticism, are also consistent (but again, not large). Women score higher on agreeableness and neuroticism, while men score higher on assertiveness.

Expectedly, women are indeed less likely to support conservative, illiberal policies (see, e.g., McCue & Gopoian, 2000) and are indeed more empathic (Rueckert & Naybar, 2008; Rochat, 2022; Christov-Moore et al., 2014). Studies further suggest that empathy can be an essential element of successful politics (i.e., it can be an asset; see, for example, Moses, 1985). Yet, empathy (when it comes to its perceived functionality in the domain of politics) is not perceived by the public as such (i.e., as being politically functional) – i.e., masculine traits are more often rated as more positive (Broverman et al., 1972), which consequently implies

that women, despite displaying policy-relevant traits (which are factually gendered), are 'at a loss.'

Of course, the most challenging question is to what extent these detected differences can be tied to 'nature' (biology), i.e., to what extent they are universal and thus culturally invariant. For this purpose, Schmitt et al. (2008) conducted a comprehensive study examining sex differences in Big Five personality traits across 55 cultures. The study found consistent sex differences in personality traits across cultures, where women scored higher than men on neuroticism, agreeableness, extraversion (women scored higher in facets like warmth and sociability), and conscientiousness. Sex differences in openness were the smallest and varied across different cultures. Interestingly, more egalitarian and economically developed societies showed more considerable sex differences in personality traits.

Another study (Weis et al., 2021) found significant interactions between sex and menstrual cycle phase, highlighting how hormonal fluctuations across the menstrual cycle impact resting state networks (RSNS) in the brain, particularly those related to cognitive and sensory functions (RSNS were more stable in men). The authors note that this has implications for interpreting sex differences in cognitive and sensory processing. Relatedly, Sanchis-Segura & Becker (2016) also emphasise how, in women, hormonal fluctuations during the menstrual cycle can affect brain function and behaviour and how biological differences, including sex chromosomes (XX vs. XY) and sex hormones (e.g., oestrogen and testosterone), influence brain structure and function, emphasising that these factors should be considered in research design and analysis.

In sum, studies indicate universal patterns of sex differences, including those in personality traits. Still, on the other hand, it would be wrong to ignore that cultural factors significantly influence the magnitude and expression of these differences. The interaction between biological, evolutionary, and cultural factors contributes to the observed sex differences in personality traits across different cultures. While studies (e.g., Buss, 2019; Schmitt et al., 2008) discuss possible evolutionary explanations for these sex differences, such as differing adaptive pressures on men and women throughout human history, most explore social role theory, which posits that sex differences in personality arise from the different social roles and expectations assigned to men and women in various cultures.

These insights, taken together, can inform policies and interventions aimed at promoting gender equality by acknowledging both universal and culture-specific aspects of sex differences in personality.

Policies and Measures Aimed at Gender Equality

In the context of what has been stated, it seems necessary to try and raise awareness of gender equality through various measures, which include a different valuation of the ‘feminine traits,’ as well as the removal of barriers that prevent women from being activated in the context of conventional political participation and representation in terms of women’s occupation of political positions. In this context, many initiatives have been launched, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly.

As indicated by Tripp and Kang (2008), the introduction of quotas offers the most explanatory power for women’s representation today, and ‘together with proportional representation systems, these institutional factors are of paramount importance’ (p. 339). In addition, and as indicated by various studies, parties function as gatekeepers for candidate selection. Thus, the emphasis on the selection process of candidates within parties has become a new area of focus (Caul, 2001; Matland, 1993). Moreover, gender mainstreaming (i.e., integrating a gender equality perspective at all stages and levels of policies, programs, and projects) in EU-funded projects should also be ensured (O’Connell, 2013).

Next, capacity building and training programs should be supported to equip women with the skills and knowledge needed to run for office and succeed in political roles. Namely several studies have shown that programs that equip women with the skills and knowledge required to run for office and succeed in political roles increase women’s political participation (Tadros, 2014). As Ballington (2008) indicated, a lack of experience with representative functions was one of the critical deterrents to entering politics for women.

Next, implementing family-friendly policies such as parental leave and childcare support to help women balance political careers and family responsibilities is also necessary. For example, Sweden’s generous parental leave policy has been linked to higher levels of women’s political participation (Nyberg, 2012).

Another set of political reforms that could empower women and in-

crease their political participation is related to finance reforms, including financial support or incentives for parties that nominate more female candidates. For example, in France, political parties that do not meet gender parity in candidate lists face financial penalties (Krook, 2010).

Summary

The current paper aims to comprehensively analyse the persistent gender disparities in society and politics, focusing on the importance of achieving gender equity for societal progress. By employing a variety of theoretical frameworks, including feminist theory, the capability approach, and intersectionality, the study seeks to understand the gendered nature of power and its impact on women's empowerment.

The paper argues that men generally enjoy greater access to resources, control, and favourable cultural norms in politics, contributing to inherent gender disparities in power dynamics. These advantages underpin the systemic barriers that women face in their pursuit of equality and empowerment.

The empirical evidence presented in the document underscores the critical role of women's education in their empowerment. Education enhances employment levels, political participation, and decision-making autonomy. Educated women are more likely to be employed, participate in political processes, and make independent household decisions. Additionally, access to economic opportunities, such as microfinance, entrepreneurship training, and employment programs, can significantly boost women's financial independence and power within the household and society.

The document highlights the critical importance of women's political representation for advancing gender equality. Higher levels of women's political participation are associated with more inclusive and equitable policies. However, women often exhibit lower interest in conventional politics compared to men. Despite this, they are more likely to be involved in unconventional political activities, such as activism and advocacy.

Next, several barriers regarding gender equality in politics and challenges concerning women's empowerment are identified. These could be summarized as follows:

- *Stereotypes and Biases.* Women in politics are often subjected to

gender stereotypes that question their capabilities and leadership qualities. They face harsher scrutiny and are frequently judged based on their appearance and personal life rather than their policies and competencies.

- *Exclusion from Networks.* Women frequently encounter exclusion from informal networks and mentorship opportunities crucial for political advancement. This lack of access limits their political engagement and support opportunities.
- *Media Representation.* The media often perpetuates gender biases, portraying female politicians in a negative light or focusing on their attributes rather than their professional achievements. This skewed representation can undermine public perceptions of their effectiveness as leaders.
- *Structural Barriers.* Institutional structures and political systems are often designed to disadvantage women. These include electoral systems that favour incumbents (often men), lack of gender quotas, and policies that do not support work-life balance, making it difficult for women to participate fully in politics.
- *Economic Disparities.* Economic barriers, such as lower funding levels and financial support for women candidates, hinder women's ability to run effective campaigns. Women often have less access to resources and funding networks than their male counterparts.

These challenges highlight women's multifaceted barriers to achieving gender equality in politics. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive policy changes, cultural shifts, and targeted interventions to create a more inclusive and equitable political landscape.

The current study tries to provide several recommendations to overcome these barriers and challenges. First, capacity-building programs are essential for equipping women with the necessary skills and knowledge to run for office and succeed in political roles. These programs should focus on leadership training, public speaking, and campaign management. Second, family-friendly policies, such as parental leave and childcare support, are also crucial. These policies help women balance the demands of a political career with family responsibilities, making it easier for them to participate in politics. Financial reforms are another essential recommendation. Incentivising political parties

to nominate more female candidates can enhance women's political representation. For example, public funding or financial bonuses can be awarded to parties that achieve gender parity in their candidate lists. This approach has been successful in several countries and has increased women's representation in political offices.

The study underscores the need for a multifaceted approach to enhance women's capabilities. This includes improving access to education, creating economic opportunities, and establishing supportive political institutions. By addressing these areas, societies can move closer to achieving gender equality and empowering women to participate fully in all aspects of political life. The document concludes that women's empowerment is not only a matter of justice and equity but also a crucial factor for society's overall development and progress.

References

- Agarwal, B. (2000). Conceptualising environmental collective action: Why gender matters. *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 24(3), 283–310.
- Alexander, A. C., & Jalalzai, F. (2020). Symbolic empowerment and female heads of state and government: A global comparative analysis. *Politics & Gender*, 16(1), 1–29.
- Ballington, J. (2008). *Equality in politics: A survey of women and men in parliaments*. Inter-Parliamentary Union. <http://archive.ipu.org/PDF/publications/equality08-e.pdf>
- Ballington, J., & Karam, A. (2005). *Women in parliament: Beyond numbers*. International IDEA.
- Bardall, G. (2011). *Breaking the mold: Understanding gender and electoral violence* [White paper]. International Foundation for Electoral Systems.
- Bardall, G. (2013). Gender-specific election violence: The role of information and communication technologies. *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 2(3), 60.
- Bauer, N., M. (2019, 26 March). Gender stereotyping in political decision making. In *Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.772>
- Bessant, J., & Grasso, M. (2019). Security and the liberal-democratic state: Criminalizing young people's politics. *Revista Internacional de Sociología*, 77(4), 4.
- Broverman, I. K., Vogel, S. R., Broverman, D. M., Clarkson, F. E., & Rosenkrantz, P. S. (1972). Sex-role stereotypes: A current appraisal. *Journal of Social Issues*, 28(2), 59–78.

- Brown, D. E. (1991). *Human universals*. Temple University Press.
- Buss, D. (2019). *Evolutionary psychology: The new science of the mind* (6th ed.). Routledge.
- Carreras, M. (2018). Why no gender gap in electoral participation? A civic duty explanation. *Electoral Studies*, 52, 36–45.
- Women in management (quick take)*. (2020, 1 March). Catalyst. <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-management>
- Caul, M. (2001). Political parties and the adoption of candidate gender quotas: A cross-national analysis. *The Journal of Politics*, 63(4), 1214–1229.
- Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW). (1979). <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>
- Christov-Moore, L., Simpson, E. A., Coudé, G., Grigaityte, K., Iacoboni, M., & Ferrari, P. F. (2014). Empathy: Gender effects in brain and behavior. *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews*, 46(4), 604–627.
- Coffé, H. (2013). Gender and political participation in Western and Eastern Europe. In K. N. Demetriou (Ed.), *Democracy in transition: Political participation in the European Union* (pp. 95–107). Springer.
- Coffé, H., & Bolzendahl, C. (2010). Same game, different rules? Gender differences in political participation. *Sex Roles*, 62(5), 318–333.
- Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6): 1241–1299.
- Dahlerup, D. (2006). *Women, quotas and politics*. Routledge.
- Dalton, R. J. (2013). *Citizen politics: Public opinion and political parties in advanced industrial democracies*. CQ Press.
- Deth, J. W. van. (2021, 29 September). What is political participation? In *Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.68>
- Deželan, T., & Lavrič, M. (2021). *Youth 2020: The position of young people in Slovenia*. University of Maribor Press. <https://doi.org/10.18690/978-961-286-518-4>
- Duflo, E. (2012). Women empowerment and economic development. *Journal of Economic Literature*, 50(4), 1051–1079.
- Duflo, E., & Udry, C. (2004). *Intrahousehold resource allocation in Côte d'Ivoire: Social norms, separate accounts, and consumption choices* (NBER Working Paper Series No. 10498). <http://www.nber.org/papers/w10498>
- Eagly, A. H., & Carli, L. L. (2007). *Through the labyrinth: The truth about how women become leaders*. Harvard Business Review Press.

- Grasso, M., & Smith, K. (2022). Gender inequalities in political participation and political engagement among young people in Europe: Are young women less politically engaged than young men? *Politics*, 42(1), 39–57.
- Hayes, D. & Lawless, J., L. (2015). A non-gendered LNS? Media, voters, and female candidates in contemporary congressional elections. *Perspectives on Politics*, 13(1), 95–118.
- Htun, M., & Weldon, S. L. (2012). The civic origins of progressive policy change: Combating violence against women in global perspective, 1975–2005. *American Political Science Review*, 106(3), 548–569.
- Huddy, L., & Terkildsen, N. (1993). Gender stereotypes and the perception of male and female candidates. *American Journal of Political Science*, 37(1), 119–147.
- Hyde, J. S. (2014). Gender similarities and differences. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 65, 373–398.
- Ikhar, M. R., Banerjee, S., Bandhopadhyaya, K., Tiwari, M. K., & Deshmukh, P. (2022). Are women with more of 'social capital' more empowered? A cross-sectional analysis from rural Wardha, Central India. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care*, 11(2), 472–479.
- Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2003). *Rising tide: Gender equality and cultural change around the world*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jalušič, V. & Antić Gaber, M. (2020). Equality for whom? Obstacles to women's access to local government in Slovenia. *Teorija in praksa*, 57(2): 437–454.
- Kabeer, N. (2005). Gender equality and women's empowerment: A critical analysis of the third millennium development goal. *Gender & Development*, 13(1), 13–24.
- Kabeer, N. (2015). Gender, poverty, and inequality: A brief history of feminist contributions in the field of international development. *Gender & Development*, 23(2), 189–205.
- King, E. M., & Hill, M. A. (Eds.). (1993). *Women's education in developing countries: Barriers, benefits, and policies*. World Bank.
- Krook, M. L. (2009). Quota laws for women in politics: Implications for feminist practice. *International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 16(3), 345–368.
- Krook, M. L. (2010). *Quotas for women in politics: Gender and candidate selection reform worldwide*. Oxford University Press.
- Krook, M. L., & Restrepo Sanín, J. (2016). Gender and political violence in Latin America: Concepts, debates, and solutions. *Política y gobierno*, 23(1), 125–157.
- Lavrič, M., S. Flere, M. Tavar Krajnc, R., Klanjšek, B. Musil, A. Naterer, A.

- Kirbiš, M., Divjak, and P. Lešek. (2011). *Mladina 2010: družbeni profil mladih v Sloveniji*. Ministrstvo za šolstvo in šport. http://www.ursm.gov.si/fileadmin/ursm.gov.si/pageuploads/slike/mladina_2010/Mladina2010-2.pdf
- Matland, R. E. (1993). Institutional variables affecting female representation in national legislatures: The case of Norway. *Journal of Politics*, 55(3), 737–755.
- McBride, D. E., & Mazur, A. G. (2010). *The politics of state feminism: Innovation in comparative research*. Temple University Press.
- McCue, C. P., & Gopoian, J. D. (2000). Dispositional empathy and the political gender gap. *Women & Politics*, 21(2), 1–20.
- McKinsey Global Institute. (2015). *The power of parity: How advancing women's equality can add \$12 trillion to global growth*.
- Moses, R. (1985). Empathy and dis-empathy in political conflict. *Political Psychology*, 6(1), 135–139.
- Norris, P. (2004). *Electoral engineering: Voting rules and political behavior*. Cambridge University Press.
- Norris, P., & Lovenduski, J. (1995). *Political recruitment: Gender, race, and class in the British Parliament*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. (2000). *Women and human development: The capabilities approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nyberg, A. (2012). *Gender equality policy in Sweden*. Ministry of Integration and Gender Equality.
- O'Brien, D. Z. (2013). Gender and selective perception: The effect of representative bureaucracies on public policy preferences. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 34(3), 301–326.
- O'Brien, D. Z., & Rickne, J. (2016). Gender quotas and women's political leadership. *American Political Science Review*, 110(1), 112–126.
- O'Connell, H. (2013). *Implementing the European Union gender action plan 2010–2015: Challenges and opportunities*. European Development Cooperation Strengthening Programme (EDCSP). <https://media.odi.org/documents/8305.pdf>
- Pattie, C., Seyd, P., & Whiteley, P. (2003). Citizenship and civic engagement: Attitudes and behaviour in Britain. *Political Studies*, 51(3), 443–468.
- Paxton, P., & Hughes, M. M. (2014). *Women, politics, and power: A global perspective*. CQ Press.
- Pfanzelt, H., & Spies, D. C. (2019). The gender gap in youth political participation: Evidence from Germany. *Political Research Quarterly*, 72(1), 34–48.
- Piscopo, J. M. (2016). State capacity, criminal justice, and political rights:

- Rethinking violence against women in politics. *Politics & Gender*, 12(2), 368–373.
- Pleš Murko, A., M. Roksandi, and T. S. Pleš. (2015). *Vpliv sistema spolnih kvot na vključevanje načela enakosti spolov pri političnem odločanju na lokalni ravni: primerjalna analiza kandidiranja in volilnih izidov žensk na lokalnih volitvah od leta 2002 do 2014*. Ženski lobi Slovenije. https://www.mirovni-institut.si/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/analizaOPENNfinal_primerjalna_analiza_volitev2002_2014.pdf
- Polish Association of Social Psychology. (2021, 31 May). *Gender stereotypes still hold true for youth and types of political participation*. <https://phys.org/news/2021-05-gender-stereotypes-true-youth-political.html>
- Pratto, F., and Walker, A. (2004). The bases of gendered power. In A. H. Eagly, A. Beall, & R. Sternberg (Eds.), *The psychology of gender* (pp. 242–268). Guilford Publications.
- Pratto, F., Lee, I., Tan, J., & Pitpitan, E. (2011). Power basis theory: A psycho-ecological approach to power. In D. Dunning (Ed.), *Social motivation* (pp. 191–222). Psychology Press.
- Rai, P. (2017). Women's participation in electoral politics in India: Silent feminisation. *South Asia Research*, 37(1), 58–77.
- Rochat, M. J. (2022). Sex and gender differences in the development of empathy. *Journal of Neuroscience Research*, 101(5), 718–729.
- Rueckert, L. & Naybar, N. (2008). Gender differences in empathy: The role of the right hemisphere. *Brain and Cognition*, 67(2), 162–167.
- Sanchis-Segura, C. & Becker, J. B. (2016). Why we should consider sex (and study sex differences) in basic and clinical neuroscience. *Journal of Neuroscience Research*, 94(1), 1–4.
- Sarvasy, W. & Siim, B. (1994). Gender, transitions to democracy, and citizenship. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 1(3), 249–255.
- Schlozman, K. L., Burns, N., Verba, S., & Donahue, J. (1995). Gender and citizen participation: Is there a different voice? *American Journal of Political Science*, 39(2), 267–293.
- Schmitt, D. P., Realo, A., Voracek, M., & Allik, J. (2008). Why can't a man be more like a woman? Sex differences in Big Five personality traits across 55 cultures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 94(1), 168.
- Sen, A. (1979). Equality of what? In S. McMurrin (Ed.), *Tanner lectures on human values* (pp. 197–220). Cambridge University Press.
- Siim, B. (2000). *Gender and citizenship: Politics and agency in France, Britain and Denmark*. Cambridge University Press.

- Silbermann, R. (2015). Gender roles, work-life balance, and running for office. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 10(2), 123–153.
- Smith, L. C., Ramakrishnan, U., Ndiaye, A., Haddad, L., & Martorell, R. (2003). *The importance of women's status for child nutrition in developing countries* (IFPRI Research Report No. 131). International Food Policy Research Institute.
- Sreberny-Mohammadi, A. & Ross, K. (1996). Women MPs and the media: Representing the body politic. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 49(1): 103–115.
- Stover, K., & Cable, S. (2017). American women's environmental activism: Motivations, experiences, and transformations. In H. J. McCammon, V. Taylor, J. Reger, & R. L. Einwohner (Ur.), *The Oxford handbook of US women's social movement activism* (pp. 685–707). Oxford University Press.
- Tadros, M. (2014). *Women in politics: Gender, power and development*. Zed Books.
- Thames, F. C., & Williams, M. S. (2013). *Contagious representation: Women's political representation in democracies around the world*. NYU Press.
- Tripp, A. M., & Kang, A. (2008). The global impact of quotas: On the fast track to increased female legislative representation. *Comparative Political Studies*, 41(3), 338–361.
- True, J. (2012). *The political economy of violence against women*. Oxford University Press.
- UN Women. (2011). *The women's empowerment principles: Equality means business*.
- UN Women. (2015). *Progress of the world's women 2015–2016: Transforming economies, realizing rights*.
- UN Women. (2016). *Annual report 2015–2016*.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2015). *Human development report 2015: Work for human development*.
- United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). (2016). *Gender, climate change and food security*.
- Waylen, G. (2007). *Engendering transitions: Women's mobilization, institutions and gender outcomes*. Oxford University Press.
- Weis, S., Hodgetts, S., & Hausmann, M. (2021). Sex differences and menstrual cycle effects in cognitive and sensory resting state networks. *Brain and Cognition*, 150, 105715.
- World Bank. (2012). *World development report 2012: Gender equality and development*.

Chapter Three

Balancing Family Obligations with Political Ambitions: Strategies, Challenges, and Influence on Youth

Danijela Lahe

University of Maribor, Slovenia
danijela.lahe@um.si

Suzana Košir

University of Maribor, Slovenia
suzana.kosir1@um.si

The increasing presence of women in Western parliaments has led scholars to examine political workplaces from a gender perspective, focusing on balancing professional and family life. Research indicates that women encounter more difficulties than men in managing parenthood alongside parliamentary careers. Recent studies reveal that institutional and policy adjustments to facilitate political careers for women and mothers remain insufficient. This study provides preliminary evidence suggesting that women in parliament are more likely to be unmarried, childless, or have fewer children than their male counterparts. The authors advocate for re-evaluating political work structures to ensure accessibility for individuals across all social strata and family life stages. Understanding the intergenerational transmission of political participation is crucial for fostering active citizenship among youth. This chapter examines how socioeconomic status (SES) and gender influence the transfer of political attitudes and behaviours from parents to children. Higher SES families offer more resources and opportunities for political engagement, increasing the likelihood of transmitting political behaviours across generations. Parental education and maternal influence are critical in developing political engagement among children. Moreover, indirect communication through observation of political actions plays a significant role in political socialisation. A holistic approach is necessary to ensure sustainable political engagement in future generations.

Keywords: balancing professional and family life, youth, women, parliament careers, parenthood, intergenerational transmission, political socialisation

Introduction

Work-life balance typically refers to an individual's ability, irrespective of gender and age, to successfully navigate between the demands of the workplace and personal or family obligations. Facilitating a more effective reconciliation of professional and private life has long been an objective of European Union policy, recognising its importance in ensuring the sustainability of employment for all citizens. One important step towards this goal was the adoption of Directive 2019/1158 (2019) by the European Parliament and the Council of Europe in 2019. This directive, aimed at reconciling the professional and private lives of parents and carers, seeks to enhance women's participation in the labour market, promote family leave, and encourage flexible working arrangements. Furthermore, it allows workers to take leave to care for relatives requiring support. Such measures are expected to make it easier for parents and carers to balance work and personal life, fostering a more motivated workforce. Additionally, the directive aims to advance gender equality within the EU by incentivising men to take parental leave, thereby reducing the burden of unpaid work on women and promoting equal sharing of caregiving responsibilities.

The emphasis on work-life balance is consistent with broader efforts to address gender disparities in various sectors, including politics. The increased representation of women in parliaments and legislatures is a relatively recent development. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU),¹ women currently make up approximately 25.6% of parliaments worldwide, indicating a significant underrepresentation compared to men. Research on women's representation in politics has predominantly explored factors related to political and electoral systems, quotas, cultural values, political attitudes, and partisanship (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005; Folke & Rickne, 2016; Krook & Norris, 2014; Palmieri, 2011; Wängnerud, 2015). The increasing presence of women in elected politics, including mothers, underscores the need to examine the working and living conditions within political environments. It is essential to determine whether these environments accommodate the needs of women and men, particularly in relation to gender-specific barriers to parental involvement.

Intergenerational transmission, defined as 'the transfer of individual abilities, traits, behaviours, and outcomes from parents to their

¹ <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/>

children' (Lochner, 2008, p. 1), is crucial in shaping various aspects of youth development, including political participation. The family, as the primary agent of socialisation, significantly influences young people's political attitudes and behaviours. Classic literature on political socialisation highlights the profound impact of the family environment, suggesting that young people's initial political discussions and experiences predominantly occur within the family (Davies, 1965; Dawson & Prewitt, 1969; Hyman, 1959; Langton, 1969). Children are exposed to their parents' political ideologies from an early age, which shape their political perspectives. Parents act as role models, and their political behaviours—such as voting patterns, participation in political discussions, and involvement in civic activities—are observed and often emulated by their children. This modelling effect is a critical component of political socialisation, whereby children learn and internalise political norms and values through observation and interaction with family members.

This discussion focuses on the intergenerational transmission of political participation intentions from parents to children, exploring how political behaviours and attitudes are conveyed within families. The goal is to present how political behaviours and attitudes are transmitted from parents to children while also considering the roles of socioeconomic status (SES) and gender in this process. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for gaining insights into the factors shaping youth political engagement and developing strategies to foster active citizenship in future generations (Gordon, 2008; Matthews et al., 2010; Quéniart, 2008).

The transmission of political behaviours and attitudes within families can be understood through several mechanisms. Firstly, direct communication about politics between parents and children provides explicit information that shapes children's political knowledge and attitudes. This direct influence is often complemented by indirect socialisation, where children observe and internalise their parents' political behaviours and attitudes without explicit instruction. The family environment also fosters political interest and efficacy, two critical predictors of political participation. When children perceive their parents as politically active and informed, they are more likely to develop a sense of political efficacy and a belief in the importance of political engagement.

SES significantly influences the process of political socialisation

within families. Families with higher SES often have greater access to resources and opportunities that facilitate political engagement, such as higher levels of education, access to information, and social networks that include politically active individuals. Consequently, children from backgrounds with higher SES are more likely to be exposed to political discussions and activities, which fosters their political engagement. Conversely, children from lower SES backgrounds may have fewer opportunities for political socialisation, which can result in lower levels of political knowledge and participation.

Gender also plays a pivotal role in the intergenerational transmission of political participation. Research suggests that parents may socialise sons and daughters differently regarding political engagement, often encouraging political behaviours more actively in sons than in daughters. This differential socialisation can contribute to gender disparities in political participation, with women being less likely to engage in political activities than men. However, changing societal norms and increased emphasis on gender equality are gradually challenging these traditional patterns, promoting more equitable political socialisation practices.

Challenges and Opportunities of Reconciling Work and Private Life with Parenthood in the Policy Environment

Balancing family life and a career in parliament poses significant challenges for many individuals. Existing research consistently demonstrates that mothers experience more difficulties in reconciling parenthood with a political career compared to fathers (Bittner & Thomas, 2017a; Campbell & Childs, 2014; Joshi & Goehring, 2018; McKay, 2007; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Silbermann, 2015; Öun, 2012). Silbermann (2015) specifically investigated the impact of travel time and proximity to home on the perceived ability to balance work and family responsibilities while pursuing a political career. His findings indicate that women are less likely to run for political office due to the anticipated challenges of managing a political career alongside domestic duties. This phenomenon significantly influences the representation of women in US politics (McKay, 2011). Moreover, Mackay (2001) identified domestic and caregiving responsibilities as critical constraints that hinder women's recruitment into politics and their ability to sustain political careers. These factors affect not only women considering entering the political arena but also those already active within it. Similarly,

Campbell and Childs (2014) underscore the inherent incompatibility between political life and caregiving responsibilities. This incompatibility contributes to the underrepresentation of parents, particularly mothers, in British politics.

Legislative rules and norms within the political sphere often impose unique barriers that surpass those encountered in other professions. Arneil (2017) conducted a comprehensive evaluation of legislative rules since 2000 through case studies in Canada, the UK, and Australia. The study found that several factors make it particularly challenging for mothers with infants to legislate effectively in office. One significant issue highlighted by Arneil (2017, p. 47) is the difficulty women legislators face in taking maternity leave. Due to the nature of their elected positions, which often last only a few years, taking extended leave is problematic. Unlike other sectors where maternity leave is more feasible, the performance of women legislators during their term is crucial for re-election prospects. Taking a year or even a few months off to care for an infant is challenging, as voters expect politicians to be 'always available,' a standard not applied to most other professions. This expectation presents particular challenges for new mothers and mothers with preschool-aged children, who require more intensive care than school-aged children. Such challenges present political mothers with difficult decisions not typically faced by working mothers in other sectors.

Furthermore, there is a lack of consistent policy across countries regarding temporarily replacing Members of Parliament (MPS) on parental leave. Decisions regarding substituting MPS during maternity or paternity leave are complex for most parliaments. For instance, in some countries like Armenia, Australia, and France, MPS on parental leave are not replaced, and specific mechanisms are often absent. In contrast, other parliaments, such as those in Colombia, Denmark, Estonia, Iceland, and the Netherlands, have provisions where the replacement MP is the next person on the electoral list (Palmieri, 2011). However, this approach is fraught with complications.

Firstly, temporarily replacing individuals on legitimate leave works well in many paid positions, but its application in competitive politics is not straightforward. Parliamentarians fiercely compete for their positions, making it challenging to delegate their responsibilities. Secondly, the next person on the electoral list may not be readily available to take up the post, as they might have secured other employment (Palmieri, 2011, p. 94). This situation further complicates the feasibility

of such substitutions. Past experiences in Canadian legislatures exemplify these challenges. In Alberta, the pregnancies of two Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) revealed that neither pregnancy nor childbirth were cited as 'approved' reasons for a legislator's absence, partly because no one had considered this option before (Arneil, 2017). While this oversight might initially seem trivial, it highlights the real obstacles that prevent parents of young children from participating in certain forms of political work to which they have democratic and constitutional rights. Therefore, institutional changes are imperative to accommodate custodial responsibilities and expand the range of potential political representatives.

Arneil (2017, p. 47) underscores the additional challenges breastfeeding mothers face in legislative environments, emphasising that legislative bodies' formal and ritualistic nature, combined with rigid timetables, creates significant difficulties. Unlike more typical workplaces, elected representatives often have no control over their daily agendas due to the necessity of responding immediately to current affairs. Some parliaments maintain archaic rules that classify infants as 'strangers' in the chamber, barring them from attendance because of their unelected or unnamed status. When such rules prove inadequate, other arguments ban bottle-feeding or breastfeeding, citing restrictions on 'refreshments' for everyone in the chamber.

Campbell and Childs (2017) make similar observations in the UK, arguing that political institutions often conflict with caring responsibilities. The demands of political work make it particularly challenging for women to reconcile legislative obligations with family caregiving roles, including childcare and, increasingly, the care of elderly or sick family members. These caregiving responsibilities disproportionately fall on women, compounding the difficulties of legislative jobs. Campbell and Childs (2017) propose several innovative solutions, such as a division of labour between political representatives, where two part-time MPs jointly represent a constituency. This approach allows elected officials to fulfil both public and private roles effectively. Moreover, Bittner and Thomas (2020, p.18) propose using a hybrid parliamentary model, combining remote and physical presence, which is optimal for ensuring consistent representation and facilitating work and family life reconciliation. Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has stimulated research into virtual parliamentary procedures, leading to a hybrid parliamentary model that has benefited MPs on parental leave and those unable

to attend due to other caring responsibilities, health needs, bereavement, weather, geographical distance and other reasons.

The necessity for a robust and equitable policy on parental leave within parliamentary settings is thus evident. Furthermore, the structural barriers imposed by legislative rules and norms disproportionately affect mothers, complicating their ability to balance career and family life. Addressing these barriers requires thoughtful policy interventions and a commitment to fostering a more equitable political landscape. By doing so, parliaments can ensure that the unique needs of parents are met, promoting a diverse and representative political body that can effectively serve its constituents. Campbell and Childs (2017) emphasise that integrating an ethic of care into political institutions would benefit women, parents, and men, who are increasingly taking on caregiving roles. Such integration would facilitate greater political participation from a broader demographic, alleviating the disproportionate burden of care on women and fostering a more inclusive and representative political environment. By addressing these institutional challenges, political environments could better accommodate the dual roles of elected representatives, contributing to greater gender equality and broader political participation. Moreover, these changes could lead to a more nuanced understanding of the demands placed on politicians and the necessary support systems required to manage their roles effectively. Additionally, promoting a culture that values caregiving responsibilities alongside professional duties would encourage a more diverse range of individuals to consider political careers.

Despite efforts to increase the inclusion of mothers in parliaments, women often encounter significant disadvantages stemming from campaign financiers, media elites, and party gatekeepers. These stakeholders hinder the promotion and selection of women candidates due to 'imputed discrimination' (Bell & Kaufmann, 2015; Deason et al., 2015; Karpowitz et al., 2017; Norris & Lovenduski, 1995; Stalsburg, 2010). Imputed discrimination refers to the expected negative reaction of voters towards certain social groups. Party members may personally support a specific category of candidate but may be reluctant to choose such a candidate for fear of losing votes (Norris & Lovenduski, 1995, p. 107). This phenomenon reflects a conflict between the responsibilities of MPs towards their children or family members and their duties to constituents or society at large. Unlike their male counterparts, who can typically delegate caregiving tasks to others, mothers with young chil-

dren face heightened scrutiny due to the demanding schedules of women parliamentarians and societal expectations that mothers bear the majority of parenting duties (Bittner & Thomas, 2017b). Consequently, female MPs often engage in 'double work' or 'double shifts,' managing both their professional responsibilities and their familial duties, while male MPs more frequently delegate family work to others (Stalsburg, 2010; Teele et al., 2018). This disparity burdens women in politics, underscoring the need to address these systemic challenges to ensure equal participation and representation.

Preliminary research reveals that women politicians face unique social and professional pressures that affect their personal lives differently from their male colleagues. Marital status significantly impacts female MPs and MEPS in political settings (Bittner & Thomas, 2017a; Bryant & Hellwege, 2019; Campbell & Childs, 2017). Women in parliament are generally more likely to be unmarried or childless or to have fewer children than their male colleagues (Campbell & Childs, 2017; Franceschet et al., 2017; Joshi & Goehrung, 2018; Stalsburg & Kleinberg, 2016). This trend is consistent with findings by Bittner and Thomas (2017b), who noted that 'women in politics are less likely to be mothers than men in politics are to be fathers' (p. 313). Increasing awareness and advocacy for these changes among campaign financiers, media elites, and party gatekeepers is thus crucial. These stakeholders play a pivotal role in shaping the political landscape and can help dismantle the barriers that impede women's political participation.

A growing body of literature demonstrates that voters differentially evaluate candidates based on their marital status (e.g., Campbell & Cowley, 2018; Deason et al., 2015; Smith, 2018). Unlike men, experimental studies have shown that women candidates are penalised by voters if they do not conform to traditional expectations of being married and having children (Joshi & Goehrung, 2018). Conversely, women candidates are evaluated more positively when they are married and have children (Campbell & Cowley, 2018; Teele et al., 2018). However, mothers with young children are perceived as having less time to fulfil their political duties compared to fathers with young children (Stalsburg, 2010).

While these studies have primarily been conducted in Western societies, it is essential to adopt a global perspective to understand the gender gap in family life and work-family balance. Joshi and Goehrung (2018) conducted a qualitative analysis comparing the marital and

parental status of over 4,000 parliamentarians in 25 countries, spanning both Western and non-Western societies. Their study explored whether family gaps among parliamentarians stem from individual, familial, institutional, or global conditions. They found that the family gaps between parliamentarians are smaller in contexts characterised by higher employment of women, greater representation of women in parliamentary leadership, and lower child mortality rates (Joshi & Goehrung, 2018, p.14). This indicates that increasing women's paid employment, providing better social protection provisions, and enhancing the number of women in parliamentary leadership positions could reduce the gender family gap. Moreover, the absence of a significant family gap in Iceland suggests that it is possible, at least in some contexts, to close such gaps (Joshi & Goehrung, 2018, p. 15). This finding highlights the potential for achieving gender parity in political representation through targeted interventions and supportive policies.

Ensuring that women can participate fully in political life without being disproportionately disadvantaged by their marital or parental status requires a multifaceted approach. Policies to increase women's employment opportunities, enhance social protection, and promote women to leadership roles in parliament are crucial steps towards narrowing the gender gap.

Furthermore, changing societal attitudes towards women politicians is imperative. Voters' biases and the differential evaluation of candidates based on gendered expectations need to be addressed through awareness campaigns and education. By fostering a more inclusive and equitable political environment, it is possible to support the participation of women in politics and ensure that they are evaluated on their merits rather than their marital or parental status.

The issue of political attrition is crucial in the context of work-life balance within the political sphere. Research indicates that women politicians leave politics more frequently and at earlier stages than men (Runderkamp, 2024). This trend, observed a decade ago in Sweden, persists today. Notably, young women are over-represented among those who have exited political office. Politicians with children are likelier to withdraw from politics than those without children. Among former politicians, 32% of women and 24% of men cite family circumstances as the primary reason for their departure (Statistics Sweden, 2016).

Studies demonstrate that women in politics, much like women in broader society, disproportionately shoulder household chores and

childcare responsibilities (Ho & Myong, 2021; Sullivan, 2018). This aligns with existing research showing that women generally face more challenges in balancing work and family life compared to men (Campbell & Childs, 2017; Johansson Sevä & Öun, 2019; Joshi & Goehring, 2018; Thomas & Bittner, 2017).

Johansson Sevä & Öun (2019) emphasise the subjective experiences of women politicians in juggling political work and family life. They find that women experience more tensions in their daily work-family balance than men, even in a comparatively egalitarian country like Sweden (p. 380). These findings suggest that working and living conditions significantly impact women's political participation. Institutional and systemic factors, while important, may not be the sole barriers to achieving gender equality in balancing work and family responsibilities within the political environment.

Reconciling work and family life involves navigating two primary spheres: professional and familial. Emery et al. (2018) extend this framework by exploring local policies addressing a third sphere. Local politicians often balance their political duties, which demand considerable time, with employment due to insufficient political salaries. This political engagement transforms their two-sphere reality into a three-sphere reality. Such a multifaceted role aligns with Voydanoff's concept of 'community,' which is identified as a third source of demands and resources, alongside work and family. This expanded perspective underscores the complexity faced by local politicians, who must integrate professional, familial, and community responsibilities, thereby necessitating nuanced policies to support their multifaceted lives. According to Voydanoff (2005), community participation involves formal voluntary work, informal assistance, and social interactions with friends and neighbours. This aligns closely with the activities of local politicians, who primarily engage in voluntary work and invest considerable effort in building social networks and fostering community connections.

Emery et al. (2018, p. 239) identify coping strategies for reconciling the dual-life sphere framework. Key strategies include communicating with family members to avoid inter-sphere conflicts and setting priorities within the political sphere by focusing on essential activities. Additionally, local politicians should consciously plan quality family time to counterbalance the uneven time distribution across work, family, and political spheres. There is also a gender dimension, as women often remain the primary household heads. Combined with a political culture

featuring late weekday meetings, numerous weekend events, and other family-unfriendly practices, some women may refrain from actively participating in local politics. These strategies are vital for maintaining equilibrium and preventing burnout in multifaceted roles. Emery et al. (2018) conclude that local politicians must maintain segmentation between working, political and family spheres, which is challenging. This involves establishing strong physical boundaries (e.g., conducting political work only at the municipality), psychological boundaries (e.g., avoiding political discussions at home), and temporal boundaries (e.g., engaging in political tasks after children are asleep) to manage these dual roles effectively. While these findings are not generalisable to all local politicians, the identified coping mechanisms elucidate the conscious thought processes and decision-making strategies employed by individuals navigating the demands of multiple life spheres.

In conclusion, the higher attrition rates of women in politics highlight the pressing need to address the work-life balance challenges unique to women politicians. Acknowledging and addressing systemic and subjective factors can foster a more inclusive and supportive political environment that enables equal participation and representation for all.

Complexities of Political Socialisation Mechanisms Within the Family Context

Political socialisation within the family is a nuanced process characterised by multiple interacting mechanisms. Direct communication, behaviour modelling, and transmitting values and norms simultaneously shape political socialisation. Each mechanism plays a distinct role in shaping political attitudes and behaviours, yet their effects intertwine and mutually strengthen one another. For instance, parents who engage in active political discussions and participate in political activities impart information and serve as role models. This dual role informs children about politics and establishes an environment where political values and norms are articulated and demonstrated clearly. Thus, within the familial context, these interconnected processes collectively influence the political development of children.

Understanding these mechanisms is crucial to understand how political socialisation in the family environment shapes young people's political beliefs and behaviours. Various social agents and institutions, such as peers, teachers, schools, and popular media, influence the for-

mation of our social and political attitudes (Barrett, 2006; Willoughby et al., 2021). Studies (Gidengil et al., 2016; Zuckerman et al., 2007) show that the family is a key socialisation agent that significantly influences the development of personal and, at the same time, political identity in young people, and this influence continues into adulthood when young people become active members of the political community.

Direct communication between parents and children is fundamental for transmitting political socialisation. Parents impart knowledge and model political behaviours and values by engaging in political discussions, shaping their children's understanding and attitudes towards politics. This active involvement allows children to develop a deeper awareness of societal issues, encourages them to analyse political events critically, and empowers them to participate actively in civic engagement. Many studies underscore the pivotal role of direct communication in fostering an informed and engaged citizenry among younger generations (Jennings et al., 2009; Zuckerman et al., 2007).

In addition to direct communication, indirect communication can also include transmitting political values and norms through the wider family and social environment, including the influence of relatives, friends, and other important people in one's life (Niemi & Hepburn, 1995). Through their educational practices and daily interactions, family, relatives, friends, and others convey values such as civic responsibility, justice, equality, and respect for democratic processes. These values and norms are integrated into the child's belief system, influencing long-term political behaviour and attitudes (Niemi & Hepburn, 1995). Indirect communication thus complements direct communication by creating a broader context of the political environment in which children learn and form their political views. The combined effect of both forms of communication enables children to develop a holistic understanding of the political world based on a combination of personal experiences, family values, and the broader social context.

Studies indicate that children often adopt similar political views and behaviours as their parents through observational learning and imitation (Flanagan & Levine, 2010; Jennings & Niemi, 1974; Zuckerman et al., 2007). This process, known as modelling, occurs when children observe and replicate their parents' political actions, such as voting, attending rallies, or joining organisations. It also highlights how parental modelling of civic engagement plays a crucial role in promoting and sustaining active citizenship among youth.

Another critical factor is political efficacy, which underscores the influence of parents on their children's belief in their capability to influence political processes. Easton and Dennis (1969) indicate that parental attitudes toward political efficacy shape children's perceptions and behaviours concerning political engagement. Children raised in environments where parents strongly believe in their capacity to effect political change are more likely to develop high levels of political efficacy themselves. This belief system instils a sense of empowerment and encourages active political participation.

The Role of Socioeconomic Status in Political Socialisation

SES significantly influences the intergenerational transmission of political participation. Higher SES families offer greater resources and opportunities for political engagement, thereby enhancing the likelihood of political participation being inherited by subsequent generations (Schlozman et al., 2013). Material wealth influences the political participation of adolescents from affluent families. Greater access to material resources enables these young people to acquire political information and engage in various forms of political participation, including voting and activism (Verba et al., 1995). This early exposure and participation in political activities are pivotal in shaping enduring patterns of political engagement into adulthood. Adolescents from wealthier backgrounds often have better access to educational opportunities, social networks, and civic engagement platforms, further enhancing their political knowledge and involvement (Verba et al., 1995). Consequently, these advantages contribute to sustained political participation and influence across their lifespan, reinforcing the role of material resources in shaping political behaviour and civic engagement among youth.

Parents with lower SES are less likely to demonstrate political participation to their children, which is a significant predictor of their future political involvement (Pacheco, 2008). Additionally, individuals from poor or working-class backgrounds have fewer chances to develop skills necessary for political engagement—such as understanding intricate social and political issues, communication abilities, and organisational capacity—both in educational settings and workplaces, compared to their more affluent counterparts (Diemer, 2012; Verba et al., 1995).

Furthermore, gender differences in SES and workplace participation

significantly influence the intergenerational transmission of political participation. In societies where the gender employment gap is diminishing, both men and women play pivotal roles in shaping the political socialisation of their children. This evolving scenario illustrates how shifting gender roles in society manifest in political patterns and engagement (Addati, 2016; OECD, 2012).

In addition to SES, parents' education also impacts children's political engagement. Higher-educated parents are more likely to be involved in political discussions and activities and encourage political interest in their children (Jennings et al., 2009). Such parents are more inclined to involve their children in political discussions, attend political events, and encourage them to think about political issues, thereby strengthening young people's political awareness and engagement. This educational leadership is passed down through generations, reinforcing enduring political engagement and participation patterns.

These factors clearly show how socioeconomic status affects the intergenerational transmission of political participation. Higher SES enables greater political engagement in individual generations and supports sustainable political behaviour and participation.

Gender Influences on Intergenerational Transmission

Gender dynamics significantly shape the intergenerational transmission of political participation, influencing how political behaviour and attitudes are passed down from parents to children. Moreover, gender differences in political socialisation are influenced by prevailing social norms and expectations. These distinct parental roles are reflected in the patterns of political behaviour and attitudes children adopt (Erikson & Goldthorpe, 1992; Sorensen, 1994). Both parents' diverse roles and influences underscore the necessity for comprehensively examining their respective roles in the study of political socialisation. By acknowledging these distinct roles within the family structure, researchers can better understand how parental dynamics shape children's political orientations and behaviours, thereby informing strategies aimed at promoting informed and active citizenship among younger generations. Fathers' contributions to the family's SES and mothers' roles as primary caregivers are crucial for children's political engagement. Gidengil et al. (2016) argue that maternal influence holds greater sway in children's political socialisation, irrespective of gender. Mothers' political activities and discussions tend to impact children's political

behaviour and attitudes more than paternal involvement. This pattern underscores the important role of mothers as primary caregivers within the family unit, where their engagement in political activities plays a crucial role in shaping children's political socialisation. The influence of maternal political behaviour extends beyond mere participation to encompass the transmission of political values, fostering a deeper understanding and engagement with political issues among younger generations. Consequently, maternal influence emerges as a critical factor in the intergenerational transfer of political participation, highlighting its importance in shaping political orientations and behaviours among children. This holistic approach emphasises the importance of considering paternal and maternal influences in fostering a nuanced understanding of political socialisation processes across different socio-cultural contexts.

These factors collectively underscore the intricate nature of gender dynamics in political socialisation and their profound impact on youth's political attitudes and behaviours. By recognising these dynamics, researchers can gain deeper insights into how gender-related factors intersect with socioeconomic contexts to mould children's political orientations. This nuanced understanding is essential for developing effective strategies that promote inclusive and equitable political engagement among younger generations, irrespective of gender disparities in SES and workplace participation.

Conclusion

The evolution of policies and innovations since granting full suffrage to women has significantly enhanced their presence in the paid workforce. Policies such as maternity, paternity, and parental leave, flexible working arrangements, and child education programs have emerged globally, albeit to varying degrees, to support working parents in balancing their professional and family commitments. Despite the broad appreciation for state support for working families, institutional and policy changes to facilitate women's political careers have not kept pace.

Although efforts have been made to improve working conditions for parents, the political sphere remains largely unaccommodating to the needs of parents, particularly mothers. This lack of adaptation discourages many women with potential political aspirations from considering politics a feasible career path due to family obligations. The political

environment often lacks the necessary support and flexibility to reconcile family life with a political career. This issue is crucial, as the involvement of parents in politics not only diversifies perspectives but also ensures that the voices of various social groups are heard and considered in legislative processes. It is imperative to recognise and support the role of parents, especially mothers, in politics. If we aim to ensure that parents can fully participate in politics as their right as citizens, we must be prepared to accommodate them as elected representatives in our legislative bodies.

The patterns we observe today will likely change in the future, particularly as women and mothers become more prominent in politics. This shift may lead to changes in norms and gender strategies. It is hoped that online harassment of women politicians will diminish as the public becomes more accustomed to women in leadership roles. Additionally, societal expectations of parents have evolved significantly over the past few decades; fathers are now more active in providing care and maintaining households, becoming more equal partners than in the past (Parker & Wang, 2013). These changes suggest that stereotypes and norms surrounding motherhood and fatherhood are evolving, indicating that the challenges faced by modern mothers may increasingly be encountered by modern fathers as well (Bittner & Thomas, 2017b).

These observations raise critical questions about the causal relationships between gender, parenthood, politics, and family life. Are the changes we observe due to the increased involvement of women in politics, thereby influencing the behaviour and policies of politicians? Or is the heightened participation of women in politics a result of evolving societal attitudes that make it more acceptable and feasible for mothers to pursue political careers? We posit that both factors are at play and contend that state and governmental institutions bear a crucial responsibility in fostering political engagement from all societal segments, particularly encouraging the involvement of women and mothers.

Reconsidering how we organise and implement politics is essential. If we want our policies to be accessible and inclusive for all, institutional structures and processes must adapt to meet the needs of parents. This is the only way to ensure that policies reflect society's diversity and that the voices of all societal groups are heard and considered. This approach is critical to creating a just and equitable society where everyone can contribute to shaping our future.

The intergenerational transmission of political participation is a complex process influenced by direct communication, indirect socialisation, socioeconomic status, and gender. Understanding the mechanisms of intergenerational transmission of political participation is vital for developing strategies to promote active citizenship and democratic engagement among young people. Factors influencing how political behaviour and attitudes are transmitted from parents to children, particularly regarding socioeconomic status and gender, must be identified and analysed. Parents with higher education levels are more likely to engage in political discussions and activities, fostering their children's political interests. This educational advantage is often passed down through generations, playing a key role in shaping young people's political attitudes and behaviours. Families with higher SES provide more resources and opportunities for political engagement, increasing the likelihood that political behaviour will be passed on to subsequent generations. Children from these families are more exposed to political debates, have greater access to political information, and are encouraged to engage in politics. The knowledge and values transmitted from higher SES families often form the foundation for their later political activity.

Gender also significantly influences political socialisation. Studies indicate that maternal influence has a more substantial impact on the political behaviour of both sons and daughters than paternal influence. Mothers' political activities and roles as caretakers in the family strongly influence children's political engagement, reflecting their role as critical agents in transmitting political values and knowledge to younger generations.

Strategies to promote active citizenship and democratic engagement should aim to create equal opportunities for political engagement and strengthen political knowledge and skills in families from diverse social backgrounds. Knowledge of these dynamics is crucial in designing political and social interventions that promote sustainable political engagement for future generations.

Policymakers, educational experts, and non-governmental organisations can develop programs and initiatives to give young people better opportunities to engage in political processes by understanding the mechanisms of intergenerational transmission of political participation. This includes educational programs that promote political literacy, initiatives to increase access to political information, and encour-

aging active participation in political and civic activities from a young age. Only by actively involving and educating young people can we ensure that future generations are well-prepared and motivated to participate actively in democratic processes and contribute to societal development.

References

- Addati, L. (2016). *Women at work: Trends 2016*. International Labour Office.
- Arneil, B. (2017). Lactating mothers in parliament: Beyond accommodation. In M. Thomas & A. Bittner (Eds.), *Mothers and others: The role of parenthood in politics* (pp. 46–63). University of British Columbia Press.
- Barrett, M. (2006). *Children's knowledge, beliefs and feelings about nations and national groups*. Psychology Press.
- Bell, M. A., & Kaufmann, K. M. (2015). The electoral consequences of marriage and motherhood: How gender traits influence voter evaluations of female candidates. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 36(1), 1–21.
- Bittner, A., & Thomas, M. (2017a). Gender, parenthood, and politics: What do we still need to know? In M. Thomas & A. Bittner (Eds.), *Mothers and others: The role of parenthood in politics* (pp. 313–338). University of British Columbia Press.
- Bittner, A., & Thomas, M. (2017b). Moms in politics: Work is work. *Canadian Parliament Review*, 40(3), 16–22.
- Bittner, A., & Thomas, M. (2020). Making a bad thing worse. *Canadian Parliamentary Review*, 43(3), 14–18.
- Bryant, L. A., & Hellwege, J. M. (2019). Working mothers represent: How children affect the legislative agenda of women in congress. *American Politics Research*, 47(3), 447–470.
- Campbell, R., & Childs, S. (2014). Parents in parliament: 'Where's mum?' *The Political Quarterly*, 85(4), 487–492.
- Campbell, R., & Childs, S. (2017). The (M)otherhood trap: Reconsidering sex, gender, and legislative recruitment. In M. Thomas & A. Bittner (Eds.), *Mothers and others: The role of parenthood in politics* (pp. 46–63). University of British Columbia Press.
- Campbell, R., & Cowley, P. (2018). The impact of parental status on the visibility and evaluations of politicians. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 20(3), 753–769.
- Dahlerup, D., & Freidenvall, L. (2005). Quotas as a 'fast track' to equal representation for women: Why Scandinavia is no longer the model. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7(1), 26–48.

- Davies, J. C. (1965). The family's role in political socialization. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 361(1), 10–19.
- Dawson, R. E., & Prewitt, K. (1969). *Political socialization: An analytic study*. Little, Brown and Company.
- Deason, G., Greenlee, J. S., & Langner, C. A. (2015). Mothers on the campaign trail: Implications of Politicized Motherhood for women in politics. *Politics, Groups, and Identities*, 3(1), 133–148.
- Diemer, M. A. (2012). Fostering marginalized youths' political participation: Longitudinal roles of parental political socialization and youth sociopolitical development. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 50(1), 246–256.
- Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2019 on work-life balance for parents and carers and repealing Council Directive 2010/18/EU. (2019). *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 188, 79–93.
- Easton, D., & Dennis, J. (1969). *Children in the political system: Origins of political legitimacy*. McGraw Hill.
- Emery, L., Meier, P., & Mortelmans, D. (2018). Juggling three life spheres: Reconciling work, family and politics. *Community, Work & Family*, 21(2), 226–242.
- Erikson, R., & Goldthorpe, J. H. (1992). Individual or family? Results from two approaches to class assignment. *Acta Sociologica*, 35(2), 95–105.
- Flanagan, C., & Levine, P. (2010). Civic engagement and the transition to adulthood. *The Future of Children*, 20(1), 159–179.
- Folke, O., & Rickne, J. (2016). Electoral competition and gender differences in political careers. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 11, 59–102.
- Franceschet, S., Piscopo, J. M., & Thomas, G. (2017). Motherhood and politics in Latin America: Continuity and change. In M. Thomas & A. Bittner (Eds.), *Mothers and others: The role of parenthood in politics* (pp. 46–86). University of British Columbia Press.
- Gidengil, E., Wass, H., & Valaste, M. (2016). Political socialization and voting: The parent-child link in turnout. *Political Research Quarterly*, 69(2), 373–383.
- Gordon, H. R. (2008). Gendered paths to teenage political participation: Parental power, civic mobility, and youth activism. *Gender & Society*, 22(1), 31–55.
- Ho, C., & Myong, S. (2021). Providing childcare. In H. T. Hoon (Ed.), *The Singapore Economy* (pp. 277–309). Routledge.
- Hyman, H. (1959). *Political socialization: A study in the psychology of political behaviour*. Free Press.

- Jennings, M. K., & Niemi, R. G. (1974). *Political character of adolescence: The influence of families and schools*. Princeton University Press.
- Jennings, M. K., Stoker, L., & Bowers, J. (2009). Politics across generations: Family transmission reexamined. *The Journal of Politics*, 71(3), 782–799.
- Johansson Sevä, I., & Öun, I. (2019). Conditional representation: Gendered experiences of combining work and family among local politicians. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 40(3), 367–384.
- Joshi, D., & Goehring, R. (2018). Conceptualizing and measuring women's political leadership: From presence to balance. *Politics & Gender*, 14(3), 350–375.
- Karpowitz, C. F., Monson, J. Q., & Preece, J. R. (2017). How to elect more women: Gender and candidate success in a field experiment. *American Journal of Political Science*, 61(4), 927–943.
- Krook, M. L., & Norris, P. (2014). Beyond quotas: Strategies to promote gender equality in elected office. *Political Studies*, 62(1), 2–20.
- Langton, K. P. (1969). *Political socialization*. Oxford University Press.
- Lochner, L. (2008). Intergenerational transmission. In S. N. Durlauf & L. E. Blume (Eds.), *The new Palgrave dictionary of economics* (2nd ed., pp. 1–7). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Mackay, F. (2001). *Love and politics: Women Politicians and the Ethics of Care*. A & C Black.
- Matthews, T. L., Hempel, L. M., & Howell, F. M. (2010). Gender and the transmission of civic engagement: Assessing the influences on youth civic activity. *Sociological Inquiry*, 80(3), 448–474.
- McKay, J. (2007). Women MPS and the socio-environmental preconditions for political participation in the Federal Republic. *German Politics*, 16(3), 379–390.
- McKay, J. (2011). 'Having it all?' Women MPS and motherhood in Germany and the UK. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 64(4), 714–736.
- Niemi, R. G., & Hepburn, M. A. (1995). The rebirth of political socialization. *Perspectives on Political Science*, 24(1), 7–16.
- Norris, P., & Lovenduski, J. (1995). *Political recruitment: Gender, race and class in the British Parliament*. Cambridge University Press.
- OECD. (2012). *Closing the gender gap act now: Act now*. OECD Publishing.
- Öun, I. (2012). Work-family conflict in the Nordic countries: A comparative analysis. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 43(2), 165–184.
- Pacheco, J. S. (2008). Political socialization in context: The effect of political competition on youth voter turnout. *Political Behavior*, 30(4), 415–436.

- Palmieri, S. (2011). *Gender-sensitive parliaments: A global review of good practice* (Reports and Documents No. 65-2011). Inter-Parliamentary Union.
- Parker, K., & Wang, W. (2013, March 14). *Modern parenthood*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2013/03/14/modern-parenthood-roles-of-moms-and-dads-converge-as-they-balance-work-and-family>
- Quéniart, A. (2008). The form and meaning of young people's involvement in community and political work. *Youth & Society*, 40(2), 203–223.
- Runderkamp, Z. (2024). No more simultaneous chess: Understanding dropout of local-level women politicians in gendered institutions. *Di-GeSt: Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies*, 11(1), 37–49.
- Schlozman, K. L., Verba, S., & Brady, H. E. (2013). *The unheavenly chorus: Unequal political voice and the broken promise of American democracy*. Princeton University Press.
- Silbermann, R. (2015). Gender roles, work-life balance, and running for office. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 10(2), 123–153.
- Smith, J. C. (2018). Politics and parenthood: An examination of UK party leadership elections. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 71(1), 196–217.
- Sorensen, A. (1994). Women, family and class. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 20, 27–45.
- Stalsburg, B. L. (2010). Voting for mom: The political consequences of being a parent for male and female candidates. *Politics & Gender*, 6(3), 373–404.
- Stalsburg, B. L., & Kleinberg, M. S. (2016). 'A mom first and a candidate second': Gender differences in candidates' self-presentation of family. *Journal of Political Marketing*, 15(4), 285–310.
- Statistics Sweden. (2016). *Demokratins representanter: En studie av representativitet, delaktighet och syn på uppdraget* (Demokratistatistik, rapport 23).
- Sullivan, O. (2018). The gendered division of household labor. In B. J. Risman, C. M. Froyum, & W. J. Scarborough (Eds.), *Handbook of the sociology of gender* (pp. 377–392). Springer International Publishing.
- Teele, D. L., Kalla, J., & Rosenbluth, F. (2018). The ties that double bind: Social roles and women's underrepresentation in politics. *American Political Science Review*, 112(3), 525–541.
- Thomas, M., & Bittner, A. (2017). The 'mommy problem'? Gender, parental status, and politics. In M. Thomas & A. Bittner (Eds.), *Mothers and others: The role of parenthood in politics* (pp. 3–22). University of British Columbia Press.

- Verba, S., Schlozman, K. L., & Brady, H. E. (1995). *Voice and equality: Civic voluntarism in American politics*. Harvard University Press.
- Voydanoff, P. (2005). The effects of community demands, resources, and strategies on the nature and consequences of the work-family interface: An agenda for future research. *Family Relations*, 54(5), 583–595.
- Wängnerud, L. (2015). *The principles of gender-sensitive parliaments*. Routledge.
- Willoughby, E. A., Giannelis, A., Ludeke, S., Klemmensen, R., Nørgaard, A. S., Iacono, W. G., Lee, J. J., & McGue, M. (2021). Parent contributions to the development of political attitudes in adoptive and biological families. *Psychological Science*, 32(12), 2023–2034.
- Zuckerman, A. S., Dasovic, J., & Fitzgerald, J. (2007). *Partisan families: The social logic of bounded partisanship in Germany and Britain*. Cambridge University Press.

Chapter Four

The Role of Education and Media Representation in Women's Active Political Participation

Suzana Košir

University of Maribor, Slovenia
suzana.kosir1@um.si

Tina Tomazič

University of Maribor, Slovenia
tina.tomazic@um.si

This chapter examines the role of education and media in empowering women for active political participation. Women's underrepresentation in politics undermines democratic principles and the development of inclusive policies. Education empowers women by providing the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary for political engagement, fostering critical thinking and leadership competencies. Simultaneously, the media influences public perceptions and attitudes, offering visibility to female politicians, highlighting gender biases, and advocating for gender equality. This study explores how educational initiatives and media representation can transform societal norms and encourage women's political careers by analysing literature, case studies, and empirical data. Additionally, the paper addresses challenges, such as gender stereotypes in educational content and media portrayals, and suggests strategies to overcome these barriers. The findings aim to identify actionable pathways to enhance women's political representation and influence, contributing to more equitable and democratic societies.

Keywords: education, media representation, women's political participation, empowerment, gender stereotypes

Introduction

Women's empowerment for active political participation is a critical issue that intersects with numerous aspects of societal development, including education and media influence. Despite significant progress in various regions, women still need to be represented in political arenas worldwide. This underrepresentation not only undermines the principles of democratic governance but also hampers the development of

inclusive policies that reflect the needs and perspectives of the entire population.

Education and media are two pivotal forces that can catalyse the transformation needed to enhance women's political participation. Education provides the foundation for empowering women with the knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to engage in political processes. It enables women to understand their rights, develop critical thinking abilities, and gain the competencies required for leadership roles. Meanwhile, the media shapes public perceptions and attitudes towards women's political involvement. By providing visibility to female politicians, highlighting gender biases, and advocating for gender equality, the media can significantly influence societal norms and encourage more women to pursue political careers.

This paper explores the intricate relationship between education, media, and women's empowerment in politics. It examines how educational initiatives can equip women with the tools needed for effective political engagement and how media representation can alter public perceptions and promote gender parity in political participation. By analysing existing literature, case studies, and empirical data, this study aims to comprehensive understanding of how education and media empower women in the political sphere.

Furthermore, the paper will discuss the challenges and barriers in both domains, such as gender stereotypes in educational content and media portrayal and propose strategies to overcome these obstacles. Through this analysis, the research highlights actionable pathways to enhance women's representation and influence in political decision-making processes, ultimately contributing to more equitable and democratic societies.

Addressing gender stereotypes and traditional roles is one of the key strategies for achieving gender equality. Fundamental shifts in gender equality, gender stereotypes, and traditional roles are present in contemporary society. Adolescents perceive them in their family environment, as well as in the educational process, peer groups, and in the media. The reinforcement of gender stereotypes and traditional roles is also reflected in the labour market and broader society (European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), 2024).

Gender stereotypes significantly influence the development of adolescents' identities. At the same time, young people shape their educational and professional aspirations in line with these stereotypes and

pursue them later in life. Career choices influenced by gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles that are passed on to young people during adolescence can exacerbate gender inequalities. Women frequently choose occupations associated with traditional women roles, such as teaching and caring professions, which usually pay lower wages than traditional male occupations (OECD, 2019). Similar conclusions were made by studies focusing on young people's career aspirations. These studies indicated that girls often avoid pursuing education in specific fields due to prevailing stereotypes about girls' (under)achievement in mathematics and science (Blanton et al., 2002; Rowley et al., 2007; Schmader et al., 2004). Researchers suggest that this trend can be changed through intervention and appropriately addressing gender stereotypes and traditional roles (Makarova et al., 2019). For example, the OECD (Brussino & McBrien, 2022) encourages the appropriate addressing of gender stereotypes and traditional roles at all levels of education, from pre-school education to university.

Given the last available data concerning university enrollment in Slovenia, we can see that more men than women apply for science, maths, statistics, technology, and construction programs. On the other hand, more women than men apply for programs in educational sciences, art, health science, and social studies. Certain equilibrium levels are present only in areas related to transport, security, tourism, public services, journalism, social sciences, and agricultural sciences. Regarding social sciences and journalism, it should be highlighted that from 2017 to 2021, more women than men graduated from these programs, with a distribution ratio of almost 1:3 (SURS, 2022).

The Role of Education in Addressing and Forming Gender Stereotypes

During adolescence, teachers and parents are perceived as crucial actors in addressing gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles. They must be particularly attentive to the conscious or unconscious biases they may pass on to their students or children (Givord, 2020).

Appropriate strategies to address gender stereotypes and traditional roles in the educational process can help teachers identify and try to eradicate them through various language tools, technology, and other approaches. These strategies aim to ensure a more equitable and inclusive education for adolescents and a future unencumbered by gender stereotypes and traditional roles.

Brussino and McBrien (2022) point out that school policies and practices influence how gender stereotypes are reinforced or challenged. In particular, language stands out; some languages, including Slovene, have a strong gender bias, such as gendered pronouns and assigning feminine or masculine forms or articles to specific nouns. Bigler and Leaper (2015) argue that gendered language also contributes to gender stereotypes by treating gender in a binary way. At the same time, it promotes masculine language using masculine (pro)nouns or predominantly masculine names for persons or occupations. When analysing curricula of various subjects in the Slovene educational system, we found that, interestingly, the English curriculum for general upper secondary schools actively addresses both women and men in certain places. The syllabus for the Slovene language for primary school is also noteworthy in this regard since it references both women and men. Throughout the document, references are made to girls and boys, which is not a regular practice.

School-based sex education also plays a vital role in addressing gender stereotypes and traditional roles during adolescence. Depending on the content covered, it can either reinforce or mitigate gender stereotypes and traditional roles (Grose et al., 2014; Naser et al., 2020). On the one hand, studies (e.g., Naser idr. 2020) suggest that school-based sex education is primarily heteronormative and does not adequately address gender stereotypes and traditional roles. However, others (Grose et al., 2014) highlight the positive effects of a comprehensive school sex education programme, such as fostering more progressive views of women, reducing support for the dominant masculine ideology, and improving sexual health, etc.

Moreover, textbooks are another important tool in addressing gender stereotypes and traditional roles. As the Council of Europe (2019) suggests, teaching materials can help achieve gender equality, eliminate gender stereotypes, and overcome conventional roles with their content. For example, suppose a textbook includes examples of men and women in various leadership and domestic positions and emphasises that gender should not determine one's career path. In that case, it can challenge gender stereotypes and promote gender equality. In addition, including stories of successful women in science, politics, and business can inspire girls to pursue careers in these fields. Similarly, textbooks can challenge harmful traditional roles that limit individuals' potential. For instance, textbooks can highlight that women can

be successful professionals while men can be reliable caregivers and homemakers.

At this point, we present the analysis of selected textbooks for Slovenian primary schools (Pogorilić, 2020). The results of eight workbooks for Slovene language learning suggest that men are represented more frequently than women in the materials analysed. In several cases, stereotypical gender roles and characteristics are typically attributed to fictional characters. Compared to men, women are portrayed as more emotional, caring, and passive, and they operate predominantly in the private sphere. In contrast, men are depicted as more indifferent, ambitious, and involved in activities related to the public sphere. Furthermore, women are more often represented in teaching, administrative and service occupations, while men are assigned to science and technology occupations. Klavž (2020) made similar findings when investigating the gender dimension in Slovenian primary and secondary school teaching materials ($n = 10$, including three secondary and seven primary school textbooks). The analysis emphasises discriminatory practices within the teaching materials and the reinforcement of gender roles associated with gender stereotypes.

Regarding the Slovenian context, The White Paper (Krek & Metljak, 2011) repeatedly highlights non-discrimination based on gender, along with a range of other characteristics. The document contains a chapter dedicated to gender in education and gender (in)equality issues. Further, it points out the need for revising equality provisions and norms in curriculum documents. At the level of primary school curricula, especially in social studies and some science subjects, different dimensions of sex (biological) and gender (social) and their interplay are tackled.

Taking a closer look at university programmes, the curricula of social science programmes are, to varying extent, oriented towards gender and society. We analysed social science programmes at four public universities in Slovenia. Generally, students receive the most significant amount of information and knowledge on these topics at the two largest and oldest universities, the University of Ljubljana and the University of Maribor. In contrast, judging by the curricula of other social science faculties in Slovenia, there is considerably less emphasis on gender in the social context and, more specifically, in the context of equality and political empowerment.

The programmes Cultural Studies – Studies of Cultures and Creativity, Sociology, Sociology – Human Resource Management, and Social

Informatics (all at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana) introduce gender and politics through various topics. Sociology of Gender is a compulsory course in the Sociology programme. The curricula of the political science courses at the same faculty (Political Science – Studies of Politics and the State; Political Science – Public Policy and Administration; International Relations; Defence Studies) contain a plethora of subjects that empower students for political action, including foundations of political science, international relations, and the political system of the Republic of Slovenia. In addition, these programmes include at least one sociological subject (Introduction to Sociology) that covers topics of gender and sexuality.

Communication studies include courses such as Introduction to Sociology, Social and Cultural Anthropology, Foundations of Communication Studies, and Media and Communication Studies. These courses tackle, at least implicitly, different dimensions of gender. In addition, all these programmes include a course related to political science. However, apart from this, and except among the electives, we did not find courses explicitly dealing with politics in any of these programmes. Among the electives, we did find subjects such as Social Exclusion and Inclusion Policies, The Politics of Globalisation, and The New Politics and Global Social Movements. These subjects can encourage students to become politically engaged and empowered.

Sociology courses at the Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana (Sociology of Culture and Sociology) include Introduction to Sociology I & II, which encompass some gender dimensions. Both courses also have a Sociology of Gender course, which addresses gender roles and stereotypes and works towards promoting gender equality. Other subjects of interest to our topic include, for example, Sociology of Social Movements and Political Institutions, Sociology of Media and Communication, Social Change and Development, and Introduction to Globalisation Studies.

Similarly, the two sociology programmes at the Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor (Sociology and Interdisciplinary Social Sciences and Sociology) include Sociology I & II, which cover general topics and concepts while incorporating gender dimensions. The Sociology of Gender is compulsory in both courses and addresses gender roles and stereotypes, promoting gender equality. In addition, both programmes include political science topics, which can stimulate and empower students for political action.

Media Representation of Women's Political Participation

From an early age, individuals encounter gender-stereotypical portrayals through diverse media, such as cartoons, children's books, and video games, as well as through the gender-stereotypical behaviours of adults and peers, such as toy preferences during play. This exposure significantly shapes their understanding of gender and exerts a lasting influence on gender-stereotyped behaviour (Škraban, 2004). Gendering refers to the perceived imprint of gender on media portrayals of politics and politicians and the processes through which gendered media representations are formed (Voronova, 2015). This early and continuous exposure to gendered messages in various socialisation agents underscores the pervasive nature of gender stereotypes and their profound impact on individual perceptions and behaviours related to gender throughout life.

With its profound connection to direct communication with society, the media industry is one of the most invasive and influential sectors in shaping public opinion, social norms, and values. Media often present events, phenomena, or groups from a singular perspective, exhibiting selective and partial representations. Consequently, media outlets are not neutral conveyors of information but interpret and construct reality in distinctive ways. In their portrayal of women, the media are frequently accused of symbolic annihilation, characterised by the traditional neglect, trivialisation, or condemnation of women. Scholars argue that this persistent sexism in media can only be mitigated through increased representation of women in influential roles within newspapers, television stations, and advertising agencies (Ryle, 2020). This call for gender parity in media production underscores the need for diverse voices and perspectives to create more balanced and equitable representations, which can foster a more inclusive society.

Media portrayals often idealise femininity and masculinity, presenting distorted images that diverge from reality. Femininity is typically depicted through traits such as tenderness, emotionality, devotion, and self-sacrifice, while masculinity is characterised by power, aggressiveness, dominance, and activity. These portrayals reinforce traditional stereotypes: women are shown primarily in roles as wives, mothers, and housewives or as sexual objects whose faces and bodies are used to advertise various products. Such representations contribute to women's ongoing economic disadvantages and underrepresentation in positions of power and leadership. The disjunction between cultural and

media representations of women and leadership significantly perpetuates these inequalities (Tischner et al., 2021). This persistent stereotyping and marginalisation in media not only misrepresent women's multifaceted identities and contributions but also undermines their potential to attain leadership roles and achieve economic equity. Thus, a critical reevaluation of media practices is necessary to foster more inclusive representation.

The male and female categories are distinct, with political norms and values predominantly defined and signified as male. Policy issues and models for political action are structured dichotomously and hierarchically, reflecting an entrenched gender dualism. This framework positions male-associated characteristics and approaches as the standard for good politics. Consequently, this gendered structuring of political norms and actions reinforces the dominance of male perspectives in the political realm and marginalises women's contributions and viewpoints (Lünenborg & Maier, 2015).

Representing women in the highest political offices is crucial for achieving political equality and advancing towards a more egalitarian society. The underrepresentation of women in political power positions highlights the persistence of patriarchal structures that continue to marginalise women politically. Although significant advancements have occurred in recent decades, gender remains a critical factor in electoral and appointment processes for official positions. The challenges women face in democratic politics are not solely due to the traditional gender imbalances in political appointments but also stem from the structurally determined roles women are expected to fulfil in society. These structural constraints reinforce the secondary political status of women and hinder their full participation in political life, thereby maintaining gender inequality in political representation (Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012).

The underrepresentation of women in political office persists due to the entrenched perception that politics inherently aligns with masculine behaviours, communication styles, and professional experiences, thereby constructing a stereotypical image of politicians as predominantly male. Gender stereotypes arise from attributing specific traits to women and men, influencing how these attributes are interpreted and recalled in social contexts. However, these stereotypes become problematic when they dictate societal expectations and constrain individuals' roles based on gender. For instance, traditional stereotypes of

masculinity and femininity prescribe distinct societal roles and identities, including expectations about professional pursuits. Social role theory illuminates how these gender stereotypes perpetuate unequal divisions of labour over time by positing that societal norms predispose individuals to anticipate conformity to gender-specific roles and traits associated with particular occupations. Consequently, cultural perceptions solidify gendered expectations regarding suitable professions for women and men, reinforcing traditional patterns of occupational segregation. In essence, the persistent underrepresentation of women in political spheres reflects broader societal norms that prescribe gender-specific roles and behaviours, perpetuating barriers that hinder women's full participation and leadership in political arenas. Addressing these stereotypes is crucial for achieving gender equality in political representation and dismantling structural barriers that limit women's advancement in politics (Meeks, 2012).

Women politicians face a dual challenge in media portrayal, compelled to navigate between societal expectations of femininity while conforming to conventional male norms of political behaviour. This dichotomy places them in a precarious position where they must balance being perceived as appropriately feminine and assertively political, often resulting in a narrow spectrum of acceptable behaviours and appearances. Research indicates that the British press emphasises women politicians' appearance and attire over their policies and leadership capabilities. This phenomenon underscores broader issues related to gender and media representation, where women in positions of political power are subjected to heightened scrutiny and gendered expectations. The media's focus on superficial aspects such as clothing and appearance perpetuates stereotypes and detracts from substantive discussions on their political achievements and policy agendas. Consequently, women politicians may find themselves marginalised or trivialised in media narratives and reinforcing traditional gender norms that restrict their full participation and recognition in political spheres. Efforts to address these challenges include advocating for more equitable and substantive media coverage emphasising women's leadership qualities, policy expertise, and contributions to public discourse. By challenging stereotypical portrayals and promoting inclusive media practices, there is potential to reshape public perceptions and support greater gender equality in political representation (O'Neill et al., 2016).

Gender-role stereotypes play a significant role in shaping profes-

sional barriers, particularly when individuals diverge from traditional gender norms associated with specific roles. The research underscores that incongruence between perceived gender stereotypes and the gender of job candidates can lead to discriminatory practices, manifesting as negative evaluations and hindering career advancement. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in sectors traditionally dominated by men, such as politics in the United States, where women candidates face challenges when entering what is perceived as a masculine domain. Studies highlight that voters often prefer candidates who embody traits traditionally associated with masculinity when selecting leaders for higher executive offices, such as US Senator, Governor, or President. This preference underscores broader societal expectations and biases regarding leadership qualities, potentially disadvantaging women candidates who do not conform to stereotypical masculine attributes. Consequently, women seeking political office may encounter heightened scrutiny and resistance due to perceived gender-role incongruence, impacting their electoral prospects and professional trajectories (Meeks, 2012).

Meeks (2012) argues that women often encounter 'either/or' dilemmas, where they are expected to embody either feminine or masculine traits but not both simultaneously. This binary expectation reflects traditional gender norms that prescribe distinct roles and characteristics for women and men. However, contemporary perspectives suggest that gender identities are not strictly confined to singular categories of femininity or masculinity. Instead, individuals have opportunities to integrate both feminine and masculine attributes into their gendered identities, albeit within societal constraints. In recent years, there has been a shift away from rigidly defined gender roles towards more fluid and inclusive notions of gender identity. This evolution allows women to adopt some traditionally masculine traits without altogether abandoning their feminine identity, and vice versa for men. This process challenges the strict dichotomy of gender roles and recognises the complexity of individual identities. For instance, women in politics may exhibit assertiveness or leadership qualities traditionally associated with masculinity while maintaining other aspects of their feminine identity. However, despite these advancements, societal norms continue to influence perceptions and expectations regarding gender roles. When confronted with individuals who defy traditional gender stereotypes, such as assertive women in leadership positions, people

may create 'subtypes' or subcategories within gender identities to accommodate these deviations. These subtypes allow for more nuanced understandings of gender expression and challenge rigid gender norms while acknowledging the ongoing complexities of gender identity in professional settings.

In media representations, male career politicians are often depicted through idealised traits such as rationality, strength, and competitiveness, reinforcing hegemonic masculinity. Assessing the portrayal of Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany, reveals a prevalent narrative framing her as an influential political figure. Despite her significant political stature, Merkel operates within an ideology that traditionally subordinates women to men. She tends to avoid projecting herself explicitly as a woman in her political performances, aligning more with masculine traits of assertiveness and dominance. Journalistic coverage further reinforces gender-based dichotomies, portraying Merkel alternately as both a nurturing figure ('Mum') and a powerful politician. This dual framing reflects broader societal perceptions and expectations regarding women in leadership roles. Merkel's political approach, characterised by a pursuit of power and a dominance-oriented style, occasionally draws negative critiques in media reports. However, what distinguishes Merkel's case is her navigation of traditionally masculine attributes within her leadership, challenging norms of political behaviour associated with femininity. Despite Merkel's adherence to masculine norms in her political conduct, media scrutiny sometimes critiques these traits as overly aggressive or exceeding traditional bounds of masculinity. This critical engagement underscores ongoing societal negotiations around gender and leadership in political contexts, highlighting how gender connotations shape public perceptions and discourse around female politicians like Angela Merkel (Lünenborg & Maier, 2015).

Despite patterns of media coverage supporting an increased female presence in high political offices in Spain, the media continues to emphasise women's physical appearance and traditional gender roles. This duality reinforces the notion that women politicians deviate from the norm, complicating the discourse that evaluates them solely on their qualifications, experience, and political performance. The persistent focus on appearance undermines efforts to assess women politicians on their merits, perpetuating stereotypes and limiting the scope of their representation. Consequently, it remains challenging to con-

struct a narrative where women are viewed purely as politicians, evaluated based on professional criteria rather than gendered expectations. This persistent media bias underscores the ongoing struggle for women politicians to be recognised for their capabilities rather than conforming to traditional gender norms (Garcia-Blanco & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2012).

Women politicians in Slovenia often articulate their femininity through prevailing societal myths, such as depicting women as sex objects, martyrs, loving and caring individuals, or enigmas and threats. This self-representation aligns with broader ideological discourses, reflecting dominant societal beliefs and myths. Consequently, Slovenian women politicians tend not to challenge these hegemonic narratives. Instead, they reinforce existing gender stereotypes by integrating these traditional roles into their political personas. This adherence to dominant ideological frameworks highlights the persistent influence of gendered expectations on women's political engagement, limiting their potential to disrupt or transform the entrenched gender norms within the political sphere (Pušnik & Bulc, 2001).

As Fabjančič (1999) observed, research on gender and media reveals a reproduction of patriarchal ideology. Women politicians are often viewed through the lens of their perceived need to occupy the private sphere, leading to the addition of sexist connotations. A male politician is deemed adequate if portrayed as a good man. In contrast, women are considered good politicians only if they conform to stereotypical gender characteristics, embodying the notion of being 'proper women.' Despite existing legislation in the European Union and Slovenia aimed at preventing sexism, both subtle and overt forms persist. Even when women hold positions such as Ministers or Prime Ministers, they are perceived differently from their male counterparts. Despite their long-standing active participation, they are often considered less significant and somewhat 'exotic' in politics. Media representation of women politicians perpetuates sexist discourse, thereby reinforcing unequal positions compared to male politicians and normalising gender disparities in political perception and treatment.

Crnović (2021) presents a comprehensive study examining how critical figures in Slovenian politics navigate gender and class distinctions. The empirical analysis of politicians' media appearances is contextualised within Bourdieu's sociological theory, gender studies, and feminist theoretical traditions. Crnović (2021) identifies an asymmetry in

the performance of masculinity and femininity, where women in politics are often reduced to their gender and the associated social roles. Consequently, they face higher expectations and harsher judgments than their male counterparts. This phenomenon is evident in the case of Alenka Bratušek, Slovenia's first female Prime Minister, who was elected in 2013. Despite her efforts to keep her personal life separate from her political role, her career was frequently scrutinised through the lens of her appearance and attire. Crnović (2021) notes that the only female politician who manages to navigate her gender representation relatively unproblematically is Ljudmila Novak, a former president of the Christian democratic party Nova Slovenija (New Slovenia). Novak's success is attributed to her alignment with traditional gender roles, which aligns more closely with societal expectations and thus receives less critical scrutiny.

Krnjajić (2018) conducted a detailed analysis of the media representation of Slovenian women politicians by examining news articles from the *Delo* newspaper and online media platforms. The study focused on four prominent Slovenian women politicians, each with distinct self-representation styles: former Prime Minister Alenka Bratušek, former Minister of Defence Ljubica Jelušič, former Member of Parliament and Minister of Culture Majda Širca, and former President of the Nova Slovenija (New Slovenia) party Ljudmila Novak. Through textual analysis of articles covering these politicians during a specific timeframe, Krnjajić (2018) uncovered a persistent presence of sexism despite ongoing efforts for gender equality in media representation and other societal spheres. By employing critical discourse analysis, Krnjajić (2018) concluded that the personal attitudes of journalists and media personnel significantly influence the portrayal of women in the media. This subjective bias perpetuates gender stereotypes and reinforces existing societal prejudices. The study highlighted that women politicians are often subjected to scrutiny and judgement based on their gender, overshadowing their professional achievements and contributions. The analysis revealed a tendency to focus on personal attributes, such as appearance and demeanour, rather than policy positions and political competence. Krnjajić's research underscores the challenges women face in achieving equitable media representation. Despite advancements in gender equality, the media continues to reproduce patriarchal ideologies, impacting the public perception of women in political roles. This study calls for a critical reassessment of media practices to foster

a more balanced and fair portrayal of women politicians, emphasising their professional capabilities and contributions to political discourse.

It is essential to recognise that media coverage in Slovenia often contravenes the Code of Ethics for Journalists (Novinarsko častno razsodišče, n.d.), which mandates impartial and non-sexist reporting. This violation is not confined to tabloids but is also evident in reputable newspapers such as *Delo*, a publication with a long-standing tradition and a trusted readership. The presence of sexism in a respected daily newspaper highlights the importance of examining how journalists select topics and the language they employ. Research on this phenomenon reveals that women are frequently subjected to biased and stereotypical portrayals, which, though subtle, perpetuate gender inequality. Such treatment can be conscious or unconscious, reflecting deeply ingrained societal prejudices. This underscores the need for a critical evaluation of media practices to ensure compliance with ethical standards and to promote fair and accurate representation of women. Identifying and addressing these biases is crucial for fostering a more equitable media landscape and society.

The increasing presence of women in Slovenian politics marks a significant departure from the traditional view of politics as a male-dominated field. However, this heightened visibility has also led to increased instances of misogyny, sexism, and personal attacks, often reflected in media coverage. Notable incidents from 2022 include public debates over the red stilettos worn by the President of the National Assembly, Urška Klakočar Zupančič, and scrutiny of Tanja Fajon's posture during a pre-election debate, both of which triggered sexist and misogynistic reactions online and in the media. Jana Javornik from the University of Leeds highlighted the disparity in how the public and media treat men's and women's appearances in politics, pointing out the double standards that exist (Mayer, 2022). These attempts to discredit women politicians stem from their deviation from traditional gender roles imposed by society. In the political sphere, women's accomplishments are often overshadowed by condescending attitudes, with their successes attributed to their physical appearance rather than their intellectual or professional capabilities. This bias underscores women's persistent challenges in gaining equal recognition and respect in politics despite their increasing participation and contributions.

Fernández-García (2016) studied the media representation of Spanish female politicians. In 2004, Spain formed its first gender-balanced

cabinet, with women appointed to traditionally male-dominated positions such as Defence and Economy. The study reveals persistent disparities in media coverage between women and men ministers despite this increase in women's representation. Although gender significantly influences these differences, the distribution of ministerial roles between men and women also plays a crucial role. Women in high-profile, traditionally male-dominated ministries still face distinctive media treatment compared to their male counterparts, indicating that gender shapes the media's portrayal and the specific nature of women's political positions.

According to Macharia (2020), gender inequality in journalism remains consistent across Asia, Europe, and Latin America, with variations primarily in the pace of change over the past two decades. Following a period of stagnation between 2005 and 2015, the visibility of women journalists in print and television news increased by 3%. Presently, women report four out of ten stories in traditional news media. Over the past twenty years, the proportion of women in newspapers has risen by 11%, their presence in news programs by 9%, and 42% of women journalists now prepare multimedia clips and online material (Macharia, 2020). However, the gender gap persists in media decision-making and management roles. In most countries, including Slovenia, chairpersons and leaders of media boards are men, with few exceptions (EIGE, 2024). This indicates that while progress has been made in increasing the visibility of women journalists, significant disparities remain in the upper echelons of media management.

In Canada, the media representation of women politicians contrasts sharply with other contexts. Wagner et al. (2017) examined whether women politicians who run competitive campaigns for high political office are as visible and prominent in news coverage as their male counterparts. Few studies have systematically or longitudinally analysed the relationship between candidate gender, competitiveness, and media visibility during election or party leadership campaigns. Moreover, most media visibility studies focus solely on candidates' presence in news stories, typically measured by the number of mentions per story. By analysing six textual and visual elements in the reporting of eleven Canadian national leadership campaigns in the *Globe and Mail* between 1975 and 2012, Wagner et al. (2017) found that candidate competitiveness and novelty, rather than candidate gender, significantly influence the media visibility of party leadership candidates. This study

suggests that in Canada, the factors determining media coverage of political candidates are more complex and are influenced by the dynamics of the campaigns rather than solely by gender.

Understanding the nuances of reporting and media visibility is critical as it often varies significantly based on gender. Media visibility plays a pivotal role for politicians as it serves as their primary means of promotion. Lühiste & Banducci (2016) utilised data from the 2009 European Election Study Media Analysis, encompassing media coverage across 25 EU member states during the campaigns for the European Parliament elections. Their research highlighted a discernible gender gap in the extent of media coverage of candidates. Despite the prominence and competitiveness of women candidates, the study identified a persistent bias favouring male candidates in media visibility. The disparity in media coverage predominantly stems from the initial selection of candidates by political parties. Parties nominate fewer women as viable candidates for electoral campaigns, influencing their subsequent media exposure. Moreover, even in instances where measures such as quotas are implemented to address gender underrepresentation, women still experience lower levels of visibility in campaign-related media coverage. This finding underscores broader systemic challenges within political communication and media representation, wherein gender biases perpetuate unequal opportunities for women in electoral contexts. The research by Lühiste and Banducci underscores the need for continued scrutiny and potential reforms in political party practices and media dynamics to foster more equitable visibility and representation of women in electoral campaigns across Europe.

Numerous studies investigating media coverage of women participating in high-profile political campaigns have identified recurring patterns of gendered reporting. These patterns are believed to have potentially negative effects, including discouraging voter support for women candidates, reducing contributions to women's campaigns, and dissuading women from pursuing political careers. However, the impact of gendered reporting is not consistent across all contexts but rather varies depending on factors such as the specific issues emphasised during the campaign and the symbolic aspects highlighted. Wasburn & Wasburn (2011) argue that the consequences of gendered reporting can be influenced by the extent of conflict between a candidate's efforts to maintain a coherent campaign message and the commercial imperatives of news media striving to attract a broad audience.

This dynamic can shape how women candidates are portrayed and perceived in the media, potentially amplifying or diminishing their electoral prospects based on media framing and public reception. Therefore, the effects of gendered reporting are multifaceted and contingent upon the strategic interactions between political campaigns and media outlets during electoral contests.

Vos (2013) conducted an analysis focusing on the television news coverage of women politicians in Flanders, Belgium, revealing disparities in media visibility compared to their male counterparts. The study found that women politicians receive significantly less coverage in television news, a trend primarily attributed to their predominance in lower-level political positions. Even after controlling for ten variables, including political status, women receive less speaking time than men. This indicates a persistent gender bias in Flemish television news, where women are consistently underrepresented relative to their male counterparts of similar political stature. The analysis also explored whether this gender bias could be mitigated by accounting for the politicians' characteristics. Despite adjustments, the adverse impact of being a woman on speaking time remained statistically significant. Journalistic decisions on coverage and quotations heavily favoured more powerful politicians, amplifying the visibility gap further exacerbated by women's lower-ranking positions within political hierarchies. Interestingly, the study noted a shift during election periods, with a noticeable increase in quotes from women politicians in news coverage. This phenomenon suggests that the gender bias in media visibility diminishes as election campaigns intensify, possibly influenced by electoral gender quotas, active campaigning by women candidates, and journalists' efforts to provide balanced coverage. Thus, while gender disparities persist in regular news cycles, electoral dynamics contribute to a temporary levelling of media visibility between men and women in politics.

Media attention plays a crucial role as an electoral resource, and media coverage disparities between male and female politicians can significantly impact women's political representation. Research conducted by van der Pas (2022) has highlighted that while the United States and Canada demonstrate relatively equal media coverage of politicians of different genders, a persistent gender gap exists across European countries. This gap persists even after rigorous adjustments for individual characteristics, indicating that European women par-

liamentarians receive less visibility in news coverage than their male counterparts. Moreover, beyond the sheer volume of media attention, scholarly investigations have revealed gender disparities in the content of political coverage, often to the detriment of women globally. These disparities manifest in various forms, including differences in the framing, portrayal, and substantive focus of news articles featuring women politicians. Such differential treatment can shape public perceptions, influence electoral outcomes, and contribute to the broader sociopolitical landscape by enhancing or hindering women's political careers and aspirations. Therefore, addressing these disparities is crucial for fostering gender equality in political representation. Efforts to promote fair and equitable media coverage, alongside structural reforms that support women's visibility and leadership in politics, are essential steps toward achieving more inclusive and representative democratic systems worldwide.

O'Neill et al. (2016) examined the visibility and portrayal of women Members of Parliament (MPs) compared to their male colleagues in the British press. Their research underscores that despite women's political participation, they often encounter marginalisation and othering within media coverage. This marginalisation persists due to entrenched patriarchal structures that shape both political reporting and journalistic practices, where male dominance remains prevalent. The study reveals that while overtly misogynistic coverage is not the norm, periodic instances of covert and explicit sexism persistently emerge in media representations of women politicians. These instances range from superficial critiques of appearance to more severe forms of belittlement, such as portraying women as inexperienced 'girls,' sexualised figures, or aggressive stereotypes like 'harridans.' Such portrayals undermine the professional credibility and political competence of women in public office, perpetuating harmful stereotypes that diminish their contributions to governance. The demeaning and intrusive nature of such media coverage is likely perceived negatively by both women politicians and voters alike, reinforcing perceptions of gender-based discrimination and inequality within political discourse. Addressing these issues necessitates challenging ingrained gender biases in journalism and fostering more respectful and equitable representations of women's political agency and leadership in media narratives.

Through a thorough examination of British press coverage spanning two decades, gender bias in media coverage during political elec-

tions has long been recognised as a significant barrier affecting women's electoral success and institutional representation. Rohrbach et al. (2020) contend that these disparities stem partly from a lack of consideration for contextual factors influencing electoral coverage. Their study focused on analysing gender bias in the quantity and content of media coverage leading up to the Swiss federal elections in 2015. The findings present a nuanced picture: women candidates continue to be underrepresented in Swiss media coverage, indicating persistent gender disparities. However, once women candidates receive media attention, the portrayal tends to be predominantly gender-neutral. This suggests that while initial visibility remains a challenge, how women candidates are depicted in the media tends to avoid overt gender stereotypes or biases. Rohrbach et al. (2020) highlight the complexity of gender dynamics in media coverage, illustrating that while strides have been made towards more equitable representation in content, disparities in the quantity of coverage persist. Addressing these disparities requires continued efforts to enhance the visibility of women candidates in electoral media coverage and ensure that their portrayal is not undermined by gender-based stereotypes or biases, thereby fostering a more inclusive political environment.

It is plausible to anticipate improved journalism and less biased media reporting through initiatives like the She Knows project,¹ launched in 2021, in response to the persistent underrepresentation of women in media coverage. This initiative operates through a dedicated website aggregating Slovenian women experts across diverse fields, both domestically and internationally. Its primary aim is to serve as a resource for media organisations and public event organisers seeking to incorporate women experts. The She Knows platform enhances visibility and amplifies their voices by inviting women to participate in media discussions and public forums. Consequently, the media's deliberate inclusion of women experts significantly shapes public opinion. This proactive approach counters the historical marginalisation of women in media representation. It promotes gender equity by ensuring women's perspectives and expertise are appropriately represented and recognised in public discourse. Through initiatives such as She Knows, there is potential for substantial shifts in media dynamics, fostering more inclusive reporting practices that reflect the diversity of exper-

¹ <https://onave.si/>

tise and viewpoints within society. These efforts are crucial to achieve greater gender balance and equity in media representation and public discourse.

Women continue to face significant underrepresentation in parliaments globally despite incremental improvements. In addition to navigating the complexities of political arenas, women in politics must actively seek media coverage to enhance their visibility for name recognition and electoral success, given the pivotal role of media in modern politics (Vos, 2013).

The research (van der Pas, 2022) underscores disparities in media coverage between men and women politicians. Women in politics often receive disproportionate attention regarding their appearance and personal lives, along with more negative visibility in media coverage that sometimes includes stereotypical portrayals of their issues and traits.

While internet technology, mainly social media platforms, was anticipated to democratise political engagement and empower marginalised groups (women included), empirical findings suggest otherwise. Cardo (2021) argues that online political discourse remains dominated by a narrow elite, primarily men, mirroring offline power dynamics. Consequently, women are less likely to actively participate in political discussions on digital platforms than their male counterparts.

These insights highlight persistent gender disparities in traditional media and online spaces, underscoring women's ongoing challenges in achieving equitable representation and influence in political domains. Addressing these disparities is crucial for fostering inclusive political participation and representation in the digital age.

Conclusion

Studying the intricate relationship between women, politics, education, and media representation is crucial for understanding the dynamics of political participation and representation in democratic societies. Despite notable strides in recent decades, women worldwide face significant underrepresentation in political positions and decision-making roles. This disparity underscores enduring cultural and societal expectations that historically discouraged women from engaging in politics.

To address these disparities effectively, it is essential to challenge entrenched gender stereotypes and traditional roles within educational

frameworks. A comprehensive approach is necessary, involving educators, parents, policymakers, and academic institutions. Teachers and parents must critically examine and address their biases to foster an inclusive educational environment that encourages girls' and boys' equal participation in political discourse and leadership roles. School policies should be designed to promote gender equality through inclusive language and comprehensive sex education programs that challenge stereotypes and promote respect for diverse gender identities.

Furthermore, textbooks and curricula shape societal perceptions of gender roles. They should present diverse and inclusive examples of men and women in various positions of authority and influence, thereby challenging traditional gender norms and promoting equality. University programs, particularly in social sciences and political studies, should integrate gender perspectives into their curricula. This integration empowers students with the knowledge and skills to engage in political action and promotes a deeper understanding of gender dynamics in political contexts.

Significant strides have been made in Slovenia, such as including inclusive language in primary and secondary school curricula and emphasising gender in university programs. However, there remains a need for more balanced representation in teaching materials and a stronger emphasis on gender equality in social science programs across all universities. The Slovenian context highlights the ongoing effort needed to dismantle gender stereotypes and promote equitable representation in political and societal spheres.

Initiatives within Slovenia, such as those led by the Slovenian Women's Lobby and various political parties' programs supporting women's political participation, demonstrate progress. These efforts include education and training programs focused on leadership, politics, and public speaking for girls and young women. Encouraging participation in youth political organisations, promoting role models, offering mentorship opportunities, and advocating for gender-sensitive policies within political parties are critical strategies to enhance women's political engagement.

Looking beyond Slovenia, these strategies can serve as models for fostering a more equal and representative political landscape globally. By implementing these strategies, countries can work towards overcoming barriers that hinder women's political participation and contribute to a more inclusive and democratic society. Promoting women's

voices in political discourse is essential for achieving gender equality and ensuring women's contributions are valued and respected in the public sphere.

In conclusion, while progress has been made, the journey towards gender equality in political representation is ongoing and requires sustained efforts across multiple fronts. Addressing gender disparities in media representation, promoting inclusive education, fostering supportive political environments, and advocating for policy reforms are crucial steps towards achieving equitable representation of women in politics worldwide. Through collaborative efforts and commitment to gender equality, societies can create environments where women's political participation flourishes and democratic governance thrives.

References

- Bigler, R. S., & Leaper, C. (2015). Gendered language: Psychological principles, evolving practices, and inclusive policies. *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, 2(1), 187–194.
- Blanton, H., Christie, C., & Dye, M. (2002). Social identity versus reference frame comparisons: The moderating role of stereotype endorsement. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 38(3), 253–267.
- Brussino, O., & McBrien, J. (2022). *Gender stereotypes in education: Policies and practices to address gender stereotyping across OECD education systems* (OECD Education Working Papers). OECD. <https://doi.org/10.1787/19939019>
- Cardo, V. (2021). Gender politics online? Political women and social media at election time in the United Kingdom, the United States and New Zealand. *European Journal of Communication*, 36(1), 38–52.
- Council of Europe. (2019). *Recommendation CM/Rec(2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on preventing and combating sexism*. <https://rm.coe.int/168093b26a>
- Crnović, D. (2021). *Politika kot medijski performans*. ZRC SAZU.
- European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE). (2024, 5 June). *Gender Equality Action Plans*. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/tools-methods/gender-equality-action-plans>
- Fabjančič, N. (1999). Medijska reprezentacija žensk v politiki. *Teorija in Praksa*, 36(1), 74–86.
- Fernández-García, N. (2016, 29 March). *Framing gender and women politicians representation: Print media coverage of Spanish women ministers*. Semantic Scholar. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Framing-gender-and-women-politicians-print-media-of-Fern%C3%A1ndez-Garc%C3%ADa/22e115ae3b306f7ae443ba74f8af569505f4850b>

- Garcia-Blanco, I., & Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2012). The discursive construction of women politicians in the European press. *Feminist Media Studies*, 12(3), 422–441.
- Givord, P. (2020). *Do boys and girls have similar attitudes towards competition and failure?* (PISA in Focus). OECD. <https://doi.org/10.1787/a8898906-en>
- Grose, R. G., Grabe, S., & Kohfeldt, D. (2014). Sexual education, gender ideology, and youth sexual empowerment. *The Journal of Sex Research*, 51(7), 742–753.
- Klavž, M. (2020). *Spol v slovenskih osnovnošolskih in srednješolskih učnih gradivih* [Thesis, University of Ljubljana]. Repozitorij Univerze v Ljubljani. <https://repozitorij.uni-lj.si/IzpisGradiva.php?id=116596>
- Krek, J., & Metljak, M. (Eds.). (2011). *Bela knjiga o vzgoji in izobraževanju v Republiki Sloveniji 2011* (2nd ed.). Zavod Republike Slovenije za šolstvo.
- Krnjajić, S. (2018). *Medijska reprezentacija slovenskih ženskih političark: razlike v poročanju med časnikom Delo in spletnimi mediji* [Thesis, University of Ljubljana]. Repozitorij Univerze v Ljubljani. <https://repozitorij.uni-lj.si/IzpisGradiva.php?id=102595>
- Lühiste, M., & Banducci, S. (2016). Invisible women? Comparing candidates' news coverage in Europe. *Politics & Gender*, 12(2), 223–253.
- Lünenborg, M., & Maier, T. (2015). 'Power politician' or 'fighting bureaucrat': Gender and power in German political coverage. *Media, Culture & Society*, 37(2), 180–196.
- Novinarsko častno razsodišče. (N.d.). *Code of ethics for journalists of Slovenia*. <https://razsodisce.org/o-ncr/na-podlagi-cesa-ncr-deluje/code-of-ethics>
- Macharia, S. (Ed.). (2020). *Who makes the news? 6th Global media monitoring project*. GMMF WACC. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1734524/FULLTEXT01.pdf>
- Makarova, E., Aeschlimann, B., & Herzog, W. (2019). The gender gap in STEM Fields: The impact of the gender stereotype of math and science on secondary students' career aspirations. *Frontiers in Education*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/educ.2019.00060>
- Mayer, T. (Director). (2022). *Ženske so v medijih podzastopane*. Rtvsllo.si. <https://www.rtvsllo.si/slovenija/zenske-so-v-medijih-podzastopane/610595>
- Meeks, L. (2012). Is she 'man enough'? Women candidates, executive political offices, and news coverage. *Journal of Communication*, 62(1), 175–193.
- Naser, S. C., Clonan - Roy, K., Fuller, K. A., Goncy, E. A., & Wolf, N. (2020).

- Exploring the experiences and responses of LGBTQ+ adolescents to school-based sexuality education. *Psychology in the Schools*, 59(1), 1–207.
- OECD. (2019). *PISA 2018 results: Where all students can succeed*. OECD Publishing.
- O’Neill, D., Savigny, H., & Cann, V. (2016). Women politicians in the UK press: Not seen and not heard? *Feminist Media Studies*, 16(2), 293–307.
- Pogorilič, I. (2020). *Prisotnost in vrednotenje obravnavanja spola v izbranih učbenikih slovenske devetletne šole* [Thesis, University of Ljubljana]. Repozitorij Univerze v Ljubljani. <https://repozitorij.uni-lj.si/IzpisGradiva.php?id=117142>
- Pušnik, M., & Bulc, G. (2001). Women in their own reflection: Self-representation of women politicians in the Slovenian press. *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 25(4), 396–413.
- Rohrbach, T., Fiechtner, S., Schönhagen, P., & Puppis, M. (2020). More than just gender: Exploring contextual influences on media bias of political candidates. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 25(4), 692–711.
- Rowley, S. J., Kurtz-Costes, B., Mistry, R., & Feagans, L. (2007). Social status as a predictor of race and gender stereotypes in late childhood and early adolescence. *Social Development*, 16(1), 150–168.
- Ryle, R. R. (2020). *Questioning gender: A sociological exploration*. Sage.
- Schmader, T., Johns, M., & Barquissau, M. (2004). The costs of accepting gender differences: The role of stereotype endorsement in women’s experience in the math domain. *Sex Roles*, 50(11), 835–850.
- Škraban, O. P. (2004). *Obdobje adolescence in razvoj identitete: izbrane teme*. Pedagoška fakulteta.
- SURS. (2022). *Statistični pregled leta 2022*. <https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/File/DocSysFile/12130/2022-pregled-leta.pdf>
- Tischner, I., Malson, H., & Fey, K. (2021). Leading ladies: Discursive constructions of women leaders in the UK media. *Feminist Media Studies*, 21(3), 460–476.
- Van der Pas, D. J. (2022). Do European media ignore female politicians? A comparative analysis of MP visibility. *West European Politics*, 45(7), 1481–1492.
- Voronova, L. (2015). From gendering to intersectional labelling: Russian and Swedish political journalists’ perspective on discriminating and promoting mechanisms in the media content. *Communication Papers: Media Literacy and Gender Studies*, 4 (7). <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7943-3076>
- Vos, D. (2013). The vertical glass ceiling: Explaining female politicians’

underrepresentation in television news. *Communications*, 38(4), 389–410.

Wagner, A., Trimble, L., Sampert, S., & Gerrits, B. (2017). Gender, competitiveness, and candidate visibility in newspaper coverage of Canadian party leadership contests. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 22(4), 471–489.

Wasburn, P. C., & Wasburn, M. H. (2011). Media coverage of women in politics: The curious case of Sarah Palin. *Media, Culture & Society*, 33(7), 1027–1041.

Chapter Five

Strategies and Campaigns of Women's Rights Organisations for the Encouragement of Women's Political Participation

Lucija Dežan

University of Maribor, Slovenia
lucija.dezan2@um.si

Suzana Košir

University of Maribor, Slovenia
suzana.kosir1@um.si

Women's rights organisations, including non-governmental organisations (NGOs), advocate for women's rights and empowerment globally. Operating across local to international levels, these organisations address diverse challenges impacting women's lives, focusing on eliminating discrimination and promoting gender equality. Concurrently, governments and public agencies are tasked with implementing inclusive policies to advance gender equity. State administrations play a crucial role by integrating policies that prevent discrimination and facilitate equal opportunities. These policies encompass promoting women's leadership roles, addressing wage disparities, supporting workforce participation, ensuring educational access, diversifying recruitment practices, helping working parents, combating violence against women, and enhancing political participation through quota systems and similar supportive measures. Through policy advocacy, public awareness campaigns, research, and service provision, women's rights organisations shape policies and foster environments conducive to women's empowerment and gender parity globally and locally. This dual effort by civil society and governments underscores a comprehensive approach to advancing gender equity and inclusivity in societal structures worldwide.

Keywords: women's rights organisations, promotion, strategies, campaigns, women's political participation, gender equality

Introduction

Women's rights organisations are dedicated entities focused on advocating for and advancing the rights and empowerment of women and

girls across diverse societal contexts. Operating at multiple levels, from local grassroots initiatives to expansive international networks, these organisations address various issues that profoundly influence women's lives.

Governments and public agencies are responsible for designing and implementing policies and programmes that do not discriminate against any group in society. Similarly, state administration has a key role in promoting gender equality by integrating policies and programmes aimed at preventing discrimination and creating opportunities for equal participation of all. Such policies and programmes can include incentives to increase the representation of women in leadership positions, measures to address the pay gap and support women in the workforce. Specific ways in which state administration already promotes gender equality include equal access to education, promoting equal pay, and providing equal employment opportunities. Additionally, state administration can lead by example by including policies that strengthen diversity and the inclusion of different groups in recruitment and promotion processes. Other measures include providing support for working parents (maternity and paternity leave), addressing violence against women (e.g., funding for safe houses and support services, training in legal aid, and adopting laws and policies that protect victims), and promoting women's political participation (e.g., quota systems, incentives, and support for women running for office).

Women's Rights Organisations

Global Level

Women's rights organisations are indispensable in the ongoing quest to promote gender equality and ensure women's voices are heard and respected globally. These dynamic organisations operate at various levels, from grassroots local initiatives to influential global platforms. Central to their missions is advocating for legal and policy reforms aimed at securing and enforcing laws that safeguard women's rights. This includes lobbying for legislation against gender-based violence, advocating for equal pay for equal work, protecting reproductive rights, and promoting women's participation in political decision-making processes.

Moreover, these organisations actively promote gender equality by advocating for equitable opportunities and treatment for women in

various domains such as education, employment, healthcare, and leadership roles. They strive to dismantle barriers that perpetuate gender disparities and hinder women's full participation and advancement in society.

At the local level, women's rights organisations often focus on community-based projects that address immediate needs. These initiatives can include improving access to healthcare, providing education and vocational training, supporting victims of domestic violence, and promoting women's participation in local governance. By working closely with communities, these organisations can tailor their efforts to specific cultural and social contexts, making their interventions more effective and sustainable.

On a national scale, these organisations frequently engage in advocacy and policy work, striving to influence legislation and public policy in favour of gender equality. They may work to ensure the implementation and enforcement of laws that protect women's rights, such as those concerning reproductive health, equal pay, and protection against gender-based violence. By lobbying government officials, conducting research, and raising public awareness, they play a critical role in shaping a legal and social environment that supports women's rights and gender equality.

Women's rights organisations collaborate globally with international bodies such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and various international non-governmental organisations. They participate in global forums, contribute to international treaties and conventions, and share best practices across borders. These organisations address broad issues such as women's health rights, including access to reproductive health services; education, ensuring that girls and women have equal opportunities to learn and succeed; labour force participation, advocating for fair wages, safe working conditions, and non-discriminatory practices; political involvement, pushing for greater representation of women in decision-making positions; and justice, fighting against gender-based violence and discrimination.

By covering such a broad spectrum of issues, women's rights organisations recognise the intersectional nature of gender inequality. For instance, improving women's access to education can profoundly impact their economic opportunities, influencing their ability to participate in political processes and advocate for their rights. Similarly, addressing health rights, including reproductive health, is crucial not only for

women's physical well-being but also for their ability to engage fully in social, economic, and political life.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, commonly known as UN Women, is one of the most pivotal global organisations dedicated to advancing gender equality and women empowerment. Established in 2010, UN Women operates with the primary objective of expediting gender equality and fostering the empowerment of women on a global scale. The organisation's extensive reach spans over 90 countries, wherein it actively collaborates with governmental bodies, civil society organisations, and the private sector to formulate and implement policies and programs that promote women's rights and gender equality (UN Women, 2020).

UN Women's initiatives are comprehensive and multifaceted, addressing many issues that impact women's lives. One of the critical areas of focus for UN Women (2020) is the eradication of violence against women. The organisation conducts and supports numerous campaigns aimed at raising awareness about gender-based violence, advocating for legal reforms, and providing resources and support to survivors. These campaigns are instrumental in changing societal attitudes towards violence against women and in fostering environments where women can live free from fear and harm.

In addition to combating violence, UN Women significantly emphasises women's economic empowerment. The organisation develops and supports programs designed to enhance women's access to economic resources, including education, vocational training, and financial services. These programs are tailored to address women's unique challenges in different regions and sectors, helping them gain economic independence and improve their livelihoods. By empowering women economically, UN Women contributes to the broader goal of achieving gender equality and reducing poverty.

Furthermore, UN Women is a staunch advocate for women's participation in decision-making processes at all levels. The organisation works to increase the representation of women in political and public life, supporting initiatives that encourage women's leadership and participation in governance. This advocacy includes promoting gender quotas in political institutions, providing training and support for women candidates, and fostering networks of women leaders. By ensuring that women's voices are included in decision-making processes, UN Women helps to create more inclusive and equitable societies.

Overall, UN Women's efforts are characterised by a holistic approach to gender equality, recognising that progress in one area often supports and enhances progress in others. The organisation's work is grounded in the understanding that true gender equality requires systemic change across all sectors of society, and it strives to create an integrated framework for advancing women's rights worldwide. Through its extensive network and collaborative efforts, UN Women continues to drive the global movement towards gender equality and women's empowerment.

In addition to UN Women, the International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP),¹ established in 1985, assumes a crucial role in overseeing the enforcement of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). IWRAP serves as an intermediary entity between domestic and international stakeholders, advocating for heightened global consciousness regarding the imperative for transformations in women's rights. The organisation undertakes many educational initiatives to enhance local institutions' capabilities, fostering improved integration of CEDAW at the national level. These endeavours encompass training programs, workshops, and collaborative ventures aimed at fortifying the mechanisms through which CEDAW is actualised within diverse socio-political contexts. By bolstering capacities and disseminating knowledge, IWRAP plays an instrumental role in advancing the principles enshrined in CEDAW and striving towards gender parity globally.

The Women & Politics Institute (WPI)² under the American University in Washington DC is a prominent entity committed to enhancing the empowerment of women within political arenas. Established with the primary goal of advancing the representation of women in political leadership roles across the globe, WPI undertakes multifaceted initiatives to foster inclusivity and equity in political processes. Central to its mission, WPI provides comprehensive educational programs, specialised training modules, and mentorship opportunities tailored for women aspiring to enter or excel in political spheres. These initiatives are strategically designed to equip women with the necessary skills, knowledge, and support networks to navigate and succeed in political landscapes. Moreover, WPI collaborates closely with governmental

¹ <http://hrlibrary.umn.edu/iwraw/about.htm>

² <https://www.american.edu/spa/wpi>

bodies, international organisations, and non-governmental entities to advocate for policies that promote gender parity and facilitate women's meaningful participation in decision-making processes. Through these partnerships, WPI contributes to shaping legislative frameworks and institutional practices that foster an enabling environment for women in politics.

In addition to its educational and advocacy efforts, WPI conducts rigorous research and analysis to identify systemic challenges and barriers hindering women's political advancement. These studies illuminate women leaders' disparities and obstacles and propose evidence-based solutions and policy recommendations to overcome gender-based inequities. By disseminating research findings and best practices, WPI plays a pivotal role in informing public discourse and policy discourse on gender equality and women's political empowerment. WPI catalyses transformative change by actively empowering women to participate and lead in political arenas worldwide. Through its holistic approach encompassing education, advocacy, mentorship, and research, WPI contributes significantly to advancing the status of women in politics and advancing the broader goals of gender equality and inclusive governance.

The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)³ and the National Organization for Women (NOW)⁴ are two distinguished women's rights organisations that have made significant contributions to advancing gender equality and promoting women's rights globally and within the United States, respectively.

Founded in 1915 during World War I, WILPF is one of the oldest and most influential international women's peace organisations. Its founding members, including notable activists Jane Addams and Emily Greene Balch, sought to unite women worldwide to advocate for peace and social justice. WILPF operates nationally and internationally, with sections in over 30 countries. The organisation focuses on issues such as human rights, economic justice, and political participation. WILPF engages in advocacy efforts at the United Nations and other international forums to promote peacebuilding initiatives that prioritise gender perspectives and the inclusion of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction processes. Through

³ <https://www.wilpf.org>

⁴ <https://now.org>

its grassroots activism, research, and policy analysis, WILPF continues to play a crucial role in promoting a feminist approach to peace and security.

Established in 1966, NOW is the largest and oldest grassroots feminist organisation in the United States. Founded by Betty Friedan, among others, NOW aims to bring equality for all women in all aspects of society. The organisation advocates for reproductive rights, equal pay, ending gender-based violence, LGBTQ+ rights, racial justice, and other issues affecting women's lives. NOW engages in legal advocacy, lobbying efforts, public education campaigns, and grassroots organising to influence local, state, and national policy and legislative changes. The organisation has been instrumental in shaping landmark legislation such as Title IX, which prohibits sex discrimination in education, and the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which enhances legal protections for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault. NOW's network of chapters across the United States mobilises activists and supporters to work towards achieving gender equality and social justice.

WILPF and NOW exemplify women's rights organisations' diverse strategies and approaches to advance feminist agendas, protect women's rights, and promote inclusive societies. Their work underscores the importance of grassroots activism, coalition-building, policy advocacy, and international solidarity in addressing systemic inequalities and advancing the rights and well-being of women globally and within specific national contexts.

These organisations continue to be at the forefront of efforts to challenge patriarchal structures, promote women's leadership, and foster a world where all individuals, regardless of their gender, can live free from discrimination and violence. Through their ongoing efforts, WILPF and NOW contribute significantly to shaping public discourse, influencing policy decisions, and advancing the feminist agenda for equality and justice.

National Level

Women's rights organisations in Slovenia are crucial in advocating for gender equality and supporting women's political participation, as well as advocating for women's rights at the national level. These organisations undertake numerous activities, including advocacy, education, research, and provision of support services, aiming to improve the posi-

tion of women in Slovenian society. Their efforts have been instrumental in creating an environment that encourages and supports women's political engagement.

One of Slovenia's most prominent women's rights organisations is the Women's Lobby of Slovenia, established in 1996.⁵ ŽLS advocates for gender equality, women's and girls' rights, and the elimination of all forms of discrimination. It operates as a network of various non-governmental organisations and individuals engaged in women's rights issues. ŽLS is known for its advocacy work, which includes developing and implementing public awareness campaigns and exerting pressure on policymakers to enact legislation that supports gender equality. The organisation is actively involved in researching women's status in Slovenia and collaborates with international organisations on gender equality issues.

The Association for the Promotion of Women in Culture – City of Women⁶ focuses on increasing the visibility and influence of women in the cultural and public spheres. The organisation engages in various artistic projects, educational programs, and public discussions that highlight women's contributions to society and culture and advocate for gender equality.

In addition to these organisations, numerous other non-governmental organisations play a significant role in improving women's rights in Slovenia. For example, non-governmental organisations such as Amnesty International Slovenia conduct campaigns to prevent gender-based violence and improve women's access to legal remedies.⁷ Amnesty International Slovenia plays a crucial role in advocating for women's rights, particularly in human rights and legislative reform. The organisation focuses on campaigns that demand improvements in the legal framework for protecting women's rights and eliminating gender-based discrimination.

The Institute 8th of March⁸ is an organisation that advocates for the rights of women and girls and social justice. The organisation conducts campaigns, research, and education to improve women's position in Slovenia. The Institute is known for its successful campaigns for wom-

⁵ <https://www.zenskilobi.si>

⁶ <https://mestozensk.org/sl>

⁷ <https://www.amnesty.si>

⁸ <https://www.8marec.si>

en's rights related to reproduction and against discrimination, as well as gender-based violence.

Similarly, webpage spol.si⁹ presents an independent and non-partisan media outlet focused on gender-related issues. In an analytical manner, it responds to gender inequalities, the phenomenon of sexism, and the reproduction of stereotypes in various social fields (politics, media, art, culture, science, etc.). In doing so, it covers a range of subject areas, e.g., the division of labour in the household, political representation and segregation in the labour market, violence in the private sphere, sexism in the media, etc. The portal is published by Vita Activa, the Association for the Promotion of Equality and Pluralism.

These organisations form a comprehensive approach to promoting gender equality and ensuring that women's voices are heard and considered in all aspects of social and political life in Slovenia. Their efforts are crucial for further progress in gender equality in Slovenia.

Strategies and Campaigns

EU Level

At the international level, the EU has aligned its efforts towards gender equality with global initiatives such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly and the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), which is part of the United Nations. CEDAW is a legally binding international women's bill of rights instrument that commits countries to promote gender equality. The central part of the convention consists of the commitment that state parties shall take measures to eliminate discrimination against women in political and public life and to ensure that women are treated equally to men in these domains:

- The right to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be elected to all publicly elected bodies.
- Participation in the formulation and implementation of government policy and the exercise of public functions at all levels of government.
- Participation in non-governmental organisations and associations.

⁹ <https://spol.si>

Such initiatives provide a platform and legal guidelines for the EU to collaborate with other countries and organisations to achieve gender equality. One of the essential European institutions that supports these efforts is the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE),¹⁰ which was established in 2006 with the aim of promoting and strengthening gender equality.

Generally, the EU combats gender inequality through legislation, gender mainstreaming, and specific measures for women's empowerment. An example of such legislation is the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025 (European Commission, 2020), which sets among its main goals challenging gender stereotypes, closing the gender care gap, addressing gender pay and pension gaps, as well as achieving gender balance in decision-making and politics. Among its significant milestones, the agenda highlights the new EU-wide work-life balance rights for parents and carers that started applying in 2022 and the #EndGender-Stereotypes campaign. The latter tackled gender stereotypes affecting men and women in various social spheres, such as career choices, sharing care responsibilities, and decision-making.

Considering action plans, Gender Action Plan III (European Commission, 2024) tackles the period from 2021 to 2025 and sets as its key priorities empowering women and girls and ensuring their equal participation in society. The document points out that currently, no country in the world is on track to achieve gender equality by 2030 and that the COVID-19 crisis disproportionately affected women and girls; thus, the need to strengthen the efforts is crucial. The document provides the EU with a policy framework emphasising five pillars of action:

- By introducing rules for applying and monitoring gender mainstreaming across sectors, the goal is that 85% of all new actions throughout external relations will contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment by 2025.
- Close cooperation with member states and partners at multilateral, regional, and country levels is needed to develop a common approach and select strategic issues.
- Focus on the key thematic areas to achieve accelerating progress. This includes social and political empowerment of women and girls and the promotion of equal participation and leadership, as

¹⁰ <https://eige.europa.eu>

well as bringing the gender perspective to new policy areas (i.e. green transition and digital transformation).

- Leading by example; the EU should establish gender-responsive and gender-balanced leadership at top political and management levels.
- Adopting a new monitoring and evaluation system approach to increase public accountability and ensure transparency and access to information on its assistance to gender equality worldwide.

In addition, the European Commission (EC) established dedicated boards such as the High-level group on gender mainstreaming and the Advisory committee on equal opportunities for women and men (Commission decision of 16 June 2008 relating to the setting up of an Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2008/590/EC), 2008). Since 2003, both groups have been helping the EC prepare the report on equality between women and men and helped the EC to prepare and implement activities aimed at promoting equal opportunities for women and men.

Lastly, various initiatives, projects, and activities have been funded through EC programs. Two important programs are the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme and Horizon Europe. These programs aim to promote and protect specific rights that derive from EU law, including the promotion of gender equality and supporting initiatives to improve equality between women and men.

Apart from legislative measures and project activities, there are also measures proposed to strengthen participation and representation in the form of, for example, a quota system. The quotas determine the numerical sex ratio on the list of candidates either for political decision-making bodies or on the lists of candidates for national representative bodies. Quotas can be defined in different ways depending on their purpose, timing, legal force, the definition of the proportion, and who determines them. In Europe, quotas are in force in eleven EU Member States: Belgium, Croatia, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, and Spain (and in eight other European countries). These laws usually require at least 30% of candidates to be a national MP (in France and Belgium the quota is 50%). As Galligan (2021) notes, in countries with legal quotas, the proportion of women in parliamentary seats has increased from 18% in 2004 to 34% today. In addition, the EC assumes that countries with implemented quota

systems will reach gender balance much sooner than countries without additional measurements. The latter can anticipate reaching gender balance in decision-making positions by 2039 (European Commission, 2024).

Other measures proposed include awareness-raising activities for young people, especially young men, mainstreaming gender equality in education, balanced media coverage of all candidates regardless of their sex or gender, workshops for journalists on conscious and unconscious bias that reproduces gender stereotypes, and similar (O'Connell, 2013, p. 24). The latter is also part of the document 'Improving Parliament: Creating a Better and More Representative House,' where the demand for increased attention to sexism in media and analysis of women's media representation is emphasised (Kelly & White, 2016, p. 34).

In addition, Lovenduski & Norris (1993) emphasises three different strategies that political parties can adopt to raise the number of women in politics:

- *Rhetorical strategies.* Women's demands should be part of political campaigns supported by clear messages from relevant political actors that women in politics matter. When political parties attempt to increase the number of women in politics and tackle gender imbalance, women can anticipate effective measures and start to consider themselves as adequate for political participation.
- *Strategies of positive and affirmative action.* Political parties develop training, workshops, financial support, and similar mechanisms for women's political participation in collaboration with civic women's organisations.
- *Strategies of positive discrimination.* Several seats are set for political bodies or electoral lists for women. However, the more important political positions are at stake, the less fond political parties are to implement strategies of positive discrimination during the candidate selection process.

Rhetorical strategies usually significantly contribute to the self-confidence of women candidates, especially in public speaking and argumentation, which positively affects voters. Positive and affirmative strategies contribute to confident and determined efforts to win. In contrast, positive discrimination strategies artificially create the need

for female candidates, consequently affecting the pool of competent candidates (Kelly & White, 2016).

We shall conclude this part with several strategies that could increase the participation of women in politics presented by the United Nations Development Programme (2012) that are still relevant 12 years later. Among them are, for example:

- Training for newly elected representatives that support the development of necessary skills that are particularly important in the field of gender equality (sensibilisation of political members is also part of this measurement).
- Supporting and developing reforms that are friendly to women and contribute to a more inclusive political culture.
- Supporting women's associations and parliament's boards.

National Context

In Slovenia, the Equal Opportunities Division at the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities¹¹ has been most involved in addressing gender stereotypes and promoting gender equality, as these concepts are most intertwined with its activities. The foundation for state activities related to gender equality was laid with the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act established in 2002. The act determined common ground for improving women's social position and developing equal opportunities for men and women in political, economic, social, educational and other areas of social life. In Article 31, the Act demands from political parties that are part of the official register to develop action plans related to gender equality and gender balance. Another significant contribution of this act was its demand that all ministries establish coordinators for equal opportunities for women and men (for municipalities to appoint such coordinators is only recommended). Until 2020, these recommendations were followed in 20% of local communities in Slovenia, while 5% developed action plans. In these, local authorities developed gender equality action plans based on national resolutions and guidelines. These documents include measures to achieve the set objectives in the areas of eliminating gender-

¹¹ <https://www.gov.si/en/state-authorities/ministries/ministry-of-labour-family-social-affairs-and-equal-opportunities/about-the-ministry-of-labour-family-social-affairs-and-equal-opportunities/equal-opportunities-division>

based inequalities in employment, balancing work and private or family life, reducing inequalities in education, culture and the media, equality in social inclusion, protecting and promoting women's and men's health, and ensuring a balanced representation of women and men in decision-making positions. Turning back to the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act, the document established a legal framework to ensure gender equality, providing a basis for enacting policies that promote equal rights and opportunities.

Another vital document in this regard is the Resolution for the national programme for equal opportunities for women and men (*Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2015–2020*, 2015). The document was the first to comprehensively define gender equality policies in six priority areas: gender mainstreaming, work, knowledge society, social well-being, gender relations, and decision-making processes. The first national programme tackled the period from 2005 to 2013. Its evaluation pointed out increased visibility and sensitivity to gender equality issues in society (e.g., increased monitoring of gender discrimination in employment by the Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Slovenia and development of tools to monitor the incidence of sexual and other harassment in the workplace), the introduction of new training, activities, and programmes (e.g. Women's Career Promotion Programme, Active Dad and Active All media campaign on gender roles and household responsibilities), and legislative changes (the Parental Care and Family Benefits Act has been more targeted in terms of the equal use of parental leave). In addition, a pilot project to mentor young women to enter politics was launched. Participants contributed the proposals for the It Pays Off conference organised by the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and the international conference Women 20 years after Beijing (*Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2023–2030*, 2023).

The second Resolution for the National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men addressed the period from 2015 to 2020. The final version was developed following the recommendations from the Expert Council for Gender Equality, established in 2015 and has been chaired by the Minister of the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities since then. The programme focused on eight areas: equal economic independence, reconciliation of work and private or family life, knowledge society without gender stereotypes, so-

cial inclusion, health, balanced representation, violence against women, and gender equality in foreign policy and international development cooperation. The document included activities to promote women's entrepreneurship, strategies to eliminate gender stereotypes in career choices, social protection programmes with the active involvement of Roma and migrant women, programmes to empower disadvantaged groups of women, and activities to promote active fatherhood and eliminate stereotypes about women's and men's roles in society. Moreover, measures were taken to update the curricula from a gender perspective, promote equal opportunities for women and men in sports, and promote gender-sensitive language practices (Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2015–2020, 2015).

The third Resolution for the national programme for equal opportunities for women and men covers the period from 2023 to 2030 (Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2023–2030, 2023). It tackles six key areas: the gender gap in employment and financial independence of women and men, health, education, gender-based violence, decision-making and external affairs. One of the main goals of this new national programme is to improve the national gender equality index by more than 10% and to reach index 78 in 2030. The basis for the programme's latest version was evaluation of the previous programme conducted in 2021. The evaluation demonstrated that activities combating gender stereotypes in youth's career choices were developed while highlighting research activities on gender equality and curriculum changes about gender equality. Moreover, additional funds were allocated to projects promoting work-life balance, active fatherhood, and initiatives combating online violence and harassment of girls and women (Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2023–2030, 2023). The latter is especially important since women (especially in politics) are increasingly exposed to online violence; the study from the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2018) showed that 85,2% of female respondents experienced psychological violence, while almost 50% received death or rape threats directed towards them, their children or other family members. These threats were expressed using social media accounts or emails.¹²

This new strategy also set specific goals, measures and indicators

¹² <https://www.gov.si teme/enakost-zensk-in-moskih>

for each of the six areas to tackle various challenges that stand in the way of gender equality, e.g., the pay gap, a disproportionate amount of care work, and aggravated risk of poverty and social exclusion for women. For example, under the goal ‘balanced representation of women and men on all levels of decision-making in politics,’ the measurement proposes changes in election legislation and supporting programmes and projects encouraging young women to participate in politics (Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2023–2030, 2023).

EU Projects

The development of various interventions, workshops, and training presents an institutionalised attempt to combat low levels of women in decision-making positions. The common goal of all these activities is the political empowerment of girls and young women, raising awareness of the importance of women’s inclusion in politics, creating a space for gaining experience and developing materials which can help civil society in the political socialisation of individuals. Many activities have been carried out to understand and tackle barriers preventing women from participating equally in decision-making processes. For example, awareness-raising campaigns on the benefits and advantages of gender balance for different target groups were carried out, contributing to raising the political culture and creating a political climate more favourable to gender equality policies. Moreover, research on possible measures to ensure a more balanced gender representation in political decision-making and analyses of elections from the perspective of gender balance, aimed at examining the impact of quotas on gender balance on candidate lists and women’s electability and representation, have also shown where significant progress has been made and where challenges remain. This progress would not have been possible without civil society’s continued pressure on the party leadership to allow women to stand in electable constituencies and electable slots on lists.

At the EU level, the European Women’s Lobby addresses the empowerment of young women for political engagement. It organises online seminars on raising awareness of women’s rights, advocacy, equal representation in politics, women’s political participation, and the like. Among their key projects, the EXCHANGE practice stands out; it is a multi-day event aimed at exchanging ideas for increasing the participa-

tion of women in politics on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean (European Women's Lobby, 2016).

In 2020, the Council of Europe released a toolkit for local authorities and civil society organisations that focuses on the participation of girls and young women from vulnerable groups in political and public decision-making processes at the local level. The tool presents the characteristics of the target group, the methodology of development and use of the training manual, examples of practical exercises for group and individual work, and examples of good practices at the local level (Golub et al., 2020). Among the presented projects, the Grow Up – Girls' Leadership Academy aimed to develop leadership skills among young women and girls. This project improved participants' knowledge of electoral and legislative processes.

National Projects

Among activities in Slovenia, the Women Can Do It project from 2002 presents a series of workshops for training women for political action, spilling over into Women Can Do It II. Both projects aimed to strengthen women's political power and influence in parliamentary parties. The participants were part of the seminars on women's representation, issues of gender inequality, and gender equality policies (Robnik, 2016). The project also designed criteria that determine to what extent certain political parties are friendly to women. Among these criteria are, for example, that gender equality is one of the main programme values of the political party, implementation of special measures for gender equality, unlimited opportunity to discuss matters related to gender equality within the party and public debates, and collaboration with non-governmental and civic organisations that support women's actions (Neubauer, 2002). Another related project was Roma Women Can Do It; the project encouraged Roma women to become more involved in public and political life. At the seminars, the participants were encouraged to build solidarity with women within the Roma community and connect with local and state politicians (Robnik, 2016).

In 2011, a mentoring programme was launched to enable young women to meet and learn from women's politicians. Women students from three Slovenian public universities (Ljubljana, Maribor, and Primorska) who expressed political interest were given the opportunity to participate in the mentoring day. On International Women's Day, 30 es-

tablished women politicians and women students spent a day together (Robnik, 2016).

Regarding integrating the principle of gender equality in policymaking (i.e., gender mainstreaming) in Slovenia, activities have been carried out within the framework of individual projects and with the support of EU funds. For example, in 2007, the project Gender Equality in Local Development took place; the civil servants in local communities in Slovenia, Luxemburg and Denmark prepared guidelines on gender mainstreaming in local development and participated in a series of workshops aimed at identifying issues related to gender equality (Robnik, 2016). A year later, a follow-up project informed on the importance of integrating the principle of gender equality in the state administration. The project included an analysis of tools for ensuring gender equality in the state administration, workshops for representatives of the state administration, and training for coordinators of equal opportunities between women and men in the ministries. From 2010 to 2012, the EU project Integration of Gender Mainstreaming Principle – Strategically was implemented. The project included a series of research, training, and workshops that contributed to the development of an online tool for solving gender equality issues and the preparation of guidelines for the integration of the principle of gender equality in development policies (Robnik, 2016).

During the project Meta dekleta, supported by EU funds, free workshops were organised in various Slovenian cities on effective communication with the media and the modern design of advocacy campaigns. The consortium created a handbook that contains the presentations of vital political bodies in Slovenia and a special chapter dedicated to local self-government (*Ženske za politiko, politika za vse*, n.d.). Another similar project was the project Winning Political Equality with New Names, where academic and research institutions, Slovenian municipalities and the Women's Lobby of Slovenia collaborated with the support of Norway Grants. The project identified obstacles that prevent women from participating in local and national politics. Based on their findings, the consortium developed support strategies and awareness-raising activities for women, men, professionals, gatekeepers and the general public. During the project, women candidates willing to participate in politics were identified and empowered with the necessary knowledge and support.

Political parties within their youth groups carry out similar projects.

In 2016, the Youth Forum of Social Democrats organised an international seminar for young women in politics entitled 'Empowerment for Participation.' The seminar aimed to empower young members with skills in communication, networking, public speaking, and campaign planning (Mladi forum SD, 2016). Part of the Social Democrats is also the Women's Forum,¹³ which presents one of the most active women's forums within Slovenian political parties. It was established in 1993 as an autonomous political association that ensures opportunities for the party to develop gender equality politics, strengthens the political power of women members, and enables civic groups with similar goals to have a direct impact on the party and parliament. In their action plan, they emphasise the importance of regular press conferences with special attention given to gender equality in public life, organisation of training for women, designing the list of perspectives and successful women that could be politically engaged, creating conditions for a smooth transition of young women from the Youth Forum to the highest party positions, and ensuring support for young women who aims for a local political career. Right-wing political parties, the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS)¹⁴ and the New Slovenia (NSI)¹⁵ also have Women's Board or Women's Association; on their websites, they highlight support for gender balance in public life, equal opportunities in professional and personal development, support for women's associations in EU and third countries, etc.

Regarding projects specifically focused on young people, #jezikza-volitve (eng. language for elections)¹⁶ was implemented by the Youth Cultural Centre Maribor in 2018 and 2019. With mentors and lecturers, more than 500 young people formulated proposals based on their expectations regarding youth over four years. The project's long-term goal was to increase young people's motivation to participate in elections and equip young people with the skills to search for relevant information – both represent essential elements of electoral culture. The first workshop strengthened the skills of critical thinking and argumentation, the second informed about the electoral process and the political system at the local, national, and European levels, and the third fo-

¹³ <https://socialnidemokrati.si/tag/zenski-forum-sd>

¹⁴ <https://www.sds.si/o-stranki/organiziranost/interesne-organizacije/zo/o-zenskem-odboru>

¹⁵ <https://nsi.si/org-oblike/zenska-zveza>

¹⁶ <https://mkc.si/jezik-za-volitve>

cused on becoming acquainted with the election programmes. By the end of this project, young people formulated proposals and later discussed them with the mayoral candidates in the city of Maribor. Following these interventions and young people's opinions, measures that would draw more young women into politics are mentoring system, organised training on politics for younger women, raising awareness among younger women about the existence of women's groups within politics, and the family-friendly reorganisation of the political field (e.g., organised childcare, shorter timetables).

Intentions for the political activation of women are also part of the project that started in 2022 under The Women's Lobby of Slovenia.¹⁷ In cooperation with the American Embassy, the organisation started the Voting Literacy for Gender Equality project. Project activities included workshops with prominent Slovenian women who were holders of elected positions at the municipal and state levels. The roundtables and workshops were recorded and are available online. The conversations with the youth took place in different Slovenian cities, while topics extended from active citizenship, civil society and politics to electoral systems and women in politics.

Conclusion

Women's rights organisations are pivotal in the global drive for gender equality, playing a crucial role in combating discrimination and violence against women while advocating for equal opportunities in all societal domains. These organisations operate at various levels, from grassroots initiatives to international networks, addressing a broad spectrum of issues that profoundly impact women's lives. By striving to eliminate discriminatory practices and promoting gender parity across society, these organisations contribute significantly to fostering a more just and inclusive world for women and girls worldwide.

The efforts of women's rights organisations are multi-faceted, focusing on a range of issues that include but are not limited to gender-based violence, economic inequality, political representation, and access to education and healthcare. These organisations employ various strategies to achieve their goals, including advocacy, public awareness campaigns, legal aid, and support services. Grassroots initiatives often work directly with communities to challenge local norms and practices

¹⁷ <https://www.zenskilobi.si>

that perpetuate gender inequality, while international networks lobby for global standards and conventions that promote women's rights.

Governments and public agencies are also responsible for advancing gender equality through policy formulation and implementation. By enacting non-discriminatory policies and programs, governments can enhance opportunities for women's leadership, address disparities such as the gender pay gap, and support women's integration into the workforce through initiatives like parental leave and anti-violence measures. Furthermore, governmental actions exemplify diversity and inclusivity, shaping societal norms and practices on a broader scale.

Effective policy measures include legislative reforms that mandate equal pay for equal work, protect women from harassment and violence, and ensure equal access to education and employment opportunities. Governments can also implement gender-sensitive budgeting to ensure that public spending addresses the specific needs of women and girls. Governments can promote a more balanced and inclusive decision-making process by setting quotas for women's representation in political bodies and leadership positions.

The European Union (EU) strategically aligns its gender equality efforts with global frameworks like the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1979) and initiatives under the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). These frameworks underscore the EU's commitment to promoting women's participation in political and public life, safeguarding their electoral rights, and facilitating their engagement in governmental policymaking at all levels.

Central to these efforts are EU institutions such as the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), supported by legislative frameworks like the Gender Equality Strategy 2020–2025. This strategy aims to challenge gender stereotypes, reduce gender gaps in caregiving and pay, and achieve gender balance in decision-making roles. The strategy also emphasises the importance of integrating a gender perspective into all EU policies and activities, ensuring that gender equality is considered in areas ranging from economic policy to health and education.

Additionally, the Gender Action Plan III (2021–2025) outlines priorities to empower women and integrate gender perspectives into emerging policy areas such as green transition and digital transformation. This plan enhances global accountability through improved monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, ensuring that progress towards gen-

der equality is tracked and reported. The plan also supports initiatives that address the specific needs of women in crises, such as those affected by conflict or natural disasters, recognising the disproportionate impact these events can have on women and girls.

Initiatives like the Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme (REC) and Horizon 2020 & Horizon Europe further bolster the EU's commitment to gender equality by funding projects that promote women's empowerment across Europe. These programs provide financial support for initiatives that aim to improve women's participation in the labour market, support women entrepreneurs, and foster gender equality in research and innovation. By investing in these areas, the EU not only promotes gender equality but also contributes to broader economic and social development goals.

These comprehensive strategies at both organisational and governmental levels aim to foster an inclusive and equitable political landscape where women's participation and representation are significantly enhanced. The combined efforts of women's rights organisations and governmental bodies are essential in creating an environment where women can thrive and contribute fully to society. By working together, these entities can ensure that gender equality is not just a goal but a reality for women and girls worldwide. This collaborative approach underscores the importance of continued advocacy, policy innovation, and resource allocation to address the persistent barriers to gender equality and create a more inclusive and just society for all.

References

- Commission decision of 16 June 2008 relating to the setting up of an Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2008/590/EC). (2008). *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 190, 17–21.
- Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW). (1979). <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>
- European Commission. (2020). *A union of equality: Gender equality strategy 2020–2025* (COM(2020) 152 final). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152>
- European Commission. (2024, 25 November). *Gender action plan – putting women and girls' rights at the heart of the global recovery for a gender-equal world*. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_2184

- European Women's Lobby. (2016, 23 November). *EXCHANGE – transatlantic cooperation to smash the glass ceiling*. <https://womenlobby.org/ExCHANGE?lang=en>
- Galligan, Y. (2021). Gender equality politics. In D. M. Farrell & N. Hardiman (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Irish Politics* (pp. 57–70). Oxford University Press.
- Golub, O., Volodko, V., & Korniienko, H. (2020). *Participation of young women and girls from disadvantaged groups in political and public decision-making processes at local level: Toolkit for local authorities and civil society organisations*. Council of Europe Publishing.
- Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2018). *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe* (Issue Briefs). <https://www.ipu.org/file/5472/download>
- Kelly, R., & White, I. (2016). *All-women shortlists* (Briefing Paper No. 5057). House of Commons. <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/SN05057/SN05057.pdf>
- Lovenduski, J., & Norris, P. (1993). Introduction: The dynamics of gender and party. In J. Lovenduski & P. Norris (Eds.), *Gender and party politics* (pp. 1–15). Sage Publications.
- Mladi forum SD. (2016, 9 May). *Mednarodni seminar Mladega foruma za večjo participacijo mladih žensk v politiki*. <https://socialnidemokrati.si/mednarodni-seminar-mladega-foruma-za-vecjo-participacijo-mladih-zensk-v-politiki/>
- Neubauer, V. (Ed.). (2002). *Ženske to zmoremo II*. Vlada Republike Slovenije, Urad za enake možnosti.
- O'Connell, H. (2013). *Implementing the European Union gender action plan 2010–2015: Challenges and opportunities*. European Development Cooperation Strengthening Programme (EDCSP). <https://media.odi.org/documents/8305.pdf>
- Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2015–2020 (RENPEMŽM15-20). (2015). *Uradni list Republike Slovenije* (84). <https://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?sop=2015-01-3307>
- Resolucija o nacionalnem programu za enake možnosti žensk in moških 2023–2030 (RENPEMŽM23-30). (2023). *Uradni list Republike Slovenije* (105). <https://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?sop=2023-01-2971>
- Robnik, S. (Ed.). (2016). *Gender equality – the (still) unfinished story: Review of developments in the field of gender equality in Slovenia 1991–2016*. Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities. <https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MDDSZ/Dokumenti/Enakost-spolov/Publikacije/beda27c4bc/NFMPublikacijaZgodovinskiPregledAN.pdf>

UN Women. (2020). *The world for women and girls: Annual report 2019–2020*.

United Nations Development Programme. (2012). *Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties: A Good Practices Guide to Promote Women's Political Participation*.

Zakon o enakih možnostih žensk in moških (ZEMŽM). (2002). *Uradni list Republike Slovenije* (59). <https://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?sop=2002-01-2837>

Ženske za politiko, politika za vse: politika za začetnice. (N.d.). <https://metinalista.si/wp-content/uploads/MetaDekleta-politikazazacetnice2.pdf>

Chapter Six

The Impact of Targeted Interventions on Political Empowerment and Gender Stereotypes Among Young Women and High School Students in Slovenia

Andrej Naterer

University of Maribor, Slovenia
andrej.naterer@um.si

Miran Lavrič

University of Maribor, Slovenia
miran.lavric@um.si

This chapter aims to evaluate the impact of targeted interventions conducted under the project ‘Empowering Women in Active Society (EWA)’. These interventions included implementing a comprehensive educational program for the political empowerment of women, workshops for high school students, and developing an online tool and materials for women interested in political engagement or pursuing a professional career in politics. We assessed the effects of these interventions through a quasi-experimental study using a separate sample pre-test-post-test design. The pre-test included surveys and focus groups; the latter was conducted with 30 young women in three groups and 37 high school students in four groups. Surveys were conducted both before and after the EWA activities. Comparative analyses of the pre-test and post-test groups revealed that most indicators measuring political engagement and gender stereotypes did not differ statistically significantly between the two groups. Furthermore, the observed statistically significant differences were predominantly in the undesired direction. On the other hand, participants from both target groups expressed very high levels of satisfaction with EWA activities. The implications of these results are discussed.

Keywords: women’s empowerment, political engagement, gender stereotypes, high school students, pre-test and post-test design

Introduction

Including women in politics and pursuing gender equality is one of the central themes within the social and political space of the numerous democratic countries in the 21st century. After Slovenia gained independence in 1991, significant strides were made in promoting gender equality, yet still more remains to be done in promoting gender equality and active inclusion of women in politics. This chapter examines the impact of the project EWA – Empowering Women in Active Society, with particular emphasis on their perceptions before and after the execution of project activities.

To establish a solid basis for the results presented at the core of this chapter, a review of key elements from historical context, legislative framework, political participation, and challenges women face in Slovenian politics is needed. Regarding the historical context, women's political participation in Slovenia is rooted in the broader socio-political changes in the region, particularly Yugoslavia. During that period, women were encouraged to participate in the workforce and political life. However, traditional gender roles persisted, limiting the extent of their political influence (Rener, 1985; Ramet, 1999). With the transition to democracy in the early 1990s, Slovenia faced the challenge of integrating gender equality into its new political framework. The initial years of independence saw limited female representation in political institutions, thus reflecting broader societal attitudes towards gender roles (Antić Gaber, 2002). Until 2000, the situation remained relatively unchanged, but since then, Slovenian women's political representation has improved, with gender quotas increasing the number of women in elected positions and changing attitudes towards women as leaders (Antić Gaber, 2019).

A suitable legislative framework was particularly important, and Slovenia has implemented several legislative measures to promote gender equality in politics. The Constitution of Slovenia guarantees equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of gender (Republic of Slovenia, 2023, p. 7):

At the national level, the principle of equality before the law is enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia (RS), and gender equality legislation includes, inter alia, the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act (amended in 2019), the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (2008), the Protection against Discrimi-

nation Act (2016) and the Act Ratifying the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2015).

Additionally, Slovenia remains invested in these issues by ratifying numerous international conventions, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). However, according to numerous authors, one of the most significant legislative measures remains the introduction of gender quotas. According to Lukšič (2010), for example, the 2006 Act on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men mandates that at least 40% of candidates on electoral lists must be women, and this system has been instrumental in increasing representation of women in political bodies. Indeed, studies have shown that introducing quotas has led to a significant increase in the number of women elected to the National Assembly and local councils (Krašovec & Johannsen, 2016). For instance, the percentage of women in the National Assembly increased from 13.3% in 2004 to 36.7% in 2018.¹ With Nataša Pirc Musar, Slovenia got the first woman president in 2022. Yet, despite these gains, women remain underrepresented in higher political offices. The number of women holding ministerial positions and serving as mayors is still relatively low, highlighting the need for continued efforts to promote gender equality at all levels of political decision-making (Antič Gaber & Kovačič, 2014).

One of the primary obstacles could be attributed to the persistence of traditional gender norms and stereotypes. According to Lukšič (2010), these societal attitudes often discourage women from pursuing political careers. Additionally, Antič Gaber (2002) describes the political culture in Slovenia as exclusionary, with male-dominated networks and practices that marginalise women, with the lack of mentorship and support for female politicians further exacerbating these issues. Another significant challenge appears to be the work-life balance. The demands of political life, combined with traditional expectations of women's roles in the family, create an additional burden for women politicians, deterring them from entering or remaining in politics (Krašovec & Johannsen, 2016).

Based on the recognition of the importance of these issues, continued legislative efforts, societal change, and support for women politi-

¹ <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking>

cians are visible within Slovenia, all striving towards gender equality in politics. Currently, there are various initiatives addressing challenges faced by women in politics. Due to the specific focus of this chapter, we will concentrate solely on the programs and approaches relevant to the project EWA. Current key initiatives in Slovenia include:

- Gender mainstreaming was introduced into Slovenian national legislation through the Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Act in 2002. It presents a key legislative framework for promoting gender equality in various sectors, including politics (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2022)
- National Programme for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men until 2030, a program which is part of Slovenia's legislative and policy framework to promote gender equality. It includes initiatives that support women's participation in various sectors, including politics (European Institute for Gender Equality, n.d.)
- Gender quotas for elections. These were implemented to ensure a minimum representation of women in political bodies (United Nations, 2023)
- Support for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) through development aid, including initiatives aimed at increasing women's participation in decision-making processes (Republic of Slovenia, 2024)

Current Interventional Programs and Projects within the EU

The inclusion of women in politics has been a focus of various interventions and projects across Europe. These aim to address gender disparities in political representation and empower women to participate actively in political processes. Initiatives include the European Women's Lobby,² Women Political Leaders,³ and Parity Democracy Project. Similar initiatives are also found at the level of EU member states and other countries within the region, such as the Political Mentoring Programme by the German Women's Council (European Women's Lobby, 2017), Forum 50%⁴ from the Czech Republic, the Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF, 2021) or the 50/50 Campaign by Women

² <https://womenlobby.org>

³ <https://www.womenpoliticalleaders.org>

⁴ <https://padesatprocent.cz>

for Election from Ireland.⁵ These often include interventions targeting a macro level of women's inclusion, for instance, by advocating for policy changes (e.g. lobbying for legislative reforms such as gender quotas) and organising awareness campaigns, all with positive results. However, these projects often also include -micro-level interventions, and due to the specific nature of the EWA project, these present a priority in our current review.

A review of the reports mentioned above shows that women's reluctance to actively enter politics often stems from self-reported incompetence and a perceived lack of necessary skills. These findings have been consistently supported by numerous studies, and there is now a broad recognition among scholars, politicians, and activists for the need for capacity-building interventions. Based on this recognition, the projects mentioned above have offered numerous activities to their women participants, with the best results attributed to:

1. *Training and capacity building* (e.g. workshops on leadership skills and public speaking),
2. *Mentorship and networking* (e.g. by pairing aspiring women politicians with experienced mentors to provide guidance),
3. *Peer learning and exchange programs* (e.g. job shadowing).

Support for the importance of these elements is strong. For instance, CLGF (2021) explored the role of mentoring in enhancing women's political involvement, highlighting several key aspects and successful practices of mentoring programs. According to their report, mentoring, particularly its face-to-face format, goes beyond traditional guidance to encompass a transformative model focused on building solidarity, mutual learning, and long-term relationships. This approach aims to foster personal and professional growth, social change, and political advancement. However, mentoring can be additionally strengthened in combination with other practices, most notably (1) *collaborative learning* (e.g. group mentoring sessions that help build skills and confidence by allowing mentees to share experiences and work on projects together) and (2) *learning by doing* (e.g. shadowing and participation in public engagements, which enhance visibility and practical knowledge). Another illustration can be provided by the Fawcet Society (2019). Focusing on developing women's political leadership in the

⁵ <https://5050parliament.co.uk>

UK, their report evaluates the impact of interventions such as training programs, networking opportunities, and advocacy campaigns. Apart from crucial political reforms and the promotion of cultural change, the report recommends establishing formal mentorship programs, support networks, and capacity-building initiatives, all essential for empowering women in politics. The report also stresses that when striving towards the political activation of women, an individual approach to their needs and capacities is necessary to realise their full activation and potential.

These reports collectively provide robust evidence supporting the effectiveness of various interventions in enhancing women's involvement in politics. They highlight a multifaceted approach that includes capacity building, mentorship, advocacy, and policy reforms to create an enabling environment for women's political participation.

The Current Study

The current study is undoubtedly comparable to the projects and programs mentioned above. However, it is also unique since it is, to our knowledge, the only study using a quasi-experimental approach to assess the impact of interventions focusing on improving political and civic participation. In this respect, project EWA rests on two general assumptions, namely that targeted interventions can positively influence:

1. women's activation and empowerment in the sphere of political and civic participation and,
2. sensitisation of Slovenian youth in recognising and actively mitigating gender stereotypes within the sphere of political and civic participation.

These assumptions are structured through the following specific sub-assumptions, namely:

1. Targeted interventions have the potential to positively influence women's perceptions and self-assessment of skills needed within the sphere of political and civic participation.
2. Targeted interventions have the potential to positively influence the motivations of women for political and civic participation.
3. Targeted interventions should be based on the provision of knowledge, skills, and other tools to address the reproduction of be-

havioural patterns fostering gender inequality and to actively support women's political and civic participation.

4. Interventions should include a plethora of approaches and methods (e.g. mentoring, job shadowing, workshops, online toolkits), enabling the targeting of specific issues at the individual level and providing a basis for proper alignment of project goals with uncovered issues.

The main objective of the current study is to evaluate the impact of targeted interventions conducted within the EWA project. These interventions included implementing a comprehensive educational program for the political empowerment of women, workshops for high school students, and developing an online tool and materials for women interested in political engagement. The project was based on a three-phase approach. The first phase focused on the analysis of the current situation among young Slovenian women and youth regarding political and civic participation. This was executed in the form of a pre-test among participants, and the results were used to develop specific interventions that targeted issues identified within the pre-test. The second phase was dedicated to the execution of the following interventions:

1. Series of roundtables with national women politicians intended to bring active politicians closer to project participants.
2. Series of workshops on gender mainstreaming for state officials, with the main aim to raise awareness on integrating gender perspectives into all stages of policymaking, program design, implementation, and evaluation.
3. Online course on gender mainstreaming with the main aim to provide online access to the topics related to gender mainstreaming with particular focus on (1) promotion of equality, (2) improvement of political effectiveness, (3) enhancement of social justice, and (4) capacity building for political and civic participation.
4. A series of mentoring opportunities in the form of job shadowing with national women politicians or visits to the national parliament and related institutions.
5. The online toolkit (EWA online platform) as a main information and communication hub.

The successful execution of these interventions enabled the begin-

ning of the third phase, namely, testing the results. This phase was conducted in the form of a post-test, with the main goal of assessing the impact of the project interventions among participating women and youth.

Method

Project EWA had a quasi-experimental design based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. For the purpose of this chapter, we will focus on survey results and focus groups.

Surveys

The project was based on four surveys, divided into pre-test and post-test of two target groups:

1. Pre-test survey of high school students.
2. Pre-test survey of young women.
3. Post-test survey of high school students.
4. Post-test survey of young women.

Four questionnaires were created based on the literature review, focusing mainly on the major obstacles that prevent young women from playing more active roles in politics and public life. Several questions were also dedicated to measuring existing gender stereotypes related to politics. Many of these stereotypes were measured indirectly through differences in answers between men and women. The questionnaire also included questions regarding political and civic participation, political activity, and political efficacy. Besides repeated questions from pre-test surveys, post-test surveys also included questions on the respondents' satisfaction with the EWA activities.

Both pre-test surveys were administered via the 1KA online application between March 1st and March 31st, 2023. All young women participating in the project ($n = 72$) were invited to participate in the survey, and all completed it. However, due to a high dropout in this target group, the post-test was completed by only 20 young women. On the other hand, 328 high school students completed the pre-test survey, and some students joined EWA activities in later stages, therefore making the post-test sample even larger ($n = 358$). Additional information about the samples and analytical procedures is provided in the results section of this chapter. Post-test surveys were conducted in June 2024 after all interventive activities with participants were conducted.

Focus Groups

Complementary to the survey project testing, focus groups with representatives of young women and high school students were also included. This method enabled a deep insight into the perceptions and opinions of participants. It facilitated the development and fine-tuning of activities, particularly the development of the women empowerment training program, workshops for high-school students, and an online toolkit.

During the pre-test phase, three focus groups were conducted with 30 young women and 4 with 37 high-school students. Each focus group was facilitated by one trained moderator (who moderated the discussion) and at least one assistant (who took notes and oversaw the recording process). Audio recordings were transcribed, and the transcriptions were coded and categorised according to the project proposal and EWA guidelines for the focus groups.

Results

Within this section, we present the results from pre- and post-test surveys within two subsamples: high school students (Study 1) and young women with political potential (Study 2). To provide a deeper insight into the developed interventions, we also include some results from the focus groups conducted in the context of the pre-test.

Results from Focus Groups

The results of the focus groups can be categorised into four topics:

1. Regarding the ‘Evaluation of the situation on the political and civic participation of women in Slovenia,’ results show predominant perceptions that there are no significant problems with women’s political participation at the local level. However, problems arise at the national level, where, for example, gender quotas fail to function effectively. In addition, gender stereotypes are perceived as particularly strong and persistent in the sphere of politics.
2. Regarding the ‘Main obstacles in the area of female political and civic participation,’ traditional roles and persisting stereotypes appear as dominant obstacles. Societal pressures, particularly through media and social media, are also perceived as strong and crucial barriers.
3. Regarding the ‘Self-evaluation of one’s abilities and skills in this area,’ personal traits, lack of motivation (e.g. lack of willpower),

and capacity (e.g. skills) appear as dominant factors hindering women's participation.

4. Regarding the 'Perceptions and suggestions on how EWA project could contribute to relevant issues of female participation,' participants expressed a desire for the provision of relevant knowledge (e.g. political information workshops), mentoring and networking opportunities (e.g. job shadowing) and various forms of capacity building (e.g. public speaking workshop).

These findings, along with other results from a pre-test, were used in the development of interventive activities and approaches to their execution.

Study 1: High School Students

The analysis of results for high school students was based on the comparison of relatively large pre-test ($n = 328$) and post-test ($n = 358$) samples. Since not all respondents who filled out the post-test questionnaire also completed the pre-test, the analysis follows the logic of a separate sample design. As Table 6.1 shows, the two samples were very similar in terms of socio-demographic structure, which makes the comparisons of the observed variables relatively valid.

This study's main statistical analytical tool was an independent samples t-test, which also included comparative analyses of means and standard deviations. T-tests were used to establish the statistical significance of differences in the pre-test and post-test groups' sample means. Additionally, analysis of 95% confidence intervals for mean values, crosstabulations, and frequency tables were used to analyse and present the results. All observed variables utilised 1 to 5 pro-trait scales, where a value of 1 indicated the lowest possible presence of a measured concept and a value of 5 indicated the highest.

Most of the relevant results can be discerned from Table 6.2, though some of them are further elaborated in subsequent analyses. Table 6.2 presents mean values with standard deviations for all 33 variables measuring different aspects of political interest, engagement, and attitudes. We also added information about the statistical significance of the difference in pre-test and post-test sample means. This information is crucial as it indicates whether there is a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and the post-test groups, inferring that this difference might at least partially be due to the exposure to applied in-

TABLE 6.1 Basic Demographic Characteristics of the Sample of High School Students

Category	Item	Pre-test		Post-test	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Gender	Female	236	72.0	252	70.4
	Male	81	24.7	91	25.4
	Other	11	3.4	15	4.2
Mother's educational level	Primary school	39	12.5	42	12.5
	Vocational or technical secondary school	21	6.8	32	9.6
	Secondary school	58	18.6	71	21.2
	Higher vocational college	3	1.0	2	0.6
	University-level education: bachelor degree	99	31.8	103	30.7
	Higher than bachelor degree (MA degree, spec.)	50	16.1	53	15.8
	Master in Science	21	6.8	18	5.4
	Doctorate of Science	20	6.4	14	4.2
Type of work settlement	Rural	133	40.7	148	41.9
	More rural than urban	33	10.1	40	11.3
	In between	48	14.7	41	11.6
	More urban than rural	45	13.8	42	11.9
	Urban	68	20.8	82	23.2

terventions. The first important finding from Table 6.2 is that, in most cases, mean values did not change statistically significantly. Out of 33 applied measures, only 10 showed significant changes. The second finding, which is rather surprising, is that in most of these 10 cases, the change was not in the desired direction.

For example, our results show that the respondents within the post-test sample, compared to those from the pre-test sample, were less interested in social, cultural, and environmental issues, as well as issues of equal opportunities for women and men. Furthermore, the post-test group reported significantly lower levels of political engagement in terms of attending future elections, sharing socially relevant messages via social networks, or visiting websites or social media profiles of political parties or movements. Some of the gender stereotypes were also significantly more present in the post-test group. This includes increased agreement with the statement that men are generally better suited to be political leaders than women and that a woman appears less feminine if she loudly defends her views.

TABLE 6.2 Means and SDS for All Included Variables Relating to Political Participation and Attitudes, High School Students

Question	Test	<i>n</i>	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>
To what extent are you personally interested in politics?	(a)	318	2.87	1.19
	(b)	348	2.83	1.14
Approximately how much time per week on average do you spend monitoring politics or current events?	(a)	316	2.54	1.50
	(b)	349	2.35	1.55
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Economy.	(a)	309	2.66	1.12
	(b)	345	2.66	1.14
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Corruption.	(a)	304	2.78	1.26
	(b)	338	2.67	1.26
To what extent do you follow the following topics: International politics.	(a)	308	2.87	1.29
	(b)	347	2.74	1.19
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Culture.**	(a)	312	3.08	1.21
	(b)	347	2.83	1.12
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Social issues and policies.*	(a)	309	3.09	1.17
	(b)	345	2.90	1.12
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Environmental issues.**	(a)	310	3.22	1.26
	(b)	346	3.01	1.24
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Issues of equal opportunities for women and men.**	(a)	311	3.52	1.32
	(b)	346	3.18	1.23
Signed the petition ('live' or 'online').	(a)	306	3.46	1.10
	(b)	330	3.46	1.07
He was present at demonstrations and protests.	(a)	304	2.56	1.15
	(b)	335	2.39	1.09

Continued on the next page

While the described changes were statistically significant, it should be stressed that they were still relatively small. For example, agreement with the statement that a woman appears less feminine if she loudly defends her views increased from 7 per cent in the pre-test to 12 per cent in the post-test group.

The above-mentioned statement is particularly interesting because the difference between the pre-test and the post-test group occurred only among girls (see Figure 6.1 on p. 147).

This might suggest that encountering many examples of women in politics through EWA activities led some girls to conclude that this type of engagement does not align with their ideas about femininity. This no-

TABLE 6.2 *Continued from the previous page*

Question	Test	<i>n</i>	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>
Contacted politicians.	(a)	306	2.04	1.01
	(b)	341	1.92	0.95
Boycotted the purchase of certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons.	(a)	285	2.47	1.08
	(b)	319	2.39	1.09
Sent or shared a message via social networks that related to a current social problem.**	(a)	303	2.87	1.22
	(b)	335	2.53	1.18
Visited the website or social media profile of a political party or movement.**	(a)	307	3.19	1.24
	(b)	330	2.91	1.23
Participated in volunteer activities.	(a)	306	3.25	1.21
	(b)	332	3.17	1.14
Participated in the activities of non-governmental organizations (youth, student, artistic, sports ...).	(a)	303	3.36	1.23
	(b)	335	3.30	1.14
If there were parliamentary elections next year and you would have the right to vote, would you participate?***	(a)	311	4.12	1.15
	(b)	366	3.84	1.11
To what extent do you think the political system in Slovenia allows people like you to influence politics?***	(a)	289	2.70	0.89
	(b)	326	3.11	0.94
How would you rate your general knowledge of politics and political events?	(a)	295	2.45	0.91
	(b)	305	2.35	0.89
And how capable do you feel or able to participate in politics?	(a)	289	2.42	1.06
	(b)	299	2.30	1.07
How likely do you think it is that you would run for some political office in the future?	(a)	296	1.9	0.89
	(b)	299	1.85	0.93

Continued on the next page

tion is further supported by the finding that the difference between the pre-test and post-test groups regarding the belief that men are generally better suited for politics than women occurred only among girls.

It should be noted that, on average, girls are substantially less likely than boys to accept either of the two statements measuring gender stereotypes in politics. This relationship has not changed. However, it is interesting to see that interventions aimed at breaking gender stereotypes might even have the opposite effect.

The third and crucial finding is much more positive in terms of the effectiveness of the observed interventions. Namely, our results show that the high school students in the post-test group were much more

TABLE 6.2 *Continued from the previous page*

Question	Test	<i>n</i>	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>
Obstacles to participation in politics: I am not confident enough.	(a)	290	2.59	1.29
	(b)	287	2.70	1.32
Obstacles to participating in politics: I don't want to be so exposed to the public.	(a)	289	3.14	1.35
	(b)	286	3.28	1.32
Obstacles to participation in politics: I have insufficient knowledge about politics.	(a)	289	3.44	1.25
	(b)	292	3.48	1.30
Obstacles to participation in politics: Because it would be difficult to reconcile political and family life.	(a)	279	2.68	1.19
	(b)	284	2.74	1.21
Obstacles to participation in politics: Because you are immediately labeled as a dirty politician or dirty politician.	(a)	271	2.98	1.36
	(b)	282	2.91	1.34
Obstacles to participation in politics: Because I am not interested in politics.	(a)	287	3.31	1.45
	(b)	281	3.40	1.42
Politics is a dirty business that an honest person prefers to avoid.	(a)	288	2.88	1.12
	(b)	285	2.95	1.17
In general, men are better suited to be political leaders than women.**	(a)	289	1.80	1.28
	(b)	284	2.12	1.25
If there were more women in politics, things would be better.	(a)	271	3.13	1.24
	(b)	281	3.09	1.16
Children are likely to suffer if the mother is employed and still in political office.	(a)	286	2.34	1.24
	(b)	279	2.49	1.23
A woman appears less feminine if she loudly defends her views.**	(a)	283	1.55	1.08
	(b)	287	2.01	1.21

NOTES Row headings are as follows: (a) pre-test, (b) post-test. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

likely to believe that the political system in Slovenia allows people like them to influence politics. This is obviously a very central attitude of political efficacy, which is one of the crucial factors of wider political engagement. Importantly, the difference between the pre-test and the post-test group was, in this case, quite substantial. For example, the share of those who think that the political system in Slovenia allows people like them to influence politics to a large or very large extent was only 15 per cent in the pre-test group. This increased to as much as 35 per cent in the post-test group (see Figure 6.3).

Furthermore, as Figure 6.4 clearly shows, this increase was particularly strong among girls. Specifically, the mean value increased by 0.49

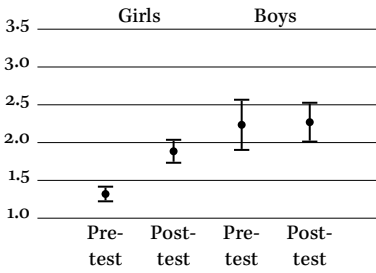


FIGURE 6.1 Agreement with the Statement That a Woman Appears Less Feminine if She Loudly Defends Her Views

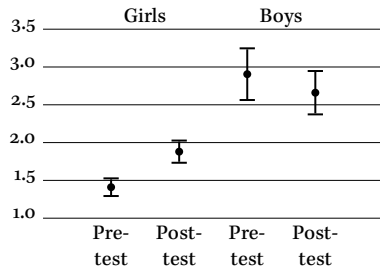


FIGURE 6.2 Agreement with the Statement That Men Are Generally Better Suited for Politics Than Women

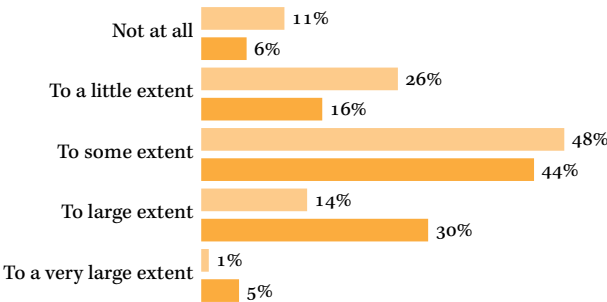


FIGURE 6.3 Political Efficacy among High School Students: Comparing the Pre-Test and the Post-Test Sample (light – pre-test, dark – post-test)

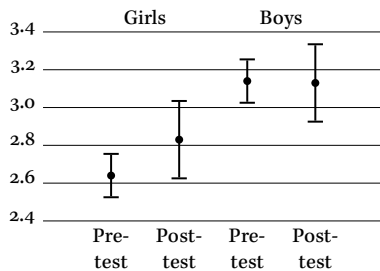


FIGURE 6.4 Gender Differences in Political Efficacy among High School Students: A Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Samples

points (from $M_{pre-test} = 2.64$ to $M_{post-test} = 3.13$) among girls, compared to an increase of only 0.31 points (from $M_{pre-test} = 2.82$ to $M_{post-test} = 3.13$) among boys. This is a very encouraging result from the women’s political empowerment perspective.

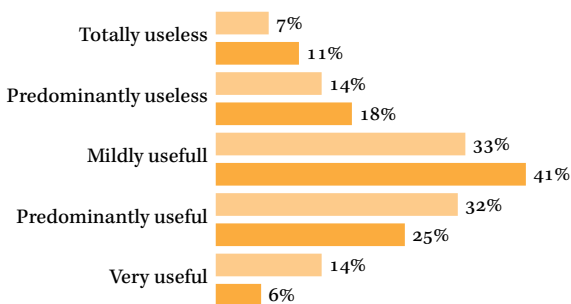


FIGURE 6.5 Gender Differences in Perceived Usefulness of the EWA Activities, only Post-Test Sample (light – woman, dark – man)

Another encouraging finding is that the respondents in the post-test group found the EWA activities predominantly applicable on average ($M_{post-test} = 3.19$, $SD = 1.11$). Furthermore, as evident from Figure 6.5, satisfaction was much higher among girls than boys. As much as 46 percent of girls found the EWA activities predominantly or very useful, compared to only 31 percent of boys.

To conclude, many of the findings presented might raise doubts about the effectiveness of the EWA activities. Most of the statistically significant results indicate lower political engagement and an increased presence of gender stereotypes in politics.

However, there are also some optimistic results. Most importantly, EWA activities were generally well received by the participants, particularly girls, with almost 80% finding the activities at least mildly useful. This is crucial since girls were the main target group of the intervention.

Additionally, the significant increase in the perception that the political system allows people like them to influence politics is a positive outcome that highlights the potential of EWA activities to foster political efficacy and engagement. This may be a crucial indicator for long-term political engagement. If young girls and boys believe that people like them can effect change, they will likely engage politically later in life.

Study 2: Young Women

The analysis of results for young women with political potential compared a relatively large pre-test sample ($n = 72$) with a smaller post-test sample ($n = 20$), focusing on those who participated in at least one EWA

TABLE 6.3 Basic Demographic Characteristics of the Sample of Young Women

Category	Item	Pre-test		Post-test	
		<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Educa- tional level	Primary school	1	1.4	0	0.0
	Secondary school	19	26.4	1	5.0
	University-level education: Bachelor degree	34	47.2	8	50.0
	Higher than bachelor degree (MA degree, spec.)	14	19.4	8	40.0
	Master in Science	4	5.6	1	5.0
Type of work settle- ment	Rural	20	27.8	4	20.0
	More rural than urban	14	19.4	5	25.0
	In between	7	9.7	2	10.0
	More urban than rural	5	6.9	2	10.0
	Urban	26	36.1	7	35.0

activity. There was a significant dropout rate among women who initially signed up and completed the pre-test. Additionally, some women joined later and only completed the post-test, necessitating a separate sample design for the analysis.

Table 6.3 compares the socio-demographic structures of both samples, showing a high level of similarity in settlement type. The gender distribution remained consistent, with each sample including one respondent who identified as 'other' while all other respondents were women. However, there was a significant difference in age structure: the average age was 28.18 years in the pre-test group and 37.65 years in the post-test group.

This age difference is also reflected in educational levels. The post-test group had a significantly higher proportion of women with tertiary education compared to the pre-test group. Only 5% of the post-test group had less than tertiary education, compared to 28% in the pre-test group. This discrepancy may help explain the high dropout rate, suggesting that EWA activities might be too demanding or less interesting for participants with lower educational levels.

As with the high school students, the primary statistical analysis tool used was the independent samples t-test, which included comparative analyses of means and standard deviations. T-tests were employed to determine the statistical significance of differences in sample means between the pre-test and post-test groups. Additionally, analyses of 95% confidence intervals for mean values, crosstabulations, and frequency

TABLE 6.4 Means and SDS for All Included Variables Relating to Political Participation and Attitudes, Young Women

Question	Test	<i>n</i>	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>
To what extent are you personally interested in politics?***	(a)	71	3.79	0.827
	(b)	19	2.95	1.177
Approximately how much time per week on average do you spend monitoring politics or current events?	(a)	70	4.11	1.814
	(b)	19	3.74	2.207
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Economy.	(a)	69	3.61	1.074
	(b)	19	3.26	1.046
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Corruption.*	(a)	69	3.55	1.132
	(b)	19	2.84	1.068
To what extent do you follow the following topics: International politics.*	(a)	70	3.84	1.030
	(b)	19	3.16	1.167
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Culture.	(a)	70	3.73	1.006
	(b)	19	3.32	1.157
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Social issues and policies.*	(a)	70	4.24	0.731
	(b)	19	3.74	0.933
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Environmental issues.	(a)	67	4.04	0.928
	(b)	19	3.79	0.976
To what extent do you follow the following topics: Issues of equal opportunities for women and men.*	(a)	68	4.37	0.809
	(b)	19	3.58	1.170
Signed the petition ('live' or 'online').	(a)	70	4.40	0.891
	(b)	19	3.95	1.268
He was present at demonstrations and protests.	(a)	69	3.13	1.097
	(b)	19	2.68	1.108

Continued on the next page

tables were used to analyse and present the results. All observed variables utilised 1 to 5 pro-trait scales, where a value of 1 indicated the lowest possible presence of a measured concept and a value of 5 indicated the highest.

Most of the relevant results can be discerned from Table 6.4, though some are further elaborated in subsequent analyses. Table 6.4 presents mean values with standard deviations for all 33 variables measuring different aspects of political interest, engagement, and attitudes. Additionally, we included information about the statistical significance of the differences in pre-test and post-test sample means. This information is crucial as it indicates whether there is a statistically significant

TABLE 6.4 *Continued from the previous page*

Question	Test	<i>n</i>	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>
Contacted politicians.**	(a)	69	3.04	1.322
	(b)	19	2.11	0.737
Boycotted the purchase of certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons.	(a)	70	3.54	1.304
	(b)	19	3.32	1.108
Sent or shared a message via social networks that related to a current social problem.**	(a)	68	4.21	1.045
	(b)	19	3.32	1.108
Visited the website or social media profile of a political party or movement.**	(a)	69	4.3	0.928
	(b)	19	3.00	1.202
Participated in volunteer activities.	(a)	69	4.06	1.083
	(b)	19	3.68	0.885
Participated in the activities of non-governmental organizations (youth, student, artistic, sports ...).	(a)	69	4.17	1.057
	(b)	19	3.68	1.157
If there were parliamentary elections next year, would you participate in these elections?***	(a)	69	4.90	0.389
	(b)	19	4.05	1.177
To what extent do you think the political system in Slovenia allows people like you to influence politics?	(a)	70	2.97	0.868
	(b)	18	2.72	1.018
How would you rate your general knowledge of politics and political events?	(a)	71	2.86	0.867
	(b)	17	2.94	0.899
And how capable do you feel or able to participate in politics?	(a)	68	2.81	0.981
	(b)	18	2.67	1.085
How likely do you think it is that you would run for some political office in the future?*	(a)	67	2.76	1.169
	(b)	17	2.12	0.928

Continued on the next page

difference between the pre-test and post-test groups, suggesting that the difference might be at least partially due to the interventions.

The first important finding from Table 6.4 is that, in most cases, the mean values did not change significantly. Out of the 33 measures applied, only 12 showed significant changes. The second and central finding is that, in all 12 cases, the change was not in the desired direction.

Specifically, women from the post-test sample were less interested in politics as compared to the ones from the pre-test sample ($M_{pre-test} = 3.79$; $M_{post-test} = 2.95$). They were also significantly less interested in topics like corruption, international politics, and social policies, as well as in issues of equal opportunities. Furthermore, the post-test group re-

TABLE 6.4 *Continued from the previous page*

Question	Test	<i>n</i>	\bar{x}	<i>SD</i>
Obstacles to participation in politics: I am not confident enough.	(a)	69	2.74	1.390
	(b)	17	2.94	1.391
Obstacles to participating in politics: I don't want to be so exposed to the public.	(a)	70	3.39	1.219
	(b)	18	3.72	1.227
Obstacles to participation in politics: I have insufficient knowledge about politics.	(a)	70	3.40	1.184
	(b)	17	3.53	1.328
Obstacles to participation in politics: Because it would be difficult to reconcile political and family life.	(a)	69	2.83	1.236
	(b)	17	3.41	1.278
Obstacles to participation in politics: Because you are immediately labelled as a dirty politician or dirty politician.	(a)	69	3.13	1.316
	(b)	17	3.47	1.068
Obstacles to participation in politics: Because I am not interested in politics. **	(a)	68	2.13	1.268
	(b)	17	3.12	1.616
Politics is a dirty business that an honest person prefers to avoid. **	(a)	68	2.69	1.069
	(b)	17	3.59	0.939
In general, men are better suited to be political leaders than women. **	(a)	69	1.38	0.750
	(b)	17	1.94	1.298
If there were more women in politics, things would be better.	(a)	66	3.50	0.932
	(b)	17	3.65	0.996
Children are likely to suffer if the mother is employed and holds a political function. **	(a)	68	2.07	1.124
	(b)	17	2.94	1.088
A woman appears less feminine if she loudly defends her views.	(a)	70	1.33	0.793
	(b)	17	1.47	1.007

NOTES Row headings are as follows: (a) pre-test, (b) post-test. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

ported significantly lower preparedness to contact politicians, as well as lower levels of sharing messages related to any social problem via social networks or visiting websites of political parties. Perhaps most surprisingly, the willingness to attend elections also dropped substantially ($M_{pre-test} = 4.90$; $M_{post-test} = 4.05$).

Furthermore, the estimated likelihood of running for political office has declined significantly. This is related to the fact that the perceived obstacle of not being interested in politics increased substantially ($M_{pre-test} = 2.13$; $M_{post-test} = 3.12$).

The decrease in interest in politics is probably related to the increased negative views of politics. For example, the post-test group ex-

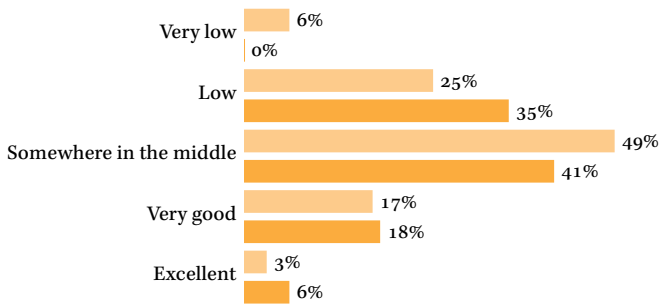


FIGURE 6.6 Self-Assessed Political Knowledge, Pre-Test and Post-Test Sample (light – pre-test, dark – post-test)

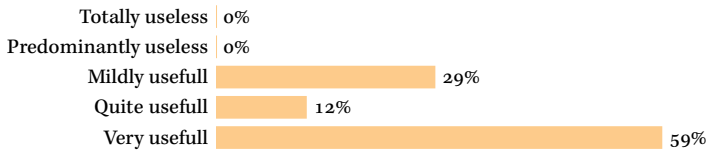


FIGURE 6.7 Perceived Usefulness of the EWA Activities, Only Post-Test Sample

pressed significantly higher agreement with the statement that politics is a dirty business ($M_{pre-test} = 2.69$; $M_{post-test} = 3.59$). Additionally, some of the gender stereotypes were significantly more present in the post-test group. This includes increased agreement with the statements that men are generally better suited to be political leaders than women and that children are likely to suffer if their mother is employed and holds a political function. There were some instances of seemingly positive effects from the EWA activities. Although the mean differences were not statistically significant, more detailed analyses suggest that these effects are at least potentially relevant and interesting.

According to the results in Figure 6.6, the share of women rating their political knowledge as very good or excellent increased from 20% to 24%. Additionally, while 6% of women in the pre-test group assessed their political knowledge as very low, there were no such cases in the post-test group.

The third and very important finding is more positive regarding the effectiveness of the interventions. Our results show that respondents in the post-test group generally found the EWA activities very useful ($M_{post-test} = 4.29$, $SD = 0.92$).

As evident from Figure 6.7, none of the respondents considered the

interventions to be predominantly or totally useless. Conversely, nearly 60% of respondents rated the EWA activities as very useful.

In conclusion, we must acknowledge that the intervention results did not meet expectations. Most indicators of political interest and engagement showed no significant change after the interventions, and those that did change significantly did so negatively. Women in the post-test group reported lower levels of political interest and engagement and, in some cases, even higher levels of gender stereotypes related to politics.

These findings can be partially attributed to sociodemographic differences between the two samples. The fact that the post-test sample consisted of older and more educated women likely influenced the results. However, additional analyses limited to women aged 25 or older and those with tertiary education did not yield significantly different outcomes.

It is important to note that all participants in the post-test group evaluated the EWA activities positively, with the majority opting for the highest possible grade. This indicates that the quality of activities was more than acceptable and is not the reason for the undesired differences between the pre-test and post-test groups.

We believe the real reason is that political engagement and interest are influenced by a complex set of determinants, which cannot be easily altered by a few workshops or similar activities. Achieving higher gender equality in politics may be better accomplished through other policy measures discussed in the introduction of this chapter.

Discussion and Conclusion

This chapter provides a comprehensive examination of the EWA project's interventions aimed at promoting political engagement among young women and addressing gender stereotypes in Slovenia. The study uses a combination of educational programs, workshops, and online tools to evaluate these interventions' efficacy through a pre-test-post-test design involving 340 high school students and 21 young women.

Key findings regarding the impact of the interventive activities on the population of high-school students could be summarised in the following points:

1. Most of the statistically significant results indicate lower political

engagement and an increased presence of gender stereotypes in politics.

2. EWA interventive activities were generally well received, particularly among participating girls, which were the main target group of the intervention.
3. The political efficacy of both girls and boys has increased significantly, which is one of the crucial indicators for long-term political engagement.

With regards to the populations of participating young women, key findings of a current study could be summarized as follows:

1. Somewhat surprisingly, most indicators of political interest and engagement show no significant change or even a negative change after the interventions, which could be at least partially attributed to sociodemographic differences between the two samples.
2. All participants in the post-test group evaluated the EWA activities positively, with the majority opting for the highest possible grade, indicating that the quality of activities was extremely acceptable.
3. There is a notable increase in the share of women rating their political knowledge as very good or excellent.
4. There is a notable predominance of positive perceptions regarding the effectiveness of the interventions, with respondents in the post-test group generally perceiving the EWA activities as very useful.

While our findings largely correspond with positive reports from other initiatives and programs (Fawcett, 2019; CLGF, 2021), these findings must be put into a broader perspective. Firstly, the alignment of positive results reported by the Fawcett Society and CLGF with the results of our study can undoubtedly be attributed to the effectiveness of (1) specific content (e.g. gender mainstreaming) and (2) specific interventive approaches (e.g. mentoring) indicating the strong demand for these interventions. Secondly, our results showing no or even a negative impact should also be considered, partly with regard to the design of the EWA project and partly with regard to the nature of the problem of political and civic engagement among women. Unlike other projects and initiatives, EWA is the only project based on a quasi-experimental,

enabling the detection of both negative and positive impacts of inter-ventive activities. Therefore, it is most likely that this approach enabled us to detect these results, while elsewhere, these findings remained undetected due to different methodology. Lastly, results showing no or even a negative impact could be attributed to the nature of the issue, namely young women's political and civic engagement. There is a general consensus that interventions in this sphere persist as notoriously difficult, and our results show that some elements of the intervention produce positive results while others fail. This indicates that there is no one-size-fits-all solution. We believe the actual reason lies in the fact that political engagement and interest are shaped by a complex array of factors that cannot be easily modified by a few workshops or similar initiatives. Thus, achieving greater gender equality in politics may be more effectively attained through complex policy measures targeting the macro-societal level while offering micro-level interventions to willing individuals.

To sum up, findings from the current study suggest several important conclusions:

1. The interventions, such as educational programs and workshops, significantly enhance young women's self-assessment of their political skills and motivations for civic participation. The provision of targeted knowledge and tools is crucial in fostering these positive changes.
2. Workshops designed for students help sensitise the participants towards gender stereotypes in politics.
3. Mentorship and networking present a crucial approach. Opportunities to pair aspiring women politicians with experienced mentors are instrumental in building confidence and providing practical insights into political careers.

Despite the overall success, the study also comes with several limitations. Firstly, the study's approach has a methodological limitation, particularly regarding the alignment of the samples throughout the project phases. Ensuring that the entire sample of participants from the pre-test took part in both interventions and post-test was a challenge. Improvement in this area would provide better results and insight into mechanisms for improvement. Secondly, there is a limitation regarding the sample size and composition. Modifying the sample by,

for example, including representatives from other populations and diversifying it by including specific sub-samples would enable better fine-tuning of the approach and provide deeper insight into the potential of the interventive activities. Thirdly, there is a limitation of the interventive approach, which included numerous activities targeting several aspects of political and civic participation. Future improvements should avoid the ‘omnibus’ approach and instead include a selection of methods and approaches, recognising that interventive activities have their limitations and that political and civic participation is influenced by a complex system of factors.

The EWA project’s targeted interventions demonstrate significant potential in the political empowerment of young women and the reduction of gender stereotypes among high school students. By addressing both skill development and societal attitudes, the project sets a precedent for future initiatives aiming to achieve gender equality in political participation. Continued efforts, improved mentorship, inclusive educational programs, and sustained online support are essential for building on this foundation and creating a more equitable political landscape.

References

- Antić Gaber, M. (2002). Women in Politics in Slovenia’s New Democracy: Why so few? In N. Toš & V. Miheljak (Eds.), *Slovenia between continuity and change, 1990-1997: Analyses, documents and data* (pp. 88-102). Edition Sigma.
- Antić Gaber, M. (2019). Slovenia: From socialist legacies to legislative gender quotas. In S. Franceschet, M. L. Krook & N. Tan (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of women’s political rights* (pp. 699–711). Palgrave.
- Antić Gaber, M., & Kovačič, M. (2014). Gender equality in politics: The case of Slovenia. *Journal of Comparative Politics*, 7(2), 45–60.
- Commonwealth Local Government Forum (CLGF). (2021). *A review of mentoring programmes for women’s political advancement and leadership*. https://www.clgf.org.uk/default/assets/File/Publications/reports/Mentoring_for_women.pdf
- European Institute for Gender Equality. (2022). *Slovenia*. <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/countries/slovenia>
- European Institute for Gender Equality. (N.d.). *Gender equality in academia and research – GEAR tool: Slovenia*. https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gear/legislative-policy-backgrounds/slovenia?language_content_entity=en

- European Women's Lobby. (2017, 25 October). *Council of German women*. <https://www.womenlobby.org/Council-of-German-Women>
- Fawcett. (2019, 17 December). *Fawcett launches 'Equal Power,' a coalition to transform women's representation*. <https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/fawcett-leads-ground-breaking-campaign-to-transform-womens-representation>
- Krašovec, A., & Johannsen, L. (2016). Gender quotas in Slovenia: Implementation and effects. *Politics & Gender*, 12(3), 456–482.
- Lukšič, I. (2010). *Gender equality in Slovenia: Achievements and challenges*. Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities.
- Ramet, S. P. (1999). *Gender politics in the Western Balkans: Women and society in Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav successor states*. Penn State University Press.
- Renner, T. (1985). Yugoslav women in politics: Selected issues. *International Political Science Review*, 6(3), 347–354.
- Republic of Slovenia. (2023). *Guidelines for the mainstreaming of gender equality in development cooperation and humanitarian aid of the Republic of Slovenia*. <https://www.gov.si/assets/ministrstva/MZEZ/Dokumenti/stiki-z-javnostmi/Guidelines-for-the-Mainstreaming-of-Gender-Equality-in-Developmen-Cooperation-and-Humanitarian-Aid-of-the-Republic-of-Slovenia.pdf>
- Republic of Slovenia. (2024, 8 March). *Minister Fajon: Women's participation in decision-making is essential for peace*. <https://www.gov.si/en/news/2024-03-08-minister-fajon-womens-participation-in-decision-making-is-essential-for-peace/>
- United Nations. (2023, 17 February). *Experts of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women commend Slovenia on women's political and economic participation, ask about Roma women and the representation of girls in science subjects*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/02/experts-committee-elimination-discrimination-against-women-commend-slovenia-womens>

Chapter Seven

Women, Politics and the Gulf Cooperation Council States: Emerging Trends

Radhika Lakshminarayanan

Independent Researcher, Kuwait
radlax123@gmail.com

Emanating from tribal and nomadic antecedents with patriarchal and patrilineal socio-cultural patterns, the interests and aspirations of Arab women have primarily remained sidelined. In recent years, considerable transformations have taken place in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states as more women enter the workforce, participate in public life, and engage in political processes. However, many factors challenge the holistic empowerment of women, particularly in their attempts at political advocacy and leadership. This paper analyses the emerging trends in women's political participation and leadership in the GCC states. The author concludes that governmental policies and proactive laws have resulted in some influential women attaining political positions. However, this is largely a liberal façade to appease Western media and garner financial investments for regional economic and infrastructural development. Therefore, real transformation towards women's political leadership and participation at the grassroots level has remained slow and evasive.

Keywords: patriarchy, gender, arabian gulf, empowerment, leadership

Introduction

Until the early 20th century, women in the Arabian Gulf region, despite its patriarchal societal norms, were known for their self-reliance, hard work and decision-making abilities, especially since most menfolk were away at sea for long periods, pursuing a livelihood through fishing, pearl diving or trading. However, with the discovery of oil in the region, these states emerged as major producers and exporters of fossil fuels, rendering them dependent on oil incomes and expatriate labour. This facilitated rapid industrial growth, infrastructural development, and a 'rags to riches' socio-economic transformation in the region. Oil development ended sea travel-related jobs for men, and wom-

en became relegated to comfortable private spaces, leading a life of self-indulgence as expatriate domestic helpers catered to all their needs. However, by the 21st century, the negative impacts of complete dependence on a single resource income became evident, and these states now seek to focus on economic diversification by branding themselves as business and tourism-friendly hubs for banking, logistics, and IT facilities that are attractive for foreign investments and collaboration. Many policy changes have been forthcoming in recent years, including 'state-sponsored feminism,' which encourages women to study and work, even as governments seek to nationalise the workforce and reduce dependence on expatriate labour. As a result, women in the region now have better access to education and career opportunities. Moreover, they are more aware of their personal rights, encouraging them to resist traditional patriarchal societal norms and clamour for political participation and leadership.

The Arabian Gulf region consists of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, including UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, and Bahrain. These states emerged from nomadic and tribal antecedents that determined their political structures. The GCC states have varying political systems; some have parliamentary institutions (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman) and written constitutions (Kuwait). However, none of them can be considered a liberal democracy in the Western sense, as executive powers are retained by a ruling dynastic head called 'Shaikh' or 'Emir,' and political power remains concentrated in the hands of ruling family members. Even as these states modernised with distinct civil, commercial, and penal codes, they have been unable to break free completely from Shariah-based norms that uphold the position of the father over children, husband over wife and family over the individual (Al-Ghanim, 2012). This supports the societal norm that women have the sole responsibility for childbearing and child-rearing as well as related duties and role expectations within domestic spheres. Further, the existence of male-based kinship structures and networks within society often reinforces informal and customary rules (Jayachandran, 2021) that sustain patriarchy, gender inequality, and women's subordination based on norms of patrilineal descent, patrifocal residence, and gender stratification (Charrad, 2011; Alwedini, 2017). Thus, the notion of citizenship remains gendered as political processes tied women's rights and benefits to their roles as a wife or daughter, rendering them dependent and second-class citizens within their own coun-

try (Rizzo et al., 2002; Abbott, 2017). Traditional patriarchal structures, gender bias cultural norms, societal expectations, and religious interpretations prevalent in GCC societies remain barriers to women's political empowerment (Sayigh, 1981; Abdalla, 1996; Gharaibeh, 2015; Arar, 2019; Said-Foqahaa & Maziad, 2011).

Key Factors Impacting Women's Political Participation

Gender roles and representations in the region have multiple, often contradictory contexts and complexities. Narratives on Arab women often negate their resourcefulness and agency in individual and collective capacities (Sukarieh, 2015), succumbing to stereotypical depictions as ostensibly 'traditional' and 'oppressed,' often veiled and restrained to the inner spaces of their homes. While women partake in decision-making within families, the intrinsic separation of family and polity renders them subordinate in public spheres, with political leadership largely viewed as a male bastion.

In recent decades, women's education throughout the GCC has become accessible and is no longer a prerogative of royal and elite women. Many female students seek university education; in most universities, female students outnumber and outperform male students (Ashour, 2020). Today, these states are seeking economic diversification by prioritising the employment of the local population (e.g. Kuwaitization, Bahrainisation, Emiratization, Omanization, Saudization, Qatarization). This process can only succeed when more females are employed within the Indigenous workforce than at present, as seen in Table 7.1. However, despite high female literacy levels in these states, social attitudes still prevent women from pursuing certain jobs. Many women prefer government jobs over the private sector due to better benefits, including favourable work hours and generous maternity leave.

Another critical factor is that within the GCC nations, ultimate political power rests exclusively with the Executive Head of state. This po-

TABLE 7.1 GCC Labour Force Participation by Gender in 2023

Gender	Kuwait	UAE	Oman	Qatar	Saudi Arabia	Bahrain
Male	85.9	93.1	88.4	96.6	79.9	87.1
Female	47.6	55.4	32.0	64.1	34.5	44.1

NOTES Based on data from World Bank Gender Data (<https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/economies>). In percent.

sition derives from royal hereditary leadership rather than an elected mandate. Representative political institutions include Shura advisory councils, consultative and appointed (e.g. Qatar, Saudi Arabia), and a few quasi-elected parliaments (e.g. Bahrain, UAE, Kuwait, Oman).

Women in the region have been able to participate in political bodies mainly through state-sponsored feminism, which signifies the specification of gender-based quotas in institutions, the nomination of women to executive and ministerial positions, and advocacy for women-centric legislation. This approach strategically instrumentalises feminism for governmental legitimisation and stability, a practice often criticised as ‘gender washing.’ This concept lent some legitimacy to the limited representative institutions in these states and enabled them to counterbalance fundamentalist and conservative Islamist elements. Women political leaders in the region mainly came from royal or wealthy elite families. Political appointments were guided by close familial connections, perhaps because these appointments might be reluctant to challenge basic socio-political structures. Notable among them are Sheikha Lubna Bint Khalid Al Qasimi (Minister for Tolerance, UAE), Sheikha Mai Bint Mohammed Al Khalifa (Information Minister, Bahrain), and Princess Reema bint Bandar Al Saud (Ambassador of Saudi Arabia to USA). A few highly educated women from non-royal and non-influential families, particularly from urban metropolitan areas, have also emerged into leadership positions (Abdulkadir & Muller, 2019, p. 188). However, they remain marginalised and sidelined from influential political committees due to power dynamics and stereotyping within legislatures that use their lack of experience and expertise in political affairs as an excuse (Shalaby & Eliman, 2020). A few rare exceptions include the appointment in Kuwait of Masooma Mubarak in 2005 as the first female cabinet minister in the GCC, marking a significant deviation from the monopoly of royal women and the reservation of ‘soft roles’ and unimportant positions to women. Since then, although the presence of women in political roles in the region has increased, their inclusion has been slow and negligible, as seen in Table 7.2.

From the above, we can observe the limited presence of women in politics and the absence of women as head of state, speaker, or deputy speaker in the region in 2023. The number of women in cabinet positions remains marginal in most states and is non-existent in Saudi Arabia. Further, in the Upper or Single house of parliament (as appli-

TABLE 7.2 Women in Politics across the GCC in 2023

Item	Bahrain	Qatar	UAE	Oman	Kuwait	Saudi Arabia
Women Head of State/Speakers or Deputy Speakers	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil	Nil
Women Cabinet Ministers	5/23 (21.7)	3/16 (18.8)	3/17 (17.6)	3/20 (15.0)	2/15 (13.3)	0/23 (0.0)
Women in Parliament (Lower/Single House)	8/40 (20.0)	2/45 (4.4)	20/40 (50.0)	2/86 (2.3)	4/64 (6.3)	30/151 (19.9)
Women in Parliament (Upper House)	10/40 (25.0)	NA	NA	15/85 (17.7)	NA	NA

NOTES Based on data from UN Women (2023). Percentages in parentheses.

cable), the UAE is the only state with 50% representation, while Qatar and Oman have less than 5%.

While state feminism has been instrumental in advancing some capable women to leadership roles and showcasing them as model citizens, the common perception of women leaders continues to endorse sexist stereotypes. Arab regimes promote a particular ideal of behaviour, values, and dress that conforms to traditional boundaries of social morality and Islamic culture. This often exalts a woman's domestic role as mother, homemaker, and caregiver while endorsing the man as the primary breadwinner in the family, despite women contributing effectively to the family income (Al-Mutawa, 2020). Additionally, the daily lives of ordinary women in the GCC remain unaffected, as a large percentage still do not exercise their voting rights. State feminism thus impacts through few policy initiatives, but apart from symbolic representation, it has failed to address social structures and regressive practices that continue to marginalise women (Geha & Karam, 2021; El-Husseini, 2023). What is needed is more inclusive feminism that is driven from the grassroots level and not merely top-down token representation delineated by male politicians whose approach is mainly male-centric.

Political Participation of Women in the GCC

In the GCC, despite considerable limitations, women's rights activists and civil society organisations have played a crucial role in advocating for gender equality and women's empowerment by raising awareness, mobilising support, and pushing for policy changes that benefit wom-

en in politics and other spheres of society. The Arab Spring revolts after 2010 also impacted the GCC region, but their manifestations varied in each country; some were more easily quelled, as in Kuwait and Oman, while others were more robust and violent, like in Bahrain. In Saudi Arabia, voices for reform of women's status came from Saudi women living abroad (Milmo, 2012), while in the Emirates, their cause was supported by reform by young political leaders (Abdullah, 2012). Although change is evident, it has remained limited to a few states more than others due to better policy-making and implementation.

Oman was the first in the region to grant women the right to vote in 1994; however, only in 2003 did two women enter the parliament. However, few women have entered politics (Al-Lamki, 2017) as tribalism and conservative ideological beliefs have hindered women's representation despite education and high income (Al Subhi & Smith, 2019). Nevertheless, the presence of women in politics is among the lowest in the region.

In Bahrain, women were first appointed to the Shura advisory council in 2000 and have participated in parliamentary elections since 2002, following a royal decree granting women full political rights. In 2010, Laitifa Al Qaoud became the first woman Member of Parliament. Since then, many women have been appointed to ministerial positions and other high-level governmental roles. The Bahraini government has implemented initiatives to promote women's political participation through awareness campaigns and capacity-building programs. However, constant crackdowns on political freedoms have impacted women candidates more, as they are excluded from influential Islamist parties and are forced to contest elections as independent candidates without any access to funding or political expertise.

Seeking to establish the image of a global society, the UAE has consistently tried to promote gender equality and women's empowerment and protect against gender discrimination. Since 2006, women have been able to vote and run for office in the Federal National Council (parliament). In 2015, a federal-level entity, the UAE Gender Balance Council, was established to reduce the gender gap. Amal Al Qubaisi was the first woman in the GCC to be elected as speaker of a national council. Further, in 2019, the UAE Cabinet approved a decision ensuring women's representation in the parliament, and women now make up about 50% of the membership. However, although some women have obtained positions within state institutions, they have not been

represented in local governments, suggesting that women's leadership is not yet accepted within society (Abdulkadir & Muller, 2020, p. 8; Levchenko, 2022).

In Kuwait, female participation had been on the modernisation agenda since the 1980s (Al Najar, 2000); however, Kuwaiti women gained the right to vote and run for office only in 2005. In the 2009 parliamentary elections, women participated as candidates for the first time and four women were elected to the National Assembly. Deeply gendered structural inequalities and sexism have created impediments to women carrying out election campaigns, inhibiting them from securing funding and building networks, as well as the hierarchies and privileges that derive from citizenship status and the socio-economic structures (Kaya, 2021). The present cabinet, albeit nominated, includes two women holding important portfolios: Noura Al Mashaan as Minister of Public Works and Municipality affairs and Amthal Al-Huwaila as Minister of Social Affairs and Labour.

In Qatar, women were enfranchised in 1999; however, only in 2003 were the first women appointed to the central, and Sheikha Ahmed A-Mahmoud became the first female Minister of Education. In 2017, four women were appointed to the Shura (Advisory) Council, marking a significant step towards women's participation in decision-making processes.

Of all the GCC states, Saudi Arabia has been perceived as a country where women are weak and inferior to men and often subject to many restrictions on their rights and freedoms. Until 1960, when the first school for girls was established, women were still confined to their homes, bound by traditional norms. However, by the early 1980s, young women were graduating from universities. Emanating from its status as the religious centre of the Islamic world, Saudi Arabia had a relatively stricter application of Shariah laws and practices, particularly relating to women. Saudi women struggled between ultra-conservative socio-cultural norms and value systems such as wearing the veil (Abaya) and gender segregation, which the country's Committee enforced for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (Mutawa), a 'religious police of men.' By the 21st century, some changes emerged, as women were allowed to vote and run as candidates in municipal elections. Since 2013, Saudi Arabia has been the only country in the region with a 20% quota for women in the kingdom's Shura Council.

Since Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman assumed charge in 2017,

he has envisioned the nation as an economic and political powerhouse. He has unleashed more liberal reforms relating to women's empowerment, as stated in his Saudi Vision 2030. A core tenet of Vision 2030 has been the recognition that the full potential of its workforce can only be reached with the engagement of women, who form half its population. New reforms have enabled Saudi women to drive, attend sports events and concerts alongside men, and obtain passports without the approval of a male guardian. However, women still need the consent of their male guardians to enter into a valid marriage contract. However, conventional gender roles expect women to obey their husbands, and new laws fail to protect women from domestic violence, exploitation, and marital rape, which Saudi law does not criminalise. While these recent legislative reforms have created opportunities for women to engage more actively in political processes, progress has been disappointing and points to attitudinal and societal impediments to women's political participation.

Challenges and Constraints

Despite many advancements, women in the region still face barriers to full political participation and leadership as they remain hindered by cultural norms, traditional gender roles, societal expectations, and institutional constraints. Progressive legislation promoting gender equality and empowering women in various fields, including politics, is being addressed. However, the implementation and enforcement of these laws still face obstacles, particularly from conservative voices that resist women's involvement in politics and call for an Islamic resurgence which emphasises faith and the utilisation of Islam as a political ideology. A review of the *Global Gender Gap Report (2023)* highlights the grave disparities and significant gaps in women's empowerment across the region (Table 7.3). The above indicates that the UAE has successfully reduced the gender gap, demonstrating how strategic state policies can enable a more inclusive and equitable society. In terms of economic participation of women, Kuwait scored the highest while Saudi Arabia and Qatar showed the lowest. Kuwait has the highest parity in education, and Oman has the lowest. Despite higher educational parity, Qatar indicated the lowest parity in women's health care, a strange anomaly as Qatar also has one of the highest GDP per capita in the world. Most nations indicated lower parity in political participation except for the UAE.

TABLE 7.3 Ranking of GCC states by Global Gender Gap (on a scale of 1–146)

Item	UAE	Bahrain	Kuwait	Saudi Arabia	Qatar	Oman
Overall ranking	71	113	120	131	133	139
Economic participation	128	122	118	130	132	135
Education	86	57	51	87	93	113
Health care/survival	119	136	87	114	143	129
Political participation	35	99	137	131	133	140

NOTES Based on data from World Economic Forum (2023).

Social and cultural stereotypes often portray women as being less capable and discourage them from pursuing political careers. The lack of political training, awareness, experience, and financial backing limits their opportunities in political spheres. A study in Kuwait concluded that women voters were largely influenced in their voting choices by their husbands, fathers, or brothers due to ignorance of political matters. This validates that understanding the mechanisms of the political and legal system, as well as knowledge of laws and women's issues, are necessary to enable women to exercise their franchise effectively and independently. A pioneering example is the 'Empower Kuwaiti Women in Politics' program, a year-long training program to prepare women to run for elected office and assist in their political campaigns.

Addressing factors supporting women's advancement in politics, Muller and Camia (2023) found that positive media portrayals, especially domestic news, play a crucial role in legitimising women's empowerment. Sectarianism, popular uprisings, and authoritarianism have also impacted women's position in electoral politics, as in the case of Bahrain (Karolak, 2021). Further, Dauletova et al. (2022) suggest that political awareness among citizens was a crucial intervention for changing public opinion in support of the political empowerment of women. Similarly, Lari et al. (2022) suggest that interventions through social awareness programs and education may improve the public's perceptions regarding the inclusion of women in power and their presence in political leadership roles.

Official and unofficial factors determine women's participation in politics. Official factors include governmental and legislative processes and policies; unofficial ones are evident in social and cultural norms. Narrow representations of Shariah law and conservative interpreta-

tions by religious bigots also have an impact. Society does not yet trust the political leadership of women. Women running for office are often exposed to sexist prejudices, criticism, and public defamation. Even women prefer male candidates and vote based on their husbands, fathers, or brothers' leanings. Additionally, patriarchal culture and tribalism are important factors restraining women. In many states, tribalism relates to the purchasing power of votes, and women do not have access to such resources. Male-dominated societies tend to marginalise women and restrain them to their private spaces. Thus, balancing public and political roles while consistently rising to familial demands as mothers, wives, and daughters limits the time and ability of women to engage in active public life.

Conclusion

Although there has been consistent progress in women's political participation in the GCC region, the road to achieving full rights, equality, and adequate representation for political power remains elusive. Emerging trends in the GCC indicate that a few women are making their way into typically male-dominated political institutions. Apart from women from elite and royal families, there is greater activism among educated women, mainly from urban areas. However, women from tribal backgrounds, especially from rural areas, remain unrepresented. State feminism and state-sponsored initiatives are mainly responsible for the advent of women into political leadership. However, conservative mindsets still exist. Education and literacy are necessary steps to encourage women to gain knowledge and self-confidence. Nevertheless, political participation and leadership require developing skills and knowledge of political processes, activism, and governmental support through stringent policy reform and funding for organisations that promote women's rights and participation. Women's advocacy groups and civil society organisations advocate for gender equality and women's political empowerment in the GCC through awareness-raising campaigns. Additionally, these organisations provide support and resources for women entering politics. International organisations and donor agencies also contribute funding and technical assistance to promote gender inclusivity. Yet, these states have witnessed only cosmetic and superficial attempts at 'gender washing' in reaction to Western pressure and Western media reporting. This suggests that women's political empowerment in the region remains

largely symbolic, a façade aimed at increasing the national economy's international business competitiveness and development, making the nation's investment profile more attractive to normative powers.

Politics in the GCC is complex, characterised by an existential interplay between social mores, gender stereotypes, religious factionalism, tribal antecedents, and hierarchical hereditary executive leadership. These factors collectively resist more vibrant and inclusive political engagement. While governments grapple to appease diverse constituencies of their electorate, including tribal networks, religious fundamentalists, and the liberals, there is a crucial need for transformation in public perception of women and women-centric laws. Through greater political awareness as voters and candidates, women can make more informed decisions regarding political choices that most represent their interests. If the region, in its entirety, has to reach its full potential in terms of gender parity, women's political empowerment is fundamental. Bringing more women into political roles will present multiple perspectives on decision-making and help create and sustain a more just and equitable society for all. Further, to succeed, such change has to be on their terms within their cultural and religious identity and contexts and cannot be judged based on preconceived Western stereotypes. Continued advocacy, legislative reforms, and societal shifts are essential for further advancing women's political participation and leadership. This will facilitate more women-centric policymaking and focus on broader issues of human rights, social justice, and sustainable development, which can create more resilient and robust states in the region.

References

- Abbott, P. (2017). *Gender equality and Mena women's empowerment in the aftermath of the 2011 Arab uprisings* (Working Paper Series). Arab Transformations Project. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep14099>
- Abdalla, I. A. (1996). Attitudes towards women in the Arabian Gulf region. *Women in Management Review*, 1(1), 29–39.
- Abdulkadir, R., & Muller, H. (2019). Between leadership and kinship: Women empowerment in the GCC countries. In I. Kubbe & A. Varraich (Eds.), *Corruption and informal practices in the Middle East and North Africa* (pp. 188–206). Routledge.
- Abdulkadir, R., & Muller, H. (2020). The politics of women empowerment: Female leaders in the UAE. *Hawwa*, 18(1), 8–30.

- Abdullah, A. (2012). *Repercussions of the Arab Spring on GCC States*. Arab Center for Research & Policy Studies. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep12637>
- Al-Ghanim, K. (2012). The hierarchy of authority based on kinship, age, and gender in the extended family in the Arab Gulf States. *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, 3, 329–356.
- Al-Lamki, A. (2007). Feminising leadership in Arab societies: The perspectives of Omani female leaders. *Women in Management Review*, 22(1), 49–67.
- Al-Mutawa, R. (2020). I want to be a leader, but men are better than women in leadership positions: State feminism and legitimizing myths in the United Arab Emirates. *Hawwa*, 18(1) 31–50.
- Al Najjar, G. (2000). The challenges facing Kuwaiti democracy. *Middle East Journal* 54(2), 242–258.
- Al Subhi, A. K., & Smith, A. E. (2019). Electing women to new Arab assemblies: The roles of gender ideology, Islam, and tribalism in Oman. *International Political Science Review*, 40(1), 90–107.
- Alwedini, J. (2017). Bargaining with patriarchy: Women's subject choices and patriarchal marriage norms. *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies*, 5(2), 11–21.
- Arar, K. H. (2019). The challenges involved when Arab women forge a path to educational leadership: Context, personal cost, and coping. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 47(5), 749–765.
- Ashour, S. (2020). The reverse gender divide in the United Arab Emirates: Factors driving 'him' away from higher education. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, 12(5), 1079–1094.
- Charrad, M. M. (2011). Gender in the Middle East: Islam, state, agency. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37, 417–437.
- Dauletova, V., Hassan, H., & Zainab Hussain, Y. (2022). Political empowerment of women and the mediating role of political awareness: The case of Oman. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 23(1),
- El-Husseini, R. (2023, 16 June). *Women's rights and 'State Feminism' in the Arab World*. Arab Center Washington D.C. <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/womens-rights-and-state-feminism-in-the-arab-world/>
- Geha, C., & Karam, C. (2021). Whose feminism? Gender-inclusive policymaking in the Arab Middle East and North Africa. *SAIS Review of International Affairs*, 41(1) 23–31.
- Gharaibeh, F. M. A. (2015). An exploration of the evolution of women's roles in societies of the Gulf Cooperation Council. *Social Development Issues*, 37(3), 22–44.

- Jayachandran, S. (2021). Social norms as a barrier to women's employment in developing countries. *IMF Economic Review*, 69(3), 576–595.
- Karolak, M. (2021). Authoritarian upgrading and the 'Pink Wave' Bahraini women in electoral politics. *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, 14(3), 79–104.
- Kaya, Z. (2021). *Women's electoral participation in Kuwait* (LSE Middle East Centre Kuwait Programme Paper Series No. 11). LSE Middle East Centre. <https://eprints.lse.ac.uk/110877>
- Lari, N., Al-Ansari, M., & El-Maghraby, E. (2022). Challenging gender norms: Women's leadership, political authority, and autonomy. *Gender in Management: An International Journal*, 37(4), 476–493.
- Levchenko, Y. (2022). Women's participation in politics and government: The experience of the United Arab Emirates and China. *Scientific Journal of Polonia University*, 48(5), 112–117.
- Milmo, C. (2012, 3 January). The action princess calling for reform in Saudi Arabia independent news services. *Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/news/the-acton-princess-calling-for-reform-in-saudi-arabia-6284225.html>
- Muller, H., & Camia, C. (2023). Between uniformity and polarization: Women's empowerment in the public press of GCC states. *Politics & Gender*, 19(1), 166–194.
- Rizzo, H., Meyer, K., & Ali, Y. (2002). Women's political rights: Islam, status and networks in Kuwait. *Sociology*, 36(3), 639–662.
- Said-Foqahaa, N., & Maziad, M. (2011). Arab women: Duality of deprivation in decision-making under patriarchal authority. *Hawwa*, 9(1–2), 234–272.
- Sayigh, R. (1981). Roles and functions of Arab women: A reappraisal. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 3(3), 258–274.
- Shalaby, M. M. & Elimam, L. (2020). Women in legislative committees in Arab parliaments. *Comparative Politics*, 53(1), 139–167.
- Sukarieh, M. (2015). The first lady phenomenon: Elites, states, and the contradictory politics of women's empowerment in the neoliberal Arab world. *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 35(3), 575–587.
- UN Women. (2023). *Women in politics: 2023* <https://www.ipu.org/file/16336/download>
- World Economic Forum. (2023). *Global gender gap report*. <http://reports.weforum.org/globalgender-gap-report-2023>

Chapter Eight

Iron Ladies: Evaluating the Struggle Against Hegemony for Political Empowerment of Women in India

Dolly Thomas

Stella Maris College, India
dollythomas@stellamariscollege.edu.in

Cinthia Jude

Stella Maris College, India
cinthiajude@stellamariscollege.edu.in

The journey of political empowerment of women in India has been extended, drawn out and arduous. Women participated in large numbers during the freedom struggle. However, they retreated from public life and remained forgotten in the larger frame of governance post-independence. The skewed demographic reports and population control needs again brought the women's question to the fore. The efforts put in by women's organisations and activists, as well as the impact of liberal education, have all positively impacted women's emancipation. The reservation of seats in local self-governance has been a game changer of sorts. In 18 states, women represent more than 50% of the population. For representation in the Parliament and State Legislatures, it took 27 years to be accepted finally. The law of women's reservation gets implemented after the next census. India has several Iron ladies who have left a lasting legacy. In a male-dominated sphere, they have prevailed and made a mark.

Keywords: iron ladies, women's question, patriarchy, political empowerment, women's organisations, gender, women's reservation

Introduction

The struggle against patriarchal hegemony has been ongoing in India for centuries. Women are fenced in by a so-called 'family culture.' Under this culture of patriarchal submission, a woman is forced to accept an inferior position accorded to her since childhood. Women are required to remain within the social boundaries dictated by culture and customs. While these hegemonic practices have eroded to an extent as a result of persistent efforts towards women's emancipation and liberal

education, for women in India, there still is the unwritten rule to conform to societal expectations of marriage and behaviour.

History of Political Empowerment of Women in India

The political empowerment of women in India has been a long, arduous road. Several factors have shaped its course, namely social and religious movements, colonialism, the fight for independence, and constitutional changes. The Women's Question was first debated among social reformers of the 19th century. The question was then taken up by nationalists, and more recently, in the contemporary period, the question has engaged all concerned with issues of poverty, development, unemployment, and inequality. During India's colonial period, educated middle-class men realised that traditional customs, especially the treatment of widows, denial of education, and child marriages, were blots on the society, and they were anxious to usher in change (Mazumdar, 2010, pp. 14–16). The woman's question got intertwined mainly with India's national movement. As the freedom struggle evolved into a mass movement, leaders like Gandhi encouraged greater participation of women. During this time, the woman's question transformed into a political issue centred on equality.

The vision of a free Indian nation necessitated addressing the women's issue as a political question. (Mazumdar, 2010). The Indian Constitution granted women the right to education, franchise, entry into political offices, and public services. These reforms remained mainly on paper and failed to transform into reality. In the years after Independence, women's issues were once again relegated to the background, and women retreated from public life. Decades later, new compulsions began to engender renewed attention to the situation of women. These were concerns with demography that confounded legislators in the sixties and the growing issue of unemployment and poverty. Population control was the need of the hour. Women's status, lack of education and employment, and limited roles in the decision-making process were identified as the main stumbling blocks (Sinha, 1998, p. 12). The woman's question came to the fore again in the 1970s, when at the behest of the United Nations, the Ministry of Education and Social Welfare appointed the Committee on Status of Women in India (CSWI) in 1971, which was given the responsibility to study the current status of Indian women and submit a detailed report to the International Women's Year 1975 (Mazumdar, 2010, pp. 3–5).

The Committee found that women had faced increasing marginalisation in society and the economy. The report indicated a declining sex ratio, as well as a growing disparity in life expectancy, but also a significant gap in access to literacy, livelihood, and education. The vision as envisaged in the Constitution was far from achieved. The tools of political rights, education and equality in legal matters that would resolve women's issues had remained outside the reach of most women. Even while a minority had benefited from education and political rights, they had made a diminutive impact on weakening the hold of patriarchal subservience (Mazumdar, 2010).

This heightened sense of right and wrong triggered by the Emergency was another propelling factor that spotlighted women. The issue that caught women's ire across the nation was the crimes of violence. These were seen as manifestations of women's marginalisation and devaluation. Women's organisations focused on various issues that came to the fore, and several of them committed to the emancipation of poor rural and urban women. The women's question since the 1990s has no longer been limited to the status of Indian women in the family or the right to equality in society (Alexander et al., 2017, p. 34). This has become a part of the larger question directed towards the change that Indian society was undergoing regarding socio-economic, political, and intellectual perception and the analysis of that process.

In recent years, attempts towards gender equity and enhancement of the role of women in the decision-making processes have ensured the political empowerment of Indian women. Dynamic women have emerged on the political scene. Women in both the federal and state governments occupy important ministerial posts. At the grassroots level, women have also become a part of governance through the Panchayati Raj. Women's involvement in the political process is not just visible but downright impactful. The women's question can no longer be ignored in India, and successive governments have focused on women-centric schemes.

Participation of women in politics remained relatively insignificant even four decades after independence. The realisation dawned that women constituted yet another disadvantaged group, and they needed preferential consideration in political representation. The 73rd and 74th amendments to the Constitution, which came into force in 1993, mandated 33% reservation for women in Panchayati Raj institutions (PRI) and urban local bodies (Singh, 2004, p. 67). With this very sig-

nificant constitutional amendment, women could enter the sphere of governance. Women's participation, which had been pegged at 4–5% earlier, rose to 25 to 40%. According to the governmental data, as of September 2021, there are at least 18 states where the percentage of women in PRI is more than 50%.

An unprecedented amount of women's representation in local governance is not just a quantitative change. However, reports speak of several success stories where women's participation has resulted in improved local governance. However, the system has several inherent weaknesses. Studies have revealed that women were often not informed or invited to the meetings of the Gram Sabha. Some women were hesitant about meeting because of the presence of village elders or were reluctant to attend meetings as it would entail a loss of the day's wages or neglect of household chores. Women who were elected president were often illiterate and from better-off families who did not need to work outside their homes. The only reason to contest elections was the pressure their husband or father-in-law put on them. Their families and communities also drove their decisions (Shashi & Sahni, 2009, pp. 29–33).

The gender composition of the Lok Sabha has been disappointing. In India's first Lok Sabha, women made up 4.41% of the strength. It crossed 10% in 2009 and peaked at 14.36% in 2019. In the recent elections of 2024, the percentage has dipped to 13.63%. Had the growth been linear, India would have had around 30% women members of parliament (MP). Any casual observer can see that the numbers are disproportionate to the population of women and that of women's political aspirations. India lags behind the global average of 26.5%. In Central and South Asian countries, the average representation of women is 19%. South Africa has 46% of women MPs; the United Kingdom has 35% of women MPs, and the United States of America has 29% of women MPs.

The bill to reserve 33% of seats in the Parliament was first introduced in 1996. The Indian Parliament that year had 7.37% women. Patriarchs claimed that India did not have 'enough capable women' to fill the reservation. In 2021, the National Federation of Indian Women filed a PIL. The government failed to respond for two years, and only after being rebuked by the Supreme Court did it take up the matter in the Parliament. Twenty-seven years after the idea was mooted, the Women's Reservation Bill was finally passed in the Parliament in September 2023. This legislation will be enforced after the next census. Ideas have

been mooted to extend it to the Upper House and the reservation for women within political parties.

An evaluation of the voter turnout in the elections of 2024 indicated that women's turnout outpaced that of men in 19 out of the 36 states and union territories (Jain, 2024). However, at the national level, men had a slightly higher turnout rate of 65.8% than women's 65.7%. Out of 8,360 candidates who contested elections this year, less than 10% were women. According to the data, 797 women contested the elections in 2024 (Sengupta, 2024).

Seventy-four women have been elected members of Parliament. Some of them are veteran politicians, and 41% (i.e., 30) have been Lok Sabha members earlier. The more significant percentage, i.e., 43, are first-time MPs, which indicates the growing aspirations of Indian women. 16% of the 74 are below the age of 40. Some of the women elected are very young. Priya Saroj of the Samajwadi Party and Shambhavi Choudhury of the BJP are 25 years old, and Iqra Choudhury of the Samajwadi Party is 29 years old. The average age of the women MPs is 50, which is lower than that of men, which stands at 56.78. Again, this indicates that younger women want a say in the nation's direction of growth.

Despite advancements, patriarchal views, violence against women, restricted access to various resources, education, and deeply ingrained societal norms are just a few of the obstacles that Indian women still confront on their path to political empowerment. These difficulties are exacerbated by intersectional inequality based on aspects of caste, religion, class, and ethnicity. In India, empowering women for politics is complex and calls for coordinated efforts by the government, major political parties, civil society, and the community. Even though tremendous progress has been accomplished, ongoing efforts are required to remove any remaining obstacles and guarantee gender parity in political representation and decision-making.

Iron Ladies: Historical Context

The phrase 'iron ladies' is frequently used to characterise influential and well-known women in politics, especially when they defy gender stereotypes and establish their dominance in areas that men typically control. Gender relations in India have a complicated past, with firmly ingrained patriarchal standards. Despite this, India has produced some amazing women politicians who have broken prejudices

and motivated others to become empowered. In addition to societal expectations, discrimination, and violence, women in the Indian political scenario face several challenges. The political empowerment of Indian women may be impeded by structural obstacles such as restricted access to political networks, economic resources, and education. Strong leadership traits like tenacity, grit, and boldness are frequently displayed by Iron Ladies in Indian politics (Jharta, 1996, p. 20). They manoeuvre through a political environment dominated by men, frequently using charm, savvy alliances, and negotiation abilities to further their goals.

Women leaders in India have led the way in several policy measures that seek to improve women's rights, combat gender inequity, and advance social justice. Their impact goes beyond symbolic representation to actual policy results that help women and underrepresented groups. Perceptions of women in politics can be influenced by how Iron Ladies are portrayed in the media and in public discourse. Gender biases and stereotypes may affect how their leadership is viewed. Women are frequently subjected to criticism and scrutiny that their male counterparts may not experience. Aspiring Indian women leaders look up to Iron Ladies as inspiration and role models. Their inspiring tales defy gender stereotypes and encourage more women to pursue political careers, broadening the potential political leaders' pool.

It is critical to acknowledge that intersecting identities, like caste, class, religion, and geography, influence women's experiences in politics (Sinhā, 2000, p. 23). Compared to their wealthier counterparts, Iron Ladies from marginalised communities could encounter more obstacles and difficulties. Women leaders' support from institutions, political parties, and civil society organisations determines how successful they are in gaining political empowerment. In particular, analysing the Iron Ladies' struggle for political hegemony in India entails evaluating the obstacles encountered, the leadership styles demonstrated, the influence of policies, public opinion, and the role played. Even though women have made significant progress in Indian politics, fundamental change in attitudes is still necessary to accomplish true equality as well as empowerment.

Iron Ladies of India

Smt. Indira Gandhi

The first Indian female Prime Minister, Smt. Indira Gandhi had a profound influence on both politics and society. During her time, she ac-

completed a number of noteworthy deeds. In 1966, during political unrest in India, she became Prime Minister and demonstrated strong leadership amid the chaos. In 1969, nationalising large banks was one of Indira Gandhi's primary economic initiatives. Indira Gandhi's government led the Green Revolution to boost agriculture by adopting quality and high-yielding crop varieties, contemporary irrigation techniques, and harmless agricultural fertilisers in the 1960s and 1970s. This programme was essential in turning India from a food-deficit country into an agricultural powerhouse that could feed itself (Duda, 2006, p. 189).

The most important foreign policy accomplishment of Indira Gandhi was India's intervention in the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971. The Indian nuclear programme was initiated by Indira Gandhi, who also laid the foundation for the nation's nuclear capabilities. The programme helped India become a nuclear power and significantly influenced the nation's strategic posture despite facing international condemnation and sanctions.

One of the most contentious moments of Indira Gandhi's presidency was her 1975 declaration of a state of emergency, which suspended civil freedoms and concentrated authority in the hands of the government. Following the Emergency, Indira Gandhi faced defeat in the general elections of 1977 (Bhushan, 2018, pp. 181–194). However, she mounted a political comeback, leading the Congress party to victory in the 1980 elections. Her return to power proved her continued political tenacity and appeal to some sections of the Indian public.

The complicated legacy of Indira Gandhi is still being discussed in India. While she is praised for her strong leadership, contributions to economic growth, and attempts to improve India's standing internationally, her authoritarian inclinations and divisive policies, like the Emergency, have also drawn much criticism (Ertan et al., 2018, p. 125). She is still regarded as the most significant woman in contemporary Indian history for her exceptional accomplishments and enduring influence on Indian politics.

J. Jayalalitha

Jayalalitha, popularly known as *Amma* (a Tamil term meaning Mother), was a well-known Indian politician and actress. She had served several terms as the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, a state in the south. Her charismatic, controversial, and populist political career profoundly affected Tamil Nadu politics and society. Under the guidance of well-

known actor M. G. Ramachandran (MGR), the founder of the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) party, Jayalalitha entered politics in the 1980s. She was adept at navigating the party's inner workings after MGR's death in 1987, emerging as his political heir and ultimately taking over as general secretary. One of the pioneer women in South Indian politics was Jayalalitha. She broke down gender boundaries and encouraged many women to seek leadership positions in public life as the first female Chief Minister (Shukla, 2007, p. 127).

She implemented several laws designed to empower women, including those that supported self-help organisations for economic empowerment and provided women with financial support for marriage. A hallmark of Jayalalitha's time as Chief Minister was her emphasis on populist social programmes meant to reduce poverty and raise the living standards of underprivileged groups. Her government implemented programmes including 'Amma pharmacies,' which provided affordable medications to the underprivileged, and 'Amma canteens,' which provided subsidised food distribution. In Tamil Nadu, Jayalalitha prioritised infrastructure development by allocating funds for initiatives like road networks, bridges, and urban amenities. The quality of education and healthcare services was enhanced, especially in rural regions, by significant investments made in infrastructure for these sectors under Jayalalitha's leadership (Sadik, 2022, p. 232).

Jayalalitha's administration implemented legal changes to enhance governance and battle corruption. Several initiatives were implemented to improve the administration's efficiency and transparency, including creating special courts to handle corruption cases more quickly and deploying online technologies for government services. Jayalalitha is a prominent person in Indian politics because of her lasting appeal to specific sections of the Tamil Nadu voter base and her significant contributions to the welfare and development of the state (Kaṇṇēcaṅ, 1996, p. 5).

Kiran Bedi

Kiran Bedi has had a notable career as the Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry, in addition to her role as an officer in the Indian Police Service (IPS). In 1972, Kiran Bedi became the first female member of the Indian Police Service. As Delhi's Deputy Commissioner of Police (Traffic), she implemented various cutting-edge strategies to enhance traffic control and lessen congestion. By strengthening community policing

and involving locals, she successfully decreased the crime rate in West Delhi during her time as DCP.

As Inspector General of Prisons, she significantly changed Tihar Jail, the largest jail facility in India. Her programmes significantly improved the living conditions and opportunities for rehabilitation of the prisoners by incorporating yoga, meditation, education, and vocational training. She also established the Navjyoti India Foundation, a non-governmental organisation that works to improve the lives of the underprivileged and combat drug consumption (Bedi, 2022, pp. 7–12).

As the Lieutenant Governor of Puducherry (2016–2021), Kiran Bedi concentrated on raising the transparency and efficiency of administration. She ensured that the public could more easily access government services and supported digital governance. Several projects to enhance Puducherry's water conservation and management were started under her direction. This included encouraging rainwater collection, desilting bodies of water, and involving the local community in water conservation initiatives. Making Puducherry water-rich was one of her most essential achievements. The collaborative governance model brought in CSR helps to desilt channels (Bedi, 2023). She tried to upgrade hygienic and medical amenities and spearheaded projects to reduce waste, promote hygienic behaviours, and maintain cleanliness. Bedi launched initiatives to improve educational standards and give young people access to vocational training, emphasising the value of education and skill development. She ensured that government initiatives reached the most disadvantaged segments of society by actively supporting initiatives that targeted the empowerment of women and marginalised populations. In order to improve the general well-being of the community, Bedi promoted projects aimed at getting young people involved in sports and physical activity.

Kiran Bedi's career has been distinguished by her dedication to serving the public, her influence on the many fields in which she has worked, and her setting of high standards for administration and public service.

Mayawati

Mayawati is a well-known Indian politician who has substantially impacted the empowerment of marginalised populations in the state of Uttar Pradesh. Among her supporters, she is affectionately called *Behenji*, a Hindi word meaning Sister. A significant accomplishment in

and of itself is Mayawati's ascent to prominence in Indian politics as a spokesperson for the underprivileged people. Uttar Pradesh, one of India's most populated and powerful states, has had her as its Chief Minister for four different periods. During her term, any Indian state's highest executive post was held by a woman from a marginalised part of society for the first time.

In order to strengthen Dalit support, Mayawati's political strategy frequently employs 'social engineering,' which focuses on forming electoral alliances across caste lines (Bose, 2009). Her political base has grown, and she has won elections by skilfully forming coalitions with other social groupings, such as Brahmins and other non-Dalit castes.

Mayawati carried out several programmes throughout her terms as Chief Minister to further the welfare and self-determination of Dalits and other marginalised groups. These programmes involved the creation of Dalit-specific housing developments, healthcare facilities, and educational institutions. Additionally, she prioritised having Dalits represented in public institutions and government jobs (Bose, 2009, pp. 237–247). Even in the face of criticism and controversy, including accusations of corruption and misappropriation of public funds, Mayawati has shown political tenacity and remained a dominant force in Uttar Pradesh politics for several decades.

Mayawati's distinctive achievements lie in her efforts to empower Dalits and other underprivileged populations, her political perseverance, and her ability to challenge entrenched power structures in Indian politics. Her contributions to social justice and empowerment have had a long-lasting effect on Indian society, notwithstanding the controversies surrounding her legacy.

Mamta Banerjee

Mamata Banerjee, a well-known Indian politician and the architect of the All-India Trinamool Congress (AITC) party, is referred to as Didi, which means elder sister in Hindi. Since taking office in 2011, she has led West Bengal as Chief Minister and has had a significant influence on the political and economic condition of the region. One of Mamata Banerjee's most significant accomplishments was ending West Bengal's 34-year communist domination in 2011. This heralded a new era of government under her direction and was a significant political shift in the state's history (Banerjee & Sengupta, 2012, p. 42).

During her time as Chief Minister, Mamata Banerjee has priori-

tised economic reforms and industrial development in West Bengal. She has also implemented numerous social welfare programmes to reduce unemployment, poverty, and social inequality in West Bengal. Programmes like the *Khadya Sathi* scheme, which offers subsidised food grains to low-income households, and the *Kanyashree* scheme, which promotes girls' education and empowerment, have benefited millions and won international praise. She has been a steadfast supporter of women's empowerment and their rights, proposing various laws and initiatives to promote women's equality and shield women from abuse and exploitation. Her government has prioritised increasing connectivity and accessibility throughout the state to promote economic development and prosperity (Mitra, 2014, p. 12).

Mamata Banerjee has shown political tenacity and sustained her appeal among sections of the West Bengal electorate despite challenges from opposition parties and criticism regarding matters like law and order, political violence, and governance. Her ability to mobilise public support has helped her retain power in the state. The distinctive accomplishments of Mamata Banerjee are seen in her attempts to empower marginalised people in West Bengal, advance economic development, and effect political reform. She is well-known in Indian politics thanks to her grassroots activism, emphasis on social welfare, and leadership style (Mitra, 2014).

Nirmala Sitharaman

Nirmala Sitharaman has served in several critical capacities within the government, most notably as the Minister of Defence and the Minister of Finance. In 2017, Nirmala Sitharaman was named India's first female Minister of Defence 2017. This nomination demonstrated the growing presence of women in senior government roles and broke down gender boundaries in the historically male-dominated defence area.

As the Minister of Finance from 2019 to 2021, Sitharaman led several significant economic reforms to strengthen India's economy. These changes included lowering corporate taxes to encourage investment, enacting the Goods and Services Tax (GST) to simplify indirect taxes, and implementing several initiatives to support small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) and the agriculture industry (Taxmann, 2021, p. 35).

While serving as Finance Minister, Sitharaman was instrumental in developing the government's response to the COVID-19 outbreak and

its economic effects. She unveiled several relief initiatives and economic stimulation plans to assist companies, labourers, and vulnerable groups impacted by the pandemic's lockdowns and economic slowdown (Taxmann, 2021).

As Minister of Defence, Sitharaman concentrated on modernising India's armed forces and bolstering the country's defence capabilities. She promoted increased defence budgets, technical advancements, and strategic alliances to improve India's security position and fend off new security threats. Her diplomatic initiatives have contributed to advancing India's strategic goals globally and strengthened its international standing. Sitharaman has advocated for social welfare and economic inclusion throughout her professional life (Nageswaran & Natarajan, 2019, p. 17). Her leadership and efforts have profoundly impacted India's strategic and economic landscape.

Mahua Moitra

Prominent Indian politician Mahua Moitra is well-known for her passionate remarks in the Indian Parliament and outspoken support of various causes. In the general elections 2019, Mahua Moitra was chosen to serve as a Member of Parliament. She is the representative for West Bengal, India's Krishnanagar constituency. Mahua Moitra became well-known for her forceful statements in the Indian Parliament, where she expressed her opinions on topics including secularism, human rights, democracy, and the freedom of speech. Her speeches are praised for their forcefulness, eloquence, and clarity in holding the administration accountable.

Moitra has been outspoken in her criticism of the deterioration of democratic norms and authoritarian inclinations in Indian politics (Bhattacharjee, 2023, p. 23). She has called attention to what she perceives as a growing tendency of authoritarianism in the nation, voicing concerns about the expansion of majoritarianism, attacks on dissent, and challenges to democratic institutions. Mahua Moitra has been a steadfast supporter of women's rights. She has made statements opposing violence against women, discrimination based on gender, and the underrepresentation of women in elected office and positions of authority. She is an inspiration to aspiring female leaders as a female politician in a field dominated by men.

Moitra has stressed the significance of inclusive development strategies and social justice. In order to improve marginalised populations

and provide equitable chances for all, she has pushed for policies to address poverty, inequality, and social marginalisation (Bhattacharjee, 2023). Concerned about climate change and environmental degradation, Moitra has called for immediate action to reduce the effects of global warming and safeguard the ecosystem. Her popularity and effectiveness as a legislator are primarily attributed to her accessibility and responsiveness to the interests of the people she represents. Among Mahua Moitra's notable accomplishments are her support of human rights and democratic principles, promotion of social justice and women's rights, and interaction with voters (Thapar, 2023, p. 67). She is a well-known figure in Indian politics and an advocate for progressive ideas and ideals.

Evaluation and Conclusion

Caste, class, religion, and geography are examples of intersecting identities that influence women's experiences in the Indian political scenario. The various obstacles that women from marginalised communities must overcome to participate in and be represented in politics are compounded. Initiatives targeting these intersectional disparities must be implemented to advance women's empowerment. In India, the sources of gender equality and political empowerment of women have been abetted by several civil society organisations, feminist groups, and women's rights campaigners. These movements have brought attention to problems, including discrimination, violence against women, and the need for more representation in decision-making bodies. The dynamic interplay of struggles, accomplishments, and ongoing challenges is reflected in the historical backdrop of the political empowerment of women in India. Even though there has been some progress, reaching complete equality and inclusiveness is still a work in progress that will take time and can only be achieved through cooperation from the public sector, the business community, and civil society.

Indian women have faced an uphill struggle against hegemonic practices for centuries. While urban educated women have been largely liberated from the structures of the traditions, gender equality remains a distant dream. Primary education for women is at an average of 71%, but there are regional disparities, and the school dropout rate for girls is still high. While several legislations have been implemented to protect women, unless there is a change in the patriarchal mindset of the population, these legislations are ineffective. With women joining lo-

cal governance in large numbers and eventually with reservation in the parliament and state legislatures, pro-women changes in Indian society will hopefully evolve.

References

- Alexander, A. C., Bolzendahl, C., & Jalalzai, F. (2017). *Measuring women's political empowerment across the globe: Strategies, challenges and future research*. Springer.
- Bedi, K. (2022). *Fearless governance*. Diamond Pocket Books.
- Bedi, K. (2023, 22. March). How we raised Puducherry's water table by 7ft. *The Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/how-we-raised-puducherrys-water-table-by-7ft/articleshow/98888688.cms>
- Bhattacharjee, J. (2023). *Whether you like it or not: A compilation of articles on politically incorrect topics*. Sankalp Publication.
- Banerjee, M., & Sengupta, N. (2012). *My unforgettable memories*. Roli Books.
- Bhushan, P. (2018). *The case that shook India: The verdict that led to the emergency*. Penguin.
- Bose, A. (2009). *Behenji: A political biography of Mayawati*. Penguin.
- Duda, P. N. (2006). *Indira Gandhi: Life and legacy*. APH Publishing.
- Ertan, S., Monroy C., Vallejo J. P., Romero, G., & Erazo, A. C. (2018). The status of women's political empowerment worldwide. In A. V. Nageswaran & G. Natarajan (Eds.), *The rise of finance: Causes, consequences and cures* (pp. 55–67). Cambridge.
- Jain, B. (2024, 7 June). 65.8% turnout in 2024 LS polls; Women beat men in 19 of 36 states/UTS. *The Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/65-8-turnout-in-2024-ls-polls-women-beat-men-in-19-of-36-states/uts/articleshow/110777159.cms>
- Jharta, B. (1996). *Women and politics in India: Impact of family and education on women political activists*. Deep & Deep Publications.
- Kaṇēcaṇ, Pi. C. (1996). *Daughter of the south: Biography of Jayalalitha*. Sterling.
- Mazumdar, V. (2010). *Emergence of the women's question in India and the role of women's studies*. <https://www.cwds.ac.in/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Emergence-Womens-Question.pdf>
- Mitra, D. (2014). *Decoding Didi: Making sense of Mamata Banerjee*. Rupa Publications.
- Nageswaran, A. V. & Natarajan, G. (2019). *The rise of finance: Causes, consequences and cures*. Cambridge University Press.

- Sadik, J. (2022). *Ammu to Amma: The life and times of Jayalalithaa*. Notion Press.
- Shashi, K. & Sahni, S. (2009). Study on the participation of women in Panchayati Raj Institution. *Studies on Home and Community Science*, 3(1): 29–38.
- Sengupta, A. (2024, 7 June). Explained: The representation of women in the incoming Lok Sabha and how it compares to previous years. *The Indian Express*. <https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/slight-dip-in-number-of-women-in-ls-well-under-proposed-33-quota-9374922>
- Shukla, A. K. (2007). *Women chief ministers in contemporary India*. APH Publishing Corporation.
- Singh, U. B. (2004). *Urban administration in India: Experiences of fifty years*. Serials Publication.
- Sinha, A. (1998). *Primary schooling in India*. Vikas Publishing House.
- Sinhā, N. (2000). *Empowerment of women through political participation*. Gyan Publishing House.
- Taxmann. (2021, 5 July). *Key highlights of FM Nirmala Sitharaman's press conference to boost COVID-19 affected sectors*. <https://www.taxmann.com/post/blog/key-highlights-of-fm-nirmala-sitharaman-press-conference-to-boost-covid-19-affected-sectors>
- Thapar, K. (2023). *The best of Karan Thapar*. Bloomsbury.

Chapter Nine

Promoting Education and Mentorship for Women in Politics

Maja Bizjak

Adult Education Centre Celje, Slovenia
maja.bizjak@lu-celje.si

Rebeka Dečman Podergajs

Adult Education Centre Celje, Slovenia
rebeka.decman@lu-celje.si

The EWA project explored the barriers preventing women's entry into politics. Preliminary research identified three primary challenges: lack of knowledge, family responsibilities, and fear of public exposure. To tackle these issues, the project developed a 30-hour training programme that equipped women with the knowledge for active political participation and engagement. The training combined theory and practice, proving to be effective. The success of the EWA project activities demonstrates the importance of customised training programmes in encouraging women's participation in politics.

Keywords: education, training, women's political participation, effective communication, workshops

Introduction

With the European project EWA, financially supported by the European Commission, we aimed to raise awareness among girls and women about the importance of active citizenship and empower them for political engagement and careers in politics. The project partners – the University of Maribor, the Ministry of Labour, Family, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, the Institute for Political Management and the Public Institution for Adult Education Celje – approached this question comprehensively. We invited 74 women to participate in pre-tests and focus groups, followed by an intervention programme. We aimed to identify the barriers that women perceive to political engagement and determine whether education and mentoring are indeed crucial tools in helping women overcome these barriers and encourage more active citizenship.

From the beginning of the project, we were guided by the question of why young women, despite their interest in active political participation, do not choose a career in politics or become more actively involved in public life (Dežan et al., 2023). Initially, we will present studies that cite various reasons for the underrepresentation of women at all levels of decision-making, both locally and nationally.

Butorova and Gyarfašova (2000) argue that women do not consider the public sphere as their own and do not feel at home. In a Slovenian survey conducted by Jalušič & Antić Gaber (2020), respondents identified the reconciliation of family and political life (39%), lack of knowledge and experience in politics (37%), and potential public exposure of children and family (33%) as key barriers to political engagement. The main concern thus stems from considerations about how political engagement will affect the lives of family members (Antić Gaber, 2007). Additionally, it is noticeable that women who decide to enter politics do so later in life than men, have fewer children than their male colleagues, and are more often single or widowed (Jalušič & Antić Gaber, 2020).

In our initial project survey involving 74 women, participants most frequently cited the following reasons for political (in)activity: lack of confidence in their knowledge, unwillingness to expose themselves publicly, insufficient confidence, and difficulty in balancing political and family life. During the focus groups conducted in March and April 2023, participants expressed the opinion that there is still a lack of will and motivation for political engagement among women. They also felt hindered by traditional and conservative attitudes and beliefs, such as the notion that women must choose between family and career, the perception of women as more emotional and less rational, and the belief that politics is a male sphere.

Cultural and social expectations are also significant factors that prevent women from participating in politics. These expectations stem from various elements, including discrimination, gender stereotypes, and lack of access to education. Gender stereotypes that confine women primarily to private and family life and cultural norms that favour men as natural leaders create substantial barriers to women's political participation. Overcoming these stereotypes in society and fostering a culture that encourages and supports women's political participation is essential.

An example illustrating the persistence of certain stereotypes and

expectations in Slovenian society is evident in the research conducted within the Slovenian project *Meta Dekleta – Promoting Active Citizenship of Younger Women* (2014). In this study, not a single man under 40 considered family an obstacle in his career path. This indicates the presence of gender-specific expectations in Slovenian society.

In Slovenia, there are several initiatives aimed at empowering women and girls for political participation (Antić Gaber et al., 2014, p. 41). For example, the Women's Lobby of Slovenia is an organisation dedicated to promoting gender equality and women's political participation. In addition, many political parties in Slovenia have programmes that support women's political participation. Although Slovenia has made some progress in this area, much remains to be done. With continued efforts towards this goal, we can ensure that women have an equal voice in the political process and that their contributions are valued and respected.

During the EWA project, we identified the following strategies to help create a more equitable political sphere:

1. *Education and Training*: providing women and young girls with comprehensive political education to build their knowledge and confidence in leadership, politics and public speaking.
2. *Mentoring and Support Networks*: establishing mentorship programs and support networks to guide and encourage women and young girls to participate in political organisations and programmes. This can be done also with the support of role models and successful women politicians as a source of inspiration.
3. *Promoting Gender Equality*: advocating for policies and practices that promote gender equality within political parties and institutions.
4. *Challenging Stereotypes*: actively working to challenge and change gender stereotypes and cultural norms that discourage women from participating in politics.
5. *Awareness Campaigns*: Launching awareness campaigns to highlight the importance of women's political participation and to change public perceptions about women's role in politics.

By adopting these strategies, we aimed to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in the political arena since education and mentorship were identified as key tools for encouraging wom-

en to enter politics. Jalušič & Antić Gaber (2020) also provided recommendations on how to promote women's presence in politics, emphasising continuous training for women politicians and introducing mentorship as an effective training method.

Mentorship can offer women support, networking, and guidance to navigate the challenges of political life. Experienced politicians can share their experiences, advise on strategic decisions, help establish contacts, and provide moral support during difficult times. Mentorship is especially important in the early stages of a political career when young women politicians face numerous challenges and self-doubt. Programs that are tailored for women in politics can be instrumental in overcoming barriers and fostering a new generation of confident and capable women leaders.

The project focused on an intervention approach that included an educational programme with various content modules. The content was tailored to the needs highlighted by the women in the focus groups as most necessary and desired: knowledge of legislation, the functioning of the political system in Slovenia, public speaking and argumentation skills, communication skills, insights into the work of women politicians in Slovenia, and motivation and confidence building.

Within the following lines, we present the educational programme organised for 65 women who participated in the project. The intervention programme serves as a pilot project that can be replicated at national and local levels even after the project ends. The overall aim of these activities is the political empowerment of girls and young women, raising awareness of the importance of women's participation in politics, creating spaces for experiential learning, and developing materials that can help civil society in the political socialisation of individuals.

The programme comprised both theoretical and practical elements, which were interlinked and mutually reinforcing. In the theoretical section, participants deepened their understanding of public speaking, learned the rules of diplomatic and political protocol, and acquired skills to successfully reconcile political and private life. The programme included lectures on the roles and functions of individual state institutions and current political issues facing modern society. With the assistance of experts, participants gained valuable theoretical foundations that enabled them to comprehend the political system and its processes more effectively. The practical component of the programme

offered participants direct insight into the work and life of politicians and political institutions. The training followed contemporary pedagogical guidelines and utilised a wealth of audiovisual resources and interactive activities, emphasising the learning-by-doing method. An interdisciplinary approach was employed, drawing upon knowledge from a range of disciplines, including law, public administration, psychology, sociology, social dynamics, and human rights.

The 30-hour training was divided into the following lectures.

The Importance of Women in Politics (Ecofeminist Perspective)

This lecture provided an overview of the fundamental principles of ecofeminism, including key concepts and definitions, and explored the intertwined nature of ecology and feminism. It also highlighted key historical events where women gained the right to vote and began participating actively in politics. The workshop then examined the current position of women in politics, presenting global statistics on women's representation in political institutions. Finally, the lecture emphasised the importance of women as influential environmental activists and their achievements in addressing environmental issues. The lecture concluded with a discussion of the role of women in both the political and environmental spheres and the importance of their active participation in creating a more sustainable and just world.

Democracy in Practice

This activity integrated theoretical and practical elements, allowing participants to gain a concrete understanding of the work of national and local institutions. They acquired knowledge of the functioning of parliament, including legislative procedures and the role of various parliamentary committees. Additionally, they gained insights into the workings of local self-government, learning about the daily challenges and responsibilities of local authorities and how local communities interact with national institutions.

The workshop also examined the responsibilities of the President of the Republic of Slovenia, including her role in the legislative process, representational duties, and her role in appointing key state officials. Through this combination of theoretical knowledge and practical experiences, participants gained a deeper understanding of the functioning of political systems at various levels and how they can actively engage in political life.

The Democratic Political System in Slovenia: Opportunities for Further Development Towards a Green State

This workshop examined the relationship between democracy and sustainable development, with a particular focus on the concept of a 'green state' and its significance for Slovenia. The lecture commenced with an overview of the fundamental characteristics of the Slovenian democratic system and the concept of the 'green state.' Participants were then introduced to how this concept contributes to sustainable development. A historical overview highlighted Slovenia's political development since independence in 1991 and the role of democracy in its progress. The current environmental state in Slovenia was discussed, addressing challenges such as pollution, water management, and biodiversity, while evaluating the effectiveness of current environmental policies. The central theme of the workshop was the connection between democracy and environmental sustainability. Participants learned how democratic institutions can improve environmental management, drawing inspiration from successful examples worldwide. The workshop concluded with a summary of the key findings, highlighting the crucial interconnection between democracy and sustainable development. Furthermore, participants gained a more profound comprehension of the intertwined relationship between democracy and sustainability in the Slovenian context.

The Power of Words: Effective Communication in Politics

The workshop systematically addressed key aspects of effective communication and conflict resolution in stressful environments, emphasising the critical importance of these skills for workplace success. Participants gained theoretical knowledge, which they then applied through practical exercises. Special emphasis was placed on developing communication strategies tailored to challenging situations, including establishing clear communication protocols to improve information flow and reduce misunderstandings. Active listening was highlighted as a crucial element for better cooperation and understanding among colleagues. Furthermore, the discussion encompassed the influence of positive language and nonverbal communication on conflict reduction and the utilisation of technology to optimise communication processes in challenging circumstances. Participants acquired practical abilities for effective public speaking, including understanding target audiences and adapting messages to suit them.

What Do Children's Clothes and Political Negotiations Have in Common?

The time management workshop placed significant emphasis on the pivotal role of achieving a harmonious balance between personal and professional commitments, particularly in the context of demanding political careers. Participants engaged in an in-depth exploration of various techniques and strategies designed to optimise time allocation, thereby increasing productivity while maintaining personal well-being. Key topics included prioritising tasks, setting boundaries, and utilising tailored productivity tools to achieve greater efficiency without increasing workload. The objective of the workshop was to provide participants with practical insights and strategies for effective time management, enabling them to fulfil political responsibilities while preserving time for their private lives. Mastering these skills is essential for sustainable success and well-being in the political environment, allowing participants to navigate their careers while maintaining a balanced and fulfilling personal life.

Power, Influence, and Professionalism: Business Protocol in Politics

The workshop offered insights into the key principles of business protocol in politics, where every action and behaviour is under constant public scrutiny. The emphasis was on the importance of presenting oneself professionally and appropriately, ensuring that interactions with colleagues, voters, and fellow politicians are conducted with the highest level of etiquette. An understanding of the subtleties of business etiquette in the political environment can significantly impact a political career. The topic encompasses several aspects, including effective communication, engagement with others, conflict resolution, and navigating the intersection of political roles and business interests. The lecture provided practical advice for building and maintaining professional relationships and navigating the complexities of political negotiations while preserving reputation and business interests.

Conversations with Women Politicians: Challenges, Achievements, and Aspirations

The workshop was conducted through several recorded interviews and job shadowing activities with women politicians. Participants engaged in discussions with experienced women leaders on a range of topics,

including barriers to entering politics, the impact of gender on policy-making, the importance of diversity in politics, and the future of women in politics.

The programme offered participants the opportunity to gain firsthand insight into the daily workings of women in politics. This involved observing their activities, legislative work, engagement with voters, and interactions with other political actors. The programme included visit to the Presidential Palace, participation in a ceremonial event, and conversations with the President of the country. Additionally, participants learned about the functioning of the National Council and the National Assembly, holding discussions with the Secretary of the National Council and women members of parliament. Furthermore, the programme provided insights into the work of female politicians in local government, with participants having the opportunity to meet the Deputy Mayor.

Conclusion

Based on feedback from participants, the programme was successfully implemented. Participant satisfaction was assessed through a short evaluation questionnaire, which indicated that the content was relevant and met their needs. The programme was rated as balanced between theory and practice. The most attended workshop was ‘The Power of Words: Effective Communication in Politics,’ demonstrating the importance of communication skills in both the political and everyday contexts.

During the implementation and organisation of the programme, several challenges were encountered, including scheduling workshops. The majority of participants were employed, making participation in activities held in the morning (e.g., job shadowing) quite challenging. A partial solution was found in holding workshops on Saturday mornings, which proved to be the most optimal time.

Our principal conclusion is that such educational and training programmes are of considerable value and importance. Participants gain knowledge, skills and confidence that are essential for a successful political career. Programmes that combine theoretical education with direct practical experiences are particularly effective in preparing women for the challenges and responsibilities that political engagement entails.

References

- Antić Gaber, M. (2007). Poklicne kariere slovenskih političark. In M. Sedmak & Z. Medarić (Eds.), *Med javnim in zasebnim: ženske na trgu dela* (pp. 111–130). Založba Annales.
- Antić Gaber, M., Podreka, J., Selišnik, I., & Šori, I. (2014). *Mlajše ženske in politika: empirična raziskava v okviru projekta Meta dekleta – promocija aktivnega državljanstva mlajših žensk*. Vita Activa. https://metinalista.si/wp-content/uploads/Raziskava_Vita_Activa_MetaDekleta.pdf
- Butorova, Z., & Gyarfašova, O. (2000, May). *Public discourse on gender issues in Slovakia*. Paper presented at the international workshop Perspectives for Gender Equality Politics in Central and Eastern Europe, Ljubljana.
- Dežan, L., Košir, S., Klanjšek, R., Naterer, A., Lavrič, M., & Tomažič, T. (2023). *EWA test design documentation*. University of Maribor.
- Jalušič, V., & Antić Gaber, M. (2020). Equality for whom? Obstacles to women's access to local government in Slovenia. *Teorija in praksa*, 57(2), 437–457.

Chapter Ten

Recommendations for Stakeholders Promoting Women's Political and Civic Participation and Gender Equality

Andrej Naterer

University of Maribor, Slovenia
andrej.naterer@um.si

Maja Mezeg

IPM Institute for Political Management, Slovenia
maja.mezeg@ipm-institut.si

The EWA project-Empowering Women in Active Society-aims to address persistent gender inequalities and promote women's political and civic activation. The project adopts a holistic approach, targeting young people, especially high school students and women aspiring to political careers, and includes comprehensive educational initiatives and collaborative efforts with various stakeholders. Key findings reveal low political interest among young people, influenced by gender stereotypes, insufficient political knowledge, and fear of public exposure. The project developed interventions in the form of educational manuals, workshops, and online tools to promote gender equality and women's political participation. The project's recommendations presented in this chapter emphasise the integration of gender equality into educational curricula, gender mainstreaming training for public administration, partnerships between NGOs and government, targeted youth engagement programs, gender-focused policies within political parties, positive media representation of women in politics, and supportive legislation by government and policymakers. These recommendations aim to create an inclusive social and political environment where women are empowered to participate fully in democratic and decision-making processes.

Keywords: gender equality, political participation, active citizenship, recommendations, youth engagement

Introduction

The EWA project-Empowering Women in Active Society-was established to address persistent gender inequalities and promote a bal-

anced representation of women and men in politics. Historically, women have been marginalised in social, political, and economic spheres. In Slovenia and globally, men have traditionally had more significant opportunities to participate in public and political life, while women were often confined to private roles. Despite notable progress in recent decades, considerable disparities remain, necessitating targeted interventions to foster gender equality (e.g. Antić Gaber, 2019; Jalušič & Antić Gaber, 2020; Luthar & Trdina, 2015; Mesec, 2020; Popič & Gorjanc, 2018; Ule, 2009, 2010, 2013). As mentioned in previous chapters of the current book, one of the persisting issues regarding women's political and civic participation in Slovenia remains the underrepresentation of women in political positions (e.g. see chapter titled 'Navigating the Path to Gender Equality: A Global Perspective on Women's Rights and the Slovenian Women's Movements'). Despite improvements seen after the 2022 elections, when the first women filled the position of the president of the country, and several other leading political positions were accommodated by female politicians, the issue remains. Although numerous notable scholars are focusing on this topic (e.g. Antić Gaber, 2019; Antić Gaber & Kovačič, 2014; Oblak Črnič & Švab, 2020; Švab 2003) and despite the apparent abundance of knowledge regarding these issues, holistic and successful interventions are scarce.

Within the context of Slovenia, the EWA project stands out in three main areas, namely (1) it adopts a holistic approach to the issues of women's political and civic participation, (2) it focuses on planned interventions, and (3) it provides a methodological approach for testing the project results. Other chapters of this publication provided an in-depth description of these elements.

However, the current chapter is dedicated to the recommendations developed within the EWA project. The main purpose of this section is to provide a general overview of these recommendations, along with their basis in gathered results and possibilities for application in the field.

Background to the Recommendations

The project's main target groups were young people, especially high school students and women aspiring to build a political career or be actively involved in society. These groups were also part of our sample in surveys and focus groups conducted during the project. The adopted tools provided valuable insights into young people's and women's inter-

est in politics, their active involvement, and the importance of gender equality among young people. Another target group were employees in public administration who received guidelines for incorporating the gender aspect into their work and policy formulation. Additionally, we created the EWA manual for secondary school teachers with classroom instructions and a manual for young women navigating their way into politics.

The survey results among high school students showed that only 34.3% of young people were interested or very interested in politics. It is concerning that 25.6% of all respondents do not devote time to educating themselves about current political topics. Participants in the survey also had to assess their general knowledge of politics and current events, with almost half rating it as reasonably good, followed by those who think they have poor knowledge. The respondents were most interested in gender equality, environmental challenges, and issues related to corruption and the economy. Analyses show that in the future, among the various methods of political participation, participants are most likely to resort to signing petitions, participating in elections, and joining non-governmental and voluntary organisations. However, they are less likely to establish contact with politicians or run for political office. Most respondents consider it unlikely (44.6%) or completely impossible (36.1%) that they will run for political office in their lifetime.

We also investigated the reasons why young people, especially women, do not decide to participate in politics actively. From the gathered results, we concluded that the main reasons are insufficient knowledge about politics, lack of interest in politics, fear of public exposure and the derogatory designation of a politician, worries about combining political and family life, and lack of self-confidence. These results were especially valuable for the preparation of project interventive activities and were also considered during the testing phase of the project. The testing results are outlined in the chapter 'The Impact of Targeted Interventions on Political Empowerment and Gender Stereotypes Among Young Women and High School Students in Slovenia.' The authors conclude that project activities generally had a positive impact on the participants, allowing important insights to be drawn from these results. These insights can be used as recommendations for relevant stakeholders.

Gender stereotypes remain one of the key obstacles in achieving desired equality between women and men and stem from established so-

cial norms. They are perceived from childhood in our family environment, workplaces, media, culture, education, among peers, and in the broader society. Stereotypes have a vast influence on our self-image, well-being, and the way we communicate with other people. They also strongly influence whether individuals participate in educational programs, are active at work, or engage more broadly in socio-political activities. Teachers and parents are key players in raising adolescents' awareness of gender stereotypes, traditional roles, and gender equality. In doing so, teachers and parents must be aware of their conscious and unconscious prejudices, which they can pass on to students or children. It is important to introduce these contents into the school environment, familiarise students with historical and contemporary examples of inequality, and teach them to recognise and address gender stereotypes and prejudices in society. With this in mind, a manual on teaching active citizenship was created for teachers. This manual emphasises gender equality and women's participation in politics, introduces key concepts, and includes three learning modules for teaching. These modules focus on gender stereotypes and gender equality, active citizenship, and women's political participation. Among the important features of the manual are the emphasis on creating a safe and inclusive environment and a clear and coherent framework to understand gender equality. In addition, activities aim to foster critical thinking and active participation. The manual is freely available on the official project's website, ewa.si, together with accompanying interactive learning tools (e.g., quizzes, memory cards, timelines, online workshops, games etc.).

Considering that women are still underrepresented in politics, it is important to understand their limited influence and the challenges they face in formulating policies that affect their lives. Increasing women's political participation is vital to achieving gender equality and improving democratic processes. Lasting change can be achieved through a comprehensive approach that includes education, awareness raising, collaboration with non-governmental organisations, and monitoring progress. To improve women's political participation, it is necessary to educate and raise awareness about gender equality and the importance of active citizenship. Misconceptions about women's involvement in politics often result from gender stereotypes and social prejudices. Generally, stereotypes portray women as sensitive, emotional, and weak, and these traits are usually not associated with political leadership. On the other hand, political leadership is associated

with typically masculine characteristics such as toughness, aggressiveness, or self-confidence. These misconceptions are harmful as they can limit women's participation in politics, make it more difficult for women candidates to be elected, and contribute to gender inequality in politics. To promote gender equality in the political space, we aimed to debunk these misconceptions and encourage greater involvement of women at all levels of politics.

We provided women and girls with various educational opportunities that included content on political processes, gender stereotypes, campaign management strategies, public speaking, media, and networking. In addition, we offered mentoring and networking opportunities with experienced women politicians. This initiative was supported by the notion that decision-makers and experienced politicians who have succeeded in breaking through the glass ceiling must be aware of their role in actively encouraging young women to participate in politics.

As part of the project, we held 30-hour workshops for women and girls who wanted to be actively engaged in the political arena. These workshops tackled topics related to the importance and role of women in politics (with an emphasis on ecofeminism), democratic processes in Slovenia, effective communication (public speaking, social media campaigns, etc.), work-life balance, business etiquette, and similar issues. Moreover, participants had the opportunity to discuss challenges and achievements with prominent women politicians. During the course of the project, the handbook *Pot v politiko* (Path to Politics) was developed (Ljudska univerza Celje, 2024). The handbook is intended primarily for women interested in politics, wanting to upgrade their political knowledge, and looking to better understand political activity. It is designed to explain why the representation of women in politics is crucial and to present the benefits of participating in the political arena. The manual is freely available on the project's website, ewa.si.

It is also essential to strengthen the knowledge of state administration employees who are responsible for effectively including gender aspects in policy making and work. Gender mainstreaming means that gender equality is fundamental in all social, political, and economic factors. In practice, this means that if specific policies and measures are gender-neutral, the results of these policies and measures will have different effects on women and men because they do not consider the particular situations of both sexes from the start. As part of the project,

we prepared guidelines for integrating gender aspects at work and creating policies for employees in the state administration. In addition, we designed an online training course on gender mainstreaming in policymaking for state administration. This course was developed in cooperation with the Administration Academy, an internal organisation unit within the Ministry of Public Administration, and it provides a combination of theory and practice. An additional feature of the course is the final assessment of knowledge, upon which participants receive a completed training certificate. Lastly, we also developed a seminar on gender mainstreaming for the coordinators for equal opportunities and employees of the ministries. The seminar consisted of a workshop on gender mainstreaming in policymaking and a lecture by a renowned Slovenian professor and Nobel prize honouree, Dr Lučka Kajfež Bogataj, who discussed environmental and climate change through a gender lens. With these activities, we aimed to equip state administration officials with knowledge and practical approaches on how to implement gender mainstreaming in policymaking.

The aforementioned guidelines are freely available on the ewa.si website. They comprise three chapters, combining theoretical knowledge with real-life examples and activities. The first chapter covers basic terminology, explaining the differences between equality, equity, and equal opportunities. The second chapter addresses the differences between sex and gender, as well as gender roles, stereotypes, and discrimination. The final chapter is devoted to gender mainstreaming in policymaking, discussing why it is important, how to successfully implement it, and how to reorganise the work process to include it.

Recommendations for Relevant Stakeholders

Based on our results and in addition to specific recommendations and suggestions within other chapters of this publication, a general set of recommendations for stakeholders to promote gender equality and women's political participation could be offered:

Recommendations for the Educational Context

Educational institutions should provide a stronger integration of gender equality into curricula. There is a persistent need to develop and implement comprehensive educational programs that address gender stereotypes, gender equality, and political participation. Within this context, interactive online tools and technologies like games and work-

shops could be used since these are familiar to students. At the same time, a set of appropriate and specialised training for teachers should be provided.

This training should provide teachers with knowledge and skills to:

1. recognise and challenge gender stereotypes, and
2. promote an inclusive environment (e.g. as demonstrated in the EWA manual, which offers modules on gender equality, active citizenship, and women's political participation).

This training should be offered in the form of continuous professional development opportunities for teachers, including workshops, seminars, and online courses focused on gender equality and inclusive teaching practices. Establishing peer learning networks where teachers can share experiences, strategies, and resources for promoting gender equality in the classroom would also be beneficial. Moreover, school-wide campaigns and events should be organised to highlight the importance of gender equality and the role of women in politics. This could be done, for example, through thematic weeks dedicated to gender equality. Such events could include debates, exhibitions, and role-playing exercises. Following suggestions gathered within our project, student-led initiatives present great potential within this sphere. Initiatives such as gender equality clubs, where students can plan events, conduct awareness campaigns, and collaborate with local NGOs, would greatly support young women's political and civic activities.

Recommendations for the Public Administration

Within this context, several important areas and numerous possibilities for improving women's political and civic participation arise. The first to mention is gender mainstreaming training. Training sessions for public administration employees should be conducted, with a particular focus on integrating gender perspectives in policymaking. Digital technologies, such as online courses, should be developed in cooperation with relevant partners (e.g. the Administration Academy) to maximise reach and impact. Teaching modules should be customisable to adapt to different departments and levels of government, ensuring relevance and effectiveness. Also, a train-the-trainer approach should be adopted to build internal capacity and ensure the sustainability of gen-

der mainstreaming efforts within public administration. This approach will enable trained individuals to disseminate knowledge and practices within their organisations, creating a multiplier effect and embedding gender mainstreaming into the institutional culture.

Policy guidelines on gender inclusion should be developed with a particular focus on integrating gender issues aspects into everyday work and policy development. Examples of such guidelines are available on the EWA project website and cover terminology, gender roles, and practical steps for gender mainstreaming. These guidelines should be part of comprehensive policy frameworks that provide detailed guidance on incorporating gender perspectives into all policy development, implementation, and evaluation stages. To bolster these frameworks, a repository of best practices and case studies showcasing successful gender mainstreaming initiatives from other countries and sectors should be formed.

Lastly, a system of monitoring and evaluation should be implemented. Such mechanisms ensure continuous improvement and accountability and are key elements of inclusive and democratic societies. Particular focus should be on:

1. regular gender audits, assessing the impact of policies and programs on gender equality and identifying areas for improvement, and
2. performance indicators, following gender equality and integrating results into the overall performance management system of public administration.

Recommendation for Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs)

Within this context, specific partnerships and collaborations should be developed and implemented. Particular focus should be on fostering partnerships between NGOs and government agencies to jointly develop and implement projects that promote gender equality and women's political participation. A multi-stakeholder partnership involving NGOs, government agencies, the private sector, and academia should be developed to leverage resources and expertise for gender equality initiatives. This partnership could be supported by a joint funding basis, securing financial support for large-scale gender equality projects and ensuring sustainability. In addition, mentorship programs should be developed to connect aspiring women politicians with experienced

leaders. These programs should provide support to help build confidence and offer practical guidance on navigating political careers. Structured mentorship programs should have clear objectives, timelines, and evaluation criteria to ensure effectiveness. Since EWA results also show the particular strength of peer mentoring, these mentorships should capitalise on peer mentorship among women at different stages of their political careers, ensuring continuous support and knowledge-sharing.

Strong support for advocacy and awareness should be provided. These campaigns should highlight the importance of women's political representation and challenge existing stereotypes and prejudices, which are cornerstones of an inclusive and democratic society. Grassroots campaigns are particularly important since they engage communities at the local level, raise awareness about gender equality, and mobilise support. In addition, policy advocacy should strive to influence legislation and policies that promote gender equality and women's political participation.

Recommendations for Youth Engagement

Within this context, targeted programs and projects for young women should consist of the following:

1. education programs targeting political education for young women, covering topics such as public speaking, campaign management, leadership skills, and work-life balance, and
2. youth leadership initiatives, encouraging young women to take active roles in student councils, debate clubs, and community organisations.

The design of these programs should strive to enhance women's political knowledge and skills (e.g. workshops covering topics such as public speaking, campaign management, and work-life balance, as demonstrated in the EWA project). Another approach in this area could be to develop internship and fellowship opportunities in political offices, NGOs, and public administration to provide hands-on experience and mentorship. Additionally, political interest among youth should be encouraged and supported:

1. interactive educational tools could be used to make learning about politics engaging and relevant for young people and

2. extracurricular activities, such as debate teams, youth councils, and model government programs that provide hands-on experience in political participation and leadership.

Surveys and focus groups could be conducted to understand the barriers young people face regarding political participation. The results can be used to develop strategies to increase their interest and political involvement. Strategies could include interactive educational tools and engaging extracurricular activities. These strategies should be incorporated into broader support structures within schools and/or communities, with the main aim of encouraging young women to participate in politics. This can include the establishment of clubs, debate teams, and youth councils. A partnership network among youth councils could act as a basis since these councils serve as advisory bodies to local governments, giving young people a voice in decision-making processes.

Recommendations for Political Parties

Within this context, particular emphasis should be devoted to gender issues. Stakeholders should ensure that candidate lists for elections are aligned with gender quotas. This involves not just meeting the minimum requirements but actively promoting the inclusion of women in winnable positions on these lists. It is essential to move beyond tokenism and ensure that women have real opportunities to be elected and make meaningful contributions.

1. implementation of transparent selection processes for candidates, prioritising gender balance and ensuring women's representation in winnable positions should be ensured, and
2. support networks within political parties for women candidates, including mentorship, training, and peer support groups should be developed.

At the same time, an internal system for training and development should be established. Political parties should provide internal training sessions to educate members on gender equality and to develop women's candidates' skills and confidence. Emphasis should be on developing a supportive environment, addressing issues such as work-life balance, mentoring for women in politics, women's civic participation, etc. Here, particular attention should be on:

1. organising capacity-building workshops for women members to enhance their political skills, such as campaigning, public speaking, and policy analysis, and
2. developing leadership programs that promote inclusive leadership styles and address the unique challenges faced by women in politics.

Recommendations for Media

Within the media context, particular emphasis should be placed on promoting a positive representation of women in politics by highlighting their contributions and achievements. This includes addressing gender bias and encouraging balanced and fair coverage of female politicians. This should be a part of broader public awareness campaigns, where media platforms could raise public awareness about the importance of gender equality and the benefits of women's political participation. Two possible venues are:

1. media training programs, offering training programs for journalists and editors on gender-sensitive reporting and the importance of balanced representation, and
2. highlighting role models, regularly featuring profiles and stories of successful women in politics and other fields to provide positive role models.

Media also presents an important potential for public awareness campaigns. Collaborative campaigns with NGOs and government agencies on public awareness campaigns that highlight the importance of gender equality and women's political participation are crucial. Media could present an important platform for collaboration between these subjects, apart from offering unique assets for a functioning democracy and the dissemination of gender-related topics. Media also presents an important context for particularly important technologies for youth. Here, social media platforms could be utilised to engage with the public, share success stories, and promote gender equality initiatives.

Recommendations for Government and Policymakers

The main focus should be on legislation and policy. Legislation supporting gender equality in all spheres, particularly focusing on polit-

ical participation, should be enforced. Particular attention should be on the following:

1. enactment and enforcement of comprehensive gender equality laws that cover political, economic, and social spheres, and
2. policy incentives for organisations that promote gender equality, such as tax benefits, grants, and awards.

At the same time, funding and resources for programs and initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and supporting women in politics should be allocated at local, regional, and national levels. Also, national campaigns should be launched to educate the public about gender equality and to encourage women's participation in political processes. Two potential options here are:

1. launching public education programs to increase awareness about gender equality and the benefits of women's political participation and
2. conducting community outreach programs to engage citizens at the grassroots level, encouraging and supporting their involvement in promoting gender equality.

A strong monitoring system should be developed to follow the progress toward gender equality. Currently, Slovenia has numerous active programs and initiatives focusing on gender inclusivity and equality. Therefore, this system should be comprehensive and stationed at the level of governmental organisation. The system of monitoring should:

1. include monitoring of all national gender equality strategies with clear goals, timelines, and accountability mechanisms and
2. include regular reporting mechanisms, tracking progress on gender equality initiatives and publishing findings to ensure transparency and accountability.

By adopting these recommendations, stakeholders can foster a more equitable society where women have equal opportunities to engage in political life and influence decision-making processes. This involves creating an environment where women are empowered to participate fully in political activities, from running for office to being involved

in policy implementation and governance. Combined efforts of stakeholders are essential for dismantling barriers, challenging stereotypes, and building a more inclusive and democratic political environment.

Conclusion

Gender equality remains a critical issue in Slovenia, reflecting broader global challenges. Despite significant progress in recent years, some disparities persist. These include unequal pay, the feminisation of certain professions, and the underrepresentation of women in politics. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive and sustained efforts across various sectors of society. The EWA project has demonstrated the importance of a holistic approach to promoting gender equality and women's political participation. Through targeted interventions, educational initiatives, and the involvement of diverse stakeholders, the project has made significant strides in raising awareness and empowering women.

The recommendations outlined in this chapter provide a possible roadmap for continued progress. Educational institutions, public administration, NGOs, youth, political parties, media, and government must collaborate to effectively implement these strategies. By integrating gender equality into curricula, promoting positive media representation, enacting supportive legislation, and providing mentorship and training, these stakeholders can create an environment where women are fully equipped and encouraged to participate in political life. Ultimately, achieving gender equality requires a collective effort. By addressing gender stereotypes, providing comprehensive education, and fostering an inclusive political culture, we can ensure that women have equal opportunities to contribute to decision-making processes and leadership roles. The work of the EWA project and similar initiatives highlights the potential for transformative change and the crucial steps needed to build a more equitable society for future generations.

References

- Antić Gaber, M., & Kovačič, M. (2014). Gender equality in Politics: The case of Slovenia. *Journal of Comparative Politics*, 7(2), 45–60.
- Antić Gaber, M. (2019). Slovenia: From socialist legacies to legislative gender quotas. In S. Franceschet, M. L. Krook & N. Tan (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of women's political rights* (pp. 699–711). Palgrave.
- Jalušič, V., & Antić Gaber, M. (2020). Equality for whom? Obstacles to

- women's access to local government in Slovenia. *Teorija in praksa: revija za družbena vprašanja*, 57(2), 437–454.
- Ljudska univerza Celje. (2024). *Pot v politiko: prirnik za ženske, ki želijo aktivno delovati v politiki*. https://ewa.si/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/EWA-prirocnik-SLO_popravljen-verzija_za-diseminacijo-v-slo-prostoru.pdf
- Luthar, B., & Trdina, A. (2015). Nation, gender, class: Celebrity culture and identity performance in the Balkans. *Slavic Review*, 74(2), 265–287.
- Mesec, P. (2020). Od identitete k spolni razliki. *Časopis za kritiko znanosti*, 48(280), 220–233.
- Oblak Črnič, T. & Švab, A. (2020). Ko politične uredbe trčijo v zasebnost: prisilna nuklearizacija vsakdanjega življenja v kontekstu epidemične izolacije. *Družboslovne razprave*, 36(94/95), 29–54.
- Popič, D., & Gorjanc, V. (2018). Challenges of adopting gender-inclusive language in Slovene. *Suvremena lingvistika*, 44(86), 329–350.
- Švab, A. (2003). Skrb med delom in družino: koncept usklajevanja dela in družinskih obveznosti v družinski politiki. *Teorija in praksa*, 40(6), 1112–1126.
- Ule, M. (2009). O vzpostavljanju feminističnega gibanja in ženskih študij v Sloveniji. *Dialogi*, 45(11/12), 69–81.
- Ule, M. (2010). Prikrite spolne neenakosti v izobraževalnih potekih in prehodih. *Sodobna pedagogika*, 61(3), 30–44.
- Ule, M. (2013). Prikrita diskriminacija žensk v znanosti. *Teorija in praksa*, 50(3/4), 469–481.

Contributors

Dr Miran Lavrič is a professor of Sociology at the University of Maribor in Slovenia. His research primarily focuses on youth in Slovenia and Southeast Europe. Lavrič has led multiple research projects and published numerous original scientific articles on various sociological topics in international journals. He led two major national studies of youth in Slovenia in 2010 and 2020 and served as the lead research coordinator for the international project ‘Youth Studies Southeast Europe 2018/2019.’

Dr Andrej Naterer is an associate professor of Anthropology at the Department of Sociology, University of Maribor, Slovenia. His research interests are children and youth, youth deviance and delinquency and small-scale communities. His work focuses mostly on qualitative methodology, content analysis, and other anthropological methods.

Dr Rudi Klanjšek holds a PhD in Sociology and is an associate professor at the Department of Sociology, University of Maribor, Slovenia. He specialises in cross-cultural studies of youth and related phenomena, such as employment, housing, well-being, and deviance. Other areas of expertise include topics on globalisation, modernisation, social change, inequality, and economic development. In the past, he was a research fellow at Auburn University, USA, and a guest lecturer at various European universities (e.g., University of Bologna, Italy, University of Orleans, France, and Masaryk University, Czech Republic).

Dr Suzana Košir is an Assistant Professor of Sociology and Researcher at the Faculty of Arts, University of Maribor, Slovenia. She has worked in different positions in higher education for more than 20 years. Her research interests include human rights education, women’s rights, gender studies, quality assurance in education, education and training, curriculum studies, and ageing.

Dr Danijela Lahe is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Sociology, University of Maribor, Faculty of Arts, Slovenia and a researcher at the Centre for the Study of Post-Socialist Societies (CePSS). Her re-

search interests include family outcomes and lifestyles, education, and social gerontology, focusing on quantitative research.

Dr Tina Tomažič is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Media Communication at the University of Maribor, at the Faculty of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science. Her main research interests are marketing, media communication, product placement, and public relations.

Dr Radhika Lakshminarayanan is an Associate Professor of History and independent researcher, currently based in Kuwait. She has worked as an Educator and Academic Consultant for leading educational institutions in Kuwait and India for the last 30 years. Her research interests include GCC studies, human rights education, gender studies, tourism, and diaspora studies.

Dr Dolly Thomas is the Director of the Centre for Women's Studies and the former Head of the Department of History at Stella Maris College, Chennai, India. Her areas of interest are women's studies, human rights, economic history and tourism.

Dr Cinthia Jude is an Assistant Professor of History at Stella Maris College, Chennai, India. Her areas of interest include church history, cultural heritage studies, and tourism. Lucija Dežan is a doctoral candidate of sociology at the University of Maribor and an assistant researcher at the Institute for Social Studies at the Science and Research Centre Koper, Slovenia. In the past, she was a research fellow at University of Oklahoma, USA. Her main research fields are migration, gender studies, and youth studies where she applies a mixed methods approach.

Lucija Dežan is a doctoral candidate of sociology at the University of Maribor and an assistant researcher at the Institute for Social Studies at the Science and Research Centre Koper, Slovenia. Her main research fields are migration, gender studies and youth studies.

Rebeka Dečman Podergajs is an experienced education organiser at the Organization for Adult Education Celje, specialising in the preparation and management of European projects with a focus on gender equality. Her competencies include writing European projects, managing project documentation, financial management, and coordinating both European and national projects. Additionally, she organises vari-

ous forms of non-formal education for companies, contributing to the enhancement of employees' skills and knowledge

Maja Bizjak is an expert in educational management at the Adult Education Centre Celje, where she organises informal forms of education, mainly for vulnerable target groups. She led numerous national and international projects, particularly within the CERV program, addressing gender equality issues.

Maja Mezeg is a Senior Advisor at the IPM Institute for Political Management. She focuses primarily on fostering active citizenship among youth, emphasising the importance of political engagement and civic responsibility, as well as raising awareness and understanding of the functioning of the European Union.



The book critically addresses issues related to gender equality, political representation, and women's empowerment in the political sphere. It conducts a comprehensive analysis of the historical evolution of women's rights, underscoring the persistent struggle against patriarchal structures and institutional biases that continue to impede women's full participation in politics. Despite important advancements, significant challenges remain, such as the underrepresentation of women in political roles and the difficulty of balancing professional and private life, particularly for those with family obligations.

A central theme of the book is the implication of political and civic engagement among women. While empirical data suggests that women may exhibit less interest in traditional political processes, they often demonstrate higher levels of participation in non-conventional political activities. The text advocates for increased efforts to boost women's political involvement, highlighting its essential role in promoting a democratic and equitable society. It further examines the intergenerational transmission of political attitudes.

The book also examines the impact of education and media, acknowledging their critical roles in equipping women with the necessary skills and confidence for political participation. The book proposes targeted interventions to mitigate barriers to women's political engagement. The text offers strategic approaches to enhancing women's political representation and influence, thereby developing a more just and democratic society.

ToKnowPress

BANGKOK · CELJE · LUBLIN · MALTA

www.toknowpress.net

