Chapter Four

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

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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 longstanding 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.

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