SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN ASIAN PARLIAMENTS

Edited by Devin K. Joshi and Christian Echle

"Analyzing an impressive array of countries, 'Substantive Representation of Women in Asian Parliaments' fills a considerable gap in the women in politics literature. With findings based on original interviews with leading political experts including parliamentarians, this collection goes beyond analyzing women's numerical presence in legislative bodies to understanding how myriad factors shape women's substantive representation. This book will be a vital resource for scholars and policymakers alike and anyone interested in advancing women's policy representation in Asia and beyond."

– **Dr Farida Jalalzai**, Professor of Political Science, Virginia Tech

"This edited volume offers a rich collection of ten Asian case studies on women's substantive representation, written by scholars from the region, cognizant of the wide-ranging diversity that can be found in the transregional perspective. As such, the book is an important contribution to the global study of gender and politics, more than often dominated by scholars working on Global North case studies and experiences. The authors engage with a variety of factors and thus contribute significantly to our understandings as well as theorizing of women's political participation not only in electoral politics but zooming into wider, underlying questions of advancing gender equality and suggesting relevant, context-sensitive critical interventions."

– **Dr Andrea Fleschenberg**, Associate Professor, Humboldt–Universität zu Berlin, Institute of Asian and African Studies

"Joshi and Echle have compiled a must-read book about women's substantive representation in an understudied world region. The chapters examine how women and men parliamentarians act on women's interests in East Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. They find that parliamentarians' ideas about men's and women's roles are formed through lived experiences and intersectional identities, but that institutions shape whether and how ideas become translated into policy. Their conclusions offer a potent reminder that women's presence does not always mean women's power."

– **Dr Jennifer M. Piscopo,** Associate Professor of Politics, Occidental College

"This book demonstrates how Asian parliamentarians have tackled policymaking for gender equality and to what extent they have achieved their agendas. It interests me specifically because I face the same problems in my everyday practice in Japan's Upper House. As a woman representative, I have been trying very hard to advance women's representation and gender equality. Gender equality in politics is no doubt a key to achieving gender equality in society. However, women MPs account for only approximately 14% of the Japanese Parliament, thereby making it difficult for me, as well as my female colleagues, to act for women and social minorities. The book offers abundant knowledge and information about gender equality and parliamentary politics. It encourages me to represent women descriptively as well as substantively. I recommend this book to many more parliamentarians inside and outside Asia, and also to researchers of gender studies globally."

– **Shizuka Terata,** Member of the House of Councilors, Japan

"Having lived in solidarity with victims of gender violence for 20 years, I am sometimes frustrated by the reality that I have to face gender discrimination even after I became a member of the National Assembly. However, with the belief that the lives of future generations must change, I am struggling harder for gender equality today. This book is a record of Asian lawmakers who are making a better tomorrow in their respective positions. I send them my gratitude and respect."

– **Jung Chounsook,** Chairwoman, the National Women's Committee of the Democratic Party of Korea, Former Chairwoman, Gender Equality and Family Committee of the National Assembly of the Republic of Korea

"The conversation on the involvement of women as decision-makers in Asia, especially in the field of politics has been long overdue. Women lawmakers and political leaders representing a region that had produced some of the greatest game-changers in the history of politics – from grassroots women community leaders, all the way to female parliamentarians right up to helming the position of prime minister and presidents is a clear indication that there is much investment and work to be done to not only shatter glass ceilings but to also pave the way and inspire other women to follow suit.

How countries managed this raging pandemic exposed the brittle structures of social justice that some nations neglected to address for years and some for decades. At the same time, it is undeniable that it also revealed the capable supervision, care, command, and conduct of women leaders in managing it. This revelation must be a lesson for all, regardless of ethnicity, religion, class, or even gender that women lawmakers must have a seat at the table where any decision is made for the good of the nation and people.

In the words of the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg that 'women belong in all places decisions are being made' and with the whole world battling this unprecedented COVID pandemic, the movement, the campaign, and the evolution of women in politics are no longer met with a question of 'how' but of 'how many.' The presence of a woman leader at the drawing board, in the peace room, and even in the war room simply enforces the concept of truly leaving no one behind and must be supported by all institutions and establishments.

The twenty-first century must be marked by capable, courageous, passionate, driven, honest, and righteous women politicians who will rise to the occasion and act as a catalyst for nations to rise above themselves to be defenders and protectors of gender inclusivity and human rights in the region. The time is now."

– **Kasthuri Patto,** Member of Parliament for P46 Batu Kawan, Malaysia

SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN ASIAN PARLIAMENTS

Combining data from nearly 100 interviews with national parliamentarians from ten Asian countries, the contributors to this book analyze and evaluate the advancement of gender equality in Asia.

As of the year 2022, no country in Asia has gender parity in its parliament. Meanwhile, the proportion of national-level women parliamentarians in Asia averages a mere 20%. What is more important than simple descriptive representation, however, is whether outcomes for women are improving. Rather than focusing on numerical representation, the chapters in this book focus on the substantive representation of women. In other words, what do women and men parliamentarians do to advance women's well-being and gender equality? Using semi-structured interviews, the author of each chapter examines these efforts in the context of a specific Asian country. The case studies include Bangladesh, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Timor-Leste.

The book is an essential resource for scholars and students of Asian politics and the politics of gender.

Devin K. Joshi is Associate Professor of Political Science at Singapore Management University. He earned his BA at Stanford University and PhD from the University of Washington, and was formerly a Deutsche Akademischer Austauschdienst (DAAD) fellow at the Free University of Berlin. His research interests include Asian parliaments, women's political representation, globalization, and human development. He is the co-author of the book *Strengthening Governance Globally* (Paradigm/Oxford University Press) and has written over 40 peer-reviewed journal articles. His recent articles have appeared in *International Studies Quarterly*; *Journal of Contemporary Asia; Politics & Gender*; and *Women's Studies International Forum*.

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PREFACE

It took Germany 56 years from its first democratic election after World War II in 1949 to get a woman chancellor. Between 2005 and 2021, Angela Merkel has led Germany through several crises, building a reputation as one of the most analytical and influential world leaders. Much has been written about the unlikelihood of a Lutheran woman from the eastern part of Germany to become the chairwoman of a political party that is mainly dominated by catholic men from the west of Germany, and eventually to become chancellor. While her road to power might not serve as an exact blueprint to other women who are striving for political office, it is safe to say that some of her experiences are shared by many other women in the political arena.

The Regional Programme Political Dialogue Asia of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has always promoted women's political leadership and empowerment in Asia. Through its Asian Women Parliamentarian Caucus (AWPC), it has been supporting a network of over 50 Asian women parliamentarians to meet annually and promote, strengthen, and develop women's political leadership in their respective countries through policy discussions and capacity building programs.

Just like Angela Merkel, the members of AWPC have their individual stories about their motivation to enter politics and about how they eventually ended up in the national parliaments of their home countries. These stories are as multifaceted as the continent on which they take place. Some of them had to overcome traditional role models, some are members of influential political families. Some have started out as political activists, others had a successful business career before they became involved in politics. Most of them feel that they have to work harder and speak louder than their male peers in order to be recognized. All of them make sure that female perspectives and experiences are reflected in policymaking and shaping the future of their countries.

It is without a doubt necessary to further increase the presence of women MPs in the region to contribute toward enhancing the quality of democratic decisions while delivering more gender-centric policymaking on a substantial level. In the last decade, many countries have implemented quotas among other policies to increase the number of women in parliaments. However, it is not clear whether these mechanisms alone can lead to a satisfactory level of substantive representation of women.

For a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world, gender equality is important and can be achieved only if there is an equal inclusion of women's interests. Based on our work with the women parliamentarians who are part of AWPC, we believe that we can contribute to this political inclusion if we are able to share more about these role models and their experiences in politics and parliaments. Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung therefore supported ten experts from various Asian countries in a research project to investigate the state of "Substantive Representation of Women by Parliamentarians in Asia." Nearly 100 interviews were conducted across ten countries to examine whether the quantitative increase in women's representation in parliaments has led to an increase in gender equality in these Asian countries. The interviews were conducted not only with members of AWPC but also with many other parliamentarians – men and women – who were kind enough to support this project. It is their willingness to speak openly about their experiences and perspectives, combined with the analytical clarity of our academic experts, which makes this book a unique source of insights into the status quo of substantive representation of women in Asia.

I would therefore like to thank all parliamentarians who were supporting this study and thereby joining us in our effort to bring more women politicians into parliaments in Asia. I am deeply impressed with the work of my co-editor Devin K. Joshi, who led the project as the principal investigator, and the team of country researchers who undertook the research and brought out the results in the form of this book. Our program manager Megha Sarmah was instrumental in coordinating the efforts of the researchers and establishing contact between them and the AWPC members. We hope you will enjoy the results of the research as much as the team enjoyed implementing the project, and we believe that the recommendations given by the authors will chart out a way for stakeholders across the region to see how they can play a bigger role in improving the substantive representation of women.

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1

SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN BY PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ASIA

A Comparative Study of Ten Countries

Devin K. Joshi

This book presents the results of a pioneering new large-scale study on how national parliamentarians in Asia are advancing women's substantive representation and gender equality. As the world's largest continent, home to three-fifths of the world's population, Asia is critical to advancing global gender equality which will require, among other things, better representation of women at the parliamentary level (e.g. Iwanaga 2008; Joshi & Kingma 2013; Prihatini 2019). As this book reveals, there is considerable diversity across Asia when it comes to women's substantive representation. Most promisingly, our study finds that younger generations of women (and men) are more actively working to advance gender equality than many older parliamentarians in the region. However, some members of parliament (MPs) clearly exhibit much greater motivation and dedication to representing women than others. Also, we find that formal and informal institutions such as parliamentary committee structures, gender quotas, and political party rules play a significant role in determining to what extent such representation takes place.

This study departs from previous analyses of women's numerical or *descriptive representation* in parliament which has long been a focus of comparative studies of women in Asian parliaments (e.g. Iwanaga 2008; Ayaz & Fleschenberg 2009; Fleschenberg & Derichs 2011; Joshi & Kingma 2013; Joshi & Och 2014; True et al. 2014; Prihatini 2019). Following the work of Hanna Pitkin (1967: 61), the descriptive representation of women (DRW) in parliament refers to whether the legislature is like a "'mirror' of the nation" in terms of "being something rather than doing something." In other words, DRW refers to whether the composition of the parliament's members reflects the composition of society in its descriptive attributes. This means that since women comprise about half of the resident or citizen population in most countries, roughly half of the parliamentarians should also be women. As of the year 2022, however, no country in Asia has achieved this. Currently, the proportion of national-level women parliamentarians in Asia

averages a mere 20% with some countries such as Sri Lanka (5%) having very few women at all while others like Taiwan (42%) are higher but still below parity.

Substantive Representation of Women

Instead of focusing on DRW, this study focuses on substantive representation of women (SRW). As Pitkin (1967) explains, substantive representation concerns how representatives *act for* a particular constituency or cause. The key issue is not how many women are MPs, but what do women (and men) parliamentarians do to advance women's well-being and gender equality.

As scholars have noted, SRW is more complex than DRW. For instance Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) have distinguished between two different types or phases of SRW: (a) process-based (where MPs bring women's interests onto the political agenda) and (b) outcome-based (where MPs change policies that affect women in areas such as reproductive rights, violence against women, sexual harassment, and so on. Alternatively, one can interpret the concept of SRW as "a process that implies a series of acts and actors: putting women's interests on the political agenda, translating women's interests, concerns and views into legislation" (Lee & Lee 2020: 440; see also Celis 2008). As Dahlerup (2014: 63) notes, given such complexity, studies on SRW have ranged from examining "the relation between voters and their representatives, to studies of legislative processes and policy outcomes, to a very broad study of actors, sites, goals and means, all under the heading of the substantive representation of women."

If it is the case (as would seem quite plausible) that women are generally more dedicated (than men) to improving women's well-being and gender equality, then we would expect to observe a positive correlation between DRW and SRW. This would mean that if a greater number of parliamentarians (and other important political decision-makers) are women, then the laws and policies of a government should correspondingly be more beneficial to women. Likewise, the procedures by which a government functions and the content of its agenda would become more women-friendly. Phillips (1995) famously referred to this dynamic as the "politics of presence." Relatedly, the "critical mass" theory holds that when women parliamentarians exceed a certain membership threshold (often seen as about 30%), SRW should significantly improve because the resulting change in group proportions shifts women from being mere "tokens" or a small minority to comprising a large minority (e.g. Kanter 1977; Dahlerup 1988; Beckwith 2007; Dahlerup & Leyenaar 2013). In this spirit, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action issued by the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women declared that women should comprise a minimum share of 30% on all important political decision-making bodies globally including national parliaments.[1]

Addressing the question of whether a greater proportion of women in parliament really has much impact on public policy, an influential study by Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler (2005: 422) concluded, "The percentage of women in the legislature is a principal determinant of women's policy responsiveness and of

women's confidence in the legislative process." More recently, Celis and Erzeel (2015) have noted that many academic studies have indeed found women in politics more active in acting for women compared to men. Similarly, among Asian countries, a recent study by Tam (2020) found that in Singapore, women members of parliament (WMPs) asked more questions in parliament on women's rights and traditional women's concerns than male members of parliament (MMPs). In India, WMPs were likewise more active in speaking up in parliamentary debates on behalf of women and children compared to MMPs (Kalra & Joshi 2020). A recent study of legislative bill sponsorship over the past two decades in South Korea and Taiwan has also clearly demonstrated that "female legislators are substantially more likely to focus on women's issues compared to male legislators" (Shim 2021: 139).

However, while ceteris paribus increases in DRW might improve SRW such gains do not always, automatically, or immediately guarantee better SRW (e.g. Wängnerud 2009). Numbers of WMPs are not the whole story because context matters, and several potential intervening factors might obstruct SRW. What are these factors?

First, increased DRW may stem from recently instituted gender quotas requiring a parliament to have a certain minimum number of women MPs by means of reserved seats or by requiring a minimum proportion of candidates who stand for parliamentary elections to be women. While quotas are potentially a positive force for DRW, women elected via quotas are not always granted autonomy by their political parties to act as they wish. Thus, since party elites often act as gatekeepers in candidate selection they may choose women who are not committed to SRW (Norris & Lovenduski 1995; Cheng & Tavits 2011).

Second, it is frequently the case that the majority of women members of political parties find themselves relegated to lower positions within the party thereby diminishing their ability to influence public policy (Holike 2012). In the case of reserved seat quotas, women parliamentarians may simply become an extension of the patronage system as in Bangladesh, where party leaders almost exclusively determine women's selection or nomination as candidates (e.g. Panday 2008). This can also occur with candidate-level quotas where party leaders in countries like South Korea can choose which women to nominate and then regularly deny them re-nomination after a single term in parliament (e.g. Mobrand 2019). Even in the absence of formal quotas, party leaders may primarily or completely determine the parliamentary voting behavior of the majority of women (and men) parliamentarians. This leaves MPs with little autonomy when it comes to policymaking in countries like India, where there is high "party discipline" in addition to rules disallowing party defections (e.g. Rai & Spary 2018).

Third, aside from the role of political party elites, ideology can shape MPs' propensity to improve SRW. In terms of traditional ideological cleavages, several studies have found left-leaning parties in Asia to be generally more supportive of women's issues and women candidates than right-leaning parties (e.g. Haque 2003; Stockemer 2009; Joshi & Kingma 2013; Joshi 2015; Joshi & Thimothy 2019; Eto 2021). In the case of Western countries, studies often find newer center-left parties

(e.g. green parties) as well as social democratic parties and liberal democratic parties supportive of women's representation. In Asia, by contrast, there is currently no country with a strong "green" party. Some Asian countries have "social democratic" parties, but most are currently not very large although some larger parties in the region like Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) do have a social democratic leaning (Fell 2018).[2]

Fourth, institutional factors can influence SRW (Franceschet 2010). In the government bureaucracy, the role of *women's policy agencies* also sometimes known as "state feminism" can make a significant contribution (McBride & Mazur 2010) as can a whole-of-government commitment to *gender mainstreaming* as has been done in countries like Sweden (e.g. Sainsbury & Bergqvist 2009; see also Joshi & Navlakha 2010). Other potentially impactful institutions include the country's electoral system (especially higher proportionality and larger district magnitudes), cross-party women parliamentarian caucuses, and impartial functioning of the judiciary.

Outside the parliament, civil society and social movements play an important role in pressuring the state to change its laws. Moreover, cross-national research finds that strong, autonomous feminist organizations together with feminist mobilizations and movements contribute significantly in the march toward progressive policy changes because they generate social knowledge about women's positions in society, challenge traditional gender roles, and prioritize gender issues (Weldon & Htun 2013). For instance in Malaysia, women's political participation increased after its 1999 general elections when the "Women's Agenda for Change" manifesto was issued and a Women's Candidacy Initiative sought to increase the number of women MPs (Mohamad 2018).

Conversely, certain civil society forces such as religious organizations have strongly opposed women's empowerment in some countries. Likewise, the presence of an informal "old boys" network in government can be a major obstacle to SRW. Another mediating factor is the role of mass media depending on whether it serves as an open public forum, as a critical watchdog, or simply as a mouthpiece for the government. Media messages can both directly and indirectly support a culture of gender equality and persuade or dissuade women from believing they have the ability to govern as political leaders (e.g. Joshi, Hailu & Reising 2020).

Longer-term and international forces also make a difference in influencing who has agenda setting, preference shaping, and decision-making power. Norms promoted by international organizations can support gender equality (e.g. Joshi & O'Dell 2017). The socioeconomic development of a country across agrarian, industrial, and post-industrial stages may also strongly influence attitudes and reforms in favor of gender equality by increasing women's access to tertiary education and employment in those professional occupations that often serve as pipelines into politics (e.g. Norris & Inglehart 2003; Thomsen & King 2020). As modernization theory implies, increased economic security provides in-groups with existential security and this may help to foster cultural openness leading to an ideological shift

making in-groups (like men) feel less threatened by out-groups (like women and gender minorities) (Inglehart, Ponarin & Inglehart 2017).[3]

Aside from SRW being contingent upon international, institutional, organizational, and ideological factors, scholars have also questioned both epistemologically and methodologically how and whether we can know that women are being substantively represented. As previous studies have demonstrated, women's interests and gender equality may be approached differently in terms of "motherly concerns" (maternity and child raising issues), women's legal/political empowerment, women's employment and economic status, violence against women, or other concerns. One approach has been to view women's issues as those directly and almost exclusively affecting women such as abortion and domestic violence (e.g. Reingold 2000; Bratton 2005). Yet, others look more broadly to social, physical, and economic well-being as well as political and personal freedom of all women (e.g. Bratton 2002) which necessarily involves dimensions such as religion and class (e.g. Htun & Weldon 2018).

The greatest challenge, however, appears to be how to deal with heterogeneity. Given the large diversity of women and their contexts and changes over time, it becomes very difficult (if not impossible) for a researcher to fully know *a priori* what issues constitute women's issues and accordingly whether or not (or to what degree) SRW is taking place. Thus, an alternative approach is to inductively examine the claims made by MPs and others on behalf of women. As Celis et al. (2008) explain, such an inductive approach to assessing SRW can be broken down into five categories. First, *who* is representing? Here, the analyst needs to consider diversity among women across region, religion, race, etc. Moreover, aside from listening to claims in general one should especially note those made by "critical actors"[4] which refers to strongly motivated individual (or groups of) activists who may have a stronger voice in the political space (Celis & Erzeel 2015: 50). Second, *what* issues are promoted inside and outside the parliament? Third, *why* do these issues get promoted? Here, analysts should be open to understanding both strategic and practical issues at play. Fourth, *where* does SRW take place? Is it inside or outside parliament and to what extent is it impacted by different legislative environments across time and countries? Fifth, *how* is SRW promoted? Does it occur through drafting bills and participating in public debates or behind the scenes through lobbying legislators and colleagues?

As one begins to grasp the complexity of substantive representation, the advantages of taking an inductive approach become more apparent. As Celis and Childs (2012: 216) note, "the pre-selection of women's issues can never entirely avoid accusations of essentialism and of homogenizing women – as if women constitute a group with shared interests." Thus, it is useful to incorporate the five categories mentioned above and examine evolving "claims" made on behalf of SRW and gender equality by parliamentary representatives. Otherwise, researchers may be guilty of taking away other women's agency and subjectivity by imposing an unwarranted external standard of what counts as women's interests in imperialistic or colonialist fashion (Lokaneeta 2016).

The Asian Context

Studying SRW by Asian MPs helps us to uncover what exactly parliamentarians do to improve gender equality by focusing on a region that has been largely overlooked by most previous scholarship on SRW. While, as stated earlier, the "politics of presence" (Phillips 1995) theory predicts a link between women's descriptive and substantive representation, one study in Asia found contrastingly that

> [F]emale representatives have often conformed to, rather than challenged, traditional gender stereotypes . . . Even in the case of successful entry into public office, feminists' capacity to affect change has been hampered by weak institutional positioning and inadequate gender sensitivity on the part of male colleagues.
>
> *(Jones 2006: 181)*

Thus, we cannot simply assume that findings from Western countries are always applicable to Asian countries or that there is a direct link between DRW and SRW.

As has been widely documented, in almost every part of Asia, for generations a patriarchal bureaucratization of power has largely prompted women's formal exclusion from political institutions (e.g. Joshi & Goehrung 2018). Perhaps, the most prominent exception to this pattern is Taiwan, which early on reserved 10% of its legislative Yuan seats for women in Article 136 of its 1946 constitution (Clark & Clark 2008). Elsewhere, until recently the few women who have made it to the highest political leadership positions in Asia were almost exclusively aristocratic women from political dynasties (e.g. Jahan 1987; Richter 1990; Fleschenberg 2008; Derichs & Thompson 2013). Today, however, pathways to parliament in Asia include not only the elite route (political insiders; surrogates for male relatives) but also the grassroots (experience in activism; solving social and political community issues) and middle pathways (working professionals; women choosing politics as a vocation) (Choi 2019; see also Inguanzo 2020; Och & Joshi 2021). Moreover, in some Asian countries, feminist activists have on occasion been able to get a foothold in politics (see Edwards & Roces 2010).

The regional context also plays a strong role because Asia mostly comprises non-democracies, semi-democracies, and newly emerging democracies whereas the West has a much greater share of established democracies (e.g. Dahlerup & Leyenaar 2013). Political secularism is also more prominent in Western countries whereas religion arguably intermixes more heavily with politics in Asia. The politicization of all four of the world's largest religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam) in the region has given additional weight to religious leaders and movements to influence politics. For instance *political Islam* referring to "the range of modern political movements, ideological trends, and state-directed policies concerned with giving Islam an authoritative status in political life" (March 2015: 103) is prominent in a number of Asian countries. In some cases, this has prompted an "Islamization race" between parties displaying their leaders' religious credentials

while contesting for a more Islamic form of governance (Arosoaie & Osman 2019). For example, in certain parts of Indonesia, there are regulations on women's appearance (i.e. dress codes), public segregation of men and women, and rules curtailing women's mode of travel and their movements at night, which of course limits women's freedom and ability to run for office (CMW 2016).[5]

In the economic sphere, women in certain Asian countries do not always join the paid workforce even after completing secondary or tertiary education as they are expected to bear children and start a family. Meanwhile, those who join the workforce earlier tend to drop out of the formal labor market or take on part-time jobs after giving birth to support their primary roles as mothers.[6] Meanwhile, increasing numbers of women must work a "second shift" after their full-time jobs doing unpaid household chores like cooking and caring for their children due to traditional gender roles and societal demands on women to adopt the role of the primary caregiver (e.g. Hochschild & Machung 2012). Such gendered role expectations may also contribute to public stereotypes that women are inferior to their male counterparts and therefore insufficiently qualified to serve as political representatives (e.g. Joshi 2021).

At the same time, Asia is a dynamic region, and a major political change occurring in Asia over the past 25 years has been the increasing number of countries adopting gender quotas (e.g. Joshi & Kingma 2013; Hughes et al. 2017). As Wängnerud (2009) has argued, gender quotas help to normalize the presence of women in politics and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2019: 2) has found worldwide that in countries with gender quotas the share of women is higher by seven points on average in lower chambers and 17 points in upper chambers compared to countries without quotas. Gender quotas are now commonly promoted in democratization and postwar rebuilding since 2000 with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 affirming the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in post-conflict reconstruction (Bush 2011).[7] For example over the past two decades, post-conflict gender quotas were adopted by parliaments in Afghanistan, Iraq, Nepal, and Timor-Leste (e.g. Dahlerup 2006a).

Meanwhile, some Asian countries have adopted gender quotas even in the absence of major violent conflict. As Swiss and Fallon (2017) have noted, gender quotas are more likely to be adopted in countries using a proportional representation (PR) electoral system (or component) and when a neighboring country has a gender quota. This pattern may explain, for instance, the diffusion of gender quotas from Taiwan to South Korea or from Timor-Leste to Indonesia. However, PR-tier elections conducted at the national level in Sri Lanka and Japan have not yet included gender quotas. Many Asian countries with SMD electoral systems like Malaysia and the Philippines have also not yet adopted a national-level gender quota although some like Bangladesh have instituted reserved seats for women.[8]

That said, in the twenty-first century, gender quotas have become increasingly more common throughout the world including Asia, although there has been backlash and sometimes disappointment with the immediate results. One reason for the latter may be that it takes time before quotas have their desired effects (Joshi &

Timothy 2019). As noted earlier, the critical mass theory suggests that qualitative change will ensue when the number of women elected to political office reaches a critical mass, but critical acts by critical actors may be even more important as women may not necessarily act on behalf of women's interests despite their presence in political office (Mackay 2004: 101; Beckwith 2007: 28). Also, it appears that placement mandates such as zipper quotas and penalties for noncompliance are more effective than quotas alone. Quota sizes must also presumably be set at the putative "critical mass" level of 30% or higher in order to have any substantive impact on legislative outcomes (Johnson-Myers 2016).[9]

Contribution of This Study

What this study adds to a thus far mostly Western-focused literature on SRW is its examination of how MPs in Asia act on behalf of women to advance SRW and gender equality. Recognizing that both women and men can be critical actors (e.g. Childs & Krook 2009; Celis & Erzeel 2015), this study takes a novel approach by assessing the contributions of both women and men parliamentarians toward advancing women's substantive representation across ten different Asian countries.

   As discussed earlier, studying SRW can be challenging because a simple number cannot sum up the outcome of interest (e.g. Pitkin 1967; Wängnerud 2009). SRW implies working on behalf of women's interests with studies of SRW often focusing on women's legislative activities "such as bill proposals, speeches on the committees, women's caucuses, and parliamentary questions" (Lee & Lee 2020: 443). While this should presumably contribute to mitigating male dominance, it is important for us to recognize that predetermined conceptualizations of "women's interests" are open to contestation because interests change over time, differ across cultures, and women are heterogeneous (e.g. Joshi & Och 2014, 2021).[10] In response, this study approaches the study of SRW inductively by listening to what Asian MPs themselves have to say about gender equality and women's representation while taking seriously three essential shapers of the political representation process: (a) ideas, (b) institutions, and (c) intersectionality. This leads us to formulate six testable hypotheses as follows.

Ideas: Since actions taken by MPs may be closely related to their personal identities and the ideas they hold dear (e.g. Burden 2015), one can presume that women parliamentarians in Asia will demonstrate greater keenness to advance SRW compared to their male counterparts. This leads us to our first hypothesis (H1) that *women MPs will do more for SRW than men MPs*. Relatedly, we hypothesize that having more women in parliament will advance SRW more than having only a small share of women. Thus, our second hypothesis (H2) is that *a critical mass of women MPs will do more for SRW than a small number of women MPs*.

While we assume that the identity and experience of being a woman makes women more inclined to stand up for women as a group, studies have also

found that some MPs are more committed than the average parliamentarian to advancing women's interests. This leads us to our third hypothesis (H3) that *critical actor MPs will do more for SRW than a critical mass of women MPs*. Lastly, we suspect that the personal backgrounds of MPs will shape their beliefs about and dedication to improving SRW in unique ways. From this we arrive at a fourth hypothesis (H4) that *certain personal experiences and ideologies are more favorable for SRW*.

Institutions: Institutions play an important role in structuring political influence. In particular, this study examines the role of parliamentary committees (as further discussed below), but it also indirectly touches upon the issue of parliamentary gender quotas. Regarding the latter, Mona Lena Krook (2015: 186) points out how "quotas give women presence, but they do not give them power," and this observation is especially relevant to the Asian context. Quota women may be stigmatized and their qualifications seen as suspect with quota women often not reelected beyond a single term or two (e.g. Mobrand 2019). Mass and elite receptiveness of gender quotas is also influenced by cultural and societal expectations such as strict gender norms in patriarchal societies and emphasis on meritocracy that in certain contexts can lead voters to perceive that women elected or appointed via quotas are unqualified or illegitimate. Another potential obstacle is the "diversity paradox" mentioned by O'Brien and Rickne (2014: 10). This refers to the counterintuitive result whereby increased numbers of an out-group may lessen the members' desire to work with one another. It can also prompt an increasingly hostile working environment whereby men become verbally aggressive and dominate committee hearings and parliamentary debates (ibid.: 9). These observations lead us to the fifth hypothesis (H5) that *certain parliamentary institutions are more favorable than others are for SRW*.

Intersectionality: In addition to examining the potential negative or positive contributions of ideas and institutions for SRW, we also take into consideration intersectionality. The origins of *intersectionality* theorizing stem from Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) legal analysis of how individuals can be victims of discrimination based on both race and gender. In other words, intersectionality relates to different forms of structural marginality. More broadly, the concept of *intersectionality* can be defined as "the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts" (Brah & Phoenix 2004: 76). Taking intersectionality seriously in gender politics means examining "what power inequalities, privileges and marginalizations does the interaction of gender with other systems of inequality produce?" (Kantola & Lombardo 2017: 23). As Hancock (2014: 57) argues, "incorporating a paradigm intersectionality approach can expand substantive representation for women and create solidarity across other categories of difference that can truly lift all boats."

As intersectionality researchers have convincingly demonstrated, scholars ought to become more aware of the interconnected nature of social categorizations like race, class, gender, religion, and indigeneity in which there are overlapping and independent systems of power relationships that produce unequal material realities and distinctive social experiences for individuals and groups (Collins & Chepp 2013: 3). Such awareness leads us to ask questions like "can elite women (ever) effectively represent the interests of marginalized women?" After all, it may be the case that women of a minority ethnicity may feel better represented by a man of the same ethnicity than by women of a different ethnicity. The same may be true for social class.

To conclude, when it comes to SRW, intersectionality matters not only because of the heterogeneity among women but also because women from disadvantaged populations may incur greater hardship. For example lower-income women (especially those with children) often shoulder a heavier care burden than elite and childless women and spend more time on unpaid household responsibilities as they cannot afford to hire servants (e.g. Heisig 2011; Joshi & Goehrung 2021). Are their interests well represented by elite women (or men) serving in parliament? In some countries, racial and ethnic minority women are more likely to live in poverty, have less access to essential services, and face additional discrimination in employment markets (e.g. Palmieri 2010). Are their interests fully and adequately represented by women (or men) of the ethnic majority?[11] This leads us to our sixth and final hypothesis (H6): *greater diversity of MPs will lead to better substantive representation of women from different backgrounds.*

Research Design

Like Celis and Erzeel (2015), this volume applies an open-ended and inductive approach to studying SRW by examining multiple actors in a system. This way, we could bring out the role of unexpected actors. The editors and case study authors in this project worked together as a team to maximize the coherence of the study. The case study authors are experienced country researchers with expertise on women's political representation and deep contextual knowledge of specific country political environments. In nine out of ten cases (all except Timor-Leste), the researchers were native-born citizens of the study country and native speakers of the national language. To maximize the quality and coherence of this study, the research team met regularly (once or twice per month) via internet conferencing over a six-month period to develop a shared approach, to coordinate activities, and to give each other advice, feedback, and support.[12]

As an inductive and qualitatively oriented research project, each national case study focuses on analyzing responses obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher with current and former MPs. Both women members of parliament (WMPs) and male members of parliament (MMPs) were interviewed to discern how they engage in supporting gender equality and SRW and to find out their perceptions of how active fellow MPs are in pursuing these goals.[13] The

three methods used to recruit MPs to participate in the study were (a) introductions made by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) between country researchers and members of the Asian Women Parliamentarian Caucus (AWPC), (b) country researchers making use of personal connections with parliamentarians and their staff, and (c) introductions made by MPs interviewed by researchers to other MPs.

To achieve a proper balance in conducting the case studies, country researchers applied a common theoretical framework focusing on the role of (a) MPs' ideas and personal backgrounds, (b) parliamentary institutions, and (c) intersectionality. At the same time, each researcher exercised her own autonomy and independent judgment on which of these aspects to devote greater attention and also which components or dimensions of SRW to emphasize. Thus, for instance some chapters pay more attention to the fate of particular legislative proposals placed on the parliamentary agenda in recent years while others focus more on the gendered dynamics of different parliamentary committees or the successful/failed contribution of gender quotas to SRW.

The interviewing component time frame of our study (March–June 2021) also took place amidst considerable COVID-19-related restrictions and lockdowns. Despite these challenges, the authors demonstrated great resilience and all were able to conduct between 8 and 15 interviews primarily with current MPs in their country. In most cases, MPs were selected through purposive sampling to obtain a roughly even mix of women and men MPs while including representatives from at least three different parliamentary committees – capturing respectively both women and men on committees with higher, medium, and lower proportions of women among committee members. Researchers also aimed to incorporate intersectionality by interviewing both privileged and underprivileged women and men in their respective parliaments based on elements of privilege and marginalization salient in their own national and parliamentary contexts. For example the privilege category selected by researchers differed across countries featuring MPs hailing, for instance, from the upper class, a powerful political family, or the dominant ethnicity.

The research team also agreed upon a unified set of interview questions (see Appendix A) to elicit SRW inductively while simultaneously taking into consideration the role of intersectionality and parliamentary committees. Parliamentary committees were singled out for consideration because of the important and gendered role they play in shaping legislative outcomes in many national legislatures (e.g. Heath, Schwindt-Bayer & Taylor-Robinson 2005; Bolzendahl 2014; Murray & Sénac 2018). In particular, we wanted to see whether committees are a welcome or hostile space for SRW and whether the committee environment changes significantly when women form a greater proportion (i.e. critical mass) of committee members.

Upon obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for conducting research with human subjects, interviews were first conducted with AWPC members connected to KAS, which sponsored the study, before snowballing out. Interviews with MPs typically lasted about 45–60 minutes and were conducted face-to-face when possible or when necessary due to COVID-19 restrictions by

TABLE 1.1 Numbers and Percentages of Women and Men in Ten Asian Parliaments (2021)

Region	Country	Women in Parliament (%)	Men in Parliament (%)	Women in Upper House (%)	Men in Upper House (%)
East Asia	1) Taiwan	47 (41.6%)	66 (58.4%)	.	.
	2) South Korea	57 (19.0%)	243 (81.0%)	.	.
	3) Japan	46 (9.9%)	398 (90.1%)	56 (23.0%)	188 (77.0%)
Southeast Asia	1) Timor-Leste	25 (38.5%)	40 (61.5%)	.	.
	2) Philippines	85 (28.0%)	219 (72.0%)	7 (29.2%)	17 (70.8%)
	3) Indonesia	121 (21.0%)	454 (79.0%)	.	.
	4) Malaysia	33 (14.9%)	189 (85.1%)	9 (13.6%)	57 (86.4%)
South Asia	1) Nepal	90 (32.7%)	185 (67.3%)	22 (37.9%)	36 (62.1%)
	2) Bangladesh	73 (20.9%)	277 (79.1%)	.	.
	3) Sri Lanka	12 (5.4%)	211 (94.6%)	.	.

Note: Women and men "in Parliament" refers to single or lower house seats as of 1 January 2021.
Data Sources: www.ipu.org/women–in–politics–2021; Taiwan News.

phone or online platforms like Zoom. Transcriptions were made of the interview content and translated into English for analysis. As some MPs requested anonymity, they are not mentioned by name in this study and only listed by unique code numbers.

Incorporating geographic diversity, our study covered ten countries from the three most populated sub-regions of Asia. We included three countries from East Asia (Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan) as covered respectively in Chapters 2, 3, and 4; four countries from Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste) as explored in Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8; and three countries from South Asia (Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) as detailed in Chapters 9, 10, and 11. As this study examines SRW as a dimension of democratic representation, all countries included in the study currently have democratic or semi-democratic forms of government.[14] As Table 1.1 displays, our ten cases capture considerable diversity in terms of numbers and proportions of women in parliament. Moreover, Table 1.2 illustrates how conditions in these countries differ considerably as well although there is a high correlation between (higher) democracy index scores and (higher) per capita income levels amongst these countries. The major exception is Timor-Leste, where democratic development exceeds economic development.

Structure of the Book

The following ten chapters present the country case studies from East Asia (Chapters 2–4), Southeast Asia (Chapters 5–8), and South Asia (Chapters 9–11). Each of these chapters follows a similar structure. First, the chapters begin with an introductory section regarding the national context, the parliament, and efforts to advance gender equality in that country. Here, authors have summarized and highlighted important findings from previous studies on parliamentary representation

TABLE 1.2 Comparative Indicators of Ten Asian Countries (2019–2020)

Region	Country	EIU Democracy Index Score 2020 (1–10)	Population (Millions of People) in 2020	World Press Freedom Rank 2020 (1–180)	WEF Global Competitive- ness Score 2019 (1–100)	Per Capita Income 2019 (USD)
East Asia	1) Taiwan	8.94	23.6	43	80.2	28,371
	2) Japan	8.13	125.8	67	82.3	40,247
	3) South Korea	8.01	51.8	42	79.6	31,846
Southeast Asia	1) Malaysia	7.19	32.3	119	74.6	11,414
	2) Timor-Leste	7.06	1.3	71	N/A	1,561
	3) Philippines	6.56	109.6	138	61.9	3,485
	4) Indonesia	6.30	273.5	113	64.6	4,136
South Asia	1) Sri Lanka	6.14	21.9	127	57.1	3,853
	2) Bangladesh	5.99	164.7	152	52.1	1,856
	3) Nepal	5.22	29.1	106	51.6	1,071

Data Sources: Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) 2020, World Economic Forum (WEF): Global Competitiveness Report 2019, Reporters Without Borders 2020 (https://rsf.org/en/ranking?) (2020 rankings accessed 30 May 2021), World Bank for 2019 Per Capita GDP (Current US$) and popula- tion figures, See https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators (accessed 30 May 2021), Taiwan National Statistics for Taiwan population, and 2019 Per Capita GDP (Current US$), See https://eng.stat.gov.tw/point.asp?index=1 (accessed 26 July 2021).

of women in their country as well as political efforts to advance gender equality over the past two decades. In addition to assessing the state of gender (in)equality in their country, authors discuss the general structure and influence of parliament and parliamentary committees in their country.

The second section of each chapter then briefly mentions sources from which data and information on the functioning of the national parliament including par- liamentary speeches, questions, bills, and voting records were obtained. It also dis- cusses which MPs were selected for interviewing and why and how they relate to diversity of parliamentary committee memberships and intersectionality.

The third section explores how personal backgrounds and experiences of MPs have shaped their thinking and commitment to advancing SRW and gender equal- ity. Here authors have taken an open-ended approach to reflect on both MPs' per- ceptions and their engagement in specific practices. For example they analyze how and what MPs say in terms of framing to make sense of their common or differing gender ideologies focusing on what a) gendered needs MPs perceive and b) what gendered obstacles MPs perceive. The authors moreover identify whether any of the MPs they have interviewed appear to be critical actors in supporting gender equality and if so, how and why?

The fourth section of each chapter focuses on institutional dimensions of SRW drawing heavily on MP interviewees' responses while some authors assess the degree to which the parliament is "gender-sensitive" (Palmieri 2011) in terms of

formal and informal organizational rules and norms. Also, this section examines the role of parliamentary committees. For example, what is women's share on each committee and how are committee memberships assigned? To what extent are parliamentary committees an arena in which gender equality can be advanced? How does the gender composition of a parliamentary committee impact women's substantive representation? Here, differences (if any) between women's and men's perspectives on different parliamentary committees are also discussed.

The fifth section of each chapter addresses intersectionality and how gender interacts with other inequalities. Since women and men are heterogeneous, this section examines what kind of women and men are MPs and what kind of women and men those MPs represent. The intersections examined here range from age to class, race/ethnicity, incumbency, dynastic family, religion, sexuality, caste, and other relevant characteristics. Comparing the extent to which MPs interviewed differ from women and men in the population, authors also assess how their intersectional backgrounds have influenced their advocacy of gender equality.

Lastly, each country case chapter concludes with the author making an assessment of how much progress toward gender equality and improving SRW has been made so far and what still needs to be done. Authors also discuss what critical interventions might be able to make a positive difference.

Finally, the concluding chapter (Chapter 12) of this volume compares the country findings to each other and presents overall lessons from the study. It discusses how issues like combating violence against women, workplace harassment, and gender-based discrimination were important SRW agenda items almost everywhere whereas other SRW issues varied significantly across countries. It also notes how few men MPs in Asia were motivated to enter politics to advance SRW. Likewise, most women MPs in South Asia and Southeast Asia did not enter politics to improve gender equality either whereas in East Asia the majority of women MPs interviewed entered politics to advance SRW. Most women MPs across Asia also actively consulted with women voters compared to only a slim majority of men in parliament. Perceptions of harassment also differed by gender but higher levels of democratic and economic development among Asian countries were not correlated with any decrease in gender-based bullying, harassment, or stereotyping of MPs. Women were also much more likely to participate in cross-party alliances supporting SRW. Yet, the fact that slightly over one out of four male parliamentarians interviewed were involved in such alliances indicates that SRW is an issue some men MPs in Asia are indeed willing to support. We also found men parliamentarians who were younger and who came from single-mother households, had many sisters, or whose family included feminist wives or daughters tended to be more gender-sensitive and supportive of SRW compared to those with backgrounds in business, the military, or dynastic political families.

As for proposed institutional reforms, almost half of the MPs interviewed for this study called for election reforms and many MPs additionally called for introducing and strengthening legal (i.e. statutory) or constitutional gender quotas that affect all candidates. They also supported quotas for parliamentary candidates adopted

voluntarily by political parties themselves. Gender equality within political parties and the presence of a nonpartisan parliamentary women's caucus were likewise found to help significantly in coordinating SRW efforts. Asian MPs generally found the parliamentary committee environment to be supportive of gender equality and women's interests except in countries where such committees have little power. Evidence from this study also suggests that the key critical mass cutoff points within Asian parliaments lie around 17.5%, 40%, and 62.5%. That is when comprising less than 17.5% of committee members, most women on parliamentary committees were unsatisfied with how it represented women's interests whereas when women comprised at least 40% (or 62.5%) of committee members, women were usually (or always) satisfied with how it represented women's interests. At the same time, there is a need for greater diversification of women (and men) MPs to improve SRW. Lastly, the chapter emphasizes how societal attitudes are the most important solution to gender equality, that both critical actors and critical mass are necessary in Asian parliaments, and that those factors inhibiting numerical representation tend to impede substantive representation.

As you will see in the upcoming chapters, there are numerous unexpected findings and the results of this study as detailed in the individual country chapters and conclusion chapter are both fascinating and illuminating.

Notes

1 As Beckwith (2007) notes, potential positive effects of women obtaining a critical mass include women experiencing (a) an increase in voting power, (b) greater opportunities to set the political agenda, and (c) a long-term spillover effect whereby more women become willing to join politics when they see many women serving as parliamentarians.

2 In the West, there have also been contagion effects over time such that a number of center–right parties have become supportive of women's interests like the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party in Germany (e.g. Thames & Williams 2013).

3 Modernization increases women's participation in the paid labor force, but women often do paid and unpaid care work that is typically devalued because it is gendered (e.g. Benoit & Hallgrimsdottir 2011). Meanwhile increases in women's paid labor force participation in recent decades have not been accompanied by a proportionate increase in men's involvement in domestic care activities (UN Women 2015: 83).

4 Childs and Krook (2009: 138) define *critical actors* as "those who initiate policy proposals on their own, even when women form a small minority, and embolden others to take steps to promote policies for women, regardless of the proportion of female representatives."

5 In certain locations, women are also expected to obey their husbands in voting choices (Hillman 2017).

6 In rural areas, women's participation in the labor force may be limited to only their family's farm or small businesses (Hirschman 2016).

7 Sarah Bush (2011) found countries hosting a UN peace operation more likely to adopt gender quotas.

8 The three main types of gender quotas are candidate quotas adopted voluntarily by political parties, legislated electoral candidate quotas affecting all parties, and reserved seats for women. According to Swiss and Fallon (2017), countries with either active civil societies or active participation in the 1995 UN World's Conference on Women have been more likely to adopt gender quotas.

9 Yet, even when set above this threshold, gender quotas can still become glass ceilings that prevent the number of women from exceeding the quota requirement (Dahlerup 2006b: 3).

10 According to Dahlerup and Leyenaar (2013: 8), six prominent dimensions of male dominance in politics include

> 1. Representation: Women's numerical under-representation in elected assemblies. 2. Politics as a workplace: Male-coded norms and practices in elected assemblies. 3. Vertical sex segregation: Unequal gender distribution of positions in political hierarchies. 4. Horizontal sex segregation: Limited access of women to a range of portfolios and committees. 5. Discourses and framing: Gendered perceptions of politicians. 6. Public policy: Policies biased in favor of men. No concern for gender equality.

11 Intersectionality does not only concern gender, race, and class. Other groups such as non-citizen, disabled, and LGBT women, for instance, may experience particular disadvantages and be inadequately represented in parliament by women and men MPs who do not share the same background.

12 Regrettably, an in-person team meeting was not feasible due to COVID-19-related travel restrictions.

13 On this point, we followed the guidelines of Celis and Erzeel (2015: 49), who note how "research on women's substantive representation needs to change its initial methodological design, if it wants to include men, right wing parties, and the non-feminists as potential actors." As Celis et al. (2008) note, since critical actors may include at times men, the methodological implication for capturing the richness of SRW is for researchers to broaden the scope of their inquiry to acknowledge multiple actors, activities, and sites in raising issues constructed dynamically across time.

14 For a critical view on the relationship between women and democratic representation, see Dahlerup (2018).

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions for MPs

A   Establish Rapport/Understand Motivations and Ideology

    1   Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today. It is a great honor to speak with you and I would like to ask your permission if it is ok to record our conversation so that I can listen to it again later and take notes as well as to quote you in the study and share a transcription of our discussion with the research team.

    2   Can you explain how you got into formal politics and into parliament? Briefly stated, what was your main motivation for entering?

B   Understanding Institutional Environment and Extent of Substantive Representation

    3   In your view, what are the most important issues in society you feel need to be addressed by government currently?

    4   How confident/comfortable are you in speaking up/raising the causes that you are passionate about in parliament and how often do the issues you raise in parliament get discussed?

    5   Do you think your gender has had an impact on your experience as a politician and if so, how? For women: have you ever been harassed, bullied, or treated according to a gender stereotype in parliament? For men: did you ever feel uncomfortable with women politicians being present? Have you ever witnessed a woman being harassed or bullied in parliament and what was your reaction/response?

    6   Do you consult with or work with female voters? What are some of the key issues affecting women in this country? Have you done any work on these issues?

    7   What has been your experience like on parliamentary committees? Has the committee environment been supportive of women's interests and

gender equality? Do other MPs listen and support you when you are pushing for policies that support women? What are their reactions?

8   How supportive are you of other women MPs through cross-political party alliances/cooperation and how well are you supported by women MPs from other parties? Are you obliged to vote with your political party on gender issues? How often have you been in a situation where you had to vote with your party and against your gender interests?

9   What legislation and policies have you advocated for that positively improved conditions for women? Has it been implemented/supported/rejected? Also, what are some strategies that you adopt when advancing women issues? What are the major obstacles to advancing gender equality? Is it, for example, your constituents, your party, the media, or something else?

C   Intersectionality: Who Represents Whom?

10   How do you feel your personal background characteristics such as your age, ethnicity, education, party, and familial background influence your policy views and behavior in political activities?

11   How do you think you as an MP represent women of different groups in your country, which vary on the basis of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, generation, and other dimensions?

12   If given a chance, what would be your top three priorities in redesigning the current political system (such as perhaps changing its gender quota or electoral system) to better empower women? Are there other reforms you would recommend?

D   Supporting Future Research

13   I am really encouraged by your support for gender equality and hope you will be able to keep working in this important area to make even more progress.

14   To further our research, can you please recommend and introduce me to two women MPs and two male MPs to meet so that I can learn more?

PART I

Cases from East Asia

2

SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN JAPAN

Pursuing Gender Equality in a Gender-Insensitive Parliament

Mikiko Eto

Introduction

Women account for only 14.3% of the members of Japan's national parliament, known as the Diet – women members comprise 9.7% and 23.1% in the Lower and Upper Houses, respectively (as of November 2021). Descriptive representation is important for women's legislative representation in which women members of parliament (MPs) represent women, and it is further indispensable for the substantive representation of women (SRW), whereby women MPs act on behalf of women's interests and demands. Case studies have demonstrated that women legislators are more eager to advocate for gender issues than their men counterparts (e.g. Lovenduski and Norris, 2003; Childs, 2004, 2008; Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005; Annesley, Gains, and Rummery, 2007; Franceschet, Krook, and Piscopo, 2012; Wängnerud, 2015; Eto, 2016). Thus, it appears that no gains in substantive representation can be made without descriptive representation.

Japanese women hardly have their voices heard in politics. An initial requirement for Japanese women's representation is therefore to improve descriptive representation to reach at least a critical mass (30%). However, some political scientists doubt the correlation between descriptive and substantive representations. They conceive of women legislators as only partial contributors to developing women-friendly and gender equality policies. They believe that diverse players inside and outside legislatures are often the ones advancing policy for women and that those who work toward women-friendly policymaking as representatives for women include men legislators, bureaucrats, scholars, and civil society activists (e.g. Weldon, 2005; Childs and Krook, 2006, 2008, 2009; Childs, 2008; Celis et al., 2008; Celis and Childs, 2012; Htun and Weldon, 2012; Celis et al., 2014).

Among these diverse representatives for women, men MPs have played a crucial role in Japan's achievements in women-friendly policymaking. Since the First

World Conference on Women in 1975, the Japanese government has enacted five women-friendly laws, namely the Act for Proportional Opportunity between the Sexes in Employment in 1985, the Basic Act for Gender Equality Society in 1999, the Act for Preventing Domestic Violence in 2001, the Act for Promoting Active Working Life of Women in 2015, and the Act for Promoting Gender Equality in Legislatures in 2018. The first three laws were established under strong pressure from the United Nations, especially the influence of the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (e.g. Kobayashi, 2004, 99–121). The last two laws were introduced by the initiative of men MPs. None of these five acts would have been passed without the approval of men MPs (Eto, 2021, 77–79, 184–190).

   This historical experience demonstrates that men MPs have a decisive role in the progress of women-friendly and gender equality policies. Yet, this raises a question about the extent to which Japanese men MPs are conscious of gender equality and interested in gender issues. How do they try to work to improve gender equality or tackle gender issues? More elementarily, how does this men-dominated Diet look? One could speculate that it is not a "gender-sensitive parliament" (Palmieri, 2012), but to what degree is it gender insensitive? As mentioned earlier, women MPs are expected to be more conscious of and interested in gender matters. Is this true of Japan? Further, how do Japanese women MPs attempt to cope with their marginalized position in the Diet? This chapter aims to find answers to these questions.

   Previous studies of Japanese women in legislatures have predominantly examined descriptive representation; they have explored what causes the underrepresentation of women, focusing on electoral rules (Hickman, 1997; Christensen, 2000; Iwanaga, 2008), party politics (Iwanaga, 2008; Christensen, 2008; Gaunder, 2012; Dalton, 2015), and the lack of electoral gender quotas (Kobayashi and Kamahara, 2019). My book on this subject, by categorizing the causes into five factors – culture, welfare states, electoral systems, political parties, and the lack of legal gender quotas – has demonstrated that all five factors have negative impacts on the legislative representation of Japanese women as they are intertwined with one another (Eto, 2021). However, no major study exists on SRW in the Japanese context. This chapter will be the first contribution to this field.

Methods and Data

My investigation was centered on interviewing 12 Diet members, consisting of five women and seven men. Of them, four belonged to the ruling party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and the rest were from opposition parties. Their ages ranged from 35 to 73 years old. Table 2.1 shows their profiles using code names instead of their real names. I requested to interview 19 Diet members, but seven of them declined. The interviews were conducted between 19 March and 19 April 2021, either face-to-face or online (see Table 2.1).

TABLE 2.1 List of Interviewees' Profiles

Code Number	Interviewed Date, Place, and Duration	Code Name	Gender	Birth Year	Party Affiliation	House	Committee Affiliation (of Women, %)	Political Career
JPN.01	19 March 2021 Diet office 59 min.	Mr. A	Male	1950	CDP	Lower	Education (17.5%) Environment (6.7%)	1983: first elected in Mie Prefectural Assembly, 1996: first elected in the Lower House, 2011–2012: Minister of Education, 2012: Minister of Gender Equality
JPN.02	22 March 2021 On Zoom 24 min.	Ms. B	Female	1986	LDP	Lower	Foreign Affairs (20%)	2012: first elected in the Lower House
JPN.03	24 March 2021 Diet office 92 min.	Ms. C	Female	1975	DPP	Upper	Education (5%) Administrative Accountability (16.9%)	2016: first elected in the Upper House, 2020~ Deputy Leader of the DPP
JPN.04	29 March 2021 On Zoom 22 min.	Mr. D	Male	1969	DPP	Lower	Nation's Basic Principle (3.3%)	2009: first elected in the Lower House, 2018~ Leader of the DPP
JPN.05	30 March 2021 Diet office 49 min.	Ms. E	Female	1967	CDP	Lower	Health and Welfare (17.8%)	1999~Niigata Prefectural Assembly, 2003: first elected in the Lower House
JPN.06	31 March 2021 Diet office 65 min.	Mr. F	Male	1957	LDP	Lower	Budget (4%)	1986: first elected in the Lower House, 2007~2008: Minster of Defense, 2008~2009: Minister of Agriculture, 2014~2015: Minister of Local Innovation, 2009~2011: LDP Policy Chief, 2012~2013: LDP Secretary-General
JPN.07	31 March 2021 Diet office 69 min.	Mr. G	Male	1948	CDP	Lower	Environment (6.7%)	2003: first elected in the Lower House
JPN.08	01 April 2021 Diet office 33 min.	Mr. H	Male	1976	CDP	Lower	Justice (8.6%) Education (17.5%)	2003: first elected in the Lower House

(*Continued*)

TABLE 2.1 (Continued)

Code Number	Interviewed Date, Place, and Duration	Code Name	Gender	Birth Year	Party Affiliation	House	Committee Affiliation (of Women, %)	Political Career
JPN.09	02 April 2021 Diet office 69 min.	Ms. I	Female	1952	LDP	Upper	Environment (35%)	2005~2009: Lower House, 2010: first elected in the Upper House, 2005~2006: Minister of Gender Equality
JPN.10	05 April 2021 On Zoom 25 min.	Mr. J	Male	1983	Innovation	Upper	Finance (4%) Administrative Accountability (16.9%)	2013~2019: Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly, 2019: first elected in the Upper House
JPN.11	12 April 2021 On Zoom 46 min.	Mr. K	Male	1983	CDP	Lower	Justice (8.6%) Administrative Accountability (7.5%)	2011~2014: Kanagawa Prefectural Assembly. 2017: first elected the Lower House
JPN.12	19 April 2021 On Zoom 29 min.	Ms. L	Female	1960	LDP	Lower	Budget (4%) Nation's Basic Principle (3.3%)	1987~1990: Gifu Prefectural Assembly, 1993: first elected in the Lower House, 1998~1999: Minister of Postal Services, 2008~2009: Minister of Consumer Services, 2017~2018: Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications/ Minister of Gender Equality, 2018: Chair of the Budget Committee, 2020~: Acting Secretary- General of the LDP

Abbreviations of Party Names
Liberal Democratic Party: LDP
Constitutional Democratic Party: CDP
Democratic Party for the People: DPP
Japan Innovation Party: Innovation

Abbreviations of Parliamentary Committees
Justice Committee: Justice
Foreign Affairs Committee: Foreign Affairs
Education, Culture, Sports, and Science Technology Committee: Education
Health, Labor and Welfare Committee: Health and Welfare
Basic Principle of Nation Committee: Nation's Basic Principle Committee
Budget Committee: Budget
Settlement of Account and Administrative Observation Committee: Administrative Accountability
Finance and Monetary Committee: Finance

MP Backgrounds and Gender Consciousness

Gender was a negative word in Japanese politics two decades ago. The LDP, specifically, treated the word as if it were taboo. A group of anti-feminist politicians, mainly composed of conservative LDP members, ran a campaign against the discussion of gender. The LDP government declined to employ the word "gender" in government documents (Eto, 2016). Nowadays, however, this word is prevalent throughout the political world. Even LDP parliamentarians no longer refrain from uttering it. One reason for the recent political acceptance of gender stems from a sexist speech by the then-Tokyo Olympic Chief Yoshiro Mori in a Japanese Olympic Committee meeting on 3 February 2021.[1] He was reported as saying that when the number of women board members increased, board meetings would take much time. This is because, according to him, women with competitive personalities try to speak out more than others. Women's speech time should be restricted, he added, if the Olympic Committee were to raise the proportion of women board members to 40% in response to the Education Ministry's request.

Owing to fierce criticism of his speech inside and outside Japan, a few weeks later, Mori stepped down from the Executive Board of the Tokyo 2020 Organizing Committee. His case gave Japanese male politicians a lesson that gender equality was a global norm that the Olympic host country must follow. Since then, gender equality has increasingly been prioritized in Japanese politics. The Japanese MPs whom I interviewed were more or less conscious of gender equality because they accepted the interview based on the understanding that my objective was to talk about gender equality. This raises the question of what factors affected their gender consciousness. I discuss these factors by focusing on the MPs' gender, generation, education, and experience before and after entering politics.

Women's Gender Consciousness Derived From Experience

It is no wonder that women, who are marginalized in society, are more conscious of gender than men. However, women do not always possess a natural-born gender consciousness. Some events invoke their gender awareness. One crucial event for women is motherhood.

A typical example might be Ms. B. She had had no interest in gender issues until she had her first baby. She was first elected to the Lower House of the Diet at age 27. She debuted brightly as the youngest MP at the time, stimulating her to tackle high politics and hard issues like foreign affairs and defense policy. When she first became pregnant, however, she was attacked for her pregnancy by some voters who thought that pregnant MPs would neglect official duties. She suddenly recognized the severity of the social reality surrounding women. This event triggered her realization of gender inequality in Japanese society whereby women are confronted with more harsh difficulties than men due to their gendered roles. She became worried that childcare policy was being formulated without the real voices of mothers. Pregnant women and women with babies or small children are in such few numbers in the Diet that social policy is made based on outdated values of mothering and parenting in which most senior men MPs still believe. Motherhood is now one of her important identities in politics. Ms. B tries to make her actions and speeches reach the many mothers/parents struggling with child-raising (JPN.02).

The health problems of children make the mothers' life more difficult. Ms. C's second daughter was born with the disability of left-side deafness, which has no medical treatment. Before her daughter's birth, Ms. C had never thought of entering politics. However, she became aware of the social reality surrounding disabled children, where the laws protecting them placed strict limitations on their life and the concept of inclusion was merely nominal. This country, she thought, urged disabled people/children to be responsible for themselves. When she felt a strong anger toward this social unfairness, she found an advertisement to recruit electoral candidates to the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ).[2] The ad described that it was legislators who could change unreasonable laws and whose task was to create children's future. This description inspired her to get into politics. Ms. C then entered into politics to represent the most vulnerable people, such as single mothers, disabled people, and young women in poverty (JPN.03).

Gender consciousness arises from women's professional experience. Ms. I was a university professor of international relations before entering politics and had taught many women students. Backed by the 1985 Act for Proportional Opportunity between the Sexes in Employment, her promising women students joined blue-chip companies in the hopes of active engagement. However, all of them resigned from these companies a decade later because of motherhood or marriage. In the mid-1990s, it was hard for working women to continue their jobs while also managing housework and raising children. Immediately after being elected to the

Lower House, she was appointed the Minister of Gender Equality in 2005. This appointment reminded her of her former women students. She, in turn, decided to work for young women who grappled with work–life balance. She is confident that her political passion lies in her concerns about the hardship of her former women students. As a representative for women, she pursues the cultivation of a women-friendly society where women have no difficulty with their life at home and in the labor market (JPN.09).

For Ms. E, collaboration with feminist activists spurs her to work toward achieving gender equality in society. Her political career started with the Niigata Prefectural Assembly election of 1999. In those days, she worked as a part-time lecturer in a college while participating in the international aid activities of a non-governmental organization (NGO). She had never thought of entering the political world, but her NGO activities inspired her to think about how politics ought to be. In 1997, a DPJ man asked her to run in the upcoming Niigata Prefectural Assembly election. He persuaded her to be the first woman in this assembly – at that point, there had been no woman member. Although she was reluctant to run in the election, she gradually changed her mind as she understood the reasons why a woman like her was needed (JPN.05).

At the time, the central government planned to enact a law for gender equality. Once the new law was passed, prefectural governments would need to make regulations to implement the new law in their regions. It would have been inconvenient for the assembly to discuss the issue of gender equality without any women members.

More persuasively, a feminist action group calling for more women legislators promised to support Ms. E's election campaign with all their strength. The group lamented not having an assembly with any woman to the extent that it desired to gain at least one woman legislator. Ms. E finally decided to run and was successfully elected. After serving one term in the prefectural assembly, she shifted her political career to the Diet and ran in the Lower House election of 2003. Her feminist supporters, likewise, made tremendous efforts to help her election campaign. They have continued their support for her until now. In this regard, feminist and other women's groups have affected her legislative activities considerably. She intends to represent women who are struggling to improve their social standing and everyday life at the grassroots. She always concentrates on listening to their real voices (JPN.05).

Ms. L started her political career in the Gifu Prefectural Assembly at age 26. Three years later, she ran in the Lower House election of 1990 but failed. In the following election of 1993, she won and became a young MP at age 32. She needed and sought to conform to the political styles of men. In the 1990s, there was a political climate under which being a woman was unacceptable in politics. In fact, some of her women supporters even asked her to conceal her gender. Additionally, she was often treated like a TV star by the media due to her age and gender, which encouraged her to think that women voters did not like a

conspicuous woman like her. She came to keep a distance from women voters. While she always attempted to work for women as their descriptive representative, she felt that women in her constituency were cold toward her. The general election of 2005, however, sparked a dramatic change in her relationship with them (JPN.12).

In the 2005 election, her party (the LDP) president, Junichiro Koizumi, refused to nominate her as a party-endorsed candidate because of her disagreement with his proposal for postal privatization. Ms. L was then forced to run as an independent candidate. Parties play a crucial role in Japanese national election campaigns, and independent candidates have to operate everything with their campaigns all by themselves. The LDP, specifically, provides powerful support for its candidates, and losing this support made it very difficult for her to be reelected. However, the growing solidarity among her women supporters helped her out of this difficult situation. They were enthusiastically committed to her campaign from every angle. She felt that the men, including President Koizumi, LDP members, and her constituents, intended to obstruct her way. She then realized that it was women who supported women. Since then, she has attached much importance to her relationship with women voters and is now confident in her communication with any women supporters (JPN.12).

Women's Influence Over Men's Gender Consciousness

Men have far fewer chances to become aware of gender concerns than women not only because of their gender but also because they are rarely discriminated against on the grounds of their gender. Rather than learning from their own experience, men's gender consciousness can be affected by women. The men interviewees illustrated the point that family structure and daily experience help men develop their gender consciousness. For instance close women relatives have a strong influence on men. Mr. K grew up in a single-mother family. When he was 11 years old, his parents divorced. After that, his mother worked very hard to raise him and his two younger sisters. One day, his mother was no longer able to work because of a severe illness. Her hardship inspired him to support incapacitated women like her (JPN.11).

Wives might be the most influential people on Japanese men, as reflected in three of the men interviewees. Through his wife's election campaign, Mr. H learned the significance of women's descriptive representation (JPN.08). Mr. G is considerably influenced by his wife, who is an ecological feminist. Under her influence, he raised his antinuclear power manifesto. His wife has suggested that there are too few women MPs to improve policies for food safety and people's everyday life, encouraging him to promote an increase in the number of women MPs. Mr. G further turned his sympathetic eyes toward his party's women colleagues. To him, it seems that they are stubborn in the pursuit of their policy. In his experience, the women are rarely hesitant about reflecting their views on policies, whereas the men cannot readily decide their opinions because they carefully consider whether their

supporters agree or disagree with them. This made him aware that women could represent people's concerns in policymaking. He has decided to work to increase the number of women MPs (JPN.07).

Like Mr. G, Mr. F admires his wife's and his women secretaries' contributions to his election campaigns and daily activities. He deeply trusts his wife, who obtained qualifications to work as a parliamentary policy secretary. Because of his busy schedule, Mr. F relies on his wife to conduct daily activities in his constituency. Her contribution is well known to his constituents. He is proud that she has cultivated an excellent reputation there. His women secretaries are highly capable of managing his political activities. He has run in Lower House elections 11 times and is convinced that he hardly would have won all of his elections if his wife, women staff, and supporters had not devoted themselves to his campaigns. Mr. F recognizes that women are indispensable for his political life (JPN.06).

Neither Mr. G nor Mr. F are hostile toward gender equality. Rather, their attitudes are women-friendly. Nonetheless, their views of women are oriented toward themselves. No one can deny that they benefit from women. From a feminist perspective, their views are old-fashioned and steeped in gender stereotypes, like women having care roles. This is a reflection of their ages.

By contrast, younger men MPs are more liberated from conservative notions of gender. Mr. J at age 38 is interested in feminism. He took a gender studies course and read feminist books while in college. He has thought about what he could do to empower women in society (JPN.10). He can be called a feminist. On the other hand, Mr. A is a senior MP who graduated from Georgetown University in 1973. Studying in the United States created the basis for his political ideas, stimulating him to be involved in supporting human rights, gender equality, and migrants (JPN.01). Mr. D likewise studied overseas at the graduate school of Harvard University as part of his work for the Ministry of Finance. During his stay at Harvard, his eyes were opened to the world, meeting diverse people from all over the world. This stimulated him to become an unbiased person (JPN.04).

Gender-Insensitive Legislative Institutions

Women share only one in seven seats in the Diet. This low level of descriptive representation perpetuates men-defined conventions and customs of the Diet, thereby causing a problem for motherhood. Japan's Labor Regulation Act, enacted in 1947, requires that employers give their employees maternity leave consisting of six weeks before and eight weeks after childbirth. Working women, regardless of their working patterns – full-time or part-time jobs – exercise their right to take maternity leave as a matter of course. Nonetheless, there was no regulation governing maternity leave for Diet members when LDP Upper House member Seiko Hashimoto was expecting her first baby in April 2000. In March 2000, the Diet Regulation Act was eventually amended to grant MPs maternity leave.

After Hashimoto, there have been several pregnant members in the Diet. Japanese politics has become more familiar with pregnant MPs and women MPs with

babies or small children. Even so, women Diet members are still expected to assimilate into men-defined customs by putting aside their motherhood (Eto, 2021, 108).

Men-Defined Working Style in the Diet

As Table 2.2 shows, Japanese MPs spend more than half a year in Diet sessions. The rest of their days are spent on maintaining their constituencies, researching policy proposals, and preparing for upcoming elections. They are always busy with these activities. Diet sessions often extend until midnight or even overnight. Party meetings are held between the sessions. Another difficulty confronting women is settling into a men-defined working style in politics. Mr. D explained how MPs are forced to work hard by the phrase "full activities for 24 hours through 365 days" (JPN.04). It is common knowledge in the Diet that MPs sacrifice their private life for politics. Ms. C regarded it as "silly men's romanticism" (JPN.03). It cannot contribute to developing women's political aspirations.

This working style hinders women MPs from maintaining a balance between parliamentary activities and motherhood (JPN.04). Ms. E, for example, described a change in her circumstances after having a child. She cannot devote 100% of her time to politics. She especially complained of decisions made at night-time meetings, as she hardly attends such meetings. Despite her absence, important decisions are sometimes made there. She does not think that all of these meetings are useless but insisted that important decisions should be made in daytime meetings (JPN.05).

Elections cause another hardship for women. The duration of Diet election campaigns is fixed at 12 days for the Lower House and 17 days for the Upper House. Although this duration is short, it imposes heavy burdens on candidates. Candidates can start their campaigns outside their offices at 8:00 and must end by 20:00. Since individual visits to voters' houses are prohibited, candidates speak to voters and express their manifestos in public spaces, such as large squares, railway stations, and community centers. The most popular campaign style is to use sound trucks where candidates repeatedly call for voting in favor of them. Standing around railway stations is also very common.

During campaign days, candidates work almost all day. They campaign outside between 8:00 and 20:00, and before 8:00 and after 20:00, they are busy with meetings and preparations for the next day. This is not conducive to motherhood. In her Upper House election campaign, for example Ms. C had a few-months-old baby and a small child. She left both children with her parents to concentrate on campaigning. One day, her child caught pneumonia, yet she was unable to suspend her campaign to look after the child, having no choice but to continue the campaign (JPN.03).

Successful Japanese election campaigns require three ingredients, namely a supporter organization, a wider recognized name or face, and money. Candidates with these three items have higher possibilities of winning elections. Hereditary MPs, who take over constituencies from their family, are natural-born holders of these items that promise them repeated victories. Incumbent candidates, particularly

TABLE 2.2 Number of Seats Per Party in the Diet (as of 5 February 2021)

Party	Lower House		Upper House		Number/Proportion of Women in Parties
	Total Seats	Women	Total Seats	Women	
Liberal Democratic Party (LDP)★	279	21	114	18	39/393 (9.9%)
Clean Government Party★	28	4	28	5	9/56 (16.1%)
Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP)	113	15	43	14	29/156 (18.6%)
Communist Party	12	3	13	5	8/25 (32%)
Japan Innovation Party (Innovation)	11	1	16	3	4/27 (14.8%)
Democratic Party for the People (DPP)	10	2	15	4	6/25 (24%)
Others	–	–	8	3	3/8 (37.5%)
Independent	10	0	6	3	3/16 (18.8%)
Vacancy	2	–	2	–	–

★ These two parties have formed the coalition government since 2014.

those who continue to win many elections, enjoy well-functioning supporter organizations and are well known to many more voters. They are good at raising money. Women from political families and those who have significant experience therefore have advantages. By contrast, less experienced women without hereditary connections are the most disadvantaged candidates. Ms. C, a first-term MP, had to supplement her deficits in these three items by working extremely hard (JPN.03).

These institutional barriers at work are represented both in politics and in the economic sphere. Mr. D interpreted it as "a post-war economic model," where men concentrate full time on working in their workplace without any responsibility for homemaking, child-raising, or caring for elderly relatives, while women bear all the responsibilities at home (JPN.04). Progress in the political world is behind that of economy and society. A related obstacle to political progress is that conventional rules and precedents dominate Japanese politics. That is why politics is more favorable to older men.

Harassment Inside and Outside the Diet

Half of my 12 interviewees referred to harassment. Many of their references were gender-stereotyped or power-related verbal attacks, not physical ones. These attacks happen both inside and outside the Diet.

In her first question after she was newly elected, Ms. C asked the Minister of Defense, Tomomi Inada, a question during the Budget Committee meeting about why the minister attempted to abolish child allowances to cover defense expenditures though the minister as a mother raised her own child. Some committee attendees sneered at Ms. C, and one of them sitting behind her said that she

should stay at home to look after her small children rather than attend the committee. These bullying words hurt Ms. C as her hands were shaking uncontrollably (JPN.03).

Mr. K indicated that he sometimes feels difficulty in communicating with senior men MPs. He hardly makes his voice heard by them as he is frustrated that they ignore his ideas without careful examination (JPN.11). This is because he is not only young at age 38 – those in their 30s account for only ten out of the total 710 MPs – but he also has less experience in politics – as he is now serving his first term. Mr. H admitted that systemic barriers like seniority affect the presence and deliberation in the Diet. When he was a junior MP with less experience, he was often severely disciplined for his political behavior (JPN.08). Mr. J views Diet customs and rules as unusual and odd. Despite the unreasonable customs, MPs are forced to obey them (JPN.10).

The number of successful election results affects whether one becomes a victim of harassment or bullying. Gender, likewise, has an impact. Accordingly, women with shorter political careers, like Ms. C, are the most vulnerable to harassment. However, young and less experienced women MPs are not always victimized if they have hereditary backgrounds. Ms. B and Ms. L are cases in point. Ms. B's father is a well-experienced Lower House member. She became a Lower House member when she was 27 years old. Despite her young age, she has not been harassed (JPN.02). Ms. L took over her constituency from her grandfather. Since becoming a Lower House member at age 32, she has not suffered any harassment. She honestly described that belonging to a political dynasty gives her an advantage in terms of men's attitudes toward her (JPN.12). The two women owe their good fortune to the political influence of their family.

Elections sometimes become the space for harassment. In her election campaign, Ms. C experienced inappropriate behavior by some men voters (JPN.03). Not only women candidates, but also women who work in campaigning, such as wives, daughters, and women staff, are often sexually harassed by voters. Occasionally, voters exercise excessive power over candidates, and harassers react to candidates' complaints by threatening to prevent the candidates from being elected. Mr. D was concerned that MPs' women secretaries have increasingly been victims of sexual harassment but have to put up with it for the sake of their bosses (JPN.04). Mr. H referred to his wife, who was first elected to the Upper House in 2019. In her election campaign, a couple of elderly men shouted at her suddenly and coercively. In his understanding, these men attacked her because of her gender (JPN.08).

Similarly, supporters are not always friendly to women MPs with small children. Ms. B and Ms. E were bullied by their supporters for being mothers. Although it was only three months after Ms. B delivered her baby, her supporters often asked her to attend half-hour meetings in Sapporo, a one-and-a-half-hour plane ride away from her living place. She questioned whether such short meetings were so important (JPN.02). In the case of Ms. E, her supporters criticized her for attending an informal party together with her small child (JPN.05).

Collaboration Between MPs in Policymaking

Nonpartisan collaboration between women MPs is crucial in numerically men-dominated parliaments, since such collaborations can foster SRW. Japanese women MPs, however, are inactive in interparty collaboration, and there is no nonpartisan caucus of women in the Diet, although women MPs occasionally collaborate with one another on individual issues. Ms. C presents a successful example of collaborating with some women MPs outside her party to fulfill her policy ideas. For instance she organized a nonpartisan MP league to make available the selling of liquid baby formula as requested by many young mothers. The league included some influential women MPs, like Seiko Noda, the then-acting LDP Secretary-General, Seiko Hashimoto, the then-Minister of Gender Equality, and Renho (Saito), the former CDP Leader. These women played a key role in persuading their party leaders to table its regulatory bill, and the formula finally came out in the market.

Aside from women's actions, men's nonpartisan collaboration can contribute to women-friendly lawmaking. Mr. A set up a nonpartisan league to enact a bill encouraging political parties to nominate many more women candidates in national and local elections. The bill that passed in May 2018 became the Act for Promoting Gender Equality in Legislatures. His league comprised 100 men and women from all parties. Specifically, his collaboration with ruling LDP women brought about success in enacting the act (JPN.01; Eto, 2021, 183–187).

A sizable gap exists between the ruling and opposition parties when it comes to cooperation. The ruling party seizes the initiative for lawmaking. For most bills, the cabinet, which is composed solely of ruling party members, took the initiative. MPs can put forward MP-initiated bills as long as they meet some conditions for proposal (Eto, 2021, 171–172). In competing against the ruling party, opposition parties often propose alternative bills to the cabinet ones or bills concerning issues that the cabinet overlooked. Opposition MPs set up nonpartisan leagues excluding the ruling MPs to emphasize their raison d'être and attempt to propose MP-initiated bills. The ruling MPs, on the other hand, organize their own intraparty leagues to promote their policy ideas. The two camps rarely collaborate with one another. Mr. A's nonpartisan league might be an exceptional case.

The degree of women's influence inside parties differs depending on the inner-party power balance. The DPP presents a higher degree of women's influence. DPP women members actively engage in party decision-making and infuse fresh ideas into party proposals. Mr. D, the DPP leader, referred to his colleague Ms. C as a good example. In a DPP meeting, Ms. C reported that there were quite a few young women who could not afford sanitary goods for their menstrual period. She then proposed that the party should take the initiative to cope with this problem. While Mr. D was astonished by her topic of menstruation and felt embarrassed about it, he was struck by her uniqueness, as no man had come up with such an idea. The DPP decided to put pressure on the government to find a solution. The issue of sanitary napkins became a policy agenda, called the "poverty of menstruation," as did other DPP policy issues, including loneliness and liquid baby formula.

Why are DPP women members involved in party decision-making so deeply? One answer, according to Mr. D, is the proportion of women (JPN.04). As Table 2.3 shows, women account for 24% of the DPP's Diet members. Since the party is small in size (25 MPs in total), furthermore, all members are encouraged to participate in board meetings. In parallel with their relatively higher proportion, DPP women members are automatically involved in party decision-making, infusing their perspectives into the party manifesto.

In contrast with the DPP, LDP women members account for only 9.9% of the party's total MPs, which is the lowest proportion among all parties. This descriptive male dominance deprives women of influence over party management. Specifically, LDP women scarcely infused their ideas into party decision-making. Such a men-centric party nature has increasingly frustrated them. Perhaps to mitigate their frustration, the then-LDP Secretary-General, Toshihiro Nikai, invited his five women colleagues to a party executive board meeting in mid-February 2021. However, the women were not allowed to speak and were treated as observers.[3]

LDP leaders provide women with nominal posts in the party without substantive power. Ms. L indicated that an LDP leader appointed her to a managerial post. Despite her higher position, she was excluded from the core of party decision-making. The LDP has formed an exclusive circle within its decision-making body, called the "inner club." The club is composed only of powerful LDP figures. It has so far included no woman. She asked an "inner" man about the reason for the exclusion of women. He answered that women lack sufficient political experience and expertise in policy to be included (JPN.12). However, his answer seemed to be an excuse. Ms. L has had a distinguished political career with rich experience since her first success in the Lower House election of 1993.

Women in Diet Committees

Diet committees influence lawmaking, as do the ruling LDP's internal committees, especially in areas like tax reforms. MPs try to exert political influence through committee discussions. Opposition party MPs, specifically, put pressure on the prime minister or cabinet ministers to revise cabinet-initiated bills through their questions. Each MP must belong to at least one committee. While junior MPs

TABLE 2.3 Annual Sessions in the Diet (Japanese National Parliament)

Ordinary Session	150 Days (Fixed)	January to June (Often Extended for a Week or More)
Extraordinary Session	Unfixed	When 25 % or more of all MPs request, it is held.
Special Session	Unfixed	It must be held within 30 days after a general election was implemented.

join two or three committees, seniors join only one. The membership in each committee is fixed (see Table 2.4). Thus, joining popular committees is highly competitive. Men MPs are more likely to get desirable committee postings than their women counterparts because of the so-called old-boys network, which suggests that committees with lower percentages of women tend to be popular among MPs. In addition, women are often forced to conform to stereotypes and are put on committees involving everyday life or low politics. The Budget Committee is the most popular – and important – because it is often broadcast live on TV and receives more attention than any other committee.

Hypothetically, committees with higher proportions of women (HPW) would enable women to speak up more actively and freely than those with a lower proportion of women (LPW). Among my five women interviewees, one is attached

TABLE 2.4 Number of Diet Committee Members, Total and Women (as of February 2021)

Committee	Lower House		Upper House	
	Total Number	Women	Total Number	Women
Cabinet (L)	40	6 (15%)	21	5 (23.8%)
General Affairs and Communications (L)	40	4 (10%)	25	4 (16%)
Justice (L)	35	3 (8.6%)	21	6 (28.6%)
Foreign Affairs (H)	30	6 (20%)	—	—
Diplomacy and Defense (H)	—	—	21	1 (4.8%)
Financial Affairs (L)	40	3 (7.5%)	25	1 (4%)
Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (E)	40	7 (17.5%)	20	1 (5%)
Health, Labor and Welfare (E)	45	8 (17.8%)	25	8 (32%)
Agriculture, Forestry, and Fisheries (L)	40	3 (7.5%)	21	6 (28.6%)
Economy, Trade, and Industry (L)	40	2 (5%)	21	5 (23.8%)
Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (L)	45	6 (13.3%)	25	2 (8%)
Environment (E)	30	2 (6.7%)	20	7 (35%)
National Security (H)	30	0	—	—
Basic Principle of the Nation (H)	30	1 (3.3%)	20	3 (15%)
Budget (H)	50	2 (4%)	45	12 (26.7%)
Settlement of Account and Administrative Observation (L)	40	3 (7.5%)	65	11 (16.9%)
House Steering (H)	25	0	25	5 (20%)
Discipline (H)	20	0	10	0
Exclusive membership, i.e. former PM and party leaders				

Notes: H: high politics (or big politics), L: low politics (or small politics), E: everyday politics

Source: www.shugiin.go.jp/internet/itdb_annai.nsf/html/statics/kokkai/kokkai_iinkaikousei.htm
www.sangiin.go.jp/japanese/kon_kokkaijyoho/index.html#02

to an HPW committee, two are on LPW committees, and two are on middle proportion of women (MPW) committees (see Table 2.1). Ms. I is a member of the Upper House Environment Committee, which she conceives of as a gender-balanced committee (35%). Based on her impression, women members are particularly active in asking questions to the minister. On the initial day of committee deliberations, for example the first three questioners including her were women (JPN.09). Ms. B, a member of the Lower House foreign affairs committee with 20% women, is satisfied with the committee's friendly atmosphere in which all other members listen to her speeches sincerely and respectably (JPN.02).

By contrast, Ms. C, a member of the LPW Upper House education committee (5%), has experienced difficulty participating in discussions. She brought up the issue of "poverty of menstruation" in the committee. She hesitated to talk about this kind of reproductive issue, which usually embarrasses Japanese people. Yet she found the courage to speak up for young women voters who asked her to tackle this issue. While her colleagues looked as if they sympathized with her, some men expressed their disapproval. A committee chairman, she said, looked at her like a filthy thing (JPN.03).

When there is a small number of women on a committee, they are often forced to assimilate into men's conventions and customs. Mr. F agrees with this view because he had a chance to talk about it with a woman colleague. She told him that only one woman in ten people would tend to behave in favor of men and accommodate men's viewpoints, which damaged women's interests. Her remark inspired Mr. F to understand that women MPs could not influence policymaking on behalf of women unless they accounted for 30% or more of the MPs (JPN.06).

Even HPW committees assume gender-blindness. The Lower House education committee has a relatively higher proportion of women, at 17.5%, which is the third largest number of women among all Lower House committees (see Table 2.4). Further, it has a woman chair. Mr. H, on this committee, stated that men members urged their women counterparts to deal with women's issues (JPN.08). However, men are not always insensitive to gender. Mr. J worked on behalf of women-friendly policies in his Upper House financial affairs committee. His committee includes only one woman. He has taken such issues as a pension scheme for non-working married women and a tax exemption on hiring babysitters (JPN.10). He acts as a representative of women in this men-dominated committee.

Party Rule for Voting Obligation

Under the parliamentary cabinet system, Japanese political parties impose strict discipline for the Diet voting of MPs, who basically must vote according to their party decisions, as the interviewees confirmed. The ruling party particularly controls the voting of its members in the Diet because rebels challenge the party's unity and weaken the power of the cabinet. Opposition parties follow a similar course to preserve their unity. No party permits its members to vote against the party line. Yet, some exceptions exist. The ruling LDP excludes matters of human

lives, bioethics, and life and death from the voting discipline (JPN.02). In the CDP, members discuss at length whether they approve or disapprove of cabinet-initiated bills, and afterwards all must vote in accordance with the party's decision (JNP.05).

Intersectionality and Interactions Between MPs and Women Voters

This section investigates how women and men MPs represent women voters substantively. The concept of SRW is divided between the women-friendly/gender equality attitudes of MPs and women-friendly/gender equality policy outcomes (e.g. Wängnerud, 2009). Here, I attach equal importance to both, attempting to illuminate how my interviewees act for women.

Men Acting for Women

Japanese MPs establish supporter organizations in their constituencies. The organizations aim to function as campaigning machines during elections. They are often attached to women's caucuses. In addition to being campaigning machines, women's caucuses provide MPs with women's everyday voices at the grassroots. Among my interviewees, the more experienced MPs have better resources that lead to better-run women's caucuses and women supporters' activities but not necessarily more interaction or understanding of women's issues that could promote substantive representation; the caucuses appear to be tokenism to a certain extent (JPN.06; JPN.12).

Rather than relying on organized women's supporter caucuses, younger MPs communicate with women individually. They are more active in hearing women's real voices. Mr. K, at age 38, serving his first term, tries to talk with diverse women voters in his constituency. Above all, women in their 30s approach him to articulate their demands more than their older counterparts. They bring up everyday issues, such as children's school lunches, safety of public areas, and municipal administrative services. Through his grassroots activities, he has become aware that it is important for MPs to listen to women's everyday issues and find some solutions with them (JPN.11).

Another 38-year-old freshman, Mr. J, does not organize women's supporter groups or a women's caucus. Instead, he makes good use of internet tools, such as blogs, Twitter, and YouTube, to listen to women's voices. Furthermore, he talks with women on streets, around railway stations, and in community centers. He sometimes invites young parents with small children to his office. For their convenience, his office has a child play space. Ms. C, likewise, has set up a similar space for children. Some voters and MPs have criticized them for having such a space in their offices, claiming that MPs' offices are neither nurseries nor kindergartens (JNP.10). Mr. J believes, however, that politicians should adopt a family friendly style to attract and connect with many young voters. In fact, young parents provide

him with useful information for his policy views. His policy issues are derived from their demands raised in these meetings (JNP.10).

It is unsurprising that men MPs can represent women substantively. This fits the liberal conception of representative democracy – Anne Phillips (1995) called this conception "the politics of ideas." Mr. F stated that he does not engage in politics to fulfill men's interests exclusively (JNP.06). Mr. H, however, argued against this idea. He believes he has thus far made efforts to be active in working for women's issues. In his support for his wife's first Upper House election of 2019, nevertheless, he realized that there was a window that men politicians like him could never open, but that women like her could do easily (JNP.08).

Mr. H has served as a Lower House MP for nearly 20 years, representing people in Akita Prefecture. His wife is based in the same Akita constituency. Despite his political career, many women voters first knew him through his wife's election. They told him honestly that they hesitated to talk about women's issues with men politicians. He witnessed that his wife attracted the attention of many more women than him. Akita Prefecture, a conservative region, still retains the custom whereby a husband, as the household leader, decides a candidate for whom all of his family members vote. Many women told him that they ignored their husbands' orders and voted for his wife in this election. She was elected successfully. Mr. H now recognizes that women are more likely to represent women, though women voters do not always welcome women MPs or prefer them (JNP.08).

Women Acting for Women

Women MPs are enthusiastic about interacting with their women voters, which they do in various ways. More importantly, they handle women's problems and find solutions. Their achievements involve neither high politics nor lawmaking immediately, but they surely contribute to improving women's everyday life.

Ms. B works in partnership with women's caucuses of vocational associations. Since she is interested in the public transportation system, she often contacts public transport associations. She had a chance to meet one of the public transport women's associations, which is composed of women masters of small railway stations. She and the masters discussed the issue of public toilets in stations because passengers often complain to the masters about the toilets. Through the discussion, Ms. B found that station toilets are inconvenient for disabled people and young parents with babies or small children. In response, she made a proposal to introduce barrier-free and young parent-friendly toilets. Her proposal was handed to the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism in charge of public toilet matters and further developed into a new guideline for managing public toilets (JNP.02).

Women's action groups provide useful information to women MPs, as exemplified by the case of Ms. E. She has participated in some women's advocacy groups, like those aiding the protection of domestic violence (DV) victims from violent

partners. These groups often organize nationwide networks. Her interaction with them reminded her of the harsh reality that so many women experience. Particularly, COVID-19 had a more negative impact on women than on men. The spread of this virus exposed the hard life of Japanese women. The most symbolic indicator was the increase in the number of DV victims. Due to the stay-at-home policy, many shelters were closed. Aware of these problems, Ms. E identified herself as a representative of marginalized women in society. She concentrated her energies on developing policies to solve the problems experienced by women on the margins (JNP.05).

Ms. C always reaches out to women in need. She has recently been concerned about single mothers. The harsh circumstances of single mothers often cause child poverty or abuse. In her belief, improving their life conditions protects the children. Thus she has tackled the issue of single mothers enthusiastically. One of her achievements was to support single mothers who could not afford school bags for their children when first entering primary school. The cost of these school bags made from leather is around USD 500. Single mothers with school-age children can receive a public subsidy for their children's education, but the subsidy is provided only after their children begin their schooling. It is a recent custom that fresh pupils attend their entrance ceremony carrying their new leather bags. However, the pupils of single mothers have to carry bags with poor-quality fabric instead of the same leather bags as their fellow pupils (JNP.03).

It seemed unreasonable to Ms. C that children would miss having proper leather school bags at the start of their school life due to their family circumstances. To solve this problem, she inquired about it with many educational administrators and found a solution to provide a subsidy to children planning to enter primary school. Since municipal governments pay half of the subsidy, she further requested municipal mayors to follow the new regulation. She visited all 54 municipalities in her Aichi constituency for four years, and as a result, her request was accepted by all mayors. She is proud that there are no pupils without leather school bags in her constituency (JNP.03).

Ms. I thinks that an increase in the number of local women legislators is important for women's political empowerment (JNP.09). Local politics is viewed as a school of democracy in the discourse of political science. Local governments cope with many women's everyday issues. Women's engagement in local assemblies is a pathway to the national parliament.

Ms. I worked to empower local women politically in her constituency, Chiba Prefecture. Previously, the LDP had no woman member in the Chiba Prefectural Assembly. She made preparations for LDP women members to enter several years ago, and in the last assembly election of 2019, she succeeded in gaining three newly elected LDP women members. One of the three, called Ms. X, had worked as her secretary. Ms. I had encouraged Ms. X to be a legislator. Ms. X was then elected to a municipal assembly in Chiba. After serving there for two terms, Ms. X turned her political challenge to the prefectural assembly. The other two women came from

Ms. I's supporter organizations. They had helped Ms. I win her election campaigns. In return for their contributions to her elections, Ms. I supported them through their challenges with all her strength (JNP.09).

Intersecting Women's Voices

Women are not all integrated into one group. Diverse women's groups exist – and they are different and diverse in their backgrounds, interests, views, and preferences. It is not easy for MPs to represent every voice. A couple of my interviewees described how they cope with this uneasiness. Ms. B, for example, unwaveringly stated that listening to every voice is all about politics. The future of babies or unborn babies, Ms. B said, is left to MPs. In her view, MPs must hear from all nationals, but Japanese nationals are composed of different people even though Japanese society is less multicultural and multilingual than other countries (JNP.02).

Women are different in their political interests and policy preferences, depending on their generation, marital status, employment, socioeconomic conditions, and whether or not they have children. How do MPs represent women who are different from each other? One answer, according to Ms. B, is that people with diverse backgrounds should constitute parliamentary membership and share power by engaging in policymaking together. In other words, parliamentary membership should reflect the diversity of the people in society. However, ironically, the Diet membership mirrors Japan's patriarchy, where senior men dominate women and young men (JNP.02).

To answer the question, Ms. L quoted the interesting words of her colleague, Mr. Y. As far as she knows, Mr. Y works to improve the social circumstances of LGBTQ people more eagerly than any other MP. Mr. Y told her that LGBTQ does not describe a fixed state but presents variability in human beings, namely many people are not aware that their identities, sexuality, and bodies sometimes include different natures from their self-definitions. Ms. L thinks that this LGBTQ condition can be compared with the diversity of women. In her experience, a woman does not remain in the same place and should never be identified as an unchangeable person. Therefore, Ms. L believes that representing diverse women requires engaging in politics with flexibility and fluidity (JNP.12).

One might raise the question of whether the women MPs should represent only the women who have similar backgrounds, socioeconomic circumstances, and ideologies to themselves. If the answer is yes, a kind of "essentialism" becomes involved (e.g. Mansbridge, 2005). Ms. L's viewpoint could potentially transcend essentialist concerns. Essentialism further implies a lack of imagination. The interviewees have used their maximum imagination to support women in need. However, people tend to gain a better understanding of those who share commonalities than of those who are different. The more different women MPs are in background, generation, and socioeconomic circumstances, the more women's voices will be appropriately heard.

Conclusion

The 12 interviewees revealed the reality of Japan's gender-insensitive parliamentary politics. The Diet is governed by men-defined conventions and customs. In other words, every aspect of parliamentary activities is covered by men's culture. The most outdated mindset in the Diet is that politicians must sacrifice their life for politics. Fortunately, this mindset is becoming increasingly unacceptable to both men and women.

This study found that women MPs are less influential in party politics than their men counterparts. Their degree of influence differs by party, however. The LDP is lukewarm about women's involvement in party decision-making. The DPP, on the other hand, encourages women to propose policy ideas in board meetings. The difference between these two parties is derived from both the proportion of women and the membership size. The share of LDP women members is only one-tenth compared to one-fourth for the DPP. The number of LDP Diet members, on the other hand, is nearly 16 times larger than that of the DPP. Age, like gender, affects power relations inside parties. Japanese party politics is generally governed by seniority rule.

Younger, less experienced, and non-hereditary MPs are likely to be harassed and bullied. Women who are MPs' secretaries, family members, election campaign staff, and candidates are often victims of sexual harassment outside the Diet as well. This is because actions outside the Diet are more invisible publicly.

The 12 interviewees, more or less, presented gender-conscious or women-friendly attitudes. They have spoken for women and worked to improve women's circumstances, though good policy results do not always arise from their political actions. However, a gap exists between the sexes in gender-related behaviors and actions. Women MPs are more interested in gender equality than men MPs. They work toward problem-solving more enthusiastically than their men counterparts. The women make greater efforts to crystalize ideas and provide solutions for women in need. The men concentrate on listening to women's voices whereas the women are more oriented toward policy outcomes.

The Japanese case, in this regard, suggests that women are more likely to act for women than men. However, women are not always conscious of gender. The same is true for men. As this research discovered, gender consciousness is developed by such factors as growth environment, education, experience, and intimate relations. To advance gender equality, therefore, Japanese politics needs MPs who have different and diverse backgrounds.

Notes

1 See Nikkei Asia's article titled "Olympic chief Mori to resign over sexist comments," available at https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/Tokyo-2020-Olympics/Tokyo-Olympic-chief-Mori-to-resign-over-sexist-comments.
2 The DPJ was dissolved in 2017. It split into the Constitutional Democratic Party (CDP) and the Democratic Party for the People (DPP).

3 Sourced from BBC, on 17 February 2021, titled "Japan's LDP party invites women to 'look, not talk' at key meetings." Available at www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-56095215.

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3

SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN SOUTH KOREA'S NATIONAL LEGISLATURE

Ki-young Shin

Introduction

South Korea has been a stable multiparty democracy since 1987, featuring a unicameral parliament and a popularly elected presidential system. The Korean National Assembly (KNA) and its 17 standing committees (as of June 2021) are the center of the nation's legislative activities. The deliberation of bills takes place in these committees and if a bill passes the committee, in most cases it also passes at the plenary session.[1] While the functioning of its standing committees is often stalled by political conflict between the ruling and opposition parties, the authority and role of the committees have grown over time, and they now take the lead in determining the content and form of KNA legislation (Jeon 2020).

The KNA handles a large number of bills which have increased from under 3,000 during the sixteenth National Assembly (2000–2004) to over 20,000 in the twentieth National Assembly (2016–2020) (see Table 3.1). This explosion in bills is mainly due to a rapid increase of bills initiated by members of parliament (MPs). The success rate for MP bills was relatively low (7%) compared to the average passage rate (13%) in the twentieth National Assembly, but discarded MP-initiated bills often influence the alternative bills of committee chairpersons whose bills had the highest success rate (100%) while 28% of government-proposed bills were passed (Jeon 2020).

Although South Korea is a vibrant democracy and the tenth largest economy in the world, large gender gaps remain. The wage gap between men and women was 34.6% in 2017, the highest among major OECD countries (OEDC 2021). Meanwhile, representation of women in parliament is far below the world average of 25% and much lower than for other upper middle-income countries. Only 19% of National Assembly MPs are women as of June 2021. MPs under the age of 45 are also underrepresented, holding just 7% of the seats (IPU 2021). Hence, the prototypical image of an MP is "a wealthy middle-aged man."[2]

TABLE 3.1 Number of Bills Proposed in the Korean National Assembly by Source (1988–2020)

Year	1988– 1992	1992– 1996	1996– 2000	2000– 2004	2004– 2008	2008– 2012	2012– 2016	2016– 2020
MP Bills	462	252	806	1,651	5,728	11,191	15,444	21,594
Government Bills	368	581	807	595	1,102	1,693	1,093	1,094
Committee Chair Bills	108	69	338	261	659	1,029	1,285	1,453
Total Bills	938	902	1951	2,507	7,489	13,913	17,822	24,141

Source: National Assembly Bill Information (http://likms.assembly.go.kr/bill/stat/statFinishBillSearch.do)

South Korea's national assembly has a mixed electoral arrangement, a parallel system combining majoritarian elections and proportional representation (PR). The National Assembly has 300 seats, of which 253 seats (85%) are for representatives of single-member districts (SMDs) and 47 seats are distributed among parties based on PR party-list votes. A gender quota was introduced in 2000, then revised several times to strengthen its effect. The quota law calls for women be nominated to at least 30% of SMDs and at least 50% of PR lists. The proportion of women MPs has increased from 5.9% in 2000 to 19% in 2020. This small increase means that quotas have had only a limited impact (Yoon and Shin 2015). This is because only PR quotas are legally mandatory and parties do not comply with the 30% quota target for SMDs.[3] As a result, a greater percentage of women MPs are elected by PR than in SMDs (see Table 3.2).

There is also an imbalance in women's representation across parties. Of the 29 women elected in SMDs in the 2020 election, 20 are from the ruling center-left Democratic Party (DP) and eight are from the conservative People Power Party (PPP). The leftist Justice Party (JP) also elected five women MPs from among six elected members. In South Korea, parties on the left have nominated and elected more women MPs, confirming the general pattern in Asia and other parts of the world (Caul 1999, 2001; Kunovich and Paxton 2005; Joshi and Kingma 2013).

Studies have examined how an increased presence of women MPs affected substantive representation of women (SRW) in Korea's National Assembly. Substantive representation is defined as a representative activity in which a legislator pursues policy formation/making in response to the interests, demands, and expectations of the individual or group s/he represents in the legislative process (Pitkin 1967). Empirical studies pay attention to bill proposals and agenda setting as measures of SRW by MPs because legislative proposals can be understood as the policy responses of legislators to the represented. When MPs work to set the agenda for particular issues, the interests of social groups (the represented) closely related to the legislation are reflected in the legislative process, resulting in increased policy responsiveness (Park et al. 2018).

Drawing on these arguments, studies examine whether increasing women in legislatures leads to better representation of women's concerns and interests in the process of legislation by looking at MPs' policy preferences, bill sponsorship

TABLE 3.2 Number of Male and Female MPs in South Korea (1988–2020)

Election Year	Number of MPs (SMD)			Number of MPs (PR)			Number of MPs (Total)		
	Male	Female	Fem%	Male	Female	Fem%	Male	Female	Fem%
1988	224	0	0.0	69	6	8.0	293	6	2.0
1992	237	0	0.0	59	3	4.8	296	3	1.0
1996	251	2	0.8	39	7	15.2	290	9	3.0
2000	222	5	2.2	35	11	23.9	257	16	5.9
2004	233	10	4.1	27	29	51.8	260	39	13.0
2008	231	14	5.7	27	27	50.0	258	41	13.7
2012	227	19	7.7	26	28	51.9	253	47	15.7
2016	227	26	10.3	22	25	53.2	249	51	17.0
2020	224	29	11.5	19	28	59.6	243	57	19.0

Source: Central Election Commission of South Korea.

records, speeches in standing committees, and voting records on women–related bills. Findings from previous research are not consistent, however. Studies based on surveys of MPs find that women members of the twentieth National Assembly are more favorable to promoting gender equality and welfare–related policy issues than men MPs (Shin and Hwang 2017; Lee et al. 2017). Gender differences in policy preferences are also found in bill proposal and sponsorship. Women MPs in earlier national assemblies (2004–2012) showed similar policy preferences for women, family, education, health and welfare issues whereas men MPs had greater interests in industry, regional development, agriculture, oceans, and fisheries (Jeon and Kwak 2017).

In terms of the election tier, Kim et al. (2008) found that women MPs elected from PR quotas had triggered women–related legislative activities in the National Assembly. A recent study of motions under the jurisdiction of the health and wel-fare committee (2016–2017) also found that women and first-term PR members submitted more bill proposals than other members (Lee et al. 2020). The same two groups were more likely to sponsor women's issue bills while men MPs also gave greater priority to women's issue bills as the number of women increased in the legislature (Shim 2021). Others are cautious about generalizing women MPs' legislative activities. They argue that the changing nature of MPs and the political dynamics in each National Assembly session are more important explanations of women MPs' legislative behavior (Seo 2010).

In terms of voting records, studies agree that no gender differences were found in voting on women and gender equality bills whereas ideology and party affilia-tion influenced voting behavior on gender equality-related bills in the seventeenth National Assembly (Park and Jeon 2008; Jeon 2009). One reason for this is that bills promoting gender equality tend to be passed with a high approval rate in the National Assembly (Park and Jin 2017). Jeong's (2019) analysis of bill initiatives by all women MPs from 2004 to 2018 shows that women MPs' number of terms

(reelections) and number of affiliated standing committees are correlated with women MPs' frequency of bill sponsorship, but the approval rate of bills correlates with ruling party membership (Jeong 2019). This follows a general trend in Korea, whereby first-term MPs propose more bills but their bills pass less (Choi 2006).

These studies suggest that women MPs have distinct policy concerns and can be significant actors to represent women's concerns in the legislature, but SRW is also contingent on political and institutional factors. Since not all of the proposed bills end up in legislation, more SRW is expected in the stage of agenda-setting and bill sponsorship whereas efforts to realize SRW may not always come into fruition in legislative outcomes. When there is conflict between parties, which is usually the case in Korea, individual MPs' representative claims are drowned out by party politics. Therefore, how specifically MPs are trying to establish an agenda for the interests of the groups they want to represent, and what are the institutional conditions that make an attempt to establish such an agenda successful, is an important research topic in the study of substantive representation.

Lastly, it is noteworthy that SRW is a *process* of making representative claims for the represented. SRW is not static in a sense that there are already a set of issues that promotes women's interests and gender equality, but rather a constant interaction between MPs and their constituents or the represented is shaping and contextualizing the contents of SRW. In that aspect, a static analysis of data collected on legislative acts is insufficient to understand how, when, and by whom substantive representation occurs and which women are represented in the representative claims for "women" (Celis et al. 2008; Lovenduski and Guadagnini 2010; Yoon and Osawa 2017). It is thus important not to dismiss the presence and role of conservative women in SRW and men MPs who act for SRW given that SRW is "an active and contingent process, in which the represented and their needs are constructed through claims, rather than a reflection of the 'authentic' needs and values of society" (Celis and Childs 2012:215).

Research Design

Focusing on legislative activities in standing committees, this chapter attempts to capture the dynamics of how SRW takes place in the KNA. By conducting and analyzing interviews with nine MPs (six women and three men) elected to the twenty-first National Assembly (2020–2024), this chapter delves into how personal, political, and institutional (formal and informal) factors affect the legislative activities and representative claims of MPs to enhance SRW. Among the interviewees were five from DP, two from PPP, and two from JP. All interviews except one were conducted face-to-face in the MP's office between 22 April and 11 May 2021. Compared to KNA party-seat ratios as represented in Figure 3.1, the interviewees underrepresent PPP and overrepresent women MPs.

Interviewees were selected to capture representation on different KNA standing committees as Table 3.3 indicates. These committees included Gender Equality and Family (76.5%) and Health and Welfare (45.8%) featuring a high proportion of
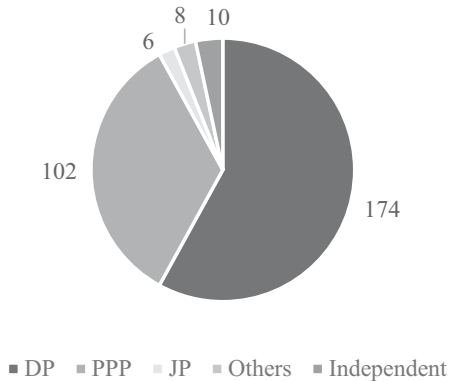
FIGURE 3.1 Number of Seats by Party in the Korean National Assembly

TABLE 3.3 Characteristics of Interviewees and Membership on KNA Standing Committees

Informant	Election Type	Past Career	Age	Party	Sex	Committee
KOR.01	1st term PR	Lawyer	50s	PPP	F	Legislation and Judiciary Gender Equality and Family
KOR.02	1st term PR	Activist	30s	JP	F	Strategy and Finance
KOR.03	2nd term SMD	Councilwoman	50s	PPP	F	Trade, Industry, Energy, SMEs, and Start-ups Gender Equality and Family
KOR.04	1st term PR	IT Employee	20s	JP	F	Trade, Industry, Energy, SMEs, and Start-ups
KOR.05	2nd term SMD	Lawyer	40s	DP	M	Legislation and Judiciary

KOR.06	3rd term SMD	Think Tank
		  Researcher
			50s	DP	M	Science, ICT, Broadcasting
						  and Communications

KOR.07	2nd term PR
	  to SMD
		Women's
		  Organization
			50s	DP	F	Health and Welfare
						Gender Equality and Family
						  (Chairperson)

KOR.08	1st term SMD	Party Cadre	30s	DP	M	House Steering Land, Infrastructure and Transport Gender Equality and Family

KOR.09	1st term SMD	Semiconductor
		  Company
		  Executive
			50s	DP	F	Strategy and Finance

women with the former chaired by a woman. By contrast, the committees for Science, ICT, Broadcasting and Communications (25%) and Trade, Industry, Energy, SMEs, and Start-ups (23.3%) have a medium share of women members. Lastly, Legislation and Judiciary (16.7%) and Strategy and Finance (19.2%) have a low proportion of women members.

Interviewees were also selected to represent a wide range of ages and personal and political backgrounds. However, despite this diversity, all MPs interviewed perceived themselves as gender sensitive and supportive of gender equality. Also, I conducted additional interviews with one committee director staff person and a director of the Deputy Speaker's staff whose positions involve observing MPs in order to gain additional perspectives on MPs' legislative activities.

Useful information was also obtained from the website of the National Election Commission and the National Assembly electronic data service system, which provides detailed data on bills, proposers, joint proposers, and standing committee deliberations.

Personal Backgrounds

MPs' demographic and personal background in terms of experience and ideology affect the extent to which they are committed to SRW. All women MP interviewees in this study confirmed their past experiences and personal commitments influenced their motivation to run for election and shaped their policy interests as MP. Women MPs who faced difficulties working in men's world before entering politics exhibited strong commitment to women's labor issues, women's working environment, the advancement of women's status, and sexual violence. All agreed that women are disadvantaged in Korean society and they want to address gender inequality. However, depending on their ideology, MPs' opinions differed as to which policy is most urgent for women and how those problems should be addressed. Though all women MPs pointed out that gender quota and women's safety issues (including stalking and sexual violence) are urgent issues, they think it harder to persuade men to enlarge opportunities for women, such as introducing 20% or 30% nomination quotas for elections. Although their ideologies are different, the women MPs persuade their respective political parties to legislate women's agenda using their lived experiences as women.

Conservative MPs emphasized work–family balance and support for women's childbirth through measures like parental leave. One conservative MP was very articulate about her motivation to represent women's issues based on her experience as a lawyer, woman, and working mother. When speaking about the impact of COVID-19 on women, she refers to the hardship of working mothers (KOR.01).

Another MP from a leftist party said that her work experience in the computer game industry brought her to awareness of labor problems such as long working hours, low wages, and unstable employment. Those experiences and her disappointment regarding the company's poor handling of sexual harassment motivated her to run in the election, because she wanted to tackle those problems more efficiently (KOR.04).

Echoing the findings of previous studies that shared past experiences of women MPs as activists or expertise in policy agenda not only motivates them to propose more women-related bills than men, it also forms a basis for cross-party coalitions to push for gender equality–related legislation (Kwon 2015; Park et al. 2018),

it is found that experience working in women's movements and civil society organizations strongly impacted the extent to which MPs committed themselves to representing women's interests and gender equality. One MP who had worked in a leading women's organization in Korea for a long time before joining politics continues to specialize in women-related policies. She joined the National Assembly in order to work on gender equality policies and has served two terms on the Gender Equality and Family Committee. However, she found working for gender equality in politics challenging and was often intimidated by heavy backlash (KOR.07).

Many former women's rights activists have entered the legislature as members of progressive parties, and their feminist background often results in severe backlash against them. Since they speak vocally for gender equality, they get criticized for making policies for only women. Such accusations come not only from conservative members of the public but also from supporters of their own party. That makes women MPs feel emotionally tense and pressured to remain silent. It is the network among women MPs that helps them to overcome such pressure and maintain commitment. Women's shared experience as former activists is also a powerful motivator for them to drive women's interests in the legislature.

> I hesitated about whether a proportional representative member of the National Assembly should be running in a constituency or not, but a lawmaker who is now in their 3rd term who was first a proportional representative but then ran in a constituency, told me that women proportional representative members should take responsibility and go run in constituencies. What she was saying was that if I was going to talk about empowering women in politics or enhancing their representation, I had to be responsible for those challenges as well. I'm not sure how others felt, but that resonated with me deep in my heart.
>
> *(KOR.07)*

Personal background and experience also influence male MPs' attitudes and commitment to SRW. A younger male MP said that an MP's gender was not important in pursuing a women's policy. He developed this belief in the women's agenda through his experience volunteering for a women's organization when he was a university student. For him, gender equality is a matter of human rights and universal equality. He said that growing up in a poor family with elder sisters in a small city also shaped his belief in gender equality (KOR.08).

Gender equality and a commitment to SRW is also associated with progressive political ideology. One MP said that gender equality is a default value for the progressive parties (KOR.05). Such beliefs prevent members of the Democratic Party and the Justice Party from expressing outright opposition to gender equality, though opponents within these parties choose to stay in silent indifference.

A general finding, however, is that the women MPs play the role of representing the voices of women within each of their political parties. Both progressive and conservative women MPs play an active role in persuading conservative males of their party to

enact legislation related to women's concerns. In that way, conservative women MPs, like their progressive counterparts, can become critical actors to promote SRW.

Institutions

Institutional factors and the role of party politics are indispensable to enhance women's substantive representation (Lovenduski 2005). This section examines how the ratio of women in the standing committee and the formal and informal institutions related to the operation of the standing committee affect the representative claims for women. As mentioned earlier, there are 17 standing committees corresponding to government departments. In the twenty-first National Assembly (2020–2024), where the number of women MPs increased to 19%, they entered various standing committees. The percentage of women in each standing committee is shown in Table 3.4.

As MPs, in principle, decide the committee they want to serve on, committee membership reflects their policy interests. Three committees have more than 30% women members: (a) Gender Equality and Family, (b) Health and Welfare, and (c) Environment and Labor. These committees deal with policies that women are said to be interested in. Women chair four committees, including the committees of Gender Equality and Family, and Environment and Labor. However, there are three standing committees that still have no women.

TABLE 3.4 Women Members in KNA Standing Committees (June 2021)

Committee	Members	Women	Women %	Interview
Gender Equality and Family (Woman Chair)	17	13	76.5	Y
Health and Welfare	24	11	45.8	Y
Environment and Labor (Woman Chair)	16	5	31.3	N
House Steering Committee	28	7	25.0	Y
Science, ICT, Broadcasting and Communications	20	5	25.0	Y
Culture, Sports, and Tourism	16	4	25.0	N
Trade, Industry, Energy, SMEs, Start-ups	30	7	23.3	Y
Public Administration and Security (Woman Chair)	22	5	22.7	N
Strategy and Finance	26	5	19.2	Y
Education	16	3	18.8	N
Legislation and Judiciary	18	3	16.7	Y
Land, Infrastructure, and Transport (Woman Chair)	30	4	13.3	N
Foreign Affairs and Unification	21	2	9.5	N
National Policy	24	2	8.3	N
National Defense	17	0	0.0	N
Agriculture, Food, Rural Affairs, Oceans, Fisheries	19	0	0.0	N
Intelligence	12	0	0.0	N

One notable feature of Korea's standing committee activities that impact SRW is negotiation group-centrism, a principle that the committee's activities operate by consensus of large parties with twenty or more members. Since the current National Assembly is dominated by two large parties, the two parties each constitute a negotiating group. The negotiating group has a secretary in the standing committee to decide agendas, meeting schedule, and bills discussed, and all standing committees are currently chaired by the ruling party. This principle affects women's representation in two ways. First, it is hard to pass controversial gender-related bills that are difficult for the two large parties (who share different ideologies) to agree on in practice, unless there is a notable level of social consensus. Multiple MPs mentioned this.

> Lawmakers have the power to propose bills. . . . [but] . . . It is not easy to propose legislation where fierce debate is expected because there is confrontation between parties. Similarly so when there are large groups or clear public opinion opposed to the agenda . . . There are laws that won't pass even if you gather 120 cosponsors.
>
> *(KOR.05)*

> We need ten people to propose a bill, but there are only six Justice Party members in the National Assembly. So, it's hard to propose bills when each party is strictly focused on advancing their own platform. For example, it was so difficult to get ten people to sign onto the comprehensive anti-discrimination act so that we could propose it. Before we proposed it, we protected the other four assembly members (of other parties) and kept their names private.
>
> *(KOR.04)*

As the second quote reveals, minority parties have little power to pass a bill representing a progressive agenda. As a result of the complex action of the chairperson's influence within the floor and factors within the party, there are limits to placing on the agenda an issue with a large number of conflicting factors and it is difficult to reach a consensus. The negotiation group principle favors large parties and is repeatedly criticized by members of minority parties who are not only excluded from the negotiation group but also face various obstacles in their legislative activities.

In principle, any member of the Korean legislature is free to introduce legislation and the number of required cosponsors to propose a bill has been lowered from twenty to ten people. However, for members of a minority party with fewer than ten members, the consent of ten members is still high. Minority MPs have to make additional efforts to introduce legislation, such as building friendships with MPs from other parties. In addition, they do not have the power to put proposed bills on the table in the standing committees because small parties cannot take part in negotiation among secretaries of large parties. In other words, if a woman member

of a minority party works in a male-centered committee, her influence is bound to be very small due to her dual minority status as a woman and a minority party member. A minority party member interviewed made sarcastic comments that "the nickname of the National Assembly Act of the Republic of Korea is the 'Negotiation Group Act' because non-negotiation groups have no authority" (KOR.02). Another member echoed this and emphasized how much workload and burden she had to bear because she is the only member of her party in the committee.

> I'm on the Trade, Industry, Energy, SMEs and Startups Committee. There are thirty people on it. In the case of a large party, there are fourteen members each, so each person handles 1/14th of the work within the standing committee. But we have to do it all with just one person . . . If the Democratic Party and our party have the same opinion, I'm going to expect 15:15 and prepare for that. But if that's not the case, I have to think about it being 29:1. There's also pressure on me to deal with it on my own when I debate with the group . . . The questioning time is the same, but since I'm alone on the standing committee, the Justice Party only has a total of fifteen minutes . . . and the big party will go fifteen times the number of people they have.
>
> *(KOR.04)*

A second notable feature regarding SRW in the Korean legislature is the existence of the Gender Equality and Family Committee, the only committee with women being a majority. The committee mainly deals with women-related issues and is naturally at the forefront of setting the agenda and taking the lead in pushing for gender equality. Thus, although the KNA has no formal women's caucus, its Gender Equality and Family Committee functions as a quasi-women's caucus. However, despite being a committee that corresponds to the Ministry of Gender Equality and Family, it is only an adjunct committee. Its chairperson and some members expressed dissatisfaction with this, interpreting the committee's marginal status as a reflection of the ministry's low status and women's issues not being viewed as mainstream (KOR.06, KOR.07).

The committee's weak institutional status has both advantages and disadvantages. The fact that all lawmakers on it are members of other committees means the agenda of the Gender Equality and Family Committee can be pushed forward in other committees. Its chairwoman noted, "I suppose you could call it a strategy of mainstreaming gender issues. You can go to every committee and ask questions related to gender equality" (KOR.07). She also asked the Speaker of the Assembly to increase the number of legislative staff for the committee, which is usually a very difficult thing to do and proposed to create a National Assembly Human Rights Center. Both of these proposals passed. She also utilized her authority to request a meeting with government ministers to ask for a promotion of personnel in charge of women' issues to a higher position. In that way, the standing committee chairperson played an important role in enhancing SRW in the legislature and government offices.

Since MPs choose to serve on the Gender Equality and Family Committee as an additional duty, it could be the case that its members have higher commitment to gender issues. In fact, interviewees serving on the committee all said there were few conflicts among members, except for a few partisan issues that divide its members.

> Because the Gender Equality and Family Committee covers issues of women and family, that, in a way, transcend party, for the most part we are in agreement on a lot of issues. Because what we're doing is saying, "let's invest funds to take care of sick kids." Normally, the ruling party sides with the government on budgetary matters, but there is no such thing on this committee. We speak in a unified voice. Violence against children, teenagers who suffer from grooming, family members, and family pains – we're practically always on the same page when it comes to such matters.
>
> *(KOR.03)*

> There is no difference between the ruling and opposition parties. However, when it comes to women's issues that involve political issues, it feels like it's impossible to get the ruling and opposition parties to work together, and that is frustrating. A good example is former Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon and the former Busan Mayor Oh Keo-don who committed power-based sexual violence. For that reason, women legislators should be coming together from both parties and speaking out on this in one voice. However, women in the ruling party did not speak out on this matter at all. Because the powerful politicians who perpetrated these problems belonged to their own party.
>
> *(KOR.01)*

In both the Gender Equality and Family Committee (77% women) and the Health and Welfare Committee (46% women), women's performance on bill proposal and sponsorship is higher than that of men. However, the dynamics seem to be different in committees with a lower proportion of women. One woman MP on a committee with a medium proportion of women stated that she did not remember active questions on gender equality or women's interests being asked in the committee. Other than routine questions such as the percentage of women managers, "there's no one who sticks in my memory. But it's not like there's someone who's passionately opposed to issues like gender equality. It's just silence and indifference" (KOR.04).

Another MP notes,

> I'd say [committee members' attitudes toward gender issues are] somewhere between reticence and listening. Because they don't express anything. They know that if they say the wrong thing about gender, they'll get attacked. So, they're not outright against it, but they don't take the initiative or attempt to do anything either. So, in my opinion, I feel they must be somewhere

between listening and silence. The first reason is that quite a lot of lawmakers don't think that actively pursuing this issue will necessarily help their political careers . . . in a sense, they (men) aren't being honest.

(KOR.06)

Other factors affecting SRW in committee work are political factors such as the advantage of the ruling party and interparty negotiation. An MP of the ruling party admitted that "you need help from the government or something similar" (KOR.05). Particularly crucial in the Korean context is the power of the Legislation and Judiciary Committee which is often used to weaken SRW. This committee whose members are completely different from the committee where the bills just passed reviews all standing committee bills in addition to its own bills. Its original authority is to amend the text of a bill, but there are cases in which a bill passed by the standing committee is delayed or the content of the bill is altered.

> The law was practically torn in half during the legislation process. As it began to be discussed on the Legislation and Judiciary Committee, at first, they asked, "Is this law only for women?" So, the Minister said, "No, this also applies to men," after which they asked, "then, does this law support homosexuality?" In the article explicating definitions for this law, [violence against women is defined as violence based on gender]. But it became [violence against women that is based on their gender as a woman] in the Legislation and Judiciary Committee. That is to say, all men are excluded from the bill.
>
> *(KOR.07)*

> The Legislation and Judiciary Committee was mainly used for discussions between the floor leaders. Say that all the members of Standing Committee A rubber-stamp a bill and send it to the Legislation and Judiciary Committee. Then the Legislation and Judiciary Committee holds on to all those bills. After that, the floor leaders meet and since all the laws are gathered on the Legislation and Judiciary Committee's table, they'll pull out their lists and swap them to decide what bills will make it to the general plenary session. Then, on the Legislation and Judiciary Committee, bills A to C pass, and bills D and after stay logged up. That's how it works.
>
> *(KOR.05)*

> The first bill I'm proposing in my name is a revision to the criminal code bolstering the punishment of rape, but after I proposed it, it's been sitting on their desk collecting dust . . . Of all the proposals related to revising the laws regarding rape crimes, it received the most attention, but since then, it's been pushed back as other bills took precedence, and the Democratic Party seems to be very cognizant that there are voters out there who oppose it. My legislation on the punishment of rape is now in the Legislation and Judiciary

Committee, but there are no Justice Party members on that Committee. So, we have to push from the outside.[4]

(KOR.04)

Party politics centered on the Legislation and Judiciary Committee eventually paralyzes the function of this committee or leads to the failure to guarantee sufficient time to discuss legislation. A member of this committee expressed her concerns regarding the lack of sufficient time to review the bills and the short notice on which bills to review at the plenary meeting of the Committee (KOR.01).

Even when all parliamentary committees are favorable to SRW-related bills, the government or party leaders' negotiations often override the decisions of committees. There are cases when the standing committee is passed over (KOR.06). In the end, important bills are often reached through final negotiations between the leadership of both parties.

MPs of small parties emphasize the dominance of two large parties as the biggest obstacle while women MPs of the largest parties point to men's vested interests within their parties as obstacles to promoting SRW. They believe that "gender inequality within political parties should be addressed first" (KOR.07). In fact, women MPs who speak for gender equality vocally experience severe criticism and accusations.

Men are the majority, so if there is a fight for a seat, they will never give it to a woman. Women are only allocated a spot or two. For example, they'll say, "Rep. Kim is very good." But when it comes time to pick the chair of a standing committee, they won't give the seat to a woman. Men just won't choose a woman. It's unspoken . . . At this stage, we (women in PPP) still need men to give us consideration. You'll never get it by arguing. But the Democratic Party can pressure for these things, because they have strong women who are united and have more numbers . . . Women should stick together for those sorts of things. That's how we win things for women.

(KOR.03)

The biggest deterrent is to think that it is really an agenda for women only. In our society, policies for the socially underprivileged are of course also for the underprivileged, but they also contain a natural premise that it contributes to the public welfare. It is always difficult to break through that part because many men MPs still think that women's policies are only for women. They'll ask, "Why are you only talking about women?" It's not about women, it's about people. It's about convincing the others that this has to do with the daily lives of Korean people. Each time you run into the same response.

(KOR.02)

There is support, but there is also a lot of backlash and disparagement. For example, in an online community where a lot of our party supporters

gather, they insult the civil law amendment bill that I proposed, the marital property joint title system, and the Framework Act on Prevention of Violence against Women . . . Supporters of the Democratic Party are very anti-feminist when it comes to women's issues. There are a lot of people like that. Those people attack me . . . I get a lot more insults flung at me than compliments.

(KOR.07)

Intersectionality

Women are not a monolithic group and gender is constructed through interacting with other inequalities (Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Hancock 2016). Likewise, women MPs cannot represent all women. When discussing SRW, it is necessary to pay attention to which women are represented (Hughes 2011) and how the structure of intersecting inequalities inherent in the political system leads to overrepresentation of certain groups and thereby hinders the promotion of SRW of other groups of women. Although the intersectionality theory has not received much attention in Korean politics, interest in the diversity of representation is growing recently. Lee et al. (2017) compared and analyzed the wealth, age, and career of men and women members of parliament according to the type of election. This revealed to what extent Korean MPs represent the socioeconomic average of ordinary citizens. According to this study, on average, Korean MPs come from privileged classes, and the most diversity is found among PR women MPs. The average age and amount of property owned by PR women MPs is the lowest compared to other groups of MPs. Also, it was found that the careers of PR women MPs were more diverse than those of men and women from constituencies.

However, just as not all women MPs represent all women's interests, the socioeconomic background of lawmakers does not necessarily guarantee substantive representation of their group. What is important to understand is whether MPs carry out their legislative activities with the same identity as the represented and the commitment that they are representatives of that group, as well as to what extent the intersectionality of MPs helps or hinders their legislative activities for SRW. The main intersections revealed in the interviews of this study were gender, generation, and class (labor).

Women MPs in their fifties recognized the importance of not being discriminated against in promotion or career as a woman and having an environment in which women could continue to work after giving birth. Most of these women have entered politics after working in a profession or business. In an era when there were very few professional women, their careers were realized by competing with men while being discriminated against because she is a woman. In order to prevent the next generation of women from experiencing the same difficulties as they did, they feel they must act for women who are both running a family and working in paid employment. They advocate for a quota system for women in all

large institutions, let alone politics, because women are still expected to take charge of housework and childcare. Without a quota system, they think that it would be difficult for women to even gain a foothold on which to compete with men. They have a strong belief that although they have benefited from the quota system, women are not superior to or inferior to men in their abilities.

> It is very rewarding in that the mandatory woman corporate director system has been a great motivator for women. Going forward, too, during my time in the National Assembly I want to create legislation that can have an impact on how society operates. Whether it is a woman executive quota system in private or public firms, I want to thoroughly prepare such legislation and pass it.
>
> *(KOR.01)*

> As society changes, these men who hold onto privileges will realize on their own that women are much better at working, that they can't do this without women . . . It's been over fifteen years since I first got my start in politics. The conclusion that I've reached is that many women should get involved in politics. That's how politics will change.
>
> *(KOR.03)*

The groups that showed the most conspicuous intersectionality of representation in interviews were young men and women MPs. In Korean politics, there are very few cases where second- or third-generation politicians inherit their parents' constituency and enter politics, and Korean society is very negative about the hereditary privilege in politics unlike other East Asian countries. Instead, most political parties implement youth quotas or preferential treatment for youth in addition to women's quotas in their nominations. The MP interviewees in their 20s and 30s were the beneficiaries of such policies. They were born into ordinary families, were interested in social issues, and entered into politics to solve problems experienced by their generation. They were strongly conscious of the representation of their generation compared to MPs in other generations. However, the collective perception between young women and men is very different, forming a sharp political cleavage at the intersection of gender and generation (Shin 2021). While the interests of the youth generation are often represented by that of young men, young women do not always share the same interests with men of their generation. The young MPs interviewed viewed both gender and youth issues as important, and the common agenda for them was the expression of representation for the politically marginalized generation; at the same time, they are also conscious of the gendered concerns and interests.

> Young people, teenagers, and children are the groups I should represent. The reason is that I think they are the most underrepresented groups. Gender injustice is also prevalent in Korean society, but I feel that the problem spanning above gender injustice is, in a way, inequality between generations.

> What feels so unfair to the future generations is that they're left to deal with the repercussions of the political decisions that were made by the generations that came before them.
>
> *(KOR.02)*

> Since I am representative of young people, I am mainly focused on introducing leg-up "ladder legislation" . . . I have proposed the Youth Political Ladder Act, Youth Residential Ladder Act, Youth Financial Ladder Act, Recruitment Ladder Act, etc. . . . I think youth policy is very important, but there are many situations in which senior citizen policies appeal much more strongly. That is why young people should vote more actively and expand their political voice, in my opinion. Proposals and bills on various political amendments or other social issues that I personally think are important have been passed, but the youth-related ones have yet to make much headway.
>
> *(KOR.08)*

The way young MPs communicate with the group they want to represent is also very different from that of the older generation. The communication is more horizontal than hierarchical and issue-based, not organization-based.

> The democratization generation seems to create an organization first. "Let's become a group for our belief." They meet and form a group, but the MZ generation never forms groups that way. They come together when they agree on an agenda. So, for example, when I make a statement or create a space for a specific issue such as the anti-discrimination act or response to the climate crisis, people who are interested in that issue come to meet me, and because I did that, I have this clear label on me that says: this person is interested in the climate crisis, this person is interested in discrimination. Then the youth or young people in the field will come and find me, and in this way, I think a relationship is formed naturally.
>
> *(KOR.02)*

Young women MPs are, however, in a more politically vulnerable position within the parliament than young men MPs. In particular, the women PR youth MPs of the minor parties are one of the smallest minorities in the Korean political system. They are also a major target of misogyny because they are women who have a clear voice on progressive agendas. For example censorship of young woman MP's clothes and online harassment are discriminatory experiences that young men MPs from the two large parties do not have to go through. It is a factor that makes it difficult to represent the voices of the marginalized, unmarried young women, the disabled, and the youth they want to represent. As one MP remarked,

> It's controversial to wear a dress that is worn by a young woman. When I saw the reactions, I felt it was both misogynistic and ageist . . . people commented

about how I looked like a hostess at a private tearoom, but to be honest, that was just the everyday attire of a woman of my age. It is also my role to display such things. I think it is also my role to display in the public forum.

(ROK.04)

Conclusion

This chapter examined substantive representation of women in the Korean legislature by analyzing how MPs represent women and what representative claims they make in the activities of parliamentary standing committees and how the institutional and political factors promote or hinder SRW. There has been considerable discussion about women's political representation in Korea, but studies on SRW are still lacking. Records of bill proposals and voting in specific standing committees are often used as indicators of SRW in the legislature. However, studies analyzing such aggregate data cannot fully capture the political contexts and informal dynamics regarding bill proposals and votes of MPs. This study conducted and analyzed interviews with nine incumbent MPs in order to overcome these limitations. The key findings are as follows.

First, institutions and political context matter gravely for SRW. In Korea, two major parties dominate the entire process of legislation. The legislative institution is set to favor large political parties, giving very little power to small party members. The small share of the seats by small parties in the National Assembly and the high threshold to be the negotiation group institutionally marginalize small parties and weaken their voices in the legislative process. But the small parties are often more concerned with SRW.

Second, women in party leadership positions are critical players in promoting SRW in the legislature. They are also the critical actors for SRW in their own parties. The interviews attest to the argument that numerical and descriptive representation of women help to enhance SRW, because critical actors also need other women's support. However, cross-party collaboration among women MPs does not always work for bipartisan policy issues. Even MPs' shared interests in gender issues are overridden by party ideology and competition.

Third, women MPs find themselves caught between rock and a hard place. The recent gender issues in Korea are thought to represent "conflict" between sexes. Although many women MPs feel that they have a "mandate" to work for women's interests and rights (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008), speaking for gender equality is thought of as burdensome for MPs and particularly so for women MPs. If they do not speak for women's interests, they are accepting the unfair status quo and fail to represent women's interests. If they do, they are going to be attacked. In contrast, most men MPs simply stay silent or indifferent to gender issues knowing that they should not openly oppose gender equality bills or make inappropriate remarks, because they would not lose anything for being silent.

Finally, intersectionality and diversity do matter for better SRW. While MPs who represent the voices of intersectional inequality are indispensable for better SRW, their own intersectional position in the legislature shaped by the opposition party, women, and youth hampers them from acting for certain intersectional groups. The current gender quota has been working in favor of diversity and small parties, particularly in PR seats. However, PR seats are so small in terms of the proportion of seats and the informal rule that PR MPs cannot run as PR in the next election are the institutional obstacles for substantive representation of minority women and citizens.

Notes

1 In the eighteenth National Assembly (2008–2012), 97.4% of bills passed by committees were passed at the plenary session (Park and Jeon 2012).
2 For MPs of the twentieth National Assembly (2016–2020), the average age is 55.5 and their average assets amount to 4.1 billion won (about 3.63 million USD). www.hankook ilbo.com/News/Read/201905311121764992 (accessed 17 July 2021).
3 For more details, see Shin and Kwon (2022).
4 In fact, one MP who is a current member of the Legislation and Judiciary Committee did not even know that the bill was proposed.

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4

SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN TAIWAN

Why Is 42% Not Enough?

Chang-Ling Huang

Introduction

Three things make Taiwan Asia's exception in gender politics. First, it leads Asia in the proportion of women in parliament (42%). Second, it has a popularly elected female president who is not from a political family. Third, it is the first and the only Asian country to legalize same-sex marriage (in 2019). However, Taiwan's experience is often neglected because of its exclusion from the international community and unavailability of its data from international sources. If Taiwan's data were included, as of 2021, Taiwan would have ranked twenty-first in the world for the proportion of women in parliament by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), sixth on the United Nation's Gender Inequality Index, and twenty-ninth on the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index.[1]

Democratization since the late 1980s has also brought about legal reforms advancing gender equality in Taiwan. Since the 1990s, civil codes and penal codes went through rounds of revisions to remove obvious patriarchal biases. Taiwan's parliament (Legislative Yuan) enacted the Domestic Violence Prevention Act in 1998, Gender Equality Employment Act in 2002, Gender Equity Education Act in 2004, and Sexual Harassment Prevention Act in 2005. Moreover, women's movement organizations have successfully made the government follow or comply with the international gender equality agenda and norms by practicing gender mainstreaming since 2003 and ratifying the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 2007.[2]

Despite all these positive developments, Taiwanese women remain underprivileged and underrepresented. As of 2020, the proportion of women in the cabinet is less than 10%, the lowest percentage in the three decades since the country democratized. Women's organizations were shocked and angered by this regression and called it "the most male cabinet ever."[3] Their frustration was glaring since this

is the second time Tsai Ing-wen, Taiwan's first female president, has failed them. When Tsai was first elected in 2016, the first cabinet under her presidency had about 10% women, and when she began her second term in 2020, the percentage became even lower. Women in the corporate world did not fare better either. The proportion of women board members on all publicly listed companies is only 14%. Women's wages are a mere 85% of men's in the labor market, and the gender gap would be larger if assets or wealth are considered.

Though Taiwanese civil codes ensure daughters have the same inheritance rights as sons, parents traditionally leave more property to their sons than daughters. Daughters can fight such wills in the court, but few do. Gender violence also remains a serious issue, but the government has yet to change its criminal statistics. Except for domestic violence (DV) cases, other violent crimes are counted without clarifying whether they are gender-related. The most severe problem that more than one former president has named a national security issue is low birth rates. Taiwan's birth rates have been very low for more than a decade. In 2009, the country had a birth rate of 0.9, the lowest in the world. In 2021, the country's birth rate is projected to be 1.07, again the lowest in the world. This population crisis results from multiple factors, but gender norms and insufficient institutional support for mothers play a role in many women's reproductive decisions.

Does a parliament with 42% women represent women's interests better than those with a lower percentage? Questions like this and the global numerical increase of women in parliament have led many to study the substantive representation of women (SRW). Renowned political theorist Jane Mansbridge (1999) argued that descriptive representation of women (DRW), racial minorities, and other historically underprivileged groups is justified because of their diverse political interests and because voters or politicians might not necessarily know their stakes in particular policies. Under such circumstances, if politicians' life experiences are closer to those they represent, their intuitive decisions are more likely to protect their voters' interests and rights. On the other hand, prominent women's activist Gloria Steinem (1992) cautioned that successful women in a patriarchal society usually have internalized patriarchal values because that would make them more acceptable by the men who hold the decision-making power. Unless women learn how to "unlearn" such patriarchal values, they will not stand for women's interests.

Mirroring these contending perspectives, empirical research on SRW draws a complex picture. After gender quotas became the prevailing mechanism to increase women's political representation, studies have found that "quota women" do represent women's interests more, but such representation could also reinforce biases against women's abilities (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008). It has also been argued that quotas have led to the inclusion of more women, but women's interests are not necessarily more represented, especially for those who are marginalized (Htun 2016). On the other hand, recent works suggest various patterns of SRW. Whether the indicators are bill sponsorship (Bektas and Issever-Ekinci 2019), floor speeches and debates (Clayton, Josefsson, and Wang 2017), request of earmarks (Schulze 2013), or policy interests (Yoon and Osawa 2017; Itzkovitch-Malka and Friedberg

2018; Gwiazda 2019; Kalra and Joshi 2020), women were found to be more actively representing women's interests, for various reasons, with various limitations, and under various circumstances.

Regarding the Taiwanese experience, though there are quite a few works discussing women's political representation and participation, especially on the adoption and impact of gender quotas (e.g. Chou, Clark, and Clark 1990; Batto 2014; Huang 2016a, 2019; Yang and Gelb 2019), few works have thus far touched upon women's substantive representation. After decades of authoritarian rule, Taiwan's first fully democratic election for parliament occurred only in the early 1990s, and the two main studies on SRW in Taiwan have focused on the performance of members of parliaments (MPs) since democratization. Chiang's (2011) work looked at female MPs' floor speeches during the fourth parliament elected in 1998, and Shim's comparative work on South Korean and Taiwanese MPs examined bill sponsorship records between 1992 and 2016 (Shim 2021). Chiang traced female legislators' speeches in several policy areas: children, care, education, crime prevention, military/foreign affairs, and economic development. She found that women MPs did speak up more about women's concerns and rights. Also, she found party differences among female legislators were not significant. Shim's work focused on a more extended period and more than 1,000 legislative bills. He found that female legislators were more likely than their male counterparts to sponsor women's issue bills, and male legislators prioritized women's issue bills when the number of women increased in the legislature. Moreover, PR tier legislators were more likely to sponsor women's issue bills than SMD legislators, and, like Chiang's earlier finding, party difference was not significant. Both of these works showed that SRW took place and Shim's work demonstrated that the degree of substantive representation was more affected by seat tiers and shares than party identifications.

These works show that SRW exists and there were no significant party differences. What then are the main challenges faced by MPs who are willing to represent women substantively? This is the question this chapter aims to explore. Based on interviews of current and former women MPs and data collected from official documents and media reports, this chapter confirms the findings of previous studies that SRW does exist. There are, however, two major challenges faced by Taiwanese women MPs. First, there exists a power difference between the executive and legislative branches of Taiwan's government. If the ministries or government agencies are resistant, it is difficult for MPs to push forward bills and make things happen. Also, resistance from ministries or government agencies is not really because they want to stand against gender equality. They are usually reluctant because they worry about workloads, and this problem can be solved only through an overall reallocation of government resources. The second challenge is about the balance of rights, especially for bills regarding women's safety. People expect the police to take immediate action against those who threaten women, but actions like preventive detention, if authorized by law, would greatly expand police power and might affect human rights protections if not correctly executed.

Given these tensions, this chapter concludes by pointing out that for SRW to advance, the efforts of different government branches need to be properly linked. For a country with a president and executive branch that is more powerful than the parliament (since Taiwan does not have a parliamentary system), having SRW in parliament is not enough. There needs to be SRW in all branches of the government and that will mesh SRW with gender mainstreaming.

Methods and Data

This chapter follows a mixed research design centered upon primary and qualitative data collected through the author's interviews with MPs to understand their viewpoints and experience with SRW. During the first half of 2021, I interviewed three former and five current MPs. I also collected relevant data from published documents, including parliamentary minutes and media reports.

In the Taiwanese context, the parliament is unicameral and active. It employs a parallel electoral system also known as mixed-member majoritarian (MMM) alongside reserved seats for representatives of indigenous citizens. There are 113 MPs in total in the legislature including 73 single-member district (SMD) seats, 34 Proportional Representation (PR) seats, and six indigenous seats. All PR seats are elected through one nationwide district, and each party presents only one list of PR candidates. All voters, except indigenous voters, cast one vote for the PR list and one vote in a single-member district.[4] The term length of MPs is four years, and there is no term limit for members from the SMD. As for PR members, although there is no legal term limit, parties have imposed various internal term limits on their PR members. The Constitution requires that women fill at least 50% of the PR seats. Because of the unbalanced seat distribution between the SMD and PR tiers, the actual quota level is only 15% of all seats, far below the current proportion of women in parliament.

All eight MPs interviewed for this study are PR women, and their party background and committee experience virtually cover all parties and committees, as shown in Table 4.1. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 90 minutes, and they were conducted either in person or through videoconferencing between late April and early June 2021. They ended or began their service in 2020.

Except for the smallest party that has only one seat, party affiliation of the interviewees covered all other four political parties. The parliament currently has eight standing committees and four ad hoc committees. Because committee assignments for MPs are done at the beginning of each four-month parliamentary session, some MPs have experience in multiple committees. The interviewed MPs have served on seven out of eight standing committees, all except the Transportation Committee which currently (in the first session of 2021) has the fewest number of women.

Focusing on PR women here is a research strategy examining most likely cases. Theoretically, PR women are most likely to represent social groups like women because they do not need to worry about voters of a geographical constituency,

TABLE 4.1 Backgrounds of the Interviewees

Code Number	Position	Committee Assignment⋆	Party Membership⋆⋆	Background
TWN.01	MP	DGJK	KMT	International Business Lawyer
TWN.02	MP	HLE	NPP	Engineer/Crime Victims Support
TWN.03	MP	CDL	TPP	Chief of Staff for Taipei Mayor
TWN.04	MP	AI	DPP	Local Council Member/ Immigrant
TWN.05	Former MP	GIJL	DPP	Feminist Lawyer
TWN.06	MP	EIKL	DPP	Feminist College Professor
TWN.07	Former MP	BHIL	DPP	Housewives League/Environment
TWN.08	MP	GHIJ	KMT	Children's Welfare

⋆ A − Interior, B − Diplomacy and Defense, C − Economic, D − Finance, E − Education and Culture, F − Transportation, G − Law, H − Health, Welfare and Environment, I − Procedure, J − Discipline, K − Constitutional Amendment, L − Audit

⋆⋆KMT (Kuomintang, Nationalist Party), NPP (New Power Party), TPP (Taiwan People's Party), DPP (Democratic Progressive Party)

Source: Compiled by author from interviews and data of Taiwan's Parliament available at www.ly.gov. tw/Home/Index.aspx.

and, empirically, they have been found to be more likely to sponsor bills concerning women's interests (Shim 2021). Exploring the difficulties the PR women encounter therefore allows us to better understand the obstacles to SRW.

As for published documents, parliamentary minutes were an essential source. These officially published legislative proceedings include all speeches, discussions, and questions asked in the parliament. The legislative processes of the Gender Equality Employment Act, same-sex marriage debates, and bill for the Stalking Prevention Act were examined because multiple MPs brought them up during the interviews and the legislative or deliberation processes reflected both achievements and challenges of SRW.

MPs' Personal Backgrounds

The backgrounds of interviewed women MPs are diverse, but all have sponsored bills related to women's rights and interests. The impact of variations in their backgrounds on their policy positions or parliamentary behavior therefore seems to be small. However, there is some convergence in their behavior patterns related to SRW because they help break gender stereotypes and change the gender culture of parliament and society in general.

Before entering parliament, all but one MP interviewed had experience in public affairs. Five were advocates for various causes, including women's rights, children's welfare, environmental protection, and crime victims' support. Some had worked full time in advocacy organizations (TWN.07, TWN.08); others wore two hats, doing advocacy while being a lawyer or a college professor (TWN.05,

TWN.06). Their advocacy experience greatly impacted their decisions to enter politics, and they pointed out that they were in politics for a long time before they entered parliament. They shared the view that when they worked for those causes outside of parliament, they needed to find MPs willing to work with them. When they had the opportunity to work from within the parliament, they took advantage of this to promote their causes more directly.

None of the interviewed MPs felt any inhibition from their parties or fellow MPs against discussing gender or any particular policy issue. Those who were advocates for social issues were used to speaking up. The other three were a lawyer of international business, a high-ranking political officer, and a local councilwoman; so they were not afraid to raise issues either (TWN.01, TWN.03, TWN.04). All of the interviewed MPs support gender equality and have sponsored bills to enhance women's welfare or to protect women's rights.

Regardless of whether they have a background in the feminist movement, the interviewed MPs showed gender sensitivity, and some shared their experience of confronting explicit or implicit patriarchal behavior of male politicians. TWN.06 formally sued a fellow male MP for sexual harassment because he used his belly to bump her from behind, and his belly touched her hip. It happened when MPs were fighting for space at the speaker's podium. Such kinds of fights were not unusual within the Taiwanese parliament. Though not serious physical fights, these incidents did involve shoving or other kinds of physical entanglement. They usually took place when the ruling party would pass a bill that the opposition party wanted to block. TWN.06, a member of the ruling party, said that though the inappropriate physical contact was annoying, she would let it pass if the man immediately apologized. What made her decide to file a formal complaint and lawsuit was his attitude. After what happened on the speaker's podium, she posted a complaint on her Facebook page and accused the opposition party of not having gender awareness. When the media reported her Facebook post, the director of that man MP's office responded by saying that she should look at the mirror, implying that she was not good-looking enough to be sexually harassed. Supporters of the male MP or his party went online to bully her and left harassing remarks on her Facebook page. This made her experience what a sexual harassment victim would experience firsthand, and she realized that being an MP would not exempt a woman from such harassing behaviors.

Other women MPs also had the experience of confronting patriarchal behaviors from men politicians. TWN.05 mentioned that when she first entered the parliament, a man came over and sat beside her during a meeting. He pushed a paper in front of her and said, "Miss, Sign!" MPs usually find cosponsors of their bills during parliamentary meetings. She looked at that man and pushed the paper back to him and said, "What 'Miss'?" That man was a bit stunned and later behaved more respectfully toward her. TWN.03 was slighted by a minister and fought back. She was the director of the mayor's office of Taipei, the capital city. She entered politics because she and the mayor were long-term working partners in the Emergency Center of the National Taiwan University Hospital. He was a medical doctor and the director

of the center, and she was the chief nurse. When he won the mayoral election in 2014, he asked her to be the director of the mayor's office, and when he established a new political party in 2019, he again asked her to go into parliament as a party-list legislator. When she questioned the government's housing policy, a minister without portfolios wrote on his Facebook page and said, "How would a nurse know anything about housing policies?" Her office confronted that minister and accused him of gender and occupational discrimination. He took down that Facebook post immediately. Sometimes, the inappropriate behavior was not apparent, but that did not mean women MPs were not aware. When asked whether she had been sexually harassed in the parliament during her two-term experience, one MP said there was no blatant harassment, but sometimes there was an unnecessary quick physical touch. She gave the example that if a man took a pen from her hand, the man might unnecessarily touch her hand even if the touch was short or quick (TWN.08).

All these examples offered by women MPs about inappropriate language or behaviors might not directly impact SRW, but when women MPs confronted or acknowledged them, it helped transform the gender culture in the parliament. Those confrontations were good reminders to male MPs that women MPs would no longer tolerate harassing language and behavior.

Another aspect of personal background that affects MPs' political behavior regarding SRW is the experience of motherhood. Some women MPs entered parliament after their children grew up or were no longer in elementary schools (TWN.01, TWN.05). They could enter politics because they no longer needed to worry about their children. Regardless of their children's age, they felt that being a mother is a positive factor because the experience made them more caring for those in need (TWN.01) or made them more convincing in policy discussion because they could cite their own experience (TWN02). One MP's experience of being a mother and a nationally known crime victim was significant in her decision to enter politics and it affected her parliamentary experience (TWN.02). Her four-year-old daughter was murdered by a random killer who had schizophrenia. The crime shocked the whole country and she became an advocate for crime victims' support since her daughter's death. She has also been concerned with laws regarding mental disability. When netizens attacked her over some political decisions, they often bullied her by saying how she let her late daughter down. She was well aware that she did not play the role of a grieving mother that some people expected to see. She once said that

> unless I could meet people's expectation to grieve only, to suffer only, to collapse only, to have my heart broken only, and to be only a victim without my own voice, these malicious intentions would never stop.[5]

The way she refused to behave like a powerless grieving mother and not shy away from politics enabled her to substantively represent women in a refreshing way.

Good communication skills, especially the ability to be good listeners, were also cited by some interviewed MPs as important factors that impacted their political

behavior. Some regarded that as a gender issue, but others attributed those skills to their past work experience. TWN.04 said:

> When my husband was in politics, he was swamped and he always wanted people to get to the point and did not want to listen to their stories. For me, the story is the point. You need to listen to their stories to understand their points.

Having been the chief nurse of an emergency room for 20 years, TWN.03 said that good communication was always crucial in an emergency room, especially with the patients' family members. The time pressure is not as great as in an emergency room, so there is no reason not to make time for communication. TWN.07 worked in a law firm before she became engaged full time with social movements. She said that when she worked in the law firm, she met all kinds of people with issues, and she felt that being a good listener is the first step to help people solve their problems.

Institutions

Institutions matter, and they can simultaneously facilitate and obstruct SRW (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008). In Taiwan, women MPs use various strategies to work within and transform the institutions to achieve SRW. However, they face institutional challenges also that are beyond parliament and those challenges hinder the degree of SRW.

Working Within the Institutions

In Taiwan, the cabinet submits most bills, but individual legislators can also submit bills if sponsored by at least 15 legislators. Though the number of required cosponsors seems high because it is more than 10% of the total MPs, in practice it is not difficult for MPs to get cosponsors. The difficulty of finding enough cosponsors was never mentioned during the interviews, and, for women-related issues, it was almost unanimous among the interviewees that cross-party cosponsors were not difficult to find. For a bill to be enacted into law, it needs to go through three rounds of reading. The most important discussion takes place in the second round, which is the committee deliberation. The third round is done in plenary meetings, which all MPs attend and no substantive changes are allowed. The only revision allowed in the third round is text revision for clarification. In practice, the most crucial negotiation among political parties regarding bills takes place between the second and third rounds in what is called "party negotiation." In the committee deliberation of the second round, if there is no agreement on specific articles, those articles are reserved for party negotiation. The whips of each party do party negotiation and usually political parties trade bills in those negotiations. If Party A wants

X bill to be passed and Party B wants Y bill to be passed, they might reach an agreement during the negotiation that both bills could be passed if Party A agrees upon certain things and Party B agrees to some other things. When to compromise and on what therefore becomes an important political skill and small parties sometimes have disproportionate leveraging power if the two large parties get caught in a deadlock (TWN.05, TWN.06). This is because a party needs only three seats in the parliament to be eligible to participate in the negotiation.

At any time, there are hundreds of bills waiting to be placed on the legislative agenda, but those treated as priority bills have a greater chance to be discussed, negotiated, and enacted. Government bills submitted by the cabinet are usually given priority, but MP-sponsored private bills could also be prioritized if major parties back them up. Because of their past advocacy experience as mentioned by some of the interviewed MPs, they learned how to mobilize public support through press conferences to elicit media reports or to use their networks with civic organizations to pressure the executive branch of the government and fellow MPs to support or prioritize their bills (TWN.05, TWN.08).

The government and the opposition sometimes trade bills because each has their priority bills to push. Since the legislative process ends when the parliament's term ends, bills not enacted into law within four years will have to start from the beginning in the next parliament. Therefore, if there are significant disagreements among parties during committee deliberation, MPs who support the bill have to either make compromises or give the bill up (TWN.05). MPs under such circumstances usually use the strategy to drop the part that did not have majority support from the bill and make that part an "appendix resolution." That means the government should attend to those resolutions made by the parliament though they are not laws.

Important agenda setting power belongs to the conveners of the parliamentary committees. For the eight standing committees, each has two conveners. The two conveners take turns to be the committee's chairperson, and conveners are elected from MPs assigned to that committee at the beginning of each parliamentary session. Most of the conveners are from the two largest parties, one each. If more than two MPs from the same committee have the same votes in conveners' elections, it will be decided by lottery. MPs usually choose which committee they want to be assigned to, but each MP for each session could be a member of only one parliamentary committee, so they sometimes have to coordinate with fellow MPs of their parties. MPs could attend any committee meetings and participate in the discussion, but they do not have voting power in the committees that they do not belong to. One strategy that women MPs use to achieve SRW is to "sit through" committee deliberation, and that means they stay for the discussion until the very end of the meeting. This is easier for PR politicians to do because, unlike the SMD MPs, they do not have to attend constituency events to please the voters. Staying for the whole time of the deliberation allows them more opportunities to defend their bills or to make sure the bills stay closer to their positions.

The gender proportions of the committees are different, though every committee has women MPs. It was found that women are more active in committees that have more women (Funk, Morales, and Taylor-Robinson 2017), and Taiwanese MPs also conveyed that experience. Figure 4.1 shows the gender proportion of legislative committees in the first half of 2021. The committee that has fewer women has a different atmosphere than those with higher proportions of women. Those on the committees of Health and Welfare or Education and Culture felt discussing women's or gender equality issues to be "natural" in those committees (TWN.02, TWN.06, TWN.07, TWN.08). MPs usually supported bills that benefit women regardless of their parties or genders in the Health and Welfare Committee. This is illustrated by the revision of the Gender Equality Employment Act. Originally enacted as the Equal Employment Act for Men and Women, it took women's organizations 12 years to get the law enacted because of opposition from employers. The law was enacted in 2002, when the center-left party, the Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), was in power, but revisions were mostly done between 2007 and 2016, when the center-right party, the Nationalist Party (Kuomintang, KMT), was in power. As shown in Table 4.2, the revisions were all progressive regarding women's and sexual minorities' rights and welfare, demonstrating cross-party support for the gradually enlarged scope of protection and enhanced level of welfare. The parliamentary minutes also showed a clear picture of support regardless of the gender of MPs (Legislative Proceedings Vol. 96–99, 103–105).

In committees that are conventionally more masculine, MPs would still raise issues concerning women's rights. TWN.07 was mostly on the Health and Welfare Committee during her parliamentary time, but she was also on the Diplomacy and Defense Committee for two sessions. She raised issues regarding the labor rights of nurses and care workers in military-affiliated hospitals largely because those workers were women. After the legalization of same-sex marriage,
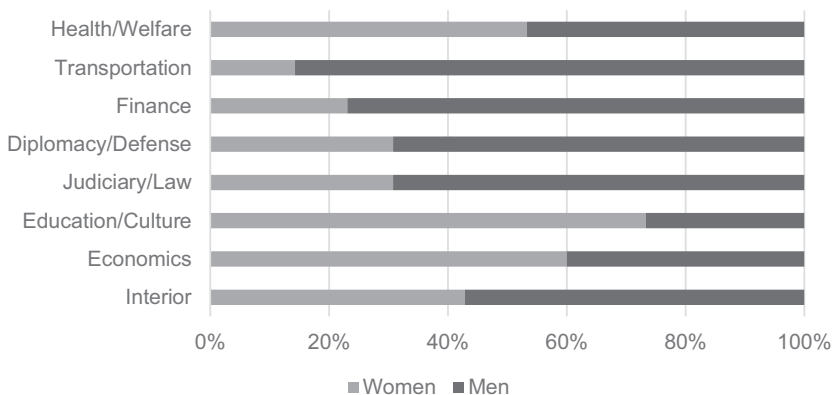

FIGURE 4.1   Gender Proportion of Legislative Committees in the First Half of 2021

TABLE 4.2 Revisions of the Gender Equality Employment Act in Taiwan

Year	Major Revisions
2007	• Changed the name of the law from "Equal Employment for Men and Women Act" to "Gender Equality Employment Act" and protected the rights of LGBT+ in the workplace
	• Childcare facilities are required, not just encouraged, for workplaces that have more than 250 employees
	• Increased the spousal accompany leave for prenatal examination from two days to three days
	• Increased the maximum fine for employers who violate the law from USD 10,000 to USD 17,000
2008	• Enlarged the scope for employers' behaviors that could be fined
2010	• Added "prenatal rest leave" for women if their doctors find the leave necessary
	• Family leave benefit applied to all employees and the requirement "for a workplace that has at least five employees" omitted
2013	• Menstrual period leave increased from one day to three days per month, and the days counted separately from sick leave
2014 (1)	• Interns and dispatched works regarded as employees of their workplace
	• Government will publish the names of employers who violate the law and repeated fines could be imposed if employers fail to comply with the law
2014 (2)	• Broadened the definition of hostile environment for workplace sexual harassment
	• Added five days "Prenatal Examination Leave"
	• Increased the spousal accompany leave for prenatal examination from three days to five days
	• Adoptive parents to have parental leave
	• Parental leave to be availed after being employed for six months, rather than one year
	• Breastfeeding rooms required for workplaces that have more than 250 employees
	• Maximum fines for violating the law increased to USD 50,000
2016	• Breastfeeding time at the workplace added
	• Childcare facilities required for workplaces that have more than 100, not 250, employees
	• Paid leaves required for employees' court appearance time if they sue their employers' for violating the law
	• Further enlarged the scope for employers' behaviors that could be fined

Source: Compiled by the author from the Law Database of the Taiwanese parliament: https://lis.ly.gov.tw/lglawc/lglawkm.

she also asked the Minister of Defense whether same-sex couples would be in the group weddings the military usually held annually. The minister replied by saying that if any of them wanted to participate they would be included. Two lesbian couples then got married in that year's military group weddings and it attracted media attention.

Transforming the Institutions

There were two major efforts made by the interviewed MPs to transform the institutions and both demonstrated SRW. The first was to establish a Gender Equality Commission within the parliament, and the second was to demand a one-third gender quota whenever possible.

The Gender Equality Commission within the parliament was created because of the demand of TWN.05. High on the gender mainstreaming agenda of the women's movement in the 2000s was to establish gender commissions in all line ministries and at all levels of government. Gender commissions consisting of both government and NGO commissioners became Taiwan's gender policy machineries over the past two decades. Such machineries have been prevalent in Taiwan's executive branch of government, from national to local levels (Huang 2016b). When TWN.05 entered the parliament, she demanded establishing a commission with members from all political parties and including outside experts. The House Speaker serves as the chair of the committee. The commission's main task is to promote gender equality within the parliament and to investigate any sexual harassment complaint filed by whoever works in the parliament, including MPs, staff of MPs, and civil servants. The latter function is essential. The Gender Equality Employment Act regulates workplace sexual harassment, but theoretically speaking, MPs do not have employers, and they are not exactly employers of their staff either since their staff are paid by the government. The establishment of the Gender Equality Commission ensured that MPs, their staff, and whoever works in the parliament would have a workplace institution to rely on if they want to file a complaint of sexual harassment.

At first, MPs who were commission members did not care about the commission, and they usually showed up for its meetings only for a short while. TWN.05 often was the only MP who attended the meetings besides the chair, the House Speaker, but she took advantage of the meeting time to educate civil servants on gender issues when discussing motions because chiefs of the bureaucratic units within the parliament would also attend the meetings. Such education was important because all these bureaucratic units played a role in the legislative process. Before any bill is enacted into law, it needs to be reviewed by the Organic Law and Statute Bureau within the parliament. The Bureau's main responsibility is to review bills for legality and constitutionality. As a lawyer herself, TWN.05 respected the professional qualities of the work done by the Bureau, but she wanted them to have more gender sensitivity. The parliament also, for the first time, conducted a survey on sexual harassment in the parliament. Those who were surveyed included government agencies' parliamentary liaison officers. All ministers and government agencies have parliamentary liaison officers to communicate with MPs' offices regarding their agencies' affairs such as budgets or bills. Those officers tended to be women, and there were rumors that staff members of MPs sexually harassed some officers (TWN.05). However, no one has ever filed a complaint. Though conventionally the executive branch of the government is more powerful than the

legislative branch, the officers still have disadvantages when they face the MPs' staff because MPs do have power to reduce budgets or to block bills. This is similar to what women lobbyists faced in the New York State House, and it shows what women lobbyists or parliamentary liaison officers had to endure to get their jobs done (Gabriel and Bosman 2017; Ember, Goodman, and Ferré-Sadurní 2021). TWN.05 finished her second term in 2020, but the effects of this gender commission as an institution continues on to the present. New MPs are aware of the commission and attend the meetings more seriously if they are members of the commission (TWN.06).

Aside from parliamentary committees, the institution of gender quotas has been implemented quite comprehensively in Taiwan. They were implemented early in elections, and since the early 2000s, one-third gender neutral quotas have been widely applied to all kinds of representative bodies. The Department of Gender Equality within the cabinet monitors its implementation, and, by the end of 2019, nearly 90% of more than 1,200 government commissions and committees complied with the quota requirement.[6] Many laws have quota articles included too, so some women MPs just demanded the one-third gender quotas all the time whenever there was an opportunity (TWN.05, TWN.06, TWN.07). Though such demands were usually met, they could still encounter opposition from the bureaucracy from time to time when bureaucrats used the expertise argument. TWN.05 once was demanding the gender quota for the Aviation Safety Committee, but bureaucrats from the Civil Aeronautics Administration vehemently opposed it, arguing that expertise was more important than gender. Though she did not agree and thought they would have no problem finding women experts in the field if they made efforts, a gender quota requirement was not included in that committee.

Institutional Challenges for SRW

Many institutional challenges for SRW in Taiwan are beyond the parliament and touch upon wider issues related to the constitutional structures and the protection of human rights. The legalization process of same-sex marriage and the discussion of bills for stalking prevention both illustrate these challenges. They showed the government's reluctance to enact important gender and women bills even when the center–left DPP controlled both the cabinet and the parliamentary majority.

Though international media labeled Taiwan as Asia's beacon for gays, public opinion over same-sex marriage was split despite years of efforts from women's and LGBT+ organizations (Jacobs 2014; Li 2016). During the 2016 presidential election, the DPP chairperson and candidate, Tsai Ing-wen, declared that she supported marriage equality in one of her campaign videos, and she got overwhelming support from the feminist and LGBT+ camps. After she became president, however, neither the government nor the DPP party caucus submitted any bill for same-sex marriage, though MPs from the DPP sponsored bills. It was evident by the end of 2016, when parliament began to deliberate on same-sex marriage again, after an effort stopped short in 2013, that public opinion over this issue was a 50–50 split.

The biggest difference was generational, not partisan (Li 2016). TWN.05 was well known to be the leading MP who sponsored the bill on same-sex marriage, and she had the support from and worked closely with a coalition of women's organizations and LGBT+ organizations. However, when the bill was under deliberation, mass mobilization of both sides took place in turns outside of the parliamentary building. This made the two largest parties adopt an "open vote" position, which meant the parties did not have a specific position on the bill. All bills regarding same-sex marriage were submitted either by a small party or individual MPs. The proportion of women in parliament was 38% at that time. Such a proportion of women, along with the strong support from the women's and LGBT+ organizations and young generation voters, still could not push the bill through.[7] The parliament finally legalized same-sex marriage in 2019 only after a constitutional ruling in 2017 and a public referendum in 2018. The ruling supported the rights of the same-sex couples but let the parliament decide whether to revise civil codes or enact a special law. The pro same-sex marriage camp wanted the revision of civil codes, but the opposing camp wanted a special law such as the civil union pact. The public referendum in 2018 ruled out the possibility of revising civil codes, but the pro marriage camp did not want a law named as civil union pact. The law ended up having the awkward name "Act for Implementation of Judicial Yuan Interpretation No. 748," and it stipulated that the articles regarding the registration of marriage in the civil codes could be applied to same-sex couples.[8]

The cabinet was not committed to the legalization of same-sex marriage mainly because of the polarization of public opinion. The still-pending enactment of the Stalking Prevention Act, however, exemplified government reluctance for practical reasons. After years of advocacy by women's organizations, the parliament held the first public hearing regarding stalking prevention in 2016. The bill was deliberated in 2017 in the joint meetings of the Health and Welfare Committee and the Committee of the Interior. After committee deliberations, the bill was not included as a priority bill in party negotiations. It therefore did not get enacted into law before the general election. When the new parliament was elected in 2020, women MPs of different parties again sponsored various bills addressing stalking prevention, forcing the Interior Ministry to submit a government bill.

In November 2020, when the Committee of the Interior held a public hearing regarding seven different bills on Stalking Prevention, some MPs interviewed were present in the public hearing. A former MP expressed disappointment that the law was blocked by the ruling party in the previous parliament and called the current parliament to enact the law soon (TWN.08). The other wondered why the Committee of the Interior was holding public hearings without placing the bills on the legislative agenda (TWN.06). From the hearing, it was clear that those who represented the interests of the police, including faculty members from the Central Police University, were worried about police workload. However, a woman MP who is a retired professor from the Central Police University and a former policewoman who is an activist for women's safety issues disagreed. They both straightforwardly dismissed such worries by citing the experience of the Domestic

Violence Prevention Act (DVPA). They pointed out that when the DVPA was enacted in 1998, there were similar concerns about police workload and the police's gender sensitivity. However, after the law was enacted, there was education and training, increased human resources, and the establishment of new institutions to help prevent domestic violence. In that public hearing, when the Minister of the Interior and representatives of the police force spoke, they emphasized that the police never refused to do the work. The chief of the Women and Children section of the Police Bureau even mentioned that she constantly worked extra hours until late evenings for two years since she began her current job. They wanted to make sure that people understood that the police could not be the answer for everything (Legislative Proceeding Vol. 110).

The draft bill for stalking prevention from the Police Bureau got much criticism because it treated stalking as a type of sexual harassment, and the bill covered a much smaller scope than bills presented by individual MPs or opposition parties (TWN.06). Because of this criticism, the bill was not placed on the agenda and the conveners waited for the government to submit a new bill. Then a woman was killed by her stalker in early April 2021, and public opinion roared about why Taiwan still had no law to prevent stalking. The cabinet quickly submitted a bill to the parliament, and the parliament soon finished the first reading. When the bill was deliberated in the committee, the worry of police workload appeared in the discussion again, though in a less straightforward way. Not only was police workload a concern, but the prosecution's workload was also mentioned. However, the bill's deliberation was completed, and all the reserved articles were waiting to be negotiated by leaders of party caucuses. Were it not for a sudden outburst of the COVID pandemic in Taiwan in mid-May, the bill might have been enacted into a law.

From these cases, the legislative processes in same-sex marriage and stalking prevention show that the executive instead of the legislative branch affects SRW to a great extent. Under Taiwan's current semi-presidential constitutional structure, cabinet members and MPs are two separate groups of people and they do not overlap. Some cabinet members are former MPs, but many are not. The executive branch conventionally has more power than the legislative branch of the government in Taiwanese politics. The cabinet usually decides whether a bill is treated as a priority bill, not the ruling party MPs. Opposition parties can trade bills with the ruling parties, but their minority position does not guarantee their priority bills will get enacted. The MPs interviewed from the two largest parties shared that, even when their own parties were in power, they had limited maneuvering power if the cabinet did not treat their bills as priority bills (TWN.05, TWN.06, TWN.08). Also, in legislative bills, MPs could only reduce the budget but not increase the budget, however supportive they were of certain policies (TWN.07). This also shows the limitation of women-friendly MPs or committees. MPs might have the power to block the government from doing what they do not want, but they had limited power to direct the government to do what they want.

Intersectionality

Addressing intersectionality, the Taiwanese parliament has always had indigenous seats. Taiwan's indigenous population is currently about 2% of the total population, but indigenous parliamentary seats are about 5%. However, men have filled most indigenous seats and there are no women's reserved seats in the indigenous districts. To show their support for women's rights, political parties sometimes place indigenous women on their party-lists. The rights of immigrants and children also touch upon intersectional representation because most of Taiwan's recent immigrants over the past two decades are women, and many abused children are girls.

If the backgrounds of PR women are indicators of intersectionality, then Taiwan has had women MPs who are indigenous people, immigrants, and disabled persons. The two largest parties have both placed immigrants on their party-lists and got them elected. The first immigrant who became an MP in Taiwan was a KMT member who served between 2016 and 2020. Among the interviewees for this study, TWN.04 is an immigrant and current MP of the DPP. Her experience was atypical for an immigrant woman because her husband was from a political family and she came to Taiwan for college, not marriage. However, her background made her a natural spokesperson for immigrants' rights. Her performance as a local councilwoman led to her being placed on the party-list. After she entered parliament, she established the Alliance for Immigrants' Rights, and more than half of the MPs, regardless of parties or genders, joined that alliance. Despite the support from her fellow MPs, she thought immigrants' rights could be better protected if the government created a ministry-level unit to handle immigrants' affairs. The current Bureau of Immigration, according to her, focused mainly upon border control and not enough on immigrants' rights or welfare. Her representation of immigrants' interests has been helped by the establishment of a committee on immigrant affairs within her party. She regularly attended meetings of that committee and the committee has become an important platform for various immigrant services or rights organizations to discuss immigrant issues.

TWN.08 echoed the sentiment that the government needs to reorganize to protect the vulnerable. There used to be a Bureau of Children's Affairs within the government before the government's restructuring in the early 2010s. After the restructuring, children's affairs have been handled by various agencies within the Ministry of Health and Welfare. The lack of efficient policy coordination among different government agencies made this MP feel that children's rights were implicitly sacrificed because children could not vote.

In general, PR women's constituencies are social organizations including, but not limited to, women's organizations. All of the interviewed MPs maintained close relations with key organizations in the relevant policy fields. They emphasized the importance of listening to all sides and paying attention to all stakeholders, and this sometimes got mixed up with the idea of the balance of rights. As a crucial feminist idea, intersectionality is about representing different women, but

MPs in general feel that they have to represent all people. For SRW, balancing the rights of different people could be challenging and tricky. When MPs deliberated on the Stalking Prevention Act bills, potential human rights violations regarding mental disability, invasion of privacy, and preventive detention were all mentioned. However, for any issue related to women's rights, when the balance of rights was considered, usually it was about men's rights.

Intersectional representation for women MPs was also related to internal party rules. Large political parties sometimes assign PR MPs to "difficult districts" to do constituency service. Difficult districts are those traditionally won by other parties. On the one hand, this strategy would enable parties to keep a presence in those difficult districts, and, on the other hand, if possible, they could consider selecting the PR MPs as candidates in those districts to challenge the incumbents. Doing constituency service would allow a PR MP to meet voters of various backgrounds, understand local issues, and increase the probabilities of intersectional representation for the PR women. Small political parties might not have that many PR MPs to assign to districts to do such constituency service, but MPs of those parties usually go to places outside of the capital city and attend to various policy issues (TWN.03).

Conclusion

For a democracy like Taiwan where the parliament has more than 40% women, it would be difficult to imagine the absence of SRW. Logically speaking, if nobody represents women substantively, then somebody could make that a campaign platform. Through interviews and published records, it is clear that MPs do represent women substantively, and such kind of representation has not been limited to women or PR MPs. However, there have also been limitations. The conventional power difference between the cabinet and the parliament mitigates the degree of SRW. Taiwan's semi-presidential constitutional structure exacerbates this problem because the cabinet is not formed, partially or wholly, by the MPs, so the increase of women MPs has not translated into a more gender-parity cabinet. On the other hand, when the cabinet is more powerful than the parliament and the cabinet members do not have to run for their offices, the cabinet would have more opportunities to enhance women's rights without the burden of facing opposition from a patriarchal society. This could probably explain the progress made by the women's movement and the DPP government between 2000 and 2008, when the center-left party controlled the cabinet but not the majority of the parliament. Quite a few gender-related laws were either enacted or revised during that period, and that was also the time when Taiwan began to engage the United Nation's agenda of gender mainstreaming (Huang 2017).

While Taiwan in some aspects has become the leader or exception of women's political participation and representation in Asia, recent developments show that, if the cabinet is not committed, then limitations on SRW in the parliament are also clear, especially when the cabinet has so few women. For SRW to be achieved, a

more active pro-women or pro-gender equality cabinet is needed. When the cabinet worried about police workload and blocked the enactment of the Stalking Prevention Act, it got the work upside down. They should not have blocked the bill. They should have reexamined the police workload or reallocated resources. Such work requires a greater commitment from the government to gender equality.

A cabinet-level gender commission was established in 1997, and it has been active since the early 2000s. The commission has been the main engine of Taiwan's gender mainstreaming and it consists of both government and civic organization members. The Department of Gender Equality, a bureaucratic unit established within the cabinet in 2012, works with the commission, and the two formed the core of Taiwan's national gender policy machinery. However, this policy machinery has shown institutional inertia and it is not institutionally linked to the parliament. The inertia is illustrated by the fact that the cabinet gender commission did not formally raise the issue of the cabinet's gender proportion, though media reports showed that some members of the commission were upset and considered resigning.[9] No one resigned. Institutionally, there is no linkage between the cabinet gender commission and the parliament. Resolutions or meeting minutes of the cabinet commission are not sent to the MPs, so most MPs would not have any idea what the national gender policy machinery has been working on.

Within the Taiwanese feminist movement circle, there used to be a popular saying: "Let's move from having nothing to having something, and then from having something to having something great." Having more than 40% women in parliament counts as having something, but to have something great, MPs' efforts are important but insufficient. Taiwan's experience shows that however much the MPs are willing to represent women's interests, the attitude of the executive branch of the government remains the key.

Notes

1 The Taiwanese government uses the same indicators and measurements of these international organizations to monitor Taiwan's gender equality development. See https://gec.ey.gov.tw/Page/8996A23EDB9871BE. Taiwanese data cited in this section are from this website.
2 The United Nations does not recognize this ratification. Still, the Taiwanese government, encouraged and monitored by women's organizations, has established a mechanism and invited international experts, usually former CEDAW committee members from the United Nations, to review the government's state reports and the NGOs' shadow reports. For the English version of the state reports and their review opinions since Taiwan "ratified" CEDAW, see https://gec.ey.gov.tw/en/D7DADA06318CA5F4.
3 This phrase was widely reported by Taiwanese media after a women's organization, the Awakening Foundation, released a protest statement: www.awakening.org.tw/news/5449 (accessed 13 July 2021).
4 The indigenous seats have two nationwide districts, and each district has three seats, elected through the single non-transferable vote (SNTV) electoral system. If a voter is an indigenous citizen, then he or she casts one vote for the PR list and one vote in one indigenous district.
5 Up Media 2020/09/26, Available at: www.upmedia.mg/news_info.php?SerialNo=96834.

6 The figures are shown in the webpage: www.gender.ey.gov.tw/gecdb/Stat_Statistics_
DetailData.aspx?sn=i9VnBrHRVPG5qI2WtF2n!g%40%40&d=194q2o4!otzoYO!8OA
MYew%40%40 (accessed 24 June 2021).
7 Legal scholars have pointed out that Taiwan's legalization of same-sex marriage was due to
multiple strategies adopted by activists, including both legal and constitutional mobilization
(Kuan 2019). Some also argued that the constitutional ruling was more about enhancing the
legitimacy of marriage as an institution, so it was not really that progressive (Chen 2019).
8 The Judicial Yuan is the judicial branch of the government under which Grand Justices
make constitutional rulings. Although they are similar to Supreme Court Judges in the
United States, Grand Justices do not judge on specific cases. They hear and review cases
and rule on the constitutionality of laws and regulations. They are not a court, but rather
a judicial authority that has the power to interpret the Constitution.
9 See https://vip.udn.com/vip/story/121157/4580503 (accessed 13 July 2021).

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PART II

Cases from Southeast Asia

5

SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN INDONESIA

Ella S. Prihatini

Introduction

Marking 25 years since the adoption of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, women's share in national parliaments around the world had more than doubled by 2020, reaching a global average of 24.9% (IPU, 2020). However, Asia recorded the slowest growth rate of any region moving only seven percentage points from 13.2% in 1995 to 20.2% in 2021 (see Prihatini, 2019a). As Figure 5.1 displays, only five Asian countries – Taiwan (42%), Timor-Leste (38.5%), Nepal (32.7%), Uzbekistan (32.6%), and Vietnam (30.3%) – have surpassed the 30% mark for women's representation. The Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU) suggests the region's champions reached this minimum threshold of 30% primarily due to post-conflict legal reforms (2020).

Meanwhile, the share of women in the Indonesian national assembly is only slightly above the Asian average. In the last two decades, following global trends including the adoption of a legislated gender quota, women's parliamentary representation in the Indonesian Lower House (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*/DPR) nearly doubled from 11.4% in 1999 to 20.5% in 2019 – reaching its highest level since its independence (see Figure 5.2). The efforts to increase women's parliamentary representation in Indonesia have also been continuously pursued through a series of affirmative action policies, especially after the fall of former President Suharto's authoritarian regime in 1998 inaugurated the *Reformasi* era (Prihatini, 2019b).

These policies include an obligation for parties to nominate at least 30% women candidates (Prihatini, 2018; Prihatini & Siregar, 2019). These gender quotas were first introduced in Indonesia under Law No. 31 of 2002 on Political Parties which encouraged parties to have at least 30% women as party board members. Law No. 12 of 2003 on General Elections then became applicable during the 2004 Elections
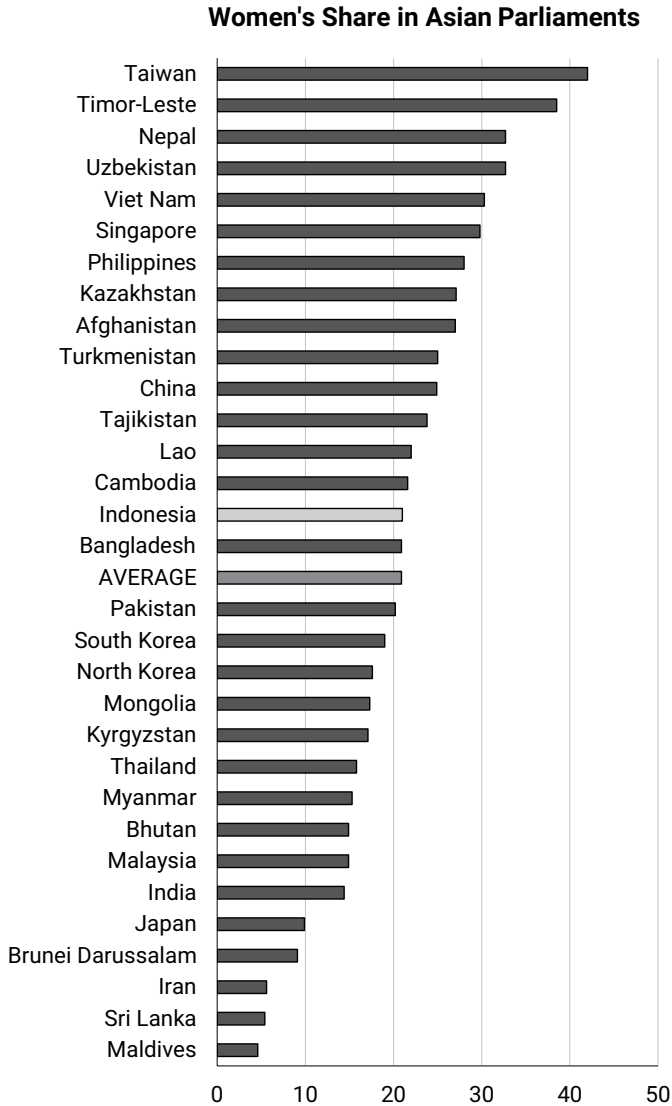
Women's Share in Asian Parliaments

FIGURE 5.1 Percentage of Women in Lower or Single House in Asia as of June 2021

Source: IPU, 2021.

requiring women to fill at least 30% of the candidates on party–lists. As Article 65(1) states, "Every political party that participates in an election may propose Member of Parliament candidates at the national, provincial and regency/munici–pality level or in each electoral district, considering at least 30 percent women's representation."

Election Year	Women's Share in DPR (%)	Women's Share in DPD (%)
1999	8	
2004	11.6	21
2009	18.04	26.5
2014	17.32	25.75
2019	20.52	30.88

FIGURE 5.2   Women's Share in DPR and DPD From 1999 to 2019

Sources: Margret et al. (2018), Prihatini, (2020).

The Indonesian Parliament

Since 1999, all legislators at the national and local levels in Indonesia have been elected by popular votes using an open-list proportional representation system. Legislative and executive elections are held concurrently every five years. The Indonesian national parliament is also bicameral consisting of a House of Representatives (*Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat*/DPR) or Lower House and Regional Representatives Council (*Dewan Perwakilan Daerah*/DPD) or Upper House – established in 2004. The two houses make up the Indonesian People's Consultative Assembly (*Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat*/MPR). As of 2019, the DPR is composed of 575 members representing 80 multimember constituencies ranging from three to ten seats each. Meanwhile, the DPD consists of 136 nonparty individuals from 34 provinces with each province granted four representatives regardless of the size of its population. The number of MPs in the two chambers has grown over time as a direct consequence of the emergence of new provinces.

According to Article 20 paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia (UUD 1945), the power to form a bill rests with the House of Representatives (DPR) and no bill requires approval from the DPD in order to be passed by the DPR (Rich, 2011). The next paragraph stipulates that each bill draft (*Rancangan Undang-undang*/RUU) is discussed by the DPR and the president to obtain mutual approval. The process of forming a law is regulated in Law 12/2011 of the Formation of Legislative Regulations which was amended by Law 15/2019. In addition, the process is also regulated by Law Number 17 of 2014, also known as the MD3 Law, which states a bill proposal can come from the DPR, the president, or the DPD. Bills from the DPR are submitted either by members of the DPR (individual or collective), a committee, joint committees, or the DPR's Legislation Council (*Badan Legislasi*/Baleg).

In practice, Indonesia has a multiparty democratic system comprising both larger and smaller parties. Table 5.1 displays the number of seats in the DPR and the top three parties in general elections. PDI-P and Golkar have always come up among the winners during the post-Suharto era highlighting their dominance in Indonesian electoral politics.

TABLE 5.1 Number of Seats in DPR from 1999 to 2019 and Top Three Winners

Year	Total Number of Seats	Three Biggest Winners (% of seats)
1999	462	PDI-P (33.7), Golkar (22.4), PPP (12.5)
2004	550	Golkar (21.6), PDI-P (18.5), PKB (10.6)
2009	560	Demokrat (20.8), Golkar (14.4), PDI-P (14)
2014	560	PDI-P (18.9), Golkar (14.7), Gerindra (11.8)
2019	575	PDI-P (19.3), Gerindra (12.6), Golkar (12.3)

Substantive Representation of Women

A growing body of research has examined the substantive representation of women (SRW) in parliament; however, these studies have largely been confined to Western democracies (Kroeber, 2018; Dingler et al., 2019; Höhmann, 2020; Wängnerud, 2009). Thus far, only limited studies have analyzed the relationship between women's descriptive and substantive representation in Asian democracies (Jovani et al., 2020; Shim, 2021) or in Muslim-majority countries (Ayata, 2008; Bulut, 2020). On the other hand, studies on women's parliamentary representation in the DPR are limited to women's views in accessing parliament (Prihatini, 2019c), committee assignments (Prihatini, 2019d), and gender quotas (Perdana & Hillman, 2020).

Thus, systematic examination of SRW in Indonesia is long overdue with some exceptions such as Kania (2015) and Jovani and colleagues (2020). Kania (2015) argues that 1998–2008 was the most progressive period in terms of protecting human rights, with at least five laws that contained women's rights: Law 39/1999 on Human Rights, Law 23/2004 on Elimination of Domestic Violence, Law 12/2006 on Citizenship, Law 21/2007 on Elimination of Human Trafficking Crimes, and Law 42/2008 on Political Laws. Meanwhile, Jovani et al. (2020) suggest female legislators in the deeply rooted patriarchal society of East Nusa Tenggara province can formulate gender-responsive policies by benefiting their status as mothers. This current study aims to fill this lacuna by exploring legislators' experiences and views on SRW in Indonesia – the world's third largest democracy. It contributes to the wider conversation on SRW by assessing how much progress toward gender equality and improving SRW has been made so far in Indonesia and what still needs to be done.

The rest of this chapter is organized as follows. The next section elaborates the study's methodology based on interviews with Indonesian lawmakers and data analysis. The third section examines the role of MPs' ideology and experience in advocating SRW in Indonesia, followed by a section examining how women's share on Indonesian parliamentary committees shapes the agenda in pursuing women's interests. The fifth section explores the role of the women's caucus and how MPs' intersectional backgrounds impact their advocacy of gender equality. Lastly, the conclusion reiterates the study's major findings and offers suggestions to improve women's substantive representation in the Indonesian parliament.

Methods and Data

This study draws primarily on interviews with eight current and former members of the DPR (see Table 5.2 for details). Interviewees responded to open-ended questions such as: (1) what factors hinder female MPs in pursuing women's interests in parliament?, (2) how conducive is the working environment at your parliamentary committee for supporting gender equality?, (3) what role does cross-party alliances among female MPs play in helping advocacy of women's interests in parliament?, (4) do you think personal background characteristics and political party influence legislators in achieving women's substantive representation?, and (5) what strategies could be useful in improving SRW in the national assembly?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted online using Zoom as a virtual meeting platform between 19 April and 13 June 2021. Respondents fell into two categories based on their membership status: former MPs (2) and sitting parliamentarians (6) currently serving in the 2019–2024 session. They were selected to represent both women's and men's committees and they hail from six out of nine parties in the parliament currently holding a total of 59.8% of DPR seats. Additionally, the interviewees represent different types of party ideologies, both Islamist and pluralist.[1] This variety in parliamentary committees and party affiliations offers important insights into how legislators promote women's issues and gender equality in their respective committees. As it is important to provide a cross-gender perspective, two interviewees are males and six are females.

Initial contact with respondents was mostly made via WhatsApp, and oral consent was obtained from all participants before the interview session began. Also, respondents agreed to have the conversations video-recorded and their details to be included in the report. Following the interviews, a thematic analysis was

TABLE 5.2 Distribution of Respondents by Sitting Period, Gender, Committee, and Party

Code	Sitting Period	Gender	Committee	Party
(IDN.01W 2021.04.19)	2004–2009	Female	III	PKB
(IDN.02W 2021.04.19)	2014–2019	Female	VIII	Gerindra
(IDN.03W 2021.04.22)	2009–2014, 2014–2019, 2019–2024	Female	X	PKS
(IDN.04W 2021.04.23)	2009–2014, 2014–2019, 2019–2024	Female	X	Golkar
(IDN.05M 2021.04.23)	2009–2014, 2014–2019, 2019–2024	Male	II	PKS
(IDN.06W 2021.04.26)	2009–2014, 2014–2019, 2019–2024	Female	VI	Demokrat
(IDN.07M 2021.05.01)	2009–2014, 2014–2019, 2019–2024	Male	V	PPP
(IDN.08W 2021.06.13)	2019–2024	Female	IV	PKB

conducted. The information was grouped into three main themes according to the research questions; perceptions of SRW, challenges in pursuing women's interests in parliament, and strategies to improve SRW in Indonesia's national parliament. Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia and then translated by the author into English.

The author moreover collected mass media reports on bills related to women's rights and interests and information on the committees and bills passed by the parliament. The official DPR website (www.dpr.go.id), in particular, provides excellent details about memberships and functions of each committee and other parliamentary bodies. Also, a list of laws relevant to women's interests obtained from the Legal Documentation and Information Network (JDIH) of the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Ministry or *Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak*/KPP-PA (www.jdih.kemenpppa.go.id) provided important background on what bills have been approved by the parliament.

According to the DPR website, there are specific steps to propose a new legislation. If a bill is sponsored by the government, the draft needs to be discussed in relevant commission(s) to gain support for further discussion within the DPR. If the bill is proposed by an individual or a group of MPs, they need to submit a proposal to the Legislation Council of the DPR (*Badan Legislatif*/*Baleg*). If agreed, *Baleg* takes responsibility for its further drafting and to sponsor it as a DPR Initiative bill.

The next stage of the process is the DPR's Consultative Council (*Badan Musyawarah*/*Bamus*) comprising the Speaker, deputy speakers, and leaders of all *Fraksi* (or party factions) and committees. The DPR also needs to send the bill to the president, so s/he can assign relevant ministers to represent the government in the deliberation processes. The government must submit a problem inventory list as a counterpart document to the bill for further deliberation and once they agree to schedule a discussion on the draft at a plenary session, the next step is to decide whether the bill should be listed as part of the National Legislation Program (*Prolegnas*).[2] If all *Fraksi* approve, the appointed committee forms a working committee (*Panitia Kerja*/*Panja*) – whose members work temporarily and will need to report to only the committee leaders – to conduct further deliberations and hearings with various stakeholders.

In addition to working in committees, MPs are also members of the Parliament's Complimentary Councils (see Table 5.3). While they can express their preferences to the leaders of their respective parties, parties have the final decision regarding the assignment to each council. Women's share in these councils is low, especially in the Ethics Council (5.9%) that deals with members who violate the Code of Ethics or are unable to perform tasks. Contrastingly, the proportion of women is highest on the Household Council (38.1%) which is relatively less prestigious in status. Women also comprise less than 15% of the powerful Consultative Council. However, since Puan Maharani became the House's first female Speaker in 2019, the council is now led by a woman.

TABLE 5.3 DPR Complementary Councils: Membership, Tasks, and Women's Share

Complementary Councils	Membership	Tasks	Women's Share (%)
Consultative Council or *Badan Musyawarah* (Bamus)	54	Determine the agenda of the DPR for 1 Session Year, 1 Session Period, or part of 1 Session Period	14.8
Legislation Council or *Badan Legislatif* (Baleg)	80	Serves as the center of national legislations activities	27.5
Budget Council or *Badan Anggaran* (Banggar)	98	Holds deliberations on State Revenues and Expenditures Budget (APBN)	25.5
Household Council or *Badan Urusan Rumah Tangga* (BURT)	21	Household affairs, including the welfare of members and employees of the DPR	38.1
Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation Council or *Badan Kerja Sama Antar-Parlemen* (BKSAP)	52	Develop, foster, and improve friendly and cooperative relationships between the House and the parliaments of other countries	25
Ethics Council or *Mahkamah Kehormatan Dewan* (MKD)	17	Investigate and verify the complaints against members about their inability to perform tasks continually or permanent impediment as members	5.9

MPs' Personal Backgrounds

Kroeber (2018) mentions how SRW can refer to two levels of analysis: the micro-level connection between the represented and single legislators and the macro-level relationship between citizens and whole legislatures. Measurement at the micro level includes behavioral and self-reported measures like membership in relevant committees (Bratton, 2005; Heath et al., 2005), bill sponsorship (Barnes, 2012), and parliamentary speeches (Osborn & Mendez, 2010; Unal, 2020). At the macro level – the output of the collective action of all legislators – scholars examine indicators like the number of bills enhancing the well-being of women (Schwindt-Bayer, 2006; Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008), the size of welfare, education, and health spending (Westfall & Chantiles, 2016; Funk & Philips, 2019), and ideological congruence (Dingler et al., 2019).

The current single-country study applies a combination of micro and macro levels of analysis based on interviews and mass media reporting. At the micro level, all interviewees claimed themselves as supporters of women's interests. However, only two respondents in this study have initiated a bill to the House. One veteran

activist and former lawmaker asserted that she and her colleagues have striven to promote gender equality through multiple legislations. She claims that, back in 2004–2009, the DPR was very productive as the House passed important bills such as Law No. 23/2004 on Domestic Violence Eradication, Law No. 6/2006 on Citizenship, Law No. 21/2007 on Human Trafficking, and Law No. 36/2009 on Health.

> In 2004–2009, I was the deputy of the Legislation Council of the DPR (*Badan Legislatif*/Baleg), so my position was strategic to smooth out bills that strongly promote democratic values and women's interests, including the Indonesian Citizenship Law which has been highly praised by other states. The Law is highly appreciated because it is very comprehensive. It not only (covers) women's rights but also the rights of children – children out of wedlock, adopted children, etc. all are recognized through this legislation.
>
> *(IDN.01)*

She further explains that the Citizenship Law was actually not listed in the National Legislation Program (*Prolegnas*). But as the Deputy Chair of *Baleg*, she invited Women's Legal Aid (LBH APIK) and an alliance of NGOs advocating women's and children's rights to present their study on the bill with references to the Citizenship Law from 122 countries. At the end of the presentation, many members of *Baleg* were fascinated by the impressive presentation. "And then they said, 'why don't we just propose the Citizenship bill as an initiative of the DPR outside of the National Legislation Program?'" she recalled (IDN.01).

Subsequently, this respondent and 12 other MPs wrote draft legislation and formally proposed the bill to the House. "At that time, we needed at least 13 MPs to be able to propose a new bill. But, since 2014 it only takes one lawmaker to do so," she said. Following that, *Baleg* assigned a working committee (*Panja*), which consisted of 17 people including quite a few numbers of male legislators, to proceed with the deliberation processes.

Despite the right of legislators to initiate a bill, in Indonesia, the executive is dominant when it comes to proposing legislation. During 2004–2009, for example, of the 193 DPR bills that were passed to become laws, 125 (64.4%) came from the government, while only 68 bills (33.6%) were proposed by the DPR (Kasim, 2011). And since there is no reliable data on how many lawmakers did actually initiate a bill to the parliament, or which party dominates this activity, bill sponsorship as a form of SRW remains unclear.

Another interviewee shared her experience on how along with four other MPs from PKS, PAN, Golkar, and Gerindra, she initiated the family resilience bill (*RUU Ketahanan Keluarga*) in the House. With the approval from all *Fraksi*, the bill was listed in *Prolegnas Prioritas* (which consisted of 50 bills) in January 2020. Nevertheless, after concerns about legislative overreach into people's private lives, *Baleg*

decided to halt the process because five out of nine party factions voted against continuing the deliberation (Gumelar, 2020).

From that experience, she explains how legislators tend to not initiate a bill because the preparation process requires extensive efforts starting from "academic text" (*Naskah Akademik*/NA) to lobbying other members and the committee. However, this pattern might change in the future because more and more MPs are initiating new bills to the House, thanks to recent upgrading and restructuring of the support system in the DPR.

> In the past, if we wished to propose a bill, we had to make the "academic texts" among other things by ourselves. But now the Secretariat of the House offers a stronger support system through its Specialist Support Office (Badan Keahlian) where they have the expertise and the manpower to help with legal drafting, etc. Also, with the new system, an individual MP can propose a bill. There is no minimum number of legislators required to support a bill to the House.
>
> *(IDN.03)*

The next question then is about why some MPs are eager to initiate bills, and what prevents the others from proposing any bill in the House. One possible explanation lies in the MP's personal background which further shapes how women's presence in the parliament may or may not affect women's interests. A male respondent shared his views on SRW in the House by arguing that, in general, there should be no obstacles for female legislators to pursue women's interests, especially when the chairpersons in Committees I and IX are women. A handful of women are currently sitting in strong positions, both in the committees and party factions. Even the Speaker of the House is a woman.

> The mainstreaming of women's issues is not a problem, but it is again the "agenda." Some women do not consider this agenda (advocating women's interest and rights) as important, and this of course depends on their level of (political) literacy, education, and socialization on gender issues.
>
> *(IDN.05)*

The interviewee adds that the current electoral system which applies open-list Proportional Representation (PR) has resulted in a fierce competition among candidates and parties. Consequently, lawmakers were not elected based on their ideological or strong intellectual frameworks but rather on the basis of popularity and vote buying practices. Thus, this partly explains why not many issues regarding welfare, justice, and local wisdom arise in the House.

> Yes, one or two (MPs) are very vocal about voicing these issues, but if I were to assess 575 members in the House, I will say there are only 20% lawmakers

who are genuinely eager to pursue such interests. The rest of them have other intentions in mind. Therefore, I cannot blame anyone if women's issues are not the main concerns in the House, because issues about justice are also not such a mainstream issue today.

(IDN.05)

A similar observation was mentioned by another respondent who is a newcomer in the House. She works in Committee IV, which oversees agriculture, forestry, and maritime affairs. The discussions about women's issues in her committee remains intermittent, meaning that if no one brings out gender equality to the floor, then the whole committee will forget about the importance of applying this perspective. She elaborates her recent experience in a hearing session with the Ministry of Agriculture.

I was proposing that a gender perspective should be included in the measurement of the government's agricultural policies, in addition to sustainability, environmentally friendly, etc. The government's representative has agreed to my request, however, the Chair of Committee IV refused to add gender equality as a measurement tool because he said that farmers are of course males and females. I further argued that if everything considered to be by default men and women are equal, then we should have no inequalities and discrimination problems. But in reality, women do experience these issues and therefore we must include gender perspective in the assessment regime.

(IDN.08)

The debate reminded her of how even in institutions like the DPR, there is lack of concern and the idea of gender equality remains a foreign concept to some members. One must always mention, emphasize, and fight to end inequality between men and women. Especially, in Committee IV that is perceived to be masculine in terms of gender relations, lawmakers may not share the same level of interest in advocating women's rights, despite the fact that a large population of Indonesian farmers are women.

At the macro level, SRW can be observed via new legislation to enhance the well-being of women. According to the Women's Empowerment and Child Protection Ministry, there are a number of laws that do so, such as Law No. 23/2004 on Eradication of Domestic Violence, Law No. 21/2007 on Eradication of Human Trafficking, Law No. 52/2009 on Population Growth and Family Development (see Table 5.4).

As can be seen from Table 5.4, the ministry's list exhibits a very modest approach. Women's rights and interests have been narrowly defined into conventional gender relations. Thus, laws deemed to improve the well-being of women are limited to the domestic sphere rather than public affairs. A prime example is

TABLE 5.4 Legislation Passed to Enhance the Well-Being of Women (1958–2019)

Year	Law Number	Title
2019	16	Amendments to Law Number 1 of 1974 Concerning Marriage
2017	12	Ratification of the ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children
2016	17	Stipulation of Government Regulation in Lieu of Law Number 1 of 2016 Concerning the Second Amendment to Law Number 23 of 2002 Concerning Child Protection into Law
2014	35	Amendments to Law Number 23 of 2002 Concerning Child Protection
2014	23	Regional Government
2012	11	Juvenile Criminal Justice System
2012	9	Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict
2012	10	Ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography
2011	12	Establishment of Legislative Regulations
2009	52	Population Development and Family Development
2008	44	Pornography
2007	21	Eradication of the Crime of Trafficking in Persons
2004	23	Elimination of Domestic Violence
2002	23	Child Protection
1999	39	Human Rights
1984	7	Ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
1979	4	Child Welfare
1974	1	Marriage
1958	68	Agreement on Women's Political Rights Conference

Source: https://jdih.kemenpppa.go.id/?page=peraturan&act=search.

the recent Job Creation Omnibus Law which was passed in October 2020 despite a national outcry.

> Women were not much involved in either ideological or factional struggles that made people questioning "where are the women's voices" when they were discussing these bills in parliament?
>
> *(IDN.08)*

The absence of women's views and aspirations in the deliberations of the government-initiated Job Creation Omnibus Law illustrates how female MPs fare in advocating women's interests in the parliament. However, it is also important to note that this Omnibus Law was passed only after ten months since its inception in

January 2020. This also caused a stir in the public since other much-needed laws such as the Protection of Domestic Workers Bill (RUU *Perlindungan Pekerja Rumah Tangga*/PPRT) have been stagnant in the process for over 16 years (Sucahyo, 2020).

Institutions

This section identifies some of the institutional hurdles to promoting women's interests in the DPR. During the 32 years of former President Suharto's administration (1967–1998), the DPR had a limited capacity to impact the legislative process as it showed no initiative to propose bills and made no significant changes to government bills (Ziegenhain, 2008). The DPR then was merely a rubber stamp, a place to reward loyal supporters, and to buy off potential critics (Sherlock, 2012). Unfortunately, today's DPR continues to inherit the once powerless and meaningless DPR of the Suharto era. As Ziegenhain (2008, p. 197) rightly argues,

> More than 2,400 people are employed but only a small number are directly involved in supporting legislators' work . . . The parliamentary records are not computerized and not systemically stored, so finding documents and background information for the legislators is a complex matter.

A study by Indonesian Parliament Watch (*Formappi*) suggests that the performance of the DPR over the 2014–2019 period was the worst since the *Reformasi* era as the number of bills passed per year on average was only five or half of the previous period (Fitra, 2019). This performance is not commensurate with the large amount of public money the institution receives with an annual budget averaging IDR 5.23 trillion (USD 367 million) (Ahdiat, 2019). The Executive Director of the Indonesia Budget Center (IBC), Roy Salam, argues the amount spent for the discussion of one bill varies, with an average of IDR 6.56 billion (USD 462,658) per draft. The DPR is also criticized for the poor quality of its legislation. *Formappi* notes that the constitutional court granted 46 lawsuits against DPR legislation deemed to be contradicting democratic values or against the 1945 Constitution (Fitra, 2019).

The DPR is not only criticized for its troubling performance in legislation. Based on WikiDPR's monitoring of MP attendance in plenary sessions during the first sitting period of 2016–2017 (16 August–28 October 2016), the average attendance was only 41.8% or 234 out of 560 members (Krisiandi, 2016). During a plenary session which discussed the state budget for 2019, as many as 81.3% of members were absent (Ibrahim, 2018). Similarly, only half of the current-term MPs attended the inaugural plenary meeting which was scheduled to elect Puan Maharani as the Speaker of the House (Maharani, 2019).

In Indonesia, lawmakers are attached to a single parliamentary committee. The number of committees in the DPR is currently 11 and each consists of 35–55 members. The membership size balances "party ratios roughly in proportion to those of the plenary" with chairmanships allocated through "negotiations among

the leaders of the dominant parties" (Schneier, 2008, p. 203). As committees are the main arena of decision-making action (Sherlock, 2012), approaching party caucus (*Fraksi*) leaders in order to influence the content of legislation will not be as productive as securing support from committee members.

Every parliamentary standing committee has a chairperson and four deputies. In the 2019–2024 period, only two out of 11 committees (18.2%) were led by a female chairperson (see Table 5.5). Meanwhile, the number of female deputies is five, assigned in Committees V, IX, and X. A study on women's committee assignments by party from 2004 to 2014 suggests that female MPs are more likely to be placed in feminine and less prestigious committees (Prihatini, 2019d). This begs the question of whether having a higher proportion of female legislators in women's committees leads to a higher representation of women-specific interests.

TABLE 5.5 Committee Gender and Prestige Type, Seats, and Women's Share as of April 2021

Committee	Gender	Prestige	Seats	Women (%)
I. Defense, Foreign, and Information Affairs★	Masculine	High	53	15.1
II. Home Affairs, Regional Autonomy, Administrative Reforms, and Agrarian Affairs	Masculine	High	49	10.2
III. Law and Legislation, Human Rights, and Security Affairs	Masculine	High	54	7.4
IV. Agricultural, Plantations, Forestry, Maritime, Fisheries, and Food Affairs	Masculine	Medium	54	25.9
V. Communications, Telecommunications, Public Works, Public Housing Affairs, Acceleration of Development of Disadvantaged Regions★★	Masculine	Medium	54	20.4
VI. Trade, Industrial, Investment, Cooperatives and Small and Medium Scale Enterprises, and State-owned Enterprises Affairs	Masculine	Medium	55	16.4
VII. Energy, Mineral Resources, Research and Technology, Environmental Affairs	Neutral	Medium	50	20
VIII. Religious, Social, and Women's Empowerment Affairs	Feminine	Low	51	19.6
IX. Demography, Health, Manpower and Transmigration Affairs★/★★/★★	Feminine	Medium	48	50
X. Education, Youth, Sport, Tourism, Arts and Culture Affairs ★★/★★	Feminine	Low	52	34.6
XI. Finance, National Development Planning Board, Banking and Non-Bank Financial Institutions Affairs	Masculine	High	55	18.2

Source: Prihatini, 2019d.
★   represents female committee chair
★★ represents female committee deputy chair

As mentioned earlier, the House has different committees and complimentary councils. Some committees and councils are perceived as prestigious, whilst others are considered less prestigious and less important. A male respondent observes:

> [C]ommittees and councils are characterized as three different classes. For example, class A is for Committee I to III and the Consultative Council (*Bamus*), Legislation Council (*Baleg*), Budget Council (*Banggar*). On the other hand, the Household Council or *Badan Urusan Rumah Tangga* (BURT) is often listed as the lowest in terms of prestige. However, in the previous term (2014–2019), the Speaker of the House attempted to change this attitude by Chairing BURT in a hope to demonstrate that the BURT council is important too, and not only dealing with domestic affairs. Apparently, this effort has not been very fruitful as we still have nearly 40% of members in BURT being women.
>
> *(IDN.07)*

He further explained that apparently the BURT council is rather relaxing in terms of the working environment as their main responsibility is the House's internal affairs, so it becomes very local and simple. "I am not sure why this is the case, but when I was there, most of the (BURT) members were female MPs, especially the senior ones," he said.

A study by Prihatini (2019d) argues how little discernible pattern there is to committee assignments in Indonesia. Party ideology, such as Islamism or secularism, is not the key determinant in explaining how parties allocate female deputies to masculine versus feminine committees. In the case of Islamist parties, for example PKS tends to assign women to feminine and low-prestige committees while PPP has been assigning women to committees that oversee issues beyond women and families. An assertion from a female MP in the DPR since 2009 may shed some light on this pattern of committee assignments:

> When I first entered (the House), I was a newbie, I also had a hard time getting assigned to the committee that I wanted. When I asked why I got Committee X, they said that it was because I hold a doctoral degree, even though at that time I wished to be assigned to Committee V. And they told me that Committee V is only for those who are senior and incumbent. Hence, as a newcomer, I cannot get the assignment to Committee V. Some committees are treated like this. But, after two years in the DPR, I was finally transferred to Committee V.
>
> *(IDN.04)*

As gender parity has never been achieved in the DPR, women's representation in some committees can be very limited. For example, if a party has only two female MPs, the party will be very likely to assign women to Committees VIII and X to partner with the ministries that oversee women's issues and education.

To overcome this shortage of representation, female MPs established the Women's Caucus of the Indonesian Parliament (KPPRI). As one of the members of the presidium of KPPRI, a respondent representing Demokrat Party explains that the women's caucus is acting as a bridge to fix the issues that might occur during the deliberation of bills or other issues relevant to women's interests, "If an issue emerges, the Women's Caucus will be holding seminars or webinars to discuss this particular debate" (IDN.06).

Aside from the politics of committee assignments, it is also imminent to delve into another obstacle in promoting women's interests in the parliament: institutional capacity. Reflecting on the Anti–Pornography Bill, Stephen Sherlock (2009) asserts that the DPR as an institution has ambitions to do more than simply review legislation initiated by the executive. DPR wants to become a major influence in the direction of national policy; however, its institutional capacity does not yet match its ambitions. The critical institutional weakness was the absence of processes to engage in early and systematic public consultation. The official website of the House also provides very limited information about the deliberation process of bills and the written records of parliamentary hearings (Anggoro, 2019).[3]

The currently ongoing debate surrounding the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill (RUU PKS)[4] provides a prime example as to how public discussion regarding this bill is rather limited. Mass media narratives urging the parliament to escalate the legislation process were dominated by concerns related to the high prevalence of sexual assaults. However, those who opposed the bill were mainly concerned that this regulation will be hijacked by promoters of the LGBT movement (Martaon, 2021).

The Job Creation Omnibus Law was also heavily criticized for a deliberation process that was far from transparent and inclusive as the government ignored regulations in Law No. 12/2011 concerning the Establishment of Legislation (Prabowo & Apinino, 2020). As a government initiative, the Omnibus Law Task Force was directly headed by the General Chairperson of the Indonesian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, under the direction of the Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs. A total of 127 people, mostly entrepreneurs, were selected to take an inventory of problems and provide input related to the bill at that time. The draft of the Job Creation Bill was submitted together with the academic text (NA), even though the NA should be made first before the bill is drafted, formed, and discussed.

Intersectionality

The 2019 legislative elections resulted in the highest proportion of women in the House. The increase is significant as political parties nominated more women than ever, with the average share of female candidates from each party standing at slightly more than 41% (Prihatini, 2020). Of the 16 parties that participated, only nine managed to meet the minimum vote threshold which stands at 4%. In 2014, PKS had only one female legislator, but in 2019, the party managed to get eight

women elected which equals 6.7% of the overall population of female MPs in the DPR. On the other hand, Demokrat, PAN, and PPP experienced a steep decline in their share of women MPs (see Figure 5.3).

A study on gender and political dynasties in the DPR suggests that one in four lawmakers has some sort of familial ties with politicians or local leaders (Prihatini & Halimatusa'diyah, forthcoming). This number resonates with existing scholarship on other Asian democracies, such as Taiwan, the Philippines, Japan, and India, which posit that, on average, 20–30% of legislators have been from families of political dynasties (Asako et al., 2015; Basu, 2016; Batto, 2018; Mendoza et al., 2012; Smith, 2018; Geys & Smith, 2017). Both men and women equally benefit from translating political kinship into electoral success; however, the degree is higher among female MPs. The percentage of female deputies with political kinship has grown from 4% in 2009 to 47% in 2019. On the other hand, dynastic male MPs comprise only 18% in the current term. Overall, MPs aged 35 or younger are three times more likely to be affiliated with political families. Of the 52 younger deputies, slightly more than half are dynastic politicians. This demographic is interesting because Indonesian youth show far less support for political dynasties (Sakti, 2020), and yet the percentage of dynastic politicians among young legislators outweigh the older age groups.

One might expect women's presence in the House to represent women's interests. However, since women are heterogeneous, their interests and backgrounds may reflect different priorities in political behavior. Table 5.6 displays the characteristics of lawmakers in the previous term. Most lawmakers are university graduates,
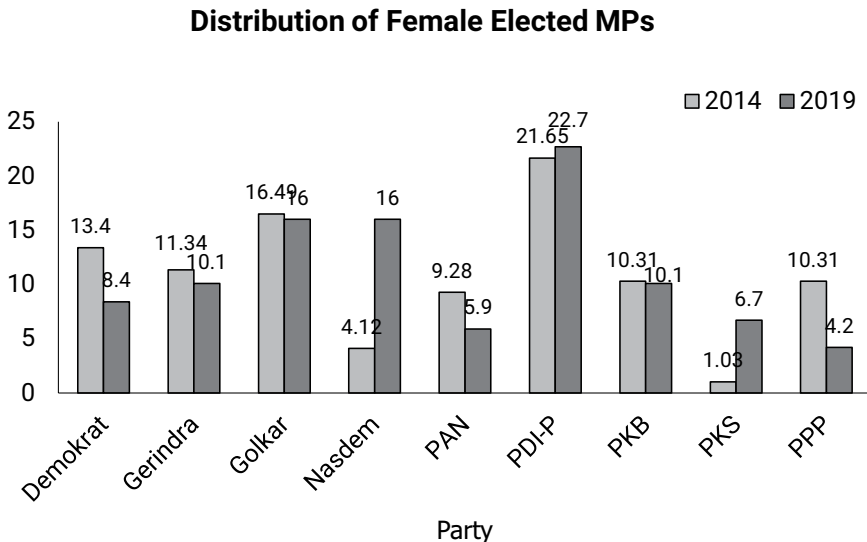
FIGURE 5.3 Female Elected MPs by Party in 2014 and 2019

Source: KPU (2014, 2019).

TABLE 5.6 Characteristics of the National Population and Elected MPs in 2014

Characteristics		National Population (%)	Male MPs (%)	Female MPs (%)
Age	20–29yo	17.34	1.29	4.12
	30–39yo	16.13	9.07	23.71
Education attainment	Higher education	5.22	82.29	84.54
Residence	Java	57.48	75.59	76.29

Source: Prihatini (2019e).

while this group comprises only 5% of the national population. Hence, lawmakers are the elites who hardly represent the commoners in terms of education attainment. Similarly, as the electoral campaign cost is prohibitively expensive for most Indonesians – ranging from IDR 2 billion (USD 138,000) to IDR 6 billion (USD 415,000) – those who became lawmakers tended to have strong financial capacity, come from the business sector, or were incumbents (Prihatini, 2019c).

Also, over 76% of female MPs are living in Java and 53% of women deputies are Jakartanians, making the DPR far from representing the national population. This gap is troubling because elected representatives are not living in the electorates they are representing. Thus, constituents might find it rather difficult to contact their deputies in the parliament. This is alarming as the House lacks diversity and is far from being inclusive (Prihatini, 2019e).

An interviewee representing Gerindra suggests female deputies are divergent in their political ideologies and political agenda. She was comparing the situation with the debate surrounding pro-life versus pro-choice in the United States. Women can claim to be feminists, but even feminists are not homogeneous in perceiving what constitutes women's rights when it comes to the rights to abort pregnancy. This debate, she further argues, has nothing to do with gender or with the relationship between men and women, since most of the differences were in fact at the ideological level.

> Another aspect relates with political agenda, since oftentimes women's issues are perceived to be controversial. For example, the amendment of Marriage Law (the minimum age to get married). Those who use the reproductive health perspective would argue that the minimum age should be increased. But those who are hesitant to change the minimum age maintain that marrying a couple who are still in their teens is better in order to prevent them from committing sin.
>
> *(IDN.02)*

Different facets of identity interact to shape experiences and affect how lawmakers advocate gender equality in the parliament (McCall, 2005). Being a woman does not always make someone have a good understanding of what women's interests are. An informant representing PKB shared this assertion by using an analogy

of someone who has no experience driving a car. She said that many MPs seem to lack in capacity or understanding of what agenda they should pursue in the parliament. "As if they are just learning the pedals, which one is the brake and which one is the gas" (IDN.08). Some deputies, both men and women, tend to be passive. Lawmakers of this type are present on almost all committees. When they do speak up, the topic will be invariably closely attached to his or her personal background.

> Not only women, but men are also the same. There are MPs who never said anything (in the committee). But if he/she does, for example in Committee I whose partner is the Army Commander, the only topic that was covered is about the corps. Same in Committee V, where some MPs rarely speak up, but only talk about dam construction. I have a colleague who always talks about the Lapindo mudflow[5] in every meeting, it is because he is one of those affected by the mudflow. In a way, this is good because a lawmaker's behavior is driven by his/her personal experience which also represents many Indonesians. This means he/she has a unique emphasis in contributing to the House.
>
> *(IDN.07)*

Female MPs coming from the women's rights movement or student associations in this study tended to express a clearer idea about the gender perspective they wish to pursue in their respective committees. Meanwhile, a respondent who has a familial tie with her party leader seems to express her reflections with more confidence. She encountered minimum resistance as people consider her substantial political connection.

All participants in this study are also married and have children. What really differentiates their narratives was experience in the House and how they perceived women's rights for different classes in the society.

> I think women's substantive representation in the House is still far from ideal, if we wish every individual to have sufficient gender sensitivity. We must continue to raise women's issues in all committees, not only Committee VIII or X. For example, we must persuade our female Finance Minister to apply budgeting that encompasses gender perspective.
>
> *(IDN.04)*

Concerning women in leadership positions, some respondents strongly argue that having female leaders is not a guarantee that they will advocate gender equality. The House of Representatives is currently led by Puan Maharani, who is the daughter of former President Megawati Soekarnoputri (Indonesia's first female president) and the granddaughter of Indonesia's first President Sukarno. But a couple of sources suggest that female leadership in the DPR has not yet made it become more pro-women in legislating for reasons that require further analysis.

> Here, we must apply feminist analysis, and class analysis. For example, what is the impact of this law or this article on women? Well, that's feminist analysis,

yes. But then, if it benefits women, which class are we talking about? It is a shame if we consider that women are a monolithic category, no class, no marital status, no ethnicity. All intersectionality, the impact of a law whether it be class, ethnicity, ethnicity, gender, etc., we must be able to use the analysis.

(IDN.01)

Another observation from a member of PKB suggests women tend to act safely. They understand that they have to adapt (to the political environment) if they wish to secure their position. At the same time, they have to avoid being too controversial. Otherwise, they risk losing their seats. "Even though I think this is exactly when female MPs must negotiate and persuade others to support women's cause" (IDN.08).

Conclusion

To improve SRW in the Indonesian DPR, a couple of strategies were mentioned by respondents: (1) establishing a political school dedicated to women who are interested in joining politics, (2) strengthening the role of women's caucus (KPPRI) in overcoming partisanship disagreements among female deputies, and (3) increasing critical acts on top of the critical mass.[6] These approaches are expected to answer complaints that parties often blame a lack of female candidates to nominate in legislative elections. With more women gaining political knowledge and trained to become politicians equipped with gender perspective, one respondent from Golkar was convinced that parties will have sufficient number of female candidates with high electability who are eager to promote gender equality in the House.

The second strategy aims to improve the capacity of women's caucus to solve the deadlock of official channels by prioritizing women's causes over the interests of their respective *Fraksi*:

> What we are currently experiencing with the Sexual Violence Eradication Bill (RUU PKS) is that female MPs are returning to their "base," in this case their parties. So, they were waiting for cues from their party caucus and behaved accordingly when we met in the Women's Caucus forum. This needs to change, because everybody is supposed to leave their party affiliation behind and discuss the bill as a common interest, carrying women's agenda.
>
> *(IDN.08)*

Lastly, a strategy to improve SRW in the House is by promoting critical acts and critical actors beyond critical mass. This means women may right now be underrepresented in numbers and leadership on committees. However, if they can speak more frequently and be more vocal in various forums, they will shape the political conversation.

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that women's descriptive representation has steadily increased in the DPR following major electoral reforms and gender

quotas, which require parties to nominate at least 30% women candidates. Currently, a woman serves as a Speaker of the House and two women are chairing committees that oversee defense (Committee I) and health affairs (Committee IX). The distribution of female MPs in committees has also improved, although the disparity between the committees is quite stark with 50% women in Committee IX and only 7.4% women in Committee III (law and human rights).

Interviews with lawmakers reveal that SRW in the DPR is still a work in progress. This finding is in line with Indonesia's experience in closing the gender gap over the years. Indonesia is currently ranked eighth in the East Asia and the Pacific region and eighty-fifth place in the world, as it has closed 70% of its gender gap (World Economic Forum, 2021). One of its most impressive achievements is in terms of economic participation and opportunity. Indonesia boasts the world's largest share (55%) of senior and leadership roles held by women and is one of the six countries in the world where a majority of such roles are held by women.

Nevertheless, more needs to be done in order to improve SRW in the national parliament. With some bills concerning women's rights and interests remaining in the backlog of *Prolegnas* for years, female deputies should speak more on behalf of their constituents and turn their volume louder in a harmonious tune whilst promoting gender equality in every aspect of life. The women's caucus may serve as an important starting point where female legislators can coordinate their political agenda. And female leaders should engage in more critical acts to support pro-women policies in all key parliamentary functions: oversight, budgeting, and legislation.

Notes

1 Following Mujani and Liddle's (2009, p. 577) parties' classification based on Islamist and pluralist ideologies, this study treats Partai Persatuan Pembangunan (PPP, Development Unity Party) and Partai Keadilan Sejahtera (PKS, Prosperous Justice Party) as Islamist parties, Partai Kebangkitan Nasional (PKB, National Awakening Party) and Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN, National Mandate Party) as Islamic social organization-based parties, and Golkar (Golongan Karya, Functional Groups Party), Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan (PDI-P, Indonesian Democracy Party-Struggle), and Demokrat (Democrat Party) as pluralist parties.

2 The list of *Prolegnas* can be very extensive, covering hundreds of new bills and revisions to legislation. However, the House creates a list of bills considered to be the priority for that year (*Prolegnas Prioritas*). The number of bills varies for each year, and for 2021, it is 33.

3 Lawmakers can also display their lack of comprehensive understanding of a bill. One example of this is when a female deputy representing Golkar retracted her support toward the Family Resilience Bill following public criticism and pressure from her own party. She was said to have not read the entire Family Resilience Bill prior to supporting the initiative (Septianto & Prabowo, 2020).

4 The bill was proposed by Committee VIII and 70 members of parliament on 26 January 2016. It was listed in Prolegnas 2016, and briefly excluded from the priority list in 2020. In 2021, the bill was relisted as part of the *Prolegnas Prioritas* among 32 other bills. The reason for its 2020 exclusion was the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing

disagreements in society (Ghaliya, 2020). The Chair of the Working Committee (Panja) of this bill is Willy Aditya (a male MP representing NasDem).

5 Fifteen years have passed since the first hot mud eruption as a result of the operations of the oil and gas company, PT Lapindo Brantas, on May 29, 2006. The industrial disaster not only caused prolonged trauma but also injuries. The strong smell of gas from the location of the Lapindo mudflow has also become a complaint for residents. They often experience respiratory problems and dizziness as they breathe air with a high concentration of methane gas.

6 Studies on critical acts versus critical mass suggest that women in politics can be numerically small compared to men, sometimes even less than 30%. However, it is their critical acts which promote women's agenda in political decision-making processes that really determine how they are shaping politics (Ayata, 2008; Childs & Krook, 2009; Chaney, 2012).

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6

SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN MALAYSIAN LEGISLATURES

Parliament (Dewan Rakyat) and State Assemblies

Ummu Atiyah Ahmad Zakuan

Introduction

The Malaysian Context

21 May 2018 was a historic date in Malaysia's political history as the country witnessed Wan Azizah Wan Ismail sworn in as deputy prime minister – the first woman to hold the post. She assumed the position as a consequence of Pakatan Harapan (PH), an opposition coalition which included her party, winning the country's fourteenth general elections. In fact, Wan Azizah was one of the few female politicians in high public office in Southeast Asia. This victory was all the more significant as it put an end to over 60 years of rule by the Barisan Nasional (BN). However, after 22 months, the PH government collapsed and again became the opposition. Perikatan Nasional (PN), a coalition of political parties,[1] is, at the time of writing, the government of Malaysia.

Regardless of the country's political climate, women's representation in the legislature has remained low. As of June 2021, Malaysia ranked 144 out of 184 countries in terms of women's percentage in the national parliament – ranking far behind many Southeast Asian neighbors like Timor-Leste (32), Vietnam (53), Singapore (54), Philippines (62), Lao People's Democratic Republic (102), Indonesia (108), Thailand (137), and Myanmar (139) (IPU 2021).

Figure 6.1 reflects the gender demographics in both the Upper and Lower Houses of parliament and in the state assemblies. Women's representation is only 14.86% in Dewan Rakyat (Lower House), 11.42% in Dewan Negara (Upper House), and totals 11.57% across Malaysia's 14 state assemblies (Dewan Undangan Negeri).[2]

In Malaysia, efforts to achieve gender equality have a long history and can be traced to the period of pre-independence from the British in 1957. These efforts
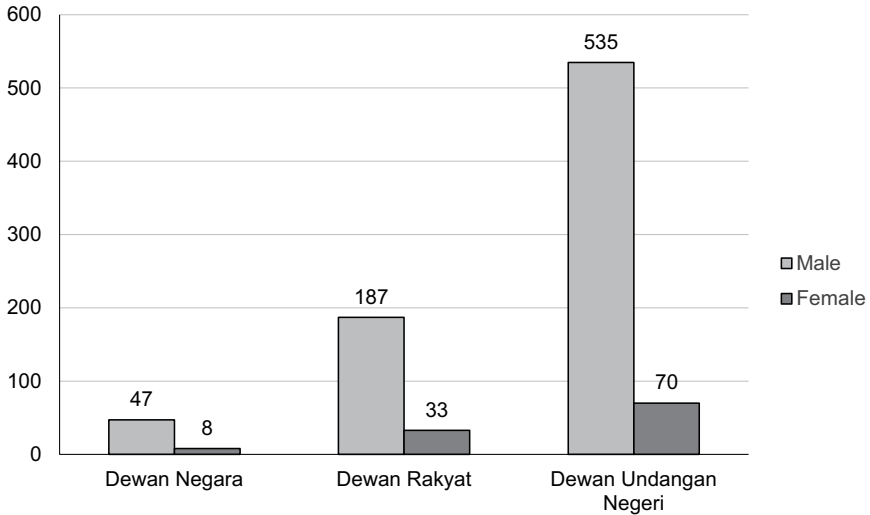
FIGURE 6.1   Gender Demographics in the Upper and Lower Houses of Parliament and in the State Assemblies

were clearly visible among women who were community and political leaders during the rise of nationalism against the British from the mid-1940s to the 1950s. These women leaders called people to join the independence movement and they called for women's empowerment (Siri Memoir 2007; Tumin 2006; Wan Teh 2001). They demanded that parties have a women's wing and nominate women as electoral candidates and representatives first in the Malayan Union Advisory Council and later in the state and federal legislatures (Dancz 1987; Wan Teh 2001).

Post-independence, the government committed to recognize and integrate women into the national development agenda through various policies and laws dealing with society, economy, and politics.[3] Greater commitment was seen in the 1970s, when gender became a development focus and was first mentioned in the Third Malaysia Plan (1976–1980). The National Policy on Women was formulated in 1989, marking a significant step in recognizing women's roles and contribution in national development. In the 1990s, the Sixth Malaysia Plan (1991–1995) incorporated a full chapter on women reflecting greater attention to their development. This commitment further increased in the Tenth Malaysia Plan (2011–2015), which established a committee to implement gender sensitization programs in the public sector (Raja and Devadason 2017).

Many legislations were amended to improve and protect the well-being of women and to accord them equal opportunity, capacity, and development. These include the Married Women and Children (Enforcement of Maintenance) Act and The Pensions (Amendment) Act 1968, giving women permanency and pensionable status. The Income Tax (Amendment) Act 1975 allowed separate assessment for married women thereby giving full recognition to women as individuals

(NCWO 2017). The Guardianship of Infants Acts (Amendment) Act 1961, was amended to allow both parents as legal guardians. Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) was established in 1987 to provide microcredit for poor women (Raja and Devadason 2017). In 1994, several laws were passed in parliament to give more protection to women and girls including amendments to the Married Women Act (Amendment) (D.R13/1994), Widows and Orphans Pension Act (Sarawak) (Amendment) (D.R30/1994), Widows and Orphans Pension Act (Amendment) (D.R31/1994), and Legal Aid Act (Amendment) (D.R44/1994).

The most historic was the passing of the Domestic Violence Act by the parliament making Malaysia the first Asian country to enact laws to protect victims of domestic violence and to have domestic violence recognized as an issue of public concern (Randawar 2018). The Policy of At Least 30 Percent Women in Decision Making Positions in the Public Sector was introduced on 24 August 2004 by the prime minister (Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development 2005). The same policy was also to be applied in the private sector by 2016 (Raja and Devadason 2017). All of these successes are testimony to close cooperation between multiple stakeholders including the government, women's civil society organizations (CSOs), and women Members of Parliament (MPs).

Despite making notable progress in gender equality, inequalities still persist. Women make up half of the population but only two-fifths of the paid workforce. Only 55.6% of working-age women were employed or looking for jobs in 2019 as compared to 80.8% of men (DOSM 2019). On the Malaysia Gender Gap Index (MGGI) for 2019, published by the Department of Statistics Malaysia which contains four sub-indices, women surpassed men in education with a score of 1.053 (DOSM 2020). However, women's scores were lower for health (0.958), economic participation and opportunity (0.717), and lowest by far in political empowerment (0.108).

Findings From Previous Studies

Most studies on women in politics in Malaysia have focused on problems hindering (or strategies to enhance) women's active participation in politics. The late twentieth-century studies revealed that culture and religion presented barriers to women's involvement in politics (e.g. Ariffin 1992, 1995; Ahmad 1994; Chu 1994). Other obstacles included women's roles as family caretakers and being confined to the domestic sphere (Ariffin 1992; Kew 1993), as well as political structures, political financing, and lack of self-confidence (Ramli 1999).

More recent studies reveal similar findings. Welsh (2019) mentions that highly ethnized and conservative politics have intensified and reinforced marginalization of efforts to stand up for women. These are further heightened by a political environment more favorable to men. Other impediments include socioreligious factors (Subramaniam 2000), financial resources (Ng 2010; Yusoff et al. 2016; Saidon et al. 2017), lack of family friendly culture in politics, individualistic/personal dislike of "dirtiness" in politics, and lack of transparency in processes of party nominations

and decisions regarding the allocation of winnable seats (Ahmad Zakuan and Azmi 2017; Izharuddin 2019).

Studies also suggest that to encourage women's participation in politics, various approaches should be employed including cooperation with women's associations and focusing on female voters (Ramli and Hassan 2009; Beng Hui and Ng 2006) or partnering with formal state actors (Mohamad 2018) to create an integrated network supporting women politicians so that they can continue to stay in power. Other strategies include reforms to political party structures, setting up quotas for a minimum number of women in parliament, and implementing a proportional representation (PR) electoral system to increase women's representation in politics (Ramli 2005; Ramli and Hassan 2009; Yusoff et al. 2016; Izharuddin 2019; Sukhani 2020).

While the predominant focus of these studies has been the descriptive representation of women (DRW) in Malaysian politics – likely due to their low numbers in the federal and state legislatures – some studies have investigated the impact of women in politics on the substantive representation of women (SRW). As noted earlier, cooperation between women's NGOs and female politicians has resulted in many achievements including the Domestic Violence Act and other women-friendly legislation. Women MPs have also made progress in the parliament enhancing funding for women's health, opening more childcare centers, and bringing more attention to the issues of children, health, social welfare, and education (Ng et al. Hui 2006). A more recent substantive change initiated by a female minister in the Prime Minister's Department was the passing of the Sexual Offences against Children Bill in 2017. Experience has shown that "it was largely women politicians who would – or could – competently participate in parliamentary debates" (Mohamad 2018, 441) on issues affecting women, family, and children.

These demonstrated instances of SRW or women's representation beyond numbers has made a difference – as high-quality, substantive engagement by women lawmakers is able to bring about change. Ng et al. (2006) emphasize how SRW in Malaysia is possible due to persistent and concerted efforts and mobilization from women's NGOs. These organizations have made visible issues such as sexual violence and crime through long-standing mobilization, drawing attention and support from multiple stakeholders (including the general public and female politicians), and they work as representatives to reform laws for the better protection of women. These findings are consistent with Pek Leng (2011), whose study covers the broader aspects of representation (conceptualization, descriptive and substantive representation, and measures to improve and enhance both types of representation).

There are several in-depth studies conducted on SRW within the Malaysian parliament. Ahmad Zakuan's (2010) investigation of the Dewan Rakyat between 1999 and 2008 found women representatives were more active and stronger advocates on child-related issues compared to their male counterparts. Analyzing parliamentary debates in the tenth and eleventh Dewan Rakyat (1999–2008), Ahmad Zakuan (2014) found that women MPs who are critical actors in SRW are those who have personal experiences (i.e. harassment, single mother), high gender awareness, sense

of obligation to represent women, networking (i.e. with women NGOs, and male MPs), and are resourceful (i.e. media, constituents, own research). Meanwhile, a study of the twelfth Dewan Rakyat (2008–2013) budgetary debates found women MPs demonstrating higher concern for and raising issues such as maternity leaves, childcare centers, women's position in the public and private sectors, and domestic helpers (Ahmad Zakuan and A. Rahman 2017).

Lastly, through an analysis of Ministers' Question Time (MQT) in the Malaysian parliament, Mohd Rashid (2019) revealed that although many men MPs participated in MQT, they appeared to only interrupt and were not serious in speaking about women's issues. In contrast, women MPs strongly advocated women's issues raising questions on single mothers, domestic violence, children, family, and women in the economy and in politics. Moreover, they touched upon other subjects such as nation, economy, and environment.

Thus far, however, this is the first study on Malaysia to examine SRW in the context of parliamentary committees.

Methods and Data

To understand the roles, functions, and impacts of Malaysian MPs within parliamentary committees as an avenue for SRW, the author conducted interviews with current MPs. In total, 15 respondents were selected – seven females and eight males. The respondents were sitting MPs or members of state assemblies (MSAs) plus a former Speaker of the Lower House and parliamentary staff persons. The selection included members representing two Special Select Committees and one Select Committee in the fourteenth Dewan Rakyat (February 2018–March 2020) as shown in Table 6.1.

The parliamentary committee system is very new to Malaysia. It was introduced in 2018, when PH formed the government. The proposal to set up parliamentary committees was stated in their manifesto (Pakatan Harapan 2018, 55).[4] The Malaysian parliament previously had a select committee after independence and several ad hoc ones. Among them was the Special Select Committee ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Organization (AIPO) from 1990 to 2007 (Penyata Rasmi Parliament, DR15.2.2000, 22).[5]

After coming to power, the PH government established ten comprehensive Special Select Committees (SSCs). Members from two of these SSCs, the Gender Equality Committee and Budget Committee, were interviewed. The former was selected due to its mandate on women and children as issues likely to be of interest to female legislators (Dodson and Caroll 1991; Ahmad Zakuan 2019). The Budget Committee was selected because of its association with male interests (Franceschet 2011), while the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) was selected as it represents a permanent committee that is set up every time a new parliament convenes. The former Speaker of the Parliament and senior parliamentary staff were also included in this study to get their perspectives and observations on the newly introduced parliamentary committee system. MSAs interviewed were from three different states.

TABLE 6.1 List of Interviewees (March–May 2021)

Code Number	Interview Date	Position/Title	Gender	Age	Committee	Party
MYS.01	2021.03.10	MP	Male	40	Gender Equality	PKR
MYS.02	2021.04.18	MP	Female	41	Gender Equality	DAP
MYS.03	2021.03.24	MP	Female	37	PAC	DAP
MYS.04	2021.04.22	MP	Male	34	Budget	DAP
MYS.05	2021.05.18	MP	Female	61	Women's Caucus	PKR
MYS.06	2021.05.03	Former Speaker	Male	NA	–	AMANAH
MYS.07	2021.04.05	Parliament Staff	Male	NA	–	–
MYS.08	2021.04.05	Parliament Staff	Male	NA	–	–
MYS.09	2021.05.10	MSA	Female	39	–	PKR
MYS.10	2021.05.19	MSA	Male	41	–	UMNO
MYS.11	2021.05.20	MSA	Male	38	–	DAP
MYS.12	2021.05.20	MSA	Female	42	PAC	UMNO
MYS.13	2021.05.20	MSA	Male	45	PAC	PAS
MYS.14	2021.05.21	MSA	Female	46	Exco	BERSATU
MYS.15	2021.05.22	MSA	Female	56	–	PAS

Notes: PAC stands for Public Accounts Committee, Exco for State Executive Committee, NA for Not Applicable.

In a federalist country like Malaysia, the state assemblies are potential platforms for advancing SRW, and therefore it is useful to understand SRW in this context.

With the aim to reflect social diversity and intersectionality, this study included representatives of varying genders, political party affiliations, age, ethnicities, and types of constituencies. It also included both Peninsular Malaysia and Borneo. Interviews were conducted between 10 March and 22 May 2021. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, only one face-to-face interview was conducted while the other 14 interviews were done through online platforms. This study also utilizes data and information from the official parliament website (www.parlimen.gov.my/), PAC website (www.parlimen.gov.my/pac/), reports from the Malaysian parliament library, online newspapers, and past studies.

Personal Background

Franceschet and Piscopo (2008, 397) describe SRW as "a process" whereby lawmakers undertake, on behalf of some or many women, tasks which include setting agendas and advocating policies, establishing connections with female constituents and NGOs. Its "outcome" refers to lawmakers' ability to make transformative outcomes to institutions and policies. Childs and Celis (2008, 420–421) define *critical actors* as "the one[s] who put in motion individually or collectively campaigning for women-friendly policy change." Taking into consideration the infancy of the parliamentary committee system in Malaysia, critical actors in the context of this study could be any lawmaker who advocates women-related issues as a process or

outcome, individually or collectively, within official lawmaking platforms or in extra-parliamentary activities. Thus, any lawmaker (regardless of gender) can be considered a potential critical actor.

Based on these parameters, this study finds that there are several critical actors who show strong conviction on gender-related claims and actively support SRW in Malaysian legislatures both at the national and state levels. These critical actors, who include both female and male legislators, have certain similarities in their personal backgrounds (family, personal, and constituency's experience as well as education).

Two legislators interviewed were raised by single mothers. Although one is from a middle class and the other from a poor family, both have seen and experienced the difficulties of being raised in a single-mother household. For example MYS.10 actively champions youth issues in the assembly, but his advocacy on women's issues has also impacted their visibility and changes in state policy. He spoke about his state having one of the highest divorce rates in the country and he noted the rising divorce rate among couples under 40. He proceeded to propose serious interventions by the state government and gained attention from the Religious exco (State Executive Committee) who promised to look into this matter. His other proposals included looking into programs to assist couples in crisis (which gained attention by the Women exco), marital issues among the natives which have caused many problems such as parents losing track of their daughters after marrying nonlocals and going to the husband's country of origin, and issues related to child marriages (which led to more substantive discussions by the state government).[6] His advocacy on women-related issues also led other legislators to label him "a very caring person towards single mothers." As he explains:

> Maybe it is because of my background – my mother divorced when I was seven years old. I was raised by my mother even after she remarried. My mother handled most of the errands since she married a lorry driver. . . . my mother was an energetic lady, and I saw her hardship in finding money to raise her children. Maybe that was my drive in trying to help these mothers. I am also the patron for a welfare association of state C, and we provide free food to zakat recipients in the state . . . that's where I noticed so many persecuted women due to the greediness and irresponsible attitude of men . . . I am anti-irresponsible men . . . if any woman comes to my office to seek help and I know her husband is downstairs, I will tell him up to come up to see me.
>
> *(MYS.10)*

MYS.10 explained that he has "more than 700 single mothers in my area and more than half are aged 40 and below." He created a dedicated women's broadcast list for women to pose any question, request, or to share their concerns or demands. He uses these inputs and raises them in the state assembly. In this case, his personal background – family, constituents, his position, and affiliation to an organization have shaped and contributed toward his SRW.

Another legislator, whose late father was a former MP, was also brought up by her mother. Early political exposure by her late father introduced her to the lived realities of society. She shares:

> I could not understand how people were so poor and how they lived differently from the way we lived . . . so when my father passed away, there was a big question of whether or not my mother was going to contest in the by-election . . . As I grew older, being raised by a single mother for so many years also made me understand what an unequal society we are . . . and it is not something that you are willing to accept when you know there are avenues and opportunities for change.
>
> *(MYS.02)*

Of all the female MPs, she is among the most frequent target of sexist and vulgar remarks from male MPs. In a recent debate before parliament was suspended, she was questioning why there was no female in the Select Committee and a male MP interrupted her with sexist and racist remarks.[7] In response, a joint statement was made the following day by 13 NGOs under Joint Action Group for Gender Equality (JAG) condemning the action (*The Star* 2020). Consequently, MYS.02 proposed amendments to the Parliament Standing Order 36 through a letter sent to the Dewan Rakyat Speaker's office.[8] MYS.02 shared many events where both female and male MPs, including herself, encountered sexist, racist, and vulgar remarks while in parliament. She narrates:

> [O]ver the years as an MP, as a female MP in the parliament, sexist remarks are something I have, I would not say I have learned to deal with it as one should never learn to deal with sexist remarks . . . but I would like to say, how I dealt with the person who uttered the sexist remarks against me . . . in 2016 where YB Pasir Salak in parliament used a vulgar, obscene phrase towards YB Teresa Kok . . . he said the only woman with the Kok in this house . . . It was so horrible, and then we asked him to apologize, retract . . . he laughed it off as a joke. He made it as if it is something that we overreacted to . . . and at that time, YB Tajuddin, he mocked me, he made fun of me, he made like a Doraemon voice and mocked me . . . in 2015, MP Baling called me "pondan" (transgender) in the parliament . . . then a few years down the line, on and off, I have been a victim of racist, sexist remarks.
>
> *(MYS.02)*

More recently, together with other female MPs, she wrote a letter to the Speaker of the House to request reinstating the Gender Equality Committee as one of the SSCs under the new government. A combination of her personal background and experiences in the parliament has contributed to her persistence in actively representing women's issues inside and outside of parliament.[9]

As a strong member of the women's caucus, MYS.05 is persistent in raising women's issues and often consults with the government regarding bill introductions and amendments. Initially, the Gender Equality Committee was not included in the new list of parliamentary committees under the new PN government, but she requested that it be reinstated along with other SSCs. Also, she proposed gender equality to be included in terms of reference of the Women's, Children and Social Development Committee under the PN government.[10] In conjunction with International Women's Day 2021, she called all women MPs to come together and support creating a gender-sensitive parliament. Her experiences of getting education overseas and leading a Muslim NGO abroad have shaped her views on women and gender roles of a family.

Other critical actors include two state assembly women. MYS.14 who has been actively working on women's issues inside and outside the state assembly asserts that "as a woman politician, we are aware that we have so much work to do to ensure that women's roles and rights are being protected, improved and empowered to a higher level." Similarly, MYS.09 proposed, together with other female politicians, to set up a state agency for women for proper and systematic planning for women's development. Moreover, she advocates economic empowerment of women including single mothers in her constituency. Commenting on her engagement with women's issues and female constituents, she says "because we are such a minority group, we try to do what we can" (MYS.09).

Another critical actor is MYS.01, who frequently supports SRW outside of parliament, for example showing his objection through social media against sexist remarks given to a female MP. He calls other MPs irrespective of parties to observe ethics while debating.[11] Also, he advocates increasing the marriage age limit.[12] It seems that his limited opportunity to make open gender claims in the parliament could be due to some strategy or tactical moves from him and other MPs. He says:

> It's about the messenger and also the message. Wan Azizah, as the first female Deputy Prime Minister, will be given more media coverage for speaking out on this issue to attack the particular policy. If I were to raise it, compared to say Hannah Yeoh, the media will read it . . . you can speak, but if no one listens, or no one reckons it, no one reports it, then you feel that it is a diminishing return . . . you do not want to waste your time, waste your bullets, your points, so you make a tactical decision. When you are in a forum, yes I will speak. But on the floor, sometimes you have that one chance, that one choice, that one moment . . . so if Wan Azizah wants to stand up, it is very different from if I were to stand up . . . So, to me, who raises it matters. It does not mean that I do not speak about it.
>
> *(MYS.01)*

Thus, although all interviewees were receptive toward women's issues, six of them can be categorized as critical actors because of their advocacy and efforts to contribute to the process and outcome of SRW. They also made convincing gender

claims inside as well as outside of the legislature. Other female lawmakers claim "I don't speak for women's issues" (MYS.12) or "I rarely bring up women's issues" (MYS.03), or that they are "seen as not very active in speaking about women's issues in the assembly" (MYS.10) but nevertheless actively represent their female voters' welfare and empowerment.

Institutions

Similar to other Commonwealth countries, Malaysia inherited a constitutional monarchy and parliamentary democracy from England. As a former British colony, British influence is still visible at the federal and state levels (Tuanku Jaafar 2014). One of the main features of Malaysia's parliamentary democracy is a separation of powers between its three branches. The parliament represents legislative power. The other two powers are the executive and the judiciary. The parliament symbolizes the people's power with its membership determined by the people directly through free, fair, and open elections (Wariya 2009). Parliamentary committees are important components enabling the parliament to be more effective in its oversight of the executive and to ensure checks and balances to safeguard the public interest against the abuse of power (Malaysian Economic Association 2017, 11).

A Standing Order (SO) of the Dewan Rakyat provides for the establishment of five Select Committees (SCs) at the beginning of every parliament. The Select Committees are Committee of Selection, Public Account Committee, Standing Order Committee, House Committee, and Committee of Privilege (Parlimen Malaysia 2018, 264–267). Special Select Committees (SSCs) are provisioned under SO 81(1), which is appointed by the Committee of Selection. The purpose of SSCs is to inquire and deliberate on matters as determined by the House (Parlimen Malaysia 2018, 268). Unlike the SCs, SSCs are established when needed and for specific cases of national interest. They serve for a limited time with specific terms of reference. The third form of committee is the Standing Joint Committee, a joint deliberation between an SC in Dewan Rakyat and an SC in Dewan Negara (Parlimen Malaysia 2018, 275).

Have parliamentary committees in Malaysia, as an institution, contributed to SRW? Figure 6.2 shows the ten SSCs established when PH became the government. With their establishment fairly new in Malaysia, this study traces what respondents in the PAC, Gender Equality and Human Rights Committee, as well as Budget Committee debated during the Royal Address when the fourteenth Dewan Rakyat (May 2018–February 2020) convened for the first time.

Figure 6.2 shows the composition of the seven members of each SSC. In total, there were 57 male MPs members (including chairs) in SSCs but only 13 women MPs and only one female MP served as chair (for the Gender Equality and Human Rights Committee). Two SSCs (Defense & Home Affairs and Major Public Appointments) had no female members at all. Most SSCs (6 of them) had only one
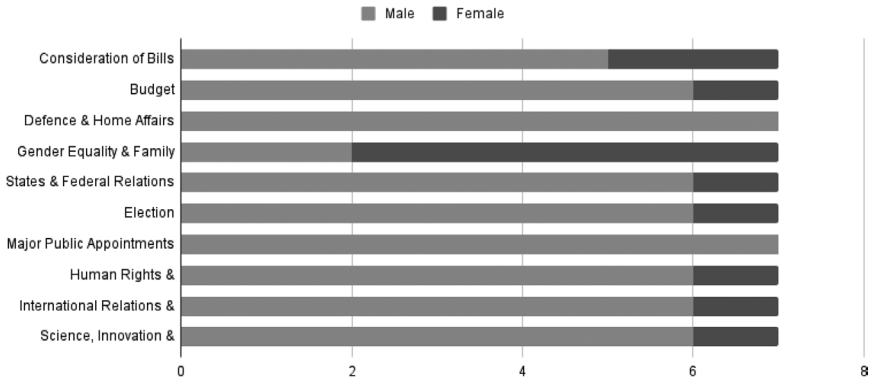
FIGURE 6.2 List of Special Select Committees in the Fourteenth Dewan Rakyat (May 2018–February 2020)
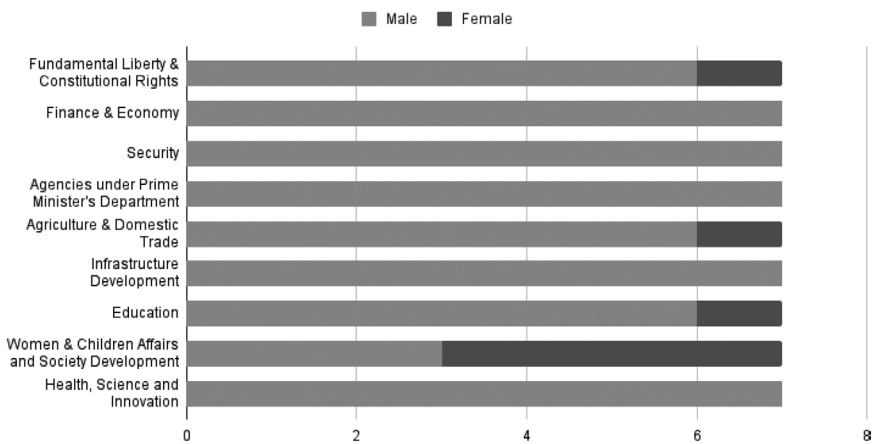
FIGURE 6.3 List of Special Select Committees in the Fourteenth Dewan Rakyat (March 2020–Present)

female member, including the Budget Committee, while one Committee had two female members. Only the Gender Equality and Human Rights Committee had a high number of women (5) than men (2). Overall, women comprised only 18.6% of SSC members and this number has decreased to 11.1% (see Figure 6.3) under the current PN government. The number of SSCs has also decreased to nine and their names have changed. The Gender Equality and Human Rights Committee was replaced by the Women and Children Affairs and Society Development Committee and it is now chaired by the current Deputy Speaker of Dewan Rakyat, the Honorable Datuk Seri Azalina Othman Said.

Among the committees investigated in this chapter, no report was available from the Budget Committee. When asked about the committee reports, two senior parliamentary staff commented that they were unavailable. They responded,

> [T]hey (the Committees) have records, but internal ones. We have it in the meeting, but not in the Hansard. Because it is stated in the Standing Orders (83 and 85) that it is not a public document. Debates and proceedings in the main hall are considered open proceedings. They are available on YouTube, live streaming, and others. They are available for public access. However, proceedings in Special Select Committees are closed proceedings. Only when the Committee decides to reveal it, then it becomes public.
>
> *(MYS.08)*

It is therefore unknown to what extent SRW took place in the Budget Committee. In one interview, an MP mentioned that the committee conducted mid-term and year-end reviews of the previous budget on spending, monitoring, and assessment and stated that at least 10–20% of their earlier proposals were incorporated by the Finance Ministry before tabling the new budget. Commenting on whether he exercises any gender perspective in discussions and proposals of the committee, he replied:

> I think to be fully fair, as I said, budgeting is new to me, I am from a healthcare background, I also have a legal background. But economics and finance are a whole new world to me, and I was only really introduced to this whole gender-sensitive budgeting, gender-based budgeting in 2020. Because I was also part of the All-Party Parliamentary Group of SDGs (APPGM SDGs), I met some activists who kept using this word which attracted me which is "gender-based budgeting."
>
> *(MYS.04)*

Although SRW could not be identified in his committee work, and gender issues were not evident in his speech during the Royal Address of the fourteenth Dewan Rakyat,[13] he seemed supportive of gender issues and this is visible in his constituency work.[14] It is also apparent in his open objections toward verbal bullying including sexist remarks in the Dewan Rakyat even against a senior politician in an executive position. He shares:

> The one thing that I did not like in Parliament, especially when they are taunting each other, especially the males when they are taunting each other, they say, "if you are a real man, you do." I stood up and said, "what's wrong if I become a woman?" So, a lot of our conversation, in my view, has to be gender-sensitive. In another incident, I corrected a male MP who made a crude comment against a female MP that her face looks like a man. I was

sitting two rows behind him and I told him that is not right, and he should not have said that.

(MYS.04)

In the PAC, seven proceedings were conducted between May 2018 and February 2020.[15] These proceedings were conducted to review issues regarding projects and government operations. The focus of the proceedings was on the transparency of project operation and documentation and financial implications of these processes. There was no evidence of gender perspectives found in the proceedings. This is consistent with what one member of the committee stated,

[B]ecause most of the issues are policy-oriented and not so much gender-oriented and maybe not so significant to be picked up . . . that aspect did not come in or didn't play a role.

(MYS.03)

Findings from the Gender Equality Committee are however mixed. While their report is not publicly available, there is some evidence of efforts toward substantive representation of women and gender issues. The newly introduced system, however, has impacted the effectiveness of the committee's work and advocacy. Despite the limitations of the system, it was revealed that engagements were held with relevant stakeholders such as the National Commission of Human Rights (SUHAKAM), the Bar Council, and Lembaga Penduduk dan Keluarga Negara (LPPKN) to get their inputs. Women from civil societies also briefed the committee on issues such as foreign nationality spouses. The committee has also discussed and engaged with other parties such as the National Council of Women Organizations (NCWO) and other women's NGOs on the Gender Equality Bill and Sexual Harassment Bill (MYS.02; NCWO Report 2020). There were also discussions to incorporate lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues into this bill and strategizing ways to get it passed (i.e. to not include the third gender to avoid total rejection). Internally, the committee also discussed issues of child marriages, marital rape, and including stalking in the Domestic Violence Act (MYS.02). It was reported that the committee was in the process of enacting a Gender Equality Assessment of Parliament as a guide for the parliament as an institution (News Straits Times 2020). However, the work of this committee and other committees was interrupted with the collapse of the PH government after only 22 months of rule.

Hence, this study's findings suggest that more SRW took place in the Gender Equality Committee compared to other committees investigated. It was also revealed that SRW in the parliament is driven strongly by the women's caucus. The women's caucus has been in existence much earlier than the SSCs and has been a more visible and stronger platform for SRW in the Malaysian parliament.

The women's caucus is a loose coalition of women MPs from different political parties, both ruling and opposition parties and crossbench. The idea was first

mooted by Dato' Seri Shahrizat Jalil and then later raised again by the Parliamentary Opposition Leader Dr Wan Azizah Wan Ismail, who in 2008 said, "it is time to set up a caucus to tackle women's issues without involving politics," then a group of female MPs came together to set up the caucus (Malaysiakini 2008). At present, its membership extends to state assemblywomen (MYS.14). The caucus is flexible, active, and not bound by any specific procedure of the parliament (MYS.07; MYS.08). As for how the caucus functions;

> It works like this. MPs among themselves create a group. Only among themselves. They don't go through the parliament. They can use parliament facilities for their meetings . . . Parliament is not their secretariat. They move independently. They also can engage with outsiders. They don't use any parliamentary budget to discuss anything. The membership is open, not bound to the political party.
>
> *(MYS.08)*

Electronic media is used to facilitate fast communication between them. The current chair of the caucus sometimes engages with members via Zoom calls to discuss issues and urgent matters (MYS.02). While parliamentary committees could not meet when parliament was suspended due to an Emergency Ordinance from 11 January to 1 August 2021, the caucus continues to be an active and meaningful platform for SRW by MPs.

Earlier, in 2014, the women's caucus demanded to be included in the budget consultation to incorporate gender-based budgeting (Penyata Rasmi Parlimen, DR24.3.2014 p. 31–32). In 2016, the women's caucus also demanded an amendment of the First Schedule to the Consequential Criminal Procedure Code. It proposed to include domestic violence among several new offenses into the penal code as sizable offenses (Penyata Rasmi Parlimen DR17052016, 68). In 2017, the women's caucus was a member of the committee headed by the attorney general to reexamine the act relating to violence on women and children (Penyata Rasmi Parlimen DR24072017, 27). In 2017, the women's caucus was part of the stakeholders consulted in drafting legislation on gender equality workshop jointly organized by the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (Penyata Rasmi Parlimen DR05042018, 29). In addition, the women's caucus held an awareness campaign on women's and children's welfare in conjunction with the Violence against Women and Children's Day on 21 November 2011 (IPU 2012). These instances show that the women's caucus is a strong SRW platform, which contributes significantly, in the Malaysian parliament.

At the state assembly level, SRW takes a slightly different form. Reflecting the federalist system, the parliament deals with national policy-making, while state assemblies focus more on policy implementation and execution. However, some areas are solely under the state's jurisdiction like land and religion where there is policymaking by states. While SRW was reported by multiple sources to take place

in the state assemblies, SRW also takes place outside the assemblies. MYS.09 and other state assemblywomen directly approached the state's women exco to establish a state agency for women, an agency that would allow the development of proper and sustainable strategic planning for women in the state. MYS.09 also makes media statements sharing their ideas which initiates public discussion and puts pressure on the state government to take up these issues. MYS.12 shared that while she focuses on issues related to technology and science, she also raises women's issues, mainly from her constituency, in the state exco meetings. She added that any state assembly legislator can propose policies related to women directly to the chief minister or to the exco in charge outside of the sittings. Interestingly, while she claims that she does not represent women's issues in the state assembly, representing women, youth, and old folks to her:

> are issues that I entertain daily, so the issues have their process flows in my office. I have channels to make sure the issues are resolved. If the issue economically impacts women, I have the platform for my staff to help and channel to agencies that will help them with the issues. I entertain issues every day, I am not collecting everything then resolve, no. So, these local issues I don't bring to the state assembly, except big issues like water which need government approval.
>
> *(MYS.12)*

Another state assemblywoman engaged in similar practices. Whenever she encounters women's issues, she takes action and links the women to related agencies such as the Islamic Religious Department and Women's Entrepreneurship Group. She also approaches the exco directly in advocating women's issues. As she mentions:

> [O]ur latest endeavor as political leaders is a focus for women political leaders, to increase the numbers of representation in the State Legislative Assembly and Parliament. Currently, we have only 14% representation in Malaysia. This is something that we are not proud of because we know we need more women so that we can get more recognition for whatever we are fighting for, so we need representation in terms of numbers.
>
> *(MYS.14)*

Two state assemblymen also confessed that they speak about women's issues in their respective state assemblies (MYS.10; MYS.11).

As a whole, these findings suggest that SRW takes place in both the parliament and state assemblies. As expected, female legislators speak for women, but evidence shows that some male legislators also seem to be more willing to speak about women's issues. Although there are institutional constraints facing legislators and limited time for sittings, women MPs and state assemblywomen utilize other available platforms for SRW. MPs use the women's caucus for SRW in the parliament while state exco meetings, state exco, and state agencies are engaged in SRW in the states.

Intersectionality

All interviewees, irrespective of gender, age, constituency, ethnicity, or political party, preferred to be seen as a representative of the people, rather than only representing women. This is because they are elected by the voters to represent them. Their concern is their constituents' needs and they have brought to attention these concerns in the legislatures. At the same time, several female legislators acknowledge a sense of responsibility to represent women. As one explained,

> [A]s a woman politician, we are aware that we have so much work to do to ensure women's roles and rights are being protected, improvised, and empowered to a higher level.
>
> *(MYS.14)*

There is also another deeper expectation for the female legislator to represent women of similar ethnicity. It can be reflected from MYS.02, who stated "they open up more if you are female, more if you are Indian and speak the same language."

As for gender, some male representatives represent women openly due to several reasons such as their being "the strongest supporters of my campaigns and close relations with many women civil society leaders and organizations" (MYS.01), "women are more than half of my voters" (MYS.10), and "they are the main voters in my area" (MYS.11). However, a differentiation should be made among those that believe in SRW and those who champion SRW. This view is reflected by MYS.11, who explains that most male legislators are receptive to women's issues because women are majority voters, but he cautioned that "there's a huge difference between what one believes in and what one champions for." This view could also shed some understanding on the remarks made by three state assemblywomen that they did not receive any sexist or vulgar remarks when speaking about women's issues in their respective assemblies. A member of state assembly A stated that

> So far OK in the State Assembly. Neither myself nor any of my female counterparts have seen it happening to any of us . . . at the moment . . . we are . . . things are quite OK lah. We don't encounter such harassment.
>
> *(MYS.09)*

This is echoed by MYS.12 in state assembly B who confessed that "since I became state assemblywoman, I have never been harassed with things that are not proper."

However, even though there is an absence of harassment against women legislators in these state assemblies, women's issues, sometimes, are seen as jokes by the men; for example male legislators offering themselves to take care of widows (MYS.14) or used as the opposition's strategy in the assembly. MYS.10 shares

> [W]e purposely bring up these issues to heat the assembly. For example, justice for polygamy. Usually, if we raise the polygamy issue, then we will end up talking about it for half a day.
>
> *(MYS.10)*

While the findings suggest that party affiliation has no direct relation to SRW as the identified critical actors in this study are from different political parties, it could, however, be an inhibiting factor to SRW, particularly on specific women-empowering issues such as leadership in politics. MYS.13 explains that his party culture follows prophetic traditions on the issue of seeking a position, and no one in his party is encouraged to ask for a position by him/herself; however, one can nominate others. MYS.15, who is from the same party, explains that after the first woman (Khajidah Sidek) contested for the party in the 1950s, it had not sent any woman member as an election candidate until 2004. She (MYS.15) was thus the first one after a long absence and she won with a big majority. This party culture could contribute to fewer women being considered at higher decision-making levels as election candidates. This observation also concurs with Azmi's (2020) study on women in this party. However, it was revealed that the party, which is the current government of state C, is the first in the country to appoint *Penghulu Wanita Tanpa Mukim* (non-district women chiefs) – 45 of them throughout the state. Their roles are to manage, coordinate, and solve women's problems in society and the family, for which they work closely with the respective constituency's state assemblywoman or man. The party also established a systematic structure to empower single mothers (known as *armalah*) in each constituency to look after the well-being of this group (MYS.15). These are among the SRW mechanisms that have been put in place by the party in this state. Therefore, while the party culture of leadership as argued earlier could hinder women's leadership in a formal institutional setting (i.e. parliament), women's leadership in other outlets is mainstreamed.

In terms of age, this was not a significant factor among the female critical actors as they are in their thirties, forties, and sixties. However, the ages of the male critical actors ranged from 34 to 41 years old. It can be argued that younger male legislators are more likely to champion SRW.

It can be seen that these factors, to a varying degree, have contributed to SRW in this country.

Conclusion

This chapter reveals that SRW as a process and/or an outcome occurs in Malaysian legislatures at both the federal and state levels. Despite structural and institutional limitations such as the infancy of the parliamentary committee system and the timing of sittings in assemblies, as well as jurisdiction of state assemblies, legislators at both the federal and state levels are receptive to women's issues. They are aware of the need for SRW, and some have succeeded in producing outcomes supporting gender equality. In the parliament, the women's caucus appears especially strong and visible as an advocate for SRW perhaps due to its nature (i.e. flexible and unbounded by any parliamentary act) and longer existence (compared to the parliamentary committees which were set up only in 2018 when the PH government won the election).

It can also be concluded that attention to SRW by legislators should be expanded and not confined to only the parliament and state assemblies. Rather, it should be

incorporated by other possible agencies, units, and platforms that interact with the work of legislators.

The study also reveals that younger male legislators are more willing to represent women openly within the assemblies and on public platforms. Female legislators who do not make gender claims or explicitly represent women seem very much inclined to support SRW in their work with constituents. Their reluctance to make gender claims is because to them women's issues should be reconceptualized. They see that the current conceptualization and advocacy have contributed to the further confinement of women to domestic issues, inherently putting men out of the picture (i.e. leading a female-dominated unit or frequent association of women-to-women issues) and hence, resulting on more burden on women. To them, men should be integrated into women-dominated areas, that is lead the Women's Affairs Ministry. In addition, gender-neutral rather than gendered claims should be mainstreamed whereas the critical actors, as expected, are more open and forceful in making gender claims.

Nevertheless, more studies are needed to understand the dynamics of SRW in the country's legislatures. A detailed investigation should be conducted to also analyze the new committee system as well as the women's caucus. News published in mid-2021 indicates that the government is planning to table the sexual harassment bill when the parliament reconvenes to be followed by a gender equality bill in the pipeline. The tabling of these two bills merits serious investigation.

Notes

1 The coalition includes BERSATU (Malaysia United Indigenous Party), BN (Barisan Nasional), PAS (Malaysian Islamic Party), GPS (Gabungan Parti Sabah), PBS (Parti Bersatu Sabah), STAR (Homeland Solidarity Party), SAPP (Sabah Progressive Party), Gerakan (Malaysia People Movement), LDP (Liberal Democratic Party), and Bebas (Independent).

2 There are two seats vacant in Dewan Rakyat due to incumbents' death and the total number of seats is 222. At Dewan Negara, the total seat is 70 and at present, there are 15 seats vacant. For more details, see www.parlimen.gov.my/statistik-dn.html?uweb=dn&.

3 Examples include the appointment of the first female senator in 1962, the "Equal Pay for Equal Work" policy that started in 1970, and the Suruhanjaya Perkhidmatan Awam (SPA) formed under Article 144 of the Federal Constitution to appoint and confirm high-quality officers without gender discrimination (Raja and Devadason, 2017).

4 Among the reforms proposed was setting up a special committee to receive and scrutinize complaints from MPs about decisions they felt to be unfair.

5 The creation of this Special Select Committee was a call from the Indonesian House of Representatives to have parliaments from five ASEAN countries contribute significantly through inter-parliamentary cooperation to attain the goals and aspirations of ASEAN (AIPA Secretariat, 2021).

6 See *The Star*, 30 November 2018 at www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2018/11/30/kelantan-underage-marriage-is-necessary/.

7 One remark was "*gelap, tak nampak, saya tak kata YB tu gelap, saya pun gelap, pakailah bedak, selesai masalah!*" (It's dark, I can't see, I didn't say YB is dark, I'm dark too, use powder, the problem is solved!). This was uttered by male MP Datuk Seri Abdul Azeez Abdul Rahim from UMNO in the sitting of the Dewan Rakyat on 13 July 2020. (see

www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmBL0h4tzP4&ab_channel=TheStar; Wern Jun 2000. https://www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/07/13/uproar-in-parliament-as-baling-mp-throws-racist-remark-to-batu-kawan-mp/1884028).

8   The first proposed amendment read:

   36(13) That an MP who utters sexist, racist or any remark that could hurt the feelings to the point of causing contempt or hatred toward any MP or a group of Malaysian society, and violated clause (4) and/or clause (10) of this Standing Order, will automatically be referred to the Rights and Privileges Committee for further investigation. For details, please see Povera and Yunus (2020).

9   Her actions include various engagements with state agencies, the media, and the community on issues ranging from business opportunities for men and women to sexual harassment, rape jokes, cyberbullying, sex education, women's participation in politics, government-linked corporations, and specific issues on Indian communities (MYS.02 Facebook).

10   Penyata Rasmi Parlimen Dewan Rakyat, DR11.11.2020, pp. 23–34.

11   "As one of the members of Special Select Committee on Gender Equality, I very much disagree with the words uttered by YB Sepang towards YB Pengerang this afternoon. All honourable members should respect each other and more concerned when debating." Tweet 9 October 2019. https://twitter.com/fahmi_fadzil/status/1181871766957748229

12   Tweet 24 October 2018. https://twitter.com/fahmi_fadzil/status/10547683350390374 45?lang=en

13   MYS.04 touched on the issues of health, lack of doctors, inferior quality of medical treatment, lack of clinical psychologists, and lack of trainings among psychologist (Penyata Rasmi Parlimen, 23 July and 31 July 2018).

14   MYS.04 has pushed for HPV vaccination, medical treatment, facilities, infrastructure, and medical training in the rural areas for emergency C-sections, mental issues among women, medical benefits of contract workers, educational infrastructure and opportunities, and Sabah and Sarawak rights (MA 63).

15   The proceedings cover (a) issues regarding the management of rebuilding existing facilities in the national sports center, Bukit Jalil Kuala Lumpur Project (Project 1), (b) management of public marina, (c) overdue GST refund, (d) loss of *Khazanah*, (e) incentives for film production in Malaysia, (f) air mobility development, and (g) the management of LPG subsidy (see www.parlimen.gov.my/pac/).

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7

FILIPINO WOMEN'S SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION IN ELECTORAL POLITICS

Jean Encinas-Franco

Background and History

Filipino women's journey to political representation has been shaped by the Philippines' colonial history, nation-building, and democratization. While the pre-Hispanic period was more egalitarian, patriarchy's onset can be traced to the nearly 400 years of the Spanish colonial regime's norms and practices that were greatly influenced by Spain's strong monarchic traditions and Catholicism. Nonetheless, this did not deter women from uniting and letting their causes be known even amidst harsh inequalities. A case in point is the struggle of Filipino women for education as immortalized in Jose Rizal's Letter to the Women of Malolos. Meanwhile, the suffragist movement during the 50-year American colonial regime ushered in the first national issue to bring Filipino women together. Through the relentless attempts of women suffragists, the Philippines' 1935 Constitution granted Filipino women the right to vote through a plebiscite. In 1937, Filipino women began exercising their right to suffrage. The exercise of this right paved the way for the first batch of women to join formal politics, such as Geronima Pecson, the first woman senator.

During the martial law period from 1972 to 1981, the flourishing of women's movements in the Philippines has been traced to the rise of student activism in the 1960s (Roces 2012, 6). As Marcos tightened his control of the country, university campuses became the hotbed of dissent against the dictatorship. While women activists were divided during the martial law, they were unified in their support of Corazon Cojuangco Aquino as the only one who could beat President Marcos and serve as his antithesis. As scholar Belinda Aquino (1993, 47) argues, she had "the moral high ground which became the basis of her political legitimacy."

The ouster of Marcos in 1986 ushered in the hope that the country's political system would be managed to address the worsening poverty. Spawned by active

participation in the anti–Marcos struggle, women's movements began to regroup and set their sights on nation-building post-EDSA.[1] The active and committed participation of key women figures and women's movements in ousting an autocratic regime ensured political space for them in the democratic transition. Moreover, President Corazon Aquino's political capital was crucial in providing democratic legitimacy to encourage the women's movement's participation in the transition. Aquino's international appeal likewise attracted international support in terms of technical and financial resources to women's groups and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

Specifically, women's participation in the process paved the way for constitutional provisions promoting gender equality. These laws have benefited women both during the transition and afterwards. Currently, women's movements in the Philippines are considered to be the most vibrant compared to other social movements. The proposed legislation that had previously languished in the legislative mill was passed into law due to their strong efforts and persistence. For example the approval of the Anti–Trafficking Law (2003, 2013), the Reproductive Health Law (2012), and the Magna Carta of Women (2009) was in part due to their combined efforts, strategic mobilizations, and framing. However, the women's movement is not necessarily monolithic and static owing to their different ideological origins, histories, and socialization. For instance during the lobby for the Anti–Trafficking Law, women's movements were split between a group advocating to stop domestic violence in general and another pushing for a law against intimate partner violence (Mendoza 2018). Eventually, the domestic violence proposal was made into a law – providing specific penalties for domestic violence against women and children.

However, challenges remain. The influential Catholic Church has blocked a divorce law and the implementation of the much-awaited Reproductive Health Law. The Supreme Court has since ruled that the law is constitutional except for eight provisions. As a result, teenage pregnancy is high and the Philippines is now the only country without a legal procedure for couples to divorce, although Muslims are allowed to do so under the Shari'a law. The labor force participation gap between men and women in the Philippines is also high compared to Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam (Epetia 2019, 30). Moreover, economic and poverty issues are often disconnected from gender in the Philippines, and also seldom discussed concerning their differential impact on men and women.

Philippine Political System and Women's Representation Post-Marcos

The post–Marcos 1987 Constitution brought back the country's democratic system. It established a bicameral legislature comprising an Upper House: the Senate, and a Lower House: the House of Representatives (HOR). The HOR currently consists of 307 members elected via districts. By law, at least 20% of its members

must come from party-list groups elected by parties. Meanwhile, the Senate has 24 members elected nationwide. A key reform introduced in the 1987 Constitution is term limits. Senators are allowed a term of six years with reelection. After serving two consecutive terms, they are not allowed to run for office in the succeeding election. They can sit out for one term and be eligible to run again. HOR members have three years per term and are allowed to have three consecutive terms, after which they are disqualified from running in the subsequent election. Like the senators, they can sit out for one term and run again.

Scholarship on Philippine politics argues that the post-Marcos era ushered in a strong president and executive branch with enormous formal and informal powers. Clientelism, patronage, and weak political parties characterize legislative–executive relations in what has been regarded as a "separate but not equal" relationship (Mendoza and Thompson 2018). These institutions, both their institutional design and informal practices, have consequences for women's descriptive and substantive representations.

In 2001, only a small percentage of women comprised the legislative branch. However, there has been a significant increase in both the legislative chambers over the past two decades (see Figures 7.1 and 7.2). After the most recent 2019 elections, women now comprise 28% of the HOR and 29% of the Senate (Figures 7.1 and 7.2). Notably, 80 years since Filipino women gained the right to suffrage, they still have not reached the 30% international benchmark putatively needed to form a critical mass to make a significant difference. Women candidates are also much fewer than men. The available data from the Commission on Elections show that in 2019 for example only 19% of candidates for all electoral positions were women
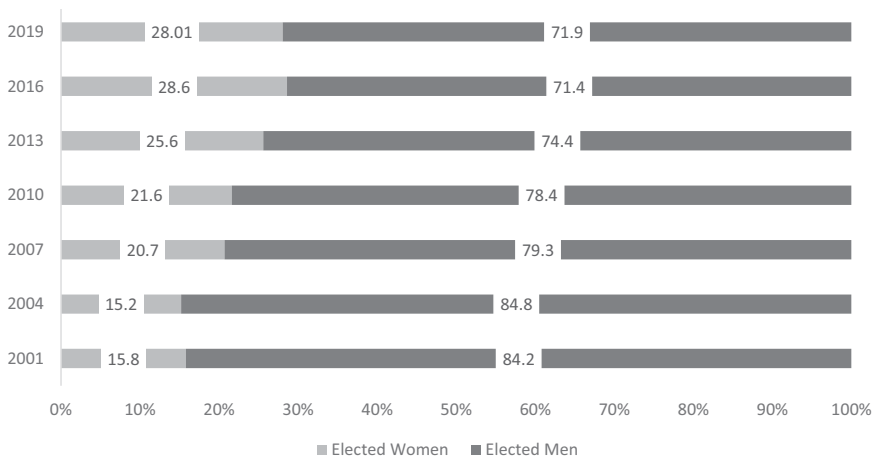
FIGURE 7.1   Elected Members of the House of Representatives by Gender (2001–2019)

Data Source: (PSA 2016, 92) with 2019 data from www.house.gov.ph.
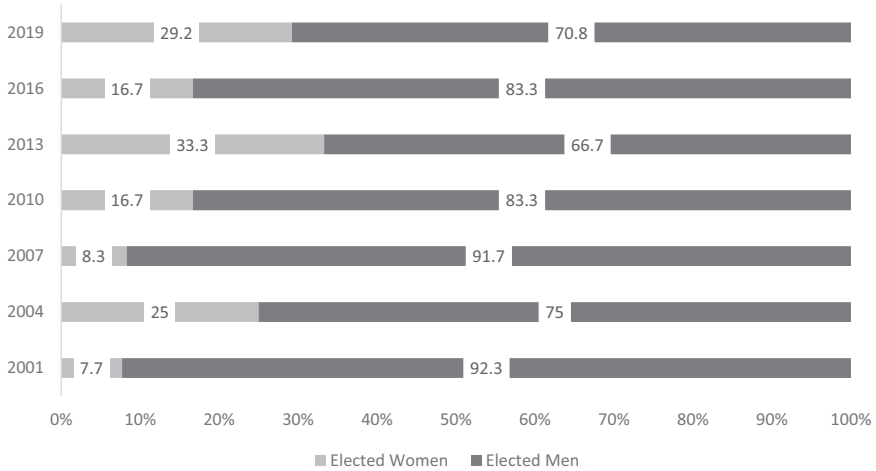
FIGURE 7.2   Elected Members of the Senate by Gender (2001–2019)

Data Source: (PSA 2016, 92) with 2019 data from www.senate.gov.ph.

(COMELEC n.d., p. 9). This suggests that barriers to women's entry into political positions exist even at the candidacy level.

In the Philippines, traditional norms about women's proper place in the public sphere remain an obstacle. The seventh round of the World Values Survey (2020, 132) has found that more than half of Filipinos believe that men make better political leaders than women. In the same survey, nearly 70% agreed that men have more right to a job than women while more than 80% agreed that being a housewife is just as fulfilling as having a job. Nonetheless, because the country has a vibrant civil society, high literacy rates for women, and has had two women heads of state, it scores highly on global ranking indices of gender progress.

One common argument made about the participation of women in electoral politics in the Philippines is that their entry is made through dynastic politics. For instance former presidents Corazon Aquino and Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo are both related to prominent men politicians. Aquino was the widow of the late Senator Benigno "Ninoy" Aquino, a staunch opposition member in the Marcos years. Macapagal–Arroyo's father was former President Diosdado Macapagal. According to Thompson (2007, 1), the "revolutionary role" of these two women presidents sets them apart from their counterparts in the rest of the world. Nonetheless, he (Thompson 2007, 1) argues that while Aquino had "moral capital" to oust Marcos and usher in a democratic government, Macapagal–Arroyo's legitimacy crisis was a bane for the country's democratic credentials. Moreover, her stance on a "strong republic" in response to numerous coup attempts to oust her reflects her desire to mimic masculine notions of leadership anchored in force and brute power.

At the local government level, research indicates that a significant percentage of women municipal mayors are likewise products of dynastic families (Labonne et al. 2017). When they lack a gender mandate, women from dynastic families do not yield optimal outcomes for their constituents (Labonne et al. 2017). As such, while women can enter politics via their families, this route to power may not have positive consequences for substantive representation.

Meanwhile, there have been several changes in the electoral system that have facilitated the entry of women in the legislative branch. In 1997, the passage of the Party-List Law paved the way for women to enter the formal public sphere, albeit as parties representing the women's constituency. When the party-list law was finally implemented, *Abante Pinay* (Advance Filipino Woman) launched the first party-list for women which helped to shepherd laws on anti-trafficking of women and children, solo parents' rights, and anti-violence against women and children. Patricia Sarenas, a member of the women's group PILIPINA, represented the party from 1998 to 2004 in the HOR. On the other hand, another women's group, GABRIELA, launched its Women's Party in 2003. They gained one seat in the 2004 elections, two in 2007, and two again in the 2010 elections. Liza Maza, the party's nominee in 2004, tried to run for the Senate when GABRIELA cooperated with the Nacionalista Party in the 2010 elections. However, she failed to win a seat. GABRIELA is also credited for pursuing the Magna Carta of Women in 2009 and for its staunch advocacy for reproductive health legislation. In the 2016 and 2019 elections, GABRIELA once again won a seat in Congress.

Methods and Data Collection

To better understand the state of substantive representation of women (SRW) in the Philippines, 11 members of parliament (MPs) – six women and five men – were interviewed for this chapter between March and June 2021. To capture diversity in the Philippine Congress, four MPs from the Senate and seven MPs from the HOR were selected. Interviewees were also chosen to reflect diversity based on their income and whether they served on committees dominated by men MPs or dominated by women MPs. While some MPs suggested names of other MPs to interview, the author's network and acquaintances in both the lower and upper Houses facilitated the scheduling of interviews.

Due to the pandemic, all interviews except for one were conducted online via Zoom. With the permission of the MPs, I recorded these interviews and made verbatim transcripts. The interviews ranged from 19 minutes (due to connectivity issues) to more than an hour. While at the onset of the research, the author thought that Zoom might not be a good way to conduct interviews; surprisingly, it has many advantages. First, MPs were better focused during the online interviews than face-to-face since distractions often occur when they are inside their offices. Second, because of the nature of Zoom, in which there is much focus on the face, the MPs' facial expressions assisted me in understanding their points and passion (or lack thereof) at certain points in the conversation. Third, some of their responses

TABLE 7.1 List of Interviewees

Code Number	Interview Date (2021)	Sex	Position	Age
PHL.01	29 March	M	Congressman	39
PHL.02	7 April	F	Congresswoman	31
PHL.03	14 April	M	Congressman	50s
PHL.04	16 April	F	Congresswoman	51
PHL.05	23 April	F	Senator	55
PHL.06	4 May	F	Congresswoman	54
PHL.07	5 May	M	Congressman	49
PHL.08	13 May	M	Former Senator	49
PHL.09	21 May	M	Senator	57
PHL.10	14 May	F	Senator	48
PHL.11	11 June	F	Congresswoman	50s

pertained to the use of Zoom in their own legislative activities during the pandemic further adding to the insights shared by the MPs.

From each interview, the video recordings were transcribed verbatim. Words spoken in Filipino were translated into English. The texts were read with an eye for their responses to questions raised on personal background, institutions, and intersectionality. Themes were developed manually using the constant comparison method. During the interviews, it was interesting that some MPs chose to make certain comments "off-the-record," especially when the discussion involved the current administration.

Data and other information were also collected from the websites of the HOR, the Senate, and the Philippines Statistics Authority. The list of interviewees is presented in Table 7.1.

Personal Backgrounds

Family, education, and social movement or activist experience clearly shaped MPs' political views. "I was a martial law baby" (PHL.02), said one MP. He narrated how his family's views against the dictator Ferdinand Marcos profoundly influenced his activism and human rights advocacy. This led him to be active in the labor movement in his adult years. Some MPs were also exposed to their parents' own advocacy and struggles such as nuclear-free campaigns and free legal assistance. Exposure to strong women was also mentioned by men MPs. For example a younger MP was brought up by a single mother and so he regarded himself as someone who "lived in a matriarchal home" (PHL.01). This was also the case for a male MP who grew up surrounded by many sisters (PHL.09). For this reason, these MPs are accustomed to empowered women and not intimidated by them.

Aside from family background, MPs consider education and extracurricular activities such as student council as precursors to their political journey. One

MP studied in Europe, where women's rights and even lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) rights are recognized. Currently, she advocates for antidiscrimination legislation based on sexual orientation and gender identity expression (SOGIE). She observed, "You know what, certain behaviors in our country have been normalized, and these are unacceptable in Western developed countries" (PHL.06). Another MP was a student leader in his university days in the aftermath of the post–Marcos democratization. His law school days further made him aware of human rights issues (PHL.09).

Regardless of sex, the interviewed MPs with a strong background in social movements are strong advocates for SRW. There are two potential explanations for this. One is their early exposure to human rights discourse and activism which easily lends itself to SRW interests. The other is that based on the interviews, the MPs indicated that these social movements or organizations have women's groups where women's issues and concerns are discussed. For these reasons, their socialization helped them understand the different ways development impacts men and women.

Other backgrounds, however, suggest potential problems for SRW. For instance an MP with a military background believes that gender equality is no longer a problem. He framed it as an issue of numbers and facilities given that, according to him, women are already allowed in the military, which provides separate quarters for them. He was also critical of the reproductive rights law's provision allowing sex education. In his words,

> Well, I believe that one, the RH Law, is a complicated issue. I don't look at it as solely or purely gender-based issue. In my case, I was opposing it because I believe the primary education system in the country is not prepared to teach sex education. So, that's one of the things that I opposed. Another issue that I opposed there was penalizing healthcare workers, whether nurses or doctors, if they refuse to perform – what's the term – reproductive health medical procedures.
>
> *(PHL.08)*

At the same time, an MP who is well known for his business conglomerates argued that gender is not a concern for him. He emphasized, "You know, I do not look at gender for any of the things that I do. I'm basically issue-based" (PHL.07). His pride is his free training programs, which he believes can alleviate poverty since he transforms the poor into "OFWs" (overseas Filipino workers). Notably, the Philippines is one of the world's largest migrant-sending states and most OFWs are women in feminized, and precarious jobs such as domestic work and caregiving. The Philippine economy has relied heavily on their remittances since the 1980s, and a lack of decent jobs within the country is a crucial emigration push factor. To a certain extent, these MPs' remarks suggest that the business and military sectors can hardly provide solid socialization on gender issues. In particular, critical

feminist scholarship on the military shows that soldiers' training enhances their masculinities to enable them to fight wars, but this ideology typically remains with them even after their service (Enloe 2000).[2]

Meanwhile, women MPs who lack activist backgrounds rely on their womanhood and regard this as a reason for garnering support from other women. They argue that their experience enables them to actualize the concerns and needs of women as mothers with specific issues. While these are identities that can indeed be developed as platforms for SRW, they can also evolve into MPs' essentialized attitudes toward women, excluding other types of women. Therefore, great care must be employed in treating motherhood identities for SRW.

Four of the women MPs interviewed also come from political families. However, their responses tend to differ depending on their background and experience. Two of them have fairly advanced awareness and advocacy for SRW, while the other two seem to lack gender awareness. While there are criticisms against women's entry into politics via their families, the interviews indicated that women MPs can espouse gender issues suggesting that political families may provide a pathway to SRW given specific background and exposure to gender issues.

Overall, this discussion suggests that MPs' diverse backgrounds may help explain differences and unevenness that they possess when it comes to SRW and gender equality issues. Essentially, some seem to show awareness of women's issues and gender, but few can relate this to macroeconomic issues or other issues generally perceived as gender-neutral. For example except for the feminists among the MPs, both men and women MPs regard poverty as the country's number one problem besides the pandemic. However, they can hardly explain the extent to which this problem can be understood from a gender dimension.

Institutions

Both formal and informal rules and practices shape SRW in the Philippine Congress as will now be discussed in detail.

Support for Women's Issues and Legislation

Both men and women MPs claim that it is not difficult to pursue gender equality and women's rights in parliamentary committees, except for issues considered to be controversial such as reproductive health legislation. According to one MP, "it's too unacceptable for a male legislator not to support something that favors women" (PHL.04). This view was also confirmed by another MP's experience when she said that, "You will hardly find a politician who will actually legislate something that is prejudicial to women because even from a political point of view, that would mean 50% of the votes would be out" (PHL.06). This implies that supporting women's issues is not difficult for men MPs. In the words of one male MP, "The

political party doesn't have anything to do with it [laughs]. So, it's really the [MP's] background and the constituents" (PHL.01). This was seconded by another MP who emphasized that

> For me, party alliances do not matter when it comes to pursuing bills for women's interest and gender equality. What matters is the content of the bill. So far, there has been no conflict with my party and my gender interests.
>
> *(PHL.06)*

The Electoral Commission data also show that historically more women vote in elections. As a woman MP remarked, "You know . . . many of our volunteers are really women . . . Like I would say 80% are women" (PHL.04).

If one takes a cursory look at pro-women legislation in the Philippines, most of them cater to the "women-as-victims" narrative, thereby making it easier to garner support from politicians. For this reason, although some measures have languished in the legislative mill, when circumstances permit and with enough sustained advocacy from women's groups and critical actors in Congress, they managed to get approved. This is not to argue that women are not disadvantaged. Rather, legislation framing them as needing protection and welfare is politically acceptable. Men legislators normally ask to be co-authors of these measures. Nonetheless, whenever economic issues are discussed, they are normally not framed as related to gender issues. For example the COVID-19 stimulus package, while it is beneficial to women who have been greatly affected by the pandemic, will not be approved because it will help women. An MP observes, "the economic stimulus is really pro-women. But that will pass and it will get overwhelming support not because it is pro-women" (PHL.04). What this implies is that gender is ghettoized as an issue and not mainstreamed into other supposedly gender-neutral issues such as the economy, trade, and foreign affairs. The consequence of this is that SRW may be discussed only in the women's committee whereas both the number of women and explicit advocacy of SRW in other committees are diluted.

Incidentally, an MP stated that in 2016, a Philippine senate resolution (Senate of the Philippines 2016) approved by all five women senators took the Lower House to task for the "proposal to show the alleged 'sex video' attributed to Sen. Leila de Lima is illegal, violating inter-parliamentary courtesy and decency, and an affront to women's dignity." In her media statement, Senator Risa Hontiveros stated

> Today, we cross party lines and temporarily set aside our differences. Our sisterhood and strong bond and solidarity as women brought us together to oppose the misogyny and sexism of those who think we are lesser beings and thus, deserve to be shamed.
>
> *(Elemia 2016)*

MP Strategies to Connect With Women Voters

MPs disclosed several strategies to determine their women constituents' concerns and further their agenda in the chamber. Those from the Lower House frequent their districts and engage in consultations with women's groups. Because they are elected via single-member districts, this is a general strategy that HOR members normally employ. Those who specifically consult women's groups reason that they are more active on the ground, so this situation lends itself to frequent communication with them. Moreover, those coming from progressive political parties have built-in consultation mechanisms with the women's sector, which means that their interactions are better organized and institutionalized.

In the senate, MPs responded that they consult women's groups, but these are usually NGOs and civil society organizations (CSOs). The national women's machinery is also a constant source of information in both chambers, especially because it formulates a Women's Legislative Agenda (WLA) outlining a set of priority legislative measures for Congress to approve. The WLA is a product of nationwide consultations periodically undertaken by the Philippine Commission on Women (PCW). The PCW is the national women's machinery tasked to coordinate and formulate policies on women and gender issues. It is also mandated to oversee the implementation of the Magna Carta of Women. A woman MP said that sometimes her office need not write the proposed legislation (PHL.05). Some groups already come to her with a written draft by an organized women's group.

In the HOR, the Association of Women Legislators Foundation, Incorporated (AWFLI) serves as a women's caucus, aiming to make the women's agenda heard in the HOR. It also serves as a venue for women legislators to talk and to initiate activities pushing for SRW. For example when the Duterte administration pushed for transforming the Philippine's political system into a federal one, the AWLFI initiated a learning seminar on how this would impact women's representation.

Another measure taken in the HOR is that during women's month, there is a day in which lady legislators take to the floor of the House and lead the plenary discussions. MPs also assist each other in defending and getting support for legislative measures, even if they are not the principal author. A woman MP describes her experience:

> Since I became a Member of Congress in 2013, I have supported the passage of two landmark laws for women – the Safe Spaces Act in 2018 and the Expanded Maternity Leave Law in 2019. Though I was not an active player in the plenary debates for both bills, I reached out to other women legislators sharing and exchanging views with them about the bill and why we should support it, and also had discussions with my constituents.
>
> *(PHL.11)*

Another strategy employed by a woman MP was to engage with men in pushing for a divorce law. In public hearings covered by the media, men testified about why divorce is also important to them. According to this MP:

> And it is yes, a strategy both for the parliamentary struggle but it's also, and it's also a strategy of trying to be consistent because we want us women to break out of the sexism and misogyny that puts us down. We also recognize that it victimizes also the men. It prevents them also from achieving their full potential. And we want to include them and we see, slowly, more of them including themselves as allies.
>
> *(PHL.05)*

According to a woman MP, one method that worked at least in the Lower House was talking to MPs one by one.

> I remember in the 17th Congress, I would go from office to office peddling the SOGIE Equality Bill and trying to garner signatures and it did work. They were able to pass the SOGIE Equality Bill unanimously in the lower House.
>
> *(PHL.06)*

Positive Perceptions of Women Legislators

Both men and women MPs regard women MPs as "strong," providing "sobering voices" and "working together" in heated discussions on the parliamentary floor and in committees. Interestingly, a number of women MPs have been repeatedly mentioned by men MPs as staunch supporters of women's rights in both chambers. They are described as vocal in advocating SRW and the women's agenda. They are described as "confident," "articulate," and "smart." Most of these women MPs are known to be feminists. As a male MP member of the committee on women observed:

> They are efficient, organized. They're open and discussions are longer. [laughs] These are my initial observations, but the environment is very nurturing and the discussions are more organized, we are able to finish the items in our agenda. They ask questions more. The questions are thorough, they are more articulate. These are my initial reactions.
>
> *(PHL.01)*

This perception was shared by a woman MP on the same committee who observed the sisterhood and camaraderie of fellow women MPs in advocating SRW. "Women easily understand each other" (PHL.11).

All MPs interviewed claim that there are hardly any issues preventing women MPs from speaking out in parliament. Women MPs also describe themselves as

"comfortable" and "confident" in a men–dominated institution. The technical assistance provided by CSOs and the national women's machinery (PCW) is a source of confidence according to a woman MP (PHL.11). Historically, women's groups, the PCW, and the United Nations have been instrumental in working together with legislators to lobby for women's agenda. These groups are instrumental in assisting critical actors in Congress in arguing for a measure's approval and mobilizing support.

Sexism, Misogyny, and Microaggressions

MPs who were interviewed expressed mixed views on their experiences of sexism. Some MPs confirmed, in varying degrees, that sexism happens in Congress and is usually couched in "jokes," "compliments," and patronizing attitudes. This ranges from subtle comments to outright misogyny. A woman MP revealed that

> [T]hankfully I haven't experienced being harassed. Although I do notice the unconscious bias when women are speaking. When it's a male colleague delivering an impassioned speech, he's intelligent, brave, inspiring, bold. But when a woman does the same thing, "Why are you mad?" or emotional. There is a difference in the comments made towards women. Another thing that I do not appreciate and I call this out all the time, is when people comment on the way I dress.
>
> *(PHL.02)*

In public hearings, some comments are downright sexist and meant to silence or belittle their legislative inputs. One woman MP narrates,

> Such as in the context of a committee hearing, they would make comments about your physical appearance, to tell you, "You look so nice today. Where did you get your make up done?" I mean like it's totally out of place. They would do that during the budget hearings, with the belief that they could just catch us off–guard and cut short our interventions so that we don't delay the passage of the budgets.
>
> *(PHL.06)*

Another one complained that

> There was also a time during a hearing that I heard a comment about me saying, "Why is she speaking so softly? It's probably because she's a girl." So, I responded by saying, "I was speaking softly not because I am a girl but because I was not feeling well." You really need to call out these things to raise awareness and assert our voice.
>
> *(PHL.02)*

Another woman MP's experience is in the context of a response by a male colleague to her statement:

> [W]hen we were hearing our bills on the then Cheaper Medicine Law. One of my colleagues was saying, "Oh, you know this particular generic medicine you're talking about is just like hairdryer." And as if men don't use hairdryer. But he meant something only we women use. He was belittling the point I was making about the generic formulation.
>
> *(PHL.05)*

In carrying out their legislative functions, both the HOR and the Senate utilized online platforms at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. According to two MPs, this has become a venue for sexist remarks and bullying. A woman MP who has been pushing an antidiscrimination bill was taken to task by an MP from a religious background who staunchly opposed the measure. She lamented that,

> Imagine, it reached the point that they could not argue against anything, use any argument against me, they started criticizing the images of the saints I have in my background. They said, "No, we cannot pass it because it's a sin just like those idols you have behind you. God is not pleased when you – " I said, "What?" I mean it was like surreal. All of a sudden we're discussing the religious (statues) we have in our home. And I called the attention of the chairperson.
>
> *(PHL.06)*

Microaggressions also occur outside committees even during informal discussions in the session hall, such as "calling a woman MP as sweetheart or darling, despite your repeated protestations and even raising my voice against that person" (PHL.05). This woman MP shouted at her colleague to call him out.

However, some parliamentarians hardly recognize sexism. For example one MP considers President Duterte's allies' bullying of Senator Leila de Lima as having nothing to do with misogyny when he said, "What happened there, she was bullied not because she was a woman but because of the advocacy or the political alignments" (PHL.08). Another woman MP framed sexist jokes as mere jokes and normal for men. She said:

> But of course, you know how boys are, they would have their own boy jokes, male jokes. I don't know maybe it's because of the way I was brought up. In whatever, I don't take it against that person. I guess what's important to me is I just have to respect that they are the way they are or whatever.
>
> *(PHL.10)*

These scenarios indicate that experiences of sexism may be happening but are not reported or recognized by some legislators. Though there is an ethics committee

in both chambers, it has not been used as a venue to hold members accountable. Moreover, the rules in both chambers have not been written with provisions on explicit sexism. What is usually censured is "unparliamentary language" which can easily be circumvented in cases of subtle sexist remarks.

Role of Religious Groups

The Philippine Catholic Church and other faith-based groups are influential in winning elections and policymaking. The country's reproductive health law, for instance, languished in the legislative mill for more than a decade due to staunch opposition from religious groups. However, in 2012, it was approved into a law as former President Simeon Benigno Aquino III pushed its approval among his allies in Congress.

A measure paving the way for a divorce law is also strongly opposed not only by the Catholic Church but also by other Christian groups (PHL.05). Nonetheless, it is already a mark of great progress that the measure has reached the committee hearing level. In the past, no legislator would even touch or file such a measure.

Aside from the Church, some MPs are also members of large faith-based groups who have blocked legislative proposals contrary to their beliefs. According to a woman MP, this is the "weaponization of religion" (PHL.06). She further adds:

> Basically, these are religious conservatives who capitalize on the ignorance of the people. You see, when you have people who base their life decisions on a holy book and are too literal about that holy book because they do not want to use their brains and they view life as just black and white, totally ignoring that hundreds, that different shades of grey that exist. It's quite difficult, you know. So, in congress, the nice thing is that in our debates in the committee, at least I'm capable of showing how fallacious and erroneous these religious conservatives are.
>
> *(PHL.06)*

Nevertheless, aside from reproductive rights, gender identity, and the divorce law, faith-based groups have not been critical of other SRW measures.

Parliamentary Practices

Formal and informal practices in the HOR and the Senate also affect SRW. Apart from being a member of the majority party or coalition, committee headships are determined by seniority and background. There is no conscious effort to achieve gender balance in memberships and headships in both chambers. This was emphasized by an MP:

> From my experience being in three congresses, it's always party allocation, not gender. But obviously, the Committee on Gender Equality and Women,

it's automatic that a woman will chair it. The Committee on Senior Citizens should be led by a senior citizen. The Committee on Youth should be led by a member of the youth. So, for example, the Committee on Justice should be chaired by a lawyer. But it's an unwritten rule. But that's how it should be. That's the culture of congress.

(PHL.01)

In the HOR, those committees considered essential, such as (1) appropriations, (2) ways and means, and (3) accounts, are headed by men MPs. Conversely, only one male MP is a member of the Committee on Women and Gender. In recent years, the House Speakership has become hotly contested owing to infighting among the coalitions supporting Duterte. This has enabled the election of a woman as speaker in 2018 (Venzon 2018). However, this was a hotly contested bid since two Duterte allies were involved. Some sectors opposed to the move, looked at it as a "naked power grab" (Cepeda 2018). Last year, a new speaker was once again elected but had to go through infighting between two Duterte allies. A male MP observed that he was witness to how women MPs silently worked to break the impasse between the two protagonists, thereby indicating to him that women in the Lower House are empowered (PHL.01). However, a woman MP observed that:

Well, to begin with, women are, I think, at least based on my observation, we tend to become more reconciliatory. We are peacemakers, we look for solutions that would benefit all parties concerned. But in the speakership row, I do not see really any role of women there. You just had the blessings of the president to seal the deal already, which is not really the ideal situation. The ideal situation is that among ourselves, we should have chosen the best person to occupy the speakership.

(PHL.06)

In relation to this, there has also been the recent practice of creating deputy speaker positions which have been criticized by the media for their budgetary implications. Deputy speakership positions are widely argued to be concessions in exchange for support by those running for Speaker of the House. However, this has enabled women to become deputy speakers. In a sense, while women have risen to power in the HOR, there are legitimacy issues surrounding their assumption into office.

It is a different case in the Senate. Because of the small number of MPs comprising the chamber, women have become chairpersons of vital committees, even those considered gender-neutral. As in the HOR, however, no male MP has headed the women and family relations committee. The highest position occupied by a woman senator is Senate President Pro-Tempore, which is akin to the Senate President's deputy.

Because Congress is a very hierarchical institution, bullying by senior members also happens. Two men MPs mentioned this. In the words of one male senator:

> As a neophyte, there's a rite of passage, you are . . . you have to prove your worth. So, yeah, I went through my own share of being undermined, being put down, and going through the process of being initiated into the . . . the whys and wherefores, and the hows of Senate politics. I had my share of – how do you call it – challenges, difficulties, and frustrations in the beginning.
> *(PHL.09)*

However, the privileging of hierarchy and seniority, even if they are not gendered, is not necessarily optimal practices from which a gender-sensitive parliament can potentially develop. There have also been claims of purposely mislabeling the gender of another colleague (PHL.06) and the use of gender-insensitive language (PHL.03).

Intersectionality

The elite democracy framework for understanding Philippine politics argues that Congress represents the landed elite, who subscribe to particularistic interests rather than national goals (Brillo 2011, 56–58). In line with this, the dominance of political families largely explains the lack of strong political parties and elite capture of policymaking. Related to this, the Philippines is currently a middle-income country characterized by high income inequality despite experiencing economic growth in the past decade. These characteristics of the country's political economy have consequences for SRW.

As discussed earlier, four women MPs who participated in this study come from political families. However, their backgrounds mitigate their understanding of SRW issues. Those whose exposure to gender equality and women's rights discourse was weak or absent tended to look at women as constituents they need to support rather than perceiving a need to cater to larger and less tangible rights issues. On the other hand, those with long experience abroad or in political parties that take gender issues into account have better appreciation of SRW. To a certain extent, this indicates that political families can indeed narrow the entry into political positions. However, there are circumstances – exposure to women's issues and political parties – that may allow representatives to still advocate for SRW.

Meanwhile, the Philippines suffers from large income inequality, despite more than a decade of growth. Among both men and women MPs interviewed, not one among them represents the 87% of Filipinos whose annual income is below USD 10,000 based on 2017 figures (Cigaral 2017). One of the poorest MPs interviewed did not even belong to this group as his income was above this threshold. Nonetheless, education and background can enable MPs to transcend their class interest, just like the case of MPs from political families. As already noted, MPs with strong

exposure to social movements tend to advocate SRW and are knowledgeable about gender issues in a deeper sense. Others may not have sophisticated gender awareness like those from social movements but understand the nature of consulting various groups. As this MP noted:

> So, you try your best to precisely bring in as many inputs as possible so that when you craft legislation, all these voices have been heard, all these voices have been weighed and that you come up with a law that is rational but at the same time takes into consideration a number of exceptions and a number of special circumstances.
>
> *(PHL.09)*

Another MP cites his graduate school background in conducting "community needs analysis" and separating women into urban poor women and solo parents in his district (PHL.01). Thus, even if he grew up in an upper middle-class family, this has enabled him to learn how to specify the needs of key women constituents. Meanwhile, a wealthy MP with a less diverse background and who comes from a family of big business declined to support the expanded maternity health law, claiming that, "if I were the employer, why would I now get women that at some point in time, she will be gone for six months" (PHL.07). His colleagues were surprised by his views, but according to him, this would be a setback for women's chances for employment.

Largely, however, MPs tend to look out for sectors rather than intersectional issues. As one MP succinctly describes,

> [T]hat's how typically each legislator thinks. Each has their own natural constituency. Whether because – of course if you're from a party list, that's a given . . . That's normal for them. But for the districts, it depends on each district's demographics. So, of course you have to represent your district. If majority of your district is composed of farmers, then you have to protect and be on the lookout for bills that affect this sector.
>
> *(PHL.04)*

Overall, intersectionality as a strategy for inclusive representation of constituents has been unevenly utilized by MPs. Their knowledge and incorporation of this concept rely to a large extent on their background and experience. Nonetheless, even in cases where MPs' backgrounds hardly represent the typical Filipino, their exposure to activism, social movements, and political party practices can bring them better awareness on this matter. They are more attuned to sectoral categories (teachers, farmers) and issues affecting them. One possible reason is that these are organized groups and are more visible in the public sphere. For party-lists, they expectedly need to represent their "natural" constituency. The high incidence of inequality in the Philippines all the more creates an urgent need for MPs to integrate intersectionality into their legislative work.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The discussion in this chapter indicates that SRW in the Philippines is still a work in progress, despite the significant strides the country has made in terms of gender equality. Overall, there is strong support for women-friendly legislation and positive perceptions of women colleagues by men MPs. Women MPs also consider themselves as fairly confident in working with their male counterparts.

A strong background in social movements and activism and exposure to Western culture and human rights education appear to support SRW. Formal and informal institutional practices, however, also shape SRW. Sexism and microaggression occur in both the legislative chambers, but some MPs tend to not take them seriously or regard them as "normal" and "cultural."

Parliamentary procedures are also hierarchical and seniority-based, lending itself to bullying. Ruling-party affiliation and background are the bases for committee chairmanships rather than gender balance. In the HOR, primary committees are headed by men and only one male MP is a member of the Committee on Women and Gender. Recent controversial elections of Speakers of the House have resulted in the election of the first woman speaker and women deputy speakers. However, because of infighting, the rise of these women legislators as officers of the chamber has been contested.

The MPs interviewed in this chapter represent the elite in Philippine society and hardly represent the average Filipino. However, MPs with strong activist backgrounds are able to transcend their class interest and even that of their political families according to the interview respondents. Education and party mechanisms also enable others to learn strategies to prioritize key sectors based on their needs.

In summary, women MPs do not necessarily do more for SRW than men MPs because the latter are generally supportive of popular women's issues. At the same time, the interviews showed that not all women MPs are supportive of SRW issues. In fact, critical actor MPs do more for SRW than a critical mass of women MPs. In other words, both men and women MPs can be supportive of women's agenda given the right background, incentives, and institutional environment. Also, certain personal experiences and ideologies are more favorable than others to SRW. However, some of the current parliamentary institutions inhibit SRW due to gendered informal and formal practices. Meanwhile, the study also suggests that some MPs transcend their elitist backgrounds on account of their education and exposure to women's issues.

Based on the results of this study, I recommend the following to improve SRW in the Philippines. Because personal backgrounds and progressive experience in social movements shape legislators' ideas and practices, it is important that the parliament have members from diverse backgrounds. Toward this end, political party development is urgent. Granting incentives for parties not only to have gender quotas in selecting candidates but also in instituting a gender agenda and sustained gender sensitivity trainings are steps in the right direction.

Disadvantaged women from marginalized sectors must also be given priority in trainings and candidate selection. This will not only potentially increase descriptive representation but can also heighten awareness and appreciation for gender issues among party members. Those from political families can also benefit from this. In the longer term, this can avoid the tendency to ghettoize women's issues as a mere sectoral concern rather than a matter that should be mainstreamed in development planning.

Many consider the Philippine party-list law distorted by traditional politicians and even political families as a route to enter politics. For this reason, there are calls to abolish the law. However, interviews show that MPs from progressive party-lists demonstrate a better understanding of SRW than MPs elected from districts. Therefore, the law can be amended to better reflect proportional representation and learn from the models of other countries. Reforms can also improve women's descriptive representation by adopting alternating (i.e. zipper style) lists of men and women party nominees.

Lastly, a gender audit of both chambers of Congress is imperative to assess their gaps in mainstreaming gender issues in their processes, administration, rules, rituals, and practices. Findings of this audit can serve as bases for implementing a comprehensive agenda and moving toward a gender-sensitive parliament.

Notes

1 Epifanio delos Santos Avenue or EDSA is the street where the people power uprising that ousted President Ferdinand Marcos took place on 22–24 February 1986.
2 Since 1987, MPs with military backgrounds have been elected to the Senate and the HOR, some of whom launched coups against previous governments.

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8

TIMOR-LESTE

Substantive Representation of Women Parliamentarians and Gender Equality

Sara Niner and Therese Thi Phuong Tam Nguyen

Introduction

The Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste achieved independence on 20 May 2002, following two years of UN administration, 24 years of Indonesian military occupation (1975–1999), and nearly 400 years of colonial association with Portugal. Today, Timor-Leste is considered a resilient democracy despite various postcolonial and economic challenges (Croissant & Lorenz 2018). The population has rapidly risen to approximately 1.3 million people who live on the eastern half of the island of Timor. Approximately two-thirds live in rural areas largely as subsistence farmers, while the remaining one-third live urbanized lives in larger towns or the capital of Dili. Over 90% identify as Catholics, but indigenous customary practices of the 13 different ethnolinguistic groups are actively practiced which for most include strictly observed gender roles and relations.

The 2002 Constitution of Timor-Leste formalizes equality between women and men in law. However, in practice there are significant differences between the status of women and men, including lower economic indicators for women, such as participation in the labor force (21%) (ADB 2016, 13) and share of waged employment (31%), the lowest in the region (ADB 2014, 2016, 14). Women are less likely than men to have participated in formal education at all levels although much of this is a legacy of the past. A high birth rate of 5.7 children (ADB 2016, 15) accompanied by high maternal and child death rates are also slowly being reduced by government programs but are linked to alarmingly high levels of malnutrition among women (WBG 2016, 26). These factors combined with stubbornly high rates of violence and harassment against women and girls (suspected to have worsened under COVID-19 restrictions) lower women's status and capacity to participate equally in society. Senior or elite women are exception and remain powerful in Timor-Leste's strictly observed social hierarchy. However, even elite

women must accept the full burden of domestic, reproductive, and care work that often precludes them from public and leadership roles or a place in the paid work-force and the status that comes with it.

The public face of political leadership in Timor-Leste remains pervasively mas-culine and control of political institutions is held by a small group of elite men, legitimized by service to the struggle for independence (see Figure 8.1). These positions include a popularly elected fixed-term president and a prime minister and cabinet or council of ministers. Executive power is shared by the president, prime minister, and government while legislative power rests with the National Parliament, although generally instigated by government. The president, currently the Fretilin party's Lu Olo, appoints the prime minister upon a proposal from the majority party or coalition in parliament. The prime minister, currently Taur Matan Ruak from the People's Liberation Party, is head of the government and determines the ministries and appointment of government ministers and the coun-cil of ministers (or cabinet).

Timor-Leste's 13 municipalities or administrative districts are further split into 67 *posto* (subdistricts) and 498 localities or *suku* which are led by the *Xefe Suku* (village head). This local-level governance takes a "hybrid" and complex form embracing both customary practices including *lisan* (customary law) and newly introduced democratic, egalitarian processes. At this level, women leaders are less than 5% although the government has legislated for gender quotas and there have been some important civil society initiatives to support women's local leadership and participation.

FIGURE 8.1   Swearing in of the Eighth Constitutional Government of Timor-Leste, June 2018

National Parliament

In Timor-Leste, the *deputados* or representatives in the single chamber 65-seat National Parliament act on behalf of the entire population for a five-year term rather than representing any specific local constituency. Representatives are elected through a closed-list proportional representation (PR) system, in which registered voters select their preferred political party from a list on a ballot. Prior to the election, political parties submit a numbered list of candidates to the National Election Commission (CNE) of which every third name must be that of a woman. Party seats in parliament are then allocated according by the *D'Hondt* highest average method to those receiving above 3% of the total votes. Whichever party or coalition accumulates the majority of seats is eligible to form the government for the next five years. A feature shared with Portugal is a formal (but not substantive) separation of powers between executive and legislature, meaning that anyone appointed to the executive leaves the legislature. As more men than women are appointed to executive roles and their places in parliament are refilled from the party-lists at the rate of 33% women, therefore in practice more parliamentary seats end up being filled by women explaining the current rate of 39%.

The parliament shares responsibility for lawmaking with the government, as well as being a consultative and reviewing body. The quality of debate has been criticized as low and the parliament described as "sleepy" due to few laws passed compared to government decrees and orders (ICG 2013, 13–14). The Speaker of the Parliament coordinates affairs including establishing the parliamentary commissions or committees at the beginning of each term. The committees give advice and make recommendations concerning laws or decisions pertaining to their jurisdiction and are responsible for analyzing and investigating matters of interest. The proposed amendments and recommendations are voted on in the plenary. Seats on committees are awarded to political parties rather than to individual members according to proportional representation in the parliament and the heads of committees are generally from the ruling party. The seven permanent committees in the National Parliament are shown in Table 8.1.

Political Parties: Factions and Alliances

Timor-Leste has transitioned from a party system with one dominant party (Fretilin) to a moderate multiparty system and more recently to a more polarized, two-party system. Competition between senior leadership of the independence struggle from the historical parties of Fretilin (*Frente Revolucionaria de Timor Leste Independente*, the Revolutionary Front for an Independent East Timor) and CNRT[1] has increased with shifting alliances with minor parties PD (*Partido Democrático* The Democratic Party), PLP (*Partidu Liberasaun Popular*, the People's Liberation Party), and KHUNTO (*Kmanek Haburus Unidade Nasinal Timor Oan*, Enrich the National Unity of the Timorese) representing a new era of politics. The two large parties have recognizable political programs and campaign on policy issues while most

TABLE 8.1 Permanent Committees in the National Parliament of Timor-Leste

Committee Number and Name in Portuguese	English Translation
1 *Comissão A: Assuntos Constitucionais e Justiça*	Commission for Constitutional Affairs and Justice
2 *Comissão B:* Comissão de Relações Exteriores, Defesa e Segurança Nacional	Commission for Foreign Affairs, Defence and National Security
3 *Comissão C: Finanças Públicas*	Commission for Public Finances
4 *Comissão D: Komisaun Ekonomia no Dezenvolvimentu*	Commission for Economy and Development
5 *Comissão E: Infraestruturas*	Commission for Infrastructure
6 *Comissão F: Saúde, Segurança Social e Igualdade de Género*	Commission for Health, Social Security, and Gender Equality
7 *Comissão G: Educação, Juventude, Cultura e Cidadania*	Commission for Education, Youth, Culture and Citizenship

Source: Data sourced from the Timor-Leste parliamentary website. RDTL (n.d.)

minor political parties lack strong policy or organizational bases. Shifting alliances and power plays between these parties demonstrate a national political culture where senior men dictate politics in Timor-Leste, dubbed *Maun bo'otismo*. This has had detrimental effects on democracy, the participation of women, youth, and other marginalized groups, as well as holding back national development including the alleviation of poverty (Niner 2020).

Women in Politics

Timorese Women's Movement and the Electoral Gender Quota System

The importance of women's political leadership is exemplified by the Timorese women's movement – largely a coalition of local women's NGOs, key women leaders and parliamentarians – who have ensured the introduction of a progressive constitution and egalitarian laws and policies in the post-conflict nation, including the 2006 electoral gender quota. National women's movements do replicate existing patterns of social and gendered hierarchies and values and may represent elite rather than more diverse groups of women in society (Molyneaux 1998, 228). Although these patterns can be seen in the women's movement in Timor-Leste, they are contested.

The percentage of women in Timor's parliament has remained steady at the one-third stipulated in the gender quota (as shown in Table 8.2) and remains the highest percentage of women parliamentary representatives in the Asia Pacific (IPU 2018).

Despite these numbers, some women parliamentarians feel their participation and influence are severely circumscribed by parliamentary and political party dynamics (Niner & Loney 2020).

TABLE 8.2 Women MPs in the National Parliament of Timor-Leste

Election Year	Women Elected	Women (% of total MPs)
2001	22 (of 88)	25
2007	18 (of 65)	27
2012	25 (of 65)	39
2017	21 (of 65)	32
2018	25 (of 65)	39

Source: Data sourced from IPU online database (IPU n.d).

Women's Parliamentary Caucus

The women's parliamentary cross-party caucus, *Grupo de Mulheres Parlamentares de Timor-Leste* (GMPTL), is supported by the parliament and UN Women. It was established in the same year as the quota system to promote representation and participation of women in politics and gender mainstreaming, as well as to increase awareness of MPs. One of their significant successes has been pressuring the government to provide adequate funding for the implementation of the progressive 2010 Law Against Domestic Violence (LADV), including establishing mechanisms that ensure the safety of survivors plus raising awareness of this law.

Attitudes Toward Women's Political Representation in Timor-Leste

A recent study revealed how men remain largely preferred as leaders (Alola Foundation & IWDA 2020). Although an overwhelming majority of Timorese believe that women and men are equal and should each have the same opportunities, reservations about women's capacity and capabilities to be political leaders remain common. This confirmed past research findings about lack of support from political parties, including women members, for gender quotas because women were seen as unqualified (Ospina & Lima 2006). While women are generally perceived to have most of the important innate characteristics necessary for political leadership, such as intelligence, honesty, and articulateness, it was believed they lack either the requisite skills, abilities, or experience (Alola Foundation & IWDA 2020). These perceptions conformed to gender stereotypes which create an unconscious bias or prejudice against women being political leaders. Women leaders also face further structural barriers, like heavy domestic burdens, lack of financial resources, and cultural beliefs. Furthermore, even when they have won a position, they faced near-impossible expectations, primarily that their first priority should always be the care of their families, while men escaped this double burden.

Women in Political Parties

While Article 8 of the Law on Political Parties (Law No/2004) urges parties to increase women's participation, both in terms of introducing quotas and promoting

women in party leadership, this has not often been actioned by parties (Ospina & Lima 2006), meaning "dominance in decision-making of male party leaders, particularly in determining the placement of candidates on the party list" (IPU 2018, 7). Women candidates are selected from patronage networks by men who lead political parties with the resulting relations of obligation and the "limited empowerment" of women (Niner 2017). Recruitment processes can become superficial, or even harmful, when women are included primarily to meet quota requirements (Sousa 2018). In 2014, the Secretary of State for the Promotion of Equality stated that high numbers of women alone would not guarantee their influence and that it is "important to go beyond representation to ensuring women play an active role" (ADB 2014, 93).

Research Methodology

To better understand substantive representation of women (SRW) in Timor-Leste, a strategy for approaching current and former parliamentary members was devised to include a balance of genders, seniority, political party membership, and parliamentary committee experience. Approaches were primarily made through the personal networks of the researchers due to normal services and offices being shut due to COVID restrictions and a recent natural disaster (Cyclone Seroja) in 2020, which caused substantial infrastructure damage and chaos in the country. This can be construed as a limitation of our study. For these reasons, all interviews were conducted over Zoom where internet connectivity allowed and WhatsApp where this was not even possible.

Ethical consent procedures were followed and due to a tense political climate, it was decided to keep all respondents anonymous. A common set of questions was applied with some variations including the addition of questions concerning political party membership and political party gender principles and policies, as this had already been identified as a barrier for women's substantive political participation in Timor-Leste.

All interviews were recorded and transcribed while interviews in Tetun were first translated by a professional translator. General themes emerged from the nine interview transcripts and were merged with those suggested by the principal investigator of the study for consistency with other case studies. Transcripts were sorted into a thematically organized analysis table. Comments were reviewed, compared, and summarized. Those results appear here along with the findings.

Table 8.3 details the gender, age, education, party, positions, and committee membership of those interviewed. All respondents were well educated with two-thirds (6 out of 9) having overseas qualifications. The respondents were on the younger side for parliamentarians; ranging in age from early thirties to late fifties. This means most were adults in 1999, when the Indonesian occupation ended but several were only teenagers. Most had associations with the struggle for independence within the country (seen as insiders with more authority to govern) and three were part of the solidarity movement from outside the country during the years

TABLE 8.3 Backgrounds of Timor–Leste Interview Respondents

Number	Sex	Age	Education	Party	Positions	Committee
TML.01	F	30s	National (UNPAZ)	PD	MP, GMPTL Secretary	B
TML.02	M	40s	International (AUS)	PLP	MP	E (Head)
TML.03	F	40s	International (Portugal)	PD	Former MP	B (Head)
TML.04	M	30s	International (USA)	PLP	Minister	B (Head)
TML.05	F	30s	National (UNTL)	Fretilin	MP	C
TML.06	F	40s	National (UNTL)	PLP	MP, VP of parliament	C
TML.07	F	30s	International (NZ)	Fretilin	Former MP	C
TML.08	M	40s	International (NZ)	CNRT	Former MP	B
TML.09	M	50s	International (AUS)	Fretilin	Former MP	A

of occupation (seen as outsiders). Five were from minor parties and four from the major parties; six from parties currently in government and three from opposition parties. We were able to engage only one from the major party recently ousted from power, perhaps because they had bigger political issues, both internal and external, to contend with.

Personal Backgrounds and Perspectives

MPs' Gender Ideology

Although only one respondent declared being a feminist (TML.07), most respondents shared gender-sensitive perceptions. Only one man, a former MP, showed little awareness of the impact of gender inequality and could be described as "gender blind" (TML.08) according to the WHO Gender Responsive Assessment Scale (WHO 2011).[2] Another two MPs, a man and a woman, could be categorized as "gender sensitive" (TML.03, TML.04). Another man and woman could be categorized as "gender specific" (TML.02, TML.09), and the two younger women were "gender transformative" (TML.01, TML.07). One of them is also an open advocate for the LGBTI community.

Viewpoints on Key Issues

There were many comments about COVID and the recent cyclone and flood as key issues in Timor-Leste currently. Some made the gendered analysis that this double crisis had led to increased domestic violence (DV) (TML.02, TML.06); increased care burdens on women (TML.07), reduced economic activity, and greater poverty for women (TML.06). One older woman, a former MP, noted that women and children had suffered more from the effects of the flood (TML.03).

When asked about what key women's issues were, three of our respondents unequivocally stated that it was the high levels of DV, including the abuse of girls (TML.02, 03, 07). Often, DV was listed as one issue for women in a list of basic

human rights deprivations that poor women suffer such as lack of clean water, electricity, health services, educational and economic opportunities. Nearly half of the respondents made the gender-sensitive link between these issues and the discriminatory patriarchal social system dominant in Timor-Leste with two stating that patriarchy was *the* key issue. A younger woman from one of the major parties stated:

> Apart from violence, which is somehow linked to everything else I think, even to women's political participation. Traditional gender roles are still very, very strong and it doesn't matter which social class, women are still expected to take care of their families. Women are still expected to be the main caregivers, it doesn't matter if you're working, or if you're not working, that's supposed to be your main role. I think that influences everything else.
>
> *(TML.07)*

How patriarchal challenges were dealt with in parliament was raised by an older former MP and minister, who stated that "[Patriarchy] is still the biggest, the biggest obstacle to, women's equality of course it is. It permeates every level. I haven't seen the issue of the patriarchy discussed [in parliament] in my time as an MP" (TML.09). The younger woman identified that "the patriarchal mindset is not only men's. Many of the women that are in parliament have that patriarchal mindset" (TML.07). Dealing with gender issues in parliament was also difficult because:

> [W]hen we discuss [issues] item by item it gets lost because of the MPs' concern: 'Is this proposal from my party?' so I have to vote for it. It's not about the real issues; it's about <u>who</u> proposes them [and who supports them].
>
> *(TML.03)*

One of the younger progressive men also pointed out that organizations within the women's movement could be very conservative and act contrary to women's interests (TML.04). An older man, a former minister in the first government, gave examples of women leaders in parliament doing this on issues of abortion and freedom of expression of young people (TML.09). This shows several MPs had a nuanced understanding of gender issues, but among several others a low level of understanding about the effects of gender relations was apparent which enabled the status quo to prevail.

One younger male MP (TML.02) argued that economic empowerment of poor women was the key issue, yet some women parliamentarians who voted for the removal of women street traders at certain sites around the city were blind to this. These privileged women MPs holding socially conservative views were unsupportive of key issues for poor women, while this younger man showed a deeper

empathy for the plight of the poor and more sensitivity to the problems of poor women. A younger woman from a major party offered this insight:

> I started realising that this patriarchal mindset is inside everyone, so I think we need to work together with women in parliament and women in the parties as well, to change that mindset because people think that gender equality is just about having women present in the room, but not the voice that is necessary.
>
> *(TML.07)*

A middle-aged man from another major party showed little comprehension of such insights arguing that:

> The important thing now is to provide good health services, education and provide the conditions so they [women] can fight for their rights. It is not about men who oppress women, this is the wrong view. We need to do self-evaluation to ask ourselves about this, we are not Westerners.
>
> *(TML.08)*

This suggestion, that insights and solutions to gender inequality common in Western societies are not appropriate for Timor, is a common viewpoint; however, this position does not acknowledge that gender inequality is inherent in social relations, just as it is in the West. Without this analysis, it will be difficult to address the inequities in health and education this respondent highlights.

Other specific issues for women raised by respondents also provide insight into MPs' ideologies and their experience of SRW. Three key issues raised in parliament that failed to effect positive change for women were raised by multiple interviewees: the Sexual Harassment in Public Spaces Resolution instigated by the cross-party women's caucus (GMPTL), which was thrown out by a hostile parliament; an attempt to increase the budget for transport of DV victims which appeared to have run afoul of political party differences; and the issue of abandonment of neonates which remained unaddressed after a particularly conservative debate. It was clear the lack of SRW was significant in the failure to address these significant social problems.

MP Perceptions of the Gender Quota

Every respondent, except one, supported the electoral gender quota. The dissenter explained:

> The quota policy is good, but it undermines women's initiative to be creative and to take initiative. For me the quota is not educative at all, you should let women use the opportunity to compete with men, basically Timor-Leste

> does not need the quota anymore . . . The quota limits the participation of women . . . [It means the women] do not show initiative. They are happy with the position as deputada, and beyond that they do not want to fight anymore. You undermine people's spirit to fight for what they want.
>
> *(TML.08)*

Several of the younger women openly admitted their roles in parliament were a direct result of the quota system (TML.01; TML.06), and most of them admitted that without the quota system women would hardly be in parliament at all and for this reason alone the quota system must continue. A young man, a current minister, stated: "With the quota system, Timorese woman are playing a more and more active part and it's a trampoline for gender-sensitive politics and the emancipation of woman's voices to be heard" (TML.04). Others believed the quota needed to be accompanied by additional programs:

> I think there is a lot more work that needs to be done with the women that are in Parliament, and with the men, but especially with the women to understand what role they can play towards gender equality, and why is it important for them to represent women, because as you know, the patriarchal mindset is not only men's but it is also in women.
>
> *(TML.07)*

Two respondents (TML.07; TML.09) believed the quota should be raised to 50% while another (TML.05) believed in making ongoing slight increases until 50% was achieved. However, one young woman pointed out that there are also senior women in influential positions, such as the wife of the prime minister, who did not support the quota:

> In one discussion, *Dona* Isabel said, 'Let women and men freely participate in politics, remove the 30% quota.' But for me, I don't agree with this, because if we remove the quota it will cause a big disaster for women. They will lose their opportunity.
>
> *(TML.05)*

Only one informant mentioned the electoral system more generally and the need for a system that would be more conducive to independent candidates:

> If the system were open to independent candidates [women would have more chance to participate in the parliament.] They could speak more freely, in their own voices. They could speak the truth based on reality. People could come with their own mandate, they will not have to care about political party interests.
>
> *(TML.02)*

Substantive Participation: Ability to Raise Issues and Be Heard in Parliament

Whether women have the power to raise issues in parliament, have their say in debates, and influence policy and social outcomes was discussed by many respondents. An older woman, former MP and minister (TML.03) expressed confidence that she was able to raise issues important to her in parliament, but that parliamentary debate was not important because substantive decisions were made by the executive and those in government, not parliamentarians. She felt because she was well educated, could speak multiple languages, and was capable (compared to others in parliament) she could get things done. Although her ideology was progressive, she did not see herself primarily as a gender advocate, and because she did not come from inside the women's movement, she was marginalized by "insider" women and was excluded from those debates. She felt marginalized due to her lack of veteran or insider status having spent the occupation period abroad. In fact, there was a lot of tension between "insider" and "outsider" women in parliament over who was authorized to speak on gender issues. Furthermore, an older man, a former MP and minister, thought,

> [it's not just gender but] . . . age, and that's an aspect that particularly doesn't help in the promotion of strong young women. They stick their heads up, they're tall poppies, and other women can knock them down, we've had this happen a number of times.
>
> *(TML.09)*

However, a young man, a current minister, felt the opposite was the case when it came to women having power to direct proceedings in parliament:

> Every year when you have the budget debate issues come to fore. Especially regarding health of woman, empowerment, education . . . the two important [budget] sessions normally are an important space for voices or concerns about women's participation in politics and society. Women's participation in society is being raised, and it goes beyond simple debate because then you have bills or proposed changes being introduced during the debates. Also, in some of the smaller committee work.
>
> *(TML.04)*

A younger woman and former representative, now turned advisor to her party bench in parliament, also thought things were improving for younger women from her party in parliament:

> In the plenary, I've noticed that the women speak up more than the men most of the time. They are not afraid to speak in Parliament. Sometimes they

lose control. But I think the men are also counting on it somehow because they know that a woman will be there, and they will actually challenge and question anything that they do not believe in.

(TML.07)

Political Parties

The issue of loyalty to political party interests or party discipline was spoken about by every respondent. The dominance of party politics and alliances over gender issues were accepted by all, although most asserted their parties' policies on gender were beneficial to women such as an older woman MP (TML.06). A younger woman also concurred:

> Female members of parliament are sensitive to gender, but the decision [on how to vote] is made by the party block and they can't vote based on their own wishes because of party discipline. You cannot disobey your party because we have to follow their guidance . . . There is a regulation in the parliamentary legislation from several years ago, that parties have a right to remove a member of parliament from their mandate.
>
> *(TML.01)*

Of the four main political parties we spoke to, only Fretilin had a formal internal gender quota of 30% for the executive, central committee, and "municipal bodies as well" (TML.07), established in 2011 along with processes of compliance. The two smaller progressive parties supported the principle of gender equity and aspired to a 30% quota but noted this was especially hard to achieve in the rural districts. Only the CNRT respondent disagreed with the use of quotas in political parties saying, "If we have a quota then we will discriminate against the men. If we talk about equality then it also covers men, not just women" (TML.08).

Institutional Dimensions of SRW

Gender Sensitivity of Parliament

Many interviewees mentioned the success of having so many women represented in parliament with one young woman, a former MP, stating:

> 38% of women in parliament is positive and I hope that we will be able to increase that to reach 50% one day. We have a woman Vice President in parliament and a woman Vice Prime Minister and that is also positive.
>
> *(TML.07)*

A woman representative from a much earlier parliament criticized the level of debate there citing illiteracy among some members and querying the power of

parliament to effect change altogether: "Government, not the parliament or the Committees have power. Legislative initiative comes from the government. Parliament is really just a rubber stamp" (TML.03). In her view, the more powerful political actors go straight into government where they have more influence, leaving the lower-level cadres in parliament. The more recent former MP cited earlier added:

> I raised gender equality in the program . . . One other woman in parliament asserted that, "Gender equality is not part of politics right now." I started realising that this patriarchal mindset is inside everyone, so I think we need to work with women in parliament and women in the parties . . . There is a need for the women and the men to understand what exactly the issues are and why are we raising them.
>
> *(TML.07)*

It is clear from these comments and the dominance of party loyalty over gender issues that more solidarity among women and their allies is needed on issues of gender equality to raise the status of women. The MP continued that for women MPs to be fully effective:

> An understanding of equity and flexibility is needed for women parliamentarians if we need them to be there to do the work, and to be good at it. We have to remember that for them to do that . . . we need to create conditions for that to happen. I don't think that it has even crossed people's minds that all of this can influence how women perform in Parliament as well. I think it's harder for women to do. I remember, it was harder for me.
>
> *(TML.07)*

Harassment

Most participants revealed anecdotes of bullying in parliament. Several told personal stories of being bullied while others relayed incidents they had observed or heard about. While some of these incidents were directed at women, bullying was also common toward younger people by elders and toward "outsiders" or those who had not lived through the Indonesian occupation or been part of the armed resistance. Incidents of racism were also reported. It appears common for those with veteran status to belittle others in parliament and assert their greater authority in national decision-making. Two younger men interviewed recalled:

> In parliament a person could be bullied, not because you are a woman, but because of your background, for example: if in the past you didn't really support independence, your political and historical background, or sometimes related to race . . . Yes it happens all the time, to both men and women, even to me. I think it is part of our work.
>
> *(TML.02)*

> I've never seen [bullying on the basis of gender] . . . I have seen people being bullied because of their age, because of their past political participation. We have seen people being bullied because of their skin, because of their race. . . . I think people thought that they were not harmful debates but I think they were harmful and I strongly disagreed with the way it was done.
>
> *(TML.04)*

However, several women related cases of gendered bullying in parliament. One was an incident of sexual abuse by a parliamentarian that was debated in the plenary:

> There was an issue with a member of government who had these nude photos of a woman he had an affair with that were distributed across social media. It was horrible. Somehow this was raised in Parliament and this man, a Member of Parliament said "Oh well, women should know better. They shouldn't come to work with miniskirts, and they shouldn't provoke men. Men are just men."
>
> *(TML.07)*

A younger woman stated that:

> Our own colleagues sometimes talk to us using words like "child." "What do you know, you are a small child who is just learning." Men talk to us like that. If we say something to them, they won't really listen to us.
>
> *(TML.01)*

An older man also stated that he had witnessed women being harassed and bullied in parliament, "but I am not going to give you examples. It resulted in me having personal conflicts with people. Particularly about the treatment of women and women being talked down to" (TML.09). Another informant admitted that she had "an uncomfortable experience" and that "verbal attacks and bullying couldn't be avoided" (TML.06). She also linked the way policies of political opponents were criticized to bullying. This was common in the recent tumultuous period of political conflict with three changes of government since 2017. One informant cited the hostile environments in political parties as a reason for qualified women refusing to go into politics (TML.01).

Women's Caucus and Solidarity Among Women

There were various opinions expressed about the women parliamentary caucus, GMPTL. One felt it was a mistake to have women's issues treated separately by the caucus and not mainstreamed in the larger parliamentary plenaries as it meant they were not treated seriously as key issues affecting the whole society (perhaps also

hindering an appreciation of the deeper societal roots of gender inequality). Others felt the women's caucus was a necessary instrument to increase solidarity among women from different political parties and to arrive at consensus and strategy on important issues for women before taking them to the parliament. One respond–ent, a leader in GMPTL said:

> The women MPs have no division between their political party interests. It is often beyond politics when it comes to common gender issues, WMPs are often united with one voice. Sometimes there is different perspectives on women issues but always a fight for the common interests of women. Therefore, at the program and budget discussions in GMPTL, the result of the voting was unanimously in favour.
>
> *(TML.06)*

The larger issue of solidarity among women in parliament garnered an array of opinions, but overall it was agreed that political party allegiance took precedence over commitment to gender equality (TML.07; TML.08). One of the older men, a former minister, was much more cynical about women's solidarity in parliament: "They put up a good pretence of solidarity but there are times when an issue comes to the fore in public debate and people fall in along party lines" (TML.09). Although he admitted that on certain serious issues "Women do show solidar–ity" giving the recent example of a particularly horrendous rape and murder case that had occurred. One woman wished this overweening loyalty to parties would change: "We who are fighting for women's participation, fighting for women's rights, I think women shouldn't do this to other women, even though we are from different political parties" (TML.05). Thus, while party loyalty dominated, this was superseded on particular critical issues and GMPTL continues to work hard to build women's solidarity.

Consultations With Women

Respondents spoke of many ways that women voters or citizens were consulted. Some said there were parliamentary plenary sessions open to the general public (TML.04). Although it wasn't clear just how much normal citizens spoke up or had influence in these sessions. The current Vice President of Parliament explained that she does visit "voters from different areas and share information and update them on politics at the national level, as well as hearing from them their issues and get–ting to understand their problems" (TML.06). She also noted how she is happy to get 30–40% women participation at these meetings. Others spoke mainly about the public consultations of the parliamentary committees and other public consultation processes of government. However, more people spoke about the consultations their political parties undertook with their membership and other constituencies given to them to manage (TML.07; TML.09).

Parliamentary Committees

As noted, one respondent felt that real power lay with government rather than parliament, but that parliamentary committees were places women could have influence (TML.03). Women in parliament are represented on committees at the rate of one-third, but political party leaders decided committee assignments. Nearly all respondents gave anecdotes of substantive participation and leadership by women in parliamentary committees despite only three or four women typically serving on a committee of 12–13 members. One former MP felt "Because of the smaller numbers that meet on the committees (rather than the parliament) there is not much of a difference between members because of their gender. It is more equal" (TML.03). A younger current minister also felt that women were now being appointed outside the traditional areas for women like Committee G (Education) and were being appointed to committees such as A, B, and C, which were more prestigious and therefore competitive to be appointed to. Commission C for Public Finances with eight women and five men is especially powerful because it scrutinizes the national budget, and women have done particularly well on this committee as these quotes highlight.

> I am a member of Committee C on Public Finance. . . . The President, Vice President and Secretary are women . . . Women dominate the decision-making process, but we always compromise, listen to each other, so the working environment is running really well. The decisions are really collective.
>
> *(TML.05)*

> I am part of Committee C on Public Finance . . . These women have powerful voices, have a good understanding about public financing, the financial structure of the government, the program based-budgeting, the petroleum fund law, the public loan . . . and of course a significant understanding about gender equality and public financing is required. Committee C is the hearth of the nation.
>
> *(TML.06)*

However, the public consultations conducted by parliamentary committees were heavily criticized for their lack of gender inclusion. One former representative and minister found them appalling,

> The last parliamentary committee meeting I went to was Committee A on Constitutional and Legal Affairs. Probably 98% of the people in the audience there were men . . . They don't give gender mainstreaming issues a thought. It's just a procedure to go through.
>
> *(TML.09)*

Although a committee might have strong women's leadership, it also depended on personal values of the women themselves as to which issues progress and which

do not. Discussions on DV in the first government (2002–2007) on Committee A were not progressive because the head of the committee, a woman, advocated conservative Catholic policies (TML.09). A member of this committee from a later time remembered four women members who "defended women's issues" (TML.08). Another younger woman parliamentarian who heads Committee B with two other women stated, "we work together in a really healthy way . . . we don't like to make things political inside the committee because these are really important issues for our nation" (TML.01). These comments demonstrate that committees have had strong leadership and participation by women, both in the past and present, yet whether they advocated for gender equality depended on their personal values and capacity, as this final quote suggests:

> I was Head of Committee B for the years I was in parliament. I felt my voice was heard because I was educated and could speak multiple languages and had the capacity. Women who are qualified this way do lead and have a voice on the Committees.
>
> *(TML. 03)*

Intersectionality

Although there are significant differences in power between men and women in parliament and government based on conservative gender relations pervasive in the broader society, there are other intersecting social categories that are just as important for establishing social status and authority within hierarchies of political power. Other related social categories are also important in post-conflict Timor-Leste and make up the social capital that dictates class and status in society. First, status awarded to customary leadership is strong and enduring, including local hereditary royalty and their families – here both women and men can hold power and privilege. This is overlaid with colonial and postcolonial legacies including privileged access to education, which is also an important asset for social status. Within this customary culture, there is a strict hierarchy based on age with younger people expected to be respectful and deferential to their elders as this former woman representative explained:

> As you know, Timor-Leste has this hierarchical mindset as well and when you still have the first generation of leadership alive and leading, it's quite a strong impact on how everything else works. The younger people, are shy to speak up to people that are more senior. I was raised to speak up, even at home, we were raised to give our opinions, even if we don't agree with each other, but that's not how most people are raised here. Here, people are taught that the eldest speaks up and the others just comply with it, like it or not, and that is reflected in everyday work everywhere, not only in Parliament.
>
> *(TML.07)*

A young women MP describes how this discrimination manifests in parliament:

> Recently I criticized an issue related to a social situation and everyone criticized me: "Who are you? Which family do you come from? Who is your father? Who is your mother? How old are you? Were your parents in the independence struggle or not?" In politics this is all really relevant, but for me it is not so important but for others it is really important. We have to be strong.
>
> *(TML.06)*

Veteran Status

In Timor-Leste, high social status is awarded to those who served in the armed resistance to Indonesian occupation and then to others who supported the independence struggle inside the country such as those from the clandestine civil resistance and lastly to those from "outside" in the international solidarity movement. These categories were referred to in relation to holding power and authority in parliament by all respondents. As one interviewee explained:

> A bigger division in parliament than gender is between veterans and non-veterans. If you did not serve inside the country during the occupation, you are marginalised. They made that very clear all the time, especially those from the older generation who were in the mountains in the resistance. Whenever there was a discussion on any issue then there would be this attitude: "If you weren't here you don't know and can't understand." Then you couldn't continue the discussion, or it could become ugly. All parties have this division also . . . As I was not a member of the official women's movement [established inside] I didn't really have the background to speak on women's issues . . . so effectively I was not part of discussions on women's issues in the parliament.
>
> *(TML.03)*

A young woman MP explained how she navigates this social hierarchy:

> My young age is a challenge for me . . . because I'm young I don't have much experience and sometimes people don't take me seriously . . . Some members of parliament come from a background with a high level of education, or they are veterans. How to fit in so that those colleagues don't abuse or bully me? It requires a lot of effort to develop the interpersonal skills needed, otherwise I would be strongly bullied. I can say that it is an honour for me to work with them. I am someone who is positive. My mentality is to see someone's joke just as a joke, not to consider them a bully.
>
> *(TML.01)*

Another younger woman and former MP who continues as a parliamentary advisor on gender issues noted:

> There is still a bit of shyness when older people start saying, "I did this during the struggle," or "this one did that during the struggle." Which is unfair for the younger generation, because most of them are born after (19)99 or they were very little in 99. So that's something we are also working on within the party to ensure that the younger generation know that they, can speak up respectfully, that they can speak up and they can give their opinions, because the needs of the youth today are not the same as the needs before 99.

Intersection of Gender and Class Representation in Parliament

The women's movement, anchored in the capital Dili, is led largely by urban, educated, middle-class women described by one respondent in this study as the "Farol women's networks" (TML.09) referring to the elite Dili suburb, where many NGO headquarters are located. Tensions often arise within women's movements between less-educated rural women and middle-class urban women with a more internationally recognizable "feminist" agenda. This is the case for women parliamentarians too. Three of the former members of parliament felt that poor women were not represented in the parliament, "nor the issues that are important to them (clean water, reliable electricity, equal salaries) you don't see this discussed much" (TML.03). Another respondent felt that official government rhetoric addresses poverty, but the actual assistance was not effective: "In rural areas many women feel ignored. Just look at access to clean water, women continue to complain about this. They have to walk for kilometres to get clean water" (TML.08).

A former parliamentarian and minister reflected on his experience and current developments in National Parliament:

> [O]f course, some women are not being given the opportunity [to represent in parliament]. We're a long way from being from being able to claim any success in that regard. The next generation of young women are very frustrated, and you can see them talking about it now . . . I think that as positions become more sought after they're the ones who have been squeezed out: young, capable, educated women. . . . In terms of representation of women who are not elite, if you look at Khunto, there is the Deputy Prime Minister, Berta, who is not an elite woman. She's attained a university education, but she was never a part of the Farol women's networks or anything like that. . . . I think regionalism has made my political party focus on ensuring rural women are represented. I think that's broken that elite cycle a little bit better lately.
>
> *(TML.09)*

His colleague agreed that the dominance of elite women in politics is being overcome in their political party and the current parliament:

> We have people from low-income communities . . . that come from the districts, we have people that have worked with the grassroots on an everyday basis. In terms of economic levels, we come from every background. In education I don't think we have anyone who doesn't have some sort of qualification even if it is not from University . . . People are also chosen because they are political, they're active in their political parties, so people that are active in the political parties already have some kind of qualification as well.
>
> *(TML.07)*

She also elaborated about the intersection of her own social categories of marginalization coming from a minority ethnicity and religion:

> Yes, ethnicity plays a big role. I'm not seen as an "original" Timorese as they say, because I was born and raised overseas. I'm from a minority and I don't want it to be misunderstood as speaking against another religion. Also, in regard to the resistance struggle itself, I do not feel that I have the right to speak a lot about it, because I was not part of it. I was not here. Gender-equality wise though, I know that I can speak up about that. After years, I decided to not stop myself because I'm the daughter of someone, because it means something if I don't speak up I would be lying to myself as well, and I won't be able to achieve what I want.
>
> *(TML.07)*

This woman has used her advantages in education and family associations to become an effective advocate for women's issues in her political party, in Timor's parliament, and the broader social system. A younger man and current minister had an equally positive view of increasing representativeness in parliament:

> I personally think you do have a stronger participation of otherwise under-represented voices now in parliament than before, than it ever has been. . . . in the current political dynamics I believe that discrimination based on socio-economic or class-based identity is largely being overcome . . . with regards to access to education . . . it might still be there but it has been penetrated. . . . On the question of elites and non-elites and representation: with the rise of political parties like Khunto and to some extent PLP, I think we have broadened the kind of class politics here. [This has] introduced a wider array of political representation, regardless of [class], everybody or everyone, every woman or every man, can imagine being invited to be in parliament, whether you speak Portuguese or you don't, you can be in there. Some may mock, but the majority, 80% of the county, people from the municipios, the

rural areas, may come and sit in national parliament and represent the voices of the people.

(TML.04)

Thus, overall, class remained an important element of status and power hierarchies in parliament, even though many felt this was changing, and many parliamentarians we interviewed spoke about its powerful intersections with gender and age.

Non-Binary Gender Representation (LGBTI) in Parliament

The emerging and growing LGBTI movement in Timor-Leste has created successful alliances with other progressive social forces, including key political leaders and the women's movement. One parliamentarian mentioned: "I think sexual orientation is a very sensitive issue. Most of us are afraid to raise this issue but there are some strong women MPs talking about this issue" (TML.02). These issues have only recently been raised in parliament in Timor-Leste, with some advocating for their acceptance and respect for their human rights, contesting conservative values. A key advocate interviewed said:

> I've had my own experience representing LGBTI with my intervention when live-streaming [a session from parliament]. I demanded that the PM shouldn't discriminate against LGBTI, but he brought up lots of things, and then the public reaction was not good. Some people posted on Facebook that I'm really bad but I didn't care. I had lots of protests from my own party: "Our party doesn't promote LGBTI." I always tell them that in our party we respect democratic values and human rights values. LGBTI people called me and really appreciated it. I am one of the leaders in GMPTL . . . and I will continue to speak up. I told the GMPTL president that if there is a letter from Bella Galhos, [leader of the LGBTI movement] then we need to respond. This is the people's house, they are the people, even though they are a minority. First of all, we need to accept their group in parliament.
>
> *(TML.01)*

Conclusion

Having a formal electoral gender quota in place means Timor-Leste is advanced in terms of a descriptive representation of women (DRW) in National Parliament. Increasing women's descriptive participation is crucial but on its own insufficient to eradicate discrimination against women in political systems. In Timor, it has not yet translated into substantive representation of every woman in parliament due to pervasive patriarchal values. Furthermore, working for gender equality is very dependent on a parliamentarian's personal values, understandings of gender relations, and the dimensions of gender inequality, as well as power relations within her own political party and the values of that party. Thus, special measures to improve

women's political representation need to be accompanied by further measures and social change that provide equality within political parties and political institutions.

The parliamentarians we interviewed showed a high level of gender sensitivity with several advocating for transformative gender strategies. However, this could be the result of our limited recruiting techniques within our own progressive networks. Furthermore, their anecdotes demonstrated many MPs had a low level of awareness or understanding of the causes and effects of unequal gender relations, which also limited SRW. This could also be interpreted as a strategic avoidance of addressing gender issues in parliament and politics leaving the status quo to prevail.

Strong loyalty to political party interests or party discipline was mentioned by all the respondents. Experiences in other countries show the use of quotas is more likely to become an effective tool for participation when women are enabled to reach decision-making and leadership positions within their political parties, which are often treated as the exclusive domain of men (IDEA 2005). Of the four main political parties, only one had a formal internal gender quota established and processes of compliance. In relation to political party allegiance, the issue of solidarity among women in parliament on gender issues was contested between the respondents, demonstrating this varies hugely depending upon the issue. However, it is clear that more solidarity and leadership among women and their allies in parliament is needed to increase SRW and gender equality more generally. Anecdotes of key gender issues debated in parliament were instructive in how solidarity might be accomplished strategically, particularly in concert with GPMTL. Additionally, more consideration needs to be given to women MPs and their competing roles in society if they are to be accepted and fully effective as leaders. Again, this requires further initiatives and transformational social change.

It was found that the parliament itself could be a hostile place for women and for other marginalized groups. Significant differences in power and status between men and women were apparent but so were other intersecting social categories for establishing authority and influence, including family background, age, class, and veteran status. How class intersects with gender and age was understood as powerful in this regard by many of the parliamentarians we interviewed. A new finding was that progress was apparent in the representation of lower socioeconomic groups in newer political parties. Another surprising new finding was that women held more substantive power within the smaller arena of the parliamentary committees particularly on the powerful Public Finance Committee.

Overall, women and men MPs working together is needed to progress SRW in Timor-Leste. Critical mass alone was not found to be totally effective at progressing SRW; rather, good strategic leadership of women MPs is required. In Timor's parliament, some MPs' personal experiences and ideologies are more favorable to SRW than those of others, irrespective of gender; thus, more progressive or greater diversity of MPs will likely lead to better SRW.

Most women MPs have attempted to the best of their abilities to represent their voters and women's concerns, but they work with limitations and lack sufficient independence to progress laws and policies that benefit all women. Their decisions

are constrained by their political party's orientation and the political alliances that they find themselves bound to support within a strongly patriarchal and competitive political system. There are clear signs of generational change. Furthermore, the representation of an LGBTI perspective in parliament is unusual for Asia, perhaps demonstrating that progressive forces along with Timor-Leste's extremely youthful population represent a great opportunity for future positive change in Timorese society.

Notes

1 The *Conselho Nacional da Resistência Timorense* (CNRT) or the National Council of Timorese Resistance was the umbrella organization for the independence movement 1998–2001. In 2007, the *CNRT* declared itself as a political party to contest the political dominance of Fretilin renamed *Congresso Nacional de Reconstrução de Timor* or National Congress for Timorese Reconstruction.
2 This analysis uses the WHO Gender Responsive Assessment Scale (WHO 2011) as a criterion for assessing programs and policies from low to high: Level 1: Gender-unequal; Level 2: Gender-blind; Level 3: Gender-sensitive; Level 4: Gender-specific; Level 5: Gender-transformative.

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PART III

Cases From South Asia

9

WOMEN'S SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION IN THE PARLIAMENT OF BANGLADESH

Understanding Key Trends and Tensions

Syeda Lasna Kabir

Introduction

The parliament of Bangladesh was established after gaining independence from Pakistan in 1971. It is a unicameral parliament with all legislative authority delegated to it by the Constitution of Bangladesh. Known as the National Parliament (*Jatiya Sangsad* in Bengali), it has seen the country switch between a presidential and parliamentary system numerous times during the past 50 years (Akter, 2019). In support of women's representation, the government took the initiative to reserve seats for women by establishing a quota in 1972. The exact number of seats reserved then increased over the years from an initial 15 to 30 (1979), 45 (2004), and finally 50 in 2011 (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018; Akter, 2019). Thus, the parliament now consists of 350 seats, where 300 seats are filled by directly elected members while the remaining 50 "reserve seat women parliamentarians" (RSWP) seats are allocated to parties based on the proportion of votes won in direct elections (Chowdhury, 2013). However, it remains to be seen whether this increase in descriptive representation has allowed women to play a more substantial role in the country's political and policymaking processes.

Representation of Women: Key Concepts and Theories

Over the years, scholars have explored the intricacies of political representation. A major contribution was made by Hanna F. Pitkin (1967), who identified three primary types of political representation: descriptive, substantive, and symbolic representation. "Descriptive representation" refers to the attributes of political leaders (e.g. their gender, ethnicity, caste, age) and to what extent these attributes match with the characteristics of the citizens they are supposed to serve (Hinojosa et al., 2017). "Substantive representation" indicates the degree of "policy responsiveness,"

that is the actual articulation of group interests in the policy formulation and implementation process (Hinojosa et al., 2017). "Symbolic representation" refers to a thing or person that acts as a symbol only. Multiple studies such as Barnes and Burchard (2012) have demonstrated that the presence of women in political leadership can encourage and inspire other women to engage more in politics. Relatedly, Zetterberg (2008) has suggested that quotas can be seen as an "explicit recognition" that politics is a place where women are just as important as men. Based on this argument, many countries have chosen to adopt a gender quota to ensure the representation of women in their political leadership. In broad terms, Bush (2011) identified two types of quota systems: (i) voluntary and (ii) legal. She further divided "legal quota" into two subcategories: (i) reserving a specific number of seats for women in the local or national government and (ii) making sure that a certain percentage of women are nominated by their respective political parties.

Unfortunately, the mere presence of women is not enough to bring about substantive change as a minority of women will only be seen as "tokens" in the political process and have very little or limited influence on parliamentary proceedings (Liu et al., 2014). In this regard, Dahlerup (1988) analyzed the trends of Nordic countries and claimed that if women could fill 30% of leadership positions, it would be enough to form what she referred to as a "critical mass." This critical mass of women would then be strong enough to start a chain reaction that will ultimately generate a qualitatively positive change for women. Thus, many countries have adopted gender quotas that hover around this percentage.

Bangladesh is one of the many countries that have decided to implement a gender quota to ensure numerical representation of women. Increases in descriptive representation are likely to empower women while making men feel less politically influential (Ulbig, 2007). However, simply including and improving the descriptive representative of women (DRW) are not enough to ensure substantive representation of women (SRW) in parliament. For instance one study on East and Southeast Asian countries by Liu (2018) indicated that women parliamentarians had actually discouraged other women from participating in regional politics. However, this is inconsistent with findings from Western countries (as discussed earlier). As a result, it is evident that the dynamics of representation are different based on the context of the country being observed and observations from one may not necessarily hold true for another. With this in mind, this chapter took the initiative to explore the unique dynamics that influence the representation of women in the political sphere of Bangladesh.

Women's Representation in Parliament

In Bangladesh, the numbers of women MPs have steadily increased since 1973 (see Table 9.1). A key contributing factor behind this increase in descriptive representation is RSWPs, as the quota for reserved seats has increased over time and is now set at 50 seats. The selection process for RSWPs, however, is quite problematic as these members are appointed by their party leaders and so will have to stay loyal

TABLE 9.1 Women's Representation in Bangladesh National Parliament (1973–2021)

Parliament	Reserved Seats for Women	Women MPs From General Seats	Total Number of Women MPs (Reserved + General)	Total Seats in Parliament	Percentage of Women MPs
1st Parliament (1973–1975)	15	0	15	315	4.8
2nd Parliament (1979–1982)	30	2	32	330	9.7
3rd Parliament (1986–1987)	30	3	33	333	10.0
4th Parliament (1988–1990)	0	4	4	300	1.3
5th Parliament (1991–1995)	30	5	35	330	10.6
6th Parliament (1996–1996)	30	3	33	330	10.0
7th Parliament (1996–2001)	30	8	38	330	11.5
8th Parliament (2001–2006)	45	7	52	345	15.1
9th Parliament (2008–2013)	50	21	71	350	20.0
10th Parliament (2014–2018)	50	19	69	350	19.7
11th Parliament (2019 – to date)	50	22	72	350	20.6

Source: www.parliament.gov.bd [accessed on 07 March 2021].

to their respective parties if they want to acquire and retain their seats in parliament (Meena, 2004; Akter and Nazneen, 2014). Moreover, this system indirectly influences aspiring women politicians to maintain subservient relations with their party leaders when compared to men who are instead able to focus on securing the support of voters from their constituencies (Akter, 2013). All of this limits what RSWPs can and cannot effectively do. So they are inherently viewed as being inferior to members of parliament (MPs) who have obtained seats through direct elections (Jahan and Kabir, 2012; Nazneen and Mahmud, 2012). This is despite the fact that RSWPs are far more active in parliamentary proceedings through the raising of motions, asking of questions, passing of votes, and by simply being present in sessions when compared to their elected counterparts as found by Ahmed (2013).

While the number of women MPs has increased to 72 (11th parliament), a large part of this is thanks to the quota system. However, questions can be raised as to whether the system was effective in improving SRW. Studies have shown that RSWPs are discouraged by party leadership to act proactively on their own initiatives in parliament and those who have acted in this way were often ostracized for

their actions which ultimately served as a deterrent for other RSWPs (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). It seems RSWPs could ask questions and raise motions as much as they wanted but only if the party leadership was happy with the direction they were moving. In addition, bills initiated by RSWPs face considerable resistance in parliament. History reveals that such resistance can be overcome only by securing the backing of the prime minister as was the case with the bill on domestic violence (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018).

Salient Issues With the Existing RSWP System

In Bangladesh, the candidates for the reserved seats have never contested in elections and are directly appointed by their party leaders (Chowdhury, 2013; Prothom Alo, 2018). Furthermore, RSWPs are also required to share constituencies with other MPs as the country is divided into 50 electoral zones to accommodate them (Paasilinna, 2016). Therefore, the current system results in RSWPs only being loosely connected with their assigned constituencies when compared to direct-seat women parliamentarians (DSWPs). This undermines their ability to speak for a local constituency while making them totally indebted to their party leaders (Chowdhury, 1994; Paasilinna, 2016).

Initially, these reserved seats were only envisioned as a temporary relief to allow women time to obtain the education, ability, and expertise needed to enter politics (Halder, 2004; Khondoker et al., 2013). However, this did not prove to be true as the number of women choosing to enter the political sphere continued to stay low. To make matters worse, political parties were using the quota as an excuse to avoid nominating women to contest general seats during the first two parliamentary elections held in Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 1994).

In addition, RSWPs receive a smaller allocation of development funds for their constituencies (one-third of what is given to other elected MPs), and this makes it abundantly clear to all that they do not share an equal standing with those who have been directly elected (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). This renders RSWPs as being nothing more than a tool to be used by the ruling party to hold a healthy majority in the legislature (Chowdhury, 1994; Jahan, 2014).

RSWPs also do not receive the same privileges that elected MPs receive and are discriminated against in parliament as the floor is often closed to them. Even when they are allowed to speak, they are allocated a very limited amount of time when compared to other MPs (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). Furthermore, unlike elected MPs, RSWPs are not allowed to ever become members of governing bodies of colleges and high schools nor play a role in the workings of local government bodies (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). In this way, RSWPs are not regarded as "true" MPs even by their constituents, and this has led to incidents where elected MPs forbade RSWPs from entering the constituency (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). Likewise, RSWPs who later served terms as an elected MP reported that there is a stark difference in the way that people had treated them before compared to the way they are treated now (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). This results in conflicts between

DSWPs and RSWPs who start seeing each other as rivals where the former does not want to act as a mentor for the latter and risk being unseated in future elections (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018).

Evolution of Parliamentary Politics

Despite its establishment in 1971, Bangladesh's first parliamentary elections actually took place in 1973 (Jahan, 1976). In an unfortunate turn of events, the ruling authority was strategically deposed through a military coup in 1975, and military rule prevailed in the country until 1990 (Akter, 2019). However, such arbitrary use of power could never be sustained and democracy returned once again in 1991, with the reestablishment of a parliamentary system of government.

   Aside from a brief spell of military rule (from 2006 to 2009), the country has not strayed away from democracy. However, the politics of the country has been infused with lessons from the military rulers of the past. As such, despite being a parliamentary system on paper, the practiced form of government is more "prime ministerial" in nature (International Crisis Group, 2015). Under the constitution, the government has three branches: the legislature, the executive, and the judiciary. The prime minister (PM) is the de facto head of both the legislature and the executive branches. In fact, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) somewhat resembles a presidential secretariat in its practices and scope of power (Muhith, 2006). The president plays only a ceremonial role applying a "rubber stamp" of approval and that too only on the advice of the PM (Ahmed, 2015).

Composition of Parliament and Parliamentary Committees in Bangladesh

The parliament is the supreme legislature authority of Bangladesh, and thereby parliamentary standing committees play an important role in overseeing the proceedings. Although Bangladesh adopted a parliamentary system in 1971, parliamentary committees began to be perceived as important only after the reestablishment of democracy in 1991, and the first bill was only referred to such a committee in 1996 (Ahmed, 2001; Ahmed, 2007; Jahan and Amundsen, 2012). As per the constitution, committees can be formed by the parliament as required and no specific provisions are provided in relation to gender when forming such committees. As a result, during the tenth parliament of Bangladesh, a total of 47 parliamentary committees were formed, and these committees consisted of 84% men and 16% women parliamentarians (Akhter, 2019). Currently, there are 50 legislative committees consisting of both women and men MPs, although the number of women in most of these committees is notably lower.

   Article 76 of the Constitution empowers these committees with various powers such as examining draft bills and other legislative proposals, reviewing enforcement of laws and measures to keep the executive in check. However, despite the powers conferred to these committees, the government is not actually obliged to respond

to any of their recommendations (Ahmed, 2001; Jahan and Amundsen, 2012). In reality, studies have noted that most activities behind the policy formulation process actually take place outside the parliament (Khan, 2006; Murphy, 2006; Pandey, 2008). This indicates that members of the executive are increasingly playing a more dominant role in policymaking while legislators are used only to approve a bill in parliament once the policy contents are finalized (Khan, 2006). As a result, parliamentary committees have very little influence on legislation.

In terms of sessions, the parliament does not actually meet very often at all in Bangladesh – averaging only 75 days per calendar year with each "sitting day" lasting an average of 3.32 hours (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). As for parliamentary committees, they meet only when it is necessary for them to review certain bills and legislative proposals or to scrutinize activities of the ministries. Thus, some committees meet more often than others.

Most MPs in Bangladesh are actually businessmen and as such spend a large portion of their time tending to their businesses (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). Women MPs are the exception as they spend the majority of their time in parliament (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). Yet, when a parliament is eventually in session, studies have shown that women MPs play a far inferior role in moving bills forward (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). Even bills pertaining to women's empowerment and representation have mostly been moved by men. Nevertheless, women do play an active role in asking questions or raising other motions as was evident during the ninth parliament where women raised 19% and 25% of oral and supplementary questions respectively despite comprising only 20% of MPs (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018).

In parliament, the extent that women parliamentarians – regardless of whether RSWP or DSWP – actually understand, use, and follow rules of the house also impacts their ability to influence parliamentary decisions (Karam and Lovenduski, 2005). A further impediment in Bangladesh is the restriction against "floor crossing" (Article 70 of the Constitution), which essentially prevents MPs from voting against their party, even if they do not agree with party directives. During parliamentary proceedings, most elected MPs also feel obligated to cater to the needs of their geographic constituencies (Saalfeld and Muller, 1997). Thus, DSWPs focus on meeting the needs of the people who elected them. However, RSWPs are able to focus on a much wider range of issues as they do not have to satisfy a particular locality in the same way as DSWPs (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018).

Sociocultural Barriers and Strides Forward

Bangladesh is largely a patriarchal society and this can be seen in the political arena as well – especially with regard to the treatment of RSWPs. These women have reported that male parliamentarians fail to acknowledge them as colleagues and routinely degrade them for holding reserved seats (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). DSWPs are also targeted as political parties sometimes form partnerships with the

opposition just to make sure that women fail to hold leadership positions (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). Familial and dynastic politics have also recently gained popularity whereby "hybrids" (such as sons and daughters of ministers or MPs) are being encouraged to take up politics (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). This reflects a tendency among the elected MPs to consider their seats as something that only they or their family members can hold on to and no one else. Unfortunately, it seems that such misguided notions have now almost become synonymous with the political culture of the country (Jahan, 2015). In fact, following in the footsteps of the men, women MPs are also beginning to initiate dynastic rule for their future generations rather than foster the growth of women political activists.

Nevertheless, Bangladesh has made remarkable progress toward removing certain gender gaps in recent years as it was ranked first amongst South Asian nations (for the third consecutive time) in the "Global Gender Gap Report" of the World Economic Forum in 2017 (World Economic Forum, 2017). The government has also provided civil society and women's rights organizations with timely support, which has translated into increased opportunities for women to receive more education and to make economic contributions (Akter, 2019). Since first beginning their activities during the 1990s (the "golden age" for feminist issues in Bangladesh), these organizations have now been able to successfully collaborate with the government to significantly improve the plight of Bangladeshi women (Rozario, 2004; Nazneen et al., 2010; Nazneen, 2017).

Despite these achievements, there are still numerous problems hindering women in Bangladesh. For example violence against women (VAW) is one of the biggest problems plaguing the country today (Akter, 2019). This is closely followed by gender-based violence (GBV) as data shows around "3,474 women and children" were affected by GBV between January and August 2017 (Steps towards Development, 2017). Other key issues facing Bangladeshi women include violence at the workplace, poor working conditions, and a lack of equitable laws for women regarding control, ownership, and use of land (Akter, 2019). These issues create significant constraints for the empowerment of women in Bangladesh.

Methods and Data

Data Collection

The primary data collection instrument used for this study was a semi-structured interview schedule provided and preapproved by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) of Germany. This was used to conduct interviews with various MPs to gather their thoughts about SRW in the National Parliament of Bangladesh. Due to the challenges of conducting face-to-face interviews during the COVID-19 pandemic, most of the interviews for the study were conducted online or over the phone.

Study Participants and Sampling

For this study, MPs were categorized into three groups – high, medium, and low. MPs belonging to parliamentary committees with the highest proportion of women MPs (over 45%) were categorized as "high"; those belonging to committees where participation of women was around 10–45% were categorized as "medium," and all other MPs were categorized as "low." Initially, the study planned to include MPs from all the different political parties. However, many MPs were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the tentative schedule prepared earlier had to be scrapped in light of these circumstances.

Instead, the researcher chose to utilize convenience sampling to reach out to MPs who were interested and willing to provide an interview. After that, the snowball technique was used by asking the participants to provide the contact details of MPs who they felt would respond positively to a request for an interview. In this way, eight interviews were conducted with various MPs (see Table 9.2). Furthermore, these eight MPs had actively played a role in 13 parliamentary committees (past and present).

Data Processing and Analysis

The majority of the interviews for this study were conducted through Zoom videoconferencing software while one was conducted over the phone. All participants expressly agreed that they could be recorded for research purposes. The interviews were primarily conducted in Bengali and then transcribed and translated

TABLE 9.2 Profile of Eight Interviewed MPs

#	Political Party	MP Status (Current or Former)	Committee Name (% women MPs)	Women's Representation on Committee
1	Ruling	MP	Public Accounts (6.7%)	Low
2	Opposition	MP	Law, Justice, Parl. Affairs (30%)	Medium
3	Ruling	MP	Civil Aviation & Tourism (10%)	Low
4	Ruling	Former MP	Labour & Employment (30%)	Medium
5	Ruling	MP	Social Welfare (50%)	High
			Women & Children Affairs (60%)	High
6	Ruling	Former MP	Foreign Affairs (20%)	Medium
7	Ruling	MP	Social Welfare (50%)	High
			Government Assurances (12.5%)	Medium
8	Opposition	MP	Public Accounts	No data
			Home Affairs (10%)	Low
			Government Assurances (12.5%)	Medium
			Library Committee (20%)	Medium

Source: www.parliament.gov.bd/index.php/en [accessed: 01.03.2021].

into English. Due to the low volume of interviews, the data gathered was analyzed by the researcher using the thematic content analysis technique. This involved the identification of prominent patterns and themes from within the data set. Those themes were then interpreted in accordance with the overarching research question to see whether higher levels of descriptive representation of women (DRW) due to RSWPs had any impact on parliamentary proceedings. Thus, through the analysis of these data, this study was able to gain key insights into the nature of representation in the parliament of Bangladesh.

Ethical Considerations

For this study, institutional ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Singapore Management University under the approval number IRB-21–043-A044(321). Furthermore, all participants were provided with the research questions well in advance of the interview and were informed that they had every right to stop the interview or not answer certain questions at any time if they felt uncomfortable. Finally, verbal consent was obtained from all participants before proceeding with the interview.

Personal Background

Parliamentarians are likely to be molded by their upbringing and as such, the study attempted to ascertain whether their backgrounds had any impact on the way they viewed SRW. Interestingly, all of the MPs interviewed reflected that they grew up in a family that was already politically connected.

> Apart from that, another big factor is that I am from a political family, both my father and mother did student politics.
>
> *(BGD.01)*

This suggests that, in relation to the interviewed MPs, those associated with a political family are more likely to secure seats in parliament. They are also trusted by their constituents who have seen their family serve them in the past, a phenomenon identified as "dynastic rule" by previous studies (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). Unfortunately, this culture of dynastic rule alienates aspiring politicians who do not belong to families with a rich political history.

Aside from this, the role parents play in influencing career decisions of their children can be very strong.

> Then my mother motivated me to become a singer . . . I continued both my studies and singing and then got married . . . eventually . . . I ended up joining politics as she wanted me to do something for the betterment of women.
>
> *(BGD.05)*

In a society like Bangladesh, children usually have little say over what career path they want to take. In this way, there are likely to be many who join politics just because that is what their parents thought would be best for them.

In terms of key gendered needs, most of the participants agreed that violence against women was the biggest issue that needed to be addressed.

> Violence against women is the biggest issue. Our government is working to address that . . . socially too we have to change our attitudes.
>
> *(BGD.03)*

Most of the MPs interviewed agreed that the way our patriarchal society currently discriminates between men and women is a key cause of violence against women. They felt that until and unless this mindset is changed, gender equality will never become a reality in Bangladesh.

Participants also reiterated that Bangladesh was very "unique" in that the PM, opposition leader and Speaker of the House were all women. They felt this must have had an impact on women, which is consistent with the view of Karp and Banducci (2008). Seeing women occupy such high-level posts must have indeed inspired many girls to step out of their comfort zones.

In terms of policy formulation, some of the MPs interviewed played a crucial role in getting certain policies passed that focused on gender issues.

> I was involved in the passing of the "National Women Development Policy 2011," the "Children's Act," and am advocating for the Representation of the People Order (RPO) to be strengthened . . . The government is also trying to pass an updated "National Women Development Policy" . . . which will be a huge achievement for us.
>
> *(BGD.07)*

These critical actor MPs have been trying to bring gender issues to the forefront. However, they acknowledge that our sociocultural environment combined with certain misguided sentiments are making the process of passing these types of bills or regulations rather "complex." Nevertheless, all of the MPs interviewed believe that their parties as well as the PM all want to see Bangladesh embracing gender equality.

Institutions

The institutions where the parliamentarians spend the majority of their working life do have an impact on shaping what issues they can or cannot raise and pursue. The sheer majority of men MPs can be a challenge for raising gendered issues.

> Over 75% of MPs in the Parliament are men, which is why, we, the women, still cannot take appropriate decisions . . . in the number of votes we are still behind them.
>
> *(BGD.03)*

> As a politician when I appear in front of the media, then it is observed that my identity as a woman becomes a key part of my criticism – "why is she not wearing a headscarf? Or, is she married? Does she have a domestic life?"
>
> *(BGD.02)*

The women MPs interviewed believed that after a certain level, our society has not become sufficiently developed enough to see women in positions of power. They particularly focused on how women are judged simply on the basis of the clothes that they wear. These begrudged sections of society are visible on Facebook where they make their opinions known for all to see.

> As a woman when I used to visit my area . . . they would refuse to give me a chair to sit on . . . they refused to include my name in the background banner as I am a woman. If I were a man, even from a reserved seat, then I would have gotten a chair. It happened many times . . . it was done deliberately just to harass me . . . if I had set a meeting, then two hours before the meeting local people will inform me that there will be no meeting.
>
> *(BGD.06)*

There are also additional obstacles for women who occupy reserved seats. These women are seen as being inferior to their elected counterparts as confirmed by the MPs interviewed.

> We, the reserved seat MPs used to get fewer chances. We were given less importance as they used to think that as we don't have fixed constituencies so what we will say about the concerns of our area?
>
> *(BGD.06)*

This is consistent with the findings of Franceschet and Piscopo (2008), who felt parliamentarians who occupy quota seats are subject to certain forms of discrimination and are likely to be viewed as being incapable as well. These RSWPs are distrusted by the elected MPs as they feel these RSWPs might compete with them in future direct elections (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). Moreover, these reserved seat members are actually able to focus more on gender issues and women advancement policies because they do not have to answer to any particular geographic constituency. However, the existing quota system severely limits their capacities in terms of both power and resources (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018).

This study found that women MPs who belonged to an opposition party were also treated unfairly.

> The majority is from the current government party and I am a woman member from the opposition party. I have to constantly request the Speaker for an extra 2 minutes or 5 minutes.
>
> *(BGD.02)*

This implies that women from an opposition party are likely to face even more obstacles compared to women belonging to the ruling party. This significantly decreases their ability to take part in parliamentary proceedings, which in turn negatively affects SRW.

There is also little scope in Bangladesh for MPs to engage in cross-party alliances due to Article 70 of the Constitution, which prevents MPs from voting against party directives.

> In parliament, I cannot do it. I can talk individually with other MPs or friends of mine during their time off. But in parliament, we cannot do that as there is no rule allowing us to go against the party there.
>
> *(BGD.06)*

This is a hindrance to substantive representation since women MPs of different parties could have cooperated and engaged in productive discussions on issues related to gender equality. However, some MPs do still feel that Bangladesh is not yet ready to part with Article 70 just yet. They feel that political parties will attempt to "buy votes" by enticing MPs with "monetary incentives." As such, they feel that the country has yet to reach the stage where one can blindly count on the integrity and morality of the MPs. In this respect, Bangladesh could follow the example of the UK Parliament by introducing the concept of unwhipped or "free votes" for certain issues (Institute for Government, 2021). Under this procedure, the parliament allows MPs to vote in "matters of conscience" (such as abolishment of death penalty and assisted death) based wholly on personal preferences and not party directives. Thus, Bangladesh could amend Article 70 by including a provision for such free votes, which could allow MPs to freely express their opinions on certain issues.

The current system of asking and answering questions is also not ideal for raising issues in parliament.

> Section 71 for asking an oral question, then there is another section, by which we can ask written questions . . . then a lottery is done to select questions that will be answered . . . so sometimes my questions did not come and so were unanswered.
>
> *(BGD.06)*

This "lottery" like system is not productive as it prevents MPs from being able to raise issues that they feel passionate about. Furthermore, for oral questions, certain MPs were earmarked as being "favorites" of the Speaker and so would get more chances to talk and ask questions when compared to others.

> There were some favorite persons of the speaker who used to get many chances to talk . . . if I can also become the speaker's favorite one day then I will be given a chance to talk.
>
> *(BGD.06)*

Combined, these characteristics severely limit the ability of MPs to raise issues that they are passionate about.

In relation to parliamentary committees, the composition and appointment of members are generally handled by the PM.

> It is usually under the jurisdiction of the Prime Minister. The Chief Whip of the government creates a list with the consent of the Prime Minister and it is presented at Parliament for voting.
>
> *(BGD.08)*

This reveals that the composition of these committees is not solely decided on the basis of expertise. Qualifications are considered, but the final decisions still rests with the PM. Nevertheless, these committees perform various functions though the responses received from MPs differ based on their party affiliation. Those who belong to the ruling party were very happy.

> These committees are very effective . . . We could ask them any question whether it was positive or negative. And they were bound to answer us.
>
> *(BGD.06)*

However, MPs belonging to the opposition party questioned the effectiveness of these committees.

> My speeches are heard, I am allowed to talk in the Committees . . . but the funny thing is, my speeches are noted of course but they take their own decisions since they have a majority.
>
> *(BGD.02)*

They question how effective a parliament such as this could really be where power primarily rests in the hands of the PM. Furthermore, other MPs highlighted the lack of follow-up processes for these committees.

> The issue is that the follow-up process is very weak . . . Due to the structure, no member of the standing committee gets to look into the implementation of the follow-up procedures. We do point out many loopholes in the system but unfortunately, it does not get the necessary attention.
>
> *(BGD.07)*

This highlights that despite their existence, the committees are ultimately unable to monitor whether their recommendations are actually being implemented due to a lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. This is a drawback of the existing system as recommendations of such committees are not binding and so may be ignored (Ahmed, 2001; Jahan and Amundsen, 2012). The MPs interviewed also agreed that the number of women present in the committees does have an impact

on how such committees will look at gender-sensitive topics as was proposed by Sanbonmatsu (2003). Increased presence of women does tend to result in increased discussions on gender-related issues in such committees.

Nevertheless, entering the political arena is still not going to be easy for a woman, regardless of whether they are highly connected or not. There are certain expectations that people harbor about politicians, and so people are reluctant to put their faith in a woman MP.

> From the very beginning, they think that women won't be able to accomplish it. Whenever I wanted to do a direct election, many senior leaders asked me if I could do it. . . . I have seen that men have these teams of musclemen that they use to harm or intimidate others. We women MPs don't have any such teams. Until these are banned, women cannot do politics freely.
>
> *(BGD.06)*

The existing political culture is more suited for men as people feel they have the capabilities necessary to get things done. Thus, women are indirectly being discouraged from entering the political arena unless they belong to reputed political families. This political culture needs to change to allow more women from diverse backgrounds to enter into politics. Moreover, the participants were disappointed with the existing training that reserved seat women received prior to their first parliamentary session.

> There were training sessions by some senior MPs but I could not understand anything. They have been in parliament for 30 to 40 years, if now they use those difficult languages, then how can we newcomers understand? It should be provided using easier language.
>
> *(BGD.06)*

The training sessions were brief and the instructors used very difficult language which made these sessions very hard to follow for first-time MPs. One of the women MPs interviewed revealed that she had to learn about all the procedures and rules of engagement herself. This issue should not be taken lightly. If new MPs are unable to understand how they should behave in parliament, then their ability to effectively contribute to discussions will be greatly diminished. As a result, these inefficient training sessions could act as an indirect barrier for SRW.

Intersectionality

Intersecting systems indeed affect women MPs in carrying out their duties. For example a woman MP from an ethnic minority background and a woman MP from a politically solvent background will face very different forms of

discrimination. Other systems that could overlap include marital status, party affiliation, and age.

> From the very beginning our culture is built up in such a way that at the end of the day – a marriage and family is a woman's main responsibility . . . And in our society, most successful women are not appreciated. We always want to see a girl succeed but not a wife . . . when a girl is given dolls and kitchen items to play with, that girl is being taught that your main responsibility is your home.
>
> *(BGD.02)*

This intersectional marginalization of women is underlined by our patriarchal society. This could refer to the phenomenon described by Ulbig (2007), where the more empowered a woman feels the more threatened a man becomes and so they try to reinstate the status quo. Though Ulbig referred to MPs, the underlying reasons – that is men beginning to feel less powerful than before – can be applicable to men in general as well. This is particularly the case in a society such as Bangladesh, where most men will actively try to discourage women from gaining economic or political independence so as to satisfy their self-esteem.

As for potential strategies, the participants agreed that education was the key to not only reducing these barriers but for also empowering women with the tools needed to become self-sufficient.

> I think the main obstacle is education, until we teach men about gender, equality cannot be achieved. It should start from childhood in the family, then continue in school, college, and then in public spheres.
>
> *(BGD.06)*

> Women are behind since in our society the finance is controlled by the men in the family. The government has many programs that are designed to assist women in this regard.
>
> *(BGD.08)*

The MPs interviewed acknowledged that the current younger generation is more supportive of gender equality and are hopeful of the future. They understand that the generation that they grew up with are unlikely to support these ideals and so progress has been slow in adopting gender-focused policies. They believe that education and programs such as microcredit are now allowing women to gain skills and become financially independent.

Nevertheless, most of the participants revealed that they were seeing some encouraging signs from women in terms of becoming more politically empowered.

> Earlier men used to force them to vote for a fixed candidate of their choice. But now they don't comply with that, rather they have grown their own

opinion now. Now women are empowered, they have their own money and they can vote for their favorite candidate.

(BGD.06)

This reveals that women are slowly but surely becoming more and more politically aware. This will hopefully lead to the participation of more women in politics and thereby improve the diversity of women MPs.

> In my area, there are no tribes so when I get called to forums regarding tribes, I do not join as I do not understand their issues . . . My views are influenced by my age, academic background, social upbringing, and familial background.
>
> *(BGD.01)*

This indicates that certain MPs are more inclined to listen to people who they can identify with. The more relatable they are and their issues to a particular MP, the more likely he or she is to address them. In fact, some of the MPs interviewed even felt that the nomination process for the reserved seats could be replaced with direct elections so that these RSWP are treated with greater respect. However, there are potential drawbacks to this approach too as highlighted by others.

> Let me say this that those who are not financially capable, those of us who are social workers and who work at the grassroots and those of us who do not have a lot of money, we won't be able to fight business women who will have a lot of money.
>
> *(BGD.03)*

In this respect, the RSWPs interviewed for this study identified strongly with their constituents and all seemed to have risen up from humble beginnings. If elections did indeed replace nominations, then it would be very hard for people to follow their example and they are afraid businesswomen or wives of prominent business-men will enter into politics. However, if measures could be introduced, such as a spending limit for election campaigns, then perhaps such reforms could be imple-mented in future. Another reform proposed by one of the participants encouraged cooperation between MPs in a district.

> In one district there can be 7–8 MPs, so the reserved seat MPs can sit with those MPs and maybe propose ideas or they can also go to the Ministries themselves with their proposals.
>
> *(BGD.08)*

Here, he proposed that MPs (both elected and reserved) working in a particular district could work together to come up with ideas or proposals for submission to the ministries. However, this is currently problematic as elected MPs usually see

RSWPs as a threat (Ahmed and Hasan, 2018). Thus, such cooperative arrangements are unlikely to succeed under the current political climate.

In terms of advocacy for gender equality, there are certain issues which the participants felt cannot be raised in Bangladesh just yet.

> Paternity leave sounds nice but since we still have more joint families, senior citizens consider this as a responsibility. I do not think a husband can suddenly take "leave" and start taking care of the child.
>
> *(BGD.01)*

The sociocultural environment and intersectional systems currently seen in Bangladesh severely limit the sort of changes that MPs can advocate for. Additionally, the practice of not being able to raise private bills also has a negative impact on ensuring a variety of issues are raised in parliament.

> Our MPs are very busy . . . if their work were limited to policies and laws then MPs would have been able to do their homework and submit these private bills. We lack the level of work required to submit these bills.
>
> *(BGD.08)*

The lack of structural support for MPs to draft and submit private bills means that MPs are largely reliant on ministries for the submission of bills. This means that MPs are not actually able to prepare bills as that is left to bureaucrats. In this respect, the gender of MPs is irrelevant as they are not able to initially prepare and submit bills according to their areas of concern. This practice needs to change. If MPs were self-sufficient, then they could submit bills that specifically address the issues that they are truly passionate about. Women MPs too would benefit from this and could then draft bills that are focused on promoting gender equality. Thus, by developing and encouraging this practice, SRW could be ensured.

Conclusion

It is evident from MP responses that the country has no doubt progressed a lot since gaining independence. The plight of women has also changed for the better as all eight MPs interviewed agreed that women are now in a much better position in society – both economically (as they have more access to resources) and politically as more women are now able to actively take their own decisions. The government has taken several initiatives to empower women in relation to inheritance, child marriage, and violence against women as well as in many other arenas. The provision of free books for girls was lauded by some of the MPs interviewed for having a critical impact in ensuring that girls completed their primary education. This has allowed girls to bravely step out from villages and seek a better life which is why there are more income-earning women in the country than ever before. However, all respondents also very clearly stated that they do not see these issues as

being "gender focused." Rather, these issues were discussed only in parliament due to their relative importance in allowing the country to progress. In other words, parliamentarians in Bangladesh do not seem to distinguish between issues in terms of whether they will promote gender equality or not.

In this regard, it seems that the findings of Dahlerup (1988) are quite relevant here as a critical mass of 30% women is still not present in parliament. Thus, as Dahlerup had stated, gender issues are unlikely to be discussed as the women present will be under pressure to discuss issues that are of national importance rather than those which advance the empowerment of women. This seems to hold true for Bangladesh, as despite the presence of certain critical actor MPs who have indeed pushed for reforms, gender issues are being discussed only as part of other broader issues and this is unlikely to change without the presence of a critical mass of women MPs.

Increased participation of women in the political process will require a change in the mindset of the population. All participants interviewed were in one way or another associated with a political family. It seems that those who wish to join politics must belong to such families, as otherwise they will not be able to win over the people. This phenomenon could be addressed by implementing Amartya Sen's capability approach (Dang, 2014). Sen had distinguished between "functions" (the things one could do) and "capabilities" (the things one could potentially do). Sen emphasized the freedom to choose, and in this respect, women are not free to choose a life in politics unless they are in some way associated or affiliated with a politically connected family. Sen also identified certain "conversion factors," which Dang (2014) grouped into three major categories: (i) personal conversion factors, (ii) social conversion factors, and (iii) environmental conversion factors.

Personal factors include physical attributes such as age or gender that negatively impacts a person's freedom of choice whereas social conversion factors include aspects such as social norms and cultural customs. Both of these factors heavily influence the participation of women in politics as the society of Bangladesh is still largely masculine and patriarchal in nature. Environmental factors such as physical facilities also play a role as there are many places situated throughout the country that do not even have a separate lavatory for women. All of these factors are currently limiting the freedom of women to choose and pursue a career in politics. Thus, in order to truly encourage substantive participation, the government must educate the public and change their outdated mindset toward women. This will have to be a long-term endeavor as such changes take time. Initiatives need to be taken to engage with families, communities, as well as religious leaders so that these outdated social norms can be rooted out from the ground up.

Aside from creating an enabling environment that encourages women to join politics, the MPs interviewed also highlighted certain procedural shortcomings as well. Currently, the training being provided to sworn-in parliamentarians on the rules and procedures of parliament is far too short and not easy to understand. This is especially problematic for women MPs as they will spend the majority of the first few sessions trying to learn the rules and processes on their own rather than actively

take part in discussions. This lack of knowledge on the proper processes reduces the abilities of all new MPs to make an impact on parliamentary proceedings. Thus, this initial training needs to be reformed so that parliamentarians are familiar with all the necessary processes before attending their premier parliamentary session. MPs have suggested that booklets of around 5–6 pages written in simple as well as clear terms could be prepared and handed out to MPs. In this way, they could refer to the booklet whenever possible to familiarize themselves with the necessary procedures.

In comparison to parliaments in other regions of the world, MPs in Bangladesh do not have their own office with teams of drafters and researchers to scribe draft bills. As a result, private bills are rarely ever raised in parliament. This is one key reason why SRW is being held back as MPs cannot put forth bills on their own as they do not have the knowledge or expertise to properly draft them. Instead, almost all of the bills discussed in parliament come from government ministries and only after a lot of the preliminary discussions about what to include or exclude is completed. As a result, allocating some resources toward the establishment of offices and staff for MPs would greatly allow women MPs to bring about substantive change.

To conclude, even though women's representation in parliament has indeed come a long way since gaining independence in 1971, there is still a lot that needs to be done. Once the sociopolitical norms begin to change, more and more women will hopefully look to join politics. This increased participation in combination with a more gender-aware society will allow these women to substantively carry out their duties and put forth bills that specifically push for gender equality. The current government has shown time and again that it is pursing initiatives that aim to improve the lives of women. As such, by addressing the key issues outlined in this chapter, the government will be able to not only develop a society that believes in gender equality but also encourage the parliament to become more gender sensitive in their procedures as well.

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10

SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS AND GENDER EQUALITY IN NEPAL

Aashiyana Adhikari

Introduction

Women's participation in politics remains a challenge globally as women continue to remain invisible in decision-making bodies (Jyoti 2015). In fact, according to the Inter Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Asian region has only 20.4% women in all parliamentary chambers (IPU 2021). Having said that, Nepal seems like a beacon of political representation with 32.7% and 37.9% women's participation in its lower and upper chambers respectively (IPU 2021). This is due to the provision of 33% seat allocation for women. Women's involvement in Nepal's national-level political leadership dates back six decades to when Dwarika Devi Thakurani was elected as the first female minister of the country in 1958 (Upreti, Upreti and Ghale 2020). At the time, Thakurani was the only woman in Nepal's bicameral parliament out of 109 members. Later in 1988, Nepali Congress leader Shailaja Acharya was appointed as Nepal's first deputy prime minister and the only woman to hold that position to date. More recently, in 2015, Bidya Devi Bhandari was elected as the first woman President of Nepal, and in 2016, women acquired the positions of Chief Justice and Speaker of the House. However, even in a position as iconic as that of the president, the role of women at the top has not been sufficient to justify unequal representation of female leaders in other government bodies (Adhikari 2020). Rather, women, like men, deserve proportional representation in order to get their voices and desires heard in legislation.

Orthodox liberal democratic philosophies, however, do not champion this line of thought because they put a stronger focus on how members behave on behalf of their constituents rather than who serves them (Pitkin 1967). Feminist scholars have countered this by calling for prominent participation of women in legislatures, dubbed as "the politics of presence" by Anne Philips (1995). In their view, increasing the number of women in legislatures is fundamentally necessary to improve

the social and domestic conditions in which women find themselves. But representation of women in parliament should not be merely limited to descriptive participation; instead, it should be more focused on substantive representation. The difference between "standing for" (descriptive) and "acting for" (substantive) representation, according to Pitkin (1967), is a key dividing line among forms of representation.

Wängnerud (2009) emphasizes that one of the central questions when studying the substantive representation of women (SRW) in parliaments is not just "what women do in parliaments," but rather "how far the percentage of women elected impacts women's interests." According to Phillips (1995, 47), gender parity among those elected to office is ideal because it will bring about more serious improvements: "It is representation . . . with a purpose, it seeks to subvert, add, or transform." Yet, Nepal falls short of this target.

In Nepal, women comprise about 33% of the Federal Parliament and former (2008–2015) Constituent Assembly. Women are also adequately represented in private sector occupations such as banking and the media (IPU 2021) . But unfortunately, those at the top – the political patriarchs – make sure a glass ceiling remains even when "many" women enter into the parliament.

Although many elections have been held for legislative bodies since 1951, representation of women in those bodies over the next five decades remained marginal to nil (Lama et al. 2011). Following the realization of multiparty democracy in 1990, three legislative elections were held in 1991, 1994, and 1999, but few seats were acquired by women showing that democracy does not inherently increase women's representation in politics and it does not equate to women having political influence and power over decision-making.

However, things changed at the end of the Nepalese civil war. As Lotter (2017) notes, "the advent of affirmative action in 2007 and Constitution of 2015 ensured 33 percent of seats in the parliament to women which was considered unimaginable in the past." Nepal witnessed numerous interconnected transformations following the 2006 peace agreement: from war to peace, from autocracy to democracy, and from a centralized to a decentralized state. Gender mainstreaming in policy and politics was likewise a high priority, although there were problems in putting it into practice.

A key clause (3) and sub-clause (b) of Nepal's interim constitution 2063 (2007) stated that political parties must ensure proportional representation of women, Dalits (so-called untouchables outside the caste system), oppressed communities/ indigenous peoples, "backward regions," Madhesis, and other classes. Following the conclusion of the armed war and the adoption of a new constitution, the country accepted women into top political positions, with a woman president (Bidhya Devi Bhandari) serving since 2015. Furthermore, provincial elections held in 2017–2018 witnessed an increase in participation of female representatives from all political parties in power (Upreti, Upreti and Ghale 2020).

Having said that, the Nepali Adhikari (2019) statistics demonstrate that while 91% of the deputy positions including those of deputy mayors and vice chairpersons

in rural municipalities were won by women, 98% of the chief positions like those of mayors and chairpersons were won by men. This reveals how power structures and gender hierarchy still play a huge role in Nepali politics. It also indicates that women have been denied political power despite getting assurance from political elites that they will be a part of state restructuring. Also, in certain cases women who are in powerful political positions belong to the higher strata of the society. Or these women are close to male political figures and mostly act as subordinates to them (Kanel 2014). Unfortunately, most women elected into the political system do not play a very substantive role and are there only to fulfill the quota mandated by the government. Women had a very small role and little power in building Nepal's 2015 Constitution and men often did not acknowledge the opinions of women in the decision-making process (Upreti, Upreti and Ghale 2020). Rather, men leaders in top positions seem to believe that women cannot be in charge of any political position and their representation should only be ceremonial (Adhikari 2020).

What has also been disappointing is that despite Nepal adopting gender quotas and other women-friendly policies, women's participation is substantially low in all government bodies (Upreti et al. 2018). Because of their gender, Nepalese women have long been impoverished, socially excluded, and marginalized. These disadvantages are particularly exacerbated for women from ethnic minorities and low-caste groups (Acharya 2020). The patriarchal social order, values, and women's rights preserved and safeguarded by the state, as well as state policies for women's growth, determine women's status. Women's relative standing, on the other hand, differs by ethnic group. Women make a significant economic contribution, yet it goes mostly unacknowledged because of their assumed traditional role.

Women's health, education, public participation, income generation, self-confidence, decision-making, policymaking access, and human rights are all in terrible shape. The Maoist insurgency, which lasted more than ten years, has expanded the gap even further (Acharya 2020). Yet, while Nepali women have always played a minor part in political leadership, they did, however, become active on several occasions and have made substantial contributions to political development in Nepal.

In the 1990 People's Movement, through active participation in politics, women from various areas and beliefs helped greatly in the country's achievement of removing the one-party government and building a multiparty democratic system (Acharya 2020). For example Mangala Devi Singh, Shalaja Acharya, Sahana Pradhan, and Ashta Laxmi Shakya are some well-known Nepalese women leaders who defied conventional wisdom (Acharya 2020). There is no doubt that both men and women made equal contributions to the People's Movement, human rights preservation and promotion, effective administration, and long-term peace. Men, on the other hand, solely hold on to the positions of state. Nepal's democratic processes have benefited greatly from the participation of Nepali women, but even within politics, discrimination against women persists.

Therefore, while women have succeeded in achieving higher positions in Nepal compared to the past, the progress accomplished so far is not enough to justify the prevailing inequality in the political system. Having political representation does not equate to the role women have over decision-making processes (Shrestha 2020). In Nepal, gender considerations have been discussed in party laws, policy manuals, and electoral manifestos, but most political parties still lack a gender agenda. The mainstream political parties' organizational systems reflect this gender imbalance in content and quantity with women's average participation in executive committees hovering around 15% (Dhakal 2015). Therefore, despite the growth of women in politics over the past 20 years, their advancement to leadership positions still continues to be a challenge.

Research Design

To fulfill these objectives and better understand SRW in Nepalese politics, this chapter employed exploratory research methods. As opposed to finding definitive answers to predefined problems, this form of research is useful for investigating a topic that has yet to be fully defined and to achieve a deeper understanding of the current problem.

Therefore, this chapter makes use of qualitative methods and primary data, namely semi-structured interviews focusing on women's participation in Nepalese politics. Interviewing MPs from diverse backgrounds was crucial to learn about their attitudes, backgrounds, and perceptions of women's engagement in politics. Additionally, relevant secondary data was collected from journals, publications, ministry portals, government speeches, and other published sources.

Interviewees included parliamentarians from different backgrounds who were selected to capture the intersectional diversity of SRW in Nepal. With the aim of incorporating both male and female perspectives, the respondents included six women politicians and two male politicians. Women legislators were also chosen from across the country and not just from the central province in order to represent geographical diversity and urban–rural differences. Women parliamentarians from marginalized groups were also interviewed in order to include their experiences. Recognizing the importance of parliamentary committees in parliament, interviews were conducted with members of three separate committees. Also, MPs from both the upper and lower houses were interviewed to obtain diverse perspectives. A description of these MPs is provided in Table 10.1.

MPs' Personal Backgrounds and Experience

Nepal has a significant chasm to close when it comes to leveling the playing field for women. According to the Human Development Report, Nepal is ranked 110th out of 162 countries, with a Gender Inequality Index of 0.476 (Baumann 2020). This clearly demonstrates a high level of gender inequality, which has always been

TABLE 10.1 Nepali MPs Interviewed in the Study (March–June 2021)

Interviewee Number	Gender	Parliamentary Committee (PC) Memberships	Political Party
NPL.01	Female	Legislative Management PC	Janata Samajwadi Party
NPL.02	Male	International Relations PC	Nepal Communist Party
NPL.03	Male	Legislative Management PC; Parliamentary Hearing PC	Nepali Congress
NPL.04	Female	Vice Chair; National Assembly	Nepal Communist Party
NPL.05	Female	(not on a committee)	Rastriya Prajatantra Party
NPL.06	Female	Deputy Speaker of Province 4 (Provincial Assembly)	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist – Leninist)
NPL.07	Female	Deputy Speaker of Province 3 (Provincial Assembly)	Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre)
NPL.08	Female	Member of Provincial Parliament of Province 3	Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist – Leninist)

a problem in the country. According to the 2011 National Census, literacy rates of men and women in Nepal differ by 17.7 percentage points and women are victims of sexual violence at a higher rate than men (Bhattarai 2017) . Even when it comes to health care, there are still women dying either during or after pregnancy due to a lack of basic health-care facilities. According to one young woman who is a member of a provincial parliament (MPP) in province number 3,

> Women's needs are not very complicated, but there are certain issues which are more important to women than men, for example when it comes to reproductive health, facilities like birthing centers, sanitary hygiene and availability of sanitary pads.
>
> *(NPL.08)*

Such needs are better addressed by women parliamentarians as they understand the needs of women better than the men MPs (NPL.03). But when we talk about women addressing the needs of women, we should not forget that women's autonomy and power to make decisions are also highly linked with increased equality in the society. Studies that look at men's perceptions of women's autonomy find that the unequal autonomy and power imbalance in the household are biased toward women, implying that women have less autonomy and power.

Similarly, male politicians in Nepal imply there is autonomy for women politicians to make decisions regarding women's issues, this is not always the reality. According to one MP, whenever women MPs try to offer any agenda pertaining to women in the parliament, they face disruptions (NPL.01). A minimum of 50% agreement is required for every bill to be passed by the parliament whereas women make up only 33% of the House of Representatives and 37% of the National Assembly. The influence of parties is significant and every party has a male leader.

Thus, it becomes difficult to enact a bill concerning women's rights and interests in this situation.

Most of the MPs who were interviewed either belonged to a political family, were well educated, or have been involved in politics for a long time. Women MPs were gender conscious and many conceded that their education and family support paved the way for their career advancement. Among six women MPs, three were from political families either from birth or through marriage. One could also see that women from a political background were a little hesitant to talk openly about gender issues as it might create some problem to the reputation of the political families that they come from.

Interestingly, three respondents were teachers before joining politics (unlike other women MPs whose entire careers have been in politics). Women who came from a teaching background had a good grasp of what they wanted to do for women's empowerment and were very vocal about it. However, this does not imply that women who came from a political background did not work for gender equality. One of the respondents entered politics because she wanted to challenge the gender roles in society as even at present when people talk about politics it is always associated with males.

As for male MPs, although they were highly educated, they seemed gender-unaware and their advanced education had no impact in making them conscious of the issues that have been oppressing women for decades in Nepal. One MP even claimed that "*there is no inequality in parliament of Nepal*" (NPL.03). This shows men's indifference regarding women's issues in the country.

Hindrances to Women's Political Advancement

When asked about family care work they have to fulfill, most women MPs responded that they have to make time for politics and are not as available as their men counterparts. Thus, women do not have as much time as men to move forward and engage in public life since they are responsible for their families and children. Nepal, being a patriarchal society, expects women to be the caregivers and usually restricts women from venturing into the public sphere. Thus, women are usually bound within their house doing household activities with neither time nor knowledge to venture into politics.

One woman MP from a marginalized community mentioned that

> Males attend private boarding schools while girls attend public institutions, resulting in a gap in education. Although the situation has changed since earlier, females were not sent to school and were expected to help with domestic chores. As a result, they were expected to undertake domestic duties and care for their children even as adults. As a result, women's lack of engagement in politics is mostly due to a lack of political education along with constraints put on women to labor solely within the home.
>
> *(NPL.01)*

Many women politicians mentioned that they also encounter financial difficulties and must seek permission from their husband, father, or other men in their family to run for office or even leave the house and travel. In a way, the power of their mobility and decisions is still under the control of the patriarch of the family they live in. Furthermore, political parties are overwhelmingly dominated by men. Financial independence and familial support are important variables in advancing women's political participation. The societal belief that men should be the ones in powerful political position also discourages women to participate in politics and work for gender equality. One elderly woman MP showed her dissatisfaction on how women in power are not given the same respect as they would have given to a man in the same position.

> Even though I am a vice president, an employee in a higher position asked me where the sir was after I returned home from work one day. The employee had come to meet me, but they had expected to meet a man figure rather than a female. The assumption that people feel that male members of society should hold positions of power questioned my motivation to stay in politics but instead of being discouraged, I tried being more vocal about the gender parity in the society.
>
> *(NPL.04)*

She is in a position where she cannot raise issues in the parliament, but she motivates other women in the same committee to act to combat inequality in the province. For women voters, especially in rural areas, they are heavily influenced by the men in their family.

> When it comes to women voters, we go throughout the village and our constituency asking women to vote for another woman. However, I believe women pay more attention to what their male family members have to say and vote for whomever they are told to vote. When I see the final total vote, I usually feel that way. Perhaps we haven't been able to make an impact on the ground level as women. There is no decision-making autonomy for females. If a patriarch supports a political party, the entire family must vote for that party.
>
> *(NPL.05)*

People elect MPs in the hope that their worries will be addressed. Yet, if women are not given the opportunity to run for office, how will women's concerns be addressed when men have delegated responsibility for women's issues only to women MPs?

Women MPs Contributing to Women's Empowerment

It is difficult to work for women's empowerment when women political leaders are still struggling to find their voice in parliament. Nonetheless, in their own ways,

women MPs have been trying to work on issues that they think are important to women in the country while for male MPs it was difficult to accept the various forms of discrimination prevailing in society. Instead, they argued that discrimination has decreased significantly whereas women MPs disagree with that argument. Because of social structures, perceived values, religious faith and customs, and many other factors, women have been subjected to gender-based discrimination, rape, and many forms of violence (NPL.06). Having laws on these subjects that are never actually implemented has proven to be ineffective. Similarly, women MPs have raised the subject of equal property rights. Although this too is on paper, effective implementation has yet to be seen.

> I believe that the main reason that women fear getting even when it is their right is the fear that they have of their families, society and the fear of what will they think if they demand for property.
>
> *(NPL.06)*

Another important role women MPs have played is evident in Bagmati province, where they are focusing on increasing the hygiene and sanitation in school toilets because in rural areas a lot of young girls miss school during menstruation.

> Despite the fact that it appears to be declining, women continue to be secretive about their periods and do not attend school. We initiated a "one school, one nurse" initiative across the province to break down such taboos and make school more comfortable for girls.
>
> *(NPL.07)*

On the one hand, this raised awareness about the importance of health and hygiene in the classroom and the community; on the other hand, it benefits not only young women students but all kids. In exchange, women receive support from their friends, family, and community members allowing them to attend school when on their period.

Furthermore, MPs are working on making provisions for maternity leave, vocational training, and promoting awareness among other things. In Nepal, uterine prolapse (UP) is the most commonly documented cause of poor health in women of reproductive age and postmenopausal women in Nepal, affecting around 10% of women of reproductive age (Silwal et al. 2016). Women's understanding of UP is currently unclear, and efforts to solve the UP problem are woefully inadequate.

> I personally lobbied for birthing centers to be established in local health facilities and for specialist health services to be provided at least once every six months. These doctors watch after and treat uterine prolapse. This may appear insignificant, yet it is a revolution. It's a revolution in and of itself for women to be able to say they won't give birth or do heavy work due to uterine prolapse. Making policies and focusing on larger concerns has

only resulted in minor changes. Small things, however, have a big impact on a lot of individuals.

(NPL.08)

Male MPs Contributing to Women's Empowerment

Among the two male MPs interviewed, one MP denied that there is much discrimination going on in the parliament and in the country while the other showed his concern over the increasing rate of domestic and sexual violence in the country. But it was clearly visible that actions taken by male MPs to reduce the violence prevalent in the country was a lot less. One emphasized that trainings should be given to women who seek foreign employment to give them alternative career options within the country (NPL.02). Although it clearly seems that he is trying to act upon the increased occurrences of sexual violence that happen to female Nepali migrants in foreign countries, he seems to be unaware of the current rates of gender-based violence within the country. It is true that both male MPs emphasized increasing the implementation of laws regarding women's rights, but it did not seem like they were aware of the gender discrimination going on within the country or chose not to speak about it.

Intraparty Women's Alliance for SRW

No matter what their background, most women MPs come together to advocate and fight for issues related to women. But sometimes, women MPs who want to support some issues feel like they cannot voice such issues because they do not align with what their party stands for. One former MP also mentioned that women are finding it difficult to unite their voices and speak out beyond their political party. MPs are expected to follow their party's wishes. Even when it comes to women's issues, it is difficult for all women to join together. But this does not mean that there is no women's intraparty union for coming together on women's issues.

A few success stories provide excellent examples of how a critical mass of women can bring about changes in the country and advance SRW in Nepal. For example women were united on the issue of a child attaining citizenship through his/her mother and they raised their voice enough to get the law implemented. Similarly, in cases such as domestic violence and rape, women unite even when there are differences among the parties (NPL.06). But women candidates' motives for getting involved in parliament and in the political parties are never the same. A constellation of interests has emerged as a result of livelihood struggles, socio-economic exclusion experiences, and complicated power relations within families and political parties (Limbu 2018). Thus, often, women who are in the parliament do not agree to pass a bill related to women because it does not align with their interests or motivations for joining politics, and sometimes women MPs are mere subordinates of political parties.

Institutions

Laws Regarding Gender Equality and Inclusion in Nepal

Article 12 of Nepal's Interim Constitution of 2007 guarantees every citizen's individual freedom while Article 13 guarantees the right to equality and provides for the formulation of laws to make special provisions for the protection, empowerment, or advancement of backward persons or communities, such as women, Dalits, indigenous peoples, and Madhesi, from economic, social, and cultural perspectives. The right of women to participate in state structures based on the concept of proportional inclusion is recognized in Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Similarly, Article 33 of Nepal's constitution specifies that the state will follow a strategy that ensures participation of all citizens from a backward class or region, including Madhesi, Dalit, indigenous peoples, and women in all the bodies of state structure on the basis of proportional inclusion. Similarly, Article 142 ensures that people from marginalized and oppressed groups, such as women and Dalits, be included at various levels of executive committees that must be registered in order to be recognized as a political party for electoral purposes. But in order to build on previous efforts for gender equality and inclusion, policies, regulations, procedures, and institutional mechanisms for elections must be developed to accommodate the demands and concepts of gender sensitivity and inclusion.

Political Change in Parliamentary Structure After the Civil War

While the country's democratic forces were preparing for the country's second people's movement in 2006, the Nepali women's movement was focused on displaying transformative leadership. The Nepalese social structure is founded on patriarchal Hindu philosophy in which males are empowered and women are subordinated (Luitel 2001), and this structure was highly restrictive before the advent of democracy in the country. Women were deemed weaker than men and had to rely on men for a lot of things. Women's social standing (including inheritance rights, ceremonial status, and property access) was also derived from their fathers, husbands, and sons.

Therefore, to overcome this patriarchal culture, women who were then in politics spoke with one voice in front of men-led political groups, proposing a nine-point gender agenda that included,

> (a) Equal right to descent, (b) Equal right to ancestral property, (c) At least 1/3 women participation as critical mass, (d) Campaign to end violence, abuse and mal- practice against women, (e) Full democracy, sustainable peace and human rights, (f) Rehabilitation of women conflict victims, (g) Reproductive health and rights, (h) Special provision for women's education, and

(i) Affirmative action to emancipate women under the name of Inter-Party Women Network (IPWN).

(Pandey 2016)

After the restoration of democracy, political parties agreed to carry them out. Pandey (2016) explains that as a result, a large number of women took part in the anti-monarchy movement in April 2006, sacrificing their sweat and blood to lay the groundwork for a republican Nepal.

Consequently, on behalf of the women's movement, Bidhayadevi Bhandari moved a resolution in the reinstated parliament on 30 May 2006, which covered four important points: women's equal right to (a) descent, (b) property, (c) participation, and (d) a law against violence against women. This went above and beyond what had been anticipated at the outset.

Despite women playing a critical part in conflict, their representation did not materialize in the postwar era. Not a single women was included in the peace negotiations, and the peace treaty hardly acknowledged women's concerns (Ghimire 2020). The Comprehensive Peace Accord led to the establishment of a National Monitoring Committee to draft a new Interim Constitution, which included two women among its 31 members. Two more women, along with Dalit [marginalized] community members, were brought in after continual pressure and lobbying by women in political parties and civil society.

When the constituent assembly was established, women held approximately one-third of parliamentarian positions and four ministry positions out of 24 in the April 2008 elections (Limbu 2018). However, between 2008 and 2020, Nepal's government has changed 11 times. With the exception of Dr Baburam Bhattarai, none of the previous prime ministers met the mandate of having 33% women in cabinet and ministerial roles. Even at present the cabinet of Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli does not have 33% women ministers.

In the aftermath of the country's national conflict, Nepal switched from a centralized, unitary political structure to a federal government system. The bottom-up growth process began with the 2017 municipal elections, which cleared the ground for it. But despite having 32.7% women's representation in parliament and 40.9% women's representation in local governments, which is the highest number of women ever elected to public office in the country, it is clear that women's roles were solely given to them to meet the quota requirement. Women's descriptive representation has improved as a result of the quota system. But even when there is representation quotas in the parliament some women MPs are not satisfied with it. As one MP explained,

> I'm on the legislative committee, and I'm an advocate for women to be represented in all of the ordinances proposed by the ministry's various committees. It is not representation to have only one woman on a 25-member committee. I am a strong advocate for equitable representation. This, however, has not been adequately addressed. Despite this, my main goal is to

make every committee more woman-friendly by having a proportionate
number of women on each committee.

(NPL.01)

As this MP has mentioned, in many committees and government bodies women
are represented only to fulfill the required quota. They are simply present to add
numbers and satisfy the quota requirements of political parties. There would be
much fewer women in the parliament and committees if government had not
implemented a mandatory quota scheme. Does this mean efforts in Nepal to give
opportunities for women to climb to the top of political decision-making have
mostly failed to materialize?

On the one hand, as Limbu (2018) notes, women are granted a quota of 33%
of parliamentary seats, 40% of seats in local government organizations, and seats
for Dalits, ethnic minority, and indigenous women in Nepal's new Constitution of
2015. On the other hand, despite the establishment of a number of organizations
to promote gender equality and social inclusion by the government, post-conflict
development politics appear to have been dominated by a limited number of elite
politicians from privileged caste and class backgrounds. Women's quotas, for exam-
ple, were occupied by privileged women groups (who had better education, skills,
and training). As a result, at the grassroots level, gender mainstreaming did not
benefit non-elite women.

Is the Quota System for or Against SRW?

As mentioned earlier, Nepal has put in place provisions to include women and
members of other marginalized communities in parliament and other state leader-
ship positions. For instance in Nepal, a woman must serve as either the country's
president or vice president, according to the constitution. Similarly, this holds true
for the president of the legislature and the chief of the judiciary. Also, the mayor or
deputy mayor of every municipality must be a woman. Furthermore, every ward in
every municipality must set aside two seats for women, one of which must be held
by a woman from the Dalit caste, a group traditionally marginalized in society's
leadership. Nevertheless, only 2% of the 753 mayor and chair seats were filled by
women whereas 91% of the deputy roles were filled by women. The role of deputy
mayor, deputy speaker, and deputy chair comes in place only when something
has happened to the mayor, speaker, or the chair (Limbu 2018). As one informant
explained,

I am the deputy speaker of my province, which has a male head speaker.
Only when he becomes ill, and only when my other women delegates raise
their voices, do I have my chance. Our main task is to draft acts in accordance
with the Constitution. Many things haven't come from the top level in this
process, making it difficult for us to perform.

(NPL.07)

Similarly, another informant responded,

> Province 2 as compared to other provinces has a lot of discrimination and inequality against women and although the voices should have been raised more frequently, but I was chosen vice president of the national assembly and do not have the authority to speak. My authority is limited to running operations in the president's absence, and only if required.
>
> *(NPL.04)*

Right now, only 2% of women are represented in crucial decision-making posts such as mayor/chief and ward chair, which are non-quota seats. Meanwhile, despite accounting for only 16% of the entire population, Khas Arya[1] men continue to dominate key decision-making positions comprising 48% of mayors and 44% of ward chairs (Limbu 2018). In this environment, many elements are at play, including historically institutionalized gender discrimination, patriarchal mindsets, socially constructed exclusion and behaviors, and economic position. The Constitution of Nepal, on the other hand, guarantees equal rights to all citizens, with affirmative action for women and marginalized groups. The truth, however, is that formal equality is insufficient since women and disadvantaged groups are not treated equally when it comes to taking advantage of official chances.

In many cases, it is clear that women candidates are chosen not to empower women but for the sake of meeting the 33% quota system. Top leaders' personal interests are also prioritized in political recruitment over a candidate's capacity and commitment to the party (Limbu 2018). Also, gender quotas have attracted a wide spectrum of actors to the new political spaces they have established. Many of the women candidates have no prior experience in social work or activism, and this is their first foray into the official political sphere. In Nepal's political environment today, which is characterized by patronage and clientelism, there is little doubt that personal political connections play a critical role in gaining entry to and sustaining the durability of women's political journeys. Hence, even when educated women politicians come through the quota system they are considered as second-class citizens and are not given a respectable position in the parliament by men parliamentarians on the grounds that they have been given spaces only for the sake of constitutional provisions (NPL.08).

Although, a lot of women entering politics in Nepal are more educated and gender aware, previous studies have found that "it is also difficult for political parties to find suitable and winning female candidates" (Acharya 2003). The decision between choosing high-profile central-level women leaders (who belong to influential circles and are tied to some of the party's prominent male leaders) and women from the party ranks who come from local politics has always been a difficult one for political parties. Nepalese parties tend to select "powerful" women as candidates in the majority of cases as is typical in both developing and wealthy nations (Acharya 2003).

There is no doubt that "the more qualified and experienced members enter the legislature, the more effective and productive the house can be," (Limbu 2018), but we need to be also realistic about what is available on the supply side (among the party cadre and affiliates) and how women's representation can be ensured. In reality, we have not yet reached the point where we are willing to compromise on the issue of "equitable representation" for the sake of "quality." It is shameful to provide spaces for women solely for the sake of a constitutional provision while doing nothing to address misogynistic behavior against them and their removal from key decision-making processes.

Gender-Insensitive Institutions

Currently, the federal parliament of Nepal has ten lower house committees, four upper house committees, and two joint committees. In a huge boost for women's leadership, more than half of these committees (9 of 16) are now led by women legislators. Having said that, there is still a lot of discrimination that goes on in the committees. Dismissal of issues concerned with women is quite common among the male MPs on the committees. As one interviewee noted, "The concerns that we bring to the table during the committee meetings are sometimes simply dismissed saying that this is not what the committee is responsible to do" (NPL.08). The most SRW activity takes place in two committees where the number of women is remarkably higher than the number of men – the Women and Social Committee and the National Interest and Coordination among Members Committee.

When we look more closely at the committee structure, the chairs of committees dealing with public accounts, law, justice and human rights, industry, commerce, labor and consumer interest are men and the members of these committees are highly dominated by men MPs. A lot of women MPs say that although they are given the chance to speak in these committee meetings, they think that political committees have embraced women's representation only because they are obliged to do so by constitutional restrictions, rather than because they believe it is the proper thing to do (Shrestha 2020). They claim that their rhetoric of equality and inclusiveness does not always translate into deeds.

However, according to the view of one male MP (NPL.02), women are voicing their opinions when necessary and have been chairing a lot of parliamentary committees and this is equitable representation. He further added that, "the committees have always chosen candidates based on their qualifications, and women who are qualified have been vocal about their issues and needs in the committee meetings." This is contradictory to what women MPs feel. One woman MP said that,

> Although the committees have performed admirably under the leadership of women, many women have raised their concern that they are not given the chance to speak and they are demeaned in the committees, more so in the parliament. They claim that they have given their names [to speak] but they

> are usually dismissed [and told] that they can speak next time, but the next time usually does not come.
>
> *(NPL.04)*

Furthermore, parties backing up their MPs is very important and issues regarding women can be raised only when the party is aligned to a similar ideology.

> We sometimes cannot talk about certain issue since our party does not support that issue, and due to very limited representation of women within the party we cannot increase our voices against it.
>
> *(NPL.05)*

Even though Nepal is ranked forty-fourth in the world for women's representation in parliament (IPU 2021), some political parties in the country still have less than 20% women. Within these parties although physical harassment is unheard of, mental harassment and bullying are quite common (NPL.05). Sometimes, women who try to raise their voice on an issue are dismissed or often not given their turn to speak by men MPs claiming that they already know about the issues.

Advancing Women-Friendly Policies in Nepal

Although descriptive representation helps women gain important positions in politics, it is insufficient to tackle gender inequality which requires substantive representation (i.e. pushing forward policies that would benefit women). The following are three prominent issues to enter parliamentary debates over the last 12 years.

Chhaupadi Pratha – *2005; 2017*

Chhaupadi pratha is the abandonment of menstruating women and girls to menstrual huts with various restrictions on their social mobility and daily chores. *Chhaupadi* was declared illegal by the Supreme Court in 2005. Despite this, the high number of women killed as a result of the practice led to its outlawing again in 2017 under the Civil and Criminal Code, which stipulates that anybody who forces a woman to practice it can be imprisoned for up to three months and fined up to 3,000 Nepali rupees. Despite the fact that the first arrest was made in 2020, *Chhaupadi is* still widely practiced.

Citizenship Amendment Bill – *2006; 2018*

A foreign woman who marries a Nepali man is automatically granted Nepali citizenship under the existing Citizenship Act of 2006. However, patriarchy and patrilineality are institutionalized when a child inherits citizenship from their mother. Many Nepali citizens are now stateless as a result of this. For the past few years,

MPs have been debating an altered bill, with parliamentarians repeatedly bringing up the sovereignty argument, limiting Nepali women's freedom.

Domestic Violence (Offence and Punishment) Act – 2009

The bill for this Act was submitted in 2002 and passed in 2009 after seven years of debate in the parliament. This act defines domestic violence and domestic partnership, criminalizes domestic violence and lays out the process for submitting a complaint, as well as the victim's compensation and the perpetrator's punishment. However, this has not translated into legislative action. This can be seen in the unwillingness to change the citizenship bill and the fact that it took seven years for the Domestic Violence Bill to become a law (Ghimire 2020).

Similarly, before becoming statutes and acts, various other bills and laws related to women's issues had to overcome numerous objections within the parliament. Hence, the quantity of female-friendly policies established in the 12 years following the conflict has been substantially lower than anticipated.

Intersectionality

While affirmative action seats have helped the disadvantaged to establish a footing, the parties have done only the bare minimum, and in some cases have even broken the laws. As a consequence, Nepal's ethnic diversity is still not properly represented in the parliament. The Madhesis and Tharus now have more representation in the government than in previous regimes, but women and Dalits still have a long way to go before attaining parity (Paswan and Gill 2018). When women who are from marginalized communities do not get elected it is very difficult to act on issues that would uplift the status of marginalized communities in the nation.

> When I joined politics, people questioned my choice as I come from a marginalized community in Nepal and on top of that I was a young woman and it is very unheard of – a young woman coming from a marginalized community entering into politics.
>
> *(NPL.07)*

Dalit women and women from lower castes face significant hurdles as a result of Nepali society's ongoing emphasis on caste; so the struggle they face is much higher than women who are from upper castes and have a privileged background. Having said that, one can see that women who come from such underprivileged backgrounds work more on equality than any other stratum in the society which was very interesting to observe.

> Women, in my opinion, are better at managing commitments than males. In their duties, women are sensitive and serious. This is also due to the fact that

they recognize that the platform they have been given was not given to them easily, and they strive diligently to attain success.

(NPL.07)

Contrastingly, it is easier for males to take power or a platform for granted, but women take their responsibilities seriously since it has not come easily to them.

Madhesi, Dalit, Janjati, Muslim, Tharu, women, differently abled, minorities, and other tribal people not only lag behind in political representation but also Human Development Index. Thus, I decided to enter politics with the goal of becoming their voice so that these groups receive a proportionate share of the state's property, power, and status. I'm following through on the commitments I've made to them.

(NPL.01)

MPs like NPL.01, who comes from a marginalized community, are setting an example by working to politically represent the marginalized communities. But social stigma, prejudice, mobility restriction, and a lack of accessible information and services challenge marginalized women. Their twofold marginalization (or quadruple marginalization if they are from a lower caste or ethnic group) imposes significant hardships on their daily lives.

In Nepal, rural–urban splits also set unique demands on women's experiences in society, especially when the nature of their employment is very difficult such as migrant, domestic, and industrial work. The lack of rural women's voices is a common issue in Nepal, where patriarchal society places a premium on family members who are men making decisions and making even simple chores more complex (International Foundation for Electoral System 2017). These kinds of difficulties are faced even more by women who are alone, widowed, or divorced. Thus, with men leaving these issues to be solved by women, there is a dire need of women from diverse background to represent and address them in parliament.

Conclusion

Some women enter into politics to become a voice in parliament for the voiceless people while some enter just to become an aid for male politicians or to serve their needs. While Nepal's quota system has been a first step for ensuring descriptive representation of women in the country's political system, SRW requires a change in the attitudes of people including parliamentarians regarding women parliamentarians. Men parliamentarians often believe that there already is equal representation and that the quota system has done justice to women, but they often forget that women are not a homogeneous group and it is difficult even within the quota system for certain categories of women to climb up the political ladder. To remedy this, more diverse women should be encouraged to participate in politics and

because democracy is based on the majority voice, current arrangements are insufficient to protect women's rights.

On the basis of the results of the previous constituent assembly elections, it is clear that explicit legal provisions are required to ensure that women participate at a minimum level in all political entities in the country. While political parties met the 50% women from the PR list criteria, there was a breach on the FPTP side due to a lack of clarity regarding the minimum number of women candidates that political parties were required to nominate. Simply providing 33% women candidates may not be the answer, since the constituent assembly election results revealed that men and women compete on an unequal basis in the country's elections.

Women's diversity should also be recognized and included into gender quotas and other affirmative action initiatives across institutions in Nepal. This endeavor, though, cannot be a one-time thing. Policymakers and female leaders must instead make a series of intentional and inclusive initiatives over time to diversify political involvement. It should also be seen that women MPs are deemed responsible to make decisions for women empowerment and act upon gender inequality as they are more committed to SRW compared to men MPs. Although having a critical mass of women MPs would ideally do more for SRW than a small share of women, in the context of Nepal from the earlier findings, it can be seen that the larger number of women in the parliament does not automatically equate to them having decision–making power.

More women MPs also cannot ensure SRW as women candidates were sought in droves primarily just to meet the quota requirement in the parliament. In fact, rather than selecting candidates from within their own parties, the party leadership went out in search of outside candidates, which they normally achieved through political/personal connections (Limbu 2018). As a result, women who lived close to powerful men benefited the most and women's representation became reduced to quantity rather than quality. Thus, in the context of Nepal, despite women having strong intraparty alliances, a critical mass of women still has not been influential enough to work for SRW.

Furthermore, one can see that women who are educated and gender aware work more toward SRW than women who are not educated and lack political knowledge. This study also found that men MPs who came from a privileged background worked remarkably less than women MPs toward equality. Men MPs focused on solving issues other than gender equality and implied that women should be the ones responsible to work toward such issues while women considered issues of inequality as their own personal issue and were thus more likely to act upon them.

In spite of the current quota system, the lack of diversity among parliamentarians is still ultimately one of the major problems faced by the parliament of Nepal and a reason many issues related to gender inequality still remain highly prevalent. As a result, increasing the diversity of MPs should be mandated in parliament to achieve gender equality and SRW.

Note

1 Khas Arya include the Hill Brahman, Chhetri, Sanyasi, and Thakuri. As a group, they occupy the bulk of Nepal's bureaucracy, judiciary, and public offices.

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11

TOWARD ADVANCING SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT

Case Study of Sri Lanka

Ruwanthi Jayasekara

Introduction

The representation of women in parliament has remained a topic of discussion among scholars and policymakers for decades. Among the various forms of representation, substantive representation is defined as "acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them" (Pitkin 1972, 209). This implies that "women's interests and female citizens are central to the representative process" (Celis 2009, 2). For a parliament to become gender sensitive, it is further noted that it should consist of women's representation (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2008, 61). The foundation to achieve this goal has been laid by the international community.

International momentum in favor of gender equality and women's leadership has been growing since the 1995 United Nations (UN) Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action launched at the conference built off earlier achievements including the International Year of Women in 1975 and International Decade of Women from 1975 to 1985. It also contributed to the 2000 UN Security Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security and the 2015–2030 Sustainable Developmental Goals (SDGs) campaign.

However, there seems to be clear differences in access to sociopolitical, economic, cultural, and institutional rights for women in developed countries compared to underdeveloped and developing countries. The reason for this appears to lie not only in the international division of labor and continuing effects of colonialism and imperialism but also in domestic conditions of society, economy, politics, and culture, which frame perceptions of gender (in)equality. This notion derives from a classical sociological lens presuming that development and modernization of a country increases and improves women's representation (Raymond and Rosenstone 1980, 158). From this perspective, wealth and education are two major components of development which correlate with increased support for

democracy, social spending, and societal pressure for the emancipation of women (Burns et al. 2001). Therefore, Sri Lanka as a developing country is a place where we might expect less representation of women than in countries with higher levels of modernization although the much smaller share of women in its parliament compared to countries like Nepal suggests that political structures may also play an important role.

This chapter examines the behavior of Sri Lankan members of parliament (MPs) and their gender consciousness. It critically analyzes the role of MPs in advancing substantive representation of women (SRW) and various obstacles. It identifies critical components in successful legislative outcomes addressing current challenges and creating gender equality. Finally, this chapter will recommend actions that are necessary to advance SRW in Sri Lanka.

Background of Sri Lankan Parliament

In Sri Lanka, the political system is semi-presidential. The executive branch is headed by the president who works alongside the prime minister and a cabinet. The president is not only the head of state but also the head of the cabinet, the government, and the armed forces. At the same time, Sri Lanka has an active unicameral legislature. In the first session of its ninth parliament (commencing in August 2020) there are 225 MPs and they meet regularly during the first and third weeks of each month. However, as there is no gender quota in parliament, only 12 seats (5% of the total) are held by women compared to 95% by men.

According to the 1978 Constitution, MPs are selected from 22 multimember electoral districts through proportional representation (PR). In addition, MPs are appointed via a national list, where members are nominated by a political party or an independent group. The number of seats allotted to the national list depends on the proportion of their share of the national vote. In the current legislature, there are 196 MPs elected from 22 electoral districts and 29 MPs from the national list.

Women's Representation in Parliament

When examining women's representation, previous studies have tended to highlight "descriptive representation" of women (DRW) paying more attention to the number of women in politics (Joshi and Och 2014). By contrast, research on SRW in politics identifies the real influence of women upon political outcomes (Childs and Krook 2009). Acknowledging the diversity of women in society, recent studies on SRW have also increasingly focused on intersectionality (e.g. Manuel 2006; Steinbugler et al. 2006; Cho et al. 2013).

Via the theory of the "politics of presence," Anne Phillips (1995) proposes a link between descriptive and substantive representation. The theory highlights two arguments, namely the "justice argument" and the "interest argument." Together they call for a gender balance among parliament representatives because current social norms lead to an oversupply of men who will not defend women's interests

as much as women. On the other hand, successful women politicians bear the possibility of becoming role models for other women to feel interested in joining politics. As empirical research has demonstrated, women parliamentarians have initiated more debates on women's interests and supported feminist bills than men (Swers 2005; Chaney 2011; Piscopo 2011). Thus, according to Phillips (1995), the issue of descriptive representation can be resolved via caucuses and quotas as solutions for political exclusion.

Gender becomes a barrier on top of class, ethnicity, religion, and age for women to enter into politics. Despite the removal of discriminatory laws, women continue to struggle. For example male MPs use sexual or verbal harassment to dominate women MPs (O'Neil and Domingo 2015, 4). Therefore, these reasons lead to underrepresentation and ineffective SRW in parliament.

To advance women's representation in parliament, a dynamic perspective is more helpful than a static one. According to Wängnerud (2009, 66), in the static perspective, "when women enter the parliamentary arena, they take over certain areas from men, but nothing becomes fundamentally different as a result. Yet, the dynamic perspective sees the emergence of genuine change." Thus, the challenge for Sri Lanka remains to dynamically improve SRW and ensure more efforts are taken to achieve outcomes which successfully benefit women's interests.

Sri Lanka is known for having achieved several breakthroughs in women's descriptive representation in politics. In 1960, the country had the world's first female Prime Minister, Mrs Sirimavo Bandaranaike, and in 1994, her daughter Mrs Chandrika Kumaratunga became Sri Lanka's first female Executive President. As one study points out, women were involved in community-level activities to enter parliament in 1947–1977. The first woman who entered parliament was Wimala Wijewardena, who later became the first female minister of the parliament. This motivated other women to consider entering parliament despite their gender, age, and ethnicity (Wickramasinghe and Kodikara 2012, 776). In Sri Lanka, there have also been women in senior management positions including CEOs, Chief Justices, and Supreme Court Judges. Yet, the question remains as to whether these women in leadership have led to better SRW.

Although there have been various efforts taken by the central, provincial, and local governments toward increasing gender equality, DRW in the national parliament has remained exceptionally low. Thus far, only at the local level has a gender quota recently been implemented after several decades of discussion making Sri Lanka one of the last countries in Asia to introduce a gender quota (Jalalzai and Krook 2010; Wickramasinghe and Kodikara 2012). This legislated candidate gender quota for the local governmental level (LGL) includes a mandatory 25% reserved seats for women as an "independent group" starting in 2016 to be increased up to one-third the total number of seats as well as legislative mandates from 2017 with parties instructed to nominate women to both First-Past-the-Post (FPTP) and Proportional Representation electoral lists (Vijeyaras 2020, 1).[1] Another accomplishment was the 2005 Prevention of Domestic Violence Act. Yet, during the parliamentary debate on that act many women remained silent on

the issue and "one of the few women who did speak, Sujatha Alahakoon (JVP) expressed deep anxieties about the impact of the Bill on the sanctity of the family" (Wickramasinghe and Kodikara 2012, 801).

Despite these measures, in Sri Lanka the share of women in parliament has consistently remained under 6% and SRW in parliament has likewise not been very impressive as will be discussed in the following.

Methods and Data

The objectives of this study were to comprehend how parliamentarians are involved in promoting gender equality in Sri Lanka, to document the struggles of women MPs, and to propose how MPs can do better at SRW. To understand parliamentarians' experiences, primary data was obtained via interviews of men and women MPs and youth parliamentarians conducted from March to May 2021. Parliament speeches were also examined and selected as major efforts related to gender equality taken by the government in the last two decades. Lastly, secondary data was obtained from scholarly papers on SRW in Sri Lanka.

The sampling of interviews was systematic with MPs selected to represent diversity and capture a holistic perspective of how parliamentarians' personal backgrounds, beliefs, and party ideologies shape their advocacy. MPs were approached through snowball sampling where certain MPs introduced other MPs to be interviewed for this study. The study includes MPs from the ruling Sri Lanka Podujana Peramuna (SLPP) and the two most prominent parties in the opposition – Samagi Jana Balavegaya (SJB) and Jathika Jana Balavegaya (JJB). Seeking gender balance three women MPs were selected from two different political parties, namely SLPP and JJB while three male MPs were selected from SJB. In addition, two youth parliamentarians were interviewed to capture the beliefs of future generations in Sri Lanka on SRW. In total, eight interviews were conducted including respondents who were young, middle-aged, and older to see if there is a change of perspectives with age.

The MP selection process also aimed to assess variation in the role of parliamentary committees with MPs in this study representing the parliament's Committee on Education, Committee on Public Enterprises, Ministerial Consultative Committee on Finance, Ministerial Consultative Committee on Water Supply, and Women Parliamentarians' Caucus. The interviews helped to better understand the MPs, their behavior, and whether they have become critical actors for SRW within committees thereby contributing to overall advancement of gender equality.

Prior to each interview, consent was requested regarding the respondent's willingness to be anonymous or quoted in the study to create a comfortable atmosphere and to encourage honest responses. Interviewees were informed of the possibility of withdrawal from the study and the possibility of refraining from answering certain questions upon their consent. Another limitation of this study is that all men MPs were from a single party. This was due to rejections (on account of time constraints) by male MPs from other parties who were requested to be a part of this study. Due

TABLE 11.1 Backgrounds of Sri Lankan Interviewees

Code	Sex	Position	Alias	Party	Committee	Proportion of Women on Committee
LKA.01	Female	MP	Ms. A	SLPP	Women's caucus	Higher
LKA.02	Female	Youth Parliament	Ms. B	–	–	–
LKA.03	Male	MP	Mr. C	SJB	Ministerial consultative committee on water supply	Medium
LKA.04	Female	MP	Ms. D	SLPP	Committee on education	Medium
LKA.05	Male	Youth Parliament	Mr. E	–	–	–
LKA.06	Female	MP	Ms. F	JJB	Women's caucus	Higher
LKA.07	Male	MP	Mr. G	SJB	Committee on public enterprises	Lower
LKA.08	Male	MP	Mr. H	SJB	Ministerial consultative committee on finance	Lower

to restrictions imposed by COVID, no face-to-face interviews were conducted. Six interviews were conducted via Zoom and two over phone (see Table 11.1).

Personal Background

The personal background of MPs plays a predominant role in their contribution to advancing their goals in all domains. Such differences are noticeable by gender, family backgrounds, level of education, profession, and so on. Gendered barriers are one of the biggest factors. As a result of these barriers, women's participation in politics has been restrained (Paxton and Kunovich 2003). On top of that, existing stereotypes in the society have portrayed "men as leaders and women as caregivers" (Wickramasinghe and Kodikara 2012, 775–780; see also Krook and Norris 2014).

Women MPs' Hurdles to Entering Parliament

Sri Lanka has become a famous example of MPs entering parliament as a result of being in a political family dynasty. This is very much visible in both men and women MPs. Many women MPs joined parliament after their husbands, brothers, or some family member left the parliament. Many of the women MPs who belong to this category did not have any interest in joining politics earlier.

When interviewed, Ms. A mentioned that she had no interest in joining the parliament earlier. However, when her husband was assassinated by terrorists, she joined the parliament for two main reasons. One was that her husband's constituency wanted her to fill the gap left by her husband. The second reason was that she wanted to be a part of the government in marking an end to the ruthless civil war,

without letting others face the same fate as her in losing their loved ones by some terrorist organization. Although Ms. A entered parliament from a political family background, she is highly educated and well qualified to serve in the legislature.

Interestingly, however, there is a visible emerging trend of women entering parliament solely out of an interest to be a part of changing the system and contributing to society. Women belonging to this category are not limited to only women from PR constituencies but are also found on the national list. Some women who entered from the national list have gone against the societal norm of merely filling a seat in parliament. They have become active advocates of gender issues. Their educational and professional qualifications have pushed them to enter parliament and actively contribute to the society in advancing SRW. Ms. F possessed experience as a social activist for 10–15 years, working even with various political parties. During her field studies, she gained firsthand experience in marginalization and discrimination faced by women. This pushed her to be a part of the legislature and implement policies that she has been raising.

It was the same situation with Ms. D. She was an orator of an organization called "Eliya" and was actively engaging in orations all over the country on the importance of changing the existing system and the way forward for Sri Lanka. She felt herself to be a responsible citizen in fulfilling her obligations to the country. Although she had no political intentions, when she was invited to serve as the Governor of the Western province, she accepted the position to actively take part in implementing what she advocated. Both Ms. D and Ms. F entered parliament from the national list, yet went more out of their comfort zone than some women MPs who enter parliament via PR.

In this context, two striking findings are that no women MPs raised the concern of being more self-aware of gender issues after motherhood and Ms. D was actually against forming women's organizations. Her belief is that one should not be treated specially due to being a woman, rather every citizen should be treated equally.

Among the interviewees, none of the women MPs stated that they were ever physically harassed or bullied in parliament. However, unfortunately, all agreed that insulting of all, perhaps unconsciously, regardless of their gender does take place. Most verbal abuse occurs between men and men. Yet, women MPs assert that they have often felt uncomfortable by the behavior of men MPs in parliament. Within parliamentary committees containing both men and women, women MPs acknowledged that there has not been an incident where men MPs have disturbed women in carrying out their work within committees. Nor have men MPs created an environment which is unsupportive of women MPs. Many men and women MPs have rather remained silent.

No direct harassment does not mean that it leads to gender consciousness within parliament either. Because, despite their years of experience, once entering the parliament, all women MPs interviewed have felt the disadvantage of being a woman. Although all women MPs were aware of the gender inequality in society and in parliament, they had to overcome gendered barriers. Ms. D was continuously questioned by the media as to whether she is capable of fulfilling her political

role, being a woman. She was also questioned on how capable she is in working with male MPs. She was character assassinated in the media for taking this challenging position as a woman.

How Gender Conscious Are Men MPs?

Men MPs interviewed acknowledged that they are not disadvantaged like women MPs. Mr. G has never really thought about his contribution in terms of his gender. However, it was highlighted that he is very conscious about gender equality and one major reason for that is his wife and his daughter. After marriage he has become even more responsible. He realizes the need of gender equality and has become more conscious of women's issues. His wife and his daughter are academically more qualified than him and he believes that it is his prime responsibility to create equal opportunities even for future generations. Then all will be able to enjoy themselves like his wife and daughter.

According to the views of Mr. C, women MPs are trapped by a societal image of women as a symbol of their heritage, culture, and dignity. This has not created the necessary fertile ground for women to advance and get into representative politics. He firmly asserts that all men MPs should encourage them, get them out of the family, and try to increase their chances of advancing women's representation.

All men MPs interviewed claimed they are more gender conscious than the majority of men MPs in the parliament and that they work with and for their women voters. Mr. H asserts that after all it is their role as MPs to represent them. When working with them he understands specific issues that relate to women. Mr. C has even conducted discussions separately with only women, as they do not have time to freely mingle all the time. Mr. C stated that when there are meetings in public, many women come to meet him with their own grievances. He has taken steps to resolve the concerns by women. Yet, Mr. C is concerned that women are not being consulted as much as the men are consulted. It is noted that men MPs who are gender conscious are backed by women – their family and women voters.

Is Gender Inequality a Pressing Issue in Sri Lanka?

As highlighted by both men and women MPs, none of the MPs directly emphasized gender inequality as the most pressing issue. For the majority of the interviewees, the most important issue needing immediate attention from the government is economic development. Other pressing issues they identified included democratic governance, law and order, equality, and quality education. However, Ms. A, Ms. B, Ms. F, and Mr. H linked the issue of economic development to women. Ms. A highlighted that in terms of economic empowerment, only 35% of women are in formal employment and the reason for this lies in factors such as insufficient childcare support and maternity leaves. Various efforts have been taken to establish daycare facilities for both public and private sector workers. Ms. A noted that "We tried to establish a day care facility in parliament,

but failed." As public representatives, many MPs have spoken about these issues inside and outside parliament to mobilize support groups and make these issues part of the national debate.

Irrespective of their gender, MPs do acknowledge the problem of gender inequality. Nevertheless, much remains to be done. One effort to reduce gender inequality and SRW has been the implementation of a quota for women in local governments. However, this was long delayed because some felt that women pushed into local government would be incompetent. Another dimension of gender inequality in Sri Lanka is that certain issues are specific to particular subgroups of women in society while others impact all women in the country. One example is the Muslim Marriage and Divorce Act (1951) in the Muslim community which violates the rights of girls and women by not allowing them to take decisions on their marriage or divorce or inheritance and property rights. "In a similar manner other laws such as Kandyan law consists of discriminatory principles on divorce and inheritance and Tesawalamai law consists of discriminatory principles on limitation of property rights to women in Jaffna" (Karunarathne 2020, 4). Although there have been efforts taken by the government to establish one law of marriage for the whole nation, they have not yet been successful.

Issues that impact all women include harassment and discrimination in public. In the workplace, there are very few women in senior positions. This is because encouragement and motivation are inadequate for many women. They always fear doing something because they think that they might make a mistake and fail. One way to directly impact the issue of women's underemployment at higher levels is to institute maternity leaves.

Another grave issue highlighted by MPs is domestic violence (DV). Some female children become sexual slaves of their own father. There are only a few reported cases, because these abused women are not even able to lodge a complaint about their abusive husband or abusive partner. Mr. G insists that

> [I]t's unacceptable for a man to raise his hand to a woman or to a partner or wife, even once in a lifetime. Even if he has annoyance, uncontrollable temper or whatever, he's just got to walk away. I think we have to have zero tolerance of domestic violence.

Among all the issues affecting women, many of the interviewees have been directly addressing DV to create more awareness around this issue.

Yet, despite a genuine interest in reducing women's burdens, many have failed to implement solid strategies. In terms of voicing their concerns in parliament, all MPs accepted that parliament is not a place where each would listen to one without interruption. MPs even go to the level of screaming and humiliating. Fortunately, there are first-time women MPs (newcomers) who confidently raise their voice on various issues. Yet, Ms. D points out alarmingly how "there are very rare instances of any follow up discussions on the issues raised." Hence, after their first term in parliament some women MPs remain silent in parliament debates. In

doing so, they fail to fulfill their responsibilities by not representing women and their needs. Hence, it appears that only a few MPs genuinely try to advance SRW.

It is startling to see that all the interviewees shared the same view concerning the major obstacle to advancing gender equality.[2] They all pointed toward the attitude of the society, which is patriarchal, male chauvinistic, and negative. This was an instance where the MPs pointed fingers at the society for their own mistakes and inaction. Ms. A noted that

> [M]ale chauvinism is still in existence. We still live in a patriarchal society, where people are led to believe that women are inferior. People try to compare the masculinity of men and women. Women are not in the main party structure.

In a similar vein, Ms. D highlighted the unethical behavior of media in the character assassination of women. Mr. C added that on the one side, women too possess a negative attitude toward themselves and there is a certain amount of reluctance by women themselves to take the plunge because of the rigors of the arena. Ultimately, all these factors obstruct advancement of gender equality.

Institutions

Institutions backed by critical actors can support gender-sensitive policies in parliament. Therefore, institutions are crucial in advancing SRW. Have parliamentary institutions thus far been supportive in contributing to resolve gender issues in Sri Lanka?

Committees are an institution within the Sri Lankan parliament that reviews prospective legislation, and all MPs serve on at least one parliamentary committee from Select Committees and Sectoral Oversight Committees to Ministerial Consultative Committees and the Legislative Standing Committee. Even a Committee of the whole Parliament can be appointed by a resolution of the parliament. There is no fixed number of dates for these committees to meet. However, ministerial consultative committees which correspond to specific government ministries and cabinet ministers should meet once a month and report their findings to the parliament within two weeks of their meeting. For other committees, their number of meeting days depends on ongoing issues in each committee. For instance the Committee on Public Finance meets almost every day before, during, and after finalization of the budget.

In Sri Lanka, there are currently no women at all on the four parliamentary committees dealing with (a) Parliamentary Business, (b) Public Enterprises, (c) Public Finance, and (d) Selection (see Table 11.2). These committees have a very low proportion of women (LPW). The committees on Public Finance and Public Enterprises are very active especially during budget finalization and while other committees meet behind closed doors, these two committees even provide live

TABLE 11.2 Women on Committees in Sri Lankan Parliament (2021)

Committee	Total Members	Women Members	Percentage of Women (%)
Parliamentary Business	26	0	0
Public Enterprises	21	0	0
Public Finance	21	0	0
Selection	13	0	0
Liaison Committee	35	1	3
Backbencher Committee	18	1	6
Ethics and Privileges	16	1	6
Legislative Standing Committee	17	1	6
Standing Orders	12	1	8
Public Accounts	22	2	9
Public Petitions	23	2	9
High Posts	19	2	11
House	14	3	21
Women Parliamentarian's Caucus	12	12	100

Source: Sri Lankan Parliament

broadcasts of committee sessions. It is unfortunate that there is no gender perspective in these prominent committees.

As pointed out by Mr. G on the Public Enterprises committee, the members have not really given a thought as to whether their committee has been supportive of women's interests and gender equality. It was acknowledged that this current research raised the concern that the committee should address gender equality. A major problem is that there has been no increase of women in parliament for years and the percentage of women has always been between 3% and 5%. All 12 women MPs currently in parliament are already on at least 4–5 committees each. Without any women members at all, LPW committees are no good at serving SRW. This is a hindrance to ensuring gender equality throughout all parliamentary work with the ultimate objective of evolving toward a gender-sensitive parliament.

However, all MPs interviewed were aware of the gender disparity in parliament and that some committees have zero women members. In addition, men MPs do perceive that the parliament is male dominated, that this is not acceptable, and that it needs more women. However, in current parliamentary deliberations, women's issues may be forgotten. Mr. H perceives that without women's participation in the committee of finance, discussions are biased. Although MPs are conscious that there is a key omission, no concrete action has been taken. One measure proposed by Mr. G was gender budgeting. As it is something new, there is a need to run seminars to learn its theory and practice and the Sri Lankan budget should be analyzed in terms of gender.

There are also no women in 20 out of 29 ministerial consultative committees as shown in Table 11.3. This raises the issue of many committees being either gender insensitive or gender blind. However, one interesting factor pointed out by Mr. C is that although there are specific members nominated to different ministerial consultative committees that does not preclude anyone from coming to the committees and making any representation there. Yet, with so few women in parliament it has not made a big impact.

In contrast to other parliamentary committees, the Women Parliamentarian's Caucus has been active in addressing gender issues. All its members are women MPs, and in this study, it belongs to those committees with a higher proportion

TABLE 11.3 Women on Ministerial Consultative Committees in Sri Lankan Parliament (2021)

Ministerial Consultative Committees	Total Members	Women Members	Percentage of Women (%)
Finance	8	0	0
Buddhasasana, Religious & Cultural Affairs	7	0	0
Foreign Affairs	7	0	0
Highways	7	0	0
Defense	6	0	0
Irrigation	8	0	0
Labor	7	0	0
Industries	9	0	0
Justice	7	0	0
Lands	7	0	0
Power	7	0	0
Ports & Shipping	7	0	0
Technology	5	0	0
Public Security	6	0	0
Trade	7	0	0
Transport	7	0	0
Agriculture	10	0	0
Plantation	9	0	0
Youth & Sports	7	0	0
Mass Media	6	0	0
Urban Development & Housing	9	1	11
Health	8	1	13
Wildlife & Forest Conservation	7	1	14
Fisheries	7	1	14
Water Supply	7	1	14
Energy	6	1	17
Education	10	2	20
Environment	5	1	20
Tourism	7	2	29

Source: Sri Lankan Parliament.

of women (HPW). Ms. F notes that although they do not share the same ideology or ideas about everything, they all agree within the women's caucus that women's issues are important and must be addressed. They are willing to listen and support each other. They meet at least once every two weeks and they have an action plan; addressing gender-based violence and increasing women's representation in decision-making not only in political organizations but also in the government's departments, authorities, and other boards of governance. The women's caucus speaks out on various issues they understand to be crucial for women. This includes gender-based workplace harassment, female genital mutilation, the marital status of parents on birth certificates, age of marriage, exploitation, work rights of women in informal employments, migrant women, and women in industries and plantations.

When some women activists submitted an official report on female genital mutilation in Sri Lanka in 2017, a team headed by Ms. A – a health specialist – supported these activists. Although there was much criticism by Muslim religious groups, this MP was able to issue a circular on prohibiting female genital mutilation in government institutions. She was also able to get the Ministry of Justice involved. FGM was previously not a discussion point in national debates and this was an achievement toward women's rights.

Another issue to be resolved was the removal of the marital status of parents on birth certificates. Ms. A has been voicing this in parliament even in 2017 when she was in opposition. She has been very vocal in addressing workplace harassment based on gender, lobbying ministries and authorities to enhance gender equality, and creating awareness to improve gender equality. She raised her concerns on the promotion of women to senior management positions in government, semi-government,[3] and private sectors at national, provincial, and local levels. Scholars likewise highlight the importance of women in leadership.

> Because it is hard for a woman leader to raise her voice in decision making bodies and gain recognition and acceptance for her leadership. Therefore, the country should adopt a gender representative governing system and give more space for women to contribute to the development process.
>
> *(Rathnayake 2017, 11)*

There have also been efforts to amend existing policies and law on the age of marriage. The main issue was that girls under the age of 18 are married off, sometimes even without the consent of the girl herself. The father or an older male in the family decides on the marriage of their girls. In this instance, it is the Muslim law that is applicable to them as it supersedes the national law for the minimum age of marriage. However, support was not rendered by the Ministry of Justice. There has also been unnecessary involvement of certain Muslim groups, leading to religious domination, which made the efforts of MPs unsuccessful. Although the law was in favor of Muslim girls, people from their same religion opposed it.

Upon the request of Ms. D with the support of the women parliamentarian's caucus, a select committee of 15 MPs, including 12 women MPs and three men

MPs, investigated and reported to the parliament its recommendations to ensure gender equity and equality with special emphasis on looking into gender-based discriminations and violations of women's rights in Sri Lanka. During her allotted time at the parliament, Ms. D fearlessly voiced out the issue of few women holding management-level positions.

Men MPs acknowledge the prominent work done by the women's caucus, which is the only HPW committee in Sri Lanka's parliament. As a very focused group, all men MPs interviewed acknowledged the active participation of Ms. A and Ms. F in the caucus. It is also clear that despite the fact that the committee has higher representation of women, it has a few critical actors who are the primary reason behind the successes achieved thus far. "Critical actors" have been defined as "those who initiate policy proposals on their own, even when women form a small minority, and embolden others to take steps to promote policies for women, regardless of the proportion of female representatives" (Childs and Krook 2009, 138). This implies that institutions will not become successful in serving SRW if not led by critical actors.

Among the critical actors, some men MPs have actively contributed to gender equality. For instance Mr. H played a prominent role in reducing the levy imported on sanitary pads. This was an initiative by the then-Minister of Finance Mangala Samaraweera and backed by Mr. H. Unaffordable price on sanitary pads is an example of horizontal discrimination, which is an imposition of a tax or duty on a product used only by a particular group in the society. Mr. H also worked for the implementation of maternal benefit payments in 2019. One reason for this is that when women go on maternity leave, it becomes a loss for the company and the private sector is not willing to commit to that. This proves that the responsibility of gender equality is not only on women but also on men, especially when they comprise the majority in the parliament. Unfortunately, very few men MPs have realized and acted either directly or indirectly on this matter, but a few is better than none and the number will hopefully increase over time.

Intersectionality

According to the concept of intersectionality, "subjects are situated in frameworks of multiple, interacting forms of oppression and privilege through socially constructed categories such as gender and 'race'/ethnicity" (Geerts & Vand der Tuin 2013: 171). Has the intersectionality of Sri Lankan MPs made them conscious of particular types of gender inequality and contributed to gender-based initiatives leading to gender-based successful outcomes?

Among the intersections that matter, family background has remained one of the very first foundations of ingraining values of gender equality. According to Mr. G,

> From my home, my parents are a very big influence. I was taught that we are all equal and we all have potential. You mustn't be discriminating to anyone. Those were ingrained in my family and my mother really drove us there.

It was delightful to hear from men MPs that they have become even more conscious of gender equality by living with their daughters. Their daughters have challenged them saying their fathers need to do more to address women's matters such as domestic abuse. This has made men MPs such as Mr. H contribute more toward gender equality. The family became a privilege for him to instill positive attitudes about women to respect gender equity and equality, and this should not only be applicable to MPs but also to the whole society. This led him to be a part of advancing SRW with successful outcomes.

As for religion, none of the MPs interviewed had restrictions or rules and regulations imposed against them entering politics due to their religious backgrounds. In the Sri Lankan parliament, there are currently women MPs who are Buddhists and Catholics, but there are no women representatives from other religions, such as Hinduism or Islam. However, Sri Lanka had women MPs from different religions in the past. Rita M. Pulendran was the first Hindu MP and Ranganayaky Pathmanathan was the second, and there were Islamic women representatives including Ferial Ashraff and Anjan Umma. It is therefore necessary to look into what measures can be taken to motivate women to enter parliament from all ethnic and religious groups today to create a balance in the DRW. The aim should not be to further segregate women based on their ethnicity but to provide equal democratic opportunities to all women.

Right now, it is unfortunate that the majority in parliament are above 50 years of age. The majority of MPs do not belong to the category of gender-sensitive MPs as they tend to remain silent on women's matters and many policies brought up by them have not considered the gender perspective. On the other hand, there are six young MPs within the age category of 25–35 years accounting for 3% of MPs. Out of these six men MPs, five have a family background in politics, but at least one entered from a nonpolitical family.

Interviews with youth parliamentarians also revealed that they are considerate about gender matters and possess a different perspective than older generations. They are more encouraging and hopeful than many men MPs in the parliament. They are interested in changing the current system of parliament to create more space for women and their ideas. It was also noted that young women who are interested in entering parliament one day are mostly from a background of politics. Thus, it seems there are many strong youth with political potential who would look up to critical actors in parliament, and these young women need to be supported during their early career, either via political parties or via the government. If there is a strong foundation, we can be hopeful of seeing better SRW with successful outcomes in future.

Aside from age, education and profession have been privileges influencing MPs' policy views and behavior as identified during the interviews, although for some of the MPs, the main reason to enter parliament was not based on their education and profession. Yet, interestingly, the main reason that all have been able to excel in their political life has been due to their education and profession.

> The fact that I've worked in areas to do with women and children and young people, the fact that my research has been in those areas and the fact that

I have the work that I did, both in the University and prior to my university career, have shaped my policy interests.

was the view of Ms. F. "Although I came from a political family, my professional background helped me to work for women and children because I worked at the Child Health Bureau" was the response from Ms. A. This demonstrates that educational and professional experience can play a major role in advancing better policies. In other words, given that personal experience and ideology shape one's commitment to SRW, having more MPs of different ages, religions, family backgrounds, education, and professional backgrounds as well as different perspectives help to see different levels of women's issues.

However, one obstacle in Sri Lankan party politics is that despite the gender of MPs, the party agenda comes first and MPs in general are expected to follow the beliefs and dictates of the party. It is noteworthy that the party influence of Samagi Jana Balavegaya (SJB) in shaping women-friendly policies when they were in government was emphasized by all the three MPs interviewed from that party. They highlighted that SJB leader's election manifesto paid more attention to gender equity and equality and therefore the party strongly believes in it and the party members are encouraged to advocate gender equality. However, it was acknowledged by Mr. G that, "We have good goals and intentions. There is no issue of my party at the policy level. But if you look at the working committee of the party, I would say we should have more women." In addition to this, political parties tend to give nominations to women for political reasons to get higher number of votes to their party while ignoring the potential of women. Thus, researchers have found women who belong to political families with a voter base and women celebrities were given nominations from political parties (Wickramasinghe and Kodikara 2012, 790).

Conclusion

While the average proportion of women in parliament around the world is 25.5% and the average for Asia is 20.4%, Sri Lanka lies far behind at 5.3% (International Parliamentary Union 2021). As a result, Sri Lanka now ranks 181 out of 186 countries in "Women in Politics 2021" by the International Parliamentary Union (IPU) and it is the lowest ranking country in South Asia. Furthermore, although Sri Lanka ranked seventh in the political empowerment sub-indicator ranking in 2006, it ranked seventy-third in 2020 (Karunarathne 2020, 2). There are various reasons behind this.

First, women account for 52% of the total population (World Bank 2020), but there are only 12 women MPs in the parliament. Such low descriptive representation translates into considerable obstacles for substantive representation. As mentioned earlier, there are many parliamentary committees that have zero women and the situation is even worse on ministerial consultative committees. Hence, women's voices are absent on ministerial consultative committees dealing with

such important issues as finance, defense, labor, justice, public security, youth, and sports and mass media. As the women MPs are already serving in four to five (or even more!) committees each they are unable to handle anymore memberships. However, according to the "politics of presence," this is an unjust situation for not providing women space in politics.

Another factor is that many women MPs in parliament in the past and even today have joined politics with the support of family politics (i.e. political families). However, some women who entered parliament to "stop-the-gap" left by their father, husband, or another family member are highly educated, professional, and act as critical actors for SRW. Therefore, they were not necessarily in parliament solely for "tokenism" where men MPs bring in women MPs solely because they are easily controllable (Zetterberg 2009, 32). Some critical actors have entered parliament through the national list and joined out of a passion to drive change in the system. Their commitment to SRW is impressive and they actively get involved in policy implementation, decision-making, and advocacy. However, no matter how educated or professional women MPs are, they have to bear the brunt of the negative attitude of society. They are seen more as caregivers than leaders. In addition, women are character assassinated easily as the media tends to rapidly broadcast any mistakes made by women.

Gender inequality in the society remains a pertinent issue. While some issues threaten a particular subgroup of women, others threaten all women. Some of the most visible and unresolved gender issues include marriage law in the Muslim community, harassment and discrimination in public, and domestic violence. Although various efforts have been taken by both men and women MPs to address these issues, they remain unresolved and unfortunately, the main obstacle is the patriarchal, male chauvinistic, and negative attitude of the society.

Despite these challenges, the Women Parliamentarian's Caucus has been very active in promoting women-friendly agenda. These include eliminating gender-based violence and increasing women's representation in decision-making in all areas of politics and governance. Some successes of the caucus include either solving or minimizing the impact of workplace harassment based on gender, female genital mutilation, revising the marital status of parents in birth certificates, age of marriage, exploitation, work rights of women in informal employments, migrant women, and women in industries and plantations.

It was also found that comparably women have done more for SRW than men. Thus, gender equality should be enhanced among MPs as one of the first steps, and the MPs interviewed for this study were hopeful about the prospects for redesigning the political system to better serve SRW. Concerning the current gender quota of 25% at the local level, all interviewees believe the quota system is not the best option and will not resolve problems right away. Yet, they also agree that it is the second-best option worth having until there is real change evolving from the society. As scholars have noted, "quotas become effective based on electoral systems, political culture, religious circumstances, the strength of women's organizations,

democratic institutions and value orientation" (Dahlerup and Gaber 2017, 312). Confirming this idea, Ms. A firmly believes that

> [A]t least 50% of MPs from the National list should be allotted to women. We need a quota at provincial and national level. In the main party structure, at least 1/3 of the positions should be given to women. The current PR system should be amended with a mixed system in which 75% are based on the people's votes and 25% from nomination. I would like to see certain women led electorates.

Relatedly, Ms. F mentioned that "what is important is that we focus on women, the women constituency and solve their matters." While being aware that descriptive representation does not always lead to substantive representation as a means of encouraging more women-sensitive policies, having more women MPs will provide more time and space for women's matters. Thus, for the moment, Sri Lanka will need more women in parliament via a gender quota as a stepping stone. According to Mr. H, "there should be an environment, which is appropriate and conducive for women to run and get elected in this country and that can't happen over midnight. It should evolve."

It was also found that despite the fact that a parliamentary committee has a higher representation of women, a few critical actors are the reason behind the success achieved so far. Among these critical actors, we found not only women but also a handful of men MPs, who were dominant in providing benefits of maternity leave for mothers in both public and private sectors and reducing the imported levy on sanitary pads. When there is a diversity among the critical actors, better policies for SRW are led from different backgrounds such as justice, equality, security, and economy.

SRW is also likely to improve when there are more women in formal employment and when women's work in informal employment is secured. While we have made progress in education and girls are reaching very good heights in many professions, more support should be given to women to balance their life and careers. As Ms. D expresses, "everyone should be employed and promoted based on their skills and performance and not based on their gender." Mr. G also points out that "the cost of maternity leave should be borne by the government and then we will increase women's participation in the labor force. That's a practical step. There should be more attention paid to the issue of day care centers." One of the main reasons for women to drop out of workforce after marriage even among those who are financially struggling is due to hardship in balancing life and career. When more women are in formal employment, however, women will begin to realize their potential and their role should not be limited to being a mother.

All three women MPs interviewed for this study believe in change and they keep advocating for it and implementing policies that support SRW. Their efforts as analyzed in the previous sections highlight their roles as critical actors in parliament and they should be role models for many young women to enter parliament.

However, right now there are no young women in the parliament. Therefore, early career support for young women is needed. Unless they belong to a political party, there are very few youth who would like to enter parliament to become a change agent. This norm should be reversed with political parties and government supporting them in order to increase young women's interest in joining politics. Financial support is also mandatory. Funding can give women candidates access to campaign like the men and motivate them to be fearless in public. Political education camps set up by government for local elections should also continue to assist women leaders. As Ms. D noted,

> There should be a political culture that can actively attract women into politics. Women can't wrestle on stage for votes. Campaigning to become an MP should be based on disciplines, which would naturally attract more women to the parliament. It is of no use if women are requested to join the list of candidates by force, for the quota system to be retained.

In order to strengthen early career support, the political parties should be very mindful and a lot more gender sensitive. The political parties should also set an example to their constituency. As Ms. F explained, "There should be more equitable policies within parties that ensure a better representation of women, in fact, within political party decision making, so that they can also work more with women constituencies." To make this successful at the institutional level, there would also need to be a sustainable law which treats both men and women equally. This law should be applicable to all without discrimination and laws of groups or communities should not supersede national law. It was also highlighted by Mr. E that "these should be sustainable and consistent. If one regime implements a policy, then it is the responsibility of the next regimes that come in to power to be consistent and continue the implementation of these policies."

To conclude, as there are only a handful of critical actors in the parliament out of 225 members, Sri Lanka should pay more close attention to developing a gender-sensitive parliamentary culture, motivating the existing critical actors and making many MPs adopt this new culture. As demonstrated earlier, thus far, gender equality legislation and policies have been strengthened but only to an extent and we need to achieve a lot more to become a gender-sensitive parliament.[4] Although critical actors promoting gender equality have been successful in putting SRW on the legislative agenda at times, they have often failed to secure successful legislative outcomes. Moreover, the three characteristics of democracies that Molyneux (2002) identified to improve SRW in parliament; "including gender equality in their constitutions, allowing women's groups and movements to mobilize in pushing for gender equality and reducing normal and informal barriers that deny women access to political power" (Molyneux 2002) are yet to be more visible in the political context of the country. Achieving DRW and SRW in parliament is a long journey ahead for Sri Lanka. Nevertheless, there is a possibility of remaining hopeful in this process if all the aforementioned proposals are considered in order

to motivate the existing handful of critical actors. This will lead toward success in establishing a gender-sensitive parliament and the natural evolution of a women-friendly political culture.

Notes

1 These quotas are a result of three electoral reforms, namely Local Authorities (Election) Amendment Act No. 22 of 2012, Local Authorities (Election) Amendment Act No. 1 of 2016, and Local Authorities (Election) Amendment Act No. 16 of 2017.
2 MPs interviewed firmly believed that from parenting onwards, equal opportunities should be given to all.
3 Semi-government organizations combine elements of both public and private sectors. They are run by the government but with private shareholders.
4 According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2008, 61), a gender-sensitive parliament consists of the following components; increasing the number of women in parliament and achieving equality in participation, strengthening gender equality legislation and policy, mainstreaming gender equality throughout all parliamentary work, instituting or improving gender-sensitive infrastructure and parliamentary culture, ensuring that responsibility for gender equality is shared by all parliamentarians – men and women – encouraging political parties to be champions of gender equality and enhance the gender sensitivity of and gender equality among parliamentary staff.

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PART IV

Conclusion

12

CONCLUSION

Comparing Women's Representation in Asian Parliaments

Devin K. Joshi

This chapter summarizes important findings from this study while identifying common trends across Asia and the sub-regions of South Asia, Southeast Asia, and East Asia. It begins by examining to what degree Asian parliamentarians have prioritized substantive representation of women (SRW). It then assesses whether SRW was a primary reason or motivation behind why members of parliament (MPs) entered politics in the first place and whether they viewed SRW as a pressing issue for their governments to address. It also probes whether MPs regularly consult and interact with female voters as well as which groups of women in society the MPs (claim to) support. It considers whether parliamentary committees and other practices and norms within Asian parliaments are supportive of SRW and compares differences between how women and men MPs differ in their advocacy. It also assesses the potentially positive impacts of gender quotas and having a critical mass (i.e. > 30%) of women representatives. Finally, the chapter concludes by discussing recommendations offered by Asian parliamentarians on how to improve gender equality and what lessons Asia might hold for SRW in general, including the roles of critical mass, electoral reform, cross-party alliances, and institutional design.

Is Gender Equality a High Priority for Asian Parliamentarians?

MPs' Motivation to Enter Politics

As the chapters in this book have emphasized, substantive underrepresentation of women both impedes the achievement of gender equality and constitutes a serious democratic deficit because it means that half of the demos is not properly represented in the government's priorities, laws, policies, and actions. Therefore,

to assess whether SRW motivated parliamentarians to join parliament, MPs interviewed for this study were asked to state what motivated them to enter politics.

In South Asia, where fundamental issues of overcoming poverty and providing basic human needs are pressing, governments and MPs typically prioritized economic development issues while giving lower priority to gender equality. As pointed out in the introductory chapter of this book (Joshi 2023), per capita income levels are closely correlated with democracy index scores across the ten countries in this study, and democracy scores were lower for the South Asian countries compared to their counterparts in Southeast Asia and East Asia. Relatedly, none of the Bangladeshi MPs interviewed (6 female, 2 male) entered politics specifically to address SRW. In Sri Lanka, only one woman out of six MPs interviewed (3 female, 3 male) entered politics to address SRW (Jayasekara 2023). By contrast, four women out of eight MPs interviewed (6 female, 2 male) in Nepal entered politics for this reason. This divergence lends support to the idea that critical mass matters for SRW (Dahlerup 1988). Whereas descriptive representation of women (DRW) is low in Sri Lanka (5% women MPs) and Bangladesh (21% women MPs total but only 6% directly elected) (Kabir 2023), Nepal has 33% women MPs in its lower house and 38% women MPs in its upper house. This is due to Nepal's constitutional one-third gender quota in addition to parliamentary quotas for other marginalized groups which have contributed positively (though still inadequately) to intersectional representation of marginalized women (Adhikari 2023).

In the Southeast Asian countries in our study, where democracy index scores were in the upper middle range, most MPs entered politics for reasons unrelated to gender equality as in Timor-Leste, a lower income country, where only one woman out of nine MPs interviewed (5 women, 4 men) entered politics to pursue SRW. Similarly, in the Philippines, no males (out of 5) and only one woman MP (out of 6) as well as none of the 8 MPs (6 women, 2 men) interviewed in Indonesia entered politics for this reason. The lone contrasting case in Southeast Asia was the relatively wealthier upper-middle income country of Malaysia where two out of three women interviewed in its National Assembly and two out of four women in state-level assemblies entered politics to advance SRW, although no male legislators in Malaysia entered politics for this purpose.

Turning to the higher-income countries in our study from East Asia, all of which scored highly (>8.00) on the democracy index, three out of eight women MPs (38%) interviewed in Taiwan were motivated by SRW to enter politics. Similarly, many women MPs interviewed in South Korea joined politics out of deep frustration with male-dominated workplaces in different occupations. For three of five women (60%) and one of seven men (14%) MPs interviewed in Japan, pursuing SRW was also a primary motivation to enter politics.

What these findings reveal is that, first, not a single male MP interviewed from South Asia or Southeast Asia was motivated to enter politics to advance SRW. Second, in South Asia and Southeast Asia, most women MPs did not go into politics to improve gender equality either. Third, in East Asia, at least half of women MPs entered politics for the purpose of SRW. Fourth, the countries of Nepal,

Malaysia, Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan stood out for having a greater share of women MPs entering politics to advance gender equality. The latter four were the wealthiest countries in this study whereas Nepal is an exception perhaps due to its combination of strong leftist party influence, one-third gender quota, and new democratic constitution of 2015.

Is Gender Equality a Priority Issue for Asian MPs?

MPs interviewed in this study expressed what they felt were the most important issues today that need government's attention. Country researchers then assessed whether any of the issues MPs mentioned were related to SRW. Altogether, only 10% of male MPs (3/31) viewed SRW and gender equality among the top priority issues compared to 45% of women MPs (23/51), revealing a significant gender gap. Thus, while about half of Asian women MPs felt SRW was a priority issue, 90% of Asian male MPs did not. This finding is salient considering that most women and men who took part in this study were probably more inclined than the average MP toward supporting SRW having given consent to participate in a study about gender equality.

In the case of South Asia, three out of six women MPs in Bangladesh saw SRW as one of the most pressing issues. In both Sri Lanka and Nepal, however, only one out of six MPs expressed that SRW was among the most pressing issues for government to address. In Sri Lanka, the top issue as expressed by most MPs was economic development, but half of Sri Lankan MPs interviewed (two women and one man) linked this to SRW. In Nepal, MPs identified the COVID pandemic as the most important issue, but this too relates to SRW as over the past two years COVID has been one of the greatest threats to women's survival and well-being in South Asia.

In Southeast Asia, SRW was seen as a priority issue for government to address by eight out of 24 women MPs but only two out of 16 male MPs. The lowest prioritizations were among women (1 of 6) and men (0 of 5) in the Philippine Congress who saw poverty and the pandemic as most pressing with similar results among women (1 of 6) and men (0 of 2) in the Indonesian parliament. SRW was given relatively higher priority by Timor-Leste's women (2 of 5) and men (1 of 4) parliamentarians and by women (4 of 7) and men (1 of 5) legislators in Malaysia.

Unlike the other two regions, the majority of women MPs in East Asia saw SRW as a high-priority issue for government to tackle. This was the case for all women MPs interviewed in Japan (5 of 5), one out of seven Japanese male MPs, and half of the women MPs interviewed in Taiwan (4 of 8). Likewise, in South Korea, all women MPs interviewed pointed out how "gender quota and women's safety issues (including stalking and sexual violence) are urgent issues" (Shin 2022). Here we see a strong and positive correlation between a country's (higher) level of economic development and MPs prioritizing SRW and gender equality on the political agenda.

Do MPs Actively Consult With Female Voters?

MPs were asked whether they make a serious effort to work and consult with female voters. Overall, across Asia, the results were 92% for women (47/51) compared to only 55% for men (16/29). In South Asia, all women MPs claimed to consult their constituents actively. In Bangladesh, all MPs interviewed stated that they make a serious effort to consult/work with female voters regardless of whether they were in a directly elected seat (i.e. in a single-member district) or reserved seat. This was also the case in Nepal and for Sri Lankan women MPs but for only one out of three male MPs in Sri Lanka. While the other two Sri Lankan male MPs also worked with female voters, they conceded working more closely with male voters. One reason for this, however, lies in prominent social norms involving gender segregation in certain aspects of the public sphere that impede political communication across the sexes.

Similarly, in Southeast Asia, women MPs worked more closely with female voters than male MPs. In Indonesia, all women MPs and no male MPs actively consulted female voters. In Malaysia, all women legislators and four out of five male legislators actively worked with women voters. In Timor-Leste, engagement with women voters was present for a slight majority of women MPs (3 of 5) but only half of male MPs (2 of 4). Lastly, among Filipino MPs, slight majorities of both women (4 of 6) and men (3 of 5) actively consulted female voters.

As in Indonesia and Sri Lanka, a gender divide was observable within East Asia, whereby all women MPs from Taiwan and Japan actively worked with female voters regardless of whether elected from a party-list or a direct constituency. However, in Japan only three out of seven male MPs actively engaged with women voters.

Overall, two puzzles emerge from these results. First, why do some women MPs not consult women voters as observed in countries like the Philippines and Timor-Leste? Second, why do some male MPs not consult women voters as observed in both less affluent countries like Timor-Leste, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka but also highly affluent Japan? What these findings suggest is that some MPs are not actively connecting with and ascertaining many of their constituents' needs. They may also not feel heavily reliant on interaction with female voters to be reelected perhaps due to the dominant role played by dynastic families (e.g. the Philippines, Sri Lanka) or political party elites (e.g. Japan, Timor-Leste) in determining which candidates are nominated and into which districts or which positions on party-lists.

Which Groups or Types of Women Do MPs Represent?

MPs in this study were asked which women they represent politically. In South Asia, male MPs in Bangladesh and Nepal did not mention which women they represented whereas in Bangladesh, all women MPs except one said they represent all women while one woman MP stood for disadvantaged women. In Nepal, three women MPs said they represent Nepalese women. Another woman MP claimed to represent marginalized women while one stood for both women and men from

marginalized communities. Lastly, one Nepali woman MP supported women with disabilities and victims of domestic violence. In Sri Lanka, women MPs variously stood for "all women," "women of this country," "young women" (from a youth parliamentarian), or "all women with special emphasis on women in informal employment and young women" (Jayasekara 2023). Two Sri Lankan male MPs said they represented women in their own electoral constituencies while another stood for Muslim women.

In Southeast Asia, all women MPs in Indonesia claimed to support women in general as did four women MPs in Malaysia with one Malaysian female MP supporting marginalized and discriminated women. Among Malaysian male MPs, one mentioned urban poor women (reflective of his constituency), another stood for single mothers, rural areas, and poor women, and another for his female constituents. Women MPs in the Philippines mentioned specific groups of women such as young women, teachers and mothers, solo parents and teen mothers, lesbians and transwomen, and mothers in general. Filipino male MPs also mentioned the urban poor and single mothers, union leaders, potential overseas Filipina women migrant workers, and women in general. Lastly, in East Asia, several South Korean MPs stood for the youth including young women while in Taiwan all but one of the women MPs said they supported "all women" with the other specifically attentive to immigrant women.

To conclude, efforts by MPs to target particular groups of women with benefits appeared to be higher in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Nepal whereas in some countries, like Bangladesh, Indonesia, and Taiwan, women MPs reported supporting "women in general" or "all women" which suggests a feeling of solidarity and not leaving any single woman behind. At the same time, the lack of a more focused answer by these MPs may reveal inattention to or under-prioritization of particular groups of women who need different and additional support than others precisely because their circumstances are different.

Do Institutions Within Asian Parliaments Support Gender Equality?

Parliamentary Committees

Among the key venues for scrutinizing, deliberating, revising, and approving proposed legislation are the parliament's various standing and select committees. In this study, researchers assessed whether MPs felt the parliamentary committee environment was supportive of gender equality and women's interests. Overall, the responses were mostly positive according to two-thirds of male (17/26) and three-fourths of female (31/42) MPs interviewed.

We also compared committees on which women MPs comprised a "critical mass" (CM) (i.e. 30% or more of committee members) with their non-CM counterparts. We found women MPs on CM committees were 80% satisfied (16/20) whereas women MPs on non-CM committees were only 62% satisfied (8/13) that

the committee environment supported women's interests and gender equality. We also found male MPs on CM committees 100% satisfied (2/2) compared to male MPs on non-CM committees who were only 40% satisfied (6/15) that their committee was supportive of gender equality and women's interests. This latter finding suggests that Asian male MPs nowadays might actually be more progressive on gender equality than usually assumed. At least among the male MPs interviewed for this research, most seemed to be aware that male dominance of committees is not conducive to SRW. Whether they are willing to change this situation is another matter, but at least some awareness is there.

The evidence from this research also suggests that the key critical mass cut-off points in Asian parliaments lie around 17.5%, 40%, and 62.5%. First, when comprising less than 17.5% of committee members, most women on parliamentary committees were unsatisfied with how it represented women's interests. This closely fits with academic research on group proportions and the expectation that token members (comprising less than 15% of a group) will have little to no influence in a group (Kanter 1977). By contrast, when women comprised at least 40% of committee members, women were almost always satisfied with how it represented women's interests. Lastly, when women comprised at least 62.5% of committee members, women were always satisfied with its representation of women's interests.

There were, however, several differences across countries. In South Asia, all MPs in Bangladesh (where committees ranged from 7% to 60% women) felt the parliamentary committee environment was supportive of gender equality and women's interests. Men in Nepal whose committees had either 19% or 46% women members also felt this way. As one male MP in Nepal pointed out, on his committee the chairperson is a woman and women are very vocal in his committee. Another Nepali man mentioned how MPs listen to women's concerns very seriously in his parliamentary committee. However, not all Nepali women MPs agreed with this. Some felt women were not given a chance to speak or that it is very difficult for women to have a say in the committees (Adhikari 2023). Contrastingly, women MPs interviewed in Sri Lanka (who sat on committees where women's share of members ranged from 20% to 100%) felt the parliamentary committee environment was supportive of gender equality and women's interests, but Sri Lankan male MPs (serving on committees with between 0% and 14% women members) disagreed primarily because no women served on their committees. Thus, Sri Lankan male MPs interviewed readily acknowledged a glaring gender deficit in parliament signaling that they might be willing (or at least permit others) to take action to remedy this imbalance.

In Southeast Asia, the picture was mixed. In Indonesia, two women MPs on parliamentary committees with respectively 16% and 26% women members did not feel their committee was supportive of gender equality. By contrast, four Indonesian women MPs on committees with 11%, 14%, 35%, and 35% women members respectively felt the committee environment was supportive. Thus, it seems that there is a notable difference between lower satisfaction at 26% and higher satisfaction with 35% women's representation. However, Indonesian male MPs on

committees with only 10% and 20% women both felt the parliamentary committee environment was supportive of women's interests and gender equality. This suggests that men are more likely (compared to women) to feel a committee is supportive of gender equality under conditions where men comprise the overwhelming majority of members. In Malaysia, two MPs (one woman and one man) on a committee with 74% women both felt the parliamentary committee environment was supportive of gender equality whereas women and men MPs on committees with 13% and 14% women did not feel the committee environment was supportive of gender equality and women's interests. Lastly, in both the Philippines and Timor-Leste, which have higher DRW, all MPs except for one woman MP felt the committee environment was supportive of SRW.

In East Asia, two Japanese women MPs on parliamentary committees with only 4–5% women members felt their committees were unsupportive of women's interests and gender equality. By contrast, three Japanese women MPs on committees with 18–35% women members felt their committees were supportive. In Taiwan, three women MPs on parliamentary committees averaging 45% women (with respectively 31%, 43%, and 60% women) did not feel the parliamentary committee environment was supportive. By contrast, five Taiwanese women MPs on committees averaging 56% women (with respectively 39%, 43%, 54%, 73%, 73% women) members felt the environment was indeed supportive of gender equality and women's interests.

Bullying and Harassment

MPs who participated in this study were asked if they ever experienced or witnessed harassment, bullying, or seeing women treated according to a gender stereotype in parliament – all of which can have seriously negative effects on legislators and the legislative environment. Among respondents who claimed to experience or observe such treatment there were fewer men (31%, 9/29) than women (44%, 23/52) although this apparent gender gap was not statistically significant (Chi-square = 0.244). Overall, the study revealed both women and men in parliament were to some degree aware of harassment though some male MPs seemed to hardly recognize sexism (e.g. Adhikari 2023; Encinas-Franco 2023). Fortunately, the majority of MPs interviewed were not harassed, but it is highly disturbing that 44% of women MPs (and 31% of men MPs) experienced (or witnessed) some form of bullying, harassment, or gender stereotyping in parliament. Mental and verbal harassment including micro-aggressions were reportedly the most common form whereas physical harassment was rare. Interviewees also revealed that bullying is a problem commonly faced by both women and men parliamentarians in Asia.

In South Asia, no male MPs expressed any awareness of such behavior in parliament. By contrast, five out of six Nepali women MPs did. They mentioned how male MPs tend to cut off women in the parliament while they are speaking by saying that they know the issue already. They stated that women MPs are still not able to put forward their concerns and issues openly, that women MPs were not selected

for leadership positions, and that women were harassed based on their clothes and had their capabilities questioned because they were females. In Bangladesh, two out of eight MPs (both women) also mentioned harassment while no MPs (0 out of 6) mentioned this in Sri Lanka. However, there were indications of indirect forms of discrimination with women expressing how uncomfortable they felt with the verbal bullying common among Sri Lankan male MPs.

In Southeast Asia, no women or male parliamentarians mentioned experiencing or observing gender-based harassment, bullying, or stereotyping in Indonesia. This was also the case in Malaysia for state-level assembly legislators whereas all women and male MPs interviewed in Malaysia's national parliament experienced or witnessed this. In the Philippines, such abuse was witnessed by four of six women MPs and one of five male MPs. In Timor-Leste, three of five women and two of four men mentioned it. Likewise, in East Asia, two out of five women and four out of seven men experienced or observed gender-based harassment, bullying, or stereotyping in Japan. Similarly, in Taiwan, four out of eight women experienced or witnessed this.

Overall, these findings indicate that higher levels of democratic and economic development among Asian countries were not correlated with any decrease in gender-based bullying, harassment, or stereotyping of MPs. Unfortunately, such demeaning behavior was present in most Asian parliaments, and Indonesia, the only country where this was not reported, appears to be an exception in the region perhaps due to its large share (55%) of women in senior and leadership roles, a rarity in Asia (Prihatini 2023).

Party Discipline

Do MPs in Asia have the freedom to vote according to their conscience or are they required to vote the party line on bills involving gender issues? On this question, we found no statistically significant difference between responses from women (28%) and men (27%) in parliament. The key divides were across countries and parties and this largely corresponded with levels of economic and democratic development whereby MPs had more autonomy in more affluent and more democratic countries. It also appeared that MPs were typically more constrained by party leaders in parliamentary systems of government than in presidential or semi-presidential political systems. For instance in Taiwan and South Korea, all MPs interviewed in national-level parliaments were free to vote as they pleased on gender issues. This was also the case in Malaysia and Indonesia. By contrast, in Bangladesh all MPs stated that they have to vote with their party on gender issues. This was also generally the case for MPs interviewed in Japan and Nepal and often so in Timor-Leste.

Interestingly, in Nepal, despite having high numbers of women in parliament, respondents noted how women generally have to stay within party limitations and work on issues selected by their party. Thus, party discipline appears to be a double-edged sword that may help to maintain intraparty unity and overall cohesion within parliament while simultaneously preventing MPs from exercising their own

personal views and preferences when voting. In a context where patriarchal party leaders decide women parliamentarians' voting choices this becomes problematic.

Cross-Party Alliances

Another relevant aspect of the parliamentary context is whether MPs are able to work through cross-party alliances to support SRW. On this issue, we found a significant gender gap whereby women (72%, 34/47) were much more likely to participate in cross-party alliances supporting SRW than men (26%, 7/27). Yet, the fact that slightly over one out of four male parliamentarians interviewed were involved in such alliances indicates that SRW is an issue some male MPs in Asia are indeed willing to support.

There were, however, notable differences across countries. In Bangladesh, no MPs worked to support SRW through cross-party alliances. In Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Indonesia no male MPs, but all women MPs interviewed worked to support SRW through cross-party alliances. Similarly, in Taiwan, all women MPs interviewed worked to support SRW through cross-party alliances. Partial support for SRW through cross-party alliances was also found in the Philippines (4 out of 6 women; 3 out of 5 men) and Japan (2 out of 5 women; 2 out of 7 men). Lastly, in Malaysia all interviewed women and men MPs in the national assembly worked to support SRW through cross-party alliances.

Interestingly, in Sri Lanka and Malaysia, where there are few women in parliament, a nonpartisan/multi-partisan women's caucus played an important role in advocating for gender equality. Women's alliances across parties were also evident in countries with a critical mass of women MPs in Taiwan, Timor-Leste, and Nepal. Also, it appeared that governments formed out of multiparty coalitions, in some cases prompted by fully or partially PR-based electoral systems (as in Indonesia, Nepal, and Taiwan), were more likely to have cross-party women's alliances and active women's caucuses. By contrast, countries where a majority of seats in parliament is held by a single party or where the main axis of political competition is between two large political parties, cross-party alliances to advance SRW were rare as in Bangladesh and Japan or restricted to fewer issues as in South Korea and Timor-Leste. Having a women's caucus in such countries would help to overcome otherwise stark partisan divides.

Comparing Bangladesh to Nepal also illustrates the potential role of proportional representation (PR)-based electoral systems in advancing gender equality. In Bangladesh, with its disproportional single-member district (SMD) electoral system as used in many former British colonies, all MPs interviewed for this research insisted on full anonymity revealing a tense and tenuously democratic political situation as reflected in Bangladesh's very low score on press freedom (see Joshi 2023). Though also a low-income country which has experienced political instability in recent decades, Nepal has a PR-based electoral system, a critical mass of women MPs, and in its parliament some women MPs have worked actively together with their counterparts from other parties on common issues concerning women.

How Asian Parliamentarians Seek to Improve SRW

Current Policy Advocacy

As this study has revealed, many parliamentarians in Asia did not consider gender equality and SRW as high priority issues and this was especially the case among men. Yet, both women and men MPs have advocated various SRW-related policies in recent years. In South Asia, MPs interviewed for this study worked on issues of child marriage and violence against women. In Bangladesh, they contributed to the National Women Development Policy, Children's Act, and Representation of the People's Order. In Nepal, MPs worked to empower marginalized women, stop domestic violence, end gender-based discrimination, enable citizenship through mother's name, and implement gender quotas in politics. In Sri Lanka, MPs campaigned to stop female genital mutilation, remove the marital status of parents on child birth certificates, curtail workplace harassment, promote women in senior management, and address the Muslim marriage law. They also worked on behalf of women in migration, education, and unemployment plus women's hygiene and hygienic products and in support of maternal leaves and benefits.

In Southeast Asia, MPs supported many kinds of SRW-related policies and issues. In Indonesia, these included domestic violence, health, citizenship, family resilience, agriculture, and violence against women. Specific laws included those addressing Eradication of Domestic Violence (2004), Eradication of Human Trafficking (2007), and Population Growth and Family Development (2009). In Malaysia, MPs worked on legislation related to sexual harassment, domestic violence, sexual violence against children, stalking, divorce among young couples, the swimming attire of Muslim sportswomen, child marriage, amending the standing order of parliament to curb sexist remarks, increasing the DRW in politics, single mothers, and gender equality in general. Malaysian MPs also supported gender budgeting, better understanding of gender in the school curriculum, training and skills for women's economic empowerment, a state agency for women, and supporting women entrepreneurs (Ahmad Zakuan 2023). In the Philippines, MPs worked on policies regarding young women's sexuality education, a divorce law, sexual and reproductive health, antidiscrimination based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE), violence against women, a safe spaces law, expanded maternity leave, women's labor issues, and gender-based violence and harassment (Encinas-Franco 2023). Specific laws in the Philippines included the Anti–Trafficking Law (2003, 2013), Reproductive Health Law (2012), Magna Carta of Women (2009), Safe Spaces Act (2018), and Expanded Maternity Leave Law (2019).

In the higher-income countries of East Asia, there was also much attention to violence-related issues as well as economic concerns and personal autonomy. SRW policies advocated in Japan included liquid baby formula, "poverty of menstruation" (i.e. inability to afford menstruation hygiene products), selective choices of married couples' surnames, women-friendly public toilets reform, support for

domestic violence victims, a law for promoting equality in politics, and tax reform for babysitting services (Eto 2023). In South Korea, women MPs advocated policies addressing the effects of COVID-19 on working mothers, work–family balance, and support for women's childbirth through measures like parental leave. In Taiwan, SRW policies advocated by women MPs included reproductive health, stalking prevention, sexual harassment, same-sex marriage, equality in the workplace, immigrants' rights, gender quotas, gender equality education, care workers' rights, women's welfare, and eliminating domestic violence (Huang 2023).

Some SRW issues like combating violence against women, workplace harassment, and gender-based discrimination were on the agenda almost everywhere. Yet, certain SRW issues like child marriage, removal of parents' marital status on a child's birth certificate, female genital mutilation, and citizenship through mother's name were expressed more prominently by South Asian women MPs. Meanwhile, certain countries like Taiwan in particular but also the Philippines and Timor-Leste witnessed relatively more advocacy of LGBT women's rights. Lastly, important SRW issues of agrarian/land reform and migrant/immigrant women came up more often in some countries than others. Notably, the former was less present in countries like Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan, which have more urbanized populations, and where large-scale equalizing land reforms were already carried out in the mid–twentieth century after the Second World War. By contrast, these issues were vocalized more frequently by Southeast Asian MPs in countries long enduring Western colonization like the Philippines and Indonesia (and also in South Asia), where highly unequal land tenure, low wages, and women relocating overseas (often without their family members) to find better paying jobs are common.

Obstacles to Reform

Throughout Asia, the societal belief that men should be the ones in powerful political positions continues to discourage women from participating in politics and working for gender equality. In Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Indonesia, social attitudes were highlighted by MPs as primary obstacles to reform. The double burden placed on women to do extensive household duties in addition to the work required of them as political representatives in these countries and elsewhere in Asia makes it very difficult for many women, especially mothers of young children, to serve as parliamentarians (Joshi & Goehrung 2021). Other impediments to gender equality identified by MPs in Bangladesh included lack of discussions in parliament, lack of educational infrastructure, a patriarchal society with outdated social norms and customs, gender-based discrimination, and bureaucratic complexity. In Nepal, MPs mentioned party leaders, government, the lack of trust in women, party policies that are not women–friendly, and the belief that there already is more or less gender equality.

In Malaysia, women MPs experienced sexist, racist, and vulgar remarks in parliament and had limited time for debate. As in Japan, the relatively small number of women representatives in Malaysia contributes to a lack of gender awareness

and a political culture of male dominance. Moreover, in Japan, gender equality was obstructed by old-boy networks, exclusive circles of men, the marginalized position of women, male-defined working styles, women's own consciousness, and the so-called postwar economic model (Eto 2023). Lastly, in the Philippines, Christian churches and the weaponization of religion, conservatives, the business sector's refusal to grant maternity leave, and male MPs' belief that there already is gender equality were identified as major obstacles to gender equality (Encinas-Franco 2023).

MP Recommendations for the Future

To make future progress on SRW and gender equality, many Asian parliamentarians felt it is imperative to (a) change social attitudes and (b) make necessary structural and institutional changes to government and the economy. Although male MPs generally had less recommendations than women MPs in parliament, MPs almost everywhere called for increased participation of women (i.e. greater DRW) in both politics and legislatures. Other reforms they highlighted included the following:

Electoral Reform

Almost half of all MPs interviewed in this study called for election reforms to improve gender equality and this was consistent across all ten countries. Many MPs additionally called for introducing and strengthening legal (i.e. statutory) or constitutional gender quotas that affect all candidates. Also, they supported quotas for parliamentary candidates adopted voluntarily by political parties themselves.

In South Asia, Nepalese MPs called for 40% women's representation in every form of government at all levels though one dissenting Nepali woman MP argued the quota system should not be kept for a long time as leadership should be determined by a person's capabilities. In Bangladesh, women MPs recommended increasing the participation of women through direct elections as opposed to using reserved seats. One reason for this is that reserved-seat women MPs in Bangladesh are not treated as full MPs – they get only one-third the allocation of development funds for their constituencies, they get less time to talk in parliament, and they are often viewed as merely a tool of the ruling party to sustain their majority in parliament (Kabir 2023). The majority of MPs interviewed in Sri Lanka called for a gender quota while some women recommended women-led electorates plus a mixed electoral system in which 75% of seats are based on the people's votes and 25% from nomination.

In the Philippines, male MPs advocated gender balance in leadership, introducing a gender quota, political party reforms, state subsidies for political parties, and a two-party system. Filipina women MPs supported honest elections, automatic youth registration, affirmative action in political parties, voter education, and equitable representation of women at all levels. Malaysian MPs sought electoral reforms and a quota for legislatures to increase women's representation. Their proposals

included reserved seats for women, a 30% electoral candidate quota for women, parties filing more women as candidates in winnable seats, greater political representation of women from the working class and professions and changing the electoral system toward more of a proportional list system.

In East Asia, Taiwanese women MPs supported both campaign finance reforms and switching to a purely proportional representation (PR) system while Japanese women MPs called for electoral reforms, more women in the Diet and local assemblies, greater party support of women candidates, and good performance by women MPs. Additionally, many Japanese men (and women) MPs advocated mandating a gender quota by law.

Reforming the Parliament

MPs recommended a number of other reforms to their parliaments. For instance Bangladesh MPs insisted that honesty, integrity, and moral principles be followed in parliament. Japanese MPs sought reform of working styles in the Diet, women-friendly party administration, parental leave for MPs, and a female prime minister taking office. Some Indonesian MPs sought to have more cross-party alliances while Filipina women MPs requested more facilities for women in parliament and more incentives to political parties. Malaysian MPs also called for work–life balance to make politics more family friendly plus a strong and permanent committee of women in the parliament and equal descriptive representation in the parliament among both MPs and parliamentary staff. Taiwanese women MPs sought to restructure government to strengthen the power of the legislative branch vis-à-vis the executive branch by switching from a semi-presidential to a parliamentary form of government.

Reforming Education and the Media

To improve SRW and gender equality, parliamentarians emphasized the importance of reforming not only education but also the media, as the latter is powerful and stereotypical in its portrayals of women members of parliament (Joshi, Hailu & Reising 2020). Bangladeshi MPs emphasized increasing the capabilities of women through educating and training women to be better parliamentarians. Indonesian MPs supported having a political school for women and gender training in addition to literacy and raising awareness. Filipino MPs called for both education and eradicating disinformation. Japanese MPs believed it is necessary to remove stereotyped images of women and to reform media coverage of women. They also highlighted potential benefits from social networking services (SNS) (e.g. social media). Nepalese MPs advocated educational reforms and expansion, awareness through media, and providing education to poor marginalized women. Lastly, Malaysian MPs sought to educate all legislators (especially men) to be more gender aware and sensitive to have the right perspectives in making decisions. They also advocated civic education starting in primary school.

Economic and Cultural Reforms

Asian MPs, especially in developing countries, generally believed that economic reforms and cultural changes are also necessary preconditions to achieve meaningful gender equality. For instance in the Philippines, some women MPs called for agrarian reform, various cultural changes, and pro-LGBT legislation. Sri Lankan MPs endorsed measures to support working mothers in the private sector as well as early career support for women and skills-based promotion. Nepalese MPs wanted basic infrastructure development, laws, and policies to develop tourism, generating employment to economically empower women, enabling women to own property by themselves, and granting them access to financial resources.

Bureaucratic and Legal Reforms

MPs also recommended governance reforms. Filipino MPs supported political party development, easing bureaucratic requirements for women, adopting a merit-based system, and properly implementing and enforcing laws impacting women. Japanese MPs advocated abandoning seniority-based rules, disclosing data on social discrimination against women, and having women-friendly party administrations. Sri Lankan MPs emphasized having space for women in party structures, women-friendly legislation, one law for the whole country ("one country, one law"), sustainability of laws and policies, and gender budgeting. Nepalese MPs called for open discussions on issues of discrimination among civil society members, punishing those who do not properly implement laws impacting women, and rewarding those who do. In Malaysia, MPs supported a government based on meritocracy which they felt would allow more talented women (and men) to govern. Additionally, they called for appointments of women to other decision-making posts (e.g. head of division, head of department, and so on) to make sure policies related to women's empowerment are thoroughly carried out.

Conclusion: Revisiting Our Hypotheses

This study looked at SRW and gender equality in Asian parliaments from the perspectives of (a) individuals and their ideas, (b) institutions, and (c) intersectionality. It included parliaments from three different sub-regions of Asia and at three different levels of DRW in 2021. As might be expected, some form of gender quota was present in all the high- and medium-level DRW parliaments except for the Philippines. At the high (critical mass) level were the parliamentary (single/lower, upper) chambers of Taiwan (42%), Timor-Leste (38%), and Nepal (33%, 38%). At the medium level (more than token but less than critical mass) were the Philippines (28%, 29%), Indonesia (21%), Bangladesh (21%), and South Korea (19%). At the low (token) level were the lower houses of Japan (10%, 23%), Malaysia (15%, 14%), and Sri Lanka (5%). We now end this study by addressing the six hypotheses about SRW raised in the book's introductory chapter.

The first hypothesis (H1) was that women MPs would do more for SRW than men MPs. Perhaps not surprisingly, the answer to this question in Asian parliaments is generally yes. Women MPs were more likely to enter parliament in order to pursue SRW, more likely to view SRW as a top priority issue for government, and more active than male MPs in engaging and consulting with female voters though most male MPs also consulted female voters. At the same time, not all women MPs prioritized SRW and the proportion of women MPs who did varied significantly across countries and regions. Notably, support for SRW as a top governmental priority was much higher in the wealthier countries of Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and Malaysia and less prevalent in the lower-income countries of Bangladesh, Timor-Leste, Sri Lanka, the Philippines, and Indonesia with Nepal being a major exception. That said, although SRW may not be a top priority for many women MPs in South Asia and Southeast Asia, they are often still favorable toward pursuing certain forms of gender equality and SRW like eliminating domestic violence, violence against women, and unequal opportunities for women and men in education and employment. It was also the case that some male MPs in Asia prioritized SRW especially among younger MPs. About 10% of male MPs interviewed considered SRW a top priority, one man was motivated to enter parliament specifically to advance SRW, and 25% of male MPs in this study engaged in cross-party collaboration to support SRW.

The second hypothesis (H2) was that a critical mass of women MPs (i.e. >30%) will do more for SRW than a small share of women. Affirmatively, this study finds a critical mass of women MPs to be necessary for SRW in Asia. As this study has demonstrated, critical mass mattered both on parliamentary committees and in parliament in general. As discussed earlier, today, male MPs in Asia are rarely motivated to enter politics in order to represent women. Because men in Asian parliaments do not generally prioritize SRW, continuing male dominance will prevent many SRW issues from reaching the political agenda. Moreover, because only about a third of women in Asian parliaments prioritize SRW there needs to be enough women in parliament so that women who do care about SRW have sufficient numbers (e.g. can serve on all parliamentary committees) to make a difference.

The positive effects of a critical mass were demonstrated in the three Asian parliaments (Taiwan, Timor-Leste, and Nepal) which currently have more than 30% women MPs and the two chambers of the Philippine Congress (28%, 29%) which lie just short of that ratio. In Taiwan, women feel comfortable speaking up in parliament and are not inhibited. They have succeeded in reforming certain institutions within the parliament and passing multiple laws supporting gender equality. Moreover, both of Taiwan's two major parties are involved in sponsoring and passing bills to improve women's substantive representation (Huang 2023). In economically less developed Timor-Leste and Nepal, where the national political culture is usually dominated by senior male leaders and women are expected to do care work for their families, having a critical mass of women in parliament has enabled women to have more political influence than in the past when their presence in parliament was small. In both cases, every interviewed MP (including

men), except one, supported their one-third electoral gender quotas. In Timor-Leste, nearly all informants related instances of strong women's participation and leadership on committees (including their parliament's powerful Public Finance Committee) despite only three or four women typically serving on a committee of 12–13 members (Niner and Tam 2023). In Nepal, more than half of its parliament committees have a woman chairperson (9 of 16), citizenship laws have been amended to grant a child citizenship through their mother, and SRW is typically viewed as a crosscutting issue with Nepalese particularly attentive to structural causes of women's deprivation (Adhikari 2023).

In the countries mentioned earlier, having a critical mass has furthered SRW in parliamentary debates and proposals due to having a sizable number of women from multiple political parties. Also, these countries have greater diversity of women in parliament including LGBT women (Timor-Leste, Taiwan, Philippines), advocates for immigrant and migrant women (Taiwan, Philippines, Nepal), and women from Madheshi, Dalit, rural poor, urban poor, and other marginalized communities (Nepal) represented. Thanks to critical mass, authors in this study found an increased likelihood of "sisterhood and camaraderie of fellow female MPs" advocating SRW on a number of parliamentary committees where according to one woman MP in the Philippines it has become "too unacceptable for a male legislator not to support something that favors women" while one of her colleagues expressed that nowadays "you will hardly find a politician who will actually legislate something that is prejudicial to women" (Encinas-Franco 2023). As Shin (2023) further emphasizes, critical mass facilitates SRW in the long run because critical actors need women's support network, and critical mass provides inspirational role models and mentors for women MPs in the next generation.

Our third hypothesis (H3) was that critical actor MPs do more for SRW than a critical mass of women MPs. We can answer this question in the affirmative as well but primarily because it is essentially tautological. Looking at cases like Timor-Leste and Nepal we are tempted to say yes – numbers of women are high but at the same time support for gender equality is not as strong as one might have expected. For example party leaders selected many women MPs in Nepal from outside their own party thereby mostly benefiting women close to powerful males. Many women MPs in Nepal also try to avoid being too controversial to not upset family members or jeopardize their chances of reelection. However, the cases of Nepal and Timor-Leste also have to be seen in context. Both are relatively economically underdeveloped, in a post-conflict setting with high rates of poverty and have only recently instituted one-third gender quotas for women MPs. The long-term effects of these quotas are still uncertain, but similar post-conflict gender quotas in Asia have exhibited positive effects as seen in Vietnam (Joshi & Thimothy 2019).

Conversely, when we look at Japan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and South Korea where DRW is relatively low, one can readily see how important it is to have sufficient numbers of women. In those countries, there are actually some parliamentary committees without a single woman at all or just a few. Even if some women MPs in such countries are critical actors, they will have no voice

on committees where they are not members. For instance in Bangladesh, despite the prime minister, opposition leader, and Speaker of the House all being women, SRW-related legislation often does not pass although an increased presence of women over time has generally resulted in increased discussions on gender-related issues in such committees (Kabir 2023). Also, in countries lacking a critical mass of women MPs like South Korea there has been a strong backlash and threats of violence against women MPs working on behalf of SRW.

As many chapters in this book have illustrated, critical actors do matter significantly, but it is the combination of critical mass and critical actors that is most powerful and therefore both should be prioritized rather than only one or the other. For instance, Sri Lanka with 5% women in its parliament does have dedicated critical actors (both female and male) but no critical mass, and this is simply not enough for adequate SRW. By contrast, Taiwan has both critical mass and critical actors which makes a huge difference even if other obstacles to SRW are still present.

Our fourth hypothesis (H4) was that certain personal backgrounds of MPs are more favorable to SRW. The answer again is yes. Parliamentarians who came from activist, social movement, civil society, and feminist backgrounds were more dedicated to advancing SRW. Those from political parties that were progressive or to the left were also more likely to support SRW. As for male MPs, those who came from single-mother households, had many sisters, or whose family included feminist wives/daughters tended to be the ones most committed to SRW as observed in Japan, Malaysia, the Philippines, and South Korea. Men from these backgrounds tended to be more gender-sensitive and supportive of SRW. Younger men were also more supportive of gender equality than those from older generations.

MPs from certain types of backgrounds also appeared to be less supportive of gender equality. For instance as Encinas-Franco (2023) noted in her chapter, MPs' remarks in the Philippines suggest that the business and military sectors have provided neither solid nor balanced socialization on gender issues. Also, less likely to support SRW were MPs coming from dynastic or hereditary political families as common in Bangladesh, Japan, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka where a large share of both women and men MPs hail from such families while in Indonesia many women MPs (but fewer men) are now linked to political dynasties too. By contrast, in South Korea and Taiwan, MPs were less likely to have dynastic roots and this appears to have benefited SRW. Therefore, a useful reform in some countries might be to introduce MP term limits for families (as opposed to individual MPs) to give more women-friendly citizens a chance to become MPs. While dynastic origins do not always inhibit SRW as occasionally seen in the Philippines, the most active and passionate supporters of SRW across countries were rarely from established political families.

Our fifth hypothesis (H5) was that certain parliamentary institutions are more favorable to SRW. The answer is also yes. This study found the presence of a nonpartisan parliamentary women's caucus helps significantly to coordinate SRW efforts. A good example is Timor-Leste's women's cross-party caucus (GMPTL) supported by its parliament and UN Women (Niner and Tam 2023). A possible

lesson here is that organizations like UN Women should support women's caucuses in other countries and parliaments such as in Bangladesh, Japan, and Malaysia which would likely benefit from having a strong and permanent nonpartisan women's parliamentary caucus.

Parliamentary committees are another institution potentially supportive of SRW, but they need to be sufficiently powerful to make a difference. For some countries in this study, parliamentary committee powers are fairly strong (e.g. Taiwan, Indonesia, South Korea) whereas in others they are relatively weak (e.g. Malaysia, Bangladesh, Japan). SRW also appears to be facilitated by MPs sitting on multiple committees, choosing their own committee assignments (instead of them being assigned by seniority or party leaders), and having the power to easily initiate private members bills that are then treated seriously on the parliamentary agenda as in Taiwan. Gender equality and party diversity among committee headships can also have a favorable effect as opposed to assigning all heads of committees to men from the ruling party. By contrast, party discipline (i.e. forced party-line voting) has often been an obstacle to SRW.

Other institutions supporting SRW include establishing a gender equality commission within parliament as in Taiwan to ensure that MPs, their staff, and those working in parliament have a workplace institution to rely on if they want to file a sexual harassment complaint (Huang 2023). Taiwan's legislature is also supportive of smaller parties that need only three seats in parliament to be eligible to participate in negotiations as compared to 20 seats needed in neighboring South Korea. Another lesson from Taiwan is that its two major political parties both have quotas for women in party leadership positions. As Shin (2023) has pointed out, gender equality within political parties is especially important as women in party leadership positions are often critical actors for SRW. This suggests that gender quotas within parties might have an even greater impact than those within parliament. Therefore, a logical implication might be to introduce electoral law reforms requiring all political parties to have at least 30% or 40% members of either sex on their leadership boards in order to be certified to contest elections.

As for electoral institutions, in countries with mixed electoral systems like the Philippines, South Korea, and Taiwan, MPs elected via multimember district proportional representation (PR) party-lists were often more committed to SRW than MPs elected from single-member districts. Therefore, electoral laws for parliaments in Asia can be amended so that multimember districts and PR lists cover more or all parliamentary seats. PR elections can also improve women's descriptive representation by encouraging or requiring zipper-style alternation of women and men nominees on party-lists. However, this study revealed that PR lists (and the women candidates on them) can also be controlled by male leaders as evident in some parties in Indonesia, Nepal, South Korea, and Timor-Leste. Both PR and SMD elections therefore seem to better facilitate SRW when MPs are not limited by their party to serve only a single term in parliament, when vote buying is disallowed, when election campaigns are not expensive, and when the parliament itself is sufficiently strong and not just a rubber stamp institution.

As for this last point, parliaments in Asia have greater capacity to advance SRW when not overturned by veto players with the power to annul or invalidate bills proposed and passed by the parliament. For instance in countries with a presidential or semi-presidential form of government, the legislature is weaker than the executive branch as neither the political chief executive nor cabinet ministers need to be members of or responsible to parliament. In these contexts, an external actor, namely the president, can overrule the work of the people's representatives in the parliament therefore rendering their efforts at times futile (e.g. Huang 2023). Conversely, even in a parliamentary system, a prime minister who is too strong and who essentially acts independently of the parliament (sometimes labeled as "prime ministerialism" (e.g. Kabir 2023) can be a major obstacle to SRW.

As for the cameral structure of parliament, it seems that unicameralism may generally benefit SRW as it removes the upper house as an additional veto player. For instance in East Asia, women's representation has encountered more obstacles in Japan (which has a bicameral system) than in the unicameral systems of Taiwan and South Korea. This disparity may also be linked to the dominance of one political party in Japanese politics compared to the predominantly two-party systems present in Taiwan and South Korea.

When one political party dominates a legislature, the assembly as an institution plays a weaker role in governance thereby presenting an obstacle to SRW. In quite a number of Asian countries, the executive branch of government dominates policymaking while legislators serve a primarily symbolic role of approving bills in parliament. The strength of parliamentary committees is likewise relevant here. Countries with weak parliamentary committees typically had less advances in SRW (as in Malaysia, Bangladesh, and Japan) whereas SRW was comparatively stronger in countries like Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea, and especially Taiwan, where parliamentary committees were relatively stronger.

Another means to systematically improve SRW is by conducting regular gender audits of parliament to assess gaps in mainstreaming gender issues into the institution's processes, administration, rules, rituals, and practices (Encinas-Franco 2023). The audits' findings can then serve as bases for implementing comprehensive reforms to achieve a gender-sensitive parliament (Palmieri 2011). Lastly, another important institutional feature influencing SRW significantly and negatively in much of Asia as most evident in less affluent South Asia and Southeast Asia is corruption and not following the rule of law. When this happens, electoral violence, money politics, and vote buying discourage many qualified women from running for public office.

The sixth and final hypothesis (H6) under consideration was that greater diversity of MPs would lead to better substantive representation of women from different backgrounds. The results of this study once again strongly imply the answer is yes. In many countries, women MPs most strongly advocating SRW belonged to small parties, had roots in activism, and were younger and better educated. As women with these profiles comprised a minority of parliamentarians, authors in this book consistently emphasized the need to have greater diversification of women (and men) MPs to improve SRW. This was also because unlike the typical

elitist members of Asian parliaments, many social groups including the poor, land-less, low- and middle-income majority, ethnic, racial, religious, and linguistic minorities, and those under the age of 45 have little if any voice in parliamentary deliberations. As one Japanese MP stated,

> [P]eople with diverse backgrounds should constitute the parliamentary membership and share power by engaging in policy-making together. In other words, the parliamentary membership should reflect the diversity of people in society. However, ironically, the Diet membership mirrors Japan's patriarchy where senior men dominate women and young men.
>
> *(as quoted in Eto 2023)*

As Eto (2023) noted in her response to this quote,

> People tend to better understand those who share commonalities than those who are different. Ms. B's argument, accordingly, is true. The more female MPs are diverse in background, generation and socio-economic circumstances, the more women's voices will be appropriately heard.

Likewise, writing on Sri Lanka, Jayasekara (2023) emphasizes how,

> It is therefore necessary to look into what measures can be taken to motivate women to enter parliament from all ethnic and religious groups today to create a balance in the descriptive representation of women. The aim should not be to further segregate women based on their ethnicity, but to provide equal democratic opportunities to all women.

To sum up, this study compared SRW and efforts to advance gender equality in Asian parliaments both having and lacking a critical mass of women legislators. From the perspective of the latter where DRW (i.e. numbers of women in parliament) is low, critical mass is crucial to achieve SRW. From the perspective of the former where DRW is high, critical actors are crucial for advancing SRW. Therefore, both critical actors and critical mass are necessary in Asian parliaments and this study correspondingly found that those factors which inhibit DRW generally also impede SRW. From the perspective of all, moreover, changing societal attitudes toward gender and gender roles is essential and perhaps the most important ingredient of all. Gender equality has to become the norm for women to be fully and properly represented in Asian parliaments and elsewhere.

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