

Women's Representation in Southeast European
Politics

NEW HORIZONS IN GENDER AND POLITICS

Series Editors: *Drude Dahlerup, Professor Emerita of Political Science, Department of Political Science, Stockholm University, Sweden and Honorary Professor, Department of Social Sciences and Business, Roskilde University, Denmark and Birgit Sauer, Professor of Political Science, Department of Political Science, University of Vienna, Austria*

New Horizons in Gender and Politics aims at publishing cutting-edge research within the expanding research field of Gender and Politics, with a broad and international scope. From being critical voices on the margin, research on gendered power structures and gendered discourses as well as multiple gender identities in politics is now at the core of political science research.

The series welcomes innovative and groundbreaking research, including both theoretically informed empirical studies and purely theoretical contributions to feminist political science. Under the guidance of the Series Editors, Professors Drude Dahlerup and Birgit Sauer, New Horizons in Gender and Politics encompasses carefully commissioned monographs and edited volumes written by globally or regionally well-known researchers in addition to works from emerging scholars.

For a full list of Edward Elgar published titles, including the titles in this series, visit our website at www.e-elgar.com.

Women's Representation in Southeast European Politics

Edited by

Lilijana Čičkarić

*Principal Research Fellow, Institute of Social Sciences, Center
for Sociological and Anthropological Research, Belgrade,
Serbia*

Marsela Dauti

*Associate Professor, Department of Social Work and Social
Policy, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tirana, Albania*

Milica Antić Gaber

*Professor of Sociology of Culture, Department of Sociology,
Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia*

NEW HORIZONS IN GENDER AND POLITICS SERIES

 **Edward Elgar**
PUBLISHING

Cheltenham, UK • Northampton, MA, USA

© The Editors and Contributing Authors Severally 2026

Every effort has been made to trace all the copyright holders but if any have been inadvertently overlooked please notify the publisher.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical or photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher. Without limiting the author's and publisher's exclusive rights, any unauthorised use of this publication to train generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies is expressly prohibited.

Published by

Edward Elgar Publishing Limited
The Lypiatts
15 Lansdown Road
Cheltenham
Glos GL50 2JA
UK

Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc.
William Pratt House
9 Dewey Court
Northampton
Massachusetts 01060
USA

Authorised representative in the EU for GPSR queries only: Easy Access System
Europe – Mustamäe tee 50, 10621 Tallinn, Estonia, gpsr.requests@easproject.com

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Control Number:

This book is available electronically in the  Elgaronline
Political Science and Public Policy subject collection
<https://doi.org/10.4337/9781035350551>

ISBN 978 1 0353 5054 4 (cased)
ISBN 978 1 0353 5055 1 (eBook)
ISBN 978 1 0494 0763 0 (ePub)

The book is dedicated to all women across Southeast Europe whose political experiences, advocacy, and democratic ideals challenge entrenched inequalities and continue to shape the development of institutions and gender equality mechanisms in post-socialist and post-conflict societies.

Contents

<i>List of contributors</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xii
PART I INTRODUCTION	
Mapping women's political representation in Southeast Europe: Legacies, reforms and struggles	2
<i>Marsela Dauti, Milica Antić Gaber and Lilijana Čičkarić</i>	
PART II WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN NATIONAL PARLIAMENTS: ACTORS, ACTIONS, AND OUTCOMES	
1 Between politics of ideas and politics of presence: Women in the parliamentary democracy in Kosovo	19
<i>Vjollca Krasniqi and Lirije Palushi</i>	
2 Insiders or outsiders: The Women's Parliamentary Network in Serbia	41
<i>Lilijana Čičkarić</i>	
3 Gendered power structures and women's lived experiences in the Slovenian parliament	62
<i>Jure Skubic and Milica Antić Gaber</i>	
4 Women's political representation in Montenegro: From reform to inequality	82
<i>Nikoleta Đukanović and Milica Kovač Orlandić</i>	
PART III CHALLENGES OF WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN CANTONS AND LOCAL COUNCILS	
5 Breaking barriers: women's policy and advocacy initiatives in the local councils of Albania	103
<i>Marsela Dauti</i>	

6	The political representation of women in Cantons of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina <i>Tajma Kapić</i>	122
7	Political participation of women in the local councils in North Macedonia: going beyond numbers <i>Tania Ivanova</i>	141
PART IV POLITICAL PARTIES AND SOCIAL MEDIA THROUGH THE LENS OF GENDER EQUALITY		
8	Gender (in)equality in Croatian parliamentary parties' statutes <i>Marjeta Šinko</i>	163
9	Political (self-)representation of women MPs on Facebook: what comes first in Republika Srpska's <i>Srpska First</i> ? <i>Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović and Vuk Vučetić</i>	182
PART V INTERSECTIONAL AND CROSS-NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES		
10	Looking from the outside in: An intersectional perspective of political participation in SEE countries through the prism of the CEDAW Committee <i>Biljana Kotevska</i>	203
11	Looking beyond numbers: How gender-sensitive are parliaments in Southeast Europe? <i>Amila Ždralović</i>	219
PART VI CONCLUSION		
12	Looking ahead: Lessons and pathways for women's political representation in Southeast Europe <i>Milica Antić Gaber, Marsela Dauti and Lilijana Čičkarić</i>	241

List of contributors

Milica Antić Gaber is Full Professor at the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. She has been a visiting scholar or lecturer at the Central European University, Budapest; the Centre for Women's Studies, Belgrade; the Inter-university Centre, Dubrovnik; Birkbeck, University of London; the Centre for Women's Studies, Novi Sad; and the University Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona. Her recent projects focus on gender quotas in politics, violence against women in politics, gender inclusive language, and gender inequalities in academia.

Lilijana Čičkarić is Principal Research Fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences in Belgrade, Serbia. She has been a Visiting Scholar at the University of Oslo and the University of Amsterdam, a Research Fellow at LSE, and a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Massachusetts and the Harvard Kennedy School. Her recent projects focus on quotas and parliamentary politics, women's leadership, women and far-right politics, violence against women in politics, and gender inequalities in research and academia.

Marsela Dauti is Associate Professor in the Department of Social Work and Social Policy at the University of Tirana. Her research examines democratization processes at the community level, focusing on issues of political and social inclusion, democratic accountability, and government responsiveness. Before joining the University of Tirana, she was a Marie Curie Fellow at the Department of Government at Uppsala University and Associate Professor at the University of New York in Tirana.

Nikoleta Đukanović is Assistant Professor in Humanistic Studies at the University of Donja Gorica. She holds a PhD from the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Belgrade. She completed a master's program at the University of Bologna, as well as one in European Studies at the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Montenegro. She has conducted research stays at the Institute of European Law in Graz (2016) and at Humboldt University in Berlin (2018).

Tania Ivanova currently serves as President of Reactor – Research in Action, a feminist think tank based in Skopje. Prior to this role, she worked with Ipsos, where she specialized in qualitative research and managed complex, multi-country quantitative surveys. Her research expertise includes political participation, gender mainstreaming, gender-based violence, education, youth engagement, and issues affecting marginalized communities. She is a member of ESOMAR and actively participates in various gender equality networks and coalitions, including EQUAPRO.

Tajma Kapić is a postdoctoral researcher at the School of Law and Government at Dublin City University in Ireland. Kapić has over 20 years of experience working with civil society organizations, United Nations agencies, and statutory bodies across multiple countries, including Ireland, Norway, the United Kingdom, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, and Thailand. She has extensive expertise in contested interethnic and intercultural contexts, with a focus on peacebuilding, post-conflict rehabilitation, and the well-being and empowerment of women.

Biljana Kotevska is a socio-legal feminist scholar focused on equality and non-discrimination law, international human rights law, interdisciplinary intersectional research, research methodologies, and legal history. She is currently a Max Weber Postdoctoral Fellow at the European University Institute (Italy), where she is expanding her research on intersectional discrimination and inequalities, as well as political discrimination and various aspects of participation as a human rights principle.

Milica Kovač Orlandić is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Law at the University of Donja Gorica. She holds a PhD from the Faculty of Law at the University of Belgrade in the field of labour and social law. Her recent publications include a book chapter on the transformation of Montenegrin labour legislation under the influence of EU integration (Nomos Publishing) and an article on the boundary of employers' right to monitor employees' communications (Foreign Legal Life).

Vjollca Krasniqi is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Prishtina, Kosovo. She holds a PhD from the University of Ljubljana and MSc degree in Gender, Development, and Globalization from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her research interests include gender, human rights, nation building, transitional justice, collective memory, and social policy. She has been actively engaged in gender equality in

the wider Balkan region and served on the boards of directors of several civil society organizations in Kosovo.

Lirije Palushi is a teaching assistant in the Department of Political Science, Faculty of Philosophy, at the University of Prishtina in Kosovo. She holds an MSc in European Integration and Public Administration from the University of Prishtina. She teaches courses on research methods, academic writing, European Union institutions, and political representation. In addition, she has extensive research and consulting experience with various local and international civil society organizations.

Zlatiborka Popov Momčinović is Associate Professor of Political Science at the Faculty of Philosophy University of East Sarajevo. She completed her doctoral thesis on the women's movement in Bosnia and Herzegovina at the University of Belgrade. She teaches the history of political ideas, gender and politics, gender equality, political participation, LGBT+ rights, and the role of religion in peacebuilding. She is a member of the Political Science Committee of the Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Marjeta Šinko is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Zagreb in Croatia. She studied political science in Croatia and Germany and has been a visiting fellow at the University of Ljubljana in Slovenia and the University of Alberta in Canada. Her primary research interests include gender and politics, comparative politics, and public policy.

Jure Skubic is a final year PhD student in the field of Gender Studies. He works as a research assistant for Sociology of Culture at the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, and as a researcher at the Institute of Contemporary History, Ljubljana. His research interests include gender studies, violence against women in politics and on social media, gender equality, gender-based violence, gender and politics, and parliamentary discourse analysis.

Vuk Vučetić is Assistant Professor in the Department of Journalism and Political Science at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of East Sarajevo. He obtained a PhD in Communication Sciences from the Faculty of Political Sciences at the University of Sarajevo. His research focuses on the mediatization of politics, analysis of media content, and social networks, especially during election campaigns. He serves on the Appeal Commission of the Press and Online Media Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Amila Ždralović is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Law, University of Sarajevo. She graduated from the Department of Philosophy and Sociology, Faculty of Philosophy, and earned her PhD in Sociology from the Faculty of Political Science, University of Sarajevo. She has worked as a journalist, high school teacher, and trainer for NGO projects. Ždralović has published over 50 scholarly papers and research reports. Her research interests include the sociology of law, the sociology of politics, and gender studies.

Acknowledgements

We express our profound gratitude to Alex Pettifer, Jo Humphreys, Nina Booth, and Emma McInnes from Edward Elgar Publishing Ltd and to the editors of the New Horizons in Gender and Politics Series, Professor Emerita Drude Dahlerup and Professor Birgit Sauer, for their prompt, unreserved, and enthusiastic acceptance of our proposal to publish this volume. We extend our appreciation for their expert guidance, constructive feedback, and well-intentioned critical insights.

We would also like to express our appreciation to our distinguished colleagues from the Gender and Politics in Southeast Europe Research Network (GenPolSEE), which was founded in 2022 through the joint efforts of the Institute for Social Sciences and the Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory at the University of Belgrade. Notably, the GenPolSEE network is the only interdisciplinary and systematic network in this region focusing on issues related to gender and politics. We would especially like to thank our colleague Saša Gavrić, who encouraged the idea of publishing this book, which we hope will attract the attention of the wider professional and academic community.

We are deeply grateful to all the authors, whose valuable discussions and suggestions during the research and the exchange of ideas at the network's annual meeting in 2024 significantly improved the quality of this volume. The positive atmosphere, dedication, mutual cooperation, respect, and understanding fostered an exciting journey that will be remembered for years to come.

We also thank our families for their tireless support, understanding, and encouragement throughout the process of writing and editing this book.

The editors

12. Looking ahead: Lessons and pathways for women's political representation in Southeast Europe

**Milica Antić Gaber, Marsela Dauti and
Lilijana Čičkarić**

12.1 WOMEN'S POLITICAL GAINS: PROGRESS, BUT STILL FRAGILE

Over the past three decades, the countries of Southeast Europe (SEE) have experienced significant political, social, and economic transitions. These transformations, often framed within the broader processes of political pluralization, democratization and Europeanization, have had profound implications for gender relations, particularly in the sphere of political representation. As the contributions to this volume and previous scholarship on the topic (Einhorn, 2006; Funk, 2004) demonstrate, the post-socialist restructuring of political institutions in the region was accompanied by a sharp decline in women's presence within formal political bodies. These developments underscore the necessity of critically examining the gendered dimensions of political transitions. The marginalization of women in the newly emerging parliamentary democracies reflects not merely institutional oversight, but also the persistence of patriarchal norms and structures that have historically constrained women's political agency (McBride & Mazur, 2010; Pudrovska, 2004). In response, a range of actors mobilized to contest this exclusion and to advocate for more gender-inclusive political spaces.

The chapters in this volume trace the multifaceted strategies employed by both local and transnational actors in pursuit of gender equality in politics. These actors include grassroots women's organizations, feminist networks, gender advocates within political parties, NGOs, and international stakeholders such as the women's sections of European leftist parties and transnational feminist alliances. Their interventions contributed to the establishment of institutional mechanisms such as women's policy offices, parliamentary committees and

commissions on gender equality, women's sections within parties, and inter-party women's coalitions. Legal and policy frameworks also evolved within this context, with the adoption of gender equality legislation and the influence of EU accession criteria serving as critical levers for institutional change. These dynamics reveal the complex interplay between local feminist praxis and international normative pressures, highlighting both the opportunities and constraints for advancing gender justice in post-socialist political landscapes (Verloo, 2007; Dahlerup, 2018). In the aftermath of the first multi-party elections in the countries of Southeast Europe, it became increasingly clear that, without targeted interventions in the institutional and regulatory frameworks shaping electoral outcomes, progress toward greater gender equality in political representation would remain incremental and insufficient.

Despite progress driven by institutional reforms implemented after the fall of socialism, no country in Southeast Europe has achieved gender equality in political representation. Bosnia and Herzegovina presents a fragmented picture: women's representation varies significantly across different levels of governance, and ethno-political dynamics in Republika Srpska continue to constrain structural change. Kosovo has exceeded its 30 percent quota nationally, but institutional inconsistencies, especially at the municipal level, restrict progress. Montenegro's experience is particularly telling. Recent parliamentary terms have seen a modest increase in the number of women MPs, but this is largely the result of men resigning to assume executive posts, with women entering parliament as alternates. These changes do not reflect genuine political will, but rather the outcomes of the internal electoral regulations, tailored to the interests of men. Across the board, gender equality remains a distant goal.

The chapters reveal that systemic barriers impede the effective implementation of gender quotas. In Montenegro, municipal election commissions have often published party candidate lists that fail to meet legal gender requirements. Also, a common practice has been placing women at the bottom of party lists. Another practice, observed in Albania and Montenegro, involves demanding women to resign after being elected so that men can take their seats. There have also been attempts to reduce the quota threshold, such as the proposal to reduce the quota threshold in the local councils of Albania from 50 to 30 percent, examples which demonstrate that formal gains can be easily reversed. Enforcement mechanisms also matter: mild financial penalties have little effect, whereas rejecting non-compliant lists proves more effective in compelling parties to adhere to gender quota requirements.

Across the region, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions. In Montenegro, no party has a woman president, and women remain underrepresented in parliamentary committees and executive roles. A similar pattern is evident in Serbia, where party leadership structures limit women's

ability to influence decisions. In Croatia, while party statutes formally embrace gender equality, they do not empower women's sections with decision-making authority or resources. In Kosovo, although more women hold parliamentary seats, party women's forums still have limited leverage over political agendas. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, fragmented cantonal assemblies and the ethnic focus of political bargains leave little space for women to access senior roles.

Some of the chapters focused on the gendered division of labour in politics. In Montenegro, interviews showed that women are often relegated to administrative and logistical campaign work. This pattern continues in parliament, where women are underrepresented in key committees. In Slovenia, similar dynamics persist, with women more often assigned to committees on education, health, and social affairs, while men dominate domains such as domestic policy, finance, energy, economy, military affairs. That said, progress is not entirely absent. In Kosovo, women MPs have taken leadership roles in areas such as European integration, spatial planning and infrastructure, public finances, and foreign affairs and diaspora. In Republika Srpska, women have assumed leadership in areas like finance, public administration, local self-government, and spatial planning and construction. In Albania, women ministers lead portfolios such as infrastructure and energy, and public administration and anti-corruption. These examples suggest that the traditional division of labour is changing, but the change is very slow.

Another key barrier to women's political advancement is their limited access to financial resources. In Montenegro, for example, political parties failed to report how they spent over €500,000 earmarked for gender equality. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the fragmented cantonal system offers few consistent channels to support women's political careers financially. The limited access to financial resources reinforces existing inequalities and restricts women's opportunities to campaign effectively and advance in their political careers.

12.2 IMPLEMENTATION OF GENDER QUOTAS: STRUCTURAL IMPEDIMENTS AND PERCEIVED REALITIES

The structural barriers to women's political participation are embedded not only in broader socio-political contexts but also in the formal and informal rules that govern political competition. These include party statutes and internal decision-making processes, organizational hierarchies, electoral systems, and the broader legal and policy environment (Matland & Montgomery, 2003).

As previous comparative research has demonstrated, the implementation of gender quotas has been one of the most effective instruments for accelerating women's political inclusion (Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2005; Krook, 2009). Whether mandated by law or adopted voluntarily by political parties, gender

quotas serve as corrective mechanisms aimed at counteracting the historical underrepresentation of women and at reshaping the gendered dynamics of political power.

In SEE countries, the introduction of gender quotas in politics emerged as a key strategy to promote an upward trend in women's participation in political life. More than three decades after the onset of post-socialist transformation, and through multiple electoral cycles and quota reforms, the chapters in this volume document a substantial increase in women's representation at national and sub-national levels. It is evident that this progress would most likely not have occurred without the adoption of gender quotas. Gender quotas targets in politics in SEE countries at national level vary from 30 percent in Kosovo, Montenegro, and Albania; 35 percent in Slovenia; and 40 percent in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, and North Macedonia (Table 12.1). They also produce varied results ranging in the actual parliaments from 19 percent in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 28.4 percent in Montenegro to 34 percent in Croatia and Kosovo, 36 percent in Albania, 38 percent in Serbia, 40 percent in Slovenia, and 42 percent in North Macedonia.

The reason for these variations lies in the fact that electoral gender quotas, although a very important systemic factor, do not operate in a vacuum but in a specific socio-political context. The chapters in this book demonstrate that contextual elements, such as dominant societal values and cultural norms, the existing political culture, the strength and enforcement of the rule of law, the structure of electoral systems and political parties, and the vitality and independence of feminist and women's movements, collectively create an environment that can either enable or hinder the effectiveness of gender quotas.

In the post-war period, the re-traditionalization of society in Bosnia and Herzegovina reinforced a strong emphasis on ethnic representation, which was enshrined in the constitution. As a result, political parties adopted a minimalistic approach to gender equality in politics. Within this context, gender quotas have had only a limited impact at both the federal and cantonal levels.

In 2015, Albania strengthened its gender quota system by amending the Electoral Code to require that every two consecutive names on municipal council candidate lists include one candidate of each gender, effectively raising the local-level quota to 50 percent. In contrast, at the national level, the gender quota threshold remains at 30 percent, due to stronger political resistance to raising the quota in parliamentary elections.

In Montenegro, a broader contextual factor that hinders the effective implementation of gender quotas is the incomplete institutional transition and the erosion of already fragile democratic practices. This includes a lack of political accountability; weak rule of law, especially the selective enforcement of gender equality legislation; and a fragmented, hybrid political system that fails to uphold legal norms in practices.

Table 12.1 Gender quotas and percentage of women in parliaments in SEE countries

Country	Year of quota introduction	Percentage of quota (legislated minimum/target)	Percentage of women in parliament
Albania	2008 (introduction of quotas in the Electoral Code and the Law on Gender Equality)	30% (legislated candidate quota). The threshold was increased to 50% in 2015 for local councils, but the initial national candidate quota was 30%	36% (2024 data)
Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republika Srpska/RS data)	1998 (Provisional gender quotas mandated by OSCE following the post-war elections)	40% (legislated candidate quota). Early rules required at least one-third of candidates on each list to be women	26.5% (2022 convocation data)
Croatia	2008 (enactment of the Act on Gender Equality)	40% (legislated candidate quota specified in AGE)	34% (11th Session of Croatian Parliament data)
Kosovo	2000 (United Nations Mission in Kosovo – UNMIK). The Law on Gender Equality was enacted in 2004	30% (electoral law threshold/candidate quota). The Gender Equality Law (2015) mandates no less than 50% representation for each gender	36.6% (2025 parliamentary election data)
Montenegro	2011 (reform of electoral legislation prescribing a minimum quota)	30% (legislated candidate quota minimum)	27.16% (2023 election data)
North Macedonia	2002 (initial introduction of a 30% gender quota). The Law on Gender Equality was enacted in 2006	40% (current legislated candidate quota for parliament and local councils, reinforced by a modified zipper rule)	42.5% (current mandate, 2025 data)
Serbia	2004 (Law on the Election of Deputies)	40% (quota increased prior to the 2020 elections). The minimum alternated between 30% and 40%	37.6% (XIV convocation in 2023)

Country	Year of quota introduction	Percentage of quota (legislated minimum/target)	Percentage of women in parliament
Slovenia	2006 (Amendment to the Law on Elections to the National Assembly). Constitutional amendments concerning quotas were enacted in 2004	At least 35% of the total number of candidates on the list must belong to the underrepresented gender	40% (2022 election)

Source: Authors' review based on official databases of gender quotas in SEE.

In Kosovo, international actors played a pivotal role in advancing gender equality initiatives. Notably, a 30 percent gender quota was first introduced by the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) in 2000. However, deeply embedded patriarchal discourses continue to undermine the transformative potential of such measures. In particular, the discourse on 'fraternity' reinforces the notion that men are the main political actors, who act on behalf of the entire population. Gender quotas, while institutionally mandated, often coexist with cultural narratives that marginalize women's political agency and reinforce masculine domination in public life. In this institutional context, the 30 percent threshold for women's presence in parliament is effectively guaranteed through both candidate list composition and post-election seat allocation adjustments.

At the practical level, several key dimensions identified in the chapters of this volume are critical to understanding the limited effectiveness of gender quota implementation. These include whether quotas are conceived as minimum guarantees or as ceilings; the type and design of the quota system, specifically, whether they apply to electoral candidate lists or to the actual composition of representative bodies; the presence of placement mandates, such as the 'zipper' rule that alternates men and women candidates to ensure equitable representation; rules governing the replacement of elected officials, which can either uphold or undermine the gender balance achieved through elections; and the existence or absence of effective enforcement mechanisms or sanctions for non-compliance. These technical aspects do not function in isolation. They are shaped by broader power dynamics, institutional cultures, and the extent of political will. Therefore, the effectiveness of quotas depends not only on their design but also on how they are integrated into the political system. In settings where entrenched elites resist meaningful change, even

well-crafted quotas can become mere formalities that reinforce, rather than challenge, existing gender hierarchies within political institutions.

Among other factors, general reluctance among political parties to adopt robust mechanisms for promoting women's political representation, including gender quotas, contributes to an environment where special measures remain largely symbolic and lack transformative impact. As a result, the effectiveness of gender quotas remains limited, constrained by both institutional inertia and ideological resistance within the party system.

In Slovenia, gender quotas have become an accepted and normalized part of the political process. In fact, they are not accepted as party's genuine attitude towards gender equality, but as something that 'is here and must be followed'. Consequently, even though the legal threshold is relatively low at 35 percent, and the presence of strong sanctions, such as exclusion from the electoral competition for non-compliance, has led most political parties not only to meet but often to exceed the minimum requirement when composing their candidate lists. In this socio-political and legal context, gender quotas have become a standard feature of electoral competition. As a result, even within the constraints of a complex proportional electoral system, gender quotas in Slovenia have proven capable of fulfilling their intended purpose, advancing a more balanced gender representation in parliament, typically ranging from 30–40 percent of women MPs, with one sharp drop to 24 percent following an ideological shift to the right.

A comparable situation can be observed in North Macedonia, where the introduction of a 30 percent gender quota on the candidates' lists, later increased to a 40 percent quota for the election of members of parliament, has been further reinforced by a modified 'zipper rule', requiring that every third position on a candidate list be reserved for the underrepresented gender. This measure is supported by mandatory compliance checks, with candidate lists subject to rejection in cases of non-compliance. These combined mechanisms have created a strong institutional framework that has facilitated a steady increase of women's representation at both national and local levels. Under these conditions, and with the rule that if a woman MP's mandate is terminated, the next woman on the candidate list assumes the seat for the remainder of the term, gender quotas have proven to be a highly effective tool. As a result, North Macedonia now stands as a regional leader in Southeast Europe, with the highest proportion of women in the national parliament, currently at 42 percent.

Meanwhile, Albania is a regional leader in women's representation in local councils, with women holding 42 percent of local council seats. However, despite the numeric progress, several concerns persist. There is a growing concern that women's representation is often instrumentalized by political leaders for political gain. The implementation of gender equality reforms relies

heavily on international donors, and there is evidence that scepticism about women's representation in local councils is on the rise (Dauti & Metaj, 2023).

Quite the opposite is the situation in Montenegro. The implementation of gender quotas has not yielded the expected results and remains largely weak and symbolic. Although a 30 percent gender quota is formally required for national elections, parties typically comply only with the bare minimum. Moreover, the legal framework lacks effective enforcement mechanisms. Even when candidate lists fail to meet legal gender requirements, the absence of mandatory sanctions allows electoral commissions to accept such lists without consequence. As a result, non-compliance often goes unpenalized, and accountability is virtually non-existent. The effectiveness of gender quotas is further weakened by the inadequate enforcement of rules governing mandate replacement. The law stipulates that when a mandate of a councillor or MP from an underrepresented gender ends, the next candidate of the same gender on the list should assume the position. However, this provision is often bypassed through a widely practiced and almost institutionalized workaround: women candidates voluntarily relinquish their mandates, allowing the seat to pass to the next male candidate on the list. This practice, embedded in the broader political culture and accepted as *modus operandi* of dominant actors, severely undermines the purpose of gender quotas. In such a context, the transformative potential of quotas is significantly curtailed, and their impact on achieving equal gender representation in politics remains minimal. Taken together, these findings suggest that while quotas have contributed to an increase in women's descriptive representation, and left-wing women parliamentarians in Slovenia, for example, support this mechanism precisely for this reason, they have not necessarily led to a substantive transformation of gendered power relations within political institutions.

In Serbia, women parliamentarians support quotas as necessary institutional correctives that disrupt political arenas historically dominated by men. But they also raise concerns that some women elected through quotas may lack political experience or act primarily in service of party elites rather than advancing gender equality. Women respondents from the qualitative research presented in the chapter argue that quotas do not guarantee substantive representation. Women elected via quotas may feel beholden to party leadership, often dominated by men, rather than empowered to advocate independently for gender equality or broader feminist agendas. This dynamic can undermine the transformative potential of quotas, leading to symbolic rather than substantive inclusion.

These concerns reflect broader tensions within feminist institutionalism regarding the risk of institutional co-optation where formal gender equality mechanisms are appropriated by dominant actors to reinforce existing hierarchies. From a feminist institutionalist perspective, this highlights the

limitations of such measures when they are not accompanied by deeper challenges to informal institutions, such as party cultures, leadership norms and behaviours, and decision-making hierarchies, that continue to marginalize women's voices. In this context, the focus on the numerical representation only risks overshadowing the need for broader structural reforms that would embed gender equality in the everyday functioning of political institutions.

12.3 WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION AT THE SUB-NATIONAL LEVEL: CANTONS AND LOCAL COUNCILS

One of this volume's key contributions is its focus on women's political representation at the sub-national level. To date, this area has received less attention than women's representation at the national level (Berevoescu & Ballington, 2021), a pattern that holds true for the region as well (Korunovska et al., 2015; Dauti, 2022). However, scholars have recently begun calling for greater focus on local-level politics (Barnett & Shalaby, 2024), where women's struggles often go unnoticed.

The three chapters focusing on women's political representation in the cantons of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the local councils of North Macedonia and Albania reveal that women do not only participate in political institutions but also engage in substantive representation. Despite the constraints they face, women representatives advocate for women and community well-being.

The chapter on women's political representation in the local councils of Albania reveals that women councillors have played an important role in advancing social welfare and providing support for marginalized groups. Women's initiatives include efforts to fund services for survivors of domestic violence, support women entrepreneurs, provide scholarships for disadvantaged students, and expand local infrastructure and social housing. Some women representatives have acted through alliances within councils to jointly advocate for health clinics or improved local roads, while others have pushed their party groups to prioritize programs for children and vulnerable families.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, women's political activity at the cantonal level demonstrates resilience within a deeply fragmented governance system. Despite institutional complexity and a governance framework that often prioritizes ethnic over gender concerns, women elected to cantonal assemblies have advanced proposals on public education, health care, social service delivery, violence against women, maternity benefit payments, and pensions for war veterans' widows.

In the local councils of North Macedonia, women representatives have engaged in substantive representation by initiating actions that promote women's interests. Women councillors have actively advocated for issues such as

gender-based violence, the inclusion of gender perspectives in local budgeting, and improved social services for vulnerable groups, particularly women and children. They have played key roles in initiating local policies and programs addressing women's health, economic empowerment, and access to childcare. The chapter also shows that women councillors engage with civil society and collaborate with grassroots organizations.

Other chapters in this volume demonstrate that women engage in substantive representation at the national level as well. Women MPs in Kosovo have spearheaded initiatives on access to health care, rural development projects, and programs to expand women's economic opportunities. The chapter on the political representation of women MPs on Facebook in Republika Srpska highlights that, while women's formal influence may be constrained by party hierarchies and ethnic politics, social platforms allow them to engage with issues such as gender-based violence, women's access to healthcare, reproductive rights, and support for vulnerable groups, particularly children, parents of children with disabilities, and large families. The chapter also underscores the significance of party ideology, revealing important differences between women MPs within the ruling coalition and the opposition.

International support has played an important role in strengthening women's advocacy efforts. For example, in Kosovo, Albania, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, international development organizations have provided training programs for women councillors and parliamentarians, supported women's caucuses, and facilitated regional knowledge exchanges. These initiatives have helped women representatives develop a broad array of skills and build networks to advocate more effectively for community needs and gender equality.

Despite these contributions, the chapters show that significant challenges persist. The advocacy efforts of women representatives are often restricted to policy areas traditionally considered women's domains, such as health, education, and social welfare, with fewer in domains like economic development, defence, or national security. The chapter on the policy and advocacy initiatives in the local councils of Albania, a country with one of the highest numeric representation of women in local councils in Europe (Council of European Municipalities and Regions, 2024), confirms these concerns: many initiatives tend to conform to traditional gender expectations, focusing on caregiving or social welfare without confronting deeper structural barriers. A similar pattern is observed in North Macedonia, where women councillors primarily focus on areas such as health, education, and social welfare. The analysis highlights that men in local councils often fail to take issues like childcare, domestic violence, and women's economic empowerment seriously; as a result, these policy areas often remain marginalized. The findings point to the necessity of shifting from predominantly service-oriented agendas to more transformative approaches that address systemic inequalities, including

by encouraging women themselves to challenge the confines of traditional policy spaces and to build broader coalitions with local actors. The findings also highlight the importance of engaging men more actively in policy areas traditionally regarded as women's domains.

12.4 WOMEN AND PARTY POLITICS: FROM MARGINALIZATION TO EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The prevailing conclusion derived from the chapters review confirm what has already been established in the literature: the fact that political parties continue to function as the predominant gatekeepers of women's political representation (Norris & Lovenduski, 1994). While formal mechanisms such as gender quotas have increased the number of women in political office, parties largely control candidate selection, placement on electoral lists, and access to leadership positions (IDEA, 2021). As such, party elites wield significant influence over which women advance politically and under what conditions. This gatekeeping function often reinforces existing hierarchies, with loyalty to party leadership prioritized over policy expertise or commitment to gender equality (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2021). Consequently, women's presence in political institutions does not always translate into substantive representation or policy influence.

Evidence indicates that obstruction and neglect by major political actors are the primary impediments to further advancements in women's political rights (Sinko, 2023). For example, the women's section of the party, rather than embodying the promotion of feminist policies, the advancement of other women, the facilitation of opportunities, and the establishment of professional networks, signifies a form of women's marginalization within the political party framework. This marginalization relegates women to roles that are conventionally associated with domestic labour and care work (Caul Kittilson, 2013; Celis et al., 2016b).

Women MPs have increasingly assumed leadership roles in parliamentary committees that were once male-dominated, and women ministers now head several key ministries. These developments signal a shift toward more equitable distribution of policy portfolios and improved visibility of women in national politics. However, this progress in representation often masks deeper structural inequalities. Despite increased presence, party structures remain largely resistant to transformation. They continue to prioritize loyalty to party elites, often masculine, over equality and merit, limiting women's access to meaningful decision-making power. As a result, even women in prominent positions may have constrained agency, with their influence shaped more by party hierarchy than by their expertise or policy agendas. Thus, gender

equality in political leadership remains hindered by entrenched party dynamics and patriarchal norms within political institutions.

As demonstrated in the chapter on Slovenia, the role of political parties is a primary factor contributing to the underrepresentation of women in politics. Political parties are particularly powerful when it comes to placing electoral candidates on their respective party lists. Party leadership is often more inclined to promote powerful men candidates than women, even if they are already MPs and seeking re-election. Political parties are therefore extremely powerful and can act as a stepping stone for politicians and enable them to have a consensual political career or suppress them, and as a result exclude them from active participation in politics.

The practice of political parties strategically manipulating electoral lists by placing women candidates in less competitive positions has been identified in most SEE countries, and recognized as a key factor in the underrepresentation of women in elected positions. This tactic circumvents the spirit of the law by effectively diminishing the prospects of women candidates being elected to office. Furthermore, sanctions for non-compliance are rarely enforced, thereby highlighting gaps in institutional accountability. Consequently, a limited number of women are nominated to run for office or placed at the top of candidate lists for councils beyond the quota minimum.

The case of Montenegro demonstrates that the selection process is a crucial area where both intra-party democracy and gender imbalances become evident. When asked whether there are appropriate mechanisms aimed at promoting gender equality and women's rights within their parties, the women politicians interviewed responded in the negative. According to them, political parties lack the will to empower the women within their ranks and do not offer internal education or capacity-building programs inclusive of women.

The implementation of gender quotas has not yielded the anticipated transformation within political parties, particularly concerning attitudes towards women's political empowerment. Women continue to report having to prove themselves at a rate that is twice as high as that of men in order to be nominated. The study from North Macedonia demonstrates that men typically attain senior party roles in their early 30s, while women generally achieve comparable positions a decade later. High educational qualifications are frequently considered a *de facto* prerequisite for women candidates, thereby indicating a double standard that is not applied to men.

A comparative review of studies across SEE countries highlights that the effectiveness of quotas is closely tied to the internal functioning of political parties. Without meaningful party reform, particularly in areas of internal democracy, transparency, and candidate selection processes, quotas risk producing descriptive rather than substantive representation. Therefore,

advancing gender equality in political representation requires not only formal mechanisms like quotas but also deeper structural changes within party organizations.

The ideological orientation of parties, as evidenced in their internal regulations and candidate selection procedures, continues to shape their approach to gender inclusion. Right-leaning parties tend to frame gender equality as a private or societal issue rather than a political priority, while center-left parties, more supportive of gender equality, have adopted voluntary mechanisms. It seems that in most of the cases, the ideology of the major parties not only matters but is entrenched. For example, in Croatia, the liberal party's adoption of a non-binding target further illustrates the tendency to favour soft, declarative approaches over concrete obligations. As a result, the effectiveness of gender quotas remains limited, constrained by both institutional inertia and ideological resistance within the party system.

12.5 WOMEN'S PARLIAMENTARY NETWORKS AS A GENDER MAINSTREAMING TOOL

Women's parliamentary networks, informal or formal, have emerged as critical platforms for amplifying gender issues and enhancing cross-party collaboration. These special working bodies have been recognized as critical actors in strengthening gender equality, supporting inter-party cooperation, putting gender issues on the political agenda, proposing or amending laws to address gender issues, overseeing governmental progress on gender equality, and contributing to a collective process of women's substantive representation (Celis et al., 2016a; Sawyer, 2020; Ahrens & Erzeel, 2024). Empirical evidence from SEE countries indicates that party discipline remains an important challenge for women who want to cooperate along party lines, but that it does not represent an insurmountable obstacle *per se* (Čičkarić, 2015, 2023).

Most country chapters document the presence of women's parliamentary initiatives to join forces according to their ideological positions, which usually means that they form alliances within their own party or across parties with similar political positions. In countries such as Serbia, Kosovo, Slovenia, and Albania, these networks have assumed a prominent role in reinforcing solidarity among women MPs and fortifying collective capacity to shape the parliamentary agenda. However, the fundamental question remains: do the women's parliamentary networks possess the capacity to transition from a descriptive to a substantive model of representation?

The Club of Women Parliamentarians in the Slovenian parliament was established with the intention of providing a space to discuss and dismantle the structural and cultural barriers faced by women MPs, foster solidarity across party lines and promote gender-sensitive policymaking. Nevertheless,

the authors' research findings indicate that the club has not adequately met these objectives. Despite its promising foundations, the club has not effectively addressed pressing challenges, such as removing obstacles in women's access to decision-making processes, and lack of institutional support remains unresolved. Moreover, the club's limited political influence and the absence of a sustained strategic agenda have constrained its capacity to push for substantive change. Despite that, the authors consider that the club still provides an opportunity for women MPs to socialize in a more informal setting, break down ideological barriers, and create a more inclusive and stimulating working environment for women MPs.

Kosovo's Women's Caucus Group stands out in the region as an example of a women's parliamentary network actively engaged in institutional reform. Unlike women's groups that focus primarily on soft policy areas or symbolic representation, the Caucus has demonstrated a consistent ability to shape the internal functioning of the legislature by influencing the leadership and composition of parliamentary committees to be more gender-inclusive. The Caucus exemplifies successful cross-party collaboration for gender equality, managing to transcend partisan divides in pursuit of shared legislative goals. It has played a key role in advancing significant national reforms, including the adoption and implementation of the Gender Equality Law, the development of gender-responsive budgeting frameworks, and ensuring compliance with international standards such as CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention.

The Women's Parliamentary Network (WPN) in Serbia has emerged as a pivotal platform for promoting gender equality and fostering inter-party cooperation, transcending the often polarized nature of Serbian politics. It plays a crucial role in facilitating cross-party collaboration on gender equality issues. Women MPs from various political parties have collaborated to prioritize concerns such as domestic violence, gender-based discrimination, and women's health. This cross-party approach has gradually integrated gender equality into mainstream political culture, even if underlying power dynamics appear to be challenging to modify.

However, its effectiveness remains constrained by broader political dynamics, including centralized party control, limited internal democracy, and entrenched patriarchal norms within political institutions. These structural barriers limit the WPN's ability to push for deeper institutional reforms or challenge dominant political agendas. Nevertheless, as with Kosovo's Women's Caucus, the WPN's relative success is underpinned by a combination of enabling factors: committed leadership among influential women MPs, strong partnerships with civil society and women's rights organizations, and ongoing support from international actors and donors. Taken together, these elements have allowed the WPN to move beyond symbolic representation and contribute to more substantive legislative and institutional change. It offered a model for

how women's parliamentary networks institutionalize gender equality within complex and often resistant political environments.

Albania's Alliance of Women Councillors shows how women in local government can form collective platforms to promote community and welfare initiatives, yet this alliance rarely tackles more transformative or systemic issues, such as political power-sharing or institutional accountability. The alliance has enabled collaboration on issues such as education, healthcare, and social protection, areas often overlooked in mainstream political agendas but crucial to everyday wellbeing.

Women's parliamentary networks in the SEE reflect both the gains and limitations of gender equality efforts in post-socialist and post-conflict new democracies. Strengthening these networks will require not only institutional access but also deeper party reform, stronger political will, and sustained support from feminist movements and civil society organizations.

12.6 DISCRIMINATION, SEXISM AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS: ATTITUDES AND EXPERIENCES

Women are still predominantly perceived as intruders in politics, a realm historically and culturally constructed as a men's domain (Phillips, 1998; Lovenduski, 2005). Consequently, they often face differential treatment compared to their male counterparts. They are frequently stereotyped as less knowledgeable, less capable in political debates, less experienced, and more emotional—stereotypes rooted in longstanding patriarchal norms that seek to undermine women's legitimacy and authority in public life (Lovenduski, 2005; Krook, 2017). Furthermore, women politicians are disproportionately scrutinized and evaluated based on their appearance, image, and bodies rather than their political ideas or competencies (McKay, 2011). Importantly, violence against women in politics, ranging from verbal abuse to physical threats, is increasingly recognized as a deliberate tool to silence and to exclude women from political life (Krook, 2017; Krook & Restrepo Sanín, 2016), reinforcing their marginalization and patriarchal power structures. This phenomenon has been recently observed across SEE as well (Čičkarić, 2024; Skubic & Antić Gaber, 2024, Dauti & Metaj, 2025), where entrenched gender norms continue to marginalize women's political participation and visibility. Especially during and after the wars on the territory of the former Yugoslavia, the processes of re-patriarchalization, hypermasculinization, and the spread of a culture of violence led to women's near disappearance from the public sphere and politics (Čičkarić, 2015).

Many women in politics in SEE face a continuum of gender-based violence that is deeply embedded in patriarchal structures and present political culture.

This violence ranges from everyday micro-aggressions to explicit, targeted misogyny, each form reinforcing women's marginalization and undermining their right to equal participation in political life.

Research on this issue in the region remains limited. However, one study on violence against women in politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Miftari, 2019) found that 60.2 percent of respondents had experienced some form of violence during their political engagement. Additionally, 96.6 percent of respondents believed that such violence most commonly takes the form of verbal and emotional abuse. Severe online harassment is also found as one of the reasons that women politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina do not fully use the digital platform for the public communication (Popov Momčinović, 2023).

In Kosovo, the prevalence of sexist and offensive remarks directed at women politicians, particularly in the media and on social networks, represents a significant challenge. Media discourse often emphasizes their physical appearance rather than their professional competence, thereby reinforcing harmful gender stereotypes and undermining their contributions to political life. Rather than critically addressing these biases, media outlets frequently reproduce and normalize them, perpetuating systemic gender-based discrimination in the political sphere.

In Serbia, women MPs report navigating a deeply gendered political landscape shaped by structural inequalities and patriarchal norms. They are routinely subjected to a spectrum of gender-based discrimination, ranging from everyday micro-aggressions to more explicit forms of verbal and symbolic violence. These include being misaddressed and ignored in favour of men despite equivalent or even superior qualifications and enduring gender-insensitive language that diminishes their professional legitimacy. Many women MPs report having to consistently exceed performance expectations to be recognized as competent, an experience that underscores the double standards imposed on women in political life. Almost half of the interviewed women MPs disclosed encountering sexist humour, demeaning remarks, or inappropriate propositions from men MPs, interactions that trivialize their presence and normalize a hostile climate. These comments, often targeting physical appearance, function as a form of symbolic violence that reasserts male dominance and undermines women's political subjectivity.

In Slovenia, interviewed women MPs describe how their authority is routinely undermined through persistent interruptions, dismissal of their contributions, and pressure to shorten their interventions. These behaviours are not isolated incidents but rather institutionalized practices that communicate to women that their voices are less legitimate or important. Symbolic and verbal violence is more or less normalized within parliamentary spaces. Women are subjected to sexist remarks, being called 'hysterical' or needing medication, explicitly linking their gender with supposed irrationality. Violence escalates

dramatically when women, especially those from left-wing parties, engage in public political discourse. MPs recounted severe online and offline abuse, including sexualized hate speech, threats of rape, and graphic dehumanization. These are not simply acts of individual malice but often coordinated attempts to discipline and silence politically active women. Grotesque and sexually violent threats, both from the public and within their own party, function as a brutal reminder of the gendered risks that come with occupying political space. Women MPs namely report that they also face hostility from men within their own political parties, who use public insults and discrediting tactics to maintain dominance. These intra-party dynamics reflect how patriarchy operates even within supposedly progressive spaces. Despite these challenges, women MPs resist, but only few of them have taken formal action, such as reporting colleagues to ethics commissions or filing lawsuits, refusing to normalize or remain silent in the face of abuse.

In North Macedonia, women in politics operate within a patriarchal system that imposes a 'double burden' of political and domestic responsibilities, especially in conservative and rural communities. These gendered expectations not only limit women's access to power but also create fertile ground for political violence and harassment. Women politicians routinely face misogynistic abuse, ranging from sexist remarks and online threats to public verbal attacks, aiming at silencing and delegitimizing them. One of the rare studies shows that women councillors face gender-based harassment, including intrusive personal questions, inappropriate comments, and sexual advances. Nevertheless, women often downplay threatening situations during campaigns or after election. Like in Slovenia, they report negative experiences with both their own and opposing party members. This highlights additional inter-party challenges for women, who often feel solely responsible for defending themselves, fearing that speaking out could damage their careers or be seen as weakness.

Ultimately, this analysis affirms what feminist scholars and activists have long argued: violence against women in politics is not incidental but widespread and, in many cases, organized and systemic. It seeks to expel women from the public sphere, especially when they challenge dominant power structures. It is a political tool of exclusion, and confronting it requires both individual courage and collective, structural transformation. Recognizing this phenomenon as violence against women in politics is crucial, as it is not merely a personal matter but a profoundly political issue, an assault on democratic participation and gender equality. Parliaments, as workplaces for women MPs, with their own internal procedures, practices, and organizational cultures (Gavrić, 2020), have the potential to play a pivotal role in addressing this form of violence. However, to date, only one (the Code of Ethics for Deputies of the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia) has been identified as a good practice in tackling issues such as sexism and sexual harassment within parliamentary

procedures and policies (OSCE/ODIHR, 2021: 38). But its results are still to be seen.

12.7 SHIFTING ATTITUDES AND GROWING ACCEPTANCE OF WOMEN IN POWER

While scholarship on women's political representation in Southeast Europe has grown in recent years, much of it has focused on descriptive representation. Far less attention has been paid to the societal-level consequences of women's political inclusion. Are public attitudes toward women's political engagement changing? Is there greater acceptance of women as political leaders? These questions have been examined in other contexts, where evidence shows that women's presence in political office influences societal perceptions, challenges traditional gender norms, and fosters political engagement (Beaman et al., 2012; Barnes & Burchard, 2013). Yet, in Southeast Europe, these aspects remain largely unexplored. The chapters in this volume begin to fill the gap by offering preliminary insights. They point to gradual shifts in perception, following the increased visibility of women in leadership roles. In doing so, these contributions begin to illuminate how women's political presence in Southeast Europe may be reshaping not only political institutions but also the broader societal norms.

Although resistance remains, attitudes toward women in politics in the region are gradually shifting. In the 2025 parliamentary elections in Kosovo, women won 36.6 percent of seats, exceeding the mandated quota. Women now lead key parliamentary committees and ministries, reflecting increased voter trust in women representatives. These changes are also tied to the expanding mandate of the Women's Caucus Group, which has moved beyond traditional areas to shape laws on finance, economic policy, and international frameworks like CEDAW and the Istanbul Convention. These changes signal a broader acceptance of women's political leadership. International actors have played a significant role in changing expectations. Enhancing women's political representation has been instrumental to the EU membership agenda. By supporting the development of local capacities and pushing for institutional transformation, international actors have signalled to the political establishment that they need to take women's political representation seriously.

In Slovenia, the implementation of gender quotas has reshaped expectations. Most women MPs interviewed supported quotas and credited them with improving women's standing, noting that even initially sceptical colleagues began to show respect as women demonstrated competence in committee work and parliamentary debate. While some men still expected women 'to be quiet or wait their turn', these attitudes have started to change, with everyday interactions becoming more professional and less overtly dismissive. In the

recent decade, significant strides have been made toward increasing women's political representation, marking a positive shift in traditionally male-dominated political systems. A notable indicator of this progress is the appointment of women to some of the highest offices of the state, including prime minister, president of the state, speaker of parliament, and various ministerial roles. These advancements not only symbolize individual achievements but also reflect broader social and institutional changes that challenge patriarchal power structures and advocate for gender equity in decision-making.

The chapter on women's political representation in Montenegro reveals gender differences in public perceptions. While 62.4 percent of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'Montenegrin women and men have equal opportunities for advancement in political life', a higher percentage of men than women agreed with the statement. The gender gap, argue the authors in this volume, suggests that 'Montenegrin women are more aware of or are more affected by the structural and cultural barriers hindering their participation and advancement in political life'. The survey revealed numerous barriers to women's participation in political life, such as the traditional division of household labour—women being primarily associated with caregiving and household responsibilities—the belief that men are better suited for political roles, and stereotypes portraying women as incapable of making political decisions and holding leadership roles.

In Republika Srpska, women politicians have become more visible by using social media platforms to highlight their work on gender-sensitive policies and community issues. Although much of their focus remains in traditionally gendered policy areas, this visibility marks a departure from earlier patterns of exclusion. It also suggests a slow shift in public perceptions of what roles are acceptable for women leaders within ethnically polarized political systems. Similarly, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, women politicians are more present in public debates and increasingly featured in media stories, particularly at the cantonal level, where they often advance proposals related to education, health, and local services. However, the fragmented political system continues to prioritize ethnic over gender considerations, limiting deeper shifts in institutional attitudes.

Despite these gains, challenges persist. Women continue to be underrepresented in most positions of power. Women politicians are more likely to face gendered criticism, including scrutiny over their appearance, personal lives, and communication styles. Online harassment and abuse, often more intense and personal for women, further discourage political participation. Nevertheless, the trajectory is one of progress. More women are running for office and winning elections, at the national, sub-national and local levels. While obstacles remain, the gains made thus far underscore the resilience and

determination of women in the region to claim their place in shaping public policy and governance.

REFERENCES

- Ahrens, P., & Erzeel, S. (2024). *Beyond numbers: Stories of gender equality in and through parliament*. International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA). <https://doi.org/10.31752/idea.2024.58>
- Barnes, T. D., & Burchard, S. M. (2013). 'Engendering' politics: The impact of descriptive representation on women's political engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Comparative Political Studies*, 46(7), 767–790. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012463884>
- Barnett, C., & Shalaby, M. (2024). All politics is local: Studying women's representation in local politics in authoritarian regimes. *Politics & Gender*, 20(1), 235–240. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X22000502>
- Beaman, L., Duflo, E., Pande, R., & Topalova, P. (2012). Female leadership raises aspirations and educational attainment for girls: A policy experiment in India. *Science*, 335(6068), 582–586. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1212382>
- Berevoescu, I., & Ballington, J. (2021). *Women's representation in local government: A global analysis*. UN Women.
- Caul Kittilson, M. (2013). Party politics. In G. Waylen, K. Celis, J. Kantola, & L. Weldon (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of gender and politics* (pp. 536–553). Oxford University Press.
- Celis, K., Childs, S. L., & Curtin, J. (2016a). Specialized parliamentary bodies and the quality of women's substantive representation: A comparative analysis of Belgium, United Kingdom and New Zealand. *Parliamentary Affairs*, 69(4), 812–829. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsw007>
- Celis, K., Childs, S., & Kantola, J. (2016b). Re-gendering party politics: An introduction. *Party Politics*, 22(5), 571–575.
- Čičkarić, L. (2015). In/visibility of women in politics. *Teme*, 39(1), 43–59.
- Čičkarić, L. (2023). Legislative quotas and political representation in Serbia. In S. Lang, P. Meier, & B. Sauer (Eds.), *Party politics and the implementation of gender quotas: Resisting institutions* (pp. 303–320). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-08931-2_16
- Čičkarić, L. (2024). A contribution to the study of violence against women in politics. *Etnoantropološki Problemi (Issues in Ethnology and Anthropology)*, 19(1), 199–216. <https://doi.org/10.21301/eap.v19i1.8>
- Clayton, A., & Zetterberg, P. (2021). Gender and party discipline: Evidence from Africa's emerging party systems. *American Political Science Review*, 115(3), 869–884.
- Council of European Municipalities and Regions. (2024). *Women in politics: Local and European trends*. <https://ccre-cemr.org/impactgoal-society/women-in-politics-study>
- Dauti, M. (2022). Bystanders or contesters? Women's political representation and quality of government in the local councils of Albania. *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 44(3), 274–298. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2022.2109946>
- Dauti, M., & Metaj, G. (2023). Where do we go from here? Enhancing women's political representation in the local councils of Albania. *Journal of Feminist Theory and Cultural Studies – GENERO*, 27(1), 33–54.

- Dauti, M., & Metaj, G. (2025). 'Hidden, complex, and difficult to address': Violence against women in Albanian politics. *Journal of Human Rights and Social Work*, Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41134-025-00390-y>
- Dahlerup, D. (2018). *Has democracy failed women?* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Dahlerup, D., & Freidenvall, L. (2005). Quotas as a 'fast track' to equal representation for women: Why Scandinavia is no longer the model. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 7(1), 26–48. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461674042000324673>
- Einhorn, B. (2006). Citizenship in an enlarged Europe: The role of gender ideologies. *Social Politics*, 13(1), 1–23.
- Funk, N. (2004). Feminism east and west. In N. Funk & M. Mueller (Eds.), *Gender politics and post-communism* (pp. 318–330). Routledge.
- Gavrić, S. (2020). *Rodno senzitivni parlament: Alatke i metode za urođjavanje politika, programa i projekata. FES Gender Toolbox u BiH – Alataka broj 2*. Sarajevo: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung – Ured u Bosni i Hercegovini. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/16300.pdf>
- International IDEA. (2021). *The role of political parties on women's participation and representation*. <https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/the-role-of-political-parties-on-womens-participation-and-representaion-en.pdf>
- Korunovska, N., Srbijanko, J. K., Ilikj, S., & Maleska, T. (2015). *Women in politics: Paths to public office and impact at the local level in Macedonia*. Skopje: National Democratic Institute.
- Krook, M. L. (2009). *Quotas for women in politics: Gender and candidate selection reform worldwide*. Oxford University Press.
- Krook, M. L. (2017). Violence against women in politics. *Journal of Democracy*, 28(1), 74–88. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0008>
- Krook, M. L., & Restrepo Sanín, J. (2016). Gender and political violence in Latin America: Concepts, debates and solutions. *Política y Gobierno*, 23(1), 125–158.
- Lovenduski, J. (2005). *Feminizing politics*. Polity Press.
- Matland, R. E., & Montgomery, K. A. (Eds.). (2003). *Women's access to political power in post-communist Europe*. Oxford University Press.
- McBride, D., & Mazur, A. G. (2010). *The politics of state feminism: Innovation in comparative research*. Temple University Press.
- McKay, J. (2011). Gender, image, and political communication. *Political Communication*, 28(2), 146–164.
- Miftari, E. (2019). *Violence against women in politics in Bosnia and Herzegovina*. Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD). <https://www.wfd.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/wfd-study-violence-against-women-in-politics-in-bih-final.pdf>
- Norris, P., & Lovenduski, J. (1994). *Gender and party politics*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications.
- OSCE/ODIHR. (2021). *Realizing gender equality in parliament. A guide for parliaments in the OSCE region*. Warsaw: OSCE/ODIHR.
- Phillips, A. (1998). *The politics of presence*. Oxford University Press.
- Popov Momčinović, Z. (2023). What women politicians could, would, and should, but cannot do. Perceptions of women parliamentarians regarding barriers to political representation of women in Bosnia and Herzegovina. *Croatian Sociological Review*, 53(3), 365–395. <https://doi.org/10.5613/rzs.53.3.2>
- Pudrovska, T. (2004). Global activism in 'virtual space': The European Women's Lobby in the network of transnational women's NGOs on the Web. *Social Politics*, 11(1), 117–143.