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THE LIMITS OF PRESENCE: CONSTRAINTS ON WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

ABSTRACT Women's political representation has increased globally over the past few decades. Women are entering the political world in more significant numbers. This increase is visible among the countries of the former Yugoslavia. Within the last three decades, women have become present in greater numbers across the parliaments of the former Yugoslavia, primarily due to the adoption of gender quotas due to women's movement activism. But is the presence of elected women enough to empower them politically and create "space" for activism, advocacy, and subsequently higher levels of substantive representation? In this work, I pose this main research question and focus on two country case studies from the region, namely Serbia and Montenegro. I argue that women politicians in both countries, despite being present to a greater extent descriptively, face considerable constraints to their political activism within institutions such as parliament, thus limiting the effects they can have in terms of substantive "output" or women-friendly legislation. I highlight several factors that complicate women's political efficacy in the two countries, including a reemergence (and legacy) of authoritarianism, ideological proclivities of ruling parties, and endemic corruption. This work contributes to the regional literature on women's political representation and situates two country case studies in a regional perspective.

Keywords: women in politics, descriptive representation, substantive representation, Serbia, Montenegro, gender quotas

INTRODUCTION

The international community's focus on women's political representation has increased considerably over the past few decades, particularly after the Beijing United Nations (UN) Women's Conference in 1995, just as women's descriptive or numerical representation has per se increased. Women

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now make up 26.7% of legislators worldwide, up from 21.3% (2013) ten years ago and up from 15.3% twenty years ago (2003) (Inter-Parliamentary Union [IPU] Women in Parliament Monthly Ranking, October 2023). Although this is far from parity, it is nonetheless a sign of improvement. Instruments such as gender quotas, tools used by countries or political parties to increase the number of women on electoral lists or legislatures themselves, are partly responsible for this increase (Tripp and Kang 2008). Quotas are used with greater frequency around the world than ever before. In fact, over 130 countries use gender quotas, whether they are legislated quotas, party quotas, or reserved seats; the utilization of quotas remains one of the most effective ways of increasing women's political representation (Quota Project 2023).

Legislated quotas involve constitutional or electoral law reforms. They are usually legal and mandatory, requiring a minimum number of women to appear on party lists, such as "at least 30%". These quotas are the most frequently used, mostly appearing in the developing world (Quota Project 2023; Towns 2010). Individual political parties use voluntary party quotas, which are primarily found in party statutes. These quotas are used in the Western world by more established political parties and they originated in Norway in the 1970s (Caul 2001; Pande and Ford 2009). Reserved seats are also found in post-conflict and developing countries. These quotas often set aside a certain number of seats for women in a legislature, or they mandate that in certain electoral districts, only women can run (Quota Project 2023).

All three kinds of gender quotas have collectively aided the international gender equality norm in politics. Over the last few decades, women have begun to enter the once impervious field of politics in much greater numbers. This has even led to women in some countries breaking the perennial glass ceiling, that of executive office (presidency or prime minister), although most countries around the world (around 60%) have yet to elect a woman executive (Vojvodić 2022). Even though challenges for women's equality in politics are durable and remain intact in many countries, considerable space has opened for women to enter this once male-dominated world.

Many of the tools used to increase gender equality in politics have involved institutional reforms, such as gender quotas, which aim to reform the composition of legislatures so that they are more gender equal. Countries have reformed their electoral laws by passing legislated quotas, enshrined in national constitu-

tions or electoral law, usually accompanied by sanctions for non-compliance, such as a list rejection. This kind of reform targets formal rules or laws and has produced positive results for certain gender equality goals. Feminist institutionalism has noted that certain long-standing political bodies, such as parliaments, are fundamentally “masculine” institutions founded upon masculine logic, much to the detriment and previous exclusion of women (Krook and Mackay 2015; Waylen 2014). Introducing more women and other previously underrepresented actors within institutions is one step to achieving greater equality.

Reforming formal institutional rules is one step in a long process towards gender equality. Many other factors can affect political gender equality, including the general political environment, public sentiments, and the ideology of elected women and their political parties. In many parliamentary systems, women who are members of more conservative political parties, for example, even if they are elected due to a gender quota, usually do not approach politics in a feminist manner. The example of Poland, where the right-wing populist party “Law and Justice” until recently held the majority of seats in their parliament, is telling in this regard (Gwiazda 2019). Conservative women, such as those in the Law and Justice Party, often possess a traditional viewpoint regarding the family and women’s roles in society, their leadership positions notwithstanding.

By extension, in this work, I maintain that although introducing gender equality tools, such as gender quotas, can initially disrupt the pattern of gender discrimination in politics by increasing the presence of women, often gender quotas per se cannot transform institutions, such as parliaments, in certain countries, simply because there are external political and social factors gender quotas cannot affect or control. Gender quotas cannot, in turn, guarantee that those who are elected to legislative positions will further gender equality, especially when there are legislated quotas within a country that apply to all political parties, regardless of ideological bent. Simply stated, the presence of women alone does not always lead to progressive action or policies or “issues” that will enhance gender equality, such as those concerning reproductive rights, education, pay parity, ending sexual harassment, and gender-based discrimination *inter alia*.

To further this argument, after first providing context about the region of the former Yugoslavia in terms of women in politics, I ultimately focus

on two empirical cases from that region, specifically Serbia and Montenegro. Serbia and Montenegro both have legislated gender quotas, which have been features of the electoral system in both countries for more than ten years (since 2004 in Serbia and since 2011 in Montenegro). Each country also has strong sanctions for non-compliance with the gender quota, namely a potential rejection of an electoral list by the Election Commission of each country until the electoral list becomes compliant with the gender quota. In addition, there are rank-order rules, and both countries have “closed” electoral lists. In Serbia, as of October 2023, women make up 34.8% of MPs, and in Montenegro, they make up 21% (IPU 2023).

Despite this positive and strong quota design of each country, women in politics are limited in terms of the effects they can have, especially given the constrained political environment in which they exist. I thus use these two illustrative cases to demonstrate that even with the “robust” and long-standing quotas intact in a country, women’s political representation and participation, in a more meaningful or transformative sense, can remain limited, often due to larger or macro factors in the political environment.

In this research, I first provide an overview of the literature concerning women’s political representation, focusing on gender quotas. I rely on the foundational work of Pitkin (1967) to put forth a framework for subsequent analysis. I then discuss women’s political representation in Southeast Europe and apply aspects of Pitkin’s framework there. In the next section, for further regional context, I focus on the countries of the former Yugoslavia, noting how all of them have strong gender quotas in place and, subsequently, high levels of descriptive representation. I, in turn, argue that in some countries, the effects of the gender quotas have been limited due to external social and political dimensions, and also the limited space women have in parliaments to effect change. In the last few sections of this research, after the case study analyses, I discuss my findings and propose future research possibilities. I then conclude by connecting the emerging themes of this work to the broader global context of women in politics.

WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION: THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

Pitkin (1967) wrote her seminal work on the types of political representation that can occur. Representatives have varied and crucial relationships, whether direct or not, with their constituents, at least in democracies or where there is some space for and expectations of electoral accountability. Pitkin delineated three main types of representation: descriptive, substantive, and symbolic. Scholars have revised the definitions of these kinds of representations since Pitkin's original work was published.

Descriptive representation is based on identity or how well a representative "resembles" the group they represent. For example, a woman does, on some level, descriptively represent other women by sharing that identity (assuming they both identify as such). Secondly, substantive representation refers to a representative acting on behalf of the interests of their group. For example, a woman introducing or sponsoring women-friendly legislation would substantively represent other women. Some other direct examples would be women advocating or even introducing laws that make government budgets more gender-sensitive or laws that disaggregate statistics by gender so that the information being analyzed takes gender into account. These and similar initiatives can ultimately benefit women. Relatedly, symbolic representation refers to the responses or reactions representatives produce within groups with which they share an identity. For example, a woman representative who inspires other women to run for political office is an example of symbolic representation.

Substantive representation has recently received much attention in scholarship. Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) differentiate between two main types of substantive representation, namely "process" and "output." "Process" refers to discussing or introducing women's policy "issues" during debates, within committees, and through questioning, while "output" refers to actual legislation or policy achievements. Most scholars approach this concept in this way. However, Gwiazda (2019) questions this framework and argues that "substantive representation" of women can occur outside of formal institutions. Women can be represented by social movements, especially when parliaments are dominated by right-wing parties that usually do

not advocate for women's issues. Gwiazda uses the case of Poland and the 2016 "Black Protests" against the proposed abortion ban to illustrate this persuasive point.

Indeed, the representation of women can occur across several sites. Historical and contemporary evidence shows that women's movements in the former Yugoslavia have effected positive social change. However, in this work, I am mainly focusing on the potential for "substantive representation" in terms of "process" and "output" within institutions. I argue that women politicians are especially constrained to affect "process" and "output" in Serbia and Montenegro, given their limiting and challenging environment.

Similarly, Tajali (2023) argues that women in conservative authoritarian regimes, such as Iran, can contribute to gender equality and voice their opinions on women's rights. But ultimately, as even she notes, this progress can heavily depend on the preferences or directives of those in power. Tajali notes that under a more moderate leader in Iran, former President Hassan Rouhani, political opportunities were present for women leaders to take advantage of and promote women's issues. However, once this power constellation changed at the elite level, women actors found it difficult to enact any progressive change. It is not my contention that the former Yugoslav countries are as "top-down" or authoritarian politically as Iran. Still, I contend that many factors converge, often from "above," to limit the political spaces in these countries, especially for positive social action.

Thus, subsequent research within the field of gender and politics has utilized the Pitkin framework significantly and has introduced other related concepts. Women's political representation has been linked formally with the need to increase the number of women in legislatures and other political bodies. The concept of "critical mass" has arisen from these works. "Critical mass" refers to the idea that once a certain threshold of women's representation, such as 30%, is met within a legislature, effecting change on behalf of women or assuring a form of substantive representation will occur more readily (Dahlerup 2006). Recently, this assertion has been contested, and the ideas of "critical actors" or, more broadly, "norm entrepreneurs" have been introduced (Childs and Krook 2009). "Critical actors" are sometimes deemed more effective than "critical mass" itself, suggesting the adage of "quality over quantity." Those who advocate for women's interests and use

their influence to push for gender-progressive legislation are more efficacious agents of change for women's rights than simply the number of women within an institution. Indeed, in many legislatures around the world, women remain underrepresented. However, regardless of number, their presence is nonetheless felt, and their voices, although sometimes minimal, are often heard. But it is, in fact, no guarantee that a high percentage of women in any political institution will, by default, lead to progressive or feminist policies for women.

The conversation regarding women's political representation broadly, particularly the descriptive kind, has often been linked to proposed remedies for women's political underrepresentation. Gender quotas have often been proposed to break the cycle of gender discrimination within politics. The literature discussing gender quotas has proliferated over the last several decades. The first wave of literature concerned gender quota adoption. Scholars discussed why gender quotas were being adopted so readily and why they were diffusing rapidly to disparate regions of the world (Caul 2001; Krook 2006; Krook 2007; Krook 2009). Scholars linked quota adoption to various domestic and international factors, including women's movement advocacy and the political opportunities that arise in post-conflict environments, such as a rewriting of constitutions or electoral laws that make it easier for quotas to be proposed and subsequently passed (Krook 2006; Tajali 2013). Gender quotas have emerged as an effective way to increase the number of women in political institutions, but they remain controversial and are often met with resistance. Elite political actors, who are often men, are initially very hesitant to pass such measures, which some of them deem as anti-meritocratic, an imposition from "above," or even, in some regions, unwanted relics of a communist past (Krook 2016; Vojvodić 2020).

Quota literature has moved from conversations of increased descriptive representation to its effects on substantive and symbolic representation. In theory, quotas should not only be breaking discriminatory cycles of political exclusion, but they should be yielding positive results for women and women's issues, such as reproductive rights, education parity, domestic violence, pay equity, sexual harassment, and femicide. Yet the results of the literature concerning this question have been mixed. Certain studies point to the positive effects of an increased presence of women in legislatures (Barnes 2012;

Barnes and Burchard 2012; Clayton 2014; Clayton, Josefsson and Wang 2017; Xydias 2007), while other studies present mixed findings (Clayton 2012; Cummins 2011; Curtin 2008; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008). Other works explore whether women's increased presence in legislatures leads to symbolic effects, such as the breaking down of stereotypes of women or even the encouragement of younger women to run for office (e.g., Bauer and Burnet 2013; Beaman, Duflo, Pande, and Topolova 2012; Clayton 2014; De Paola, Lombardo and Scoppa 2010). Results have pointed to women's transformative power in the symbolic realm. Women do sometimes advocate for women's or even feminist issues, but this heavily depends on the proclivities of the politician and the environmental, societal, and political context in which they work. Therefore, increased representation of women is not always guaranteed or sufficient for substantive or symbolic representation.

WOMEN IN POLITICS IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Similarly to women and politics literature generally, the literature on women's political representation in the former Yugoslavia region has been developing over time, although somewhat more slowly. While women and politics literature on the region is not extensive, it has increased over the past two decades (e.g., Čičkarić 2023; Antić and Lokar 2006; Mršević 2005). Much of the literature about the region in this regard initially focused on the absence of women in legislatures, especially during the beginning of democratization (which remains incomplete in many countries of the region). During communism in Yugoslavia, women were present in legislatures across different governmental levels, but their influence remained constrained in a one-party system. It was only until well after the fall of communism that women started entering political institutions more readily. In terms of sheer numbers, this has undoubtedly improved over the last two decades (See Table 2).

The literature concerning women's political representation in the former Yugoslavia, more specifically, can often be associated with the women's movements in the respective countries in the region. For example, in Serbia, women organizing around a women's group network, the "Palić" network, began to discuss the issue of encouraging women to run for office before de-

mocratization even began (Antić and Lokar 2006). Women's networks and groups, such as Palić, are primarily responsible for the many gains women have made in this regard. Some of the early literature in the region post-democratization discussed the adoption of gender quotas, which became a primary goal for the women's movement there (Vojvodić 2021). While elites were initially skeptical about quotas and reluctant to pass them, quotas were eventually passed in all the countries of the former Yugoslavia. These quotas have become more ambitious and stronger over time. This evolution can also be traced to the efforts of women's groups and their allies.

Concurrently, more recent literature has noted that despite quota adoption, women in the region still face considerable obstacles in politics and that patriarchal belief systems and resulting institutions are still dominant in the region (Rashkova and Zankina 2017). Recent literature has also noted the strength of women's groups in the region advocating for gender quotas and other gender equality measures (Thames 2018). While this impetus from women's groups still exists to an extent, women and their networks are working in somewhat difficult environments in the region. With a rise in authoritarianism and a complex legacy of nepotism and corruption, the democratic space in many settings has dwindled, leaving women's groups to think of creative ways to bolster gender equality in politics and beyond. I focus on this emerging observation and link two case studies to further knowledge about it. Although there is some literature concerning women in politics in the former Yugoslavia in the contemporary era, much remains to be explored, especially regarding the possibility of substantive representation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

Given the existing literature and the noted concepts above, I focus on the status of women's political representation in Southeastern Europe, utilizing Serbia and Montenegro as illustrative cases. Using the theoretical concepts of "critical mass" and "critical actors," I ask the following research questions: Research question:

- 1) What is the status of women in politics in the broader region of the former Yugoslavia?

- 2) Have changes in descriptive representation due to well-designed gender quotas led to greater attainment of political gender equality in Serbia and Montenegro?
- 3) What societal and institutional constraints facilitate or inhibit women's political gender equality and activism in each country?
- 4) How does each case relate to established theories of women's political representation?

I base my analysis and subsequent findings on mostly qualitative data, namely previously completed interviews with experts, secondary sources of information, and media analyses. I use a case study approach to assess the status of women's political representation in Serbia and Montenegro. These cases are informed by empirical data, including interview data, academic articles, and information from media sources. The research questions posed previously will serve as a guide for the work. I will assess the answers to each question in my subsequent discussion.

REGIONAL OVERVIEW: STATUS OF DESCRIPTIVE REPRESENTATION IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA

Before turning to the empirical case studies, I provide relevant context regarding women's descriptive representation status in the former Yugoslavia. All countries of the former Yugoslavia have linked histories and connected presents. It is thus important to situate the two case studies in a regional context so their situations are observed and interpreted comparatively. I will then further highlight the country case studies of Serbia and Montenegro. This context will include a temporal range from the beginning of democratization in each country (early 2000s) (following its independence from Yugoslavia) until the current era (2023).

Country	Percentage of Women in Parliament	Quota Adopted?	Type of Quota	Year of Quota Adoption
North Macedonia	42.50%	Yes	Legislated	2002
Slovenia	37.80%	Yes	Legislated	2006
Serbia	34.80%	Yes	Legislated	2004
Kosovo*	33%	Yes	Legislated	2000
Croatia	31.80%	Yes	Legislated	2008
Montenegro	21.00%	Yes	Legislated	2011
Bosnia & Herzegovina	19.10%	Yes	Legislated	1998
7	31.43%			

Table 1. Women in Parliament in the Former Yugoslavia (2023)

(Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and Quota Project, as of August 2023)

As demonstrated by Table 1 above, the countries of the former Yugoslavia are generally performing well in terms of descriptive representation. Keeping in mind that the world average for women’s representation in legislatures is 26%, the countries of the former Yugoslavia collectively exceed that average at 31%. Four countries, North Macedonia, Slovenia, Serbia, and Croatia have achieved the 30% “critical mass” of women’s representation in their parliaments. Two countries, Montenegro and Bosnia & Herzegovina, have not, despite also having legislated gender quotas. North Macedonia remains a leader in this regard. It was one of the first countries to adopt a gender quota, calling for “at least 40% of candidates... to belong to the less represented gender” (Quota Project 2023).

These descriptive statistics suggest that there has been progress in this realm, especially when looking at women’s status in politics ten years ago (2013). Table 2 demonstrates this change. Table 2 demonstrates that the percentages of women in ex-Yugoslavia country parliaments have fluctuated over time but that, generally, they have risen. In some cases, such as Northern Macedonia, the quota was increased to 40% of candidates from a lower

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

percentage, 30% (USAID 2019), thus yielding a higher percentage of women in parliament by 2023. Overall, the average percentage of women in parliaments has risen by 4%. This indicates that descriptive representation has gone up in the region. The problem, therefore, is not solely in numbers but also in additional factors constraining the ability of women to make changes in their societies. The number of women in parliament indicates progress, but other factors limit their potential efficacy.

Country	Percentage of Women In Parliament (August 2013)	Quota Adopted?	Type of Quota	Year of Quota Adoption
North Macedonia	34.10%	Yes	Legislated	2002
Serbia	33.20%	Yes	Legislated	2004
Kosovo*	33%	Yes	Legislated	2000
Slovenia	32.20%	Yes	Legislated	2006
Croatia	23.80%	Yes	Legislated	2008
Bosnia & Herzegovina	21.40%	Yes	Legislated	1998
Montenegro	17.30%	Yes	Legislated	2011
6	27.79%			

Table 2. Women in Parliament in the Former Yugoslavia (2013)

(Sources: Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and Quota Project, as of August 2023)

It is important to note that all countries of the former Yugoslavia have a legislated gender quota or a quota enshrined in the nation's electoral law. However, the quality of these gender quotas varies. Their designs are mostly effective, but certain aspects can limit women's descriptive representation. Table 3 demonstrates the range of quota designs in the former Yugoslavia. Table 3 shows this disparity.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Country	Percentage of Women In Parliament	Type of Quota	Percentage/ Rank Order	Sanction	Quota Strength	Open/ Closed Election Lists
North Macedonia	42.50%	Legislated	40% (specific rank/order)	Refusal of List	Strong	Closed
Slovenia	37.80%	Legislated	35%, at least one in three	Refusal of List	Strong	Open
Serbia	34.80%	Legislated	40% (specific rank/order)	Refusal of List	Strong	Closed
Kosovo*	33%	Legislated	30%	Refusal of List	Strong	Closed
Croatia	31.80%	Legislated	40% (no specific rank/order)	Fines of 50,000HRK	Mixed	Open
Montenegro	21.00%	Legislated	one in four, 30%	Refusal of List	Strong	Closed
Bosnia & Herzegovina	19.10%	Legislated	40% (specific rank/order)	Refusal of List	Strong	Open
	31.17%					

Table 3. Gender Quota Quality in the Former Yugoslavia

(Sources: IPU, Quota Project, and Vojvodić 2021)

Table 3 indicates that all countries of the former Yugoslavia have a legislated quota, which is the most effective quota. Additionally, five out of six countries have a specific percentage of women that should be included on an electoral list in addition to a specific rank order stipulation (one in three, two in five, etc.). Croatia is the only country that does not have a specific “rank-order” requirement, although it does have a required percentage of women that should be included on an electoral list, namely 40%. Furthermore, five out of six countries also have strong sanctions for non-compli-

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSC 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

ance, namely a refusal of a list by election authorities until it is gender quota compliant. Croatia is the only country in the region that fines political parties for non-compliance. This is often insufficient for compliance, although Croatia has improved in this regard over time despite the lukewarm sanction. Two categories related to the “electoral system” have also been included. Generally, electoral systems that hold elections via a “proportional representation” (PR) system are most conducive to gender quota efficacy and an increase in women’s numerical representation (Matland and Studlar 1996). Also, elections have “closed” lists, where voters essentially vote for a political party with a fixed list, instead of “open” ones, where voters can choose which candidates to vote for on an electoral list regardless of order.

All countries of the region have a “PR” electoral system, which aids their ability to increase women’s political representation. However, not all countries have a “closed list” system. This has been a problem in countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there is a strong voter bias towards ethnicity and gender, thus making the representation of women in that country lower than world and regional averages. In general, most of the countries in the region have a very well-designed and effective gender quota. The quotas have aided descriptive representation considerably in the region. But as mentioned, this is but only one step in the process of lasting change.

It is thus essential to note that progress has been made over time in the region. Ten years ago, women’s descriptive representation was generally lower. Progress has not been remarkable, but it has been gradual, and at the very least, most countries have not regressed. Still, true parity, even in terms of numbers, remains elusive. The region is dealing with many crucial factors, such as post-conflict considerations, namely inter-ethnic relations, economic constraints, corruption, and a rise in authoritarianism. Creating substantial change for the region’s women and people will take more than numbers.

It is also important to discuss the status of women in politics and gender quotas, specifically in Serbia and Montenegro. Serbia has a robust, strong, and effective gender quota, which has led it to increase women’s descriptive representation over time and, in turn, gain international recognition for its gender equality initiatives. Montenegro also has a reasonably solid and effective gender quota, but the percentage of women in parliament is

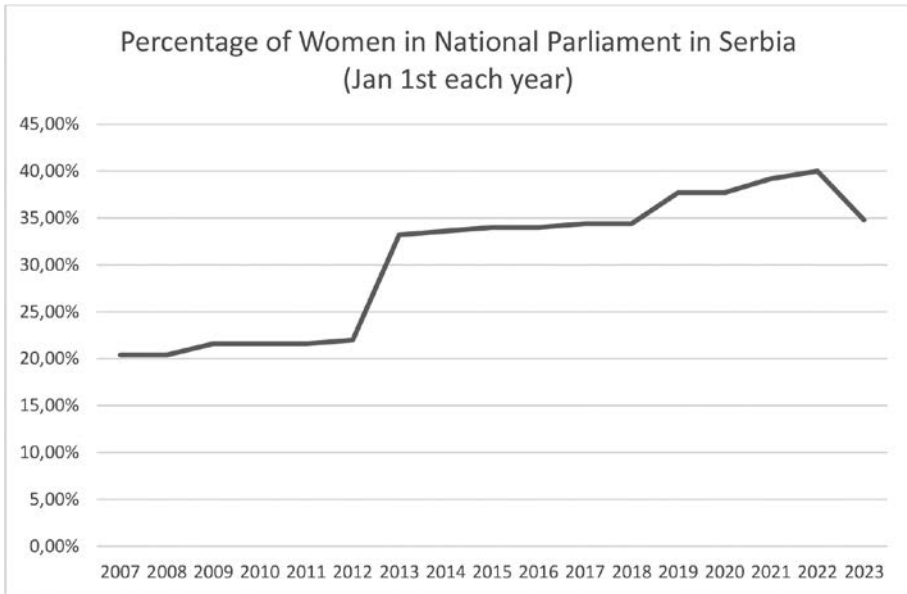


Chart 1. Women in Politics in Serbia Since 2007

(Source: Quota Project 2023)

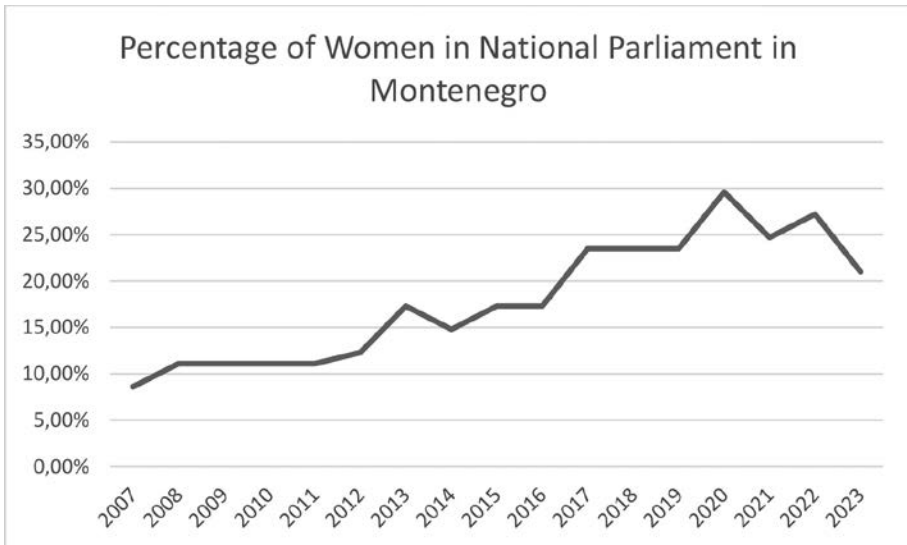


Chart 2. Women in Politics in Montenegro Since 2007

(Source: Quota Project 2023)

currently below the world average at 21%. The main difference between the Serbian and Montenegrin gender quotas is in the details of it. The Montenegrin quota does call for a woman to be placed on an electoral list in “one in every four” places. Parties fulfill the bare minimum of that requirement, and sometimes, when there is an odd number of candidates among small parties, women will be excluded in the aggregate. For example, if a political party in Montenegro secures thirteen seats, only three will go to women, and ten will go to men. In Serbia, the Parliament is larger (250 members in Serbia vs 81 members in Montenegro), and the rank-order stipulation calls for “two of five” candidates to be women. This is a much more effective rank-order stipulation than Montenegro’s, leading to more women in parliament. It is also crucial to note the changes in women’s political participation within the two countries over time. Charts 1 and 2 demonstrate the change in the percentage of women in Parliament in each country from January 2007, the year after their respective independence from each other, to the current year, 2023.

There are several important observations to note from these two charts. First, overall, the trajectory for women in parliament has had some fluctuations over time, but it has generally gone up, with a drop seen in both countries recently. Second, Serbia has performed better than Montenegro over time. The average number of women in the Serbian Parliament over the past 16 years has been 30%, while in the Montenegrin Parliament, it has been just 18%. In both charts, we can see that upon gender quota adoption in Montenegro in 2011 and gender quota reforms in Serbia in that same year, women’s political representation went up. Overall, both countries have increased the percentage of women in their parliaments primarily because of effective gender quotas. Still, substantial challenges remain in each society for women politicians and women in society at large.

CASE STUDY DESIGN

Now that the status of women in politics has been contextualized both in the broader region of the former Yugoslavia and within Serbia and Montenegro, I now turn to the case study portion of this research. Case studies are important to do when an in-depth and nuanced analysis is necessary

(Gerring 2007). These case studies aim to illustrate the reality for women in politics in each country through examples of the constraints women politicians face in sometimes inhospitable contexts. The case studies were selected because they are cases that are similar in terms of background factors but also different in terms of certain outcomes, such as the level of women's political representation.

Serbia and Montenegro share a common cultural history; they were a part of the same country, with various iterations of “Yugoslavia” from the early twentieth century (1918) until 2006. So, they share many societal, cultural, and historical ties, making them more amenable to comparison. Furthermore, both countries have similarly designed quotas, except that Serbia's gender quota has a superior rank-order stipulation, and Serbia also has a higher percentage of women in parliament. This is true currently and has been consistently true over time. Thus, there is room to explore why this is the outcome we see. Within each case study, I will explore various aspects of each country. I will first explore societal constraints that hinder the progress of women and women politicians. I will then focus on the informal factors of institutions that also hinder progress, such as corruption, a rise in authoritarianism, and party ideology.

SERBIA

Background

Serbia performs reasonably well regarding gender equality indicators, particularly in politics. Due to the strength of its gender quota, Serbia is ranked 47th in terms of women in parliament worldwide. This is relatively low compared to even two years ago when Serbia was ranked 34th worldwide and had nearly 40% women in its Parliament. As stated in the previous section, some fluctuations within this indicator have occurred over time, but overall, Serbia has had a significant number of women in its Parliament. Over the past decade, it has averaged over 30% women in the legislature – attaining a level known in the literature as “critical mass.”

Regarding broader gender equality indicators, Serbia ranks 38th in the world in terms of gender equality according to the Global Gender Gap 2023

Report by the World Economic Forum (2023). Notably, this is fifteen spots below last year. In terms of political empowerment, one of the four subindices of this report, Serbia ranks 32nd globally. In this report, political empowerment is defined by three criteria: “women in parliament,” “women in ministerial positions,” and “years with man/woman head of state.” While these indicators suggest a country’s political empowerment level, other factors are also important to note. Serbia has an excellent international reputation regarding some gender equality indicators, but the reality is more nuanced and less positive.

Within this case study, I will focus on several factors that I deem as constraints on the ability of women’s issues to be promoted in Serbia in a substantive sense by women politicians. I highlight the general political environment with a rise in authoritarianism during the decade-long rule of the Serbian Progressive Party and its former leader, Aleksandar Vučić. I also highlight the Progressive Party women currently in politics and their ideological proclivities and consequent worldviews.

Challenging Political Environment

In 2019, Serbia was downgraded by Freedom House from “free” to “partly free” (Freedom House 2023). Freedom House reported that since 2012, SNS “has steadily eroded political rights and civil liberties, putting pressure on independent media, the political opposition, and civil society organizations” (Freedom House 2022). In fact, the eleven-year rule of the Serbian Progressive Party, the largest political party by European members, has proven to be a primary cause of the move towards semi-authoritarianism in the country. The party has been described in a myriad of ways, as “populist,” “center-right,” and “catch-all.” Still, the Serbian Progressive Party focuses on consolidating power and generally minimizing dissent. Aleksandar Vučić, Serbia’s President (and former Prime Minister), along with the Serbian Progressive Party, has been accused of stifling media dissent, constraining the activities of the political opposition, creating a culture of cronyism, and even affiliating with criminal elements (Freedom House 2022).

Generally and by extension, the political space for women politicians who disagree with the ruling party’s directives is minimal and essential-

ly inhospitable. Given that authoritarian and semi-authoritarian countries generally do not provide space for democratic or progressive movements, the situation in Serbia is reflective of a confined space for women's issues, namely also feminism and feminists. The ideological proclivity of the Serbian Progressive Party is also officially "center-right." The party has consistently advocated for pro-natalist and other conservative issues at the expense of more progressive causes.

Despite the favorable international indicators for Serbia in terms of gender equality, the Serbian Progressive Party has confined the space within which progressive women politicians and the previously active women's movement in Serbia can operate. The Serbian Progressive Party has championed mostly right-wing populist social issues and technocratic or neo-liberal economic reforms. Its interest and genuine endorsement of women's issues is minimal, and what it does "display" in this regard is mainly to impress the officials of the European Union or the international community at large (Dević 2021).

Ideology of Women in Parliament

Furthermore, the composition of the Serbian Parliament includes 88 women altogether. Forty-three, almost half, of these women are members of the Serbian Progressive Party. While some women political leaders in Serbia, such as Maja Gojković, who serves as the President of the Coordination Body for Gender Equality of Serbia, do discuss and promote some gender equality initiatives, others hold conservative or traditional worldviews and generally do not wander away from set party directives and goals (Dević 2021). This is evident in the story of Serbia's Prime Minister Ana, whose appointment led to Serbia's major milestone: having a woman prime minister and an openly gay one remains rare and an accomplishment per se. However, Brnabić's tenure as prime minister has been defined mainly by her non-involvement in social issues that affect her own life and the lives of other women and LGBTQ+ people. Serbia does not recognize gay marriage, nor does it even recognize domestic partnerships. In fact, in 2021, a proposed domestic partnership bill spearheaded by former Minister for Human and Minority Rights and Social Dialogue Gordana Čomić did not make it to Parliament, and Vučić,

as president, threatened to veto it anyway (Stojanović 2023). Brnabić may be constrained by the conservative environment in which she works. Still, there could be more done in the country to pioneer specific, crucial, and contemporary social issues, such as the plight of LGBTQ+ people.

Conclusions

While Serbia does rank favorably in specific international ratings, the constrained, semi-authoritarian political environment makes it difficult for progressive voices to emerge and influence politics. Serbia's women still face substantial challenges, including workforce discrimination, pay inequities, harassment, and, most notably, domestic violence and femicide (UN WOMEN Serbia 2023). So, the work for women's groups and allied politicians is far from over. In a sense, Serbia embodies the idea that even though a well-designed and effective quota exists in the country, and there is a "critical mass" of women present in parliament, the political environment remains constrained, so much so that it is nearly impossible for a true gender equality agenda to materialize. The possibility of substantive representation – in the form of a true reflection of women's issues and goals among elected politicians – thus remains elusive.

MONTENEGRO

Background

Montenegro is ranked 69th in the 2023 Global Gender Gap Report. Thus, it also performs well across certain international indicators for gender equality. However, it is ranked only 82nd in terms of political empowerment. Montenegro is also classified as "partly free" by Freedom House. It faces similar challenges, societal problems, and hindrances to women's political participation in Serbia, but it also faces unique problems in this realm and others. While Serbia continues to be ruled by the Serbian Progressive Party, as of 2023, Montenegro's experience with a long-standing and dominant leader ended in June 2023. Not only did Montenegro's long-time ruler, Milo Đukanović, lose the Presidential election to pro-EU reformed Jakov Mila-

tović in April 2023, but Đukanović's party, the Democratic Party of Socialist (DPS) also lost seats again in the June Parliamentary elections, thereby losing to Milatović's party "Europe Now!" Despite this sign of progress, Montenegro still faces many obstacles to political gender equality. Montenegro is generally a conservative and traditional society, and women are not usually seen as belonging to political bodies. Often, they face discrimination and sometimes violence and harassment in this realm. Additionally, various legacies, including political corruption stemming from the Đukanović era, make it more difficult for independent and progressive candidates to enter politics.

Legacies of Corruption

As noted, for over thirty years, the Montenegrin political party "DPS" or the "Democratic Party of Socialists" of Montenegro was in power. Its leader, Milo Đukanović, was in power as prime minister or president for much of that time. This long-standing single-party rule has left a legacy of corruption, nepotism, and clientelism in the country (Bieber 2018). Montenegro's 81-member Parliament is comprised of only 21% women, despite a well-designed gender quota. This legacy of corruption has made it difficult for independent actors, including women, to enter politics. Coupled with traditional and conservative social attitudes that pervade the country, women's political representation lags in descriptive and certainly substantive realms. This is made even more difficult by the reality that Montenegro's women's movement is not as organized or as large as Serbia's. The gender quota adoption process in the country, for example, was aided by civil society but was spearheaded by women politicians, who were working somewhat independently from women's groups (Vojvodić 2021). Although this is evidence of "critical actors" present in Montenegrin politics, examples such as these are relatively rare.

Problematic Attitudes

In a conservative society, women face discriminatory or even exclusionary practices. As Balkan Insight notes:

“Seven out of 10 women politicians in Montenegro have experienced violence during their political work, according to a UNDP-supported study published last year by the Women’s Political Network. Nine out of 10 have experienced gender-based discrimination” (Vučinić 2022).

This kind of attitude discourages women from entering the realm of politics. Research from the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) also found that:

“the rise in violence against women active in Montenegro’s public and political life is one of the contributing factors to low women’s political activism. We found that 70% of women said that nothing would motivate them to become more active in politics” (Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) 2022).

Given this harsh reality, it will take a concerted effort by politicians and society at large to promote more women in Montenegrin politics. At the very least, the quota would have to be strengthened further, and public campaigns would have to emphasize the value of having women in politics to change long-standing mentalities.

Case Study Conclusions

Unlike Serbia, Montenegro has not achieved a “critical mass” of women in politics. Although it has come close in the past, the number of women in politics has recently declined despite the changes in the electoral space in Montenegro. “Critical actors” in Montenegrin politics do exist. The new President seems to be pioneering a pro-European and more open national and international agenda. However, this may change, given the country’s political instability in the last few years. Despite the current President of Montenegro, the reality of women’s political representation remains grim. A legacy of corruption, a relatively closed political environment, and problematic traditional attitudes make it difficult for women to make inroads in Montenegrin politics.

DISCUSSION

Now that I have put forth the broader context and the subsequent case studies for this research, I will discuss the findings and implications. It can be safely deduced that women in the former Yugoslavia face challenges in the political realm. Despite somewhat favorable gender equality indicators among countries in the region, the practice of politics for women remains arduous, challenging, and sometimes volatile. Gender quotas, despite being well-designed in many cases, are insufficient to create the space for feminist or progressive outcomes. Women face challenging political environments in Serbia and Montenegro, especially, and often battle external challenges, such as dominant political parties, corruption, criminality, and complex internal challenges, such as ideological constraints, party directives, and harassment within legislatures.

Thus, the space for true political empowerment remains constrained, and the possibility of substantive representation remains low. Political gender equality remains more than just numbers. For women to achieve this kind of equality, they must be present. Still, they also must be active, and for this to happen, the political environments they work in must be safe, hospitable, and encouraging. The political environments of Serbia and Montenegro elude this reality. The cases of Serbia and Montenegro suggest that women politicians work in environments with complex legacies. Serbia and Montenegro are products of the break-up of Yugoslavia and still, many decades later, face complex economic, social, and political realities. In both cases, this has led to corrupt systems and a tendency towards authoritarianism. These macro factors have thus made the lives of women politicians and those who aspire to enter politics very difficult, constraining the democratic space available for lasting, gender-equal change.

FUTURE RESEARCH AND CONCLUSIONS

This research set out to explore the dynamics of women's political representation, namely the descriptive and substantive kind, in the former Yugoslavia, emphasizing two countries, Serbia and Montenegro. In this research, I broadly discussed the evolution of women and political literature within the

Southeastern European region. I then put forth my research questions and methodology. Subsequently, I turned to a general contextualization of the region in terms of women's descriptive representation before discussing two countries of the region in greater detail. After this, I discussed my findings and the implications of them.

Throughout the work, I make the argument that despite gains in descriptive representation and well-designed gender quotas, women politicians in Serbia and Montenegro, due to external and internal political dimensions, have not achieved a high level of political gender equality, nor is there much space for them to ensure substantive representation or put forth gender equality goals. I supported this assertion throughout the paper with data, complementary information, and real-world examples of women's political obstacles.

This research could be expanded in several ways. First, future research could expand the case study selection and include all countries of the former Yugoslavia to increase the generalizability and implications of these findings. Many countries of this region face similar hindrances in this realm, but it would be interesting to note the specifics of this. Additionally, parliamentary discussions and legislation in each country could be further analyzed to ascertain if there is any substantive representation occurring. I maintain here that the space for this kind of activity is limited. Still, there may be examples of critical actors who are an exception to this trend, especially in Montenegro now. Further interviewing could be done of women politicians, especially in Montenegro, to ascertain their personal experiences with discrimination, harassment, and discouragement. Lastly, scholars could ascertain the level of symbolic representation in the region in the future. It appears that women in Montenegro generally have no desire to enter politics, but this could again be analyzed further, and a similar analysis could be done in other countries of the region. This comprehensive analysis would contribute to the body of literature concerning the region.

The literature written about women's political representation in the former Yugoslavia could generally be broadened. Scholars will have to grapple with the unpredictable and sometimes concerning changes occurring in the region and situate these changes in a more global and comparative context. What is ultimately the future of women in politics in the former Yugoslavia?

This is the question that may be not only relevant for the region but also, ultimately, the world. As there is increased backlash towards women and women politicians across regions, it is increasingly important for scholars to turn their attention to these important themes, noting along the way how to create more electoral and democratic space for women, who are often pivotal agents of change. Although their presence will not be enough, encouraging their safety, autonomy, and right to speak may facilitate a more positive and progressive era, where their presence will undoubtedly lead to positive and progressive action.

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Ograničenja prisustva: prepreke za političko predstavljanje žena u Srbiji i Crnoj Gori

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Sažetak: Širom sveta, žene su prisutnije u politici nego ikada pre. Porast zastupljenosti je takođe vidljiv u zemljama bivše Jugoslavije. U zadnje tri decenije, broj žena se znatno povećao u parlamentima zemalja regiona. To je delimično zbog rodni kvota koje su uvedene tokom zadnje dve decenije pod uticajem ženskog pokreta. Ali, da li je ova povećana prisutnost žena u ključnim institucijama dovoljna da napravi veći prostor za žene poslanice i političarke tako da bi one mogle da imaju suštinski i moćniji uticaj na politiku? U ovom radu to pitanje je postavljeno i razmatrano na primeru dve države, Srbije i Crne Gore. U ovom radu branim tezu da su žene političarke limitirane da suštinski promene politiku, a i uz to zakone, inicijative i zatim kvalitet života žena. Drugim rečima, njihovo političko predstavljanje je jako ograničeno. Žene u politici se susreću za ozbiljnim preprekama i u Srbiji i u Crnoj Gori, kao što su, na primer, politička represija i dominacija pojedinih političkih stranaka, ideološke orijentacije tih stranaka, i prisutnost korupcije u politici i u širem društvu. Ti faktori značajno komplikuju sposobnost i moć žena da imaju veći uticaj u politici. Cilj ovog rada je da doprinese literaturi o ženama u politici u regionu bivše Jugoslavije i da nastavi akademsku raspravu o ovoj ključnoj temi.

Ključne reči: žene u politici, političko predstavljanje, deskriptivno predstavljanje, suštinsko predstavljanje, Srbija, Crna Gora, rodne kvote