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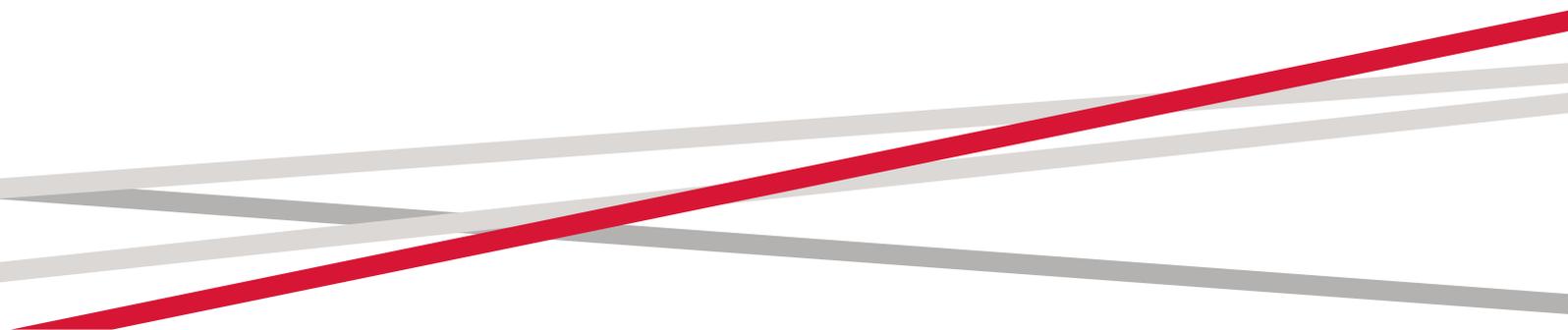
Women in politics: why are they under-represented?

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Women in politics in Ukraine: Underrepresented but breaking through

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Abstract

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Women are generally under-represented in political offices worldwide, and their under-representation becomes larger in more senior positions. In this brief I review some recent academic literature in economics and political science on the likely causes of women's under-representation. Broadly speaking, the literature has divided such causes into "supply-side" and "demand-side" factors: the former include women's potentially lower willingness to run for political office, whereas the latter include voters' and party leaders' prejudices against women in politics. Understanding the underlying causes of women's under-representation in political institutions is crucial in order to design the most effective policies to address the existing gender gaps. In concluding I summarize some of the policies that have been proposed or used to empower women in politics and review the evidence on their effectiveness when available.

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2005 marks an important milestone for gender equality advocates in Ukraine - a long-awaited "Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men" was finally passed" (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2005). While the law can be commended for its merits in laying the legal groundwork for gender equality in Ukraine in various domains, it should be treated as a starting point and not as a finish line. Numerous barriers impeding equal access of women to employment, including political office, are still to be addressed. This policy brief attends to the issue of women in politics in Ukraine, highlighting the problems that women seeking political office face.



Women in politics: why are they under-represented?

Women are generally under-represented in political offices worldwide, and their under-representation becomes larger in more senior positions. Of the four dimensions considered in the World Economic Forum's Gender Equality Index (namely, Economic Opportunity and Participation, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment), the dimension called Political Empowerment, which measures the extent to which women are represented in political office, records the poorest performance, with only 25% of an hypothetical 100% gap having been closed to date.

Importantly, although there is large variation across countries, gender inequality in political empowerment is documented in every region worldwide, including in those countries that are most socially and economically advanced. Sweden, for instance, while having a good record of women's representation in most institutions (women currently represent 47.5% of the Parliament members, 54.5% of the ministers, and about 43% of the municipal councillors), has never had a woman as Prime minister, and only one third of its mayors are female. Countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have only closed 15% of an hypothetical 100% gender gap in political empowerment, according to the World Economic Forum, by far their worst performance among the four sub-indexes that compose the overall Gender Equality Index.

Given the persistent under-representation of women in political institutions, where important decisions that shape societies are taken, economists and political scientists, among others, are increasingly interested in understanding the causes of the gender gap in political

representation. In this brief I summarize some of the recent academic literature on this question, and I review some policies that may help closing the gender gaps in political representation.

Table 1. World Economic Forum Gender Equality Index. Regional Performance in 2020, by Sub-index

	Overall	Econ. Participation and Opportunity	Educational Attainment	Health and Survival	Political Empowerment
Western Europe	0.767	0.693	0.993	0.972	0.409
North America	0.729	0.756	1.000	0.975	0.184
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.721	0.642	0.996	0.979	0.269
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	0.715	0.732	0.998	0.979	0.150
East Asia and the Pacific	0.685	0.663	0.976	0.943	0.159
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.680	0.666	0.872	0.972	0.211
South Asia	0.661	0.365	0.943	0.947	0.387
Middle East and North Africa	0.611	0.425	0.950	0.969	0.102
Global	0.685	0.582	0.957	0.958	0.241

Note: The Global Gender Equality Index tracks countries' progress towards reaching gender equality in educational and health attainment as well as in economic and political life. The overall score is an unweighted average of these four sub-dimensions. A score of 1 corresponds to perfect equality; by contrast, the closer to 0 the score, the larger the gender gap in the respective dimension. The regional average for Eastern Europe and Central Asia is calculated based on the individual scores of the 26 countries. This Table is the authors' own rendering of data taken from the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2020 (WEF, 2019 p.22).

Why are women under-represented in political office?

Broadly speaking, three main reasons are most often explored, namely women's unwillingness



to become politicians, voters' bias, and parties' bias. Below I provide an overview of some of the work that has addressed each of these three factors.

Gender gaps in political ambition

Large-scale surveys have documented that women who, based on their professional and economic credentials, are potential political candidates, report lower ambition to occupy executive offices than comparable men (Fox and Lawless, 2004). The main reasons for the gender gap in ambition appear to be that (a) women are less encouraged to run for office than men and (b) women are less likely to believe that they are qualified for office than men.

Women's tendency to shy away from competition (Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007) may also play a role, since the political selection process is likely perceived as highly competitive. As Preece and Stoddard (2015) find by using two experiments, priming individuals to consider the competitive nature of politics lowers women's interest in running for political office, whereas it has no effect on the interest of men.

Women's willingness to advance in their political career can also be influenced by family and relational considerations. Recent work from Folke and Rickne (2020) shows that in Sweden female politicians who are promoted to mayor (i.e. the highest office in municipal politics) experience a significant increase in the likelihood of divorcing their partner, whereas this is not the case for men. If women face higher costs for their career achievements, as the evidence in Folke and Rickne (2020) suggests, they may be discouraged from pursuing such objectives.

While there is evidence that women may on average be less willing to advance to top positions than men, it is not clear how

quantitatively relevant this factor is to account for the lack of women in power. The introduction of gender quotas in candidate lists in different countries worldwide can be informative in this sense. If women's under-representation in electoral lists is mostly due to the lack of qualified female politicians, some electoral lists (in most cases representing specific political parties) may not be able to run due to the introduction of a quota, and the average "quality" of lists, measured by some relevant (to voters) characteristics of their members, would decrease. The literature finds no evidence of either of these two responses to quotas (see Baltrunaite et al., 2014, Besley et al., 2017, Bagues and Campa, 2020). On the contrary, in Italy (Baltrunaite et al., 2014) and Sweden (Besley et al., 2017) quotas appear to have improved the "quality" of the elected politicians.

Voters' bias

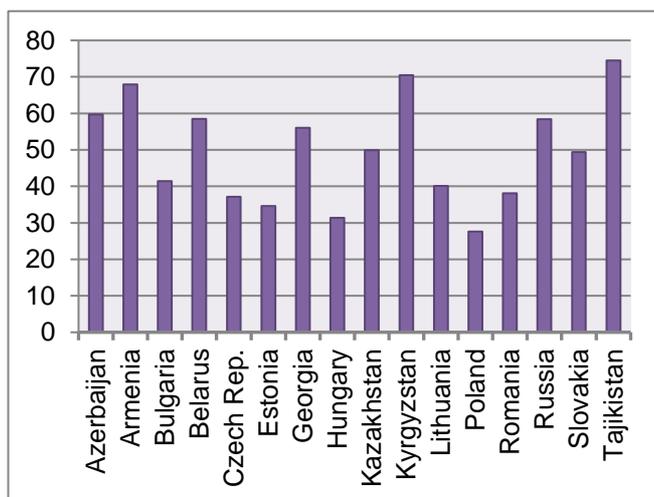
Krook (2018) observes that the existing work in political science regarding the importance of voters' bias in explaining women's underrepresentation in politics leads to ambivalent conclusions. Results in the most recent economics literature confirm this assessment. Barbanchon and Sauvagnat (2019) compare votes received by the same female candidate in French parliamentary elections across different polling stations within an electoral district and find that votes for women are lower in municipalities with more traditional gender-role attitudes. They interpret this pattern as evidence of voters' discrimination and conclude that voters' bias matters quantitatively in explaining women's under-representation among politicians. Conversely, Bagues and Campa (2020) find no evidence of voters bias against women, based on voters' reaction to the introduction of a gender quota for electoral lists in Spain. Specifically, they study how the quota impacts the electoral performance of lists that



were more affected by the quota – i.e. that were forced to increase their share of female candidates by a larger extent, due to their lower level of feminization pre-quota. They do not find evidence that such lists have worsened their relative electoral performance due to the quota. Put differently, there is no evidence that voters lower their electoral support of a list when its share of female candidates increases for exogenous reasons.

Survey data on voters’ attitudes can also help in gauging the extent to which voters discriminate against women. Based on data from the latest wave of the World Value Survey (WVS, 2017-2020), in Western Europe typically less than 20% of survey respondents express agreement with the statement “Men make better political leaders than women do” (e.g. 5% in Sweden, 9% in Denmark and Germany, 12% in Finland and France, 19% in Italy; only in Greece the share of agreement is higher than 20%, at 26%). As shown in Figure 1, these percentages are substantially higher in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.).

Figure 1. Share of survey respondents who report to “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” with the statement “Men make better political leaders than women do”.



Notes: Data are based on the latest wave of the World Value Survey, 2017-2020. The countries selected were either part of the former Soviet Union or under direct Soviet influence before 1990.

It bears noting, however, that answers to the WVS are not always informative about the extent to which voters’ bias prevails in a country. Where the percentage of respondents who think that men make better political leaders than women is close to or above 50%, as e.g. in Armenia, Georgia or Russia, voters’ bias is likely to be an important factor. However, in countries with lower levels of agreement, such as for instance Poland, drawing conclusions is harder, since the WVS does not measure the share of respondents who think that *women make better political leaders than men do*.

Parties’ bias

Party leaders, who often are key players in the selection of politicians, may prefer to promote male rather than female candidates. If they are aware of voters’ bias against women, preferring male candidates is consistent with a votes-maximizing strategy. However, party leaders may also act as gate-keepers and hold women back even in absence of voters’ bias. Esteve-Volart and Bagues (2012) find evidence of an agency problem between voters and parties by looking at Spanish elections. While parties tend to nominate women in worse positions on the ballot, there is no evidence that women attract fewer votes than men; moreover, when the competition is stiffer, women’s position on the ballot improves. These two facts lead the authors to conclude that the disadvantage women face can likely be attributed to parties’ rather than voters’ bias.

When considering all these factors, it is also important to note that the systematic under-representation of women in political institutions is likely self-reinforcing, due to gendered group dynamics. In the laboratory, women in male-majority teams appear significantly less likely to put their name forward as team-leaders than women in female-majority teams; they anticipate,



correctly, lower support from team members (see Born et al., 2019). Female mayors in Italy are significantly more likely to be removed by their municipal councils than their comparable male colleagues; importantly, this is especially true when the share of male councillors is particularly large (Gagliarducci and Paserman, 2011). These studies suggest that, since the political arena has been historically male-dominated, gendered group dynamics can create vicious cycles of women's under-representation.

Which policies can be used to increase women's representation in political institutions?

Different policies can be considered to address the various factors accounting for women's under-representation in politics. In an attempt to address the "supply side" aspect of women's under-representation, various non-profit organizations have offered training programs aimed at providing women with knowledge, skills and networks to build political careers (see, for instance, NDI 2013). While reviewing the existing literature on these programs is beyond the scope of this brief, to the best of my knowledge there is little to no research-based evidence on the quantitative impact of training on women's advancements in politics. Non-profit organizations, political parties and researchers may fruitfully collaborate to implement and systematically test training programs.

Gender quotas are the most commonly used policy intervention, especially those regulating the composition of candidate lists, and they have been extensively studied; overall the literature suggests that quotas are more or less effective in empowering women depending on their design and the context where they are used (see Campa and Hauser, 2020 for a more comprehensive

review of the economics literature on gender quotas and related policy implications). Given the nuances in the functioning of quotas, countries or regions that consider their adoption should consult with experts who know the ins and outs of such policies and combine their expertise with local knowledge of the relevant context.

The structure and distribution of power within parties is likely crucial for improving women's political representation. Some scholars have devoted attention to the role of women's organizations within parties. Theoretically such organizations should favour the creation of networks and offer mentorship services, which are likely crucial to climb the career ladder in politics. In Sweden, a coalition of women from both the right and the left is credited for having pressed the Social Democrats' into adopting their internal zipper quota by threatening to form a feminist party (see Besley et al., 2017). Women's wings within political parties could play a similar role. Kantola (2018) notes that women's organizations seem to be currently deemed as outdated, at least in European parties; Childs and Kittilson (2016), on the other hand, find that their presence does not seem to harm women's promotion to executive roles within parties, a concern that has been associated with the existence of such organizations. In countries with public funding of political parties, specific funds could be directed to women's organizations within parties.

Folke and Rickne (2020) also note that, since women in top jobs appear to face more relational and family constraints than men, policies that improve the distribution of economic roles within couples could help address the under-representation of women in positions of political power; their observation underlines the crucial role of gender-role attitudes in affecting women's



empowerment in any area of society. How can these attitudes change? An increasing amount of research is being devoted to answer this question. Campa and Serafinelli (2019), for instance, show that a politico-economic regime that puts emphasis on women's inclusion in the labor market can change some of these attitudes. More research from different contexts and on specific policies will hopefully provide more guidance for policy makers on this important aspect, but the message from the existing research is that gender-role attitudes can be changed, and therefore policy-makers should devote attention to interventions that can influence the formation of such attitudes.

In many Western democracies the rate of progress in women's access to top political positions has proven especially slow. This history of Western democracies and the existence of the self-reinforcing mechanisms described above can serve as a lesson for countries in transitions, where new political organizations and institutions are emerging. In absence of specific policies that address women's underrepresentation at lower levels very early on, it would likely take a very long time before gender gaps are closed at higher levels of the political hierarchy.

In concluding, I observe that constant monitoring of the gender gaps in political institutions is important, even in presence of clear upward trends, since progress is rarely linear and therefore needs continuous nurturing.

Women in politics in Ukraine: Underrepresented but breaking through

The problems

When considering the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, out of four scores, which measure how far the country came to closing existing gender gaps in the economy, education, health, and politics, the Ukrainian score for political empowerment is the lowest, at 0.11, against an overall index of 0.71 (Global Gender Gap Report. Insight Report, 2020). The literacy rates and access to economic opportunities in Ukraine are indeed better than in many countries, but it only raises a number of questions: Why do well-educated and professional women not occupy political positions? What are the barriers to political participation and how can those be dealt with? To answer these, we will first take a look at women's representation in the highest legislative body - Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine. With very few women in the parliament during the initial years after Ukraine gained independence, the situation since then is evidently improving (here and below we take data from Verkhovna Rada's open data portal: <https://data.rada.gov.ua/>) However, the pace of change remains slow, as the percentage of women in parliament is approximately 22% in the current convocation, up from 19% in the previous one. These figures represent a significant increase compared to earlier years, with an average of 12% over the last six convocations (since 2002).

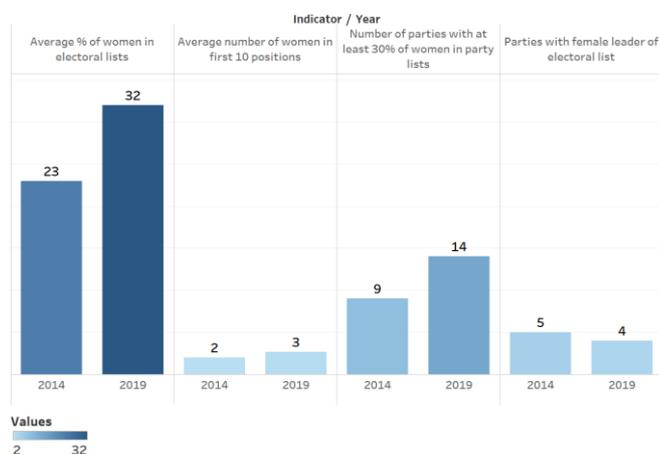
An increase in the number of female MPs coincides with the introduction of the gender quota. The first attempt to promote women in parliament was implemented in 2013 through the law on political parties, which required the inclusion of not less than 30% of females in electoral lists, though without any real sanctions



for non-compliance. The impact of this intervention is still to be studied, but the percentage of women in political parties' lists started to gradually rise. During the parliamentary elections in 2014, 9 out of 29 political parties that took part in the election had at least 30% of women in their lists, 5 parties had a female leader of the party list and the average number of women in the first ten seats was about 2. However, these averages do not account for the women's party Solidarity of Ukrainian Women ("Solidarnist Zhinok Ukrainy"), which presented a list with almost 73% of women and all 10 first seats occupied by women.

Instead of a "stick", the legislation offered a "carrot". Political parties that had more than 30% in their fraction in parliament, received an additional 10% of state funding (two in current parliament). This could have provided an additional incentive to comply with the 2013 law since with time more parties observed the quota - in the elections of 2019, 14 out of 22 competing. 4 parties had a female leader of the party list and the average number of women within the first 10 seats on the electoral list increased to 2.68, with more political parties placing women closer to the top of the list.

Figure 1. Women in parliamentary elections. Note: Average numbers for 2014 do not account for the women's party Solidarity of Ukrainian Women ("Solidarnist zhinok Ukrainy").



Source: The Central Election Commission of Ukraine, 2020



Still, women are less likely to hold leadership positions within the legislative branch. In the Ukrainian Parliament, there are three leadership positions - Speaker, First Deputy Speaker, and Deputy Speaker. The highest office of the Speaker has never been held by a woman, and the first woman to serve as a Deputy Speaker was nominated in 2014. However, from that point on a woman held at least one of the two deputy leadership positions. As of 2020, only 3 women serve as committee heads in the Parliament with the other 20 committees headed by men, and 2 women lead the parliamentary groups (fractions) as heads or co-heads (The Parliament of Ukraine, 2020). The subcommittee on gender equality and non-discrimination within the Committee on Human Rights, De-occupation and Reintegration of Temporarily Occupied Territories in Donetsk, Luhansk Regions and Autonomous Republic of Crimea, National Minorities and Interethnic Relations are headed by women.

Additionally, in 2011, an Inter-Fraction Association "Equal Opportunities", consisting of members of several parliamentary groups and political parties, was launched (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2011). Not having such formal powers as a subcommittee, the caucus, nevertheless, has been actively operating ever since and remains an important advocate for gender equality in Ukraine, introducing legislation and promoting the idea of gender equality publicly, including through an advisory board (Gender Council: New Opportunities, 2016).

The situation is very similar within the executive branch. No woman has ever held the highest office of the President. There has been, however, a female Prime Minister elected twice (Yulia Tymoshenko in 2005 and 2007-2010), whereas women occupied the Vice Prime Minister's

positions only twice in the past 10 years. Although in recent years an increase in the number of women ministers in the government was observed, in 2020 this number again dropped to about 14% (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine - Government of Ukraine, 2020). In 2018, a new office of Government Commissioner for Gender Equality Policy has been established and since then occupied by Kateryna Levchenko, which shows the declared intent to keep the issue on the government agenda (Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, 2018).

Women on the local level have a higher representation and their presence increases at the lowest levels of administrative division. The percentage of women occupying major positions is the highest in the villages (over 31%) and it decreases with the size of the territorial unit, down to 9% in the cities (see Figure 2). Even more women hold the deputy leadership positions across all types of local units but, again, the percentage is by far higher on the village level.

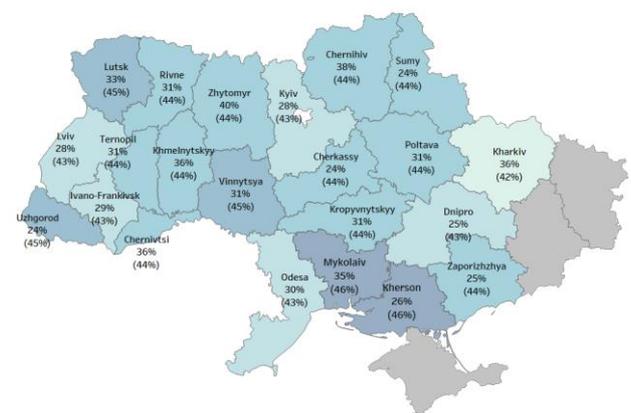
Figure 2. Women in the local government. Source: Association of Ukrainian Cities. "Gender Policy at the Local Level," 2020.



Note: This is illustrated in the survey by the Association of Ukrainian Cities, conducted in April - May 2020 in 836 communities (members of the Association). 363 communities represented cities, 233 - towns and 243 - villages

The 2020 local elections in Ukraine have been particularly interesting in the context of gender equality, since it has been the first local election with a gender quota in place. However, the introduction of the quota at all electoral levels was not the only change. The Electoral Code of Ukraine also introduced sanctions in case the quota was not met - the party list was not to be registered unless it had at least two women for every five positions. As a result, in the 2020 local council elections at the city level, political parties had an average of about 44% of women on their lists (Figure 3, percentages in brackets).

Figure 3. Percentage of women candidates in party lists on the city level (in brackets) and elected to the city councils. Source: The Central Election Commission of Ukraine, 2020.



Note: For this study, we focused on cities that are regional capitals (centers of 'oblasts' - the official name of regional units in Ukraine). The elections were not held in the cities on the occupied territories (Donetsk, Luhansk, Crimea).

On the other hand, an increase in the share of women in electoral lists does not guarantee that women actually get elected to the council, as this depends on the electoral system and the voters' response to the quota. Figure 3 clearly indicates that the number of women elected to the city councils does not fully reflect their increased presence on the party lists. At the city level, no woman was elected mayor.



Possible solutions

According to Amy Alexander et al., there are three main ways to increase women's empowerment in politics: 1) mainstream channels; 2) activist channels; 3) attitudes toward women's political empowerment (Alexander, 2018). Activist channels were not the focus of this particular study, as they are quite hard to measure considering the extremely volatile civil society in Ukraine. However, this path to political office might contribute to the political empowerment of women, as there is a lot of anecdotal evidence of women moving from NGOs into political positions, especially after the Revolution of Dignity.

Mainstream channels include political interest and formal political participation (seeking political office and party membership). Political parties as another important pathway for women in politics have also been more supportive in the last decade. While the practice of establishing women's wings is often treated ambiguously (Kantola, 2019), especially in Ukraine, parties offer other opportunities for professional development - training, mentorship programs, internal and external networking, etc. These efforts are often supported by international donors and thus are rarely systemic, but are still very important to help empower women.

The third path is less direct - women are more likely to participate in political life if such a choice is considered acceptable in their environment. A good indicator of the long-term trends in attitudes towards women in politics is the World Values Survey question on women and political leadership (Men make better political leaders than women do, Inglehart et al, 2018). Though in the past decade there has been a drastic improvement and the number of Ukrainians who agreed or strongly agreed with

this statement decreased, it is still relatively high (from 52% in 2009 to 40% in 2020). Therefore, this crucial component of successful women's empowerment needs more attention from gender equality advocates. More effort is needed to eliminate the bias that is ubiquitous in the media and quite frequent in educational materials (this has been studied quite intensively, for example, Martsenyuk, 2020; Kitsa & Mudra, 2019). Success stories of women leaders could help promote the idea, especially if the focus shifts from their families (how they can successfully balance) to their professional traits and experience.

Conclusion

"Women's political empowerment is not a zero-sum game, and gender equality opens, rather than closes, the political domain to all members of society" (Alexander, 2018). A society, providing equal opportunities for political office, is more capable, wealthy, and well-versed to solve challenging issues by bringing in a variety of perspectives. Despite formal recognition of the need for change, Ukraine still has a long way to go. Women are still underrepresented in the parliament and, especially in the executive branch, while there has been some progress on the local level, they struggle to move up the party and political lines. The first election with the use of a gender quota paired with sanctions promotes women's empowerment, but to make the change systemic political parties should be more supportive of women by providing additional resources for them both during and beyond the election period. Society is also quite reluctant to accept the idea of women as political leaders, so more attention should be paid to education and media that could contribute to women's empowerment by eliminating any bias in the content they provide and showing more positive examples of women leaders.



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