

Women in Parliaments

Obstacles and opportunities for female political representation and gender sensitive policies

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Abstract

The article examines the question: To what extent greater female representation in parliament can be translated into legislation that reduces socio-economic barriers for women or advances their socio-economic status in society? In addition, it offers critical insights into the most significant obstacles that female parliamentarians face when entering parliament.

In 1995, the year of the signing of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on gender equality and empowerment, the proportion of women holding seats in parliament was 11.3%. Twenty-five years later, women hold only 25% of seats in parliament.¹ Women account for more than half of the world's population, yet representative inequalities in national parliaments prevent their voices, concerns, and needs from being heard.

The same is true for socio-economic legislation that upholds the principle of equality. According to the 2020 Women, Business and the Law Report, only eight economies fully enshrined gender equality in their socio-economic legislation and policies.

Ending gender inequalities relies on improving other areas of development, such as decision-making structures, education, economic opportunity, and vice versa. This paper, in keeping with the underlying principle of the interconnectedness of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, maintains that when more female parliamentarians are able to take a seat at the decision-making table, and champion gender-sensitive socio-economic policies, all of society benefits - not just women.²

¹IPU Parline Database (Retrieved 24 September 2020: <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages>)

² Any correlations of female representation in parliament underscored in the paper are contingent on two caveats. First, the results of the quantitative and qualitative analyses do not allow for the establishment of causal relationships. Therefore, when referring to a potential 'impact' in the present analysis, it should be understood only as a suggestion of what might be achieved if more women were represented in parliament. The quantitative analysis looks explicitly at descriptive representation to substantiate the existence of a positive relationship between the percentage of women in parliament and legal frameworks that remove structural barriers to access. Second, the insights of the female parliamentarians serve to enhance the quantitative findings by offering specific examples and understandings, however, they do not present conclusive evidence.

Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund

Equality matters. And if we are to understand the barriers that get in the way, we need to understand their political roots. That is why this research project is so important. It is designed to unpack the relationship between women's representation in parliament, the obstacles in the way, and the subsequent success or otherwise of lawmakers passing law and regulations which are better for economic and social inclusion.

Being based on both a qualitative and quantitative a cross-country statistical analysis, the present article seeks to include developmental variables such as the Human Development Index to identify the extent to which other factors related to international development influence gender equality. This is particularly important in the context of the achievement of the Sustainable Development Objectives and inclusive growth, which require equal socioeconomic opportunities for both men and women. Indeed, it is difficult to analyze development issues, such as gender equality, separately since they are interdependent and interact with each other.

Furthermore, by conducting interviews with women parliamentarians, this paper is able to better understand the obstacles that women face when entering parliament and passing legislation, shedding light on the role of political systems, structural and developmental conditions, cultural values and perceptions, in producing laws aimed at advancing women's socioeconomic rights and inclusion. The interviews conducted in 20 different countries provide useful information about common obstacles experienced by women legislators worldwide as well as local particularities, conforming a comprehensive analysis of the lawmaking processes related to gender equality.

I hope you find the article useful. We hope that by identifying common elements and differences in the responses, we can play a part in knocking down the barriers that stand in the way of female politicians changing the world for the better.

Liam Byrne MP, UK and Chair of the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank and IMF

Women Political Leaders

How can the world achieve equality between men and women when the legislation that regulates daily freedoms, opportunities and privileges does not provide equal opportunities and discrimination against women is built into legal systems around the world?

During the G20 Summit in Osaka, Japan, Women Political Leaders articulated a clear call for action: “Ditch laws that treat men and women as not equal.”

To date, according to the World Bank’s Women, Business and the Law Report, only eight economies in the world enshrine men’s and women’s socio-economic equality in their legislation. Progress is stagnant. A mere decade ago, no country in the world afforded women equal socio-economic legislative rights; 10 years later, only eight countries have made the necessary effort to fully protect economic equality through legal frameworks.

To better understand how equality is impacted by legal barriers and the percentage of women in parliaments, Women Political Leaders, in conjunction with the World Bank Group and the Parliamentary Network on the World Bank & International Monetary Fund, carried out an article under the guidance of Victoria Budson, Executive Director of the Women and Public Policy Program at the Harvard Kennedy School. This article pairs a rigorous quantitative analysis, studying the relationship between the percentage of women in parliament and the effectiveness of legal frameworks that repair gender inequalities, alongside an in-depth qualitative analysis of women parliamentarians’ experiences in parliaments.

This article offers a unique and essential understanding of how to achieve this progress – and fast.

Women, and the world, can no longer afford to wait for equality. Now, as the world addresses the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, is the time to reflect on how the world can best create a new normal with equality for women at the centre of the equation.

Silvana Koch-Mehrin, President and Founder, Women Political Leaders

Preface

The following article is a collaboration among leaders and researchers invested to further the understanding of the important links between those who serve in public office, and the policy outcomes that follow political representation. More specifically, this article seeks to address the following question:

Does a higher number of elected women in deliberative bodies increase the quantity, and quality, of legislation that promotes gender socioeconomic equality?

Those of us working on this paper were interested in investigating other similarly fundamental questions, such as: does an increase in the number of women in office lead to more legislation that is drafted, and that is moved onto the floor? If so, does this process pass more readily with a higher proportion of women elected? Does the percentage of women in a governing body matter—and if so, is there a tipping point? Is there an effect that arises with new entrants to the system that fades over time? Or is it true that, as seniority increases together with female political tenure, we see a rise in legislation that acts on women's behalf? Does power increase as “novelty” of women's participation fades? How are legislative outcomes shaped by the elected women's minority or majority statuses in their country? This article brings us a step closer to understanding these questions.

Throughout my career working on behalf of the empowerment, equality, and longevity of women's rights, I have come to firmly believe that the two most important levers affecting access to equality are 1) the ability of women, and people of all genders, to independently support themselves, and their dependents, over the totality of their adult life; and 2) the statutory protections and constitutional rights that recognize their legal agency. Notably, the latter is not static and involves constant vigilance, and scrutiny.

“Descriptive representation” refers to the extent that elected leaders share attributes and experiences with the groups of people they represent. Currently, political systems worldwide show evidence that, despite the ambition of leaders to effectively represent constituencies whose experiences do not overlap with their own, they fail to correctly identify, promulgate, and represent such issues in a comprehensive manner. This is this challenge that brings us to examine the relationship between women's descriptive representation and the subsequent policy changes. We urgently need to support women's equality, and improve legal frameworks that give them agency, all across the globe.

This paper shows a relationship between the percent of women within a parliamentary body and the increase in gender equality regulations and laws produced by that body. The results also found that, a variable proxying for “expected years of education”, in addition to the percentage of women in parliament, has a positive impact in the gender equality legislative framework. This

is an important finding that supports the role of female leadership in both enabling education attainment,³ and adding effect to the advancement of social outcomes. These two complementary factors provide key insights to understanding how we reach increased legislative outcomes supporting women's equality.

It is vital that political leaders and the academics, activists, practitioners, and citizens who elect them *and* hold them accountable work to create a political system that no longer requires descriptive representation. Rather, it would be a system that makes the lives and needs of the "other" (in this case, women and girls) transparent in policy--and that such transparency would result in the kinds of practical laws that stave off the type of unintended consequence that result in systemic bias and unmet needs.

However, until that goal is achieved, it is critical that investments be made in making political systems accessible to women to ensure greater statutory protections that enable women to live and work with equality. Moreover, we must continue to conduct this kind of comprehensive analysis that further untangles the meaning and impact of women's electoral success, and the corresponding outcomes of the betterment of women's lives.

Victoria Budson, founder and Executive Director of the Women and Public Policy Program (WAPPP) at the Harvard Kennedy School of Government

³See <https://epod.cid.harvard.edu/publications/female-leadership-raises-aspirations-and-educational-attainment-girls-policy>

Introduction: Exploring the relationship between the percentage of women in parliament, equality and international development

“When the composition of decision-making assemblies is so markedly at odds with the gender make-up of the society they represent, this is clear evidence that certain voices are being silenced and suppressed.”

- Anne Phillips, *Politics of Presence*, 1991

The year 2020 marks the 25th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a revolutionary blueprint for advancing women’s rights. It is a defining moment to measure achievements and to reflect critically on the challenges that remain in improving women’s political representation and leadership globally. Not only is it essential for decision-making bodies to reflect the composition of the societies they represent, but this paper adopts the stance that it is also crucial to international development as effective representation will improve the lives of people of all genders -- as embodied by Sustainable Development Goal 5.

There is no doubt that progress has been achieved - the number of female parliamentarians has more than doubled from 11.3% to 25% in the last 25 years.⁴ Nevertheless, on the road to equality there remains much to be traveled. It is important to consider that women make up more than half of the world’s population and that rectifying representative inequalities in parliaments is merely one stop on this journey, albeit a critical one.

Indeed, achieving equality between women and men in parliaments would be significant for the global political community in several ways. Equal representation not only fulfills the democratic imperative of gender parity in parliament, but also increases the chances that policies seeking to remove structural inequalities are being proposed and passed. As a result of their own experience, some female representatives may notice more acutely when legislation is lacking in areas related to gender equality and, subsequently, promote legislation aimed at protecting the rights of women and people of all genders.

Women’s representation & the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Target 5.5 of Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality seeks to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.” Meanwhile, Target 5.A underscores the need to champion reforms that “give women equal rights to economic resources as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property.” 5.C highlights the global community’s responsibility to “adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.”

⁴ IPU Parline Database (Retrieved 24 September 2020: <https://data.ipu.org/women-averages>)

These targets suggest that the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5 – i.e. gender equality and empowerment – hinges upon women’s equal representation in politics as well as the passing of gender-sensitive reforms and policies.

SDG 5 also depends on improvements in other areas of the Development Agenda such as SDG 4 (Quality Education) and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), or vice versa (Stakeholder Forum, 2015).⁵ Consequently, ending gender inequality relies on the ability of the global collective to improve other areas of development, such as education, inclusive leadership, property rights and economic growth.

This implies that when more women are able to take a seat at the decision-making table, the entire world will benefit -- not just women. While individual countries may need to overcome unique obstacles that vary according to the level of development, the underlying premise of the 2030 Agenda rests on a holistic approach to the attainment of the individual goals. Consequently, this paper looks forward to analyzing the political and socio-economic inclusion of women through the legislative branch, and its faculties, while introducing factors related to socio-economic development, such as inequality and education, into the analysis.

Article outline

The article seeks to provide key insights into the dynamics between these variables by exposing obstacles to women’s political inclusion and the passing of legislation that improves women’s economic and social conditions. First, the paper will seek to identify the obstacles women face when entering parliament (I), then it would shed light on the barriers to female parliamentarians when passing legislation that improves women’s economic and social conditions (II). Last, with the inclusion of a short statistical analysis, the article seeks to strengthen the findings and establish a correlation between the proportion of women in parliament and the quality of legislative frameworks that improve women’s socio-economic rights (III). Additionally, the model will the level of development of countries in order to account for other areas of development that might influence this relationship.

Identifying obstacles for women parliamentarians

In order to better understand the underlying dynamics behind the descriptive political representation of women and its relationship with legal frameworks aimed at reducing gender socioeconomic inequalities, a qualitative survey was conducted. The survey, distributed in the form of an online questionnaire, was designed to help discern what specific obstacles female parliamentarians may or may not experience while producing, passing or proposing legislation that 1) removes barriers preventing women from accessing equal socio-economic

⁵ Universal Sustainable Development Goals : Understanding the Transformational Challenge for Developed Countries, Report of a Study by Stakeholder Forum, available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?page=view&type=400&nr=1684&menu=1515>.

opportunities or 2) legislation that advances women's socio-economic standing in society.

The purpose of this analysis is to offer empirical insight and to set the stage for future areas of critical inquiry. The survey was carried out with balanced geographical representation and the participation of as large a number of parliamentarians as possible, thus allowing for a more accurate assessment of potential patterns in the survey responses. Additionally, increasing the amount of observations gathered encourages varied information. This affords a greater possibility to identify any significant differences in participant responses as well as similarities.

Another important justification for this exercise is that such an analysis could shed light on whether or not women parliamentarians from different countries and cultures experience similar obstacles. Furthermore, by diversifying the responses we aim to gather more intelligence on existing barriers that might not have been observed before.

While we were able to gather specific, and important, insights from this analysis, with which to highlight crucial areas for future consideration, we cannot draw any conclusions about the status of women parliamentarians currently and by no means provide any general explanation to gender socioeconomic inequality

Methodology

Survey respondent selection

First, geographical regions were determined according to the World Bank's standard breakdown: Africa (AFR), Middle East and North Africa (MENA), Western Europe and North America, Eastern Europe and Central Asia (ECA), Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), East Asia and the Pacific (EAP) and South Asia (SAR).

Each global region was included to encourage more expansive representation. Next, countries were identified according to two central criteria:

1. Whether or not they meet a 30% threshold of women in parliament. This particular characteristic, enshrined in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, was selected to divide countries into categories because 1) general consensus, both political and academic, suggests it marks the beginning of the substantive representation of women in politics as a result of their increased presence, although debate remains, and 2) the database selected for this paper, the Inter-Parliamentary Union Women in Parliaments Statistical Archive, provides an explicit starting point from which to create categories.⁶

⁶The database provides widespread descriptive statistics for 193 countries regarding the number of women in upper, lower and bicameral houses of parliament. For more information on the data selected for this paper, please visit the data annex.

2. Using the Women, Business and Law Index, countries were categorized according to their overall WBL Index Score in conjunction with the percentage of women in their parliaments. In addition to ensuring as much geographic diversity as possible, we sought to identify a range of countries with both high and low WBL Index scores, as well as high and low percentages of women in parliament, to access a more representative picture of what challenges women parliamentarians face when passing, producing or proposing legislation that repairs socio-economic inequalities between men and women.

A selection of countries was made based on these categories to include diversified global representation and reach countries where female parliamentarians are active members of either the Women Political Leaders (WPL) Network or the Parliamentary Network of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

A total of 21 women parliamentarians from the following countries responded to the survey: Bangladesh, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and South Korea.

Questionnaire design

The survey was divided into three parts to encourage a systematic assessment of female parliamentarians' insights and experiences through the analysis of both close-ended and open-ended questions.

Closed-ended questions

The first portion of the survey includes closed-ended questions designed so that respondents must select one of a limited number of answers provided to them. These questions seek to identify obstacles that women parliamentarians might face when passing, proposing or producing legislation repairing gender-based socio-economic inequalities. More specifically, these queries address perceptions of female leadership and the potential impact of pre-existing legislation as barriers.

Open-ended questions

The open-ended questions allowed for a greater variety of responses, which could shed more light on individual experiences, regional differences, and what best practices, in the eyes of respondents, might help increase the number of women in parliament. They were designed to assess the existence of obstacles for women parliamentarians when introducing or passing legislation related to socio-economic inequalities between women and men. Additionally, these questions attempt to gain insight into the different barriers that are present for passing legislation that either reduces pre-existing socio-economic barriers for women or advances their socio-economic status in society.

Expected Results

We sought to identify any potential patterns, similarities or differences in the 21 parliamentarians' responses to the qualitative survey. Commonalities could lead to a deeper understanding in terms of the challenges that women face both in parliament and when passing legislation that pertains to women's equality. Although we are unable to draw finite conclusions from this survey, we can highlight the existence of best practice examples based on the global collection of responses.

This article supports the notion that improving international development and advancing gender equality are related processes, as enshrined in the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and Sustainable Development Goals. Critical observations will be utilized to develop a deeper understanding of what mechanisms could help address inequalities between women and men in parliaments. Additionally, these results may contribute to a greater understanding of which areas of development, or dimensions of legislation, are crucial to ensuring gender equality.

Scaling women parliamentarians' responses

The first part of the questionnaire consists of two close-ended questions, with answers distributed on an ordinal scale of 1-5, with 0 representing *no impact*; 1 representing *almost no impact*; 2 representing *minimal impact*; 3 representing *some impact*; 4 representing *substantial impact*; and 5 representing *great impact*.

I. Identifying obstacles to entering parliament: women parliamentarians share their insights

Political representation is both a democratic imperative and essential to improving women's socio-economic status (Horowitz 2009). The first portion of the open-ended questions asked women parliamentarians to identify the obstacles they face when entering parliament. Their responses shed light on measures that can be implemented to bypass these obstacles. The parliamentarians' answers also allow us to identify some of the main factors leading to the underrepresentation of women in parliament.

When asked to identify central obstacles to proposing, passing or introducing legislation that provides equal access to socio-economic opportunities for women and men, several key themes emerged in women parliamentarians' responses: the importance of values, culture, and the need for more comprehensive affirmative action measures.

These answers are significant because parliamentarians across regions produced similar responses, in addition to underscoring similar issues, while 1) having no identifiable personal connection and 2) living in different countries and geographical areas. Additionally, among those interviewed, we were able to

recognize common obstacles despite differing locations, political systems, ages and positions within parliament.

When asking women parliamentarians about what they perceive as the main obstacles to entering parliament, we were able to identify 3 fundamental categories of barriers: 1) barriers involving political and electoral systems, 2) structural and socio-economic barriers, and 3) cultural and ideological barriers, which, as reflected by the first part of the qualitative analysis, 86% of respondents believe have a noticeable impact on the number of women in their countries' parliaments. This also confirms Horowitz's argument that "the supply of female candidates is determined by women's structural access to opportunities, and political and cultural demand for female representation" (Horowitz 2009).

Identifying obstacles: political and electoral system

Quotas

When discussing possible measures to increase the descriptive representation of women in parliament, almost 60% of the interviewed parliamentarians acknowledged gender quotas as a measure to boost women's political participation. This would seem to confirm the existing literature documenting quotas' powerful positive impact on women's legislative representation (Williams 2015).

The results of the survey responses have highlighted two types of quotas: candidate quotas and reserved seats. Candidate quotas consist of nominating a minimum percentage of women candidates for election and applying these candidates to political parties' lists. They may also require other measures, such as the placement of women in certain positions. Candidate quotas can be compulsory or voluntary (Williams 2015). Reserved-seat quotas consist of reserving a certain portion of legislative seats for female legislators. The advantage of reserved-seat quotas is that they make a certain level of women's participation compulsory in the legislative process (Williams 2015).

A majority of the interviewed parliamentarians agree that a stringent quota system advances women's representation in parliament, in addition to tackling obstacles related to women's political representation. However, their responses also suggest that quotas systems are not strong enough on their own to affect change - they should be institutionalized to a higher degree.

In fact, some of the respondents agreed that having compulsory quotas enshrined in the law at the constitutional level will yield more significant results than relying solely on voluntary quota systems. A compulsory quota would set a mandatory threshold of the percentage of women required to appear on the electoral lists, thus increasing the proportion of female candidates in the legislative powers of government. Williams and Thames elaborate on this logic by claiming that "compulsory party and reserved-seat quotas can have a much broader impact on women's representation than voluntary party quotas because of their broader

scope” (Williams 2015). In the scope of the open-ended questions parliamentarians seemed to agree that taking more aggressive affirmative action measures, such as reserved seat quotas, would complement compulsory party quotas.

The survey responses seem to confirm the argument that reserved-seat quotas are more effective in guaranteeing women’s meaningful political inclusion. According to the literature on the subject, reserved-seat quotas provide greater opportunities for women’s participation in the legislative process because they require the reservation of a certain portion of seats for female legislators. Meanwhile, candidate quotas only increase the chance that women will be elected (Meier 2000) (Williams 2015). Reserved-seat quotas also demand that women parliamentarians leaving office be replaced by other women thus maintaining a minimum level of female representation inside parliaments.⁷ These arguments are mirrored by the exceptional case of women’s parliamentary representation in Rwanda, which is in part due to the preservation of reserved-seat quotas in the 2003 Constitution: Article 9 demands that at least 30% of the seats in decision-making organs must be occupied by a woman (Elgie 2008). After implementing these measures, Rwanda observed an increase from 25.7% of women in the Chamber of Deputies to 48.75% after the 2003 elections. This catapulted Rwanda to obtaining the highest percentage of women Members of Parliament in the world, which it still has to this day (Elgie 2008).

A final important issue brought up by the interviewed parliamentarians is the recurrence of quotas at all levels. Indeed, two mentioned the importance of having compulsory quotas in every election applied to all political parties. This strict measure would strengthen women’s representation not only at the federal level, but also at local and state levels, consequently ensuring a more generalized inclusion of women in the political life of the countries.

Political parties

While quotas are a proven mechanism to increase women’s political representation, they are not sufficient according to some of the interviewed women parliamentarians. Quotas would seem to have a greater impact when combined with substantial electoral and political party reform. Zetterberg and Bjarnegard explain that “a growing body of research on the impact of compulsory quotas has shown that these quota laws may, but do not necessarily, increase the number of female legislators. One reason why even legally adopted quotas are not always effective is that political parties charged with their implementation do not comply with the quota requirements” (Zetterberg 2016).

This is because political parties often act as the gatekeepers of political inclusion. Candidate selection often operates through the parties themselves, thus the

⁷Here it is also important to note that the effectiveness of legislated candidate list quotas is significantly higher when supported by regulatory mechanisms or sanctions, for example, the rejection of lists that do not abide by the quota requirement. See the cases of Bolivia and the Democratic Republic of Congo in the Women, Business and the Law Report 2016, p.11

gender dynamics inside political parties are extremely important to consider when increasing women's representation in parliament (Horowitz 2009). Therefore, in countries where political parties represent the basis for political life, it is essential to bolster the inclusion of women inside parties to ensure their widespread political representation (Horowitz 2009). An identified pattern in survey responses suggests that in countries with strong party systems, affirmative electoral action must be taken, such as installing quotas inside all political parties, and be an object of legal sanction (Zetterberg 2016).

Additionally, some respondents mentioned the need to have affirmative action measures that go beyond quotas. For example, economic incentives that encourage a greater participation of women inside political parties. Parliamentarians also recommend that political parties ensure 1) the nomination of women to positions of power inside and outside the party, like appointing members of the cabinet, and 2) reflect women's perspectives within party agendas. Also, parliamentarians indicated that political parties should improve their modus operandi to include more women. More specifically, two of the interviewed Members of Parliament underlined the importance of implementing a mandatory alternate order in electoral lists, alongside quotas, to promote equal opportunities between men and women.

Finally, one of the respondents underscored the importance the electoral system has on the descriptive representation of women. She highlighted the need for proportional representation in order to increase the number and influence of women in politics. The logic behind this argument has been widely studied by researchers: Horowitz stipulates that "female politicians are elected in much greater numbers under proportional representation systems where voters choose among closed party lists in multimember districts rather than individual candidates in single member districts" (2009). This may be due to the fact that the nature of majoritarian elections, as opposed to proportional representation systems, follows a zero-sum game that creates incentive for parties to nominate men who they feel are the safest candidates (Horowitz 2009).

As a result, the representation of women in parliament would seem to depend on a multitude of factors related to institutional constructions of electoral and party systems inside democracies. To this end, many affirmative measures can be implemented, such as compulsory candidate quotas, reserved seats, legal sanctions, financial incentives and alternate order in electoral lists.

It is important to note, however, that the need for these kinds of affirmative-action measures may mirror structural gender-based inequalities in society that affect women's descriptive representation in parliaments. Indeed, some parliamentarians mentioned several factors related to development issues that play a role in the political representation of women.

Identifying obstacles: existing inequalities and structural conditions

Economic inequalities

Two of the interviewed women parliamentarians spoke both directly and indirectly about the impact that gender-based financial inequalities have on women's descriptive representation in parliaments.

According to the literature, the "feminization" of poverty is a significant barrier to increasing the political representation of women in parliament (Shvedova 2005). Along the lines of Shvedova's argument, the interviewed parliamentarians discussed taking affirmative action measures which provide women with financial resources like campaign financing or, alternatively, limiting the amount of money candidates can spend during their campaign. These measures would help to ensure financial equality between women and men when running for political office, while consequently responding to the structural "feminization" of poverty.

Another factor mentioned in the survey responses is the "dual burden of women," as coined by Shvedova (2005). The author acknowledges that in most countries women are responsible for a disproportionate share of domestic work. This presents a difficult barrier for some women to overcome as they would be compelled to meet the basic needs of their families and consequently have little to contribute actively to political life (Shvedova 2005). Three Members of Parliament confirmed this sentiment in their survey responses: one mentioned the importance of having a good balance between work and family life, while another underscored the importance of successful parenting and family life to allow for more freedom in the workplace. The last response underlined the importance of educating women to help empower them to achieve their own purpose in life. In this context, the responses seem to reaffirm that family life and social expectations are an important factor in determining women's representation in parliament.

Education

Additionally, three interviewed parliamentarians brought up the link between education and women's political representation in parliament in their responses. Despite the fact that "no study that includes measures of women's educational attainment as a predictor of female presence in national legislatures found it to have a significant effect" (Horowitz 2009), some qualitative research, and the results of this survey, would seem to highlight education as an important factor for women's increased presence in politics.

As Shvedova points out, "many candidacy nomination procedures require a minimum level of literacy. This prevents women from registering as candidates for elections" (2005). In addition, a certain level of political training is essential for women to participate in the political arena (Shvedova 2005). The results of the survey mirror these insights as women parliamentarians cited national education, education curriculums and the educational empowerment of women as essential to advancing women's participation in politics.

These arguments, which take into account the structural conditions affecting women's political inclusion in parliament, also seem to reflect the underlying assumption that the Sustainable Development Goals are interrelated. This implies that Goals 8 (Inclusive Growth) and 4 (Education) could be intricately linked to the attainment of Goal 5 (gender equality). In this context, the inclusion of women in parliament would seem to depend on several structural factors in addition to the political system itself. Therefore, it seems that increasing the number of women in parliament constitutes an issue of development that can be achieved by working on education and economic equality.

Identifying obstacles: cultural and ideological perceptions

Culture, values and social factors

The third category of barriers identified by the survey participants relates to socio-cultural perceptions of female leadership and the perceived political capacity of women. Horowitz's research confirms the importance of perceptions, claiming that "the way in which the general public imagines women's capabilities and opportunities matters to their political inclusion" (2009).

According to the literature, cultural narratives denote a particular image of the role women should play in public life. In many countries, this role is highly apolitical and restricts women to labels such as "working mothers" or "housewives." These assumptions lead to a discrepancy between women's expected roles and the anticipated requirements of a political leader (Horowitz 2009) (Shvedova 2005). The literature affirms that these perceptions affect, depending on the country, both the electorate and the parties themselves, thus leading to an underrepresentation of women in politics (Horowitz 2009). While not a globally inclusive picture, this point is also reinforced by the findings of the Reykjavik Index for Leadership whose cross-country survey of 22,000 men and women in G7 and BRIC countries cites vast discrepancies in how women and men perceive women's capabilities to lead (2019).

Not surprisingly, when parliamentarians were asked to identify some of the main obstacles to women's entry in parliament, some referred to the perception that men are more capable politicians than women, especially regarding "hard policy" subjects such as national security. In this context, the interviewed parliamentarians emphasized the critical role that both feminist movements and movements advocating women's rights may play in increasing descriptive representation by challenging cultural and social perceptions. Indeed, such movements may provide a space to dispute traditional gender roles and make it more costly for political parties to exclude women from their electoral lists (Hubbard 2020).

Additionally, some surveyed parliamentarians highlighted the importance, directly or indirectly, of changing not only male's perceptions of female leadership, but also altering how women perceive themselves. Some researchers attribute a lack of confidence, resulting from perceptions that women may have of themselves, as

one of the central reasons for the underrepresentation of women in politics (Shvedova 2005). Interviewed parliamentarians also stressed the need for women to continue demanding greater rights. In addition, they underscored the importance of solidarity by encouraging other women to stand up for their political rights and suggesting that women leaders should empower other women to define their own roles and careers.

II. Identifying obstacles to passing legislation for removing barriers and advancing rights for women

Two of the open-ended questions were designed to identify the main obstacles that women parliamentarians face when trying to pass legislation that removes barriers for women by increasing their socio-economic inclusion. The answers to these questions allow us to identify obstacles inside the legislative branch that may prevent women from achieving equality, in addition to illustrating some of the obstacles that women parliamentarians face in their daily work lives.

Some of the responses reveal the following obstacles to passing and/or introducing legislation that removes socio-economic barriers for women: perceptions, a predominantly masculine culture in parliaments and party systems, lack of political will, connection to the executive power, a lack of awareness and training in comparison to male counterparts, the underrepresentation of women in parliament, and a lack of previous gender inclusive legislation.

Increased descriptive representation of women

An important factor to passing legislation that improves women's socio-economic rights is the increased representation of women in parliament. Survey responses pointed out that a low proportion of women representatives in some parliaments has an effect on the passing of this type of legislation. This insight is confirmed by previous research as Karam and Lovenduski state that "the extent of women's impact will depend very much on the number of women in parliament who are motivated to represent women's issues and concerns" (Lovenduski 2005). This may be attributed to the fact that women's presence in parliament, even in small numbers, affects the behavior of male legislators. Nevertheless, Karam and Lovenduski argue that long term change also comes as a result of a substantial number of women in parliament who are willing to represent concerns specific to women (Lovenduski 2005).

As we will see in the following section, the argument delineating the positive impact of descriptive representation on laws that remove barriers for women will be also supported by the statistical model of this article. Indeed, the paper will seek to advance a positive correlation between the percentage of women in single and lower houses of parliament and the quality of legal frameworks and regulations that advance socio-economic access to opportunities for women. However, Lovenduski and Karam reaffirm that "change does not simply result from numbers; rather it is a complex process of overcoming resistance to women in which presence is only one part of the necessary mixture" (Lovenduski 2005).

Furthermore, other factors pointed out in survey responses seem to confirm that the impact women parliamentarians may have on passing gender equal laws also depends on other factors both inside and outside of parliament.

Party systems, lobbying practices and a lack of political will

According to the response results, political parties seem to present a substantial obstacle for passing legislation that removes structural barriers for women. Almost 20% of the interviewed parliamentarians agreed on the importance of political parties when passing legislation that reduces socio-economic obstacles for women. This phenomenon could be explained by lobbying and whipping practices, a party's political agenda or a lack of political will coming from within the party.

To this end, research shows the existence of a significant political imbalance between men and women inside parties. Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership and decision-making positions inside political parties. This leads to a lack of political incentive, or will, in which male members have little interest in addressing inequalities. Therefore, women struggle to mobilize ideas that differ from leading partisan goals (Hubbard 2020).

In addition to this, when women parliamentarians were asked to identify the existence of obstacles in passing or introducing legislation that advances women's socio-economic inclusion in society, many spoke about whipping practices and parties' political agendas. The responses demonstrate that party agendas often have other priorities and objectives. Research has shown that the nomination of women is often related to a party's agenda, which is determined by the political environment of the nomination (Funk 2017). An article written by Funk et al. shows that in Latin American countries parties nominate more women when faced with a certain distrust from voters, while when parties face many competitors they are less likely to nominate women (2017).

This phenomenon is exacerbated by whipping and lobbying systems. Whipping prevents parliamentarians from voting as individuals, thus the pressure to adhere to predetermined party agendas, and lobbying, allow external actors to influence party agendas. Two interviewed Members of Parliament acknowledged that financial institutions, lobbying groups and ministries often possess more influence and access in orienting the political agenda than parliamentarians do. An example developed during the survey was the case of maternity leave: some interviewed MPs labeled it as a difficult issue in parliamentary discussions because employers find this issue difficult to manage and therefore put pressure on the decision-making processes. As a result, the capacity of women parliamentarians to influence the party's political agenda may be undermined.

Male culture and external & internal perceptions

Another issue raised by women parliamentarians participating in the survey regards the culture both inside and outside of parliament. Parliamentarians identify a predominantly masculine culture inside parliament, which, in turn, shapes legislative processes and agendas. Upon entering parliament women step into “a male domain” that was “established, organized and dominated by men acting in their own interest and establishing procedures for their own convenience” (Lovenduski 2005).

Interviewed parliamentarians described parliament as a male-dominated organization, which leads to the patronization of female parliamentarians and their exclusion from areas of discussion that are perceived as masculine. Indeed, when asked about obstacles to passing and introducing laws that advance the socio-economic status of women, more than 25% of respondents cited a lack of will from male colleagues to pass these types of laws due to a patriarchal culture within parliament.

Additionally, at least three parliamentarians referred directly to the lack of proper training for women upon entering parliament as a significant obstacle. This may reinforce the power held by older, male legislators who know the system better and are sometimes reluctant to place women in higher leadership positions (Shvedova 2005). Also, answers affirm that this type of organizational culture may entail excluding women from certain “hard policy” topics, such as national defense and finance.

In addition, cultural and religious values, as well as the perception of gender roles, were mentioned as significant barriers for women to pass laws that aim to improve women’s socio-economic opportunities. Some of the interviewed parliamentarians acknowledged that cultural and religious backgrounds may affect the way both female and male parliamentarians vote. These perceptions can influence the passing of regulations that advance women’s rights in different ways. First, certain systemic values shape societal perceptions. These perceptions are therefore ingrained in voters’ mindsets and difficult to change. At least four members of parliament referred, directly or indirectly, to patriarchal traditional values as an obstacle to passing legislation that removes barriers for women. Secondly, perceptions may also influence the way women perceive themselves as politicians. This can lead to a lack of confidence on the part of some women legislators (Shvedova 2005). Indeed, according to the survey responses, fear of criticism is an obstacle to both entering parliament and passing legislation that increases gender equality.

Previous existing legislation and the executive connection

Finally, an issue that several women parliamentarians raise when relaying obstacles to passing legislation that advances women’s socio-economic access to opportunity is the existence of previous legislation delineating the political and

economic inclusion of women. One parliamentarian points out that laws can change not only perceptions, but behavior as well.

According to survey responses, this would be the case regarding rules related to family life, entrepreneurship, finance and inheritance. Indeed, some research underscores that laws and policies play an important role in shaping women's economic agency (Htun 2019). Studies have also found that women's increased social and economic agency alters norms regarding women's behavior and political participation (Htun 2019). Consequently, existing legal frameworks that advance women's socio-economic rights may boost the political inclusion of women and facilitate further production of this kind of legislation, thus reaffirming the results of this survey.

However, some of the women parliamentarians participating in the survey note that even when legislation is adequate the problem lies in the application of the law. Indeed, Annesley and Gains argue that "the gendered disposition of the core executive both facilitates and constrains the capacity of committed feminist policy actors – ministers and bureaucrats – to gender policy outcomes" (Gains 2010). This point illustrates that the connection between the executive and the legislative also plays an important role in advancing equal rights.

Identifying obstacles: introducing versus passing legislation that removes socio-economic barriers for women

As the results of prior open-ended questions demonstrate, some of the interviewed women parliamentarians believe that their countries' political parties and systems play a significant role in determining the outcome of not only the number of women in parliament, but also the presence of legal frameworks that repair gender-based socio-economic inequalities. This can in part be attributed to the notion that political parties are often viewed as gatekeepers for women's inclusion in politics. As previously mentioned, Horowitz cites the party candidate selection process as a deciding factor in the gender make-up of certain political parties (2009). This process can be determinative in countries where political parties represent the foundation of political life. It is therefore key to boost the inclusion of women in political parties to ensure greater representation of women's interests (Horowitz 2009).

In this context, when asked if barriers for introducing legislation that reduces pre-existing socio-economic obstacles for women differ from the passing of said legislation, some of the parliamentarians cited political party agendas and internal politics as highly influential in determining which bills are introduced and which are passed. In fact, eight parliamentarians, both directly and indirectly, mentioned internal party dynamics as a deciding factor of how difficult both introducing and passing legislation related to gender inequality may be.

Here it is important to note that national differences in political systems and within parliaments play a critical role in deciphering the obstacles to both passing and introducing the aforementioned legal frameworks. For example, one parliamentarian noted that administrative bodies are unable to submit their own bills because it is difficult to reach consensus among the relevant ministries. Therefore, ministries deliver their propositions to invested parliamentary committees, who are then responsible for introducing and passing said legislation. Disagreement may ensue between parliamentary committees because they may be representing the vested interests of the ministries.

Even if female ministers are able to propose legislation specific to women's socio-economic rights to a predominantly female parliamentary committee, their proposals may not experience equal treatment. According to Yoder's assessment of tokenism in the workplace, it is sexism -- not the size of the group of people-- that determines inequities (1991). Her research suggests that highly masculinized occupations, such as politics, become more resistant to increasing numbers of women rather than less.

Another interviewed parliamentarian mentioned that the obstacles will depend on the ruling political party: if cabinet bills are introduced, they can bypass the majority with support of the ruling party, whereas member bills may never even be discussed because they require approval from both the ruling and opposition parties. Furthermore, one female parliamentarian specifically pointed out that political party structures and strategists greatly influence what bills are able to make a "short list" and which will never be introduced.

Kathlene's study on the interaction of gender and position in American politics examines if an increased presence of women in state legislatures may lead to greater influence in policymaking. Her findings suggest that "despite their numerical or political gains, (women) may be seriously disadvantaged in committee hearings and unable to participate equally.... These findings are not actually surprising given our culture and the social construction of male power" (1994).

Along these lines, some of the women parliamentarians interviewed said that it is the subject of the legislation that determines the obstacles more so than the action of introducing or passing legislation. Four parliamentarians asserted that if the legislation is specific to women's rights it will be met with opposition from either their male counterparts or pervasive patriarchal biases.

Finally, some of the parliamentarians indicated that there is no difference between obstacles in introducing legislation that removes socio-economic barriers for women versus obstacles in passing it.

Consequently, the obstacles that women parliamentarians seem to face in introducing versus passing legislation that reduces socio-economic barriers for women would seem to rely on differences in parliamentary systems and political party structures. While some similarities can be identified in parliamentarians' responses, such as the existence of male resistance to legislation that speaks specifically to improving women's status, discrepancies present in particular national party systems seem to determine the existence of unique obstacles.

III. Measuring the relationship between legislation and the percentage of women in parliament: A cross-country numerical approach

Studying whether or not the proportion of women in parliament impacts the extent to which parliaments, and individual representatives, take women's interests into consideration when drafting legislation is a complex debate. Demonstrating the existence of such a connection would require identifying factors related to 1) the behavior of female parliamentarians, 2) policy congruence with female voters' preferences, 3) understanding women parliamentarians' intentionality when drafting legislation⁸, and 4) considering the intersecting components of a person's identity – such as race, class, and ability status – in an attempt to correctly capture their lived experiences (Crenshaw 1989).

Nevertheless, this article introduces a new approach to evaluate the aforementioned relationship: instead of studying inputs -- i.e. how women parliamentarians may represent the interests and preferences of the electorate-- this paper analyses outputs: does greater female representation in parliament correlate to legislation that either reduces socio-economic barriers for women or advances their socio-economic status in society?

In the first part of the paper, evidence seemed to point out that increased female presence in parliament can lead to passing legislation aimed at increasing gender socioeconomic equality, in spite of the many obstacles women face when passing these laws or entering parliament. In addition, several respondents mentioned developmental components, such as education or income, as important factors of women increased descriptive representation in the legislative branch.

This article will seek to corroborate these insights by searching for an existing positive relationship between the percentage of women in parliament and the quality of legal frameworks in granting equal access to socio-economic opportunities to women globally, through the use of statistical data.

Consequently, the following analysis aims to show that an increased presence of female representation in parliament is positively associated with gender equal socio-economic policies and the afore mentioned developmental factors. This

⁸Indeed, the meaning of substantive representation might refer to the connection between represented parties and single legislators or the relationship between citizens and whole legislatures (Kroeber, 2018).

paper will contribute to the literature by providing a cross-country measurement on the effect that women in parliament have on the existence of such legislation.

Constructing the model

We first deployed an ordinary least squares (OLS) simple regression to identify the existence of a correlation between the percentage of women in parliaments and the quality of legal frameworks that advance women's socio-economic status in society.

The objective was to prove an existing relationship between the proportion of women in parliament and the quality of the gender sensitive legal framework in 185 countries. To do this we ran regressions taking as our explanatory variable the percentage of women in lower or single houses of parliament (data provided by IPU), and as dependent variable the WBL Index which measures the gender sensitive quality of laws and regulations.

In the first model we found a positive relationship between the percentage of women in parliament and the WBL index overall score. This means that increases on the proportion of women in parliament is correlated to an increase of the WBL overall index, and thus to improvements in the existent gender equality regulations and law frameworks.

Then, we incorporated the Human Development Index (HDI) into the analysis by running a multiple linear regression taking the WBL Overall Index score as the dependent variable, and the percentage of women in parliament as well as the HDI as explicative variables. The results turned out to be significant showing a positive correlation between the three variables.

These results appear to confirm that the political representation of women and the level of a country's development are correlated and could be complementary as pointed out in the first part of the article. If this is the case, in order to advance women's political representation, and their potential impact on legislation that increases gender equality, it is imperative to focus on other areas of development such as education and economic growth.

This would seem to provide support for the underlying thesis that the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are inextricably linked. More specifically, it would suggest that advancements toward achieving SDG 5 (Gender Equality) are linked to improvements in SDGs 3 (Good-Health and Wellbeing), 4 (Quality Education) and 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth).

Finally, we decided to follow up with these insights by constructing a multiple linear regression including the individual variables of development counted in the HDI along with the percentage of women in parliament explaining changes in WBL Index. This allowed us to identify the expected years of schooling as complementary variable to the percentage of women in parliament in explaining

changes of the WBL Index. Therefore, we can say that the expected years of education, in addition to the percentage of women in parliament, are positively correlated to the gender equality legislative framework, if measured by the WBL Index.

This conclusion is important as it help us to better understand the factors affecting the rules and the legislation related to gender equality by adding a development variable into the model. In that sense we can presume that SDG 5 and SDG 4 are related, as improvements on education would contribute positively to improvements on gender equality legal frameworks. Additionally, this could be a useful recommendation for members in parliament by saying that in order to achieve legal improvements in gender equality it is important to boost women political representation in parliament and invest in education opportunities.⁹

Conclusion

Through the present analysis, we identified “expected years of schooling” as a complementary variable to the percentage of women in parliament in explaining variations in the WBL Index Score. Therefore, we can conclude that “expected years of schooling,” in addition to the percentage of women in parliament, has a positive impact on legislative frameworks that either reduce socio-economic barriers for women or advance their status in society.

Despite a lack of previous research proving a connection between women’s political representation and level of education (Horowitz 2009), the findings of this paper are able to introduce the educational variable alongside the proportion of women in parliament as a possible explanation for improvements in the socio-economic legal frameworks that include women. Not surprisingly, education was mentioned several times by women parliamentarians throughout the survey as an effective way to remove barriers to women’s political participation, such as entering parliament. Education also acts as a useful mechanism for advancing legal frameworks that reduce socio-economic barriers for women, according to the survey responses.

This conclusion is critical. It helps cultivate a better understanding of which factors may impact legal frameworks that repair socio-economic gender-based inequalities by adding a development variable into the model. Consequently, we can also presume that SDG 5 and SDG 4 are related as improvements in education, advancements in legislation that promotes socio-economic equality between women and men, and an increased representation of women in parliaments are correlated. This could also act as a useful point of recommendation for Members of Parliament when examining how they can better achieve legal improvements in gender equality.

⁹The data and the full analysis are available at:

The way forward: Final Results

“Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.”

- Kofi Annan, Secretary General of the United Nations (1997-2006), April 1998

The results of this report offer critical insights regarding the potential impacts that an increase in the proportion of women in parliament may have on legislation that advances women’s socio-economic standing in society, in addition to exposing significant obstacles that female parliamentarians face when entering parliament. Furthermore, both the analysis provide valuable information regarding the interrelatedness of gender equality and international development.

Not only do these findings have a consequential capacity to drive greater equality between women and men in politics, but they are also crucial because they underline the importance of achieving gender equality to fulfill the promises of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The results of this paper are also noteworthy in the context of 2020, which marks 25 years since the passing of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action.

In this section, we summarize the report results thus offering potential pathways for political leadership and policy intervention, both of which are necessary to accelerate equality between women and men in parliaments and within legal frameworks.

Results

The qualitative survey was designed to help discern which distinct obstacles women parliamentarians may face entering parliament or while producing, passing or proposing legislation that either removes barriers preventing women from accessing equal socio-economic opportunities or legislation that advances women’s socio-economic standing in society.

One major obstacle uncovered by the survey results was the perceived impact of harmful cultural narratives derived from patriarchal foundations. The results of our qualitative analysis suggest that perceptions of women’s capacity as political leaders may have a strong influence on women’s ability to enter parliament.

Additionally, participating parliamentarians specifically identified a masculine parliamentary culture as harmful to women’s participation and legislation that affects women, in addition to citing a lack of confidence in women’s ability to

address certain “hard policy” subjects; this is viewed by some respondents as a direct result of discriminatory perceptions.

In addition to altering men’s perceptions of female leadership, parliamentarians’ responses define the need to alter women’s own perceptions of what they can accomplish as well. Education may be an important tool in dispelling negative gender perceptions. Therefore, in direct line with quantitative results demonstrating a correlation between education, the descriptive representation of women in parliament and the quality of legal frameworks that repair socio-economic inequalities between women and men, this paper finds that investment in education may be an innovative pathway to improving gender equality in politics and society.

Other significant obstacles that women confront upon entering parliament include pre-existing legislation, party politics and agendas, and economic inequalities. Party agendas and politics are described as substantial barriers to improving women’s socio-economic status through legislative initiatives. In fact, some Members of Parliament state that the power politics within parties and between branches of government determine the support or rejection of certain legislation. Pre-existing legislation may also dictate whether or not female parliamentarians experience a vicious or virtuous cycle when passing, proposing or producing legislation that addresses women’s socio-economic inequalities.

Whereas the qualitative results are able to provide specific insights as to what obstacles women parliamentarians confront in their daily work, the quantitative model provides evidence to support the existence of a positive relationship among the number of women in parliament, a country’s level of development and the quality of legal frameworks that advances socio-economic equality between women and men

Indeed, The last section of the paper provides a short cross-country measurement on the effect that women in parliament have on the existence of legislation that reduces socio-economic obstacles for women or, alternatively, legislation that advances women’s socio-economic status as measured by the Women, Business and the Law Index. The analysis reveals a positive relationship between the percentage of women in parliament and the WBL Index Score.¹⁰ This means that an increase in the number of women in parliament is correlated to an improvement in existing legal frameworks that address socio-economic inequalities between men and women.

¹⁰The WBL Index measures legal differences between women’s and men’s access to socio-economic opportunities in 190 economies across eight indicators and was utilized for this article as a benchmark for gender equality.

Consequently, these results indicate that quotas may have a significant impact on gender equal legal frameworks within national settings. Devlin and Elgie (2008) note that in Rwanda the introduction of quotas resulted in women's issues being raised more easily and more often in parliamentary debate. This argument is supported by almost 60% of interviewed parliamentarians, from across geographical regions, who acknowledge gender quotas as an important mechanism to meaningfully advancing women's political participation.

The results suggest that the implementation of affirmative action legislation in the form of quotas may help to increase the number of women in parliaments. As mentioned in detail in the existing literature, the figure of 30% is often cited as a threshold for the substantive representation of women. Grey (2006) prefers to suggest different thresholds depending on the desired outcome: 15% may allow women politicians to alter the political agenda, but 40% is necessary for gender sensitive policies to be enacted.

While a majority of parliamentarians participating in the survey agrees that quotas most certainly have an impact on the descriptive representation of women in politics, their responses, and the literature, suggest that quota systems are not strong enough on their own and must be institutionalized to a greater extent. It is also necessary to underscore that quotas cannot create substantive change or eradicate inequalities in legislation and within parliaments without other means of support. In some countries, academics and politicians alike recommend the usage of mandatory quotas, while others lament quotas' failure to catalyze categorical change because they are not sufficiently enforced.

The results of the analysis are also able to offer a bit of insight as to why some countries may experience a greater positive impact as a result of quotas or the increased number of women in parliaments. According to the statistical results, variations in the proportion of women in parliament seem to better explain variations in the WBL Index Score in countries when incorporating the Human Development Index into the model.¹¹

These findings are supported by Krook (2010b), who demonstrates that factors impacting the descriptive representation of women are not necessarily the same across countries. Meanwhile, Stockmer (2014) pinpoints development itself as a factor in explaining an increase of the proportion of women in parliament. Another important discovery offered by this , and supported by the quantitative results, is that education matters in improving female political representation. Indeed, "expected years of schooling," as defined by the HDI, in addition to the percentage of women in parliament, is positively correlated to legislative frameworks that

¹¹The Human Development Index is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development including a long and healthy life (health), knowledgeability (education) and a decent standard of living.

either reduce socio-economic barriers for women or advance their socio-economic status in society.

This particular conclusion is crucial for several reasons. First, it allows for a deeper understanding of which development factors may affect legislation that repairs gender inequalities. Second, we can suppose that Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5, on gender equality, and SDG 4, on education, are related. Therefore, by improving a country's education outcomes, we would expect to see positive improvements in socio-economic legal frameworks that advance gender equality. Survey responses also underscore this point as several female parliamentarians directly highlight the link between education and women's representation, which is connected to cultural narratives as well.

These results would suggest that an integrated approach to economic and social development that includes specific references to gender equality in legislation is an important step to take toward advancing equality. As the logic behind the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) shows, only by addressing gender inequality as a factor of development can the global community achieve the targets set for the 2030 Agenda.

This paper has uncovered an inextricable network of relationships among the descriptive representation of women in parliaments, legal frameworks that repair socio-economic gender-based inequalities and development. In addition, it presents explicit insights that highlight which barriers may hinder progress for women entering parliament and when passing or introducing this type of legislation. As Kofi Annan's words underscore, to see improvement in both sustainable development, democratic governance, education and more, we must view equality between women and men, boys and girls, and people of all genders not as an addition to the global sustainable development agenda, but rather as a prerequisite for any future progress.

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