# What Women Politicians Could, Would, and Should, but Cannot Do. Perceptions of Women Parliamentarians Regarding Barriers to Political Representation of Women in Bosnia and Herzegovina

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the main barriers to women's political representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) from the perspective of female parliamentarians. The theoretical section presents the main obstacles to women's political representation, followed by an overview of trends in the political representation of women and the controversies surrounding the presence of women in politics within the ethnocratic context of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Using the data from qualitative research, gathered through in-depth interviews with female MPs from BH elected to state and entity parliaments, this paper analyses and discusses the main obstacles to the political representation of women. They include challenges relating to family life and traditional gender roles, internal party processes and dynamics, especially informal relations among men, lack of support in election campaigns and various manoeuvres to circumvent quotas, shrunken space for women in parliaments, and distorted representation in the media. The experiences of the interlocutors are strongly gendered, and all the mentioned obstacles prove to be relevant, regardless of their varying impact on individual women MPs. Even interlocutors who have not personally encountered certain obstacles acknowledge their existence, noting that their female colleagues in politics have experienced them, sometimes in a brutal manner. There is agreement among the interlocutors that women are severely disadvantaged in politics. Therefore, serious additional positive measures should be taken to improve gender equality, given that the ethnocratic system favours ethnic representation and men maintain a firm grip on political power in post-conflict BH society.

Key words:  political representation of women, women parliamentarians, Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnonationalism, gender (in)equality

## 1. INTRODUCTION

One of the pioneers of women's activism in political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) told me once that she was angry with women (politicians) because they were not able to achieve substantial gender-specific results in politics. This sentiment is not new to me. While on the surface, women appear more present in politics and representative bodies in BH, the available research, mostly conducted by local and international NGOs, shows that they have still not managed to initiate substantial changes (e.g. Kadribašić et al., 2020). However, prominent international scholars dealing with women's representation have emphasised that – to avoid gender essentialism – we should not have *a priori* expectations about what women "should" do in parliaments and politics. Instead, we should focus on understanding processes and making representative claims (Childs and Krook, 2009: 126). Furthermore, before we can understand women legislators, we must first understand women candidates and the obstacles they face (Kunovich and Paxton, 2005: 509).

Instead of being "angry with women" in BH politics, we should take a closer look at the various barriers that women face in politics, a domain that has long been dominated by men. This scrutiny should extend beyond the formal procedures and institutional aspects of political life to encompass various processes, including those occurring outside representative institutions, "to understand what is going on in representation" and why representatives are not always good or successful (Saward, 2006: 298, 302). Furthermore, the specific context of BH should be taken into account. As Deiana notes, setbacks and resistance to achieving gender equality in politics are prevalent worldwide. However, the divisive nature of ethno-national politics in BH has inevitably pushed gender concerns to the margins of the dominant political agenda (2015: 110).

Besides, women's political representation in particular is a burgeoning field of research, but much more investigation is needed in post-socialist countries in Europe and the Balkans (Dahlerup and Antić Gaber, 2017: 308). Predominant research in BH focuses on the descriptive representation of women, yet there is a lack of research dealing with the various types of representation of women and the relationships between them (Ždralović, 2021: 317). In this way, the actions of representatives are overlooked and women parliamentarians in BH are not seen as active participants. This article seeks to contribute to existing knowledge by focusing on the dynamics of women's (under)representation in BH politics. It analyses the obstacles they face in fulfilling their roles as representatives, drawing on Pitkin's distinction between presence in politics (descriptive representation), the articulation of representative claims (substantive representation) and representation to the electorate (symbolic representation) (Pitkin, 1967).

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Women's political representation is both normatively and practically important (Kunovich and Paxton, 2005: 505). As women make up half the population, an ideal representation would be proportional to their demographic share. Despite being a heterogeneous group, women share certain gendered experiences that can be better represented by women themselves (Paxton and Hughes, 2014: 9). Despite the steady increase in women's descriptive representation around the world, research identifies several obstacles. In particular, it is recognised that the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation is ambiguous (Childs, 2006: 18). A greater presence of women in parliaments does not directly lead to greater representation of issues concerning women, nor does it guarantee successful outcomes (Celis et al., 2008: 102, 106).

There are economic, social, political, and cultural barriers imposed on women in all environments (Čičkarić, 2015: 49). Despite the significant correlation between the level of economic development and improved opportunities for women's participation, conclusions often vary when it comes to less developed countries (Rosen, 2011: 307). Access to resources remains unequally distributed globally, and the double burden of traditional gender roles in the family hinders the political engagement of women, who lack time as an important resource for political involvement (Fardaus, 2019: 8). In BH in particular, the majority of people, regardless of their level of education, believe that housework is a woman's natural duty (Košarac and Kurteš, 2021: 10). Women who ascend to top positions and maintain them in fields such as business or academia use a variety of strategies beyond achieving work-home balance. These strategies include integrating work and family, redefining roles, outsourcing household tasks, and multitasking (Cheung and Halpern, 2010: 185). Nevertheless, they often lack social support and are exposed to gender stereotypes, as demonstrated by the experiences of women in management positions in BH (Spahić-Šiljak, 2019: 22). When women decide to enter politics and run for office, they often lack self-esteem and are more likely to doubt their abilities (Fox and Lawless, 2011: 60).

Moreover, women must be selected before they can be elected, and various analyses show that political parties produce and perpetuate gender inequality "through a variety of practices and norms, many of which are informal" (Kenny and Verge, 2016: 360). Men and their informal ties "have more influence over the development of party platforms and the selection of candidates than women" (Davidson-Schmich, 2018: 57). While left-leaning parties exhibit greater gender equality, this achievement results from an ongoing struggle (Lovenduski, 2019: 27). In the Western Balkans, and especially in BH, the failure to consolidate democratic insti-

tutions has further strengthened male leadership in political parties, informal ways of political decision-making and clientelism (Simović, 2019: 237).

Once selected, women often face challenges such as a lack of financial and party support, minimal media coverage, and election campaigns that are usually portrayed in the media as "men's campaigns" (Clavero and Galligan, 2005: 991). Available studies on media content during the election campaigns in BH also show the extremely high invisibility and gender stereotyping of female candidates (e.g. Popov-Momčinović and Vučetić, 2013; Infohouse, 2022). Statements regarding the likability of female candidates remain prevalent in the media worldwide (Bligh et al., 2012: 588), including reports on their perceived limited chances or personal characteristics (Paxton and Hughes, 2014: 120). Finally, when women enter parliaments, they encounter institutions that are not designed to represent women, making it difficult to articulate women's perspectives (Celis and Lovenduski, 2018: 151).

It is presumed that at least some barriers can be overcome by affirmative measures such as quotas (Galligan and Clavero, 2008: 153). However, quotas are met with reluctance in many Central European countries and in the Balkans due to the unpopular first wave of quotas under communist rule (Dahlerup and Antić Gaber, 2017: 308). In addition, some autocratic states use gender quotas in order to appear "progressive, liberal, and democratic while diverting attention from [their] persistent authoritarian practices" (Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2022: 62).

When it comes to the perceptions of women politicians, they are more likely to cite cultural and gender stereotypes than any other barrier, often limiting the effectiveness of women's representation once they are elected (Paxton and Hughes, 2014: 104). Interestingly, as Krook notes, women can be politically prominent in some traditional and highly patriarchal countries (2010: 890). However, in less democratic settings, various barriers – unfair candidate selection, clientelism, gender-stereotyped representation, and gendered electoral violence – are compounded (Højlund, 2021: 7–9).

Against this background, it is often argued that it is not clear what should be done to achieve parity (Čičkarić, 2015: 47). According to some authors, even individual women may be more or less successful in representing women's interests as critical actors (Childs and Krook, 2009: 140). In this context, it is assumed that a specific political socialisation in the family, a potential for activism, and a Promethean attitude towards society form a specific profile of a woman interested in active participation in public life and in changing stereotypes about women politicians (Čičkarić, 2015: 48).

This demonstrates the complexity of factors that enable or hinder women's political representation, and the various factors "may operate in more diverse ways than can be captured by traditional statistical analyses" (Krook, 2010: 889). Significant regional differences are also captured, both in terms of barriers and opportunities for women's political inclusion (Hughes and Paxton, 2014: 239), along with the contextual differences between countries within certain regions as well (Rosen, 2011: 318). A global trend is that a large number of countries worldwide, including BH, have improved legislation and taken various measures to promote gender equality in politics. Legal and formal improvements are considered a good starting point for gradual change (Nacevska, 2018: 84). However, gender inequality in politics remains a challenging issue, and women's underrepresentation persists both descriptively,  substantively, and symbolically.

## 3. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: KEY CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN'S POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

Women from Bosnia and Herzegovina attracted international attention because of the brutal way in which gender intersected with ethnonational identity, especially through the massive rapes during the war in the nineties (Helms, 2014: 24). They became a powerful symbol of victimisation for the entire country, but were powerless and excluded from decision-making processes. They were absent during peace negotiations, and the constitution of BH (actually part of the Dayton Peace Agreement – DPA, signed in 1995) does not include specific commitments or measures for equal political representation of women (Ždralović, 2021: 326). There is a continuity of inequalities along the continuum from war to peace that makes women vulnerable to male control and violence (Kostovicova, Bojicic-Dzelilovic and Henry, 2020: 255). The surveys show that gender-based violence is widespread, but that only 6% of victims of domestic violence have sought help from institutions (Miftari, 2019: 16). It is evident in the perceptions of female politicians, 66% of whom consider violence against women a normal phenomenon in BH politics, that there is a continuum of gender-based violence in wartime and peacetime, both in private and the public spheres alike (Miftari, 2019: 24). Violence against women in politics is increasingly recognised as a specific form of violence in other contexts as well, aimed at preventing women from engaging in politics (Krook, 2020).

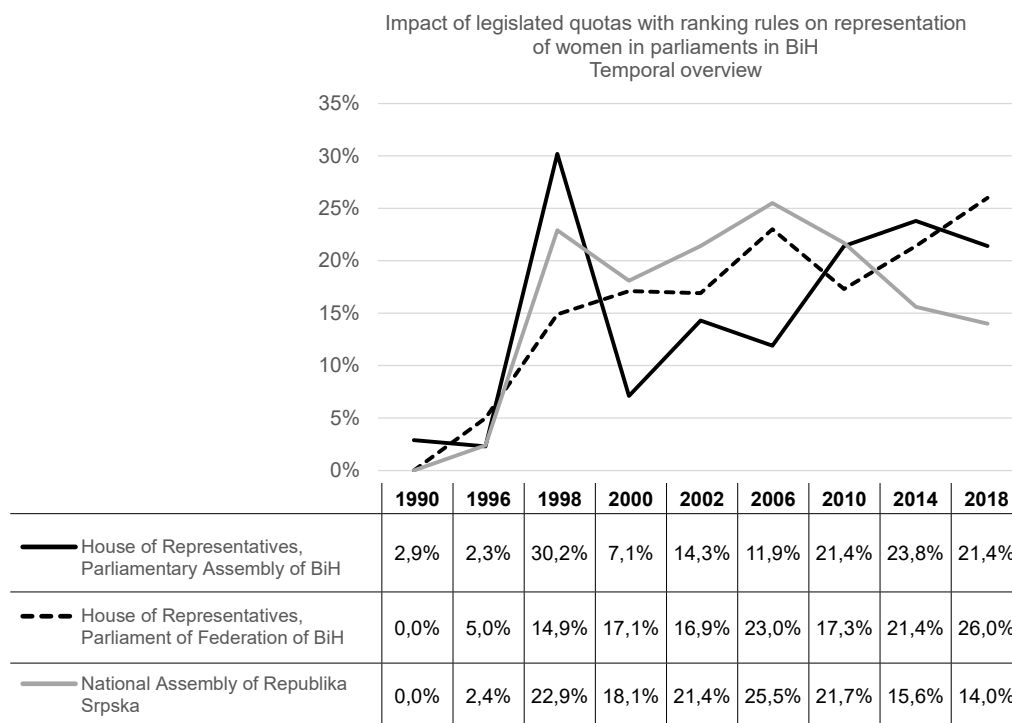On the other hand, in BH, there is a history of marginalisation and sacrifice as the fate of women, as well as struggle, resistance and emancipation (Majstorović, 2011: 281). Postwar restructuring under the auspices of the international community and international organisations brought opportunities for women's political engagement, as in other recent postwar societies (Berry, 2018: 208). Because women

were excluded from formal politics, they entered the public arena primarily through civil society organisations, and women's organisations mushroomed in the postwar period (Helms, 2014: 21). The first postwar election, with less than 5% of women elected, was the catalyst for a coordinated campaign by women's organisations for the introduction of the first gender quotas in for the 1998 election (Aganović, 2015: 42). With the support of the OSCE, which monitored the postwar elections, and with financial assistance from USAID, the 30% quota was introduced, and in conjunction with closed party lists, the number of women elected increased rapidly (Figure 1).

Subsequently, the Law on Gender Equality (LGE) in BH (2003, amended in 2009) and the Election Law of BH (2001, amended to align with LGE in 2013) mandate quotas of 40% for the minimum representation of the underrepresented gender on the electoral lists. Due to the semi-open lists, the number of elected women has decreased, but they have managed to remain present in politics (Popov-Momčinović, 2019: 165). As pointed out by some women politicians and activists, the preferential voting system favours visible candidates, who are predominantly men (Aganović, 2015: 50), and male candidates garner around 70% of preferential votes (Mulalić and Karić, 2020: 36). On the other hand, some claim that the manipulation of women went deeper when the electoral lists were closed (Aganović, 2015: 61). What they agree upon is dissatisfaction with the practices and results. The problems include a minimalist attitude of political parties towards the quota, and the absence or non-implementation of other positive measures[1] (OSCE, 2023: 9, 19). The mere fact that only 16% of the lists in the 2018 election were headed by women (Kadribašić et al., 2020: 49) shows that political parties assume that women are the less-represented gender and should remain so. Therefore, women's representation at all levels remains around 20% and oscillates (Figure 1).

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[1] In addition to the quotas in the Election Law of Bosnia and Herzegovina, there is an affirmative measure in the Law on Financing of Political Parties. This law contains a provision that when allocating funds to parliamentary parties, an additional 10% of the available funds should be allocated in proportion to the number of seats held by the less represented gender. However, there is no evidence that political parties recognize these funds in this way or use them for activities to promote gender equality in the party (OSCE, 2023: 9).

Figure 1:   Descriptive representation of women in BH from 1990 to the 2018
election. Source: Kadribašić et al., 2020: 21.

Impact of legislated quotas with ranking rules on representation
of women in parliaments in BiH
Temporal overview



| | 1990 | 1996 | 1998 | 2000 | 2002 | 2006 | 2010 | 2014 | 2018 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| House of Representatives, Parliamentary Assembly of BiH | 2,9% | 2,3% | 30,2% | 7,1% | 14,3% | 11,9% | 21,4% | 23,8% | 21,4% |
| House of Representatives, Parliament of Federation of BiH | 0,0% | 5,0% | 14,9% | 17,1% | 16,9% | 23,0% | 17,3% | 21,4% | 26,0% |
| National Assembly of Republika Srpska | 0,0% | 2,4% | 22,9% | 18,1% | 21,4% | 25,5% | 21,7% | 15,6% | 14,0% |

When it comes to substantive representation, available research points to the gap between women in politics and women's politics (Veličković, 2015: 32). Additionally, there are women politicians who not only do not support gender equality, but oppose it (Popov-Momčinović and Ždralović, 2023: 111). Moreover, many women are observed as pawns of the male-dominated establishment who do not advance substantive representation of women (Berry, 2018: 176). In this regard, there is an infamous case of a woman MP at the state level. She called the leader of her party, Milorad Dodik, "God" during a parliamentary session in March 2020 and publicly insulted female journalists (Radio Sarajevo, 2020). Her statements went viral on social media.

The main challenge for the representation of women seems to be the political system that prioritises the collective rights of the three constituent peoples (Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats), producing "the gendered interaction between conservative nationalism and consociationalism" (Kapić, 2021: 128). The DPA ended the war, but embedded ethnocracy in the very political system. The main characteris-

tics of ethnocracy are the definition of politics as the defence of ethnonationalist interests; and the perception of the people(s) as a collective body characterised by shared culture, history, religion, myths, and presumed ancestry (Mujkić, 2007: 7–11).

Furthermore, the state is administratively divided along ethnic lines: the entity Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina entity (FBH) consists of ten cantons − five of which are dominated by Bosniaks, three by Croats, and two are ethnically mixed, while Republika Srpska (RS) functions as a Serb-dominated entity (Banović, Gavrić and Mariño, 2021: 49). The electoral system reflects these administrative divisions and political parties compete in an ethnic pool, leading people to vote along ethnic lines (Vukojević, 2017: 70). In addition, multiethnic parties function as open ethnic parties that include members of other ethnic groups, but elections eventually reveal the true nature of each party (Kasapović, 2016: 182). To stay in power, political elites mobilise ethnically defined social groups and elevate certain groups as the "most aggrieved", weakening women's engagement with common gender interests (Berry, 2018: 26). Furthermore, the interconnectedness between poor economic performance and weak institutions fosters the prevalence of informal life and relationships in politics, clientelism and citizens' dependence on party leaders (Bliznakovski, Gjuzelov and Popovikj, 2017: 25).

Previous research shows no significant difference between right-wing and left-wing parties when it comes to nominating women for higher positions in BH and other countries in the region (Rashkova and Zenkina, 2017: 384). In addition, it is difficult to position political parties according to traditional ideological criteria used in political science. Instead of catch-all, political parties employ catch-us strategies, for elections on both the entity and state levels (Vukojević, 2017: 68, 70). The Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the ethnonational Bosniak party, has combined moderate and hardline positions in various periods (Vukojević, 2023: 181). The Serb Democratic Party (SDS) underwent a transformation from a hardline and ethnically exclusive party to a more compromising political stance (Vukojević, 2023: 180). In contrast, Dodik's Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD) shifted from a moderate, cooperative party to a hardline, Serbian ethnonational party after coming to power in 2006. (Vukojević, 2023: 181). One of the problems is the trend in ruling ethnonationalist parties, which usually "nominate a few strong women", serving as "token women" (Dahlerup and Antić, 2017: 309). For example, Željka Cvijanović of the SNSD, now serving as the Serbian member of the tripartite presidency, is perceived by the public as a tandem of Dodik and transmits similar nationalist rhetoric (Kadribašić et al., 2020: 53). Sometimes, token women have family ties to male leaders (Dahlerup and Antić, 2017: 309), as seen in the case of the SDA, where Sebija Izetbegović, the wife of the party leader Bakir Izetbegović, holds an influ-

ential position within the party. Because of token women, the electorate, including female voters, does not favour female candidates over men (Alađuz, 2014: 27).

Still, there has been recent progress with amendments to the statutes of the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SDP BH) and the entry of the liberal Our Party *(Naša stranka*) into parliaments at the state and FBH entity levels, as well as in some cantons. Both parties have set the goal of gender parity on the lists of candidates, as well as for the nominated positions (OSCE, 2023: 12). Our Party achieved significant success in gender equality, with 61% of its elected candidates in the 2018 parliamentary elections being women[2] (Memišević et al., 2021: 10).

However, the general progress is very slow, leading many civil society activists and feminists to distrust the possibility of change "from within", i.e. through formal political action (Ždralović, 2021: 318). Against this backdrop, many women are discouraged from becoming more engaged in political parties and running for elections. Within the post-war patriarchal society characterised by high levels of corruption, politics is generally perceived as an amoral domain, one from which women, as bearers of patriarchal morality, should stay away (Helms, 2007: 242). Yet, some women choose to enter politics, achieve successful election outcomes, work with the women's movement, and launch various initiatives for women within representative bodies (Berry, 2018: 176). Therefore, it is important to gain deeper insight into women's representation as a process and explore how women participate in it and experience it.

## 4. DATA AND METHODS

The research question addressed in this article, to be investigated using a qualitative research process, is: What barriers do women face in political representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina? This inquiry spans from the micro level of their personal experiences to the macro level of their political engagement, as perceived by women parliamentarians.

I conducted eleven in-depth interviews with women parliamentarians using Zoom between February and June 2022 (Table 1).

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[2]     However, Our Party's most significant gains were in urban centers, especially in Sarajevo, where it won over 13% of the vote in the 2018 elections. At the state level, the party won only 4.89% of the vote and has frequently faced criticism for being Sarajevo-centered (Popov-Momčinović and Ždralović, 2023: 123).

Table 1.     Interview participants

| MP | Political party | Elected at what level of government | Party ideology |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Social Democratic Party of BH (SDP) | Entity level (Federation of BH) | Left |
| 2 | Democratic Front (DF) | Entity level (Federation of BH) | Center-Left |
| 3 | Party of Democratic Progress (PDP) | Entity level (Republika Srpska) | Center-right |
| 4 | Alliance for a Better Future (SBB) | Parliamentary Assembly of BH | Center-right |
| 5 | The Serbian Democratic Party (SDS) | Entity level (Republika Srpska) | Right |
| 6 | Social Democratic Party of BH  (SDP) | Entity level (Federation of BH) | Left |
| 7 | Democratic Front (DF) | Parliamentary Assembly of BH | Center-Left |
| 8 | Our Party (NS) | Entity level (Federation of BH) | Liberal |
| 9 | Our Party (NS) | Parliamentary Assembly of BH | Liberal |
| 10 | Alliance for a Better Future (SBB) | Entity level (Federation of BH) | Center-right |
| 11 | Alliance of Independent Social-democrats (SNSD) | Parliamentary Assembly of BH | Center-Left |

The women MPs from two of the largest right-wing parties representing Bosniaks (The Party of Democratic Action – SDA) and Croats (The Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina – HDZ BH) did not respond to the request for an interview. In my opinion, this did not significantly affect the outcome of the study, as it is difficult to position political parties in BH on the ideological spectrum. As previously explained, some parties with the prefixes "social" and "social democratic" actually have the profile of an ethnonational party (Popov-Momčinović, 2019: 160), and the majority of (parliamentary) political parties are personalistic and clientelistic (Simović, 2019: 240, 241). In addition, the main idea of the research was to gain insight into the processes of women's representation in BH in general. As in other qualitative research, the aim is to gain deeper insights into the processes of

women's representation, rather than simply accessing the number of people who exhibit a particular characteristic (Gobo, 2006: 423).

Two interlocutors who left politics (one of them also left the party), and one who left the party and joined another represent critical cases that can provide additional information for understanding the research phenomenon. Such cases are important for qualitative studies with small and strategic samples for validity (Vučković Juroš, 2011: 169). The validity is further ensured by reviewing other data and reports on gender equality in BH politics and by checking the correspondence between my observation and theoretical ideas (Gobo, 2008: 205).

The ethical protocol of the research was presented both before and during the interview. I explained my position as a university professor interested in gender equality in politics. I believe that this motivated some women MPs to participate, share their political experience and knowledge, and make their voices visible in the research. Considering the ethnic division of society in BH, which is also reflected in the education system and academia, the fact that I work at the university in Republika Srpska might have discouraged women from ethnonational parties representing Bosniaks and Croats from responding. I guaranteed the scientific purpose of data collection and clarified that I would not quote interlocutors by name without their consent. To minimise the possibility of indirect identifiability, I assigned each interlocutors a new name reflecting the multiculturalism of BH while also allowing for contextual interpretation of the analysis.

The interviews lasted an average of one hour. The questions were designed to cover various periods of their political activity. Representation was not limited to representative bodies and the post-election period, as Steward (2006: 269) suggests. Asking predetermined questions helped mitigate the risk of guiding the process, inherent in interviewing members of the political elite. Reciprocity was established by providing them with space to reflect and add anything they found important to the topic (Sediman, 2006: 99).

I transcribed the interviews verbatim and analysed the data. In doing so, I noted the themes that the interlocutors frequently mentioned in connection with the obstacles to women's political representation, as well as those found in the literature and other studies. I then conducted both inductive and deductive thematic analyses manually, using Microsoft Word, following the approach outlined by Philip (2019: 89−120). The explanation of the coding process, along with examples, is available in the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language in the online supplement. The quotes selected for analysis represent illustrative and typical perspectives. In addition, I have selected quotes from atypical (maximum variation) cases to better understand the patterns and prove the refutability of the explanation.

# 5. ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

## 5.1. Family life: navigating the double burden

In the context of barriers, the interlocutors mentioned family the least frequently, mostly alongside other explanations for their political engagement. Jelena and Milica mentioned taking a break from politics after getting married and having children, suggesting that it is not easy for women active in politics to balance family life and political careers. Amila, in particular, emphasised that she did not become fully involved until her daughters were grown up. Jelena and Kristina mentioned that it was important to establish their professional careers first, as did Milica, indicating the presence of a triple burden. Milica's experience, giving birth during one of her previous terms and having three children, illustrates how difficult it is to juggle multiple commitments:

> [T]his was such a strain, mentally and physically, they were small, they did not sleep all night, I would come in the morning, go to the parliamentary session, carry the breast pump, and I did all this in the National Assembly...

Amila and Jovana emphasised how important the support of their husbands was, both for the beginning of their political involvement and for its continuation. Such support is important for politically active women to reconcile various commitments, especially in the context of patriarchal norms with double standards for male and female behaviour, such as going to the *kafana* (the pub) with male party colleagues, as Amila put it.

The problem of reconciling family life and political activity was present when interlocutors such as Vesna, Emina and Milica talked about other women in general and their party colleagues. For example, Vesna mentioned that she encouraged women members of her party to appear on the high-rated political evening show *Odgovorite ljudima.* However, they refused, mainly because of family responsibilities.

The interlocutors also perceived a negative political influence on the family. Ivana accused herself of sacrificing her family life for politics. Emina, Gorana, and Samira explained that political involvement often has a negative impact on the personal lives of women politicians, and their families:

> They came to my younger daughter, who is still very young, her friends came to class, "oh they wrote about your mother and said she was a whore", and the child had serious psychological problems because of all that … (Samira)

Amila, on the other hand, claimed that even young, unmarried women without children were not active enough, adding, "I am a little angry with young women". This indicates the great importance of other obstacles.

## 5.2. Political parties and women in ol' boys' club: "You can talk, but…"

Most often, interlocutors mentioned political parties in the context of obstacles, as women must first undergo a selection process before being eligible for election. Ten interlocutors referred to political parties (either their own or in general) as a sphere dominated by men – a men's club. Emina illustrated this with the example of her party, which has a strong leader with a strong foothold in the business sector: "…a very closed men's club, in which the leader and 5 or 6 of his closest associates literally negotiated guidelines and agreements for party activities within this innermost circle…"

In such an environment, proactive women face the phenomenon of the glass ceiling. Belma, a member of the executive committee of a left-wing party, claims that women are expected to passively participate in meetings. When she proposes something, it seems as though her male colleagues on the party executive committee respond with, "You can talk, but we are doing our own thing".

Ivana and Jelena, both members of the party executive (one from the left and one from the liberal faction), on the other hand, did not mention such problems. Indeed, Jelena, who left one party to join another, was very enthusiastic about her new affiliation.

Amila, Emina, Jelena and Vesna mentioned the informal connections that men establish within parties due to their longer tenure. In contrast, women often lack gender awareness and solidarity, and, consequently, often fail to support each other. Vesna, in particular, criticised the women's organisations in the party (women's forums), arguing that they contribute to the marginalisation of women within the party. In her opinion, such forums "look like an exchange of recipes". She points out that the women's forum frequently takes no action when women face discrimination within the party. As highlighted in the analysis by activist Dženana Alađuz, women can hardly hope to hold leadership positions within the party; instead, they are relegated to women's forums if they seek a presidential role (2014: 28).

In such a constellation, men maintain a firm grip on the leadership of the parties. While Amila and Belma highlighted the insensitivity of party leaders to the lack of support for their initiative to improve the electoral law in terms of gender equality, other interlocutors refrained from criticising their leaders, despite describing the

party as a men's club. Only Emina, who exited politics, and Vesna, who left the party, were more direct in their criticism. Milica and Samira, on the other hand, described their party leaders as "positive selectors" whose support was perceived as crucial. Milica added that her party leader seemed to be an autocrat "only at first glance". Despite somewhat differing interpretations of their experiences with party leadership, interlocutors who did not report experiencing such problems still acknowledged their existence.

While there have been some improvements in normative changes among left and liberal parties (OSCE, 2023: 19), the results are still not satisfactory. Belma highlighted that her party has adopted the 50–50 norm for party organs, stating that this process would hopefully be implemented in the future. Amila said that her party increased the quotas from 30% to 40%. Irena and Jelena praised their party's 50–50 initiative, based on the premise that men and women were and should be equal. Irena, however, acknowledged that there was still much to be done, and emphasised the importance of greater involvement of men in this initiative.

However, some women also expressed acceptance of the political reality of party life as a hard fact with little room for substantial improvement: "…but what can you do, that's the way it is" (Belma); "The party has its own inner life, its own relations, and no one will come to you and say, 'Come on, you are really great...'" (Milica)

## 5.3. Elections and campaigning: Entering the battlefield

Belma, Jelena, and Samira described politics as a battlefield, highlighting that these negative tendencies increase during elections. The perception of politics as "a rough and tumble" world discourages women across the globe (Fardaus, 2019: 10). Some interlocutors described intra-party events during elections as particularly hurtful, either personally or to other women. The fact that parties are predominantly led by men is evidenced by the lack of support for women during election campaigns, as Belma, Emina, Ivana, Vesna, and Samira said. In some cases, the lack of support transforms into anti-campaigning and "dirty" campaigning within the ranks of one's own party (Picture 1).

Picture 1.  Election Congress of the SDA Party in Tuzla (illustrating Samira's experience: she attended the rally without an assigned seat, despite being assured of a front-row seat)



Source: SDA Gradski odbor Tuzla https://sdatuzla.ba/programsko-izborna-konvencija-stranke-demokratske-akcije/

As one of the most frequent "benevolent" strategies to exclude women, interlocutors talked about circumventing quotas. Gorana, Jovana, Vesna, and Samira linked this to the perception that politics is a man's game and women resign themselves to being the least represented gender, often placed on a list with little or no chance of being elected. Particularly, young women are manipulated and added to the list merely to comply with the electoral law, without having a real chance of being elected. On the other hand, Milica mentioned that in one of the elections, she met two party quotas for women and youth for nomination and considered it a good opportunity to launch her political career. The case of Emina, a prominent and recognised figure in the society of BH before entering politics, shows that other women, not only young ones, can be marginalised and manipulated to circumvent the effect of quotas:

> The leader (...) *asked me to join a list of a political party, but I was warned very favourably about alleged indicators that the position offered to me was one for which I could not be elected* (...)*. So, I was expected to put my previous work and public recognition at the service of promoting the political party.*

Ivana's and Irena's cases are atypical. In contrast to other interlocutors, they emphasised the positive experiences they had during the election campaign and their subsequent electoral success. However, Ivana interpreted this more as a result of her efforts to build contacts and networks, rather than direct support from her party.

In addition, some left-wing, multiethnic parties have various quotas (ethnic quotas, gender quotas, socioeconomic quotas, and age quotas), as is the case in Belma's party. She did not explain this as a direct circumvention of gender quotas, but noted that it often led to confusion. When it comes to women, "subjective" criteria can be decisive because "someone may not like me". On the other hand, some women can "benefit" from the various party quotas, as was the case with Vesna, who met ethnic, gender, and age quotas in one left-leaning party (as a young Croatian woman in a predominantly Bosniak constituency in Sarajevo). However, this elicited negative reactions within the party, causing her to doubt her own political qualities.

## 5.4. Across the threshold of the parliament: "I think it could be me…!"

After the election, the structure of decision-making within the parties continues to affect the processes and opportunities for elected women to be more proactive. In this context, they most frequently mentioned limited space to address gender equality issues and pursue gender mainstreaming in parliaments; or when launching an initiative that affects women to gain support.

As Belma explains, this arises from the fact that the head of the party club most often discusses the party's position in the parliaments. To her knowledge, it has always been men in her party in this role. She mentioned that, in one previous convocation, it was expected of her to take that position due to her experience, but: "[the leader of the party] decided that his chief of staff would be the head of the club."

Amila is the president of the party club, and her experience is atypical. She nominated herself for this position, saying that it was time to stop constantly retreating from men. Her case also shows that there can be an advantage when women are more assertive: "… and when they said it was going to be a male colleague, I said out loud 'Well, I think it could be me' (...) miraculously everyone said that it was a great idea! And even this male colleague…".

Ivana mentioned that there are now some women in this position in the Parliament of the FBH, representing parties of the left (Democratic Front), liberal (Our party), and centre-right (The Alliance for a Better Future and the Party of Democratic Action - PDA). She praised their work, saying, "They are really great women".

However, disappointment with other women MPs was common, and instances of not supporting initiatives affecting women caused anger. Some interlocutors mentioned that women from the two ethnonational parties - HDZ BH and Dodik's SNSD - did not vote for the initiative of two female MPs aiming to ensure a minimum of 40% women in the executive at the state level. This initiative was proposed by two women MPs from a liberal party in cooperation with the civil society organisation Sarajevo Open Centre (Istinomjer, 2021). Another example is that female MPs from ethnonational parties (SDA and HDZ BH) did not support an initiative to improve the position of mothers in the Federation of BH. According to Samira, this is an unbelievable occurrence that demonstrates the extent to which party discipline is entrenched.

Due to the perceived lack of solidarity across party lines, the initiative to establish women's clubs in parliaments also failed. Interlocutors are deeply disappointed because such a club already existed in the previous convocation at the level of the Federation of BH entity (Radio Sarajevo, 2013). One of the interlocutors attempted to launch this initiative at the state level, but nothing concrete was ever accomplished. Ivana mentioned that Mrs. Zuko, a woman MP from the ethnonational SDA party in the Parliament of FBH, actively worked against such networking. Amila interpreted this more as a personal conflict between some women MPs. Jovana stated that the ruling party – SNSD forbade its women deputies in the Assembly of Republika Srpska from joining the network.

Jelena and Jovana mentioned the lack of resources and commitment from both male and female members of parliamentary committees for gender equality at both state and entity levels. The following quote illustrates that gender equality is not treated as an important issue in parliaments:

> At this convocation we had a chairman [of the committee for gender equality], a man who came with all the materials and brought them into the meeting. He did not even open them and that was it. (Jovana)

## 5.5. Media and social networks: "I am not a public toilet!"

The media in BH does not pay enough attention to gender equality in general (BH novinari, 2021), and the unsystematic coverage of women's representation, both before and during the election, is a typical explanation of the interlocutors:

> Journalists call me especially after the election to say, "oh, what are we going to do now, there are so few women [elected]", and only then are there talks about the underrepresentation of women …(Vesna)

There are atypical cases of positive experiences with the media, but they are interpreted more as a result of personal persistence, communication skills, and specific training rather than as recognition of the importance of gender equality by the media, as prescribed by the LGE[3]. Particularly problematic are online media, especially comments on portals and social networks, which often discuss the appearance of female politicians and similar trivialities, typically not commented on for men. The high number of portals that do not meet the criteria of professional journalism, the lack of regulation of hate speech on the Internet, especially concerning women and various marginalised groups, and the inaction of the institutions were also mentioned. This problem has been repeatedly brought up in various analyses and at several conferences organised by the Association of Journalists of BH (BH novinari, 2013; BH novinari, 2021b).

Given that media in the society of BH operate divided along ethnic lines (Bogdanić, 2014: 6), some women also experienced negative comments concerning their ethnicity. This way, public attention was diverted from their concrete political involvement. When women MP mention a "sensitive" national issue or when their initiatives or comments are interpreted through an ethnonational lens, they often face a lot of negative comments and threats on social media. One of the interlocutors referred to the internationally sponsored negotiations to amend the electoral law that took place at a resort in Neum. After publicly stating that it was not right for Bosniaks to elect a Croatian member of the presidency[4], she faced a barrage of hate speech online: "…that I should be raped by everyone in turn, that I should be impaled, that my children should be raped…".

Many interlocutors cited the case of a young woman MP, Lana Prlić, who urged citizens to be more responsible on her Facebook profile in the context of a vaccination campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic. This sparked a multitude of misogynistic comments, sexism, hate speech, and threats, with many of the neg-

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[3] The LGE (Article 21) also requires the media to provide equal and non-discriminatory coverage. In addition, the media are required to promote awareness of gender equality through program concepts.

[4] The interlocutor refers to the problem with the BH electoral law, according to which the member of the tripartite presidency representing Croats is elected in the entity FBH as one electoral unit. The votes of Bosniaks, being more numerous, can determine who will be elected to that position, as seen in the case of the election of Željko Komšić as a Croat member of the presidency. This has exacerbated political tensions in BH, particularly between the HDZ BH and predominantly Bosniak parties (Kasapović, 2016: 180). Despite several negotiations between political parties, a compromise has not yet been found. Our intelocutor, a woman MP elected in a majority Bosniak constituency, criticised the fact that Bosniaks elected a member of the presidency over Croats, which has exposed her to hate speech from part of the Bosniak public on social media.

ative comments also coming from women. As Amila and Jelana said, what Lana experienced "was something unbelievable".

Ivana, who is young, mentioned a large number of articles about her alleged sexual affairs with her male colleagues, along with numerous sexist and misogynistic comments, stating, "I am a public person, but not a public toilet". Amila, Ivana and Emina confirmed that young women politicians were particularly exposed to negative comments and sexism on social media. Amila added that a female party colleague of hers, an older doctor from a small town, had received many negative comments on social media during the election and that older male candidates had never experienced anything like this. There is an atypical case with Jelena, who was the only interlocutor to state that she had received many positive comments on social networks after her media appearances, while the number of negative comments was negligible. She was particularly proud that this also happened when she was the only woman politician on a TV show, alongside male politicians. Nevertheless, all interlocutors agree that women politicians are much more susceptible to negative comments, including hate speech on the Internet than men.

Vesna and Ivana explained how they typically dealt with this problem: "It took me a year or more to finally go to a psychologist to process what I read about myself"; "It touches me less and less, but you also fear that if it touches you less and less, do you actually lose the feelings and empathy?"

## 6. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

Women in BH face various barriers when it comes to their political representation. The barriers interlocutors mentioned most frequently were related to political parties, followed by parliaments, media and social networks, and least frequently, to family life. The interlocutors consider themselves professionals and, like most women MPs in the Western Balkans, have completed higher education (Nacevska, 2018: 153). According to the last census in BH in 2013, women finally outnumbered men in terms of educational attainment, so they are represented in the pool of potential candidates (Paxton and Hughes, 2014: 117). However, despite some progress and opportunities that have opened up in the post-war reconstruction period and with improved legislation (such as quotas) in BH, women remain underrepresented, and their opportunities to initiate significant changes in political parties and representative institutions are limited.

In this regard, the literature often focuses on the issue of traditional gender socialisation, as many women lack self-esteem and cannot envision themselves as candidates, while men usually accept their life and work skills as unique training for elected public service (Trimble, 2006: 903; Fox and Lawless, 2011: 60). Therefore,

the role of the family as a primary socialisation unit and later as a potential resource for political engagement is very important (Fardaus, 2019: 8). Interlocutors in this study often mentioned the importance of educating and encouraging girls. The fact that they were interested in politics and social issues from a young age, even before officially entering politics, suggests that they received such encouragement. On the other hand, the observation that some of them became fully involved in politics only when their children were already grown up indicates the existence of obstacles. It also highlights the additional challenge for women to reconcile various commitments. The case of the interlocutor who gave birth to her twins during one of her mandates in the National Assembly illustrates this difficulty. Although they were least likely to cite family commitments as a barrier to their personal political path, they acknowledged these barriers when talking about other women in politics or women in general. Women who are unable to juggle multiple commitments and lack family support, they noted, have little chance of political engagement. Interestingly, the results of studies on European values in BH show that the majority of the population does not view women's participation in public life negatively, but still prefers traditional gender roles in the family (Bašić, 2020: 84). Such values explain why women in politics face a double and triple burden. Moreover, due to patriarchal norms dictating "proper" behaviour of men and women in public within the post-war society of BH (Helms, 2007: 239), they also need the support of their families, especially their husbands, to run in elections. In addition, they need to become more active after the election, given that informal decision-making prevails in BH, demanding additional time for political engagement. Some interlocutors explicitly mentioned receiving such support, whether to run for office or attend various political events, both formal and informal. On the other hand, the infrequent mention of family life and dynamics in connection with the obstacles can be interpreted as a result of the retraditionalisation of society, where the family is "respected regardless of anything" (Košarac and Kurteš, 2021: 15). Considering that the media repeatedly pose questions to female politicians such as "How do you align your professional and political obligations with family?" (Mulalić and Karić, 2020: 30), the interlocutors in this study may have aimed to avoid reproducing such stereotypes.

Patriarchal norms and gender stereotypes are not limited to the private sphere and family life. As Lovenduski notes, they also influence political organisations (parties) and institutions (parliaments) and weaken the effect of improved legislation (2019: 20). The fact that interlocutors most often mention political parties, their dynamics, and their internal relations in relation to the obstacle confirms that making decisive progress on gender equality is not easy to achieve within these structures (Paxton and Hughes, 2014: 148). At least some political parties on the left, as well as the liberal Our Party, have initiated changes by increasing gender quotas

and introducing gender-sensitive language in their own statutory documents and various projects and initiatives (OSCE, 2023: 19). This trend is also confirmed in many countries, particularly among left-leaning parties (Childs, 2006: 18). However, the results are not satisfactory, and party programs and platforms are generally inconsistent across the Western Balkan countries (Nacevska, 2018: 141). In the ethnically divided society of BH, conservative parties pursue exclusively ethnic interests and emphasise traditional gender roles in their programs, associating women's rights exclusively with motherhood (Alađuz, 2014: 39; Popov-Momčinović, 2019: 160). On the other hand, leftist parties focus more on the inclusion of various ethnic groups to symbolically differentiate themselves from ethnonational parties (e.g. Kasapović, 2016; Vukojević, 2017), placing less emphasis on gender equality (Kapic, 2021: 129). Accordingly, interlocutors from leftist parties that have launched initiatives to improve the electoral law for achieving gender parity report not receiving support from party leaders.

As Kenny and Verge noted, political parties "seem to have developed an expertise in exploiting the legal loopholes in electoral and quota rules" (2016: 363). Specifically, combining quotas for women and youth is a tactic often employed in BH to nominate less experienced women with less chance of success. Cross-national studies also indicate that women's chances improve when parties have clear and consistent rules (Paxton and Hughes, 2014:151). In some leftist parties in BH, there are various quotas – ethnic, youth, and for other social groups, making it difficult for women to gain a comprehensive understanding of the candidate selection process that will help them secure their positions. As Kunovich and Paxton suggest, women should also explore, understand, and possibly manipulate the rules of the game (2005: 115). However, political parties in BH, as the interlocutors pointed out, function as men's clubs with a fixed male leadership and the predominant influence of informal rules. This limits the opportunities for women to explore and manipulate the formal rules. Therefore, gender equality in politics has not been achieved due to both direct and visible resistances, as well as many indirect ones (Celis and Lovenduski, 2018: 157). According to the interlocutors, these various forms of resistance to gender equality are prevalent in BH politics, especially during elections. When these tactics are deemed insufficient, more brutal forms of gender-based violence are used against politically active women (Miftari, 2019). Some interlocutors mentioned their own or other women's experiences with anti-campaigns or dirty campaigns orchestrated by male members of their own party.

Despite having criticised politics as a male-dominated field, it is interesting to note that interlocutors rarely criticised their party leaders. This can be interpreted as a result of internalised patriarchal values among women, a phenomenon present even among educated women from urban areas (Majstorović, 2011: 294). Howev-

er, the interpretations of the interlocutors in this research, all of whom are aware of various forms of gender inequality in BH politics, suggest that this is more of an acceptance of political reality as it is. Men remain the most important political actors, and the support of party leaders is paramount for selection, securing a place on the electoral list, and ultimately election to parliaments. Only the interlocutors who left the party and/or politics directly criticised their leaders. The interlocutor who joined another party criticised the previous party and leadership. In the liberal Our Party, which has achieved a high level of equality, the awareness of gender issues by the party leader and the party as a whole is highly valued.

Politics as a male affair is reflected in the media, with women parliamentarians being underrepresented and stereotypically portrayed when they are featured (Paxton and Hughes, 2014: 120). Social media places too much emphasis on their appearance and other personal characteristics, negatively affecting their privacy and family life (Media.ba, 2020). Some interlocutors shared such negative experiences in this research. Due to the lack of regulation of hate speech on the Internet and minimal institutional reaction, female politicians in BH, as well as other visible women, such as journalists, are often exposed to a variety of negative misogynistic comments, sexism, and hate speech, especially when their gender intersects with their ethnicity (Popov-Momčinović and Vučetić, 2021: 166).

The interpretations and experiences of the women interlocutors show that their most stable and reliable resources are their commitment and desire to develop their professional and political skills. Women politicians find themselves "caught between two contradictory expectations": they must prove that they are as capable as men, and they must prove that women make a difference in politics (Dahlerup, 1988: 279). To navigate these different and conflicting expectations, elected women employ various strategies, similar to those described by our interlocutors. These include working hard, being highly competitive, and prioritising their female identity by launching initiatives that address women's issues (Ehrhart, 2023: 7). This strengthens women's ability to be more active in parliaments as masculinised institutions and potentially connect with female constituencies. Building contacts with experts, especially women's NGOs, consistently remains an important part of women politicians' tactics (Helms, 2007: 250). Networking with other women MPs was recognised as important by the majority of interlocutors, but it encountered backlash from ethnonational parties at both state and entity levels. In a political context with strong inter-party conflicts and a party-controlled system of awarding prizes, the space for such cooperation is limited (Childs, 2006: 13), and the BH case confirms this explanation. The prevention of women's informal networking in parliaments, even when addressing "soft" issues unrelated to "serious" political matters, highlights that women can only find room for collaboration on softer

topics, despite the persistent and harsh impact of inequality on women's lives. The compulsion to deal predominantly with "soft issues" is also evident in cases where female politicians face numerous misogynistic comments, sexism, and hate speech on social media, particularly when addressing "sensitive" national issues or expressing views through an ethnonational lens. However, considering the existence of a network of women parliamentarians in the previous convocation at the entity level of the FBH, the question arises as to why it was now met with backlash. It should be taken into account that cooperation among women, for example in civil society and across ethnic lines, is often seen as non-serious and not a real threat to male power, thus being tolerated (Helms, 2007: 250). One possible explanation for this could be that, at this level, the number of elected women has increased significantly after the 2018 election, therefore posing a more substantial threat to patriarchal power structures. On the other hand, this could be interpreted as a personal conflict, as one of the interlocutors suggested. Some other authors also point out that women from different political parties in BH often see themselves as bitter opponents (Mulalić and Karić, 2020: 29). Nevertheless, the explanation that it is a backlash seems to be valid when comparing, for example, with other instances where ethnonational parties act against cross-ethnic solidarity, as seen in the case of workers (Mujkić, 2016: 631).

In addition, poor governance, lack of institutional capacity, and various problems in implementing laws on gender equality (Kostovicova, Bojicic-Dzelilovic and Henry, 2020: 259) hamper the representation of women. This makes cross-country comparisons challenging, although it is generally acknowledged that regional factors, including situational ones, play a crucial role (Čičkarić, 2015: 49). Nevertheless, the majority of conventional evidence on women's representation is derived from statistical analyses and case studies in Western contexts (Krook, 2010: 892). Comparisons are also problematic because BH is often described as a sui generis political case. Most research has focused on the position of women as victims of war and post-war violence, with less emphasis on their agency as political actors. There is a persistent gendered discourse of victimisation that extends from the war into the post-war period, causing many women to doubt their capabilities or accept a passive role in politics (Helms, 2007: 246). Despite their annoyance or disappointment with certain female politicians and MPs, especially those perceived as token figures, women should not be essentialised or blamed (Trimble, 2006: 954). The interlocutors are aware of the various formal and informal structures in BH politics that hinder descriptive, substantive and symbolic representation of women. They mention some of their own initiatives and those of other women MPs, calling for more assertiveness among women.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The increased political representation of women is one of the most important modern political trends (Hughes and Paxton, 2019: 47), but the obstacles are not easily overcome, as cross-national studies confirm. This research, despite its limitations, contributes to academic and contextual knowledge of how the main obstacles to women's representation in Bosnia and Herzegovina operate from the perspectives of elected women. Women's representation has increased following the improvement of legislation in the post-war period, a result of mobilisation by the women's movement. Still, the incremental gains have been slow and descriptive representation remains low and fluctuates. In the context of an ethnically divided post-war society, characterised by high levels of party clientelism, political fragmentation, and social repatriarchalisation, women are discouraged from entering politics and running in elections. Those who decide to do so need the support of their families, especially in the context of the double standard for men and women, the lack of party support during the campaign and the prevalence of informal rules. Once elected, their ability to substantively represent women's issues is limited, as is their ability to collaborate across parties. The firm male leadership within parties spills over into parliaments, hindering collaboration across ethnic or ideological lines. In addition, media distortion of women's political representation and unregulated hate-speech and sexism on the Internet, especially when gender intersects with ethnicity, discourage many women from engaging in politics or being more active once elected.

Considering this unfavourable context and the firm grip of male leaders on BH politics, it seems that the representation of women in parliaments relies on a few women with a high level of self-esteem and consciousness, who can be described as critical actors (Childs and Krook, 2009). This is especially true for women from political parties that have integrated gender equality and adopted a more proactive approach to ensure equal representation of women. However, their potential is also limited by various obstacles, some of which are analysed here, collectively hampering both descriptive and substantive representation of women. Moreover, individual women MPs are affected differently, but their interpretations also confirm that gender inequality is deeply rooted in BH politics. All these obstacles and their personal experiences prove the importance of the feminist slogan that, for women, "the personal is political," and this rings particularly true when they engage in politics.

Some women accept this reality with resignation, which leads to disappointment, and subsequently discourages voters from recognising women's potential to initiate change. This further solidifies the power dynamics favouring men in the

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ethnocratic context of BH. Some interpretations from the interlocutors suggest possible differences depending on the age of women MPs, their previous experiences, party ideology, government level, etc. For this reason, further research, especially on a larger sample, is needed to fully clarify the obstacles and prospects for success in BH.

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## DATA ACCESS AND TRANSPARENCY

An explanation of the coding process, along with examples, is available in the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian language in the online supplement at the following link: https://hrcak.srce.hr/ojs/index.php/rzs/libraryFiles/downloadPublic/340

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# Što bi političarke mogle, htjele i trebale učiniti, ali ne mogu. Percepcije zastupnica o preprekama političkoj reprezentaciji žena u Bosni i Hercegovini

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## SAŽETAK

Ovaj rad analizira glavne prepreke političkoj reprezentaciji žena u Bosni i Hercegovini iz perspektive zastupnica. Teorijski dio prikazuje glavne prepreke političkoj reprezentaciji žena, oslanjajući se na nalaze svjetske literature. Sljedeći dio daje pregled etnokratskog konteksta BiH, trendova u političkom predstavljanju žena i kontroverzi o prisutnosti žena u politici u takvom okruženju. Koristeći podatke kvalitativnog istraživanja (dubinski intervjui sa zastupnicama iz BiH izabranim u državni i entitetske parlamente), analiziraju se i raspravljaju glavne prepreke političkoj reprezentaciji žena. Tiču se obiteljskog života i tradicionalnih rodnih uloga, unutarstranačkih procesa i dinamike, posebice neformalnih veza muškaraca, izostanka potpore u predizbornoj kampanji i raznih manevara zaobilaženja kvota, suženog prostora za žene u parlamentima i iskrivljene reprezentacije u medijima. Iskustva sugovornica izrazito su rodno uvjetovana, a svi čimbenici predstavljaju prepreke i izazove, bez obzira na različit utjecaj na pojedine zastupnice. Neke sugovornice koje se osobno nisu susrele s nekim od prepreka napominju da te prepreke postoje i da su ih, ponekad u brutalnom obliku, iskusile druge političarke. Sve se slažu da su žene u politici u izrazito nepovoljnom položaju. Stoga treba poduzeti ozbiljne dodatne pozitivne mjere za poboljšanje rodne ravnopravnosti u politici, jer etnokratski sustav favorizira etničku zastupljenost, a muškarci imaju čvrstu kontrolu političke moći u postkonfliktnom društvu Bosne i Hercegovine.

Ključne riječi:   politička reprezentacija žena, zastupnice, Bosna i Hercegovina, etnonacionalizam, rodna (ne)ravnopravnost