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### Substantive representation of women by parliamentarians in Asia: A comparative study of ten countries

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# 1

## SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN BY PARLIAMENTARIANS IN ASIA

### A Comparative Study of Ten Countries

*Devin K. Joshi*

This book presents the results of a pioneering new large-scale study on how national parliamentarians in Asia are advancing women's substantive representation and gender equality. As the world's largest continent, home to three-fifths of the world's population, Asia is critical to advancing global gender equality which will require, among other things, better representation of women at the parliamentary level (e.g. Iwanaga 2008; Joshi & Kingma 2013; Prihatini 2019). As this book reveals, there is considerable diversity across Asia when it comes to women's substantive representation. Most promisingly, our study finds that younger generations of women (and men) are more actively working to advance gender equality than many older parliamentarians in the region. However, some members of parliament (MPs) clearly exhibit much greater motivation and dedication to representing women than others. Also, we find that formal and informal institutions such as parliamentary committee structures, gender quotas, and political party rules play a significant role in determining to what extent such representation takes place.

This study departs from previous analyses of women's numerical or *descriptive representation* in parliament which has long been a focus of comparative studies of women in Asian parliaments (e.g. Iwanaga 2008; Ayaz & Fleschenberg 2009; Fleschenberg & Derichs 2011; Joshi & Kingma 2013; Joshi & Och 2014; True et al. 2014; Prihatini 2019). Following the work of Hanna Pitkin (1967: 61), the descriptive representation of women (DRW) in parliament refers to whether the legislature is like a "mirror" of the nation" in terms of "being something rather than doing something." In other words, DRW refers to whether the composition of the parliament's members reflects the composition of society in its descriptive attributes. This means that since women comprise about half of the resident or citizen population in most countries, roughly half of the parliamentarians should also be women. As of the year 2022, however, no country in Asia has achieved this. Currently, the proportion of national-level women parliamentarians in Asia

averages a mere 20% with some countries such as Sri Lanka (5%) having very few women at all while others like Taiwan (42%) are higher but still below parity.

## Substantive Representation of Women

Instead of focusing on DRW, this study focuses on substantive representation of women (SRW). As Pitkin (1967) explains, substantive representation concerns how representatives *act for* a particular constituency or cause. The key issue is not how many women are MPs, but what do women (and men) parliamentarians do to advance women's well-being and gender equality.

As scholars have noted, SRW is more complex than DRW. For instance Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) have distinguished between two different types or phases of SRW: (a) process-based (where MPs bring women's interests onto the political agenda) and (b) outcome-based (where MPs change policies that affect women in areas such as reproductive rights, violence against women, sexual harassment, and so on. Alternatively, one can interpret the concept of SRW as "a process that implies a series of acts and actors: putting women's interests on the political agenda, translating women's interests, concerns and views into legislation" (Lee & Lee 2020: 440; see also Celis 2008). As Dahlerup (2014: 63) notes, given such complexity, studies on SRW have ranged from examining "the relation between voters and their representatives, to studies of legislative processes and policy outcomes, to a very broad study of actors, sites, goals and means, all under the heading of the substantive representation of women."

If it is the case (as would seem quite plausible) that women are generally more dedicated (than men) to improving women's well-being and gender equality, then we would expect to observe a positive correlation between DRW and SRW. This would mean that if a greater number of parliamentarians (and other important political decision-makers) are women, then the laws and policies of a government should correspondingly be more beneficial to women. Likewise, the procedures by which a government functions and the content of its agenda would become more women-friendly. Phillips (1995) famously referred to this dynamic as the "politics of presence." Relatedly, the "critical mass" theory holds that when women parliamentarians exceed a certain membership threshold (often seen as about 30%), SRW should significantly improve because the resulting change in group proportions shifts women from being mere "tokens" or a small minority to comprising a large minority (e.g. Kanter 1977; Dahlerup 1988; Beckwith 2007; Dahlerup & Leyenaar 2013). In this spirit, the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action issued by the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women declared that women should comprise a minimum share of 30% on all important political decision-making bodies globally including national parliaments.<sup>1</sup>

Addressing the question of whether a greater proportion of women in parliament really has much impact on public policy, an influential study by Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler (2005: 422) concluded, "The percentage of women in the legislature is a principal determinant of women's policy responsiveness and of

women's confidence in the legislative process." More recently, Celis and Erzeel (2015) have noted that many academic studies have indeed found women in politics more active in acting for women compared to men. Similarly, among Asian countries, a recent study by Tam (2020) found that in Singapore, women members of parliament (WMPs) asked more questions in parliament on women's rights and traditional women's concerns than male members of parliament (MMPs). In India, WMPs were likewise more active in speaking up in parliamentary debates on behalf of women and children compared to MMPs (Kalra & Joshi 2020). A recent study of legislative bill sponsorship over the past two decades in South Korea and Taiwan has also clearly demonstrated that "female legislators are substantially more likely to focus on women's issues compared to male legislators" (Shim 2021: 139).

However, while *ceteris paribus* increases in DRW might improve SRW such gains do not always, automatically, or immediately guarantee better SRW (e.g. Wängnerud 2009). Numbers of WMPs are not the whole story because context matters, and several potential intervening factors might obstruct SRW. What are these factors?

First, increased DRW may stem from recently instituted gender quotas requiring a parliament to have a certain minimum number of women MPs by means of reserved seats or by requiring a minimum proportion of candidates who stand for parliamentary elections to be women. While quotas are potentially a positive force for DRW, women elected via quotas are not always granted autonomy by their political parties to act as they wish. Thus, since party elites often act as gatekeepers in candidate selection they may choose women who are not committed to SRW (Norris & Lovenduski 1995; Cheng & Tavits 2011).

Second, it is frequently the case that the majority of women members of political parties find themselves relegated to lower positions within the party thereby diminishing their ability to influence public policy (Holike 2012). In the case of reserved seat quotas, women parliamentarians may simply become an extension of the patronage system as in Bangladesh, where party leaders almost exclusively determine women's selection or nomination as candidates (e.g. Panday 2008). This can also occur with candidate-level quotas where party leaders in countries like South Korea can choose which women to nominate and then regularly deny them re-nomination after a single term in parliament (e.g. Moberand 2019). Even in the absence of formal quotas, party leaders may primarily or completely determine the parliamentary voting behavior of the majority of women (and men) parliamentarians. This leaves MPs with little autonomy when it comes to policymaking in countries like India, where there is high "party discipline" in addition to rules disallowing party defections (e.g. Rai & Spary 2018).

Third, aside from the role of political party elites, ideology can shape MPs' propensity to improve SRW. In terms of traditional ideological cleavages, several studies have found left-leaning parties in Asia to be generally more supportive of women's issues and women candidates than right-leaning parties (e.g. Haque 2003; Stockemer 2009; Joshi & Kingma 2013; Joshi 2015; Joshi & Thimothy 2019; Eto 2021). In the case of Western countries, studies often find newer center-left parties

(e.g. green parties) as well as social democratic parties and liberal democratic parties supportive of women's representation. In Asia, by contrast, there is currently no country with a strong "green" party. Some Asian countries have "social democratic" parties, but most are currently not very large although some larger parties in the region like Taiwan's Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) do have a social democratic leaning (Fell 2018).<sup>2</sup>

Fourth, institutional factors can influence SRW (Franceschet 2010). In the government bureaucracy, the role of *women's policy agencies* also sometimes known as "state feminism" can make a significant contribution (McBride & Mazur 2010) as can a whole-of-government commitment to *gender mainstreaming* as has been done in countries like Sweden (e.g. Sainsbury & Bergqvist 2009; see also Joshi & Navlakha 2010). Other potentially impactful institutions include the country's electoral system (especially higher proportionality and larger district magnitudes), cross-party women parliamentarian caucuses, and impartial functioning of the judiciary.

Outside the parliament, civil society and social movements play an important role in pressuring the state to change its laws. Moreover, cross-national research finds that strong, autonomous feminist organizations together with feminist mobilizations and movements contribute significantly in the march toward progressive policy changes because they generate social knowledge about women's positions in society, challenge traditional gender roles, and prioritize gender issues (Weldon & Htun 2013). For instance in Malaysia, women's political participation increased after its 1999 general elections when the "Women's Agenda for Change" manifesto was issued and a Women's Candidacy Initiative sought to increase the number of women MPs (Mohamad 2018).

Conversely, certain civil society forces such as religious organizations have strongly opposed women's empowerment in some countries. Likewise, the presence of an informal "old boys" network in government can be a major obstacle to SRW. Another mediating factor is the role of mass media depending on whether it serves as an open public forum, as a critical watchdog, or simply as a mouthpiece for the government. Media messages can both directly and indirectly support a culture of gender equality and persuade or dissuade women from believing they have the ability to govern as political leaders (e.g. Joshi, Hailu & Reising 2020).

Longer-term and international forces also make a difference in influencing who has agenda setting, preference shaping, and decision-making power. Norms promoted by international organizations can support gender equality (e.g. Joshi & O'Dell 2017). The socioeconomic development of a country across agrarian, industrial, and post-industrial stages may also strongly influence attitudes and reforms in favor of gender equality by increasing women's access to tertiary education and employment in those professional occupations that often serve as pipelines into politics (e.g. Norris & Inglehart 2003; Thomsen & King 2020). As modernization theory implies, increased economic security provides in-groups with existential security and this may help to foster cultural openness leading to an ideological shift

making in-groups (like men) feel less threatened by out-groups (like women and gender minorities) (Inglehart, Ponarin & Inglehart 2017).<sup>3</sup>

Aside from SRW being contingent upon international, institutional, organizational, and ideological factors, scholars have also questioned both epistemologically and methodologically how and whether we can know that women are being substantively represented. As previous studies have demonstrated, women's interests and gender equality may be approached differently in terms of "motherly concerns" (maternity and child raising issues), women's legal/political empowerment, women's employment and economic status, violence against women, or other concerns. One approach has been to view women's issues as those directly and almost exclusively affecting women such as abortion and domestic violence (e.g. Reinhold 2000; Bratton 2005). Yet, others look more broadly to social, physical, and economic well-being as well as political and personal freedom of all women (e.g. Bratton 2002) which necessarily involves dimensions such as religion and class (e.g. Htun & Weldon 2018).

The greatest challenge, however, appears to be how to deal with heterogeneity. Given the large diversity of women and their contexts and changes over time, it becomes very difficult (if not impossible) for a researcher to fully know *a priori* what issues constitute women's issues and accordingly whether or not (or to what degree) SRW is taking place. Thus, an alternative approach is to inductively examine the claims made by MPs and others on behalf of women. As Celis et al. (2008) explain, such an inductive approach to assessing SRW can be broken down into five categories. First, *who* is representing? Here, the analyst needs to consider diversity among women across region, religion, race, etc. Moreover, aside from listening to claims in general one should especially note those made by "critical actors"<sup>4</sup> which refers to strongly motivated individual (or groups of) activists who may have a stronger voice in the political space (Celis & Erzeel 2015: 50). Second, *what* issues are promoted inside and outside the parliament? Third, *why* do these issues get promoted? Here, analysts should be open to understanding both strategic and practical issues at play. Fourth, *where* does SRW take place? Is it inside or outside parliament and to what extent is it impacted by different legislative environments across time and countries? Fifth, *how* is SRW promoted? Does it occur through drafting bills and participating in public debates or behind the scenes through lobbying legislators and colleagues?

As one begins to grasp the complexity of substantive representation, the advantages of taking an inductive approach become more apparent. As Celis and Childs (2012: 216) note, "the pre-selection of women's issues can never entirely avoid accusations of essentialism and of homogenizing women – as if women constitute a group with shared interests." Thus, it is useful to incorporate the five categories mentioned above and examine evolving "claims" made on behalf of SRW and gender equality by parliamentary representatives. Otherwise, researchers may be guilty of taking away other women's agency and subjectivity by imposing an unwarranted external standard of what counts as women's interests in imperialistic or colonialist fashion (Lokaneeta 2016).

## The Asian Context

Studying SRW by Asian MPs helps us to uncover what exactly parliamentarians do to improve gender equality by focusing on a region that has been largely overlooked by most previous scholarship on SRW. While, as stated earlier, the “politics of presence” (Phillips 1995) theory predicts a link between women’s descriptive and substantive representation, one study in Asia found contrastingly that

[F]emale representatives have often conformed to, rather than challenged, traditional gender stereotypes . . . Even in the case of successful entry into public office, feminists’ capacity to affect change has been hampered by weak institutional positioning and inadequate gender sensitivity on the part of male colleagues.

(Jones 2006: 181)

Thus, we cannot simply assume that findings from Western countries are always applicable to Asian countries or that there is a direct link between DRW and SRW.

As has been widely documented, in almost every part of Asia, for generations a patriarchal bureaucratization of power has largely prompted women’s formal exclusion from political institutions (e.g. Joshi & Goehring 2018). Perhaps, the most prominent exception to this pattern is Taiwan, which early on reserved 10% of its legislative Yuan seats for women in Article 136 of its 1946 constitution (Clark & Clark 2008). Elsewhere, until recently the few women who have made it to the highest political leadership positions in Asia were almost exclusively aristocratic women from political dynasties (e.g. Jahan 1987; Richter 1990; Fleschenberg 2008; Derichs & Thompson 2013). Today, however, pathways to parliament in Asia include not only the elite route (political insiders; surrogates for male relatives) but also the grassroots (experience in activism; solving social and political community issues) and middle pathways (working professionals; women choosing politics as a vocation) (Choi 2019; see also Inguanzo 2020; Och & Joshi 2021). Moreover, in some Asian countries, feminist activists have on occasion been able to get a foothold in politics (see Edwards & Roces 2010).

The regional context also plays a strong role because Asia mostly comprises non-democracies, semi-democracies, and newly emerging democracies whereas the West has a much greater share of established democracies (e.g. Dahlerup & Leyenaar 2013). Political secularism is also more prominent in Western countries whereas religion arguably intermixes more heavily with politics in Asia. The politicization of all four of the world’s largest religions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam) in the region has given additional weight to religious leaders and movements to influence politics. For instance *political Islam* referring to “the range of modern political movements, ideological trends, and state-directed policies concerned with giving Islam an authoritative status in political life” (March 2015: 103) is prominent in a number of Asian countries. In some cases, this has prompted an “Islamization race” between parties displaying their leaders’ religious credentials

while contesting for a more Islamic form of governance (Arosoaie & Osman 2019). For example, in certain parts of Indonesia, there are regulations on women's appearance (i.e. dress codes), public segregation of men and women, and rules curtailing women's mode of travel and their movements at night, which of course limits women's freedom and ability to run for office (CMW 2016).<sup>5</sup>

In the economic sphere, women in certain Asian countries do not always join the paid workforce even after completing secondary or tertiary education as they are expected to bear children and start a family. Meanwhile, those who join the workforce earlier tend to drop out of the formal labor market or take on part-time jobs after giving birth to support their primary roles as mothers.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, increasing numbers of women must work a "second shift" after their full-time jobs doing unpaid household chores like cooking and caring for their children due to traditional gender roles and societal demands on women to adopt the role of the primary caregiver (e.g. Hochschild & Machung 2012). Such gendered role expectations may also contribute to public stereotypes that women are inferior to their male counterparts and therefore insufficiently qualified to serve as political representatives (e.g. Joshi 2021).

At the same time, Asia is a dynamic region, and a major political change occurring in Asia over the past 25 years has been the increasing number of countries adopting gender quotas (e.g. Joshi & Kingma 2013; Hughes et al. 2017). As Wängnerud (2009) has argued, gender quotas help to normalize the presence of women in politics and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2019: 2) has found worldwide that in countries with gender quotas the share of women is higher by seven points on average in lower chambers and 17 points in upper chambers compared to countries without quotas. Gender quotas are now commonly promoted in democratization and postwar rebuilding since 2000 with UN Security Council Resolution 1325 affirming the importance of women's equal participation and full involvement in post-conflict reconstruction (Bush 2011).<sup>7</sup> For example over the past two decades, post-conflict gender quotas were adopted by parliaments in Afghanistan, Iraq, Nepal, and Timor-Leste (e.g. Dahlerup 2006a).

Meanwhile, some Asian countries have adopted gender quotas even in the absence of major violent conflict. As Swiss and Fallon (2017) have noted, gender quotas are more likely to be adopted in countries using a proportional representation (PR) electoral system (or component) and when a neighboring country has a gender quota. This pattern may explain, for instance, the diffusion of gender quotas from Taiwan to South Korea or from Timor-Leste to Indonesia. However, PR-tier elections conducted at the national level in Sri Lanka and Japan have not yet included gender quotas. Many Asian countries with SMD electoral systems like Malaysia and the Philippines have also not yet adopted a national-level gender quota although some like Bangladesh have instituted reserved seats for women.<sup>8</sup>

That said, in the twenty-first century, gender quotas have become increasingly more common throughout the world including Asia, although there has been backlash and sometimes disappointment with the immediate results. One reason for the latter may be that it takes time before quotas have their desired effects (Joshi &



Timothy 2019). As noted earlier, the critical mass theory suggests that qualitative change will ensue when the number of women elected to political office reaches a critical mass, but critical acts by critical actors may be even more important as women may not necessarily act on behalf of women's interests despite their presence in political office (Mackay 2004: 101; Beckwith 2007: 28). Also, it appears that placement mandates such as zipper quotas and penalties for noncompliance are more effective than quotas alone. Quota sizes must also presumably be set at the putative "critical mass" level of 30% or higher in order to have any substantive impact on legislative outcomes (Johnson-Myers 2016).<sup>9</sup>

## Contribution of This Study

What this study adds to a thus far mostly Western-focused literature on SRW is its examination of how MPs in Asia act on behalf of women to advance SRW and gender equality. Recognizing that both women and men can be critical actors (e.g. Childs & Krook 2009; Celis & Erzeel 2015), this study takes a novel approach by assessing the contributions of both women and men parliamentarians toward advancing women's substantive representation across ten different Asian countries.

As discussed earlier, studying SRW can be challenging because a simple number cannot sum up the outcome of interest (e.g. Pitkin 1967; Wängnerud 2009). SRW implies working on behalf of women's interests with studies of SRW often focusing on women's legislative activities "such as bill proposals, speeches on the committees, women's caucuses, and parliamentary questions" (Lee & Lee 2020: 443). While this should presumably contribute to mitigating male dominance, it is important for us to recognize that predetermined conceptualizations of "women's interests" are open to contestation because interests change over time, differ across cultures, and women are heterogeneous (e.g. Joshi & Och 2014, 2021).<sup>10</sup> In response, this study approaches the study of SRW inductively by listening to what Asian MPs themselves have to say about gender equality and women's representation while taking seriously three essential shapers of the political representation process: (a) ideas, (b) institutions, and (c) intersectionality. This leads us to formulate six testable hypotheses as follows.

**Ideas:** Since actions taken by MPs may be closely related to their personal identities and the ideas they hold dear (e.g. Burden 2015), one can presume that women parliamentarians in Asia will demonstrate greater keenness to advance SRW compared to their male counterparts. This leads us to our first hypothesis (H1) that *women MPs will do more for SRW than men MPs*. Relatedly, we hypothesize that having more women in parliament will advance SRW more than having only a small share of women. Thus, our second hypothesis (H2) is that *a critical mass of women MPs will do more for SRW than a small number of women MPs*.

While we assume that the identity and experience of being a woman makes women more inclined to stand up for women as a group, studies have also

found that some MPs are more committed than the average parliamentarian to advancing women's interests. This leads us to our third hypothesis (H3) that *critical actor MPs will do more for SRW than a critical mass of women MPs*. Lastly, we suspect that the personal backgrounds of MPs will shape their beliefs about and dedication to improving SRW in unique ways. From this we arrive at a fourth hypothesis (H4) that *certain personal experiences and ideologies are more favorable for SRW*.

**Institutions:** Institutions play an important role in structuring political influence. In particular, this study examines the role of parliamentary committees (as further discussed below), but it also indirectly touches upon the issue of parliamentary gender quotas. Regarding the latter, Mona Lena Krook (2015: 186) points out how “quotas give women presence, but they do not give them power,” and this observation is especially relevant to the Asian context. Quota women may be stigmatized and their qualifications seen as suspect with quota women often not reelected beyond a single term or two (e.g. Moberand 2019). Mass and elite receptiveness of gender quotas is also influenced by cultural and societal expectations such as strict gender norms in patriarchal societies and emphasis on meritocracy that in certain contexts can lead voters to perceive that women elected or appointed via quotas are unqualified or illegitimate. Another potential obstacle is the “diversity paradox” mentioned by O'Brien and Rickne (2014: 10). This refers to the counterintuitive result whereby increased numbers of an out-group may lessen the members' desire to work with one another. It can also prompt an increasingly hostile working environment whereby men become verbally aggressive and dominate committee hearings and parliamentary debates (ibid.: 9). These observations lead us to the fifth hypothesis (H5) that *certain parliamentary institutions are more favorable than others are for SRW*.

**Intersectionality:** In addition to examining the potential negative or positive contributions of ideas and institutions for SRW, we also take into consideration intersectionality. The origins of *intersectionality* theorizing stem from Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1991) legal analysis of how individuals can be victims of discrimination based on both race and gender. In other words, intersectionality relates to different forms of structural marginality. More broadly, the concept of *intersectionality* can be defined as “the complex, irreducible, varied, and variable effects which ensue when multiple axes of differentiation – economic, political, cultural, psychic, subjective and experiential – intersect in historically specific contexts” (Brah & Phoenix 2004: 76). Taking intersectionality seriously in gender politics means examining “what power inequalities, privileges and marginalizations does the interaction of gender with other systems of inequality produce?” (Kantola & Lombardo 2017: 23). As Hancock (2014: 57) argues, “incorporating a paradigm intersectionality approach can expand substantive representation for women and create solidarity across other categories of difference that can truly lift all boats.”

As intersectionality researchers have convincingly demonstrated, scholars ought to become more aware of the interconnected nature of social categorizations like race, class, gender, religion, and indigeneity in which there are overlapping and independent systems of power relationships that produce unequal material realities and distinctive social experiences for individuals and groups (Collins & Chepp 2013: 3). Such awareness leads us to ask questions like “can elite women (ever) effectively represent the interests of marginalized women?” After all, it may be the case that women of a minority ethnicity may feel better represented by a man of the same ethnicity than by women of a different ethnicity. The same may be true for social class.

To conclude, when it comes to SRW, intersectionality matters not only because of the heterogeneity among women but also because women from disadvantaged populations may incur greater hardship. For example lower-income women (especially those with children) often shoulder a heavier care burden than elite and childless women and spend more time on unpaid household responsibilities as they cannot afford to hire servants (e.g. Heisig 2011; Joshi & Goehrung 2021). Are their interests well represented by elite women (or men) serving in parliament? In some countries, racial and ethnic minority women are more likely to live in poverty, have less access to essential services, and face additional discrimination in employment markets (e.g. Palmieri 2010). Are their interests fully and adequately represented by women (or men) of the ethnic majority?<sup>11</sup> This leads us to our sixth and final hypothesis (H6): *greater diversity of MPs will lead to better substantive representation of women from different backgrounds.*

## Research Design

Like Celis and Erzeel (2015), this volume applies an open-ended and inductive approach to studying SRW by examining multiple actors in a system. This way, we could bring out the role of unexpected actors. The editors and case study authors in this project worked together as a team to maximize the coherence of the study. The case study authors are experienced country researchers with expertise on women’s political representation and deep contextual knowledge of specific country political environments. In nine out of ten cases (all except Timor-Leste), the researchers were native-born citizens of the study country and native speakers of the national language. To maximize the quality and coherence of this study, the research team met regularly (once or twice per month) via internet conferencing over a six-month period to develop a shared approach, to coordinate activities, and to give each other advice, feedback, and support.<sup>12</sup>

As an inductive and qualitatively oriented research project, each national case study focuses on analyzing responses obtained from semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher with current and former MPs. Both women members of parliament (WMPs) and male members of parliament (MMPs) were interviewed to discern how they engage in supporting gender equality and SRW and to find out their perceptions of how active fellow MPs are in pursuing these goals.<sup>13</sup> The

three methods used to recruit MPs to participate in the study were (a) introductions made by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) between country researchers and members of the Asian Women Parliamentarian Caucus (AWPC), (b) country researchers making use of personal connections with parliamentarians and their staff, and (c) introductions made by MPs interviewed by researchers to other MPs.

To achieve a proper balance in conducting the case studies, country researchers applied a common theoretical framework focusing on the role of (a) MPs' ideas and personal backgrounds, (b) parliamentary institutions, and (c) intersectionality. At the same time, each researcher exercised her own autonomy and independent judgment on which of these aspects to devote greater attention and also which components or dimensions of SRW to emphasize. Thus, for instance some chapters pay more attention to the fate of particular legislative proposals placed on the parliamentary agenda in recent years while others focus more on the gendered dynamics of different parliamentary committees or the successful/failed contribution of gender quotas to SRW.

The interviewing component time frame of our study (March–June 2021) also took place amidst considerable COVID-19-related restrictions and lockdowns. Despite these challenges, the authors demonstrated great resilience and all were able to conduct between 8 and 15 interviews primarily with current MPs in their country. In most cases, MPs were selected through purposive sampling to obtain a roughly even mix of women and men MPs while including representatives from at least three different parliamentary committees – capturing respectively both women and men on committees with higher, medium, and lower proportions of women among committee members. Researchers also aimed to incorporate intersectionality by interviewing both privileged and underprivileged women and men in their respective parliaments based on elements of privilege and marginalization salient in their own national and parliamentary contexts. For example the privilege category selected by researchers differed across countries featuring MPs hailing, for instance, from the upper class, a powerful political family, or the dominant ethnicity.

The research team also agreed upon a unified set of interview questions (see Appendix A) to elicit SRW inductively while simultaneously taking into consideration the role of intersectionality and parliamentary committees. Parliamentary committees were singled out for consideration because of the important and gendered role they play in shaping legislative outcomes in many national legislatures (e.g. Heath, Schwindt-Bayer & Taylor-Robinson 2005; Bolzendahl 2014; Murray & Sénac 2018). In particular, we wanted to see whether committees are a welcome or hostile space for SRW and whether the committee environment changes significantly when women form a greater proportion (i.e. critical mass) of committee members.

Upon obtaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for conducting research with human subjects, interviews were first conducted with AWPC members connected to KAS, which sponsored the study, before snowballing out. Interviews with MPs typically lasted about 45–60 minutes and were conducted face-to-face when possible or when necessary due to COVID-19 restrictions by

**TABLE 1.1** Numbers and Percentages of Women and Men in Ten Asian Parliaments (2021)

<i>Region</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>Women in Parliament (%)</i>	<i>Men in Parliament (%)</i>	<i>Women in Upper House (%)</i>	<i>Men in Upper House (%)</i>
<b>East Asia</b>	1) Taiwan	47 (41.6%)	66 (58.4%)	.	.
	2) South Korea	57 (19.0%)	243 (81.0%)	.	.
	3) Japan	46 (9.9%)	398 (90.1%)	56 (23.0%)	188 (77.0%)
<b>Southeast Asia</b>	1) Timor-Leste	25 (38.5%)	40 (61.5%)	.	.
	2) Philippines	85 (28.0%)	219 (72.0%)	7 (29.2%)	17 (70.8%)
	3) Indonesia	121 (21.0%)	454 (79.0%)	.	.
	4) Malaysia	33 (14.9%)	189 (85.1%)	9 (13.6%)	57 (86.4%)
<b>South Asia</b>	1) Nepal	90 (32.7%)	185 (67.3%)	22 (37.9%)	36 (62.1%)
	2) Bangladesh	73 (20.9%)	277 (79.1%)	.	.
	3) Sri Lanka	12 (5.4%)	211 (94.6%)	.	.

*Note:* Women and men “in Parliament” refers to single or lower house seats as of 1 January 2021.

*Data Sources:* www.ipu.org/women-in-politics-2021; Taiwan News.

phone or online platforms like Zoom. Transcriptions were made of the interview content and translated into English for analysis. As some MPs requested anonymity, they are not mentioned by name in this study and only listed by unique code numbers.

Incorporating geographic diversity, our study covered ten countries from the three most populated sub-regions of Asia. We included three countries from East Asia (Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan) as covered respectively in Chapters 2, 3, and 4; four countries from Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Timor-Leste) as explored in Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8; and three countries from South Asia (Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka) as detailed in Chapters 9, 10, and 11. As this study examines SRW as a dimension of democratic representation, all countries included in the study currently have democratic or semi-democratic forms of government.<sup>14</sup> As Table 1.1 displays, our ten cases capture considerable diversity in terms of numbers and proportions of women in parliament. Moreover, Table 1.2 illustrates how conditions in these countries differ considerably as well although there is a high correlation between (higher) democracy index scores and (higher) per capita income levels amongst these countries. The major exception is Timor-Leste, where democratic development exceeds economic development.

## Structure of the Book

The following ten chapters present the country case studies from East Asia (Chapters 2–4), Southeast Asia (Chapters 5–8), and South Asia (Chapters 9–11). Each of these chapters follows a similar structure. First, the chapters begin with an introductory section regarding the national context, the parliament, and efforts to advance gender equality in that country. Here, authors have summarized and highlighted important findings from previous studies on parliamentary representation

**TABLE 1.2** Comparative Indicators of Ten Asian Countries (2019–2020)

<i>Region</i>	<i>Country</i>	<i>EIU Democracy Index Score 2020 (1–10)</i>	<i>Population (Millions of People) in 2020</i>	<i>World Press Freedom Rank 2020 (1–180)</i>	<i>WEF Global Competitiveness Score 2019 (1–100)</i>	<i>Per Capita Income 2019 (USD)</i>
<b>East Asia</b>	1) Taiwan	8.94	23.6	43	80.2	28,371
	2) Japan	8.13	125.8	67	82.3	40,247
	3) South Korea	8.01	51.8	42	79.6	31,846
<b>Southeast Asia</b>	1) Malaysia	7.19	32.3	119	74.6	11,414
	2) Timor–Leste	7.06	1.3	71	N/A	1,561
	3) Philippines	6.56	109.6	138	61.9	3,485
	4) Indonesia	6.30	273.5	113	64.6	4,136
<b>South Asia</b>	1) Sri Lanka	6.14	21.9	127	57.1	3,853
	2) Bangladesh	5.99	164.7	152	52.1	1,856
	3) Nepal	5.22	29.1	106	51.6	1,071

*Data Sources:* Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU) 2020, World Economic Forum (WEF): Global Competitiveness Report 2019, Reporters Without Borders 2020 (<https://rsf.org/en/ranking?>) (2020 rankings accessed 30 May 2021), World Bank for 2019 Per Capita GDP (Current US\$) and population figures, See <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators> (accessed 30 May 2021), Taiwan National Statistics for Taiwan population, and 2019 Per Capita GDP (Current US\$), See <https://eng.stat.gov.tw/point.asp?index=1> (accessed 26 July 2021).

of women in their country as well as political efforts to advance gender equality over the past two decades. In addition to assessing the state of gender (in)equality in their country, authors discuss the general structure and influence of parliament and parliamentary committees in their country.

The second section of each chapter then briefly mentions sources from which data and information on the functioning of the national parliament including parliamentary speeches, questions, bills, and voting records were obtained. It also discusses which MPs were selected for interviewing and why and how they relate to diversity of parliamentary committee memberships and intersectionality.

The third section explores how personal backgrounds and experiences of MPs have shaped their thinking and commitment to advancing SRW and gender equality. Here authors have taken an open-ended approach to reflect on both MPs' perceptions and their engagement in specific practices. For example they analyze how and what MPs say in terms of framing to make sense of their common or differing gender ideologies focusing on what a) gendered needs MPs perceive and b) what gendered obstacles MPs perceive. The authors moreover identify whether any of the MPs they have interviewed appear to be critical actors in supporting gender equality and if so, how and why?

The fourth section of each chapter focuses on institutional dimensions of SRW drawing heavily on MP interviewees' responses while some authors assess the degree to which the parliament is "gender-sensitive" (Palmieri 2011) in terms of

formal and informal organizational rules and norms. Also, this section examines the role of parliamentary committees. For example, what is women's share on each committee and how are committee memberships assigned? To what extent are parliamentary committees an arena in which gender equality can be advanced? How does the gender composition of a parliamentary committee impact women's substantive representation? Here, differences (if any) between women's and men's perspectives on different parliamentary committees are also discussed.

The fifth section of each chapter addresses intersectionality and how gender interacts with other inequalities. Since women and men are heterogeneous, this section examines what kind of women and men are MPs and what kind of women and men those MPs represent. The intersections examined here range from age to class, race/ethnicity, incumbency, dynastic family, religion, sexuality, caste, and other relevant characteristics. Comparing the extent to which MPs interviewed differ from women and men in the population, authors also assess how their intersectional backgrounds have influenced their advocacy of gender equality.

Lastly, each country case chapter concludes with the author making an assessment of how much progress toward gender equality and improving SRW has been made so far and what still needs to be done. Authors also discuss what critical interventions might be able to make a positive difference.

Finally, the concluding chapter (Chapter 12) of this volume compares the country findings to each other and presents overall lessons from the study. It discusses how issues like combating violence against women, workplace harassment, and gender-based discrimination were important SRW agenda items almost everywhere whereas other SRW issues varied significantly across countries. It also notes how few men MPs in Asia were motivated to enter politics to advance SRW. Likewise, most women MPs in South Asia and Southeast Asia did not enter politics to improve gender equality either whereas in East Asia the majority of women MPs interviewed entered politics to advance SRW. Most women MPs across Asia also actively consulted with women voters compared to only a slim majority of men in parliament. Perceptions of harassment also differed by gender but higher levels of democratic and economic development among Asian countries were not correlated with any decrease in gender-based bullying, harassment, or stereotyping of MPs. Women were also much more likely to participate in cross-party alliances supporting SRW. Yet, the fact that slightly over one out of four male parliamentarians interviewed were involved in such alliances indicates that SRW is an issue some men MPs in Asia are indeed willing to support. We also found men parliamentarians who were younger and who came from single-mother households, had many sisters, or whose family included feminist wives or daughters tended to be more gender-sensitive and supportive of SRW compared to those with backgrounds in business, the military, or dynastic political families.

As for proposed institutional reforms, almost half of the MPs interviewed for this study called for election reforms and many MPs additionally called for introducing and strengthening legal (i.e. statutory) or constitutional gender quotas that affect all candidates. They also supported quotas for parliamentary candidates adopted

voluntarily by political parties themselves. Gender equality within political parties and the presence of a nonpartisan parliamentary women's caucus were likewise found to help significantly in coordinating SRW efforts. Asian MPs generally found the parliamentary committee environment to be supportive of gender equality and women's interests except in countries where such committees have little power. Evidence from this study also suggests that the key critical mass cutoff points within Asian parliaments lie around 17.5%, 40%, and 62.5%. That is when comprising less than 17.5% of committee members, most women on parliamentary committees were unsatisfied with how it represented women's interests whereas when women comprised at least 40% (or 62.5%) of committee members, women were usually (or always) satisfied with how it represented women's interests. At the same time, there is a need for greater diversification of women (and men) MPs to improve SRW. Lastly, the chapter emphasizes how societal attitudes are the most important solution to gender equality, that both critical actors and critical mass are necessary in Asian parliaments, and that those factors inhibiting numerical representation tend to impede substantive representation.

As you will see in the upcoming chapters, there are numerous unexpected findings and the results of this study as detailed in the individual country chapters and conclusion chapter are both fascinating and illuminating.

## Notes

- 1 As Beckwith (2007) notes, potential positive effects of women obtaining a critical mass include women experiencing (a) an increase in voting power, (b) greater opportunities to set the political agenda, and (c) a long-term spillover effect whereby more women become willing to join politics when they see many women serving as parliamentarians.
- 2 In the West, there have also been contagion effects over time such that a number of center-right parties have become supportive of women's interests like the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) party in Germany (e.g. Thames & Williams 2013).
- 3 Modernization increases women's participation in the paid labor force, but women often do paid and unpaid care work that is typically devalued because it is gendered (e.g. Benoit & Hallgrimsdottir 2011). Meanwhile increases in women's paid labor force participation in recent decades have not been accompanied by a proportionate increase in men's involvement in domestic care activities (UN Women 2015: 83).
- 4 Childs and Krook (2009: 138) define *critical actors* as "those who initiate policy proposals on their own, even when women form a small minority, and embolden others to take steps to promote policies for women, regardless of the proportion of female representatives."
- 5 In certain locations, women are also expected to obey their husbands in voting choices (Hillman 2017).
- 6 In rural areas, women's participation in the labor force may be limited to only their family's farm or small businesses (Hirschman 2016).
- 7 Sarah Bush (2011) found countries hosting a UN peace operation more likely to adopt gender quotas.
- 8 The three main types of gender quotas are candidate quotas adopted voluntarily by political parties, legislated electoral candidate quotas affecting all parties, and reserved seats for women. According to Swiss and Fallon (2017), countries with either active civil societies or active participation in the 1995 UN World's Conference on Women have been more likely to adopt gender quotas.



- 9 Yet, even when set above this threshold, gender quotas can still become glass ceilings that prevent the number of women from exceeding the quota requirement (Dahlerup 2006b: 3).
- 10 According to Dahlerup and Leyenaar (2013: 8), six prominent dimensions of male dominance in politics include
  1. Representation: Women's numerical under-representation in elected assemblies.
  2. Politics as a workplace: Male-coded norms and practices in elected assemblies.
  3. Vertical sex segregation: Unequal gender distribution of positions in political hierarchies.
  4. Horizontal sex segregation: Limited access of women to a range of portfolios and committees.
  5. Discourses and framing: Gendered perceptions of politicians.
  6. Public policy: Policies biased in favor of men. No concern for gender equality.
- 11 Intersectionality does not only concern gender, race, and class. Other groups such as non-citizen, disabled, and LGBT women, for instance, may experience particular disadvantages and be inadequately represented in parliament by women and men MPs who do not share the same background.
- 12 Regrettably, an in-person team meeting was not feasible due to COVID-19-related travel restrictions.
- 13 On this point, we followed the guidelines of Celis and Erzeel (2015: 49), who note how "research on women's substantive representation needs to change its initial methodological design, if it wants to include men, right wing parties, and the non-feminists as potential actors." As Celis et al. (2008) note, since critical actors may include at times men, the methodological implication for capturing the richness of SRW is for researchers to broaden the scope of their inquiry to acknowledge multiple actors, activities, and sites in raising issues constructed dynamically across time.
- 14 For a critical view on the relationship between women and democratic representation, see Dahlerup (2018).

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# APPENDIX A

## Interview Questions for MPs

### A Establish Rapport/Understand Motivations and Ideology

- 1 Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with me today. It is a great honor to speak with you and I would like to ask your permission if it is ok to record our conversation so that I can listen to it again later and take notes as well as to quote you in the study and share a transcription of our discussion with the research team.
- 2 Can you explain how you got into formal politics and into parliament? Briefly stated, what was your main motivation for entering?

### B Understanding Institutional Environment and Extent of Substantive Representation

- 3 In your view, what are the most important issues in society you feel need to be addressed by government currently?
- 4 How confident/comfortable are you in speaking up/raising the causes that you are passionate about in parliament and how often do the issues you raise in parliament get discussed?
- 5 Do you think your gender has had an impact on your experience as a politician and if so, how? For women: have you ever been harassed, bullied, or treated according to a gender stereotype in parliament? For men: did you ever feel uncomfortable with women politicians being present? Have you ever witnessed a woman being harassed or bullied in parliament and what was your reaction/response?
- 6 Do you consult with or work with female voters? What are some of the key issues affecting women in this country? Have you done any work on these issues?
- 7 What has been your experience like on parliamentary committees? Has the committee environment been supportive of women's interests and

gender equality? Do other MPs listen and support you when you are pushing for policies that support women? What are their reactions?

- 8 How supportive are you of other women MPs through cross-political party alliances/cooperation and how well are you supported by women MPs from other parties? Are you obliged to vote with your political party on gender issues? How often have you been in a situation where you had to vote with your party and against your gender interests?
- 9 What legislation and policies have you advocated for that positively improved conditions for women? Has it been implemented/supported/rejected? Also, what are some strategies that you adopt when advancing women issues? What are the major obstacles to advancing gender equality? Is it, for example, your constituents, your party, the media, or something else?

#### C Intersectionality: Who Represents Whom?

- 10 How do you feel your personal background characteristics such as your age, ethnicity, education, party, and familial background influence your policy views and behavior in political activities?
- 11 How do you think you as an MP represent women of different groups in your country, which vary on the basis of socioeconomic status, ethnicity, generation, and other dimensions?
- 12 If given a chance, what would be your top three priorities in redesigning the current political system (such as perhaps changing its gender quota or electoral system) to better empower women? Are there other reforms you would recommend?

#### D Supporting Future Research

- 13 I am really encouraged by your support for gender equality and hope you will be able to keep working in this important area to make even more progress.
- 14 To further our research, can you please recommend and introduce me to two women MPs and two male MPs to meet so that I can learn more?