

# **Women in Post-Soviet Parliaments: an Intra-Regional Comparison**

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Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Political Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary

2016

## Abstract

The post-Soviet space presents a peculiar case of women's representation in national parliaments, where authoritarian governments tend to have more women in parliament than democratic ones and classical institutional measures, such as gender quotas and proportional electoral systems, fail to substantially advance women in the region. This thesis seeks to explain this puzzle by assessing the explanatory power of classical variables for women's parliamentary representation with regard to Soviet successor states. It conducts an intra-regional comparison, which allows it to combine the region's specific post-communist and post-Soviet circumstances and comparative analysis in order to gain better insight into the variation of women in the countries' parliaments. The findings suggest that socioeconomic variables, such as participation in labor and educational attainment as well as cultural variables, namely attitudes towards women in leadership roles, tend to be much more successful in explaining the proportion of women in post-Soviet parliaments than classical institutional explanations mentioned above. Moreover, they create an environment that is crucial for institutional measures to work as expected.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Professor Matthijs Bogaards for his continuous encouragement and professional judgment throughout this process, as well as his excellent approach towards teaching in general. I would also like to thank my academic writing instructor, Zsuzsanna Toth, for her insightful comments and extraordinary patience.

This academic year would not have been so amazing and significant to my life without the support of my friends both at Central European University and home, whose friendship I value greatly. You know who you are.

Last but not least, I want to thank the two most important people in my life—my mother and my grandmother—for raising me to be who I am today and teaching me how to be resilient and overcome any possible obstacles that life can throw at you. They are the strongest women I will ever know.

I dedicate this thesis to them.

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## Introduction

While women have secured political rights in almost every single country on the globe, their representation in the highest governmental institutions remains a sphere of vast inequality. Protecting and promoting women's rights, along with ensuring that a critical mass of women is represented in the national legislature, are an indispensable feature of a viable democracy. As Frene Ginwala, a former speaker of the National Assembly of South Africa of 10 years, points out in her Foreword for *Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers*:

While the debate about enfranchisement of women and participation of women in decision-making often focuses on issues of justice, equity and human rights, the representation of women and the inclusion of their perspective and experience into the decision-making process will inevitably lead to solutions that are more viable and satisfy a broader range of society. That is why women should be part of the process and why it matters: all of society benefits as we find better and more appropriate solutions for our problems. (Ginwala 2005, 15)

These particular women's rights issues received attention incomparable to previous advancements especially in the period of a massive wave of democratization of 1970-1990s that affected countries across the continents. Associating a country's democratic development with gender alignment—a theory that is actively promoted by many international organizations such as the UN, International IDEA, and the World Bank—was largely influenced by these tendencies (Jacquette and Wolchik 1998). However, as of April 1, 2016, according to Inter-Parliamentary Union, an international organization of parliaments of sovereign states, the world average of women in lower or single houses of national parliaments still amounts to a mere 22.7%<sup>1</sup> (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016). Therefore, while progress is undeniable, it is

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<sup>1</sup> With only the Nordic countries on average scoring up to 41.1%, which is still not the desired even distribution between men and women.

clear that universal gender parity in the legislative branch of governments is far from being achieved and is still something to be desired both in new and established democracies.

Ex-communist countries, especially those of the former Soviet Union, present a very peculiar case of how transition to democracy, while opening up new political opportunities and liberties for women, ended up with fewer women in the national legislatures compared to the situation of an authoritarian regime. The last elections prior to the 1988-1989 reforms, which largely contributed to the dissolution of Soviet Union, resulted in the regional average of women in the Supreme Soviets of Union republics<sup>2</sup> amounting to 36%. However, the first democratic elections witnessed a dramatic decrease to an average of 6%. One of the most striking drops happened in Azerbaijan. The 1984 elections saw 40% of women in its Supreme Soviet—the highest in the Soviet Union at the time. The first post-reforms elections in 1990 saw a drastic drop to 2% (Matland and Montgomery 2003, Tripp 2002). The sharp drop is generally attributed to the abandonment of the 33% quota and women being more of a ‘window dressing’ than politicized contributors to the legislature (Dahlerup 2004, Nechemias 1994, Rueschemeyer 1998). This, however, does not explain the fact that after 25 years of democratization and women acquiring an actual tradition of political participation, the regional average of women in lower or single houses of national parliaments for the post-Soviet space is an underwhelming 19.1%—still substantially lower than during the Soviet times and trailing behind the overall European average and the average for other post-communist countries on the continent (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016).

The surprisingly poor record for women in national parliaments, however, is not the only peculiarity of the ex-USSR region. While the most popular explanations for the increase of the number of women in the legislature in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are the institutional ones, including

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<sup>2</sup> Supreme Soviets of Union Republics—the official name of national parliaments of the Soviet republics.

democratic development, the presence of quotas and proportional (PR) electoral systems, the post-Soviet space does not seem to follow the same pattern. For instance, Belarus and Kazakhstan, being arguably among the most authoritarian post-Soviet states, have the highest proportions of women in their lower chambers of national parliaments in the region (27.3% and 27.1%, respectively). At the same time, as of 2014, Latvia's parliament is only 18% female, despite the country scoring quite high on the Freedom House ranking, being a member of the European Union and having the highest proportion of women elected, namely 15%, in the first post-communist election in the region. Moreover, out of the seven countries which have at least 20% of women in national parliaments, only one has a quota implemented and three a PR electoral system (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016, Freedom House 2016). Thus, we are presented with not only a far from perfect representation of women in the legislative branch in the region but a strikingly nontrivial variation among the post-Soviet states as well.

These paradoxes, however, did not seem to attract researchers to study the tendencies across post-Soviet states as a region. First, the literature tends to focus on women's representation in other world regions, especially Europe or South America (Sawer, Tremblay, and Trimble 2006; Kittilson 2006). Second, the study of women in power in post-communists states mostly focuses on Eastern and Central European members of the former communist bloc which are currently members of the EU (Rueschemeyer and Wolchik 2009). Third, while there is a number of sociological studies looking at women of the former Soviet Union in transition (Racioppi and O'Sullivan See 2009), there is virtually no research examining the dynamics for women in parliaments within the post-Soviet space. Those who argue that the former Soviet Union truly is an under-researched area still tend to focus on separate cases rather than on the region as a whole (Moser and Scheiner 2012; Connolly and Ó Beacháin Stefańczak 2015).

This study will fill this literature gap by explaining the variation in proportions of women in parliaments in the post-Soviet space. It evaluates the explanatory power of variables affecting



the number of women in parliaments that have been most popular and successful in the state-of-the-art literature. Generally speaking, the study addresses the following questions: what explains the variance in the proportions of women's representation in national parliaments of post-Soviet states? Do classical explanations hold for the ex-Soviet Union? If so, then to what extent? If not, what are the underlying patterns of the region that hinder it from aligning with popular theories? In short, this study examines the variation in women's representation in national parliaments of former Soviet republics by investigating the classic explanatory variables in order to achieve an understanding of why these countries do not align with popular institutional explanations.

In order to provide the most comprehensive answers to the above-mentioned questions, this study relies on the methodology of comparative area studies (CAS). Being a rather new approach in the field, CAS does not have a go-to manual for application. However, it has been employed by political scientists and research institutes—the most prominent one being the German Institute of Global and Area Studies (GIGA)—that analyze political phenomena within a particular region or across regions. In general, any study that analyzes political, economic and social developments using a comparative study methodology and bases itself on a region or several regions to find explanations for its research question can be considered a CAS. The general consensus on CAS boils down to it being “a scholarly field of study that combines the context sensitivity and knowledge of area studies with the explicit use of comparative methods as the appropriate means to generate both contributions to broader disciplinary and theoretical debates, and better insights into the cases” (GIGA 2016). This approach is very appropriate for studying women's representation in parliaments of the post-Soviet space because it allows to challenge the theories which define casual mechanisms for women in parliament employed in other regions. It helps establish how ‘limitless’ the explanatory factors for women's political representation really are and what their true scope is.

There are three forms of CAS that are being promoted by research institutes: intra-, inter- and cross-regional comparisons. The present study is an intra-regional comparison, which is defined as a method where "aspects or phenomena of different geographical entities within a given region are compared" (Basedau and Köllner 2006, 11). The unit of analysis of an intra-regional comparison is a region or an area. I define Soviet successor states - Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan –as geographical entities and the territory they are covering is an area or a region.

The justification behind approaching ex-USSR as a region is found in the abundant works of post-Sovietologists who analyze the processes in the region in the light of the legacies of the Soviet past (Hanson 2003, King 1994). Post-Sovietologists argue that even if someone wants to research one country of the former Soviet Union, they have to take into consideration the former Soviet experience because its influence cannot be ignored by the analysis.<sup>3</sup> They also question the interaction of post-Sovietology and comparative politics and argue that it is most of the time unsuitable to compare Soviet successor states as a region with other regions of the world due to the complexity of the region on its own and the nature of its political culture and authoritarian rule (Bunce 1995).

The thesis proceeds in the following manner. Chapter 1 establishes conceptual importance of the topic by looking at the connection between women in parliament and democracy in order to provide foundation for the puzzle of post-Soviet states explained earlier. It then differentiates between descriptive and substantive representation of women in parliaments and explains why this thesis focuses exclusively on the former. Chapter 2 provides a theoretical background to

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<sup>3</sup> Regular publications of post-sovietologists can be found in *Post-Soviet Studies* (founded in 1985, active under the current name since 1992). Other journals publishing on interactions within the former Soviet Union include *Post-Communist Economies*, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, *Europe-Asia Studies*, *Problems of Post-Communism* and other.

women's representation in parliament. In order to do so, it draws on the existing and abundant literature on the topic and summarizes the most crucial explanatory variables into three sets. Chapter 3 through 5 engage in an empirical analysis of these sets for the former Soviet republics, with Chapter 3 dedicated to the comparison across institutional indicators, Chapter 4—across socioeconomic indicators, and Chapter 5—across cultural indicators. The countries are compared using a variable-oriented approach, with special attention devoted to the cases that help refute the widely accepted theories. The Discussion provides an overview of the comparative analysis by drawing on the interpretations for each set of indicators. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the findings and addresses the question of what the region's experience can tell scholars of other regions and policy-makers of Soviet successor states.

## Chapter 1. Women, Political Representation and Democracy

Before entering the discussion of how countries can pave the way to equal representation of women and men in national parliaments and what factors influence and hinder that representation, one has to address the question of why representing women in parliament matters in the first place. Can a country be a fruitful and prosperous democracy and have zero female decision-makers whatsoever?<sup>4</sup> Does the number of women really matter? The short answer to that question is no. The long answer has to do with much more than alleged ‘fairness’ of politics. What this chapter will do is give grounds for the puzzle that is the post-Soviet space where countries with the harshest authoritarian regimes have the highest proportion of women in their national parliaments, while more democratic countries trail behind in representing women in their national legislatures. This puzzle served as a crucial reason for choosing post-Soviet countries as a region worth examining in the light of women’s representation in parliament. The chapter will proceed with looking at the different ways that representing women in national legislatures is crucial for a viable democracy, as well as examining two established types of parliamentary representation and their implications for women.

### *1.1. Why Care? The Importance of Representing Women in Parliament*

While there are numerous arguments in favor of women in parliaments being indispensable for democracies, this subchapter will distinguish three. The first argument speaks directly to national parliaments’ basic function of being representative of its population. As many NGOs and IGOs working with the issues of gender equality repeatedly point out, women are not a minority, and should not be treated as such. It is simply counterintuitive to suggest that a national parliament is supposed to issue legislation which will affect citizens of that nation

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<sup>4</sup> In my early stages of research, specifically, presenting the research proposal for peer review, one of the most common questions addressed the connection between a democratic government and women’s political representation. I found, to my personal disappointment, that this connection is not as obvious as I believed it to be—hence is the starting point of this study.

equally without taking into consideration the perspective of literally half of the people affected. Proportional representation of society's composition, in turn, contributes to the general stability of said government (Human Rights Watch 2011). Second, providing women with every single opportunity to exercise their political rights is an integral part of upholding their basic human rights—a motto of any functioning democracy. Failing to establish an equality of opportunity to participate in the decision-making process does not only send “a clear message ... about the value of their citizenship” (Matland and Montgomery 2003, 4)—it paves the way towards upholding gender stereotypes about politics still being exclusively ‘a man’s game’ and hinders the development of a generally more gender-equal society. Lastly, giving a legislative voice to women is more likely to bring light to certain issues that can be overlooked by a male-dominated parliament. This is not to say, however, that women in parliaments concentrate exclusively on women-related issues, or that men neglect these issues altogether. Nevertheless, research shows that, compared to men, women are more likely to focus on certain gender-salient aspects of the whole spectrum of a country’s legislature, including healthcare, the economy, education and other (Phillips 1995). It is absolutely crucial to take into account women’s point of view when drafting legislature in these and other spheres, especially when the specific aspect affects exclusively women—for example, reproductive rights, equal pay etc. Obviously representing women is not a sufficient factor for a viable democracy. It is, nonetheless, an undisputedly necessary one. As Julie Ballington points out in the Introduction to International IDEA’s handbook on women in parliaments, “taking into account gendered perspectives and involving women and men in decision-making processes is a *sine qua non* of any democratic framework” (Ballington 2005, 24). When talking about the so-called ‘quality of democracy’, researchers mostly address such aspects of governance as legitimacy, responsiveness, and accountability, and none of them are possible without a substantial presence of women in the legislature.

## 1.2. Descriptive and Substantive Representation of Women

In the previous section, I discussed the importance of women's presence in national parliaments. However, in order for women to have an impact on national politics, they have to be there in numbers in the first place. Therefore, having established that women do indeed matter, for the purpose of this study, which asks what influences the *number* of women in national parliaments, one has to make a clear distinction between what is known to be a *descriptive representation* and *substantive representation*.

The difference between the two boils down to the questions that these two types of representation address: *who* is being represented and *what* is being represented? In the case of women's representation, the former would address the proportion of seats held by women, or the number of women in national parliaments, expressed as a percentage of all seats available. The latter, however, focuses on a much more ambiguous aspect of women's representation—on what female legislators bring to the table, or, more specifically, what are the effects of their presence in national parliaments. Descriptive representation of women has a longer history of research, partially because there is a clear dependent variable, which, given its numeric character, is easily submitted to both qualitative and quantitative research, as well as to comparisons across countries and time (Wangnerud 2009). Substantive representation of women is not as easily gauged—while there is research that women are best equipped to represent women and certain case-studies do show that female legislators pursue women-related issues, this, as I mentioned above, does not automatically mean that they do so on a basis that provides a regular pattern (Phillips 1995). Hence, descriptive representation does not equal substantive representation.

This thesis is going to focus exclusively on descriptive representation of women in parliaments, simply because studying the different dimensions of substantive representation of women is hardly possible on a regional basis. This is due to the fact, that a comparative study requires an

assumption that, within each society, women have common interests which transcend ethnic, age, and class lines—an assumption that is simply not true. Representing ‘women’s interest’, pursuing ‘pro-women policies’ and achieving ‘gender equality’ can mean completely different things for women depending not only on their country of residence but also on their ethnicity, religion, age, class and so on (Chappell and Hill 2006). Accounting for enormous variations for a number of societies in a qualitative manner, let alone for variation within each society, simply extends beyond the limits of this study. At the same time, comparing countries according to the descriptive representation of women in parliaments by looking at what influences the variation in numbers is much more plausible. Last but not least, the study takes into consideration the descriptive representation in *lower* or *single* houses of national parliaments, because they, unlike the upper houses, are always elected directly and are subjected to the explanatory variables which will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 2. Theories and Indicators of Women's Representation in Parliament**

The research on factors influencing the number of women in parliaments has been quite extensive. Generally, the researchers tend to differentiate between three main categories: institutional indicators, socioeconomic indicators, and cultural indicators. Here I distinguish variables within each of the said categories, which have dominated the research and are considered most influential. They are usually the ones that produce the most significant results for single-case studies, as well as regional and global studies of women in parliament. These variables serve as a theoretical foundation for investigating whether the classical explanatory variables are applicable to ex-USSR as a region and possible refuting their universality later on in the thesis.

### ***2.1. Institutional indicators***

Institutional explanations undoubtedly have the best track record in explaining the rise in women in parliaments over the past decades. They are especially popular in statistical studies since they are quite easy to measure and define, and in cross-national studies, since they produce significant results for large-N studies. Moreover, institutional positive actions can provide the most short-term effects and can be introduced in an efficient manner. Institutional indicators are considered to be the most mainstream in the literature on women in parliaments and are the primary focus of the most recent publications (Joshi and Kingma 2013, Krook 2011, Wangnerud 2009).

#### ***2.1.1. Strength of democracy***

As it was argued at the beginning of this chapter, no democracy can call itself a functional one if it does not seek to base itself on the standards of gender equality. The strength of democracy is an obvious factor in gender equality: a country with a strong viable democracy would not allow for any discrimination based on gender in any of its institutions, including political ones



because it goes directly against the basic principles of democracy (Inglehart and Welzel 2005). At the same time, since most of the research has been focusing on studying the factors affecting women's representation in parliaments in established democracies, this fundamental aspect has been often taken for granted. However, this particular study has to account for variation in the degrees to which a country upholds political rights, civil liberties, freedom of expression, the rule of law, free and fair election and other factors, which contribute to establishing how strong a democracy is. These factors are also crucial in determining whether all citizens, and women in particular, are faring in the electoral process in fair conditions without having to face political obstacles on top of cultural and socioeconomic ones.

### **2.1.2. Strength of parliaments**

When it comes to evaluating descriptive representation of women in national parliaments, especially in democratically under-developed countries, researchers are frequently faced with the situation where women are subjected to the so-called 'token representation'—being manipulated by the government, usually a male-dominated one (Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor-Robinson 2013). This often happens when a country lacks a viable system of checks and balances, which leads to the parliament being dependent on the executive branch or higher authority, like the president, and bearing little significant power. In his work on strength of parliaments, Steven Fish argues that powerful legislature holds the key to a viable process of democratization, as well as to upholding said democracy (Fish 2006). The relationship, hence, can be two-fold: 1) effective legislatures should encourage democracy and provide more opportunities for women to stand for office; 2) countries with ineffective legislatures are more prone to women being used as tokens in a symbolic parliament, which can lead to a relatively high number of women being present in the parliaments in order to create a public image of a democratic state (Rosen 2013).

### 2.1.3. Electoral systems

The tradition of explaining the variations in women's representation of parliament using the type of electoral systems is probably the oldest out of all the explanatory factors and dates back half a century to when Maurice Duverger in *The Political Role of Women* (1955) argued for proportional (PR) electoral systems to result in a higher proportion of women in lower or single chambers of parliaments. It is also the most popular one: Duverger's original idea gained popular support and is considered to be one of the major explanatory factors to this day. This is partially due to the fact that, unlike socioeconomic and cultural factors, institutional factors, and electoral systems in particular, are more flexible and can be changed using quite a plausible procedure. Moreover, the evidence is undeniable: countries with a PR system tend to have more women in parliaments than countries with majority/plurality system (Kenworthy and Malami 1999). PR system means that parties receive representation in parliament according to the proportion of votes from all the votes cast that they received from the electorate.

Researchers highlight three advantages of PR systems for women being elected to parliaments. First, they allow for a greater district magnitude (the number of seats per district) and therefore a greater party magnitude (the number of seats a party wins in a district). Second, unlike majoritarian systems, PR systems are not as internally competitive, which, for combination with a larger number of seats being allocated to the party, creates more chances to women to be nominated from a party in the first place and, thus, get elected. In general, such a system encourages party gatekeepers to balance the slots between men and women to attract more votes, reach party equity, or maintain party peace (Gallagher & Mitchell 2005). Third, while the system is not as competitive internally, it is, due to a larger number of parties standing a chance to be represented in parliament and hence participating, very competitive externally. This way, if one party picks up a doctrine of gender equality to speak to a certain (female) electorate, other parties, especially from a similar ideological background, are more likely to

introduce gender equality in their agenda as well in order to prevent electorate monopolization (Lovenduski and Norris 1993).

#### 2.1.4. Quotas

The introduction of gender quotas, which, simply put is the share or proportional part of a total number of places that belongs to women, took place in the late 1970s with parties employing party charters in a handful of advanced democracies, such as Germany and Norway. Almost half a century later, a certain type of quota is implemented by 128 countries in the world. Quotas are considered to be the most affirmative, some would even say drastic, action of directly increasing the proportion of women in national parliaments. According to Drude Dahlerup, the most prolific publisher and advocate of electoral gender quotas, quotas constitute a “fast track [of] gender balance in politics” (Dahlerup 2006, 3). The quotaProject, a global database for quotas for women, which is a collaborative project of International IDEA, Stockholm University, and the Inter-Parliamentary Union, defines three types of gender quotas implemented in politics today: 1) reserved seats (constitutional and/or legislative), 2) legal candidate quotas (constitutional and/or legislated), and 3) political party quotas (voluntary). While the first one defines a clear number of women that are supposed to be elected, the other two establish a minimum threshold of percentage of women, usually without a ceiling amount, either as a legal requirement or as an option for political parties (quotaProject 2016).

It is quite obvious how the implementation of the first two types of quotas can directly and considerably increase the number of women in parliaments—non-compliance will simply result in legal action. At the same time, a country is not necessarily going to follow the general assumption that quota systems should ensure women constituting at least a so-called ‘critical minority’ of 30-40% and can introduce a legislated quota as low as 10%. The voluntary party quota is likely to be an effective way of achieving parliamentary gender parity in countries where an established tradition of political gender equality is present already and no affirmative

action is necessary. Without such tradition, voluntary party quotas can remain an advisory concept, or an attempt to appear ‘modern’ without any substantial improvements whatsoever. Moreover, the voluntary nature of political party quotas can also lead to a situation where such quotas are being adopted by small, uninfluential or non-parliamentary parties and do not result in a higher percentage of women in parliaments. At the same time, quotas as a means to considerably increase the political representation of women are considered to be a double-edged sword and cause most controversy. Proponents of quota systems argue that it is the only definite way to achieve equal representation of women since other means cannot battle the hidden barriers and direct discrimination that is happening in spite of equality of opportunity being introduced. Opponents of quota systems argue that any sort of preferential treatment, even if it is to account for certain imbalance, goes against the principles of liberal democracy. There is also an issue of whether quotas make politics completely about gender and not qualifications, and some female legislators have even spoken against quotas by arguing that women should not be elected just because they are women (Dahlerup 2005).

## *2.2. Socioeconomic indicators*

A literature review shows that it is the socioeconomic indicators that are handled with the most caution. While the general logic that the social and economic position of women in societies should have a direct effect on women’s political aspirations and hence participation in national parliaments, there are still certain pitfalls to be aware of. First, the concept of socioeconomic development can be quite ambiguous, and it is often unclear which variables are to be employed to measure it. Second, the implications of such variables as proportion of women with higher education or labor participation can be measured exclusively over quite a substantial period of time. Lastly, the findings concerning those and other variables are probably among the most contradictory in the field (Tremblay 2007).

At the same time, while socioeconomic factors may not facilitate a larger proportion of women in national parliaments *per se*, they can serve as hindrances to women participating in politics in general. Moreover, Richard Matland (2005) found that a minimum threshold of socioeconomic development is necessary in order for any of the most popular explanations for the increase of women in parliaments to hold, which can also explain why the significant findings for the institutional factors mentioned above are relevant mostly for well-developed countries. Therefore, the possible perils should not serve as a discouragement from excluding socioeconomic factors from research, especially since there is a vast number of publications proving their relevance (Reynolds 1999).

### 2.2.1. Education

The first step in women's participation in politics is obviously increasing the pool of women qualified for the job. This is why education has been considered to be an influential variable in determining the actual population of potential female parliamentarians. Education is also the primary facilitator of women stepping outside of the household in search of employment, which in turn improves their economic position. At the same, looking at just the proportion of the female population with secondary or even higher education may prove insufficient, which has been the case, especially when the research shifts its focus from well to less developed countries. Women, even after acquiring a higher professional education, may still choose not to participate in the labor force due to certain ideological, cultural and psychological hindrances which will be examined further. The type of education also matters: studies show that looking at the proportion of women with a relevant college degree, like law, economics, and social sciences, even in the countries of the same region and level of socioeconomic development, is likely to be effective in explaining the proportions of women in parliament (Newman and White 2012).

### 2.2.2. Participation in labor

Unlike education, which has had a mixed success as an explanatory variable for women's willingness to participate in the legislature, the share of women in the labor force has had a better track record among scholars. Participation in labor is considered the first step in women actually relieving themselves of their domestic boundaries. A structural change of women stepping outside the private sphere where they receive no financial compensation for their work to becoming independent economic actors has proven very successful in improving women's position in the society and, hence, contributing to a wider gender realignment (Norris and Inglehart 2003).

However, the way that participation in labor influences the number of women in national parliaments is a bit more complicated. Studies show a similar pattern to women receiving education: any job will not just do. There is a growing wave of professional segregation and recruitment discrimination when it comes to what kinds of jobs women have access to, on top of a global tendency for gender gap in earnings (Shvedova 2005). There is also an issue of the so-called 'privatization of women', when women tend to reproduce their domestic activities in their paid labor (Shapiro and Stiglitz 1984). While this increases their visibility as workers, it hardly encourages women running for office. Hence, a country with a high female labor participation rate may easily have a handful of women in parliament. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to the ratio of women in professional occupations, which are generally considered to be paving the way to becoming a member of parliament, as a better indicator of women's qualifications and willingness to accept a certain degree of public responsibility (Ruedin 2010).

### 2.3. *Cultural indicators*

While culture is an ambiguous term in itself, the so-called 'cultural explanations' for women in national parliaments have been quite popular and appear in a number of studies. Cultural

variables affect both the ‘demand’ and the ‘supply’ side of women in parliaments, where the former is the criteria that is being used to evaluate female candidates and the latter is women’s own willingness to run. Culture can create a certain filter or a barrier, both in the society as a system, which, in turn, affects the institutional variables mentioned above, and even in women’s minds, where their own self-perception can serve as a hindrance from them running for office (Lovenduski and Norris 1995). Therefore, culture here is understood as certain patterns in the society that define social roles of women and men.

### **2.3.1. Gender-related cultural attitudes**

When it comes to culture, it is hard to distinguish specific variables, as it has been done with institutional and socioeconomic indicators. Certain sex stereotyping affecting the public opinion is always presumed. It assumes that politics, being quite competitive and rigorous, requires masculine traits and cannot be subjected to ‘weak’ femininity (MacIvor 1996). This can not only significantly affect the way that women are treated when exhibiting interest in running for office, but also contribute to women’s lack of confidence in themselves, which is often the cause of women being underrepresented in formal political institutions. This is also connected to the political socialization that women experience in childhood, where women are first introduced to socially constructed masculine model of politics. Moreover, if girls grow up seeing only male-presidents and male-ministers, this can discourage them from pursuing a life in politics (Gidengil, O'Neill and Young 2010). Lastly, the concept of ‘dual burden’ or the well-known ‘work-family’ dichotomy can intimidate a woman from such an important civic duty as being a parliamentarian. Sometimes, institutional factors come into play as well: a lack of sufficient maternal benefits can discourage a woman running for office until her children are older (Kittilson and Fridkin 2008).

### 2.3.2. Women in political culture

A widely recognized book by Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris (2004) *Rising Tide: Gender Equality and Cultural Change around the World* is probably the most comprehensive research to this day giving a full account of how, basically, *culture matters*. They find that a shift from traditional towards egalitarian view of women in society has been the greatest contributor to gender equality in a society as a whole. To define egalitarian culture, Norris and Inglehart use their own gender equality scale which compiles survey data from the pooled 1995—2001 World Values Surveys / European Values Surveys that covers attitudes on the rights that women and men have when it comes to acquiring education and employment, on women as leaders and on their traditional childbearing and caring role. The authors find a significant relationship between gender equality in a society and the number of women in parliaments. The question remains whether attitudes on different societal spheres are equal in their ability to explain women's role in a particular society and therefore are indispensable to predicting the number of women in parliaments, or whether focusing exclusively on societal attitudes towards women in positions of power is enough to measure the influence of cultural indicators.

### 2.3.4. Religion

Other factors which often appear in research frequently include religion, especially to explain regional differences in women's representation in national parliaments. While religion itself is commonly perceived as a carrier of traditional values, including those towards women, some studies have shown that women enjoy more political possibilities in Protestant than in Catholic countries (Diaz 2005). However, since hardly any religion can be viewed as 'women-friendly', much more widespread are those studies that view religion as a hindrance to women's political advancement. They show that countries where religion, be it Catholicism, Confucianism or Islam, plays a significant role in shaping the mindset of the society will tend to have fewer



women in positions of power due to those religion's nature to portray women in subordinate positions (Fleschenberg and Derichs 2011).

This chapter has established a clear theoretical framework for this study. I have distinguished and highlighted the explanatory factors for women's representation in national parliaments. In addition, their importance and relevance, as well as the potential perils of using such explanations were discussed. The following chapter will proceed to the empirical intra-regional analysis at hand. It will apply the variables discussed in this chapter to the case selection of this thesis—the post-Soviet space—while using data that would allow us to compensate for the ambiguity of certain explanatory variables as much as possible. This will be done in order to evaluate their explanatory power and fulfil the agenda of this study by interpreting the variance in women's representation in national parliaments in the region.

## Chapter 3. Comparing across Institutional Indicators: Do Mainstream Explanations Work?

As a first step of answering the research question, the previous chapters provided a conceptual and theoretical background for the issue of women's representation in national parliaments. Most importantly, I distinguished three clear sets of indicators that can promote or hinder women from accessing parliamentary incumbency. In this chapter, I will examine the first set—institutional indicators—in the context of post-Soviet states. While the variables defined as 'institutional indicators' were discussed separately in the previous chapter, their interconnectivity makes it impossible to do so while discussing their empirical implications. For instance, International IDEA has a whole page dedicated to the suitability of certain electoral systems for the efficiency of quotas (International IDEA 2012). Electoral systems, in turn, can be analyzed in the light of the country's strength in democracy. The latter is also correlated with the strength of parliaments (Fish 2006). Therefore, this subchapter will proceed in the following manner: it will first conduct a descriptive analysis of all institutional variables for the post-Soviet space and then discuss the joint implications of said variables.

### *3.1. Effect of institutional variables: a comprehensive look at the results*

The post-Soviet space is truly an exceptional case of countries that, despite constituting a single political entity, ended up going through various, and sometimes polar, transitions, which directly affected women's position in the society and their political perspectives. Socioeconomic factors, for instance, have always varied across the Soviet republics and cultural identities that, while maybe not explicitly, always separated the republics, were simply frozen and managed to persevere and manifest themselves after the collapse of the Soviet Union. However, institutional design in the Soviet Union was consistent and rigid and then changed completely for all the republics. The democratic transition that post-communist countries embarked on in 1990 has been successful in some cases, like the Baltic states, but has

experienced a number of pitfalls in other. Most countries of the region endured quite lengthy political instability, defined by corruption, revolutions and other types of armed conflict, revival of ethnic tensions etc. Table 1 provides an overview for the strength of democracy in post-Soviet states 25 years after the transition started, in accordance with the *Freedom in the World* and *Nations in Transit* reports.

**Table 1. The state of democracy in post-Soviet countries at the time of the most recent parliamentary elections, 2011-2016**

<i>Country</i>	<b>Year of election</b>	<b>Women in parliament</b>	<b>Aggregate score</b>	<b>Status</b>	<b>Regime type</b>
<i>Latvia</i>	2014	18.0%	85	Free	Consolidated Democracy
<i>Lithuania</i>	2012	23.4%	90	Free	Consolidated Democracy
<i>Estonia</i>	2015	23.8%	94	Free	Consolidated Democracy
<i>Russia</i>	2011	13.6%	28	Not Free	Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
<i>Uzbekistan</i>	2015	16.0%	3	Not Free	Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
<i>Azerbaijan</i>	2012	16.9%	23	Not Free	Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
<i>Tajikistan</i>	2015	19.1%	16	Not Free	Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
<i>Turkmenistan</i>	2013	25.8%	6	Not Free	Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	2016	27.1%	24	Not Free	Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
<i>Belarus</i>	2015	27.3%	17	Not Free	Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
<i>Armenia</i>	2014	10.7%	46	Partly Free	Semi - Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
<i>Georgia</i>	2012	12.0%	60	Partly Free	Transitional Government or Hybrid Regime
<i>Ukraine</i>	2014	12.1%	62	Partly Free	Transitional Government or Hybrid Regime
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	2015	19.2%	38	Partly Free	Semi - Consolidated Authoritarian Regime
<i>Moldova</i>	2014	21.8%	63	Partly Free	Transitional Government or Hybrid Regime

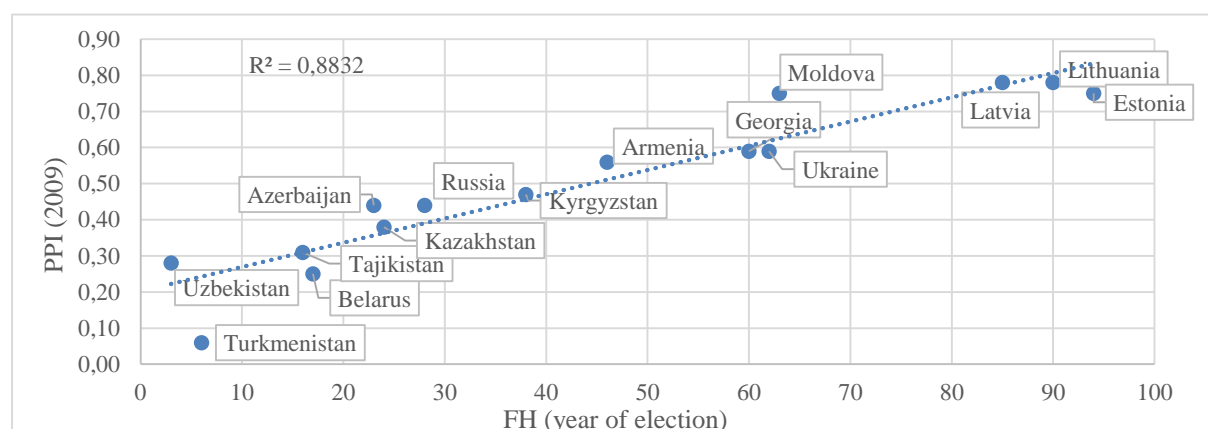
Source: Data from Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016, Freedom House 2016

Note: Aggregate Score Explanation: 0=WORST, 100=BEST.

As we can see, out of 15 ex-Soviet republics, only 3 were marked as ‘free’ at the time of most recent parliamentary elections and could be considered functional viable democracies, while 5 were ‘partly free’, meaning that they are once again in a transitional state or that the political rights and civil liberties in these countries are moderately protected . Unfortunately, almost half of the countries were considered ‘not free’ and currently have some form of an authoritative government. The same statuses are valid for the latest Freedom in the World report (2016). Furthermore, from the table alone, it is already evident how much variation there is between the post-Soviet countries clustered by regime status. What is also striking is that consolidated authoritarian regimes clearly tend to have more women in parliament, while democratic countries come in second and transitional governments—third.

Moving onto the second explanatory variable, the extent to which democracy is viable is also influenced by the capacity of the highest governmental bodies to implement and influence policy independently. In order to measure that, we look at the Parliamentary Power Index (PPI), which covers “the parliament’s ability to monitor the president and the bureaucracy, parliament’s freedom from presidential control, parliament’s authority in specific areas, and the resources that it brings to its work” (Fish 2006, 7). Figure 1 shows the correlation between PPI and Freedom House.

**Figure 1. Correlation between the Parliamentary Power Index and Freedom House aggregate scores**

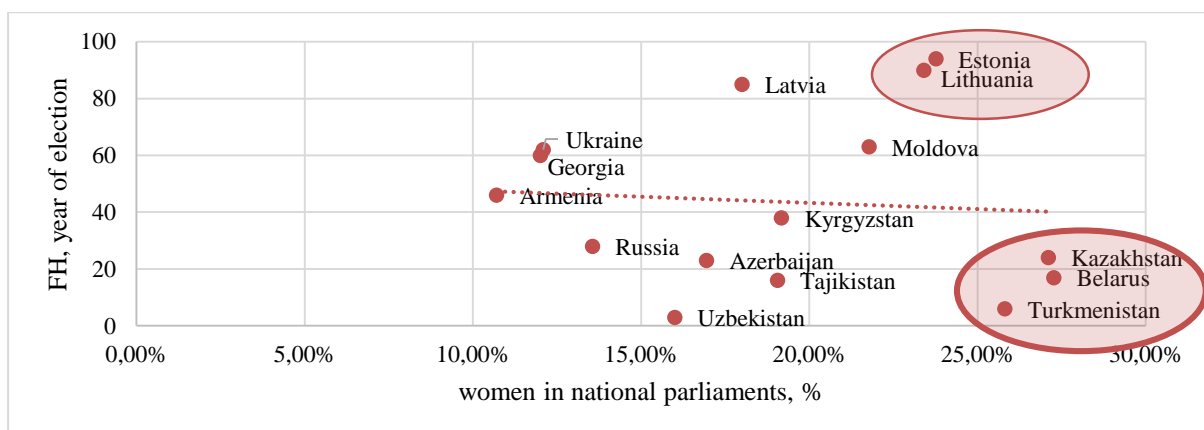


Source: Fish 2009, Freedom House 2016.

Despite the fact that the latest index is available for the year 2009 and all the latest parliamentary elections took place afterwards, it almost perfectly correlates to the Freedom House aggregate scores of the countries for the year at their latest elections, which not only supports its validity<sup>5</sup>, but also justifies looking at these two potential explanatory variables together.

When it comes to how women are represented in national parliaments in the light of these variables, Figure 2 and 3 show that the post-Soviet space fails to meet the mainstream expectations. Estonia and Lithuania are the only countries to perfectly align with the general theory, where strong democratic processes seem to have benefitted women's ability to access elected office. The way that the rest of the countries are distributed is quite scattered: considering their state of democracy, Armenia, Georgia, Ukraine and especially Latvia seem to not have enough women, while Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan seem to have too many. While the rest of the countries have a more or less appropriate proportion of women in parliament considering their FH and PPI scores, they lack a coherent pattern. Clearly, the logic 'stronger democracy—more women' does not apply to most of the post-Soviet countries.

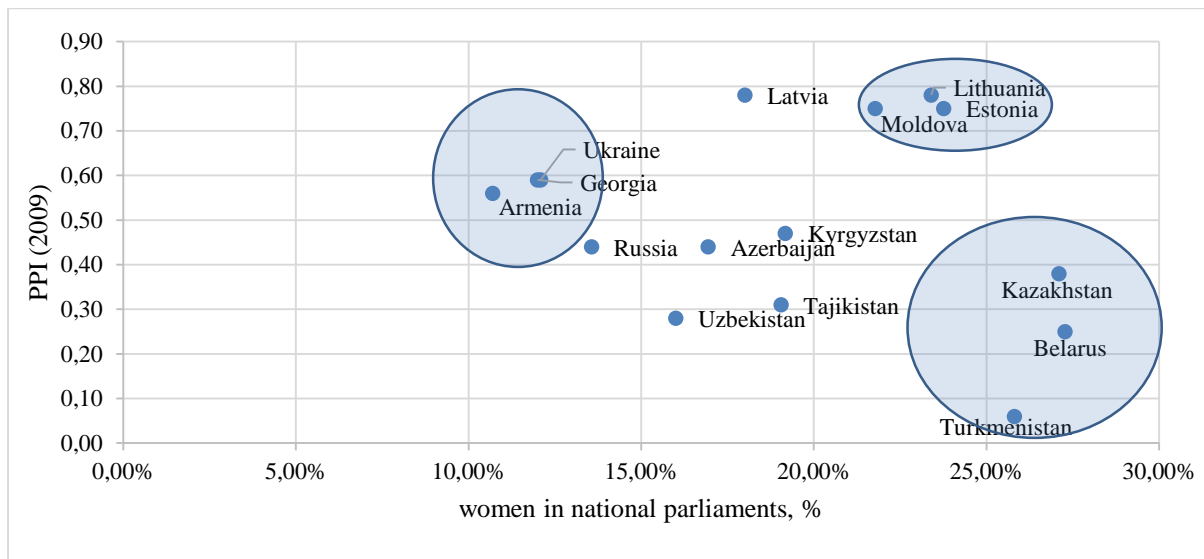
**Figure 2. Relationship between the strength of democracy and the proportion of women in national parliaments**



Source: Freedom House 2016, IPU 2016.

<sup>5</sup> There is only one noteworthy outlier: Turkmenistan has an exceptionally low PPI, which is due to the fact that, at the time of measurement, the Turkmen parliament virtually had only one party, which supported the country's super-presidential regime. The first multi-party elections in the country took place only in 2013.

**Figure 3. Relationship between the strength of parliament and the proportion of women in national parliaments**



Source: Fish 2009, IPU 2016.

Moving onto electoral systems and their explanatory power, we first have to acknowledge that the post-Soviet space is, surprisingly, equally divided when it comes to the type of electoral systems they had implemented at the time of the most recent elections. The elections took place under closed-list proportional electoral rules (PR) in six states, under plurality/majority electoral with single-member districts (SMD) rules in four states and under mixed electoral systems rules in five. However, it is not only the variation between the types of electoral systems that we are faced with: the variation within each type of electoral system is striking as well. The proportion of women in national parliaments varies from 13.6% in Russia to 27.1% in Kazakhstan for PR systems, from 10.7% in Armenia to 23.4% in Lithuania for mixed systems, and from 16% in Uzbekistan to 27.3% in Belarus for plurality/majority systems. Table 2 provides an overview of the situation.

**Table 2. Electoral design for the post-Soviet states, 2011-2016**

<i>Country</i>	% women in parliament	Electoral System Family	Details	Electoral Process Score (FH)
<i>Armenia</i>	10.7%	Mixed	31.7% Plurality/Majority (simple majority), 68.3% PR (5% threshold)	5.75
<i>Azerbaijan</i>	16.9%	Plurality/Majority	FPTP	7.00
<i>Belarus</i>	27.3%	Plurality/Majority	TRS	7.00
<i>Estonia</i>	23.8%	PR	List PR	1.50
<i>Georgia</i>	12.0%	Mixed	48.6% Plurality/Majority (FPTP), 51.4% PR (5% threshold)	4.50
<i>Kazakhstan</i>	27.1%	PR	List PR	6.75
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	19.2%	PR	List PR	5.25
<i>Latvia</i>	18.0%	PR	List PR (5% threshold)	1.75
<i>Lithuania</i>	23.4%	Mixed	50.4% Plurality/Majority (simple majority), 49.6% PR (5% threshold)	2.00
<i>Moldova</i>	21.8%	PR	List PR	4.00
<i>Russia</i>	13.6%	PR	List PR (7% threshold,	6.75
<i>Tajikistan</i>	19.1%	Mixed	Parallel	6.75
<i>Turkmenistan</i>	25.8%	Plurality/Majority	TRS	7.00
<i>Ukraine</i>	12.1%	Mixed	50% Plurality/Majority (FPTP), 50% PR (5% threshold)	3.50
<i>Uzbekistan</i>	16.0%	Plurality/Majority	TRS	7.00

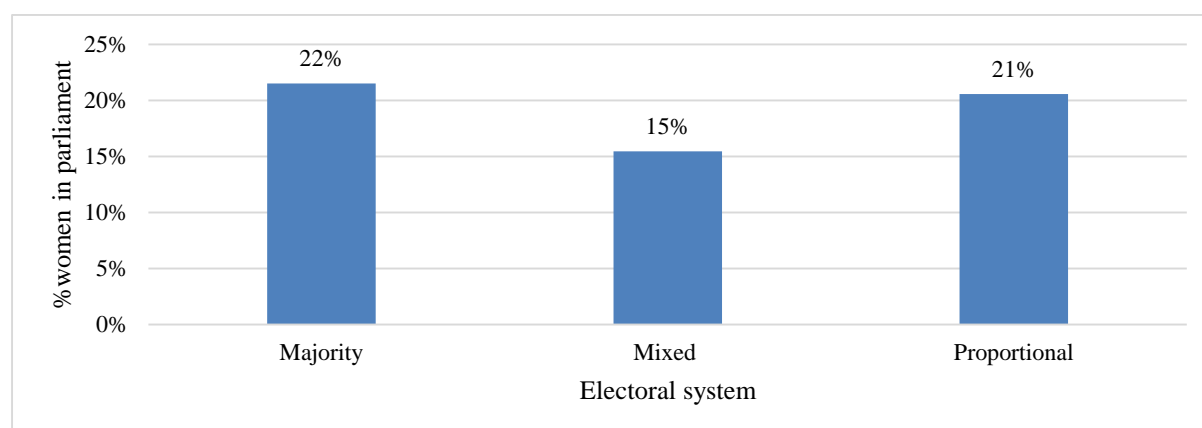
Source: Data from International IDEA 2016, Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016.

Note: PR—Proportional Representation, FPTP—First Past The Post, TRS—Two-Round System (International IDEA 2013).

While scholars established that PR systems tend to favor women's representation in parliament due to reasons explained in the theoretical chapters, there are a number of publications that argue that the experience is different in post-communist states, where the relationship between women's representation in parliament is either very similar for both PR and SMD tiers of mixed systems (Moser and Scheiner 2012) or in some cases even goes against the general expectation with women faring better in the SMD tier than in the PR tier (Moser 2001). Looking at the post-Soviet space, we are at first presented with exactly this type of unexpected relationship,

where on average there is a slightly higher percentage of women in countries with majority-type electoral systems than PR or mixed systems (see Figure 4).

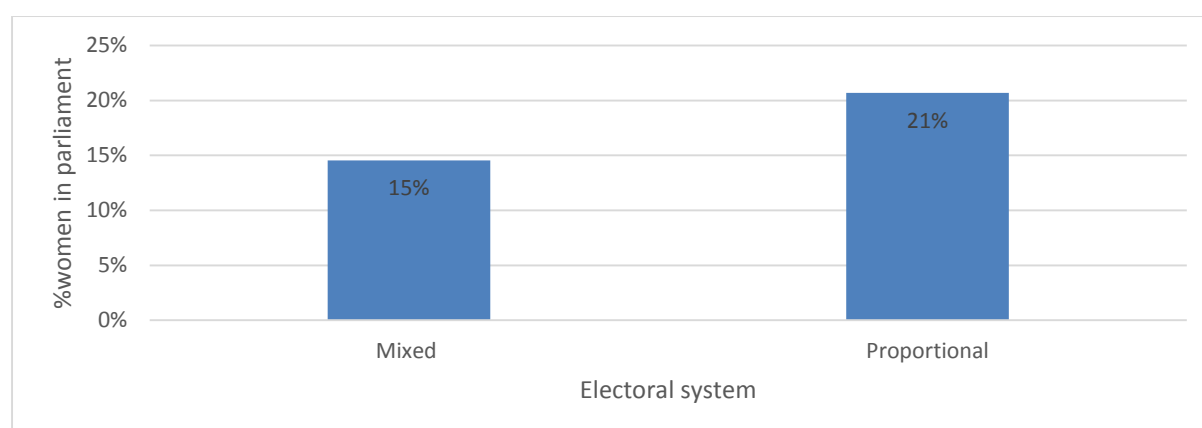
**Figure 4. Average proportion of women in post-Soviet national parliaments by electoral system at the time of the most recent parliamentary election**



Source: International IDEA 2016, Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016.

Yet, the only way one can study effects of any electoral system is if one presumes that the elections are conducted freely and fairly, which is certainly not the case for many of the post-Soviet countries (for more details see Table 1 earlier in this section). Interestingly enough, once we narrow down our analysis to countries which are deemed partly free or free by FH, we are left with exclusively mixed and PR systems, meaning that plurality/majority electoral systems are employed only in authoritarian post-Soviet countries (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5. Average proportion of women in national parliaments of democratic post-Soviet states by electoral system at the time of the most recent parliamentary election**



Source: International IDEA 2016, Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016.



At first glance, we do see that the average proportion of women in parliaments is higher for PR than for mixed systems, but a closer look shows a more complex situation. First, the average of 21% is still lower than the world average and the European average, both for countries with PR systems and for countries with other electoral systems. Second, there are peculiarities, like Armenia, having a parallel electoral system, allocates almost 70% of its parliamentary seats according to a PR system yet still has the lowest proportion of women in the post-Soviet space. Third, Ukraine and Georgia have very similar electoral systems to that of Lithuania yet have considerably fewer women in their national parliaments.

Lastly, when it comes to affirmative measures of increasing the number women in parliament, the post-Soviet space has not really subjected itself to one of the 21<sup>st</sup> century's most successful and popular 'remedies' for underrepresentation of women, namely the implementation of gender quotas. What Drude Dahlerup (2004) calls a 'quota fever' that has affected other ex-communist countries in Africa and the Balkans faces a strong resistance in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and not just ex-Soviet states. As Table 3 illustrates, out of 15 countries, only 5 has some sort of a quota system implemented, and only 2 have it implemented more or less efficiently. Dahlerup (2004) also points out that this is due to a very strong resistance, especially in the Eastern Europe, to what is known as 'forced emancipation' of the Soviet gender quota of 33%, which in reality was a mere 'token' representation.

**Table 3. Gender quotas in the post-Soviet states at the time of the most recent parliamentary elections, 2011-2016**

<i>Country</i>	<b>% of women in parliament</b>	<b>Type of quota</b>	<b>Details</b>
<i>Armenia</i>	10.70%	Legislated candidate quota	‘The number of persons of each sex shall not exceed 80 % of any integer group of five candidates starting from the second number of the electoral list (2–6, 2–11, 2–16 and so on up to the end of the list) of a political party or alliance of political parties and of each party included in an alliance for the National Assembly election under the proportional electoral system’ (Article 108, (2), Electoral Code of Armenia, 2011).
<i>Georgia</i>	12.00%	Supplementary public funding incentives	‘An election subject, receiving funding from the state budget, receives 10% supplementary funding if in its nominated party list for parliamentary elections or local self-government elections it has included at least 20 % candidates of a different gender in a group of every 10 candidates’ (Article 30.7 (1.), the Organic Law of Georgia on Political Unions of Citizens, 1997).
<i>Uzbekistan</i>	16.00%	Legislated candidate quota	‘The number of women shall constitute not less than 30 percent of the total number of candidates deputy nominated by a political party’ (Article 22 (4), Law on Elections of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis, 2004).
<i>Kyrgyzstan</i>	19.17%	Legislated candidate quota	The Electoral Law specifies a 30% quota for either sex on electoral lists. Lists that fail to meet the quota requirement will be rejected by the Electoral Commission. No more than 3 positions can separate men and women. (Code on Elections, Article 60 (3), 2011).
<i>Lithuania</i>	23.40%	Voluntary political party quota	Social Democratic Party: at least one-third of either sex on the election list.

Source: Data from Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016, quotaProject 2016.

Lithuania is the only country that has a voluntary political party quota in place, adopted by the largest party in the Seimas (Lithuanian unicameral parliament), Social Democratic Party in the 1990s. The quota requires at least 33% of party’s nominees to be women, which largely contributed to country achieving a 23.4% benchmark of women in its national parliament—

higher than the world average and close enough to the European average. Kyrgyzstan could also be considered a successful example, this time of a legislated candidate quota, which was introduced in the aftermath of the Tulip Revolution of 2005. While the first post-quota elections did witness an inspiring rise to 23.33% of women in Jogorku Kenesh, country's supreme legislative body, the latest 2015 elections resulted in a seemingly slight but comparatively significant drop of 4% (.

Similar case happened in Kyrgyzstan's neighbor-country, Uzbekistan, where implementation of the same 30% gender quota contributed to the representation of women reaching 22% in the lower house during the 2009 parliamentary elections, but dropping to 16% during the 2014 elections, despite women constituting 31.8% of nominees as required (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2015). This was a harder blow towards women in parliament that can be attributed to the single-member plurality system which generally makes it harder for women to fair and actually receive a mandate and the Uzbek quota legislature lacking certain provisions, present in Kyrgyzstan (see Table 3). Moving onto the Caucuses, both Armenia's legislative candidate quota of 20% and Georgia's financial incentives failed to reach a significant improvement for women becoming parliamentarians at any point after the implementation.

In sum, quotas have not been implemented in the post-Soviet space or in a particular subregion for them to have a significant region-wide effect, yet even when they are implemented, they do not seem to advance women in national parliaments the way that literature and empirical evidence from other parts of the world suggests. While there are constant pressure on Latvia and Estonia from the Council of Europe to introduce gender quotas, Lithuania still remains the only Baltic country with a voluntary party quota. As for legislated quotas, they have failed to repeat the success of other post-communist states, like ex-Yugoslavia republics, which were not repelled by the so-called 'relics of the past', and to contribute to an increase of women in post-Soviet parliaments.

### *3.2. Interpreting the results for institutional variables: no pattern?*

The descriptive analysis presented above clearly shows that institutional factors fail to create a specific pattern for the post-Soviet space as an entity. Moreover, in most cases, the effects of these institutional factors do not align with the popular expectations. A high proportion of women in such consolidated authoritarian regimes (FH) as Belarus, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan from an institutional point of view could only be explained by the phenomenon known as ‘token representation’ of women in a clearly symbolic parliament. All three states are marked quite low in terms of their political rights and their electoral process is regarded by organizations like OSCE as ‘deeply flawed’ (Freedom House 2016). All three countries are ranked quite low on the PPI, reflecting how severe the personalist regimes are. At the same time, there are four more authoritarian states - Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Russia—where token representation does not seem to be on the agenda since the number of women in parliament in those countries is quite low.

Looking at the effects of the electoral system, there are only 3 democratic countries with full PR systems in the post-Soviet space - Latvia, Estonia, and Moldova - where Latvia with its 18% of women in parliament can hardly be considered an example of how PR advances women. While Moldova and Estonia can potentially be used as support for PR electoral systems, a definitive conclusion in favor of PR cannot be drawn.

The implications of gender quotas can be examined only for a handful of post-Soviet countries where the quotas are actually implemented. The effectiveness of the Lithuanian voluntary political party quota can be attributed to the country having a long history of women occupying positions of power. The current two-term female president, Dalia Grybauskaitė, despite publically denouncing gender quotas, calling them “a positive discrimination”, has enjoyed a high approval throughout her time in office. That contributed to upholding an egalitarian view of women in the society and the quota turning out to be a relative success (Mejere 2012,

Taljunaite 2004). In Armenia and Georgia, where a mixed parallel electoral system is implemented, similar to Lithuania, the results were not so fruitful. In the Armenian case, the OSCE/ODIHR observer mission reported an alarming withdrawal of female candidates after the electoral lists had been approved, and these candidates being replaced by their male counterparts (Freidenval and Dahlerup 2013). Georgian parliamentary elections did not favor women as well since the funding quota turned out to be an insufficient motivation for parties to include women in their party lists.<sup>6</sup>

Kyrgyzstan, while being a problematic case of having a semi-consolidated authoritarian regime, is a clear example of a combination of PR electoral system and a legislated quota with rank-order rules. While the country does not have such a high proportion of women in its national parliament at the moment, it reached 23.3% after PR system had first been implemented in 2007. Considering the fact, that the country is advancing in terms of its democratic development and its latest elections were deemed legitimate by international observers, we can expect progress in terms of women's representation. This could not be said for Uzbekistan, however, which has the lowest possible score for its electoral process according to FH, making the discussion of the quota or electoral system implications redundant. What is also noteworthy is that in Uzbekistan the actual proportion of women in a national parliament is the furthest from the legislated 30% quota. However, it is important to highlight, that falling short of meeting the legislated quota goal by a substantive number of digits is valid for all the countries discussed above. This can be explained by women being used just to 'fill the seat' and not run an actual campaign, and the quota legislature lacking rank-order rules, meaning that women are put at the bottom of the party-list.

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<sup>6</sup> It is worth noting that in 2014 both the supplementary funding and the minimum proportion of female candidates were increased to 30% (quotaProject 2016) which could potentially bring about improvement for women in Georgian national parliament.

## Chapter 4. Comparing across Socioeconomic Indicators: Back to Basics

In the previous chapters, such institutional indicators as the level of democracy, strength of parliaments, type of electoral systems, and presence of gender quotas were discussed. But while they shape the ‘demand’ side of women’s representation in parliament—how favorable the institutional design itself is of women in politics and how easy it is for women to pursue elected office, the ‘supply’ side is directly affected by the socioeconomic structure of the society (Lovenduski and Norris 1993). This structure creates a system that can either facilitate or hinder women’s acquirement of certain skills necessary for public service. While socioeconomic explanations are not as popular in the state-of-the-art literature, they are crucial in providing a comprehensive image of women’s position in the post-Soviet region.

As was argued in the theoretical part of this thesis, the two most defining elements of this structure are labor force participation and educational attainment. But while both can empower women in general, the measurements used to evaluate them need to include factors that would directly affect the political side of women’s empowerment. This chapter will look at the post-Soviet women’s position in labor and education, having to take those provisions into consideration.

### *4.1. Women’s economic advancement: more than just participation*

In order to evaluate the extent of women’s participation in labor I use the *Economic Participation and Opportunity* subindex (hereinafter EPOS) of World Economic Forum’s *Global Gender Gap Index* (hereinafter GGGI<sup>7</sup>):

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<sup>7</sup> The other subindexes that go into GGGI are *Educational Attainment*, *Health and Survival* and *Political Empowerment*. The abbreviations are not official and are used to ease the discussion.

This subindex contains three concepts: the participation gap, the remuneration gap and the advancement gap. The participation gap is captured using the difference between women and men in labour force participation rates. The remuneration gap is captured through a hard data indicator (ratio of estimated female-to-male earned income) and a qualitative indicator gathered through the World Economic Forum's Executive Opinion Survey (wage equality for similar work). Finally, the gap between the advancement of women and men is captured through two hard data statistics (the ratio of women to men among legislators, senior officials and managers, and the ratio of women to men among technical and professional workers). (World Economic Forum 2016).

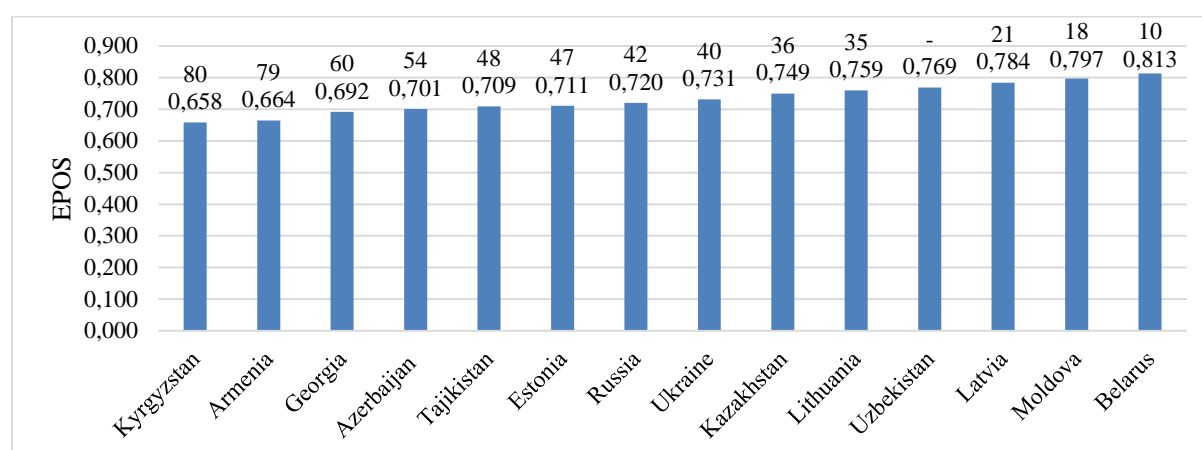
To my knowledge, the subindex has never been used as a way to measure socioeconomic effects on women in parliament. However, the fact that it looks at wage equality for women and their employment in professional and senior positions makes it a more reliable socioeconomic indicator for women's political participation than simply looking at labor force participation rates. The latest 2015 subindex is used for all countries, since the index compiles data that ranges back to 2007. The only exceptions are Uzbekistan which stopped being covered by the report in 2009 and Turkmenistan which has never been covered by the report. No alternative for Turkmenistan has been found since the only available data covering Turkmenistan is the proportion of women in the labor force which can be ambiguous for the purpose of this analysis.

When it comes to general rankings of EPOS, which covers 145 countries, the post-Soviet states provide satisfactory results (Figure 6). There is little variation: all countries, except for Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, are located in the first half of the subindex. This should not be surprising since the Soviet system heavily integrated women into the workforce.<sup>8</sup> Belarus clearly stands out: it does not only rank the highest out of the post-Soviet countries in terms of women's economic participation, it also ranks the 10<sup>th</sup> in the world for that subcategory.

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<sup>8</sup> In the 1980s, almost 90% of USSR's working-age women were employed (Einhorn 1993).

**Figure 6. Economic Participation and Opportunity Subindex Rankings and Scores (2015)**



Source: World Economic Forum 2016.

Moving onto the relationship between the subindex and the proportion of women in parliament, a first glance at Figure 7 shows us a strong linear relationship between the two ( $r = 0.53$ ). Considering the range, the line is not very steep, indicating little variance in the countries' EPOS scores. The scatterplot also allows us to separate the 15 states into some clear clusters for further analysis.

Starting from the countries with the lowest proportion of women in parliament in the region, Armenia and Georgia, on the one hand, and Ukraine and Russia, on the other hand, are quite close to the trend line. However, while the first three belong to the low-middle income group, Russia is the only country in the region outside of the EU Baltic states that belongs to the high-income group (Global Gender Gap Report 2015). At the same time, Russia aligns with the trend line: its low level of economic participation and opportunity for women corresponds with its underwhelming number of women in parliament.

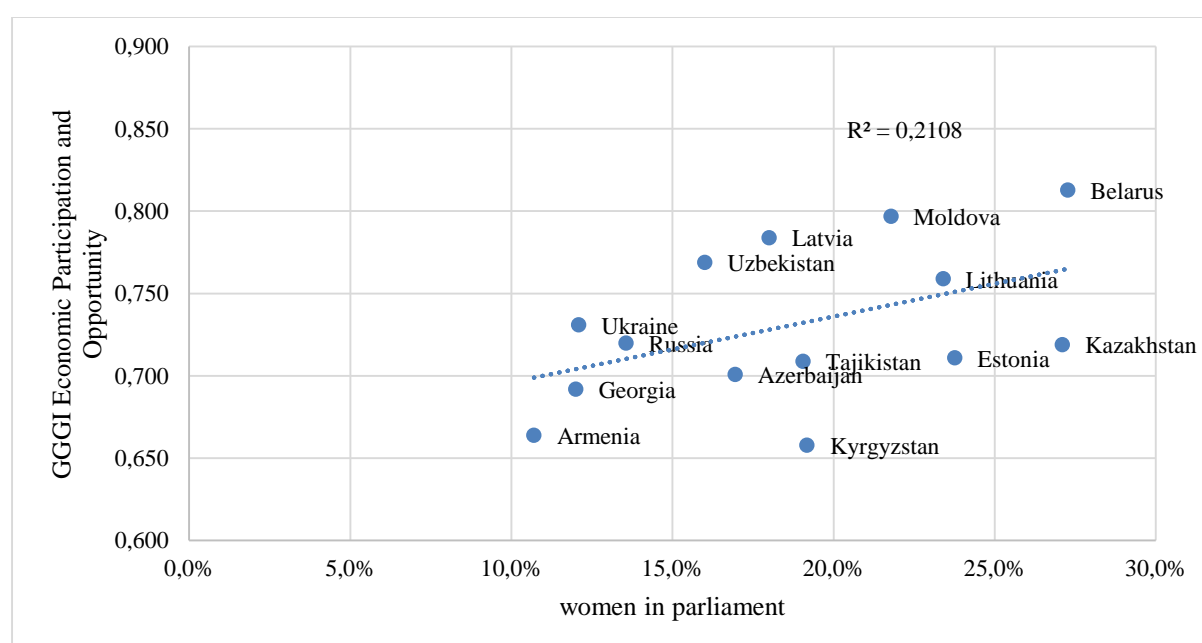
Moving onto countries with a comparatively moderate for the region proportion of women, we observe a situation similar to the previous one. There is a cluster consisting of three low-middle income group countries—Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Tajikistan—and one high-income country—Latvia. Azerbaijan and Tajikistan seem to be close enough to the trend line and have



an appropriate EPOS score for their women's representation. Uzbekistan and Latvia are above the trendline, which means that, while women are advanced economically, they are still trailing behind in political representation in those particular states. Kyrgyzstan seems to be the only outlier on the scatter plot with women's economic situation being the worst in the region, while their parliamentary representation is higher than in 8 other countries scoring better on the index.

The last cluster consists of the region's countries with the best record for women in parliaments and has the most variance out of three. Kazakhstan, despite having the second largest proportion of women in parliaments in the region, is only the sixth in the region in terms of women's economic development. Interestingly enough, the exact opposite is valid for Moldova: second on the EPOS score and 6<sup>th</sup> on women in parliament in the region. Lastly, Estonia presents an interesting case of a democratic and well-developed country, with the third largest proportion of women in parliament in the region, yet scoring lower on the subindex than some of the less socioeconomically developed countries.

**Figure 7. Relationship between Economic Participation and Opportunity subindex and proportion of women in national parliaments**



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016, World Economic Forum 2016.

In general, the post-Soviet space as a region seems to align with the socioeconomic predictors for women's representation in parliament. There are, however, certain cases that are worth taking an in-depth look at. Looking at Central Asian countries in particular, one can observe that all of them, except for Uzbekistan, are below the trend line. The reason behind Uzbekistan's surprisingly high EPOS score can lie in the fact that the measurement is not up to date and, most importantly, does not contain the advancement gap, meaning that there was no data available for the number of legislators, senior officials, and managers, as well as professional and technical workers (the same is valid for Tajikistan). This being the most crucial data for tracking how the participation in labor can pave the way for women in elected office undermines the validity of the scores for these two countries. Therefore, it would be problematic to take these countries into account when evaluating the effect of this particular variable.

Estonia also seems to be an outlier both for the Baltic region and for the cluster of countries with a comparatively high proportion of women in parliament. The country's overall EPOS score is being dragged down by its female to male ratio of legislators, senior officials, and managers (0.48). At the same time, that particular measurement is taken from 2010, while in the recent 2015 elections Estonia has made a 5% leap in its women's parliamentary representation.

#### ***4.2. Relevant educational attainment: does the degree matter?***

Moving onto the educational attainment variable, I decided to abstain from using the relevant subindex of GGGI, because it compiles data on women to men ratios in primary-, secondary- and tertiary-level education, as well as female to male literacy rate, which, as it has been argued before, are not reliable measurements of women's political empowerment and may not necessarily promote women running for office (World Economic Forum 2016). While looking at tertiary level education rates alone may originally seem like the way to go, a number of

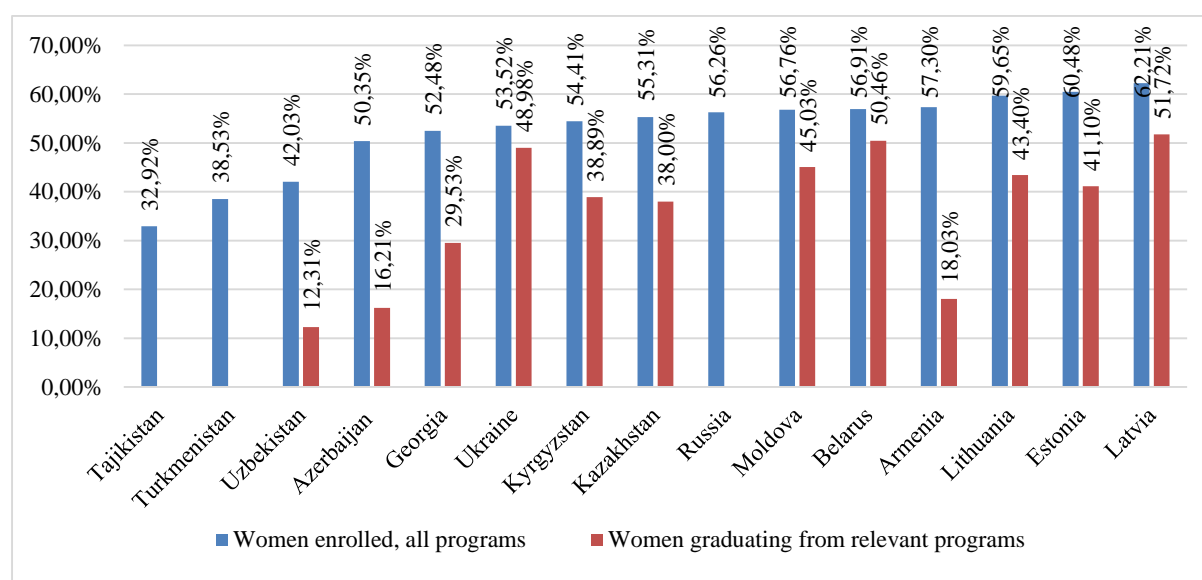
studies, having found no significant relationship between the indicator and women's political representation, suggest otherwise (Kenworthy and Malami 1999, Kunovich and Paxton 2005, Matland 1998). Therefore, in an attempt to narrow down the potential pool of qualified female candidates even more, this study uses the percentage of female graduates from tertiary education graduating from Social Sciences, Business and Law programs, provided by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, as a potential explanatory factor for women in parliament. While the data for such a narrow indicator is limited (there are no measurements for Russia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan), it is the closest that one can get to measuring the amount of women with relevant skills to effectively fare in the political arena (Shvedova 2004). The data on the general enrollment rates in tertiary education for the region is provided as well, but it serves only as a backbone to the previous indicator and is not used as an independent variable.

It is also rarely clear what time frame is being used when employing educational attainment as a variable. While some use rates from the year of election, the outcome of which is being used as a dependent variable (Yoon 2004), others opt for the rates 10-15 years prior to the election cycle to allow for the establishment of the pool of eligible qualified women, but end up having huge missing data issues (Kunovich and Paxton 2005). Since data for the post-Soviet space is very scattered in terms of its availability, I will calculate a country mean by using all the available yearly rates per country since the start of the measurement (1999). That would both cover the eligible pool of women and compensate for the missing data in some countries.

Starting with a general overview of enrollment of women in tertiary education, the doctrine of equal opportunity and access to education that was actively promoted in the Soviet times has survived through the transitional period. Figure 8 shows that, with the exception of some Central Asian countries, post-Soviet states do not only enjoy a gender equality in higher education but a situation which favors women more. Women on average make up 50 to 60% of tertiary education enrollment, with Baltic countries dominating the list.

At the same time, the situation is not as homogenous when it comes to the share of women who graduate from a degree that could pave the way to elected office. In Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Armenia only around 15% of female students graduate from Social Sciences, Business and Law programs which means that only around 7.5% of all tertiary graduates in those countries are women with qualifications and professional training to become MPs. These countries also happen to have some of the lowest levels of women's representation in their national parliaments.

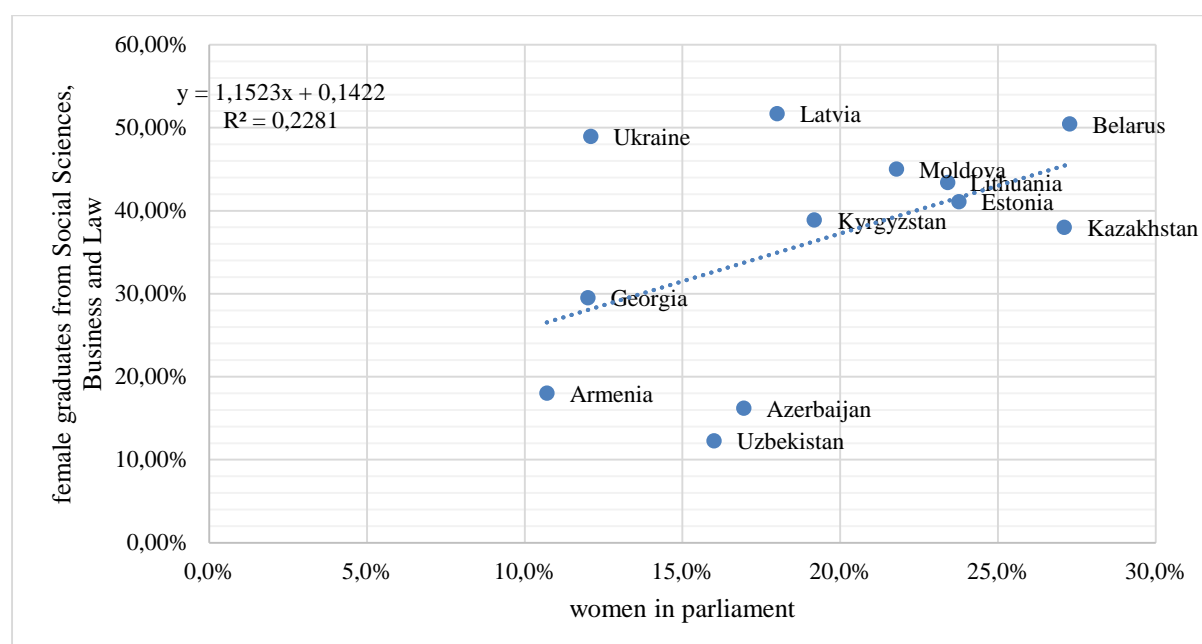
**Figure 8. Percentage of students in tertiary education who are female and percentage of female graduates from tertiary education graduating from Social Sciences, Business and Law programs (1999—2015)**



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2016

Figure 9 shows that the relationship between the proportion of female graduates from Social Sciences, Business and Law tertiary education programs and women's representation in national parliaments in the post-Soviet region is quite similar to the one of the latter with women's economic advancement. Countries like Moldova, Lithuania, Estonia and Belarus can serve as support for the hypothesis that women's parliamentary representation is promoted by them receiving a relevant education.

**Figure 9. Relationship between the proportion of female graduates from relevant programs and proportion of women in national parliaments**



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016, UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2016.

Latvia remains an outlier: with educational attainment being the highest in the region for both indicators, it is surprising that the country has a relatively low number of women in its national parliament. Another interesting case is Ukraine, where the fact that a quarter of the tertiary female graduates has received degrees in politics-friendly spheres in the past 25 years did not result in a satisfactory proportion of women in parliament. While there is no data available for Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, we can suspect, from the low proportion of women enrolled in tertiary education alone, that the relatively high proportion of women in those parliaments is not a result of women being socioeconomically advanced or seeking political representation. It also makes one question the qualifications of women present in the countries' legislatures by providing more support for the idea of 'token representation' discussed in the previous chapter.

## **Chapter 5. Comparing across Cultural Indicators: Women and Values in the post-Soviet region**

During the Soviet era, political culture was imposed from above. The communist propaganda of proclaimed gender equality with women having the same abilities and inspirations as men was artificially imposed on the long-existing cultural differences in the societies that made up the Soviet Union. However, exactly because the approach was manufactured to fit the governmental rhetoric of the country having more equality than some of the Western democracies, it was not really meant to bring about the emancipation of women. Despite providing women with social benefits and certain legal provision for equality, the state failed to reconcile the underlying perceptions of traditional roles of women with them contributing to the planned economy as much as men did (Lazreg 2000). However, the perseverance of the patriarchal nature of society was not the only thing that affected the post-communist states: the creation of what is known as the ‘double burden’ for women wanting to be both mothers and workers contributed to women being discouraged from taking upon themselves the responsibility of public office (LaFont 2011).

Having analyzed the effects of institutional indicators and socioeconomic indicators which affect the demand and supply sides of women’s representation in national parliaments in post-Soviet states, this empirical subchapter will proceed by looking at the remaining cultural indicators in order to assess to what extent these patterns are visible after the post-Soviet transition. These cultural indicators contribute to both the demand and the supply of women in national parliaments. Cultural gender-related stereotypes and attitudes can not only hinder voters and political leaders from nominating female candidates for MPs but also discourage women themselves from actively seeking education, employment and political representation (Lovenduski and Norris 1995).

To evaluate the explanatory power of the variables, I will use the data from World Values Survey (WVS). Whether it is the attitude towards women as political leaders, the general perception of women's role in society or the role of religion in the society, WVS provides data on various questions connected specifically to the variable at hand. WVS covers 6 waves, from 1981 to 2014, and the most appropriate data to each country, considering the availability and the year of their latest parliamentary election, is going to be employed.<sup>9</sup> None of the Waves have ever covered Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, so these countries will be missing from this chapter's analysis. Moreover, it has to be acknowledged that the most recent available data for Latvia and Lithuania is from 1996 and 1997. At the same time, cultural attitudes take generations to change (Norris & Inglehart 2004). So while one could expect attitudes in these countries to have changed over the course of 10 years, that change is not going to be significant enough to exclude the countries from the design altogether.

### *5.1. Egalitarian view of women and the effect of religion*

In order to evaluate gender-related cultural attitudes, I create a Gender Equality Indicator by using data from WVS Waves 4-6 (1995—2014). The results are calculated in such a way so that the higher the score is, the more egalitarian is the society towards women.<sup>10</sup> The indicator compiles calculated indicators from the responses (agree strongly, agree, disagree and strongly disagree) to the following statements:

When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women.”  
University education is more important for a boy.”  
If a woman earns more money than her husband, it's almost certain to cause problems.<sup>11</sup> (World Values Survey 2012)

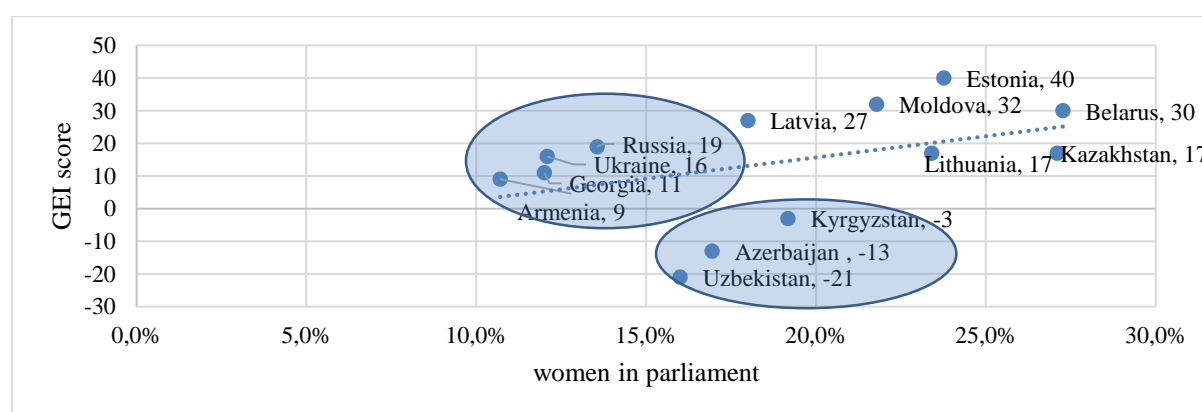
<sup>9</sup> Selected samples: Armenia 2011, Azerbaijan 2011-2012, Belarus 2011, Georgia 2008, Kazakhstan 2011, Kyrgyzstan 2011, Latvia 1996, Lithuania 1997, Moldova 2006, Russia 2006, Ukraine 2006/2011, Uzbekistan 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Calculated indicator: [+] Disagree, Strongly disagree, [-] Strongly agree, Agree

<sup>11</sup> This statement was not covered in Wave 5 (2005-2009), so the results for Wave 4 or 6, or the mean of both are used instead.

Figure 10 shows clear tendencies for post-Soviet countries. First, there is a positive relationship between the indicator and the proportion of women in parliament ( $r = 0.42$ ). Second, there are two clear clusters in the region. The first consists of countries that score lowest on the indicator and happen to be Muslim. The second one consists of countries which score lowest in terms of the proportion of women in their parliament, and they not only are located very close to each other on the equality indicator but also share a dominant religion—Christian Orthodoxy. Moreover, the country scoring highest on the indicator—Estonia—is the two countries with a Protestant majority in the region, while the country that, compared to the previous results for women's education and employment scores surprisingly low on the indicator—Lithuania—is the only country with Roman Catholicism being the dominant religion. These are hardly coincidences and give foundation to look at post-Soviet region's religious landscape before drawing conclusions from the Gender Equality Indicator alone.

**Figure 10. Relationship between the Gender Equality Indicator and women's representation in national parliaments**



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016, World Values Survey 2016.

Table 4 presents an overview of the dominant religions in the post-Soviet region, as well as a 3-point range defining to what degree people consider religion to be important. I calculated the range using the responses for WVS's 'Important in life: Religion' indicator, which asked to



indicate how important religion is in one's life with possible answers being 'very important', 'rather important', 'not very important', 'not at all important'.<sup>12</sup>

Table 4 also shows that on average countries which consider religion to be an important part of their lives score have a more traditional view of women than the rest. This supports the theoretical assumptions that in the countries where religion is strong enough to impose patriarchy and traditional values on the society in general and women in particular, it most probably will. Another hypothesis presented in the theoretical chapter—that Catholic countries would be less 'women-friendly' than Protestant ones—is also supported by GEI scores.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, countries where Islam is a dominant and highly important religion fair considerably worse when it comes to the egalitarian view of women: they are the only ones to fall below 0 on the indicator.

**Table 4. Religious landscape for countries on the Gender Equality Indicator, 2016**

<b>Dominant religion</b>	<b>Countries</b>	<b>Importance of religion</b>	<b>Mean GEI score</b>	<b>Average women in parliament, %</b>
<i>Orthodoxy</i>	Belarus	Moderate	24.3	18.7
	Russia	Moderate		
	Ukraine	Moderate		
	Moldova	Moderate		
	Georgia	High	10	11.4
	Armenia	High		
<i>Roman Catholicism</i>	Lithuania	Moderate	17	23.4
<i>Protestantism</i>	Estonia	Low	40	23.8
	Latvia	Moderate	27	18.0
<i>Islam</i>	Kazakhstan	Moderate	17	27.1%
	Azerbaijan	High	-12.3	17.4
	Kyrgyzstan	High		
	Uzbekistan	High		

Source: Data from Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016, The World Factbook 2016, World Values Survey 2016.

<sup>12</sup> My calculation: responses for 'very important' and 'rather important': 0%-33.3% - low, 33.4%-66.7% - moderate 66.8%-100% - high.

<sup>13</sup> At the same time, Lithuania's low GEI score is cancelled out by its effective gender quota. This and other similar cases will be addressed in more detail in the Discussion section.

While the connection between the GEI scores and importance of religion is obvious from the table, their joint influence on the proportion of women in parliament is not as straightforward. It is true that moderately religious countries fare better in the parliamentary representation of women than highly religious ones, yet there is a slight discrepancy between highly religious Orthodox and Muslim countries. While highly religious Orthodox countries—Georgia and Armenia—score considerably better on GEI than highly religious Muslim ones, representation of women in parliament of the former trails behind the latter's. This means that while the non-egalitarian perception of women can explain the poor record of women in parliament in separate clusters and variance within these clusters (see highlighted clusters on Figure 10), it fails to explain the variance between them.

## *5.2. Women as political leaders: evaluating the attitudes*

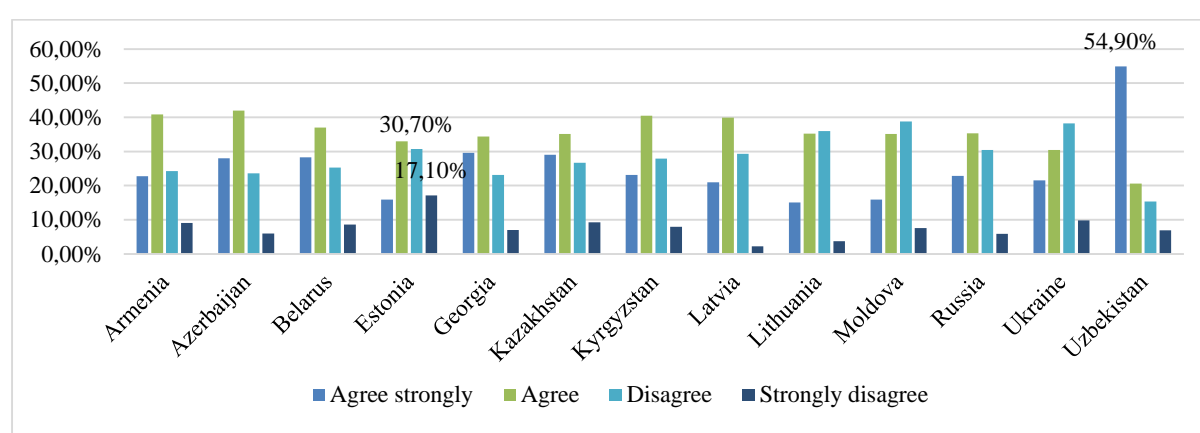
While general cultural attitudes towards women regarding women's equal rights to employment and education may be too broad to be able to explain the variance in women's parliamentary representation, people's attitudes towards women in a position of power encompass a narrower scope of attitudes. Such attitudes should directly influence the will of both the people driving the institutions and women themselves to advance women in politics. In order to evaluate the cultural attitudes towards women in parliament across the post-Soviet region, I employ the latest available data from World Values Survey which contains the responses on a Likert scale to the following:

People talk about the changing roles of men and women today. For each of the following statements I read out, can you tell me how much you agree with each? Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree, or disagree strongly? ...On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do. (World Values Survey 2012)

Starting with the general overview, from Figure 11 it is pretty clear that post-Soviet countries as a region tend more to agree than disagree with the statement. On average, 25% of the post-

Soviet region's sample strongly agree that men make better political leaders and 35.5% agree, while 28.5% disagree with the statement and only 7.8% strongly disagree. Overall, Uzbekistan is the country that stands out the most with its obviously negative attitudes towards women in power with more than half of the country's sample strongly agreeing with the statement. Estonia exhibits the most support for women as political leaders with almost half of the country's sample disagreeing with the statement.

**Figure 11. “On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do” (1999-2014)**

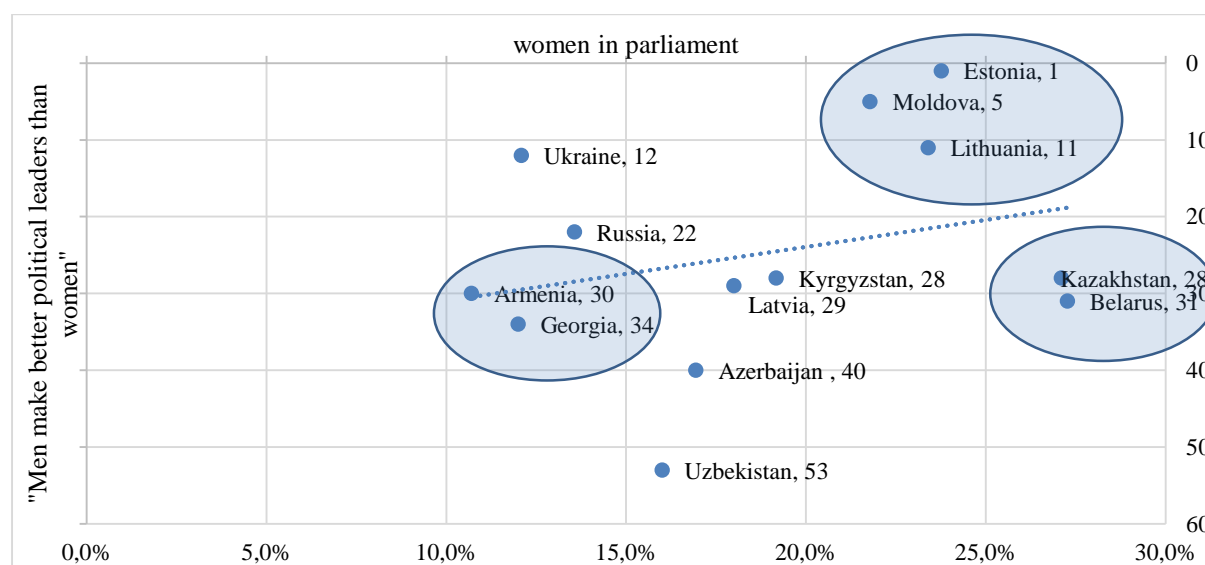


Source: World Values Survey 2016.

Figure 12 shows a very scattered relationship between the attitudes, which were recalculated in a continuous variable, where a lower score means greater support for women as political leaders. Still, there are, again, some easily distinguished clusters, which help explain certain outliers from the previous analysis. Lithuania, Estonia, and Moldova, on the one hand, show the highest support for women as political leaders, which is backed by them having the largest proportion of women in parliament among the region's democracies. Latvia, on the other hand, scores considerably worse than its European counterparts, which can serve as an explanation for it trailing behind with its 18% of women in parliament. Kazakhstan and Belarus, on top of having almost the same proportion of female parliamentarians, have similar societal attitudes towards women in power. While not the bottom of the list, the countries tend more to agree than disagree with the 'patriarchal way' (see Figure 11) and their scores are not satisfactory to

use cultural attitudes to explain them leading the region in terms of women's representation in parliament. Referring back to the importance of religion, most of the highly religious countries tend to largely agree with the statement, with highly Muslim countries once again faring worse with their attitudes than the Orthodox ones.

**Figure 12. Relationship between attitudes towards women as leaders and proportion of women in parliament**



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016, World Values Survey 2016.

Overall, societal attitudes towards women as leaders provide a pretty straightforward image, which mostly corresponds to the way women are represented in the national parliaments. Compared to general societal attitudes towards women and their rights, this variable provides a better tool for explaining the variation between the female representations in post-Soviet parliaments that are present today. At the same time, considering the fact that there is no data for two countries and that the time frame is quite broad, it is important to approach this explanatory variable with the previous explanations in mind. This will be addressed in more detail in the Discussion part, where all the explanatory variables will be reflected upon and a more comprehensive image of the interpretation of the results will be provided.

## Discussion

The main objective of this study was to provide explanations for the variation in women's representation in national parliaments of post-Soviet states by analyzing the region across the classical explanations. By applying the 'magic triangle' Fuchs (2003, 4) of institutional, socioeconomic and cultural indicators, which are usually employed when explaining women's representation elsewhere, and interpreting the results with the regional aspects in mind, we now have a perception of how efficient these classical explanations actually are when it comes to the post-Soviet region. While the interpretation of the results for each set of indicators has already been provided, this part will simply readdress those interpretations and try to establish certain patterns for the region, by looking at pairs or clusters of countries.

Overall, the study has provided empirical support for the hypothesis that also founded the puzzle, which drove me to choose post-Soviet union states as a region in the first place: institutional indicators are not strong in explaining the variation of women. Such variables as the strength of democracy or the presence of positive measures like PR systems and quotas, do not have much explanatory power on their own. Seven out of fifteen post-Soviet countries are clearly plagued by authoritarian regimes, yet three of them are leading the region in terms of descriptive representation of women in parliament without a quota system in place and, considering the variation between the countries, by quite a margin as well.

It is clear that there are other mechanisms that are at work in the post-Soviet region and the analysis of socioeconomic and cultural indicators in the countries proved just that. They manage to not only provide a pattern for the region but to also explain the failure of institutional explanations in total and the success of some of the singular variables in particular. Starting with the countries that originally provided biggest support for the hypothesis, in Belarus and Kazakhstan what might be called 'token representation' in clearly artificial parliaments is supported by the countries' being quite advanced in terms of the socioeconomic and cultural

position of women. Judging from the findings in Chapter 4, there is clearly enough women in the countries with professional aspirations and willingness to step outside of the household, as well as relevant skills acquired via education. These factors simply enlarge the pool of qualified women and it should only be natural for a parliament to be representative of that pool. Kazakhstan, while not scoring as high in terms of education and employment as Belarus, is quite egalitarian in terms of perception of women in the society compared to other Muslim countries in the region. The country also has a PR electoral system in place, which, despite the limitations discussed in Chapter 3, still allows for a larger number of qualified women to be nominated in the first place. Even though the strength of democracy and parliament in those countries strongly hint at the fact that women are more of a ‘window dressing’, they are there in numbers. Whether those numbers are meaningful or not is outside of the scope of this study (for more detail see Section 1.2.)

Although socioeconomic and cultural indicators serve their main purpose of expanding the pool of qualified women and are effective in increasing the number of women on their own, their combination also creates an environment which can largely influence the efficiency of institutional measures. The underwhelming proportion of women in Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, and Uzbekistan can be attributed to a high degree of religiosity and non-egalitarian perception of women, which, in turn, contributed to the mediocre socioeconomic position of women in those countries. These are also the conditions that do not allow gender quotas to work as efficiently as they are usually designed to in the last three countries mentioned above. This means, that the pro-women environment is crucial for positive measures like gender quotas to advance women in parliament. Lithuania, for instance, has a viable quota system in place exactly because its socioeconomic and cultural environment is sufficiently favorable of women in political power. While the same can be said about Kyrgyzstan, where the proportion of female graduates in general and with relevant degrees is quite impressive for the region and

the attitudes towards women in power are solid, there is still an issue of traditional perception of women which does not allow the quota to be employed to its fullest potential.

Moving onto the countries that do not have a quota system in place, the socioeconomic and cultural landscape of Moldova and Estonia, on the one hand, seems to be fairly encouraging of women in the position of power for the countries to have a satisfactory proportion of women in parliament without any positive measures. On the other hand, Russian and Latvian women seem to be hindered by cultural indicators. Latvia, however, can be called somewhat of an outlier: considering the country's leading position in term of the pool of qualified women and the country scoring higher in terms of egalitarian perception of women than, for instance, Lithuania, the negative perception of women as leaders seems to be the only thing hindering women from getting elected. Similarly, Ukraine's favorable socioeconomic and cultural environment for women seems to be insufficient to increase the number of women in the country's parliament.

Lastly, it is important to mention the encountered data limitations for certain countries of Central Asia, especially for socioeconomic and cultural variables (for more detail see Chapters 4 and 5). The Global Gender Gap Report never covered Turkmenistan, stopped covering Uzbekistan in 2009 and lacked data for female senior officials, legislators and managers, as well as for women in professional and technical employment for both Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Turkmenistan and Tajikistan are also not covered by the World Values Survey and were completely absent from Chapter 5, which discussed cultural attitudes towards women in society and leadership. While these limitations technically do not allow us to see the full picture for the region, from the data that is available and from the tendencies in the sub-regions of former Soviet Union we can suspect that the processes in the countries that were not partially covered by the analysis are more or less similar and should not significantly influence the established pattern. For instance, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, despite missing from the

cultural analysis, are still considerably behind regarding women's socioeconomic position, which, presumably, are affected by traditional attitudes towards women in those countries. Furthermore, this leads to questioning the qualifications and the actual role of the women in the countries' parliaments, attributing them to once again the cases of token representation.

The sum up, ex-Soviet countries as a region tend to follow socioeconomic and cultural explanations on a general level. Not only do they matter on their own: they are also pivotal for affirmative measures to advance women in parliament to work as well. The implications of such a finding, relative to what it means for ex-Soviet Union as a region and what message it sends to scholars studying other regions, will be discussed in Conclusion.



## Conclusion

The purpose of this thesis was to explain the variation in the proportion of women in post-Soviet parliaments. In the Introduction, I argued that classical institutional explanations and measures to improve women's parliamentary representation, despite dominating the recent literature, do not hold for ex-USSR as a region, where authoritarian countries on average tend to have more women in national parliaments than democratic ones. In order to test this hypothesis, this study first provided a conceptual background to the issue of women's parliamentary representation by explaining the importance of the issue at hand and its connection to a country's democratic development. In doing so, it also narrowed down the scope of the study to the descriptive representation of women in parliament. Second, it established a theoretical framework by distinguishing three sets of explanatory indicators—institutional, socioeconomic and cultural—which, in turn, shaped the structure of the analysis. The variables were chosen on the basis of their prevalence in state-of-the-art literature and importance for shaping the indicators. Finally, the study engaged in a comparative analysis of post-Soviet countries across the variables, taking into account the region's specific environment, assessed the explanatory power of those variables and interpreted the results.

The analysis found that, indeed, institutional explanations alone fail to account for the uncanny variation in women's representation in post-Soviet parliament. Most importantly, it found that it is the socioeconomic and cultural variables that are most apt to explain that variation. Those also happen to be the variables which are considered to be the most ambiguous in the literature. Moreover, they also shape the environment in which institutional variables can operate efficiently. Without them, introducing classical institutional measures like PR electoral system or gender quota will fail to achieve their goal—increasing the number of women in parliament—in post-Soviet countries as a region. The most surprising finding is arguably the fact that socioeconomic explanations, namely women's advancement in the labor market, tend

to work best when it comes to independent interpretations. This provides an incentive to readdress the variables such as relevant labor participation and education, which have been denoted as ‘old-fashioned’ and designated to a more of a secondary role in the literature. Furthermore, the findings clearly establish that explanations for women’s parliamentary representation are not limitless. This is a strong message for scholars studying female parliamentary representation in other regions and should serve as caution against drawing definite conclusions about measures that increase the number of women in parliament, which is something that large-N studies tend to do (Dahlerup 2006, Tripp and Kang 2008).

The study was conducted using a comparative area study methodology. Conducting an intra-regional comparison allowed to look at the combination of the region’s specific post-communist and post-Soviet context with the previously established theoretical framework and apply it to the analysis. The case selection and the employed method also partially shaped the contributions of this study. It did not only fill the gap in the literature, which lacks research on women’s political representation in post-Soviet states in general. In fact, it is the first intra-regional comparison of women’s representation in parliament. It provides a significant contribution to comparative area studies by taking a region that is not that commonly geographically defined in research—the post-Soviet space—and treating it as an important analytical category that explains the roots of casual mechanisms in the region with regard to women in parliament. While being grounded in issues of social science and parliamentary representation, the study also contributes to both the feminist literature on a broader level and the school of post-Sovietology.

Obviously, carrying out a medium-n qualitative study comes with limitations. One of them was narrowing down the number of variables per each set of indicators in order for the research to be feasible. That is why some of the variables like political party ideology, women’s movements, gender-related welfare and other factors which sometimes appear in the literature

on women in parliament were not included in this research. I found that these require a much more in-depth look at country-specific circumstances which would go extensively beyond the limits of this kind of research. Moreover, the choice for the particular variables in this research was grounded in the fact that they have shown significant findings in both small-N and large-N studies. Nevertheless, exploring the post-Soviet region across the potential explanatory variables, not covered by this study, can be where further research takes the issue of women's representation in Soviet successor states.

Alongside with the theoretical value, there is a number of things that this study suggests about practical implications for women in parliament. First, the fact socioeconomic and cultural variables matter much more than institutional ones makes improving women's political representation in former Soviet Union problematic both for policy-makers and women's rights activists. This is because implementing a quota or changing an electoral system is a matter of legislation and can be handled in a relatively short period of time. However, eliminating discrimination in access to education and jobs, let alone inspiring a shift in cultural attitudes, can take *generations*. While this sounds bleak, the number of women in post-Soviet parliaments can and should be improved.

First and foremost, in countries like Turkmenistan, where barely any gender-disaggregated data exists, institutional efforts should be made to collect and systematize such data in order to have a clear picture about the gender-related issues in the countries in the first place. Generally, encouraging regular surveys, reports, statistics and other gender-based projects is a backbone for developing pro-women policies. In terms of socioeconomic indicators, making sure that women receive relevant education and training is crucial. The analysis showed that this especially turned out to be a problem in the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia. This problem can be potentially solved by introducing educational centers provide women with incentives and skills to become more politicized and participate in electoral campaigns. When

it comes to labor participation, increasing labor protection for women—including paid maternity leave and child welfare—is the first step of challenging the idea of a double burden. Eliminating gender discrimination at the workplace requires systematic supervision by national governments, international organizations and human rights organizations. Overall, making sure that women acquire financial and educational resources and not only encouraged to do so, but are also legally protected in the process, will provide women with an incentive to speak out and seek participation in decision-making processes on a state level.

Changing cultural attitudes, however, is a much more complicated task. Some researchers argue that promoting economic equality by some of the measures mentioned above is the foundation of creating an egalitarian culture in societies (Norris & Inglehart 2004). While those measures could promote women's confidence as citizens, it is crucial to encourage active and meaningful political participation once women are in parliament. That means putting women's voices on the political agenda and making sure that women are the driving force of policy change across societal institutions and not just those that affect them directly. These measures also need to go hand in hand with governmental support and media coverage in order to promote the idea and that women can take upon themselves the responsibility of public office.

Although the top-down approach with positive measures did not prove very effective—moreover, in some post-Soviet countries it turned out to be clearly ‘just for show’ and was not meant to bring about change—giving up on it altogether would be the wrong way to go. In countries like Ukraine, Moldova and Estonia, for instance, the cultural and socioeconomic landscape is quite egalitarian, meaning that if these countries were to introduce affirmative measures, such as gender quotas, there is a high chance they would be successful in increasing the number of women in parliament, as it has been in Lithuania so far. As for the rest of the post-Soviet region, however, such actions first and foremost need to be combined with promoting gender equality in education, labor and societal values.



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