

**Political Participation of Women in the Parliament of Kazakhstan**

by

Nurgul Mamzhanova

Dayana Zhunussova

Aigerim Kairatkyzy

Supervisor

Clifford Wentworth Frasier

**Policy Analysis Exercise Project**

Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
Degree of Master of Public Policy

Graduate School of Public Policy

Nazarbayev University

Astana, Kazakhstan

April 12, 2024

## **Abstract**

This research discusses the political participation of women in Kazakhstan and current gender policies that attempt to ensure equal opportunities for women in the legislative branch. Throughout decades, women were excluded from the political arena indicating a high level of gender inequality in the state. To promote gender equality, Kazakhstan in collaboration with international organizations has made progress, but not in all public spheres. Women's political participation still seems to be low which makes them underrepresented. This paper focuses on the legislative branch of Kazakhstan as one of the public spheres having a low level of women's participation. To establish gender equality, Kazakhstan has adopted various policies and regulations which have not yielded considerable results. This paper attempts to provide explanations for the ineffectiveness of the current policies and demonstrate the attitudes of people toward women politicians in Kazakhstan through mixed-method research. The data was collected via survey of the public and interviews with female deputies. The survey collected responses from 350 citizens across Kazakhstan showing the attitudes of citizens toward women in politics. Interviews were conducted with 6 current and former members of the Parliament (MPs) that provided detailed information on current and past experiences of women in the Parliament. The study reveals that the underrepresentation of women in Parliament stems from traditional beliefs and expectations about women's role in society. However, there is a high level of public trust in female politicians indicating the potential for further advancement of women in the political arena.

## Contents

Abstract.....	1
1. Introduction.....	3
1.1. Background.....	3
1.2. Problem Statement.....	3
1.3. Research Questions.....	4
1.4. The Objective of the Study.....	4
1.5. Electoral System of Kazakhstan.....	4
2. Literature Review.....	5
2.1. Political Participation and Women in the World.....	5
2.2. Historical Perspective on Women’s Role in Kazakhstan.....	6
2.2.1. Social Image of Women in Kazakhstan’s History.....	6
2.2.2. Women in Soviet vs Post-Soviet Kazakhstan.....	6
2.3. Gender Inequality in Kazakhstan.....	7
2.4. Women’s Political Participation in Kazakhstan.....	8
2.5. Government action.....	10
3. Methodology.....	12
3.1. Data Collection.....	14
4. Research Findings.....	15
4.1. Survey Results.....	15
4.2. Interview Results.....	19
5. Discussion.....	22
6. Conclusion.....	25
6.1. Recommendations.....	25
References.....	29
Appendices.....	34

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Background**

Gender equality appears to be an important indicator of the development of the state as well as human progress. Women's participation in politics is an important condition for maintaining democratic governance (Shakirova, 2015, p. 214). Therefore, there is a high necessity for the provision of equal rights and opportunities for all, allowing women to be involved in decision-making processes that will ensure the socio-economic development of the state. Since independence, Kazakhstan has significantly promoted women's empowerment in public life. Kazakhstan has ratified important international commitments, including the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, consciously holding a course for gender policy (UN Women, 2022). Over time, Kazakhstan adopted the National Strategy for Gender Equality in 2006, which entailed the creation and development of the legislation on gender equality (UNDP, 2021).

Gender quotas are a world practice to recruit more women in politics. Most of the world's states are taking such measures to guarantee equal access for women to the electoral process. Following this, in 2020, president Tokayev signed laws providing 30% quotas for women in party lists. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of such quotas is at stake (Ibrayeva, 2020). Despite the accomplishments, gender gaps and imbalances persist. According to the website of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2023), the share of women in Mazhilis is 20%, while the share of women in the Senate is equal to 17.3%. Moreover, the National Strategy for Gender Equality, which evaluates the current gender situation in social and political life, recognizes the presence of gender stereotypes and distrust towards women in politics as well as the actual employment problems, unequal opportunities, and discrimination in Kazakhstan (Akorda, 2005). The issues of gender inequality and women's participation in politics are existing and acute problems in Kazakhstan, which need a thorough analysis in terms of policy formulation and implementation.

### **1.2. Problem Statement**

There remains a relatively low level of political participation by women in the politics of Kazakhstan.

### **1.3. Research Questions**

1. Why, regardless of government initiatives, is women's political participation in Kazakhstan still low?
2. What are the attitudes of people about women politicians in Kazakhstan?

### **1.4. The Objective of the Study**

The literature review and results of the interviews will demonstrate what barriers women face in the Parliament both from the sides of government and citizens, which discourage women from entering politics. Furthermore, the responses to surveys and questionnaires, reflecting the public opinion on women in politics, will confirm whether the arguments about social stereotypes studied by previous literature about women truly demotivate them from participating in politics.

Along the way, we will gain insight into the government policy aimed at increasing political engagement of women, a policy designed to counteract the various barriers. Furthermore, we believe that research will support more progress toward equalized participation of women in politics.

### **1.5. Electoral System of Kazakhstan**

The Parliament of Kazakhstan is the highest representative body that consists of a higher chamber, the Senate, and a lower chamber, the Mazhilis. The Senate consists of 50 deputies. 40 Senate deputies are elected by two persons from every region, cities of republican significance, and the capital of the country based on indirect suffrage by secret ballot. The other 10 Senate deputies are appointed by the President of Kazakhstan, 5 of which are proposed by the People's Assembly of Kazakhstan. The term of office of the deputies of the Senate is six years. The Mazhilis consists of 98 deputies elected according to the mixed electoral system. 69 out of 98 deputies in Mazhilis are elected from political parties on party lists in a single national electoral district. The remaining 29 deputies are elected in single-mandate territorial electoral districts. The term of office of the deputies of the Mazhilis is five years (Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024). As of 2023, according to the websites of the Senate and Mazhilis of Parliament of the RK (2023), out of 148 deputies in the Parliament of Kazakhstan, 27 of them are women: 10 female deputies in the Senate and only 17 women in Mazhilis of the Parliament.

Because there could be institutional barriers to women's participation in politics, for instance, related to the role of party lists for Mazhilis elections, we ask current and former deputies the broad question of why they think there are fewer women in Parliament. Such a question captures their perspectives on institutional barriers, among other types of barriers.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Political Participation and Women in the World**

To begin with, political participation is defined as activities that affect the government structure and its decisions in which citizens are engaged through a selection of government authorities and policies (Conway, 2001, p. 231). In democratic regimes, participation in politics is the right given to any citizen as an opportunity to influence and change government policies. However, according to Conway (2001), "only certain segments of the citizenry can effectively seek and win" elected and selected offices in high governmental positions, which is men, as the seats are allocated disproportionately between two gender groups around the world (p. 231). This disproportionality is demonstrated by the fact that, currently, "women's representation in legislatures around the world is 15 percent" (Bari, 2005, p. 1). In other words, when the democratic governments that seek equality and equity per se are allegedly moving toward gender equality that can resolve the problem of low political participation of women, the numbers show that the process is too slow and the problem is not addressed correctly.

According to Teorell (2006), "participation is a mechanism for representation", which means government officials are elected to represent the public, however, women tend to be underrepresented in politics (p. 789). That is, the regime indeed might play a role in shaping the representation of women in all spheres, which is tested by Viterna and Fallon (2008). Viterna and Fallon (2008) deduce that women can form effective coalitions under a democratic regime, which means that feminist movements are more effective when they aim at states where the democratizing process is complete. This might explain why the political activism of women and the share of women in the legislature of Kazakhstan is low given that the Kazakhstani regime is a weak democracy.

## **2.2. Historical Perspective on Women's Role in Kazakhstan**

### *2.2.1. Social Image of Women in Kazakhstan's History*

Historically, the nomadic Kazakh society was patriarchal, where the leading role of protector and breadwinner in the family was played by a man, while women's role was usually associated with the concepts of "wisdom", "fertility", and a family "hearth" (Abdikadyrova et al., 2018). This was due to the greater degree of their direct involvement in household activities of the nomadic society, dictated by the division of labor. While some researchers note the humiliating position of women compared to the position of men in a nomadic society, other historians present Kazakh women as brave warriors and wise rulers who had honorable positions in society (Abdikadyrova et al., 2018).

The Kazakh people experienced numerous transformations in the way women were perceived and their roles in society as cultural traditions have been changing since the time of Tengrism and the adoption of Islam (Kozhakhmetova, 2022). So, the idea of oppressed women was not widespread and there is extensive historical evidence that women leaders were prevalent within the nomadic pastoral confederation and achieved great military success (Kozhakhmetova, 2022). The Great Steppe had a culture that valued masculinity and heroism, among women as well (Abildina and Eskazinova, 2013). The existence of such contradictions is explained by the fact that a woman performs several social roles throughout her life, sometimes at the same time (Nuryшева et al., 2020). The social roles women perform at different stages of life affect the social status of women in Kazakh society.

### *2.2.2. Women in Soviet vs Post-Soviet Kazakhstan*

During the Soviet time, women were a symbol of equality, were well-educated, and demonstrated high leadership skills (Shakirova, 2015, p. 222). The soviet "zhensovety" defended the political and economic rights of women and promoted women in their professional sphere. The first female activists who joined the party were members of these women's councils (Zellerer & Vyortkin, 2004). However, this does not mean that the Soviet government perceived female public servants equal to their male counterparts. Soviet women mostly worked as street-level bureaucrats in education and healthcare sectors, which led to the lack of their political experience (Khassanova, 2001, p. 3). The fact is that the political election processes in the Soviet state were not democratic,

and there was a shortage of women in elected positions in the government, since men were mostly recruited from the party ranks (Khasanova, 2001, p. 3).

Since attaining independence, “there was a sharp decrease of women’s share at all levels of governing structures” (Khasanova, 2001, p. 3). According to Zellerer and Vyortkin (2004), women in independent Kazakhstan tend to choose a mix of old and new forms of empowerment strategies, namely Soviet strategies and those of modern Kazakhstan. Zeller and Vertkin (2004) argue that the reason why women themselves become defenders of their political and economic rights is due to underrepresentation in politics, lack of economic opportunities in a male-dominated society, and lack of assistance from the post-Soviet government. Considering historical aspects, the low political participation of women in modern Kazakhstan is associated with the Soviet past, which constrains the current institutional dynamics (Benedict, 2014, p.3).

### **2.3. Gender Inequality in Kazakhstan**

UN Women (2022) underlines the great progress of Kazakhstan in the promotion of gender equality in a wide range of spheres, referring to a huge change in the Gender Gap Index 2022 from 51st to 65th place. The Gender Gap Index indicates the progress of gender equality in education, health, economic participation, and politics (World Economic Forum, 2022). It shows that there is less gender gap in education opportunities, political empowerment, and wages (UN Women, 2022). Considering leadership positions for women, although there is an increasing number of women in government, the Parliament is experiencing a slight change (UN Women, 2022). Relying on the statistics provided by the Bureau of National Statistics of Kazakhstan for 2022, women make up 51% of judiciary positions, 53.4% in science, 32.3% in NGO and labor union leadership, 43% in small and medium-sized enterprises, and only 4% in government (UN Women, 2022). It can be inferred that women account for around 40-50% of public sectors and entrepreneurship, implying equal opportunities for both men and women which cannot be said about governmental positions.

Bari (2005) argues that the establishment of gender equality is the responsibility of both the country and international communities (p. 9). However, Shakirova (2015) underlines the inefficiency of local gender policies implemented with the help of IOs (pp. 211-212). Shakirova (2015) argues that the women’s movement in Kazakhstan is already at its highest point (p. 220).



In this regard, analyzing gender policies adopted in Kazakhstan, Kireyeva et al., (2021) mention three factors such as the labor force, leading positions, and the wage gap that are used to assess changes in the participation and activity of women. Based on the statistics comprising data from 2001 to 2019, aside from other sectors where the employment of women has increased significantly, a growth of the number of women in public health and public administration sectors increased only by about 1% (Kireyeva, et al., 2021). The involvement of women in decision-making positions in politics has not improved, despite the attempts to decrease the wage gap between male and female employees, provide full access to education for women, and increase the labor force. Gender policies do not specifically improve gender issues when it comes to politics because the government approaches do not include increased opportunities for women to be promoted to top positions in Parliament, for example. That is, for the political representation of women to be higher, the government needs to facilitate their participation in decision-making processes in government.

Emphasizing the importance of descriptive representation of women in Parliaments, O'Brien and Piscopo (2019) argue that the legislative branch directly represents the voices and the will of people, which is why women's inclusion and exclusion is the issue worth considering. An increased political participation of women can benefit them and others, but can make men disadvantaged (O'Brien & Piscopo, 2019). Specifically, when women lawmakers implement policies in favor of women leaders, children, and the most marginalized, men are expected to respond to the success of women unevenly as their political rights will be exercised by women (O'Brien & Piscopo, 2019). Accordingly, male politicians are supposed to be constraints in both cases of success and failure on the path of women becoming decision-makers in the legislative area, imposing social standards and stereotypes of who women are and putting them in a small world (Khassanova, 2000).

#### **2.4. Women's Political Participation in Kazakhstan**

Despite the progress of Kazakhstan in the promotion of gender equality, women continue to be underrepresented in public and political spheres and their decision-making role is limited. This is evident in Parliament, local governing bodies, executive offices, and municipal government (Mynbayeva, 2016). According to Aliya Kuzhabekova et al. (2018), four main barriers hinder women's political participation in Kazakhstan: socio-cultural and religious barriers, gender

stereotypes in career choice, male dominance in the organizational structure of the civil service in Kazakhstan, and lack of work-life balance. The patriarchal structure and religious norms put women into second roles and deprive them of the opportunity to compete with men (Sapargalikyzy & Seidumanov, 2021). As women take on the social role of "mother" associated with empathy, care, and sensitivity, society expects women to choose appropriate "female" occupations. Education and health care are stereotypically considered feminine fields, although leadership positions in these fields are usually held by men (Kuzhabekova et al., 2018). Difficulty in balancing work with family responsibilities is the biggest barrier to women's career advancements. The maternity leave, which causes career interruption, keeps them out of leadership positions (Kuzhabekova et al., 2018). Being busy with household chores, Kazakh women become more indifferent to political activities. Khassanova (2000) states women's lives are determined by concepts of "the small world", where their world is narrowed to a kitchen from the windows of which they turn into indirect observers of political life. All these barriers become greater when women attempt to participate in the legislature as they are not welcomed in politics. For example, Aigul Solovyova, a former member of Kazakhstan's Mazhilis, claims that "politics has always been a man's business and it is men who decide to allow women to enter the politics or not" (Witte, 2022). Herrick and Sapiyeva (1998) found that Kazakhstanis most often rely on gender generalizations when evaluating politicians (p. 29). Thus, the negative perception of women politicians in Kazakhstan also remains an obstacle to women's active participation in political life.

Considering the statistical data on the political participation of women in Kazakhstan, the proportion of women among political civil servants is 9.3%, among administrative civil servants of corps A - 4.1%, and corps B - 55.3% (Forbes Woman Kazakhstan, 2019). Out of 18 seats in the renewed Government, including the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Ministers, and ministers, women held only two positions, i.e. 11.1% (Forbes Woman Kazakhstan, 2019). Notably, no woman has ever been appointed to the post of akim of the region or the city of republican significance (Aulbekova, 2019). As for the Mazhilis of the Parliament, an enormous number of men "are selected from the elected members of the Mazhilis to occupy high positions in the government or the presidential administration," while only one woman was elected in the same way, who was the daughter of the first president (Zeinilova, 2017, p. 4). When it comes to other women who have few seats in the Mazhilis, they have never been elected as equally as men have. Moreover, Zeinilova (2017, p.4) argues that women in Parliament have never been able to voice

issues related to the status and well-being of women, and if they intend to do so, they usually lose influence and authority in political circles. In other words, women in Parliament, being representatives of female citizens of Kazakhstan may not have the intention to deal with issues related to violence and discrimination against women. Based on interviews conducted with 40 female political representatives who worked in the Mazhilis and local authorities in 2016, Zeinilova (2017) found that 90% of respondents were “reluctant to participate in official politics” due to lack of motivation and interest (p. 3).

On top of that, Tanalinova (2012) argues that the female electorate itself gives preference to men, implying that there is electoral behavior among women in which women do not support each other, making the female electorate less cooperative and stable than the male electorate. Nevertheless, Tanalinova (2012) adds that women should strengthen solidarity towards each other to promote the advancement of women in politics, which can be achieved through information and educational activities among the female electorate. Agreeing with Tanalinova’s point, Maltseva (2021) believes that the promotion of women into politics is already in an active process as recently there has been a significant increase in political activity of Kazakhstani women. According to Maltseva (2021), the development of social media and the revival of feminist ideas among the young female generation contribute to the current political empowerment of women, so there is a potential for changing political institutions in Kazakhstan in near future.

## **2.5. Government action**

Starting from the 1990s, the Kazakh government has made considerable efforts to combat gender inequality. Kazakh women were given complete voting rights in 1993, which was two years after the country's independence, following the limited suffrage they were granted in 1924 (European Institute for Asian Studies, 2020, p.3). In 1999, the government of Kazakhstan implemented the National Action Plan aimed at 'Enhancing the Status of Women in the Republic of Kazakhstan', which had twelve objectives to better the lives of Kazakh women. A national gender equality strategy which was planned to be implemented within 10 years was introduced in 2006. Ensuring higher involvement of women in public life was the main focus of the strategy. This step made Kazakhstan the first country in Central Asia that set up a national organization advocating for gender equality (European Institute for Asian Studies, 2020, p.3). Specifically,

strategic initiatives pursued an increase in women's representation in politics and a response to violence against women (Shegenova, 2012). However, little progress in protecting women's rights and interests has been made since the adoption of the strategy for gender equality (Segizbayeva et al., 2014). Khairullayeva et. al (2022) believes that the implementation of this strategy is mostly explained by the country's aspiration to consolidate its democratic image in the international arena (p. 1). Nevertheless, the study also reveals that the introduction of gender equality strategy brought a slight positive change in women's civic engagement but there is still an unfavorable public perception of women in politics (Khairullayeva et al., 2022, p. 8).

Ayupova and Kussainov (2018) add that after the gender equality strategy, Kazakhstan has introduced various legal instruments to promote the rights of women and children. The updated concept of family and gender policy launched in 2016, aims to increase the proportion of women in leadership positions in the public, quasi-government, and corporate sectors of economics by 30% by 2030 (Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 384, Adilet Zan, 2016). At the same time, this initiative aims to reduce the level of domestic violence against women and reduce the wage gap between men and women in Kazakhstan.

Analyzing statistics on the representation of women in politics for the last 10 years, Kazakhstan has made some progress since 2011 when there were only 17.8% of women in the Parliament. According to the Bureau of National Statistics, there was a sharp increase in female representatives in the legislative branch from 17.8% to 26.2% in 2013 (ASPR of the RK, 2021). However, over the past seven years, there has been stagnation in the representation of women in parliamentary bodies. In 2015 there were 26.7% of women in the Parliament of Kazakhstan, by 2016 the percentage share of women had increased to 27.6%. Starting from 2017 it remained constant at 27.4% till 2019. It dropped to 26.5% in 2020 (ASPR of the RK, 2021).

To further stimulate women's political activity, Kazakhstan introduced a 30% gender quota in 2020. The establishment of a 30% limit for women representatives in Parliament in 2020 was considered not entirely logical, since the proportion of women in 2016 had already reached 27.6%. Aliya Tlegenova (2021) sharply criticized the government's initiative, since the gender quota implies the representation of both women and youth. Tlegenova (2021) argues that since the percentage share of women on parliamentary lists is entirely up to the discretion of the parties, there is a high possibility that the quotas will be filled by young people, among whom there are a disproportionate number of men and only a few women. Second, the quota applies only to party

lists, which in the closed-list electoral system allows parties to distribute electoral mandates at their discretion after the publication of election results. Third, since there are no control mechanisms and sanctions for non-compliance with the quota, there is no guarantee that the parties will keep these seats in Parliament for women (Tlegenova, 2021). Tlegenova (2021) provides an example of two parties adhering to quotas in their initial party lists, however, according to the elections to the Mazhilis, only 20% of women candidates were from the People's Party of Kazakhstan and only 17% of women candidates represented the Ak Zhol party.

Overall, statistics demonstrate that the quota is not the best approach to resolve the problem of women's low participation because government seeks to reach equal outcomes instead of creating equal opportunities. According to Khassanova (2001), it appears that government authorities "tried to build-in" women's problems into already worked out plans", putting women in the same minority list as youth and people with disabilities, which means that the problem of gender inequality was not intended to be addressed properly (p. 4). Moreover, the country still pursues the promotion of a unified national identity that has subverted mechanisms of gender equality, placing it away from the top agenda setting (Benedict, 2014, p. 3). Even if women enter the top positions in the government with the help of gender quotas, the situation will not change in the direction of equality because the decisions are made within the "patriarchal context of modern democracies" on the "male's terms" (Bari, 2005, p. 3). Therefore, gender quotas can facilitate women's political participation only when the wider politics, that is the governmental system, will be transformed, which means treating women and men equally.

### **3. Methodology**

The study of women's political participation in Kazakhstan's Parliament will rely on survey and interview methods.

The interviews will be conducted with female deputies of the Parliament to obtain information about their experience working in the legislative branch. Interviews will not be limited to the women deputies who are currently holding an office, women deputies who were members of the previous Parliament will also be invited (see Appendix A). This will help to collect more information. To get in touch with female deputies of the Senate – where there are 10 female deputies – we will contact the reception of each Senate committee they are in. To get in touch with

the female deputies of Mazhilis – where there are 17 of them – we will appeal to the deputies through the Mazhilis official website. If necessary, we will resort to a convenience sample of contacts provided by one of the NU GSPP faculty professors or try to reach them through social media accounts.

Overall, with an expectation that deputies will confirm their participation in the interview and approve its usage in our paper, 10 semi-structured interviews with current and ex-deputies will be conducted. A small-N study might create a selection bias, however, since the likelihood of receiving a positive answer to our requests to conduct an interview is expected to be low due to the busy schedules of the deputies, interviews with 10 female deputies out of 27 current deputies should provide an indication of other women in the Parliament. The idea behind interviewing female deputies is that their responses will help us answer the first research question on the reasons for the constant low political participation of women in Kazakhstan.

Furthermore, conducting a survey will indicate the general public's opinion about women in politics. As of 2023, the total population of Kazakhstan is 19,766,807 people, 61.8% of them live in urban areas, while 38.2% are rural residents (ASPR of the RK, 2023). The research team assumes that the strategic sample which is designed to approximate representative sample size of at least 600 urban respondents will capture the average Kazakhstani citizen who usually visits public square places.

This study will pursue a collection of opinions of women and men over the age of 18 as this category of citizens is anticipated to be familiar with the issue of low female participation in politics in Kazakhstan and be able to answer all the survey questions. Since there are three of us in the research team, we plan to split up into different locations: Almaty, Karaganda, Pavlodar, and Astana, and travel there to distribute questionnaires to citizens in the public squares (see Appendix B). Two places were selected for conducting our survey that includes the post office of KazPost and Public Service Centers (PSC). Questionnaires are planned to be distributed in these places because these are the places where an average citizen regularly seeks public services. Since a lot of people often visit PSCs and KazPost waiting for the service, we will take advantage of long queues and ask waiting people to participate in the survey. Before distributing questionnaires, we will introduce ourselves as graduate students who are conducting scientific research. The survey that people will take will notify them about confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. We plan to spend 3-5 hours per week at the study sites (PSCs and KazPost) for three

months. This approach is not purely a random sample, however, it still makes it feasible to collect hundreds of fairly reliable opinions applicable to 61.8% of Kazakhstani citizens who live in urban areas. The research team considers this approach to be more representative than conducting an online survey through social media platforms for several reasons. First, the method creates a sample that reflects the demographic characteristics of the average citizen of Kazakhstan. Second, the research team suggests that the method suffers from less selection bias in terms of average Kazakhstani people visiting public squares compared to those who self-select to participate in the survey. People participating in a social media survey may reflect different categories of the public and have higher political awareness. Despite the fact that random sampling is the most preferred approach, the research team has done the second best method that approximates a representative sample. However, the main limitation of the research is the financial and time constraints that will not allow us to visit all cities of Kazakhstan. Since Astana is the capital with a high concentration of civil servants and politicians, and the cities of Almaty and Shymkent have relatively educated populations, conducting surveys of the residents of smaller cities is necessary for the research.

### **3.1. Data Collection**

In total, we collected 350 survey responses from the general public and 6 interview responses from former and current female Parliament deputies. As part of the study, we surveyed people in KazPost and Public Center Services, asking them to scan the QR code of the survey website and submit the responses. Based on the opportunity, we traveled to Pavlodar, Karaganda, and Almaty to survey people in the mentioned centers. There was some difficulty in collecting responses from people older than 60 because we found fewer such persons waiting in line in KazPost and PSCs and those who we found were sometimes not comfortable with QR technology.

Regarding the interviews, we expected to collect 10 interviews with 10 deputies, however, we did not receive a confirmation from four deputies with whom meetings were requested. Interviewees were reached out via contact shared by the professor of the faculty, Facebook accounts, and requests for meetings on Parliament's official website. One interviewee, a former deputy, conducted a guest lecture previously at the university, where she was invited for the interview beforehand and confirmed her participation. She also shared the contact of another deputy, who would greatly contribute to our research. In other words, when it comes to interviews,

the social media networks, the snowball effect, where professors and interviewees recommend other potential interviewees, and the openness of former and current deputies contributed significantly to our work.

#### 4. Research Findings

##### 4.1. Survey Results

For the analysis of survey results we converted all variables – including categorical – into numeric data for the use in Stata software. The summary of results is as follows:

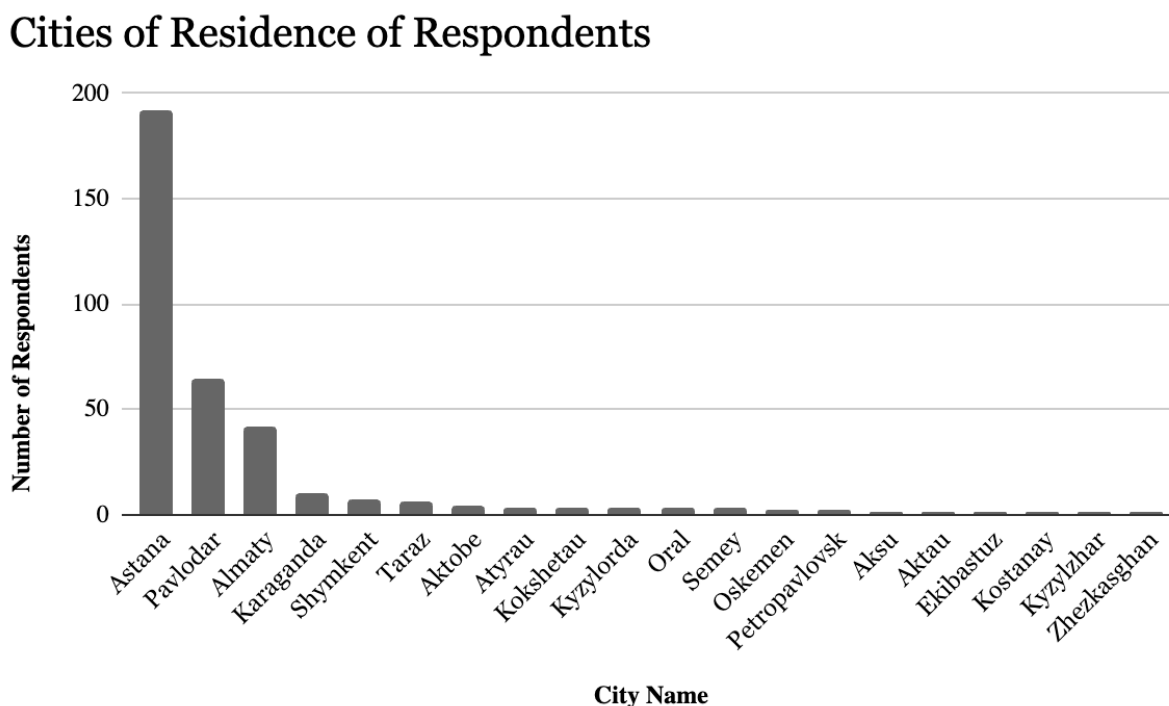
*Table 1. Summary for all variables.*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Obs</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. dev.</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
Gender	347	1.27	0.45	1	2
Age	350	1.73	0.89	1	4
Younger and Older than 45	350	1.24	0.43	1	2
City	350	3.01	3.77	1	20
Large and Small cities	350	1.31	0.46	1	2
Satisfaction	350	2.71	1.01	1	5
Capability	350	3.32	0.95	1	5
Trust	350	3.87	1.08	1	5
Voting	350	1.69	0.46	1	2
Increasing representation	350	1.73	0.90	1	3

According to the data, out of 350 observations, 252 respondents are women, 95 are men, and 3 preferred not to answer (see Appendix C). The majority of people are younger than 45, precisely, 265 people mentioned their age as 18-30 and 30-45, while the rest 85 of the respondents are older than 45 (see Appendix D).



Figure 1. Distribution of cities mentioned in the survey by respondents.



According to Figure 1, the most frequently mentioned city is Astana, followed by Pavlodar and Almaty. Since Astana, Almaty, and Shymkent are the largest cities, we categorized them as “big cities” and other cities were categorized as “small cities”. In this sense, 241 of the respondents come from large cities and 109 are from small cities.

Regarding the question about satisfaction with the current state of political representation of women in Kazakhstan, the most frequently mentioned answer is “neutral” (see Appendix E). While 40% of respondents tend to be neutral about this issue, 40% of respondents are dissatisfied with the status quo. This implies the majority is informed about the fact that women hold less than 30% of seats in Parliament and are not indifferent to the issue.

Nonetheless, more than half of the surveyed people regard women as equally capable as men in holding leadership positions (see Appendix F). Only 12% think that women are much less or less capable of doing the same work as men, while others admit that women’s work capabilities are similar and/or better in some spheres when compared to men.

Related to this, when measuring their trust in women politicians from 1 to 5, where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest degree, 125 respondents chose 5, 98 respondents chose 4, 96

respondents chose 3, and the rest of people exhibited their low trust (see Appendix G). In other words, since people regard women as equally capable of making decisions as men, they also tend to strongly trust women politicians. To test the correlation between variables, a correlation test was run, the result of which showed a significant correlation between the capability of women and the trust of people at a 95% significance level (see Appendix H). This implies that people believe in the high capability of women and highly trust them, that is why they are not satisfied with the low representation of women in the Parliament. Moreover, this assumption is also confirmed by 57.4% of respondents, who think that more women in Parliament will enhance the decision-making process (see Appendix I). Although the majority of the respondents, 68.9%, did not vote for the female deputy candidate, generally they support women politicians (see Appendix J).

Furthermore, to check whether there is a statistically significant variation in demographic categorical variables such as gender, age (younger than 45 and older than 45), and urban area (large and small cities) in terms of three variables such as satisfaction, capabilities, and trust, an independent two-sample t-test was conducted in Stata. Along with the bi-variate regression, a two-sample Wilcoxon rank-sum test (the Mann-Whitney test) and t-test for results verification, where gender, age, and city were treated as independent variables and satisfaction, capability, and trust as dependent variables. According to the results of three tests, there is a statistically significant difference in means of female and male gender groups in terms of satisfaction, capability, and trust at a 0.05 significance level (see Appendix K). On average, women respondents chose “dissatisfied” for the satisfaction question, “equally” for the capability question, and “4 out of 5” for the question about trust. Whereas, male respondents chose “neutral”, “less capable”, and “3 out of 5” for the same mentioned questions, respectively. Similarly, when it comes to the satisfaction variable, there is also a significant difference in means of age and city groups. Specifically, the average answer of young people and older people to the satisfaction question was “dissatisfied” and “neutral”, correspondingly. However, as for capability and trust variables, the results show that the distributions are not statistically different at a 0.05 significance level for age and city groups.

Furthermore, showing statistically significant differences, the results from running the t-test indicate that women and men appear to have different average scores on satisfaction with the current situation of low political participation of women. Specifically, on average female respondents are dissatisfied while more men are mostly neutral. Notably, this trend also applies to the questions on the capability of women politicians and the trust of the public in them, as more

female survey respondents think that women politicians are equally capable compared to male politicians and deserve a higher level of trust. When it comes to the variation of opinions depending on the age of respondents, it is different between younger and older groups, because on average young adults are dissatisfied with the problem whereas the older generation tends to be neutral to this problem. However, the views of respondents younger and older than 45 years old are converging on the questions about capability and trust, which implies that on average both age groups regard women as equally capable as men and trust them highly. A similar trend is noticed when analyzing the results in terms of the city of residence of surveyed people. Namely, there is a statistically significant difference in the opinions of people from big and small cities, as big city residents are less content with the current state of women politicians, whereas, in contrast, small city residents are more content with the status quo. Nonetheless, despite empirical differences in data, residents of both types of urban areas tend to agree on one view regarding capability and trust, as the average answer was equally capable and higher trust.

Moving to the results of an open-ended question about the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in the Parliament, some of the survey respondents mentioned several reasons resulting in 434 responses from 350 respondents. 73 out of 350 people who participated in the survey refrained from responding to this question which accounts for 17% of all 434 responses (see Appendix L). “Mentality” implying the cultural beliefs and values dominating in Kazakh society was the most frequent answer mentioned 136 times, constituting 31%. 100 responses mentioned “gender roles and stereotypes” which makes up 23%. The category of “gender roles and stereotypes” indicates social expectations and assumptions regarding women’s roles and behaviors in society. With a notable difference “lack of competencies” and “lack of public trust” were mentioned 34 and 33 times respectively accounting for about 8% each. The “lack of competencies” category encompasses the idea that women do not possess the necessary knowledge and skills to be a deputy which explains their underrepresentation while “lack of public trust” indicates a low level of trust and confidence in female deputies among the citizens regarding their effectiveness and integrity. The least mentioned reasons are “corruption”, “lack of support” and “lack of interest in politics” which had 22, 19, and 17 responses. By corruption, respondents imply corrupt practices during elections and the decision-making process in the Parliament. Lack of support encompasses the idea that government institutions fail to support women in politics. “Lack of interest in politics” which was the least popular reason mentioned by

the respondents implies a low level of interest in political affairs among women. It can be assumed that respondents with patriarchal views might have indicated this reason, making women themselves responsible for their underrepresentation without the consideration of external barriers.

#### **4.2. Interview Results**

In total, 6 interviews were conducted with female deputies from the Mazhilis and the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Out of the 6 interviewees, four women currently hold the post of deputies of the Parliament and two women are ex-deputies of the Mazhilis and well-known political figures in Kazakhstan. According to Gaukhar Tanasheva, the current deputy of the Mazhilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Member of the Committee for Social and Cultural Development, the lack of legislative protection and laws ensuring gender equality results in low political participation of women in Kazakhstan. Gaukhar Tanasheva argues that the influence of women in the decision-making process is severely limited since the representation of women in leadership positions remains very low. For example, in local executive bodies of 17 regions and 3 largest cities of the country, the total share of women leaders is 17.8%, while there are only a few women ministers in the government, and not a single female akim of a city or district (Tanasheva, 2023). Gaukhar Tanasheva argues that if there were more female governors, the situation would have improved significantly in many regions across the country. Dinara Shukizhanova, the current deputy of the Mazhilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Member of the Committee on Economic Reform and Regional Development also believes that the greater empathy and consistency inherent in women can make them excellent leaders, akims, and ministers. According to Dinara Shukizhanova (2023), a woman can intuitively communicate better with the public because she is more empathetic to people's problems, less prone to corruption, and more concerned about solving a problem. She believes that the main reason for the low representation of women in politics is cultural stereotypes and women's fear. Dinara Shukizhanova (2023) believes that women themselves should stop promoting the idea that politics is not a woman's business, since "professionalism has no face and gender". She also shared that she has never faced pressure from men or concessions within the walls of Parliament just because she is a woman. In her opinion, when a woman demonstrates her competence and professionalism, she is recognized and treated as a professional without any gender component.

Natalya Dementyeva, a current deputy of the Mazhilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Member of the Committee on Legislation and Judicial Reform, also never faced pressure or any kind of discrimination from male deputies at work. She explains the low participation of women in politics with the argument that it is simply impossible to combine the roles of wife, mother, and successful politician. For the sake of a career in politics, women most often have to sacrifice family and personal happiness, and many Kazakh women, being homemakers, are not ready to choose in favor of politics (Dementyeva, 2023). Therefore, Natalya Dementieva admits that high politics is a man's business since men by nature are assumed to be brilliant politicians, whereas women are only in isolated cases. Nuriya Niyazova, a member of the Committee on Finance and Budget of the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, argues that our Kazakh identity and Eastern mentality are the main barriers to women's low political participation in the country. According to Nuriya Niyazova (2023), family responsibilities and social expectations that require Kazakhstani women to be the guardians of the family hearth, participate in the upbringing of children, and take care of the older generation make it difficult for women to balance family and career in politics. As a female member of the Parliament, Nuriya Niyazova notes instances of gender discrimination when "women are never being given the first word in meetings" or simply in the group photos, where female deputies are always at the end of the hierarchical chain which appears to be shocking to foreign delegates.

Zauresh Battalova, an honored politician and former deputy of the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, agrees that a male-dominated political environment contributes to the marginalization of women in Parliament. She has also encountered cases of men talking to women in raised voices, whispering and talking over women's speeches in meetings, and generally not providing any support to their female colleagues. Shortly, Battalova (2023) states that "bullying and pressure are always put on women", which is psychologically difficult for female deputies to deal with. Moreover, raising the issue of discrimination in the work environment and noting cases when young female deputies tend to face more difficulties caused by male colleagues, Zauresh Battalova (2023) emphasizes that all deputies "need to be treated equally regardless of age" and gender. The former deputy also shared her experience as an opposition politician, noting that having a clear dissenting position against the ruling party can lead to restrictions on freedom of speech and difficulties in accessing resources and supporting one's political activities (Battalova, 2023).

Like her deputy colleagues, Zauresh Battalova (2023) agrees that cultural traditions and societal expectations primarily contribute to women's hesitation to enter politics. However, another important reason for the low representation of women in politics that has not been mentioned by any other interviewed female deputies and cited researchers is the lack of time and financial resources. Women face economic barriers to funding the election campaigns, especially when the political party is unwilling to promote a female candidate and she must finance it at her own expense. According to Zauresh Battalova (2023), women often enter politics later in life when they already have family and children, thus they cannot afford to spend money from the family budget on their political projects and initiatives. So economic barriers remain a serious problem for women who would like to participate in elections and compete with men. Importantly, Zauresh Battalova is the only deputy who spoke to the institutional barriers, namely financial requirements in the beginning of the election process. Other deputies did not speak to any institutional barriers within the electoral system.

Meruert Kazbekova, a politician and former deputy of the Mazhilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan, adds that women themselves may not be confident in their political aspirations. In addition, she suggests that the existing intense competition among men primarily focused on business and power, may be reluctant to involve women due to fears of women not participating in corruption schemes and their potential orientation towards serving people rather than lobbying interests of particular groups. According to Meruert Kazbekova (2023), "they don't let women in because of state budget money". Nevertheless, both interviewees emphasize the importance of the presence and active participation of women in the legislative branch where decisions about how the government shall operate are made because women contribute to the order in the country. Specifically, Zauresh Battalova (2023) believes that "men perceive the development of the economy, ... statehood and social security of population one-sidedly", that is why participation of women, which in turn will ensure the pluralism of opinions, is important for the advancement of decision-making processes for the common good.

Furthermore, some deputies believe that besides barriers that constrain women from entering the elections for deputy positions and further serving their mandate and discrimination in the work environment, there is a problem of lack of interest of women in politics overall. Meruert Kazbekova (2023) says that "women are not very active themselves" meaning that the majority of women are not interested in participating in political decision-making processes. Nonetheless,

Zauresh Battalova (2023) also shares that women “began to have an interest in politics”. For that reason, she insists on the promotion of the political activity of women. Zauresh Battalova created a League of Women’s Solidarity, “Zhiger”, where she teaches women to be politically active to be able to compete with men in the political landscape. She advocates for more such training and seminars to support women politicians and activists to speed up the process of transformation in Kazakhstan because, as she says, only more proactive and trained women that are firm in their civic positions have the opportunity to make their way into politics. Generally, all interviewees noted an increased interest in politics and a positive shift in Kazakhstanis’ perception of women in politics. Shukizhanova (2023) believes that only through examples of successful and professional female politicians, long-existing gender stereotypes in our country can be changed.

Regarding government initiatives to ensure gender equality, interviewed deputies have different opinions about the 30% gender quota but the majority confirm that this policy is problematic and needs either changes or a total abolishment. For example, Natalya Dementyeva and Nuriya Niyazova support the gender quota and believe that this percentage should grow annually, as this allows for a more inclusive Parliament, which directly affects the decision-making process. In contrast, Zauresh Battalova, Meruert Kazbekova, and Dinara Shukizhanova argue that the gender quota system is very ineffective and propose its abolition. According to them, gender quota appears to be ineffective because the number of women in Parliament does not increase and their representation does not grow. The gender quota was originally designed to target only women, however with time and the addition of changes that “distorted the quota”, today the 30% includes women, youth, and people with disabilities. As a result, the image of the current women's deputy is “a young woman with a disability” (Battalova, 2023). Moreover, Dinara Shukizhanova (2023) sharply criticizes the quota system, since it purposefully determines the composition of the government already at the beginning of the elections. Zauresh Battalova, Meruert Kazbekova, and Dinara Shukizhanova believe that the election of candidates should be based solely on the professional qualities and competencies of a person, regardless of whether the candidate is a woman or man, old or young, or a person with a disability.

## **5. Discussion**

Having analyzed the data, the research findings demonstrate the strong connection between the general public’s and female deputies’ opinions about the political participation of women in

the Parliament of Kazakhstan. The research shows that female deputies and the public recognize that the problem of women's low participation in politics exists and needs to be addressed. The data collected firsthand by the research team was found to be consistent with the secondary data from academic literature. Triangulating our research findings with secondary data from academic literature revealed compelling insights, which confirm that women's low participation is a problem. According to the survey results, most people are not satisfied with the status quo regarding women politicians in the country, which indicates that people are not indifferent to this problem. Addressing the second research question regarding people's attitudes towards women politicians, study results show that, in general, the public positively perceives women politicians and supports them. According to survey results, 91% of respondents have a high level of trust in female politicians and consider them equally capable of making important decisions at the political level. The interviewed deputies agree that women have enough competencies and capabilities to make political decisions, moreover, they believe that innate female empathy and communication skills make women excellent leaders.

Overall, in the course of analyzing the results of the survey, two large pictures of respondents emerge. The first picture portrays a young woman from the big city, who is more dissatisfied with the status quo of women's role in politics and appraises women politicians as equally or more capable and worthy of higher trust. While, the second picture shows an image of an older man from a small city, who is more satisfied with the issue, considers women politicians as equally or less capable than men politicians, and trusts them less. In other words, checking the variation in opinions and whether they are different depending on gender, age, and urban area gives a clearer picture of public opinion.

Answering our first research question: "Why, regardless of government initiatives, is women's political participation in Kazakhstan still low?", gender stereotypes and traditional oriental mentality remain the main reason for the low political participation of women in Kazakhstan, and a targeted 30% gender quota has failed to solve this problem. The gender quota has been strongly criticized by several academic researchers, one of them is Aliya Tlegenova (2021) mentioned in the literature review, as well as interviewed MPs. Current women deputies find the gender quota system ineffective and call for its abolishment. The results of the study show that, despite the government's initiatives, the number of women participating in politics remains low due to several factors. According to research findings, mentality, gender roles, and stereotypes



remain the leading barriers to women's participation in politics. The idea ingrained in Kazakh mentality of women being a keeper of the hearth and involved in household activities which was previously emphasized by scholars suppresses women's participation in parliamentary politics. At the same time, interviewed MPs and academic scholars also confirm this as the major barrier to women's political participation in Kazakhstan. Alongside, gender roles and stereotypes also encompassed the emotionality of women frequently mentioned by the respondents. They stated that women tend to be emotional and soft-hearted and this will affect their professionalism in decision-making. These two factors appear to largely explain why women in Parliament are still underrepresented.

A special note should be made on the corruption topic. The 17% of respondents mentioned corruption as a major barrier constraining women's participation in Parliament. The deputies did not touch on the topic of corruption and nepotism in the political environment of Kazakhstan. However, the interviewed ex-deputy of the Mazhilis, Meruert Kazbekova (2023) claims that women are not welcome in politics because of their non-involvement in corruption schemes. Among current women deputies, none of them faced gender discrimination or any pressure from male colleagues, in turn, two ex-deputies stated that they had repeatedly faced discrimination while working in Parliament. Consequently, the research team concludes that two ex-MPs were more open and honest in their answers since they currently do not hold public office and are not burdened with a mandate. Thus, it is important to take into account the risk of bias in the words of deputies who currently hold positions in Parliament, due to the risk of losing their place in public service.

Overall, the results of the study demonstrate that the majority of people are aware of the existing problem of low participation of women in Parliament and express significant concern about this issue. The public, women deputies, and academic scholars together believe that the cause of the problem is rooted in the Kazakh mentality and socially constructed gender roles and stereotypes, which continue to hinder the active participation of women in politics. Along with traditional and social barriers, current women deputies and scholars highlight the ineffectiveness of the existing gender quota system and require changes in legislation.

It is also worth noting that there is a possibility of biases since the number of surveyed women and men, people of younger and older ages, and people from big and small cities is not equal. There is a higher number of women, younger people, and residents of big cities who took part in the survey. This can be explained by the fact that mostly women and young people were

willing to participate in the survey. As for the category of city, the surveys took place mostly in big cities and cities of residence of researchers since there was a limitation in time, resources, and opportunities to travel to smaller cities. Nevertheless, regardless of the limitations, we have collected large numbers in all categories, meaning that it is a fairly reliable estimate for men, older people, and people from small cities.

## **6. Conclusion**

A low level of participation of women in Parliament continues to be a problem despite the recently taken initiatives for increasing women's presence in politics. Mentality, gender roles, and stereotypes impede women's involvement in decision-making processes. The results of the study show that scholars, MPs, and the public come to the same conclusion that the main reasons explaining the underrepresentation of women in Parliament are traditional beliefs and expectations about women's role in society. However, it was found that there is a high level of public trust in female politicians indicating the potential for further advancement of women in the political arena. According to interview results, MPs highlight the professionalism and high competence of women politicians.

Regarding the government policies, the 30% gender quota initiated in 2020 came under criticism from women deputies for being modified by including youth and people with disabilities in it. They claim that the ideal candidate who can gain a seat in Parliament should be a young woman with disabilities. Accordingly, they acknowledge the ineffectiveness of this initiative and most of them believe that it should be abolished. Based on the analysis and discussion, we came up with proposed recommendations encompassing the enhancement of women's competency level, promotion, and support of female politicians to mitigate the issue of low participation of women in Parliament.

### **6.1. Recommendations**

In this regard, based on the analysis and discussion of the research literature and opinions of former and current women MPs about the problem of low political participation of women in the Parliament of RK, the following recommendations to the government are presented that are aimed at increasing the political participation and representation of women in Kazakhstan.

First and foremost, in response to the problem of cultural mentality it is recommended to conduct mass media campaigns that will build on trust and promote the image of women politicians as role models that people will want to follow and support since there is a fairly high level of trust towards women politicians observed among public. For that, women MPs should have more opportunities to speak within the Parliament and in other venues because as known from the interviews, as of now there is a problem of voice among women MPs. Women MPs are being silenced by male colleagues, although their voices are trusted and should be heard and respected. Moreover, distinguished women MPs should have an opportunity to advertise their achievements and professional experiences to the public via Internet sources and TV programs with the assistance of the government. This will spark interest in politics among women, inspire and encourage women to aspire to leadership positions and run for election in the Parliament, and attract more women to the field of public policy. The ultimate goal of promoting the positive image of woman politician is to dispel the stereotypes about women's role in society, showing that women are fully capable of running the government.

On top of that the second recommendation is to provide government assistance in training competent and professional female political leaders. For example, the League of Women's Solidarity "Zhiger", initiated by Zauresh Battalova to unite politically active women who are ready to lead the government, regularly conducts seminars and lectures for women by women on improving leadership skills among female civil servants and women nominating themselves for public civil service positions. Following this approach, it is recommended to expand government cooperation with local and international NGOs to conduct such training and workshops for women across all of Kazakhstan, not only in large cities like Astana and Almaty. The purpose of these training sessions is to help women interested in politics express themselves professionally and increase women's confidence in their skills and ability to compete with men in the political arena.

Concerning the issue of discrimination and harassment towards women deputies in the Parliament mentioned by the majority of interviewed MPs, it is recommended to review anti-discrimination policies and penalty regulations for the violation of work ethics in the Parliament. Discrimination and harassment must not be tolerated in any workplace and must be reported. Along with that, reporting of discrimination and harassment incidents via filing complaints should be encouraged to increase the effectiveness of the corrective and preventive action. As a legislative

body of government, the Parliament has to be a discrimination-free place where professional deputies treat each other with respect.

The fourth recommendation is about raising the transparency of the process of nomination of candidates to the deputies of the Mazhilis and Senate via the elimination of bureaucracy in the process of registering candidates. According to the interviewed MPs, women candidates face issues with registration since some of the candidates find themselves deregistered with no money refunded. For that, the procedures of candidate registration and participation of nominees in the election campaign shall be clarified and performed properly so that candidates will not be deprived of the opportunity to become the deputy. Additionally, since there are a lot of women candidates who are not nominated by the parties and are limited in financial resources but not in their desire to run for elections, it is recommended to provide government assistance in attracting sponsorship for candidates' election campaigns from independent sponsors. By voluntarily providing motivated women candidates who cannot afford election campaigns with funds, sponsors will have a chance to support government policy toward gender balance. However, the possible lobbying of interests should be monitored and prevented at the outset.

Finally, it is recommended to make amendments to the 30% quota, increasing the threshold from 30% to at least 50% within a certain period and separating quota categories of youth and people with disabilities. Notably, the 30% quota is designed to enhance the political participation of groups of people that are poorly represented in the legislative branch of the government and is the main government policy towards increasing the representation of women in the government. However, according to the academic research on the quota and the opinions of former and current women deputies of Parliament, the quota does not effectively serve its purpose due to distorted requirements resulting in unchanging low numbers of seats distributed for women specifically.

Therefore, there should be different quotas that separately target three groups such as women, youth, and people with disabilities. Gender quota should be of a minimum of 30% with a threshold incrementally increased up to 50% by 2030. The time frame will allow the public to witness and assess the changes that elected or assigned women deputies can bring. The minimum of 30% will guarantee the share of women in the candidate list and allocated number of seats, and the threshold of 50% will be a limit which implies equal distribution of seats for both women and men deputies in both chambers. Notably, a 50% gender quota is being brought to attention following the example of several countries of the European Union's legislated quotas established

towards gender balance. At the same time, quota must not be realized for the name of quota as it is made now, that is women deputy candidates must be elected and assigned based on their high qualifications and professional experience that match the requirements. Important to mention, that the abolition of quota, as suggested by some interviewed deputies, is not considered as a recommendation because without proper support of women politicians in the form of official government policy women will face more barriers on their way to the seat in the Parliament.

## References

- Abdikadyrova, Zh., Kadyrov, Zh., Talaspayeva, Zh., & Sharypkazy, N. (2018). The role of women in Kazakh nomadic society. *The Turkish Online Journal of Design, Art, and Communication*, pp. 2404-2419. Retrieved from: [http://www.tojdac.org/tojdac/VOLUME8-SPTMSPCL\\_files/tojdac\\_v080SSE310.pdf](http://www.tojdac.org/tojdac/VOLUME8-SPTMSPCL_files/tojdac_v080SSE310.pdf)
- Abildina, S. K., & Eskazinova, Z. A. (2013). THE GENDER ASPECTS OF HISTORICAL STUDY OF THE SITUATION WOMEN IN KAZAKHSTAN. *Education and Science Without Borders*, 4(7), 73. Retrieved from: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1445182894?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true&sourcetype=Scholarly%20Journals>
- Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan Bureau of National Statistics. (2021). Number of Women, holding Ministerial positions in the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Retrieved from: [https://gender.stat.gov.kz/page/frontend/detail?id=71&slug=-58&cat\\_id=9&lang=en](https://gender.stat.gov.kz/page/frontend/detail?id=71&slug=-58&cat_id=9&lang=en)
- Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan Bureau of National Statistics. (2023). The population of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2023. Retrieved from: <https://stat.gov.kz/ru/industries/social-statistics/demography/publications/6373/>
- Akorda. 2005. STRATEGY FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN FOR 2006-2016. Retrieved from: [https://www.akorda.kz/upload/nac\\_komissiya\\_po\\_delam\\_zhenshin/5.2%20%D0%A1%D0%93%D0%A0%20%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B3%D0%BB.pdf](https://www.akorda.kz/upload/nac_komissiya_po_delam_zhenshin/5.2%20%D0%A1%D0%93%D0%A0%20%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B3%D0%BB.pdf)
- Aulbekova, A. (2019). Politicians are at the decision making level. Forbes Kazakhstan. Retrieved from: [https://forbes.kz/woman/jenschinyi\\_u\\_vlasti\\_1555046103/](https://forbes.kz/woman/jenschinyi_u_vlasti_1555046103/)
- Ayupova, Z. K., & Kussainov, D. U. (2018). New approaches of the protection of the women's and children's rights in The Republic of Kazakhstan. *QAZAQSTAN RESPUBLIKASY*, 77. Retrieved from: [http://reports-science.kz/images/pdf/d20183/011\\_77-82.pdf](http://reports-science.kz/images/pdf/d20183/011_77-82.pdf)
- Bari, F. (2005). Women's Political Participation: Issues and Challenges. *United Nations, Division for the Advancement of Women*. Retrieved from: <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/enabling-environment2005/docs/EGM-WPD-EE-2005-EP.12%20%20draft%20F.pdf>

- Benedict, A.G. (2014). Women in Kazakhstan: A Multifaceted Approach to Female Political Representation. *UMI Dissertation Publishing, ProQuest LLC*: United States, pp. 1-102. Retrieved from: <https://www.proquest.com/docview/1650651550?pq-origsite=gscholar&fromopenview=true>
- Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2024). Brief information about the electoral system of Kazakhstan. Retrieved from: <https://www.election.gov.kz/eng/electoral-system-of-the-rk/brief-information-about-electoral-system-of-the-rk.php?v=mobile>
- Conway, M. (2001). Women and Political Participation. *Journal of Political Science and Politics*, Vol. 34 (2), pp. 231-233. DOI: [10.1017/S1049096501000385](https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096501000385)
- Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan No. 384. (2016). <https://adilet.zan.kz/eng/docs/U1600000384>
- European Institute for Asian Studies. (2020). Women Empowerment and Gender Equality in Kazakhstan. Retrieved from: [https://www.eias.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/EIAS\\_Policy\\_Brief\\_Kazakhstan\\_Gender\\_Equality\\_2020.pdf](https://www.eias.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/EIAS_Policy_Brief_Kazakhstan_Gender_Equality_2020.pdf)
- Herrick, R., & Sapieva, A. (1998). Perceptions of women politicians in Kazakhstan. *Women & Politics*, 18(4), pp. 27-40. DOI: [10.1300/J014v18n04\\_02](https://doi.org/10.1300/J014v18n04_02)
- Ibrayeva, A. (2020). Kazakhstani Women to Get Gender Quotas for Party Lists. *Kursiv Kazakhstan*. Retrieved from: <https://kz.kursiv.media/en/2020-07-06/kazakhstani-women-get-gender-quotas-party-lists/>
- Kireyeva, A.A., Kenzhegulova, G.K., & Osama, R. (2021). Gender Equality and Women Participation in Government: the case of Kazakhstan. *Economics: The Strategy and Practice*, №2 (16), pp. 197-204. DOI: [10.51176/1997-9967-2021-2-197-205](https://doi.org/10.51176/1997-9967-2021-2-197-205).
- Kozhakhmetova, D. (2022). WHY DO WOMEN REMAIN UNDERREPRESENTED IN POLITICS IN KAZAKHSTAN? *Norwegian Journal of Development of the International Science No 93/2022*, 66(1), 67. DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.7121188](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7121188)
- Kuzhabekova, A., Janenova S., & Almukhambetova A. (2018). Analyzing the Experiences of Female Leaders in Civil Service in Kazakhstan: Trapped between Economic Pressure to Earn and Traditional Family Role Expectations. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 41:15, pp. 1290-1301, DOI: [10.1080/01900692.2017.1387142](https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2017.1387142)

- Khairullayeva, V., Sarybayev, M., Kuzembayeva, A., Yermekbayev, A., & Baikushikova, G. (2022). Gender Policy in Kazakhstan. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 24(1), 25. Retrieved from: [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360995735\\_Gender\\_Policy\\_in\\_Kazakhstan](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/360995735_Gender_Policy_in_Kazakhstan)
- Khassanova, G. (2000). On the Way to Democracy: Women 's Activism in Kazakhstan. *Demokratizatsiya*, 8(3), pp. 385-395. Retrieved from: [https://demokratizatsiya.pub/archives/08-3\\_Khassanova.PDF](https://demokratizatsiya.pub/archives/08-3_Khassanova.PDF)
- Khassanova, G. (2001). Women in Democratic Institutions in Kazakhstan. *Central European University Center for Policy Studies*. Retrieved from: <http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00001809/01/Khassanova.pdf>
- Mazhilis of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2023). Mazhilis committee. Retrieved from: <https://www.parlam.kz/en/mazhilis/committee>
- Maltseva, E. (2021). Women's Political Empowerment in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan. In: Karabchuk, T., Kumo, K., Gatskova, K., Skoglund, E. (eds) *Gendering Post-Soviet Space*. Springer, Singapore. DOI: [10.1007/978-981-15-9358-1\\_15](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-15-9358-1_15)
- Mynbayeva, J. (2016). Women in Kazakhstan. *Wonder Foundation Insight Report, London*. Retrieved from: <https://wonderfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Women-in-Kazakhstan-Wonder-Foundation-Insight-Report-Digital.pdf>
- Nuryшева, G.Zh., & Kaldayeva B.S. (2020). THE IMAGE OF A WOMAN IN THE TRADITIONAL KAZAKH WORLDVIEW. *Central Asian Journal of Art Studies*, 5 (4), 28-39. DOI: [10.47940/cajas.v5i4.290](https://doi.org/10.47940/cajas.v5i4.290)
- O'Brien, D.Z., & Piscopo, J.M. (2019). The Impact of Women in Parliament. In: Franceschet, S., Krook, M.L., Tan, N. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Women's Political Rights. Gender and Politics*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. DOI: [10.1057/978-1-137-59074-9\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-59074-9_4)
- Sapargalikyzy, Zh., & Seidumanov, S.T. (2021). WOMEN OF KAZAKHSTAN IN THE STATE GOVERNING BODIES: INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS AND CAREER STRATEGIES. *Siberian Law Review*, (3): 18-31. Retrieved from: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/kazahstanskije-zhenschiny-v-organah-gosudarstvennogo-upravleniya-institutsionalnye-usloviya-i-kariernye-strategii>



- Segizbayeva, D. W., Aikupeshova, D. M., & Kim, V. V. (2014). DEVELOPMENT OF GENDER POLICY AND GENDER EQUALITY IN KAZAKHSTAN. *SCIENCE AND WORLD*, 130. Retrieved from: <https://paper.researchbib.com/view/paper/48560>
- Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan (2023). COMMITTEE ON CONSTITUTIONAL LEGISLATION, JUDICIARY SYSTEM AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES. Retrieved from: <https://senate.parlam.kz/en-US/committees>
- Shakirova, S. (2015). Gender equality in Kazakhstan and the role of international actors in its institutionalization. *Institutionalizing Gender Equality: Historical and Global Perspectives*, Ed. by Yulia Gradszkova and Sara Sanders. L: Lexington Books. P. 209–224.
- Shegenova, J. N. (2012). Gender Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. *Modern higher education: an innovative aspect*, (1), pp. 177-181.
- Teorell, J. (2006). Political participation and three theories of democracy: A research inventory and agenda. *European Journal of Political Research*. DOI: [10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00636.x](https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2006.00636.x)
- Tanalinova, A. U. (2012). Problems of Realization Women's Right to Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan. *Siberian Law Review*, (2):11-14. Retrieved from: <https://www.siberianlawreview.ru/jour/article/view/860>
- Tlegenova, A. (2021). Kazakhstan's National Gender Policy: Reality and Challenges. *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*. Retrieved from: <https://cabar.asia/en/kazakhstan-s-national-gender-policy-reality-and-challenges>.
- Zeinilova, M. (2017). An Alternative Approach to the Advancement of Women Political Participation in Non-Democratic Post-Soviet Regimes. *CASPIAN*. Retrieved from: <http://caspianet.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Maira-Zeinilova-Womens-Political-Participation.pdf>
- Zellerer, E., & Vyortkin, D. (2004). Women's Grassroots Struggles for Empowerment in the Republic of Kazakhstan. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 11(3), pp. 439–464. DOI: [10.1093/sp/jxh044](https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxh044)
- UN Women – Europe and Central Asia. (2022). Kazakhstan. Retrieved from: <https://eca.unwomen.org/en/where-we-are/kazakhstan>

- UNDP (2021). Kazakhstan: Gender Equality. Retrieved from: <https://www.undp.org/ru/kazakhstan/gendernoe-ravenstvo>
- Viterna, J., & Fallon, K. M. (2008). Democratization, Women's Movements, and Gender-Equitable States: A Framework for Comparison. *American Sociological Review*, 73(4), 668–689. DOI: [10.1177/000312240807300407](https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240807300407)
- World Economic Forum. (2022). Global Gender Gap Report 2022. Retrieved from: [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2022.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf)
- Witte, M. (2022). Steppe Sisters: Kazakhstan's Rising Women Politicians. *The Edge Kazakhstan*. Retrieved from: <https://www.edgekz.com/steppe-sisters-kazakhstans-rising-women-politicians/>

## **Appendix A**

### **Interview Questions**

1. What is it like to be a woman in politics? What is it like to be a deputy woman?
2. How were you elected or assigned? What was your campaign or program?
3. Out of 148 deputies in the Parliament, only 27 are women: 10 of them are Senate deputies and 17 are Majlis deputies. Why do you think we have much less women in the Parliament?
4. Have you encountered any difficulties on the way to becoming and staying a deputy?
5. Have you observed any positive changes in the attitude or perception of women in politics in society? Are there any noticeable shifts in public opinion supporting greater gender equality in political representation?

## Appendix B

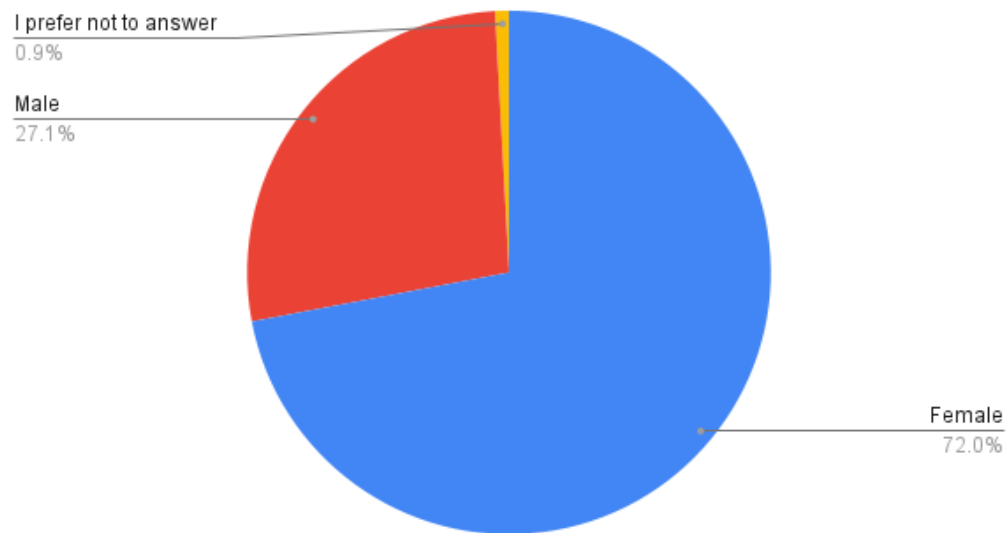
### Survey Questions

1. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Prefer not to answer
2. How old are you?
  - a. 18-30
  - b. 30-45
  - c. 45-60
  - d. 60 and above
3. Which city are you from?
4. How satisfied are you with the current representation of women in politics in Kazakhstan?
  - a. Very dissatisfied
  - b. Dissatisfied
  - c. Neutral
  - d. Satisfied
  - e. Very satisfied
5. Do you think that women are equally capable as men in leadership positions in politics?
  - a. Much less
  - b. Less
  - c. Equally
  - d. More
  - e. Much more
6. On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means the lowest level of trust and 5 means the highest level of trust, how much do you trust female politicians?
  - a. 1
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. 4
  - e. 5
7. Have you ever voted for a female candidate?
  - a. Yes

- b. No
8. What do you think are the main reasons for low political participation of women in Kazakhstan?
9. Do you think that the increase in female participation in the Parliament will lead to the advancement of decision-making processes?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. Prefer not to answer

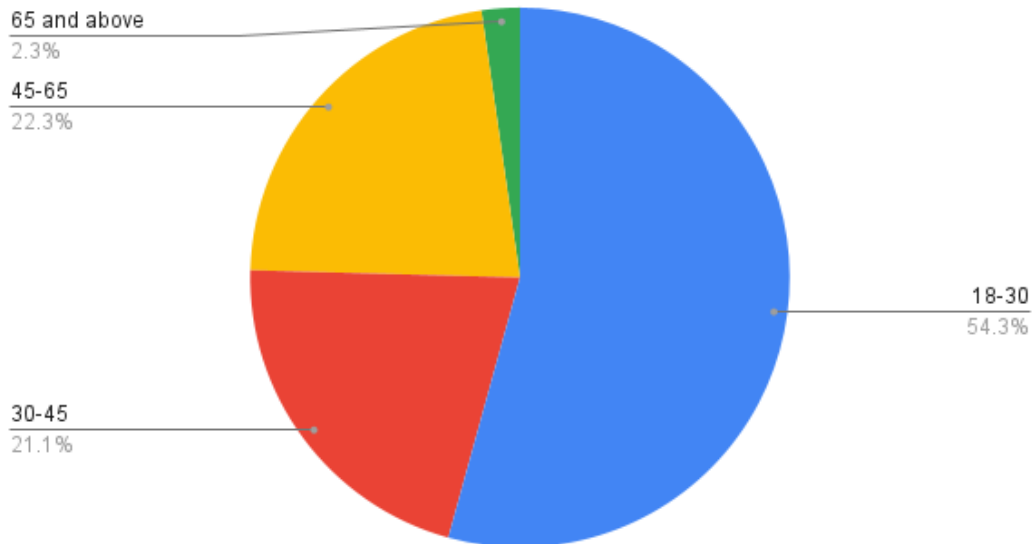
**Appendix C**  
**Survey result: Question 1**

What is your gender?



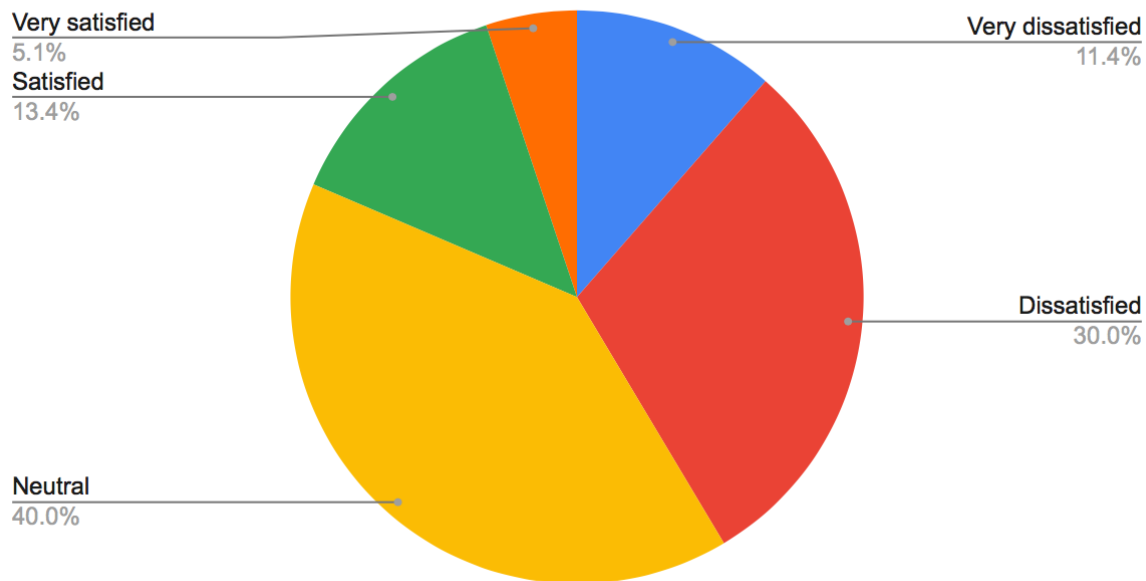
### Appendix D Survey result: Question 2

How old are you?



**Appendix E**  
**Survey result: Question 4**

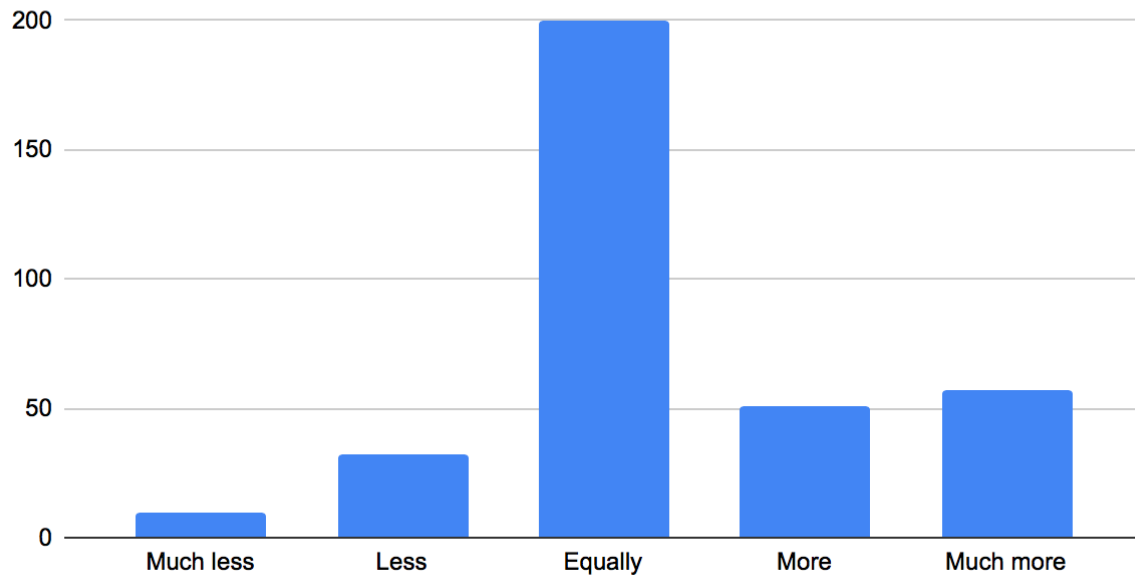
How satisfied are you with the current representation of women in politics in Kazakhstan?





**Appendix F**  
**Survey result: Question 5**

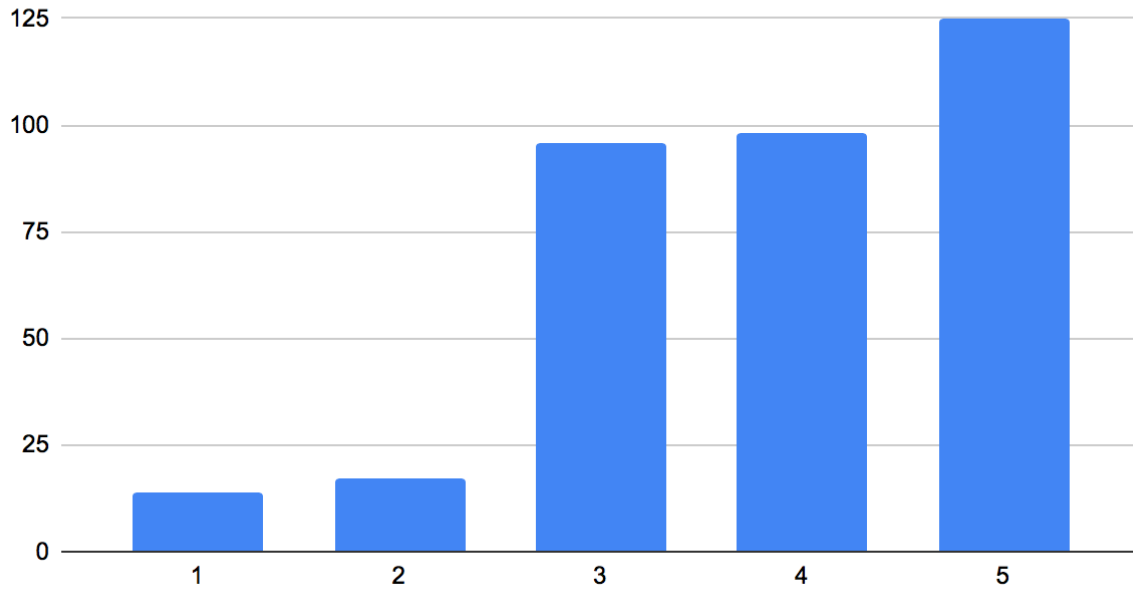
Do you think women are equally capable as men in leadership positions in politics?



## Appendix G

### Survey result: Question 6

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means the lowest level of trust and 5 means the highest level of trust, how much do you trust female politicians?



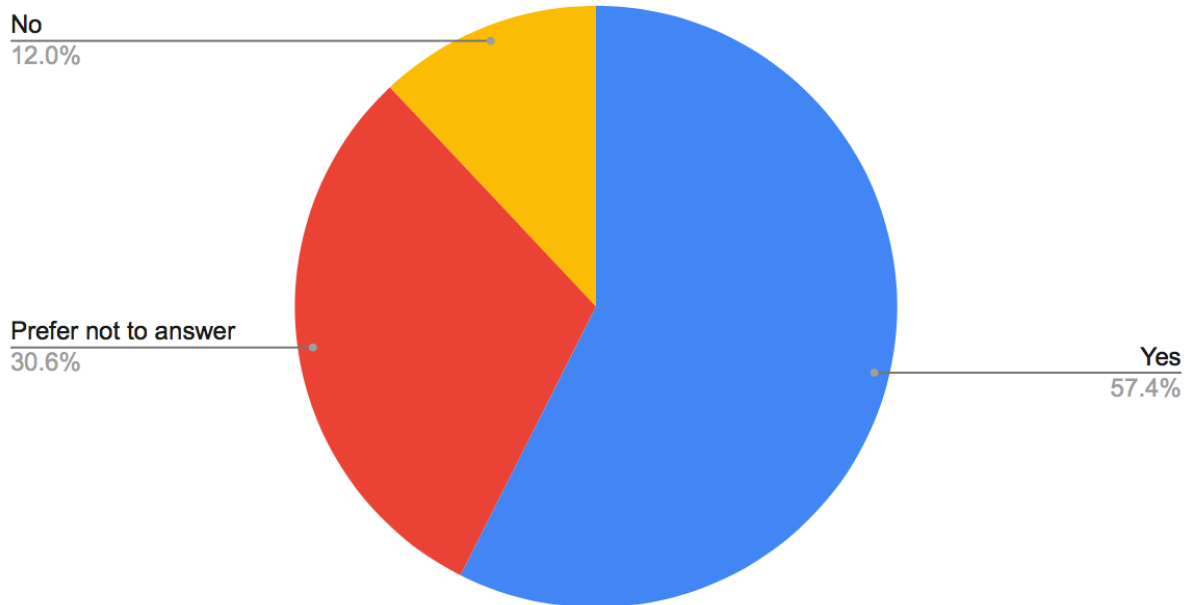
**Appendix H***Table 1. Matrix of correlations.*

Variables	(1)	(2)	(3)
(1) Satisfaction	1.000		
(2) Capability	-0.144	1.000	
(3) Trust	-0.138	0.522	1.000

## Appendix I

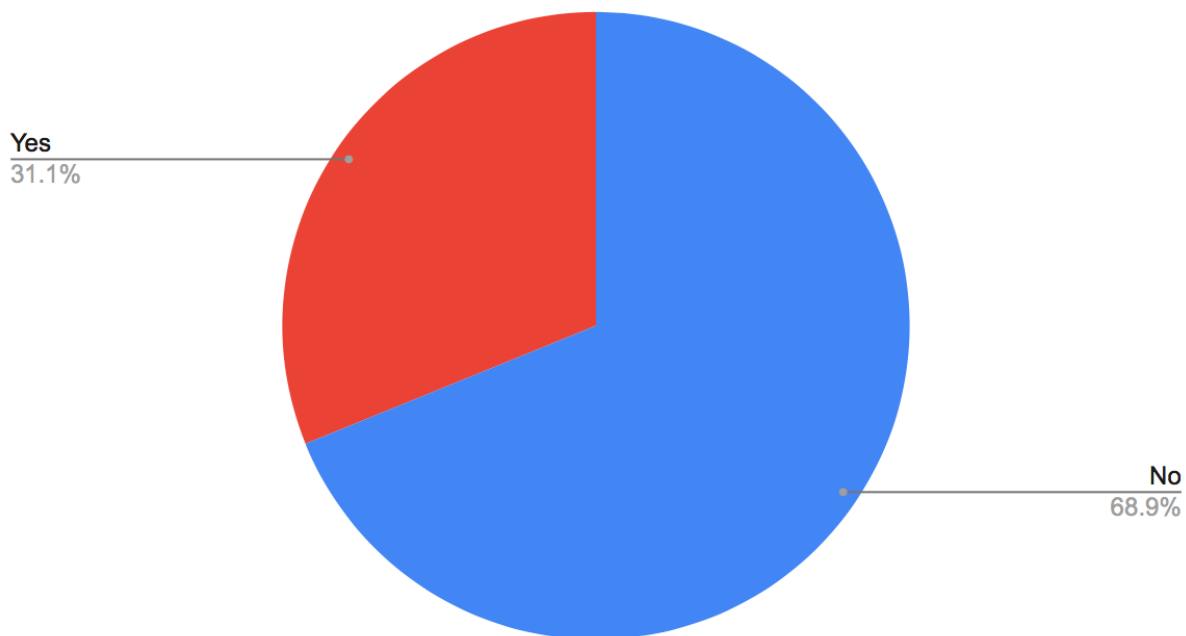
### Survey result: Question 9

Do you believe that increasing the representation of women in the Parliament of Kazakhstan would lead to better decision-making processes?



**Appendix J**  
**Survey result: Question 7**

Have you ever voted for a female political candidate?



## Appendix K

The interpretation of coefficients in the regression test says that a positive coefficient indicates the increase in the mean of the dependent variable with the increase in the value of an independent variable, while the negative variable shows the decrease in the mean of the dependent variable with the increase in the independent variable. Important to mention that in independent variable groups, females, younger than 45, and big cities are categorized as 1, and males, older than 45 and small cities are categorized as 2. Thus, according to the results, when it comes to the satisfaction variable, the regression coefficients of all three categories are positive, showing that variables categorized as 2 (male, older than 45, small city) correspond to a higher mean of satisfaction variable. As for capability, the regression coefficient is negative, which implies that sub-categories such as male, older than 45, and small city correspond to the lower mean of capability variable. Nonetheless, the trend is slightly different regarding the trust variable, where the gender variable has a negative coefficient against age, and city variables have positive coefficients. This means the male category complies with a lower mean of trust and age along with city categories corresponds to a higher mean.

*Table K1. Regression Output with Satisfaction as a Dependent Variable.*

Variable	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P> t	[95% conf. interval]	
Gender	0.51	0.18	4.30	0.00	0.28	0.74
Age	0.67	0.12	5.51	0.00	0.43	0.91
City	0.31	0.12	2.63	0.00	0.08	0.53

*Table K2. Regression Output with Capability as a Dependent Variable.*

Variable	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P> t	[95% conf. interval]	
Gender	-0.64	0.11	-5.99	0.00	-0.86	-0.43
Age	-0.05	0.12	-0.45	0.65	-0.29	0.18
City	-0.11	0.11	-0.87	0.38	-0.31	0.12

*Table K3. Regression Output with Trust as a Dependent Variable.*

Variable	Coefficient	Std. err.	t	P> t	[95% conf. interval]	
Gender	-0.61	0.13	-4.82	0.00	-0.85	-0.36
Age	0.12	0.15	0.85	0.39	-0.15	0.38
City	0.04	0.13	0.28	0.78	-0.21	0.28

**Appendix L**  
**Survey result: Question 8**

The main reasons for the underrepresentation of women in the Parliament of Kazakhstan

