

Nina Đorđević¹
Leipzig University

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SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN: THE CASE OF SERBIA

ABSTRACT Substantive representation of women has received much attention in the research on representation since the 1980s. However, that research was mainly focused on Latin America and Western Europe, while the Western Balkans remained understudied. This paper aims to contribute to the research on the substantive representation of women in Serbia by examining the substantive representation of women in the Serbian parliament in the five chosen convocations, aiming to explore which MPs (men or women) act in the interests of women and which interests are represented. To answer this question, the quantitative content analysis of the parliamentary debates in the Serbian parliament in the selected years is performed. The main findings from the research indicate that male MPs tend to advocate for the interests of women more than female MPs. However, women are more likely to speak on the topic when participating in the debates. Furthermore, it can be observed that the traditional interests of women dominate the discourse on the substantive representation of women, mainly revolving around the category of family and childcare.

Keywords: substantive representation, women's interests, women's representation, Serbia

INTRODUCTION

Substantive representation of women has received much attention in the research on representation since the 1980s. In those studies, scholars have operationalized the substantive representation of women differently. Some explored the changes in legislation concerning women's interests (Vidal-Correa 2020; Franceschet and Piscopo 2008), while others observed

1 E-mail: ninaa.dordevic@gmail.com

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the behavior of representatives during parliamentary debates (Clayton, Josefsson, and Wang 2017; Weeks and Masala 2023; Siow 2023).

However, that research was mainly focused on Latin America and Western Europe, while the Western Balkans remained understudied. Serbia presents an interesting case for this type of analysis since its legislature and institutional mechanisms are based on the principles of gender equality. Since the 2000s, Serbia has ratified all major international conventions regarding gender equality and the interests of women. Apart from that, the legislation introduced in Serbia regarding women has been modern and harmonized with the EU. In addition, from 2004 onward, several laws concerning political participation have been passed, introducing gender quotas, thus increasing the descriptive representation of women at the national and sub-national levels. The last quota law led to almost 40% of women holding seats in parliament. However, women still face significant difficulties in practice when trying to achieve equality.

Given the lack of systematic research on the substantive representation of women and the apparent research gap in the case of Serbia, further research is needed. This research is unique, as there is almost no research on the substantive representation of women in Serbia. Considering the fact that Serbia has ratified all international conventions related to the interests of women and that the legislation and institutional mechanisms are based on principles of gender equality, it is essential to assess women's political representation as a precondition for achieving absolute gender equality. The objective of this research is to gain a better understanding of the development of the substantive representation of women's interests during parliamentary debates. Therefore, this paper aims to explore which MPs (men or women) act in the interests of women and which interests are represented.

In this paper, the substantive representation of women will be operationalized as speaking for the interests of women, meaning that speaking about women's interests in the parliament and, therefore, putting them on the political agenda is considered an act of substantive representation. Whether the interests are represented using a feminist or a conservative perspective is not explored since both claims should be considered as interests representation given the heterogeneity of women as a group, thus allowing for a broader array of representative actions to be captured. This research is based

on the understanding of substantive representation as a process. Thus, by analyzing the MP's speeches during parliamentary debates, the study aims to quantitatively investigate the change in attention to women's interests in the Serbian Parliament in the selected timeframe. In addition, this research aims to quantitatively investigate the changes in the types of claims that the representatives most articulate.

This paper begins with a comprehensive literature review that introduces key concepts of representation and provides an overview of existing research in the field. Following that, a section will be focused on the case selection and the research context. The methodology employed in the study is then outlined. The subsequent part presents the analysis findings, highlighting the key results and their implications. The results will be discussed in relation to the research objectives, and insights into the representation of women's interests in the selected case will be provided. The paper concludes with a summary of the main findings and a discussion of the study's limitations. Recommendations for further research will also be provided.

DEBATING THE CONCEPT OF SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION

The research on representation has been mainly based on the concepts of representation defined in the book *The Concept of Representation* by Hannah Pitkin. In the book, she distinguished between different forms of representation. According to her, there are four types: formalistic, descriptive, symbolic, and substantive. She identifies substantive representation as the one true form of representation that can be defined as "acting in the interest of the represented, in a manner responsive to them" (Pitkin 1967). Pitkin characterizes this form of representation as 'acting for,' putting the action of the representatives as agents representing the interests of the 'respected groups' in the center of attention, meaning that, unlike previous types, the content of representation is what matters the most (Pitkin 1967).

Even though it was not previously intended by Pitkin, the concept of representation became the foundation for the research on the representation of women. Scholars became widely interested in assessing the content and quality of the substantive representation of women worldwide. In order to do so, the concept had to be more clearly operationalized by answering

two main questions: what are the interests of women, and how should the representatives be responsive to women? This has led to numerous debates among scholars, mainly around the issue of defining women's interests. The literature review shows that there is no agreement between the scholars on whether there is such a thing as the interests of women and, if yes, what those interests are.

In the 1980s, Sapiro (1981) argued that even though we can acknowledge that differences among women exist based on their class, race, age, and marital status, there is still a set of interests that they all share. This interest is in connection with their distinctive position in society, which is based on the division of labor in the private sphere, mainly revolving around reproduction and childcare. Moreover, Diamond and Hartsock (1981) focus on productive work, emphasizing that the interest that women have in common is rooted in their socioeconomic position in society, which is a result of the division of labor in the public sphere.

The debate about women's interests in the 1990s was characterized by the emphasis on the claim that even though women may have shared experiences, they are a heterogeneous group. On that note, Anne Phillips claims that it is clear that women share some distinct interests that are different from those that men have. However, she notes that there can be no universal interests that all women share since each woman's identity consists of different layers, each connected with a different set of experiences and, therefore, different interests depending on those experiences. Women have different priorities and attitudes toward what are considered to be women's interests. Moreover, there is no universal set of women's interests that can be applied to all women in all societies regardless of all other factors. Still, this does not mean that there is no need to increase the descriptive representation of women. On the contrary, by advocating for more women's presence, it becomes more likely that different perspectives are heard and diverse interests are represented (Phillips 1995; 1998). On that note, Williams (1998) warns that we must be careful when defining the universal interests of women to avoid 'group essentialism' since there are notable differences in opinions and interests among the members of every group, including women. Nevertheless, there are many shared opinions and perspectives that can generate some specific interest among women derived from their position in a society

shaped by privileged men and, concerning this, the fact that they are often marginalized. Hence, the universal interest of women would be to have their voices heard during policy-making. Furthermore, she claims that including women's perspective in politics could have as its end result the complete abolishment of gender inequality in a society.

The debate in the early 2000s onward continued the discourse set in the 1990s. One of the most influential scholars in the field, Iris Marion Young (2000), argued that social groups, including women, possess shared perspectives related to their structural position in society. However, they do not necessarily generate shared interests. For this reason, the main goal of political representation should be to include more women's perspectives rather than defining some inherently women's interests, which results in more inclusion and greater substantive representation. Another view is given by Wängnerud, who claims that women's main interest lies in expanding their autonomy. She identifies three aspects of women's interest:

“the recognition of women as a social category; acknowledgment of the unequal balance of power between the sexes; and the occurrence of policies designed to increase the autonomy of female citizens” (Wängnerud 2000).

On the other hand, Franceschet and Piscopo (2008) argued against the universal definition of women's interests since it implies homogeneity among the represented members of the group. Similarly, Weldon (2002) notes that although we can maybe identify some similarities in the structural position of women as a group and the problems that come with it, the solutions, perspectives, and prioritization of those issues highly differ among women. This leads us to conclude that there is no reason to think that individuals can effectively represent groups and that increasing the number of women in political institutions will lead to a significantly better substantive representation of women (Weldon 2002).

In more recent empirical research, the interests of women are often predefined following the traditional and/or feminist conceptions of what constitutes women's issues encompassing a wide array of interests, mainly focusing on gender equality, women's health, violence against women and family (Weeks and Masala 2023; Piscopo 2014; Clayton, Josefsson, and

Wang 2017; Mügge, van der Pas, and van de Wardt 2019; Vidal-Correa 2020). On the other hand, some scholars adopt a different approach to defining women's interests in their studies. According to Saward (2006), the representatives should be seen as 'the makers of the representative claims' rather than as 'delegates' representing fixed interests. He states, "The world of political representation is a world of claim-making rather than fact-adding (Saward 2006, 302)." This approach emphasizes that interests and identities should not be seen as clear, firm, and stable but socially constructed through the actions of representatives. The constructivist argument is, therefore, that people's interests are modeled and changed by the political actors and their actions (Lončar 2023). Following this, instead of relying on preconceived notions, they often interview women MPs to understand how these politicians perceive women's interests.

Interestingly, most of these studies align with the definition of women's interests mentioned above. For instance, Gwiazda's (2021) case study on the substantive representation of women in the context of right-wing populism in Poland demonstrates this alignment. Based on the interviews that she conducted with female members of different political parties, she identified childcare and the pay gap as predominantly perceived as women's interests. On the other hand, a study by Wendy Smooth (2011) on substantive representation of women in the US challenges the notion of a monolithic understanding of women's interests. She argues that the research on substantive representation often fails to account for the heterogeneity within the category of women, resulting in a focus primarily on the interests of privileged women (Smooth 2011).

The approach taken in many studies on the substantive representation of women was criticized for ignoring the conservative claims of the representatives. Celis and Childs (2012) argue that only focusing on the feminist claims and thus ignoring the conservative ones assumes the homogeneity of representative's claims and perspectives concerning women's interests. They emphasize that even those claims that can be considered conservative and 'anti-feminist' should not be discarded as not acting for women. Furthermore, in the research on substantive representation, scholars should not decide upon sympathies whether they would use a feminist or a conservative perspective, but they should include both. Additionally, it is important

to note that women disagree regarding the key women's issues. By only including claims made in the 'feminist fashion,' there is a risk of excluding the interests of those women who disagree with the feminist view on what constitutes women's interest. Therefore, the heterogeneity of women as a group is not fully acknowledged. As a result, we would only have a limited view of substantive representation of women without understanding its full scope (Celis and Childs 2018).

Considering how the representatives should be responsive to women, scholars have operationalized substantive representation in empirical research differently. Some scholars analyzed the voting behavior of the MPs related to proposals about women's interests (Lloren 2015). Others claimed that substantive representation is performed by creating legislation concerning the interests of women (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Piscopo 2014; Vidal-Correa 2020). However, scholars often identify speaking about women's issues during parliamentary debates and putting those topics on the political agenda as an act of substantive representation of women (Clayton, Josefsson, and Wang 2017; Chaney 2012; Siow 2023; Weeks and Masala 2023). This approach is based on the fact that participation in the parliamentary debates is seen as particularly important for women's representation since it is one of the most visible activities that can influence how women are perceived in society. Chaney also notes that the presence of women in the debates can empower women but can also reveal some structural inequalities between men and women (Chaney 2012). Moreover, Celis emphasizes that "legislatures are key sites of representation" because it is where it is decided which issues are going to be prioritized. She then notes that the responsiveness of parliamentary debates is crucial for representation (Celis 2012). In her work, Celis analyzed parliamentary debates using specific criteria concerning what constitutes acting for women. She notes that "acting for women is to denounce a situation that is disadvantageous for women, to formulate a proposal to improve the situation of women, or to claim a right for women with the same goal" (Celis 2012; 2006). These claims show the significance of exploring substantive representation of women by analyzing parliamentary debates. This serves as a foundational aspect of the research, providing a basis that can be further expanded upon by incorporating additional approaches.

The increase in the number of women who constitute a part of the legislative bodies worldwide has led more scholars to explore the link between the descriptive form of representation and substantive representation. They presumed there is a clear and automatic correlation between the two, meaning that when one increases, the other does, too. This assumption was based on the theory of critical mass developed by Kanter, who argued that when there is a larger proportion of women present in a group, they tend to form coalitions and alliances focusing on the interests of women (Kanter 1977). Later, scholars started applying this approach in the studies of representatives' behavior inside the legislative bodies, mainly focusing on the relationship between the number of women and the attention to their interests. The primary assumption was that when women constitute a 'critical mass,' there will be a significant increase in women-friendly policies and better substantive representation of women (Childs and Krook 2008).

Nevertheless, the concept of critical mass in studying substantive representation of women has been widely criticized. In the work of Celis et al. (2008), there is an emphasis on the need for the shift from 'critical mass' to 'critical actors' and the expansion of the definition of 'critical actors' in the operationalization of the research on the substantive representation of women. Following, Sarah Childs and Mona Lena Krook (2006) argue that instead of asking 'when women make a difference,' a question 'how the substantive representation of women occurs' should be asked. Additionally, the focus on 'what women do' should be shifted to 'what specific actors do.' The researchers should not give attention only to the acts of female representatives but consider all 'critical actors' in the substantive representation of women (Childs and Krook 2006). In another paper, they further emphasized the need to move from 'critical mass' to 'critical actors.' Hence, they state that there "still may be place for the concept of critical mass – but not critical mass theory" (Childs and Krook 2009, 145). They explain that critical actors could mobilize the representatives that were not active and, therefore, constitute a critical mass needed for the policy change to happen (Childs and Krook 2009).

On that note, the analysis of the behavior of the MPs in the German Bundestag, conducted by Christina V. Xydias, revealed that female members of the parliament act more frequently on the subject of women's interests

than their male counterparts. Interestingly, women MPs were more inclined to speak both on account of the feminist understanding of women's interests and the traditional ones (Xydias 2007). Moreover, the study on the voting behavior of women in the Swiss Parliament confirmed that women tend to vote more on bills with feminist agenda than men (Lloren 2015). Furthermore, a comparative study of five European parliaments had the same conclusion. Based on the analysis of the parliamentary debates, this study showed that the topics that women tend to prioritize differ from those of men. Female MPs were more inclined to speak on subjects highly influenced by gender norms in society, ensuring that women's perspectives are acknowledged, at the very least, within the parliamentary setting (Wäckerle and Castanho Silva 2023). In addition, findings from the research on the behavior of female MPs in the Knesset (parliament in Israel) by Itzkovitch-Malka and Friedberg (2018) indicated that the behavior of women differs from that of men. Female members of the Knesset acted most frequently on topics that are traditionally considered to be in the interests of women. They highlight that women act according to their gendered stereotypes and 'play safe' by representing the interests of women and thus avoiding other high-profile issues, such as national security. However, it is noted that this behavior can be a result of women being marginalized and excluded from the debates that are considered to be high-profile and within the domain of men. Female MPs also prioritized women's issues and actively sought to put them on the political agenda. It is important to note that they contributed to women's substantive representation by representing more diverse interests of women who were previously not present in the public discourse and acted for certain groups of previously marginalized women (Celis 2006).

On the other hand, some scholars found that female and male members of the parliament tend to represent women's interests in relatively equal proportions (Celis and Erzeel 2015; Devlin and Elgie 2008). The only differentiating factor is the party affiliation. Men that participate in the substantive representation of women often come from center and right-wing parties, such as liberal, conservative, and far-right parties (Celis and Erzeel 2015).

THE CASE SELECTION

The percentage of women in political institutions in Serbia has traditionally been very low. Despite various efforts, including adopting different strategies and ratifying international conventions, women were underrepresented. Until the 2000s, the percentage of women holding seats in the parliament remained below 10%. According to some authors, the main obstacle to women's inclusion in the political institutions in Serbia is the authoritarian political culture that is intertwined with the patriarchal one, resulting in men, rather than women, being seen as leaders and decision-makers (Lončar 2020; Čičkarić 2016).

The first significant change in women's political participation occurred after the elections in 2003, resulting in 12.4% of women holding seats in the parliament (Figure 1). Despite the increase in women's representation, in 2004, the law on the election of MPs was adopted that introduced gender quotas (Službeni glasnik 2004). The regulations impacted the next convocation, which lasted relatively short (2007–2008), increasing the percentage of women in parliament to 20.4%. The gender structure in the following parliamentary assembly from 2008 to 2012 changed further, increasing the percentage of female representatives to 21.6% (Lončar 2020).

In order to correct the shortcomings of the law from 2004, a new law was introduced in 2011 (Službeni glasnik 2011), leading to a significant increase in the percentage of women holding seats in the next two parliamentary convocations (2012–2014 and 2014–2016) to around 34%. This trend followed the elections in 2016, increasing the percentage of female representatives in the parliament from 2016 to 2020 to 37.2% (Narodna skupština Republike Srbije 2023a).

Although women became much more represented in parliament, at least when it comes to descriptive representation, under the influence of the election laws introduced, the representation of women was still seen as needing improvement. In order to achieve that, in 2020, the law on the elections was once again changed, this time raising a gender quota to 40% (Službeni glasnik RS 2020). As expected, these changes resulted in an increase in the percentage of women holding seats in the parliament in the next convocation to 38.8% (Narodna skupština Republike Srbije 2023a).

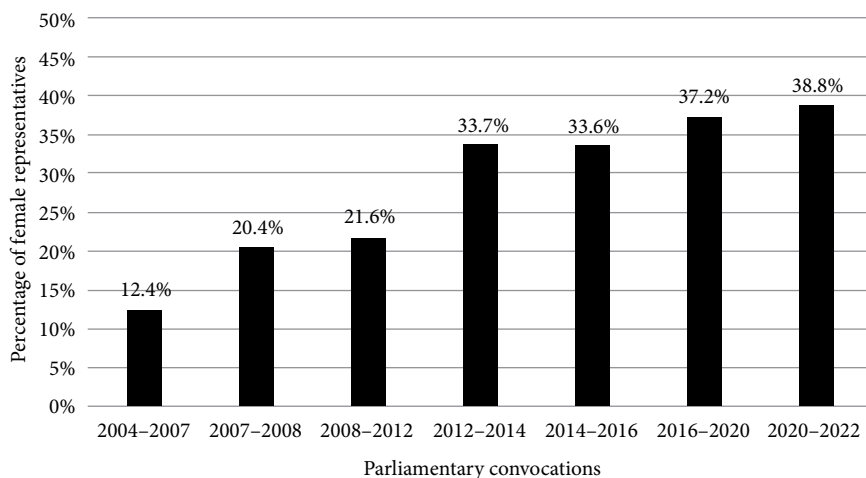


Figure 1. The Development of Descriptive Representation of Women in the Serbian Parliament

Despite the increase in the descriptive representation of women in the parliament, we can still notice that the roles of female representatives in the parliament are still influenced by traditional gender roles and what is perceived as the domain of women. This can be seen by analyzing the structure of the parliamentary committees. The information provided on the official website of the Serbian Parliament shows that women MPs are often involved in committees concerning human and minority rights, rights of children, social issues, and culture, and thus being less present in the committees regarding defense, finance, administrative and budgetary issues. Furthermore, women acted as presidents or vice presidents of the parliament in fewer instances than men. In the observed period, from 2007 to 2022, women were presidents of the parliament only in four convocations (2008–2012, 2016–2016, 2016–2020) (Narodna skupština Republike Srbije 2023b). They are also rarely presidents of parliamentary groups.

These developments led some researchers to investigate women's representation in the Serbian parliament in the context of the effects gender quotas had. However, they focused mainly on the descriptive representation of women while also understanding the concept of substantive representation as women's membership in certain parliamentary committees or whether they held certain leading positions in political institutions without inspecting whether they acted for the interests of women (Lončar 2020; Čičkarić

2016; 2020), leaving the topic of substantive representation of women in Serbia largely under-researched. Furthermore, in those studies, it was assumed that critical actors in women's substantive representation are only women, thus not observing the actions of male representatives (Čičkarić 2016; 2020; Lončar 2020; Loš 2021), which, as previously mentioned, has been criticized. However, those studies give a good starting point for a deep analysis of the substantive representation of Serbia that should be conducted.

Researching the women's substantive representation, scholars concluded that the increased presence of women in the parliament did not significantly affect the patriarchal values that are widespread in society, leading to women adhering to traditional gender roles and the sentiment that women do not belong in politics, resulting in them rarely holding leading positions in the political institutions (Lončar 2020; Čičkarić 2016). Furthermore, they conclude that it is not clear if the increased descriptive representation of women influenced by quota affected gender equality since there is no obvious indicator as to what extent women can influence the political agenda and foster change (Lončar 2020). Moreover, even though Serbia has developed mechanisms for achieving gender equality at a very high level, discrimination against women is still present in the institutions, leading to the marginalization of women there (Čičkarić 2016). On the other hand, Čičkarić (2023) highlighted a positive trend where political parties are increasingly incorporating gendered perspectives into recruitment and party politics.

Regarding the substantive representation of women, Čičkarić critiques female representatives for not acting more in the interest of women. She claims that substantive representation of women implies the feminization of politics based on gender-equal political participation. However, she does not conduct a deeper analysis of the substantive representation of women (Čičkarić 2020). Another study by Tatjana Loš (2021) concluded that female MPs rarely state as their primary motive for political participation the achievement of gender equality and better representation of women's interests. Although they tend to be pretty active, they strictly adhere to the party agenda, thus rarely acting or speaking for women. The reason for this is that they perceive the substantive representation of women as not very important, and they tend to stay blind to the discrimination against women in the assembly (Loš 2021).

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This research is intended to be a descriptive case study of the substantive representation of women in the Serbian parliament encompassing five parliamentary convocations (2004–2007, 2008–2012, 2012–2014, 2016–2020, and 2020–2022). This time frame was chosen in order to see the development of the substantive representation of women during the years, followed by a significant increase in women's descriptive representation influenced by gender quotas. The convocation 2004–2007 was chosen as a starting point since it was the last year before the introduction of gender quotas and the first convocation where women held more than 10% of the seats in the parliament.

The method used in this research is a quantitative content analysis conducted using computer software and analyzing the text of transcripts based on coding previously selected keywords related to women's interests. The aim is to determine the presence of those keywords in the parliamentary speeches of MPs, therefore identifying the representative actions as acting for women. This method was often used in the research on the substantive representation of women (Clayton, Josefsson, and Wang 2017; Chaney 2012; Broadbent 2019).

Data collection was performed by compiling the transcripts of the parliamentary sessions available on the website otvoreniparlament.rs (Otvoreni parlament 2023), which contains all the information related to the activity of the Serbian parliament. The transcripts include data from each parliamentary session held in the observed timeframe. Each speech had to be manually downloaded from the website, copied into a database, and organized according to the information about the MP that gave it. Due to a large amount of data, one year from each of the selected convocations was used in the sampling. The years were chosen based on the two criteria: they contained politically relevant moments concerning women's interests (e.g., passing of important laws and policies related to women's issues), and they were (except 2016) years outside of elections. The parliamentary convocations from 2007–2008 and 2014–2016 were omitted from the observation due to their short-lasting period and the fact that they did not contain any particularly significant political moment that pertained to women's interests.

Content analysis was performed on the transcripts of the parliamentary sessions using the QDA Miner and the IBM SPSS Statistics software. The first step in the research was selecting the keywords related to women's interests. The keywords used in the analysis were selected following what are considered to be the traditional interests of women based on the previous research done on the substantive representation of women³ (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008; Clayton, Josefsson, and Wang 2017; Broadbent 2019; Chaney 2012). Those keywords were assigned to four categories: gender equality in the public sphere, violence against women, family and childcare, and women's health. Using the predetermined keyword in the analysis minimizes the possibility of bias, often seen as a shortcoming of the research on women's substantive representation. Additionally, studies on women's representation have been criticized for their approach to defining what constitutes acting for women by only considering feminist conceptualizations, thus neglecting the heterogeneity of perspectives in relation to the interests of women (Celis and Childs 2012). In order to avoid the possibility of depicting the interests of women as homogenous, this research considers both the feminist and conservative claims of the representatives.

In order to determine how often, when, and by whom the previously defined keywords pertained to women's interests were spoken, text data mining for speeches in the plenary debates that occurred during the years under observation was performed, and then the final dataset was created. A total of 34,470 speeches were examined. The speeches made by government members, the president, and other external speakers were removed from the database since only the activity of the elected MPs was the subject of the analysis.

After identifying the segments containing the keywords, a closer look into the speeches' content was taken to determine if they were used in the context of acting for women. All instances where the MPs used the selected keywords in another context unrelated to substantive representation of women were discarded from the analysis. Finally, the statistical analysis of the final dataset was conducted in order to answer the research question. The results from the conducted quantitative analysis will be explained in detail in the next section.

3 See Appendix for the full list of keywords.

FINDINGS: SUBSTANTIVE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN SERBIA

The figure below illustrates the percentage of speeches related to women's interests given by male and female MPs out of the total number of speeches during the observed years. Over the majority of the observed period, the percentage of speeches pertaining to women's interests consistently ranged between 4% and 5% of the total speeches given.

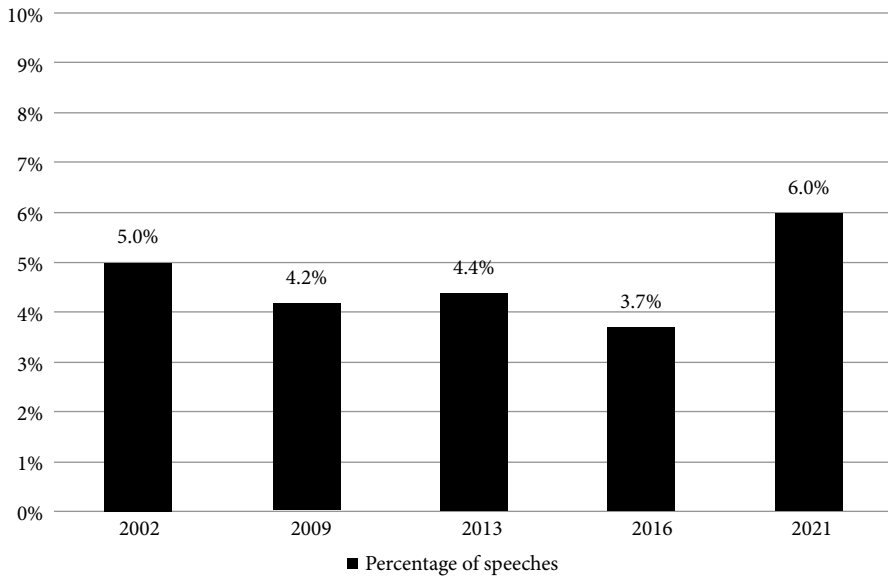


Figure 2. The Percentage of Speeches Related to Women's Interest

The year 2021 is particularly noteworthy as it can be seen as an outlier and counterintuitive. After the 2020 elections, only the ruling party, the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), and its coalition partners held seats in the parliament, as the opposition parties boycotted the elections. This circumstance makes it challenging to determine if the results from this year accurately reflect the “real” situation in the parliament. Considering that the ruling party sought to legitimize itself and demonstrate the democratic nature of the institutions, it is difficult to ascertain the true motivation behind speeches on women's issues. Moreover, reports on the functioning of the parliament indicate a loss of its representative function and a lack of genuine debate (Otvoreni parlament 2022).

Further examination of the data reveals an overarching trend where men tend to engage more frequently in discussions regarding women's interests within the parliamentary debates (Figure 3). The results also show an increase in female MPs' involvement in addressing women's issues over time. However, it's important to acknowledge the broader context: men generally exhibit higher levels of participation in parliamentary debates than women. Hence, even though men tend to speak more frequently on the subject, women have a higher likelihood of addressing the topic when they decide to partake in the debates compared to their male counterparts (Figure 4). In fact, the likelihood of women speaking about women's interests is twice that of men. This indicates that women representatives in the Serbian case are more inclined to prioritize and advocate for issues directly affecting women.

Moving on to a more detailed analysis of the interests represented during the parliamentary debates (Figure 5), the findings indicate that most speeches revolve around the category of family and childcare regardless of other factors. This prevalence of speeches on family and childcare topics can be interpreted as reinforcing traditional gender roles by emphasizing the role of women as mothers. Upon examining the content of these speeches, it becomes evident that many speeches categorized under family and childcare address the need for improving conditions for future mothers. The objective is to incentivize them to have more children, aligning with an ongoing public discourse about the low birth rate being one of the most significant issues.

Interestingly, there is a slight decrease in the number of speeches related to the family and childcare category over time. This shift could reflect a diversification of topics or a redistribution of focus, indicating a broadening range of interests addressed by female MPs beyond the traditional emphasis on family and childcare.

It is worth mentioning that both male and female members of parliament frequently address issues related to family and childcare (Figure 6 and Figure 7). However, male MPs focus predominantly on this topic, while women allocate a significant but comparatively smaller portion of their speeches to family and childcare matters. The findings indicate that men have consistently spoken more about family and childcare than women. It is worth mentioning that in both 2005 and 2016, when there were debates on laws

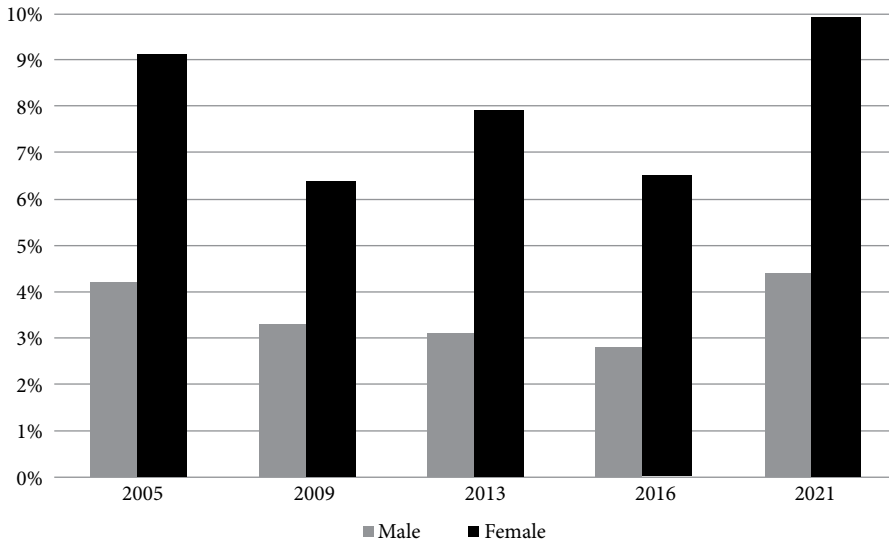


Figure 3. The Percentage of Speeches Made by Men and Women MPs Related to Women's Interests Out of the Total Number of Speeches Related to the Topic

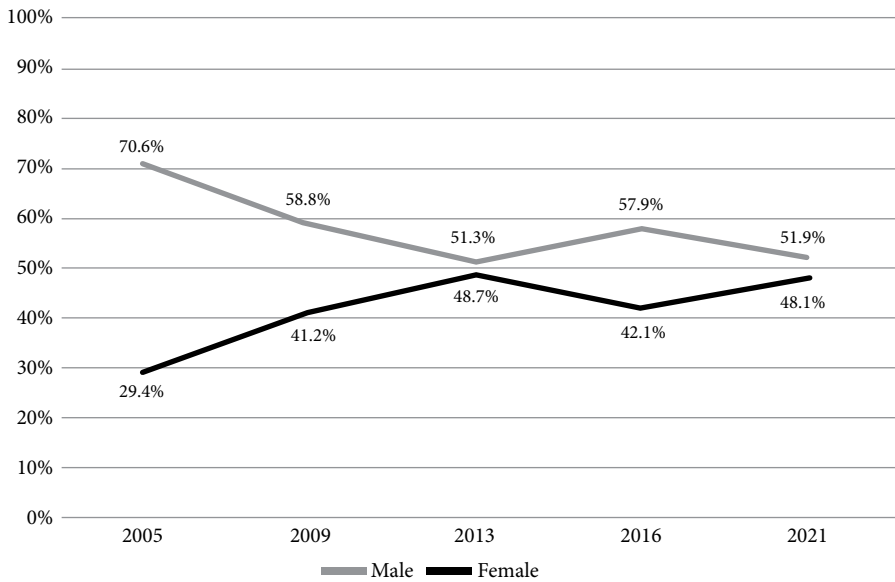


Figure 4. The Percentage of Speeches Made by Women and Men Related to Women's Interests Out of the Total Number of Speeches Made by Them

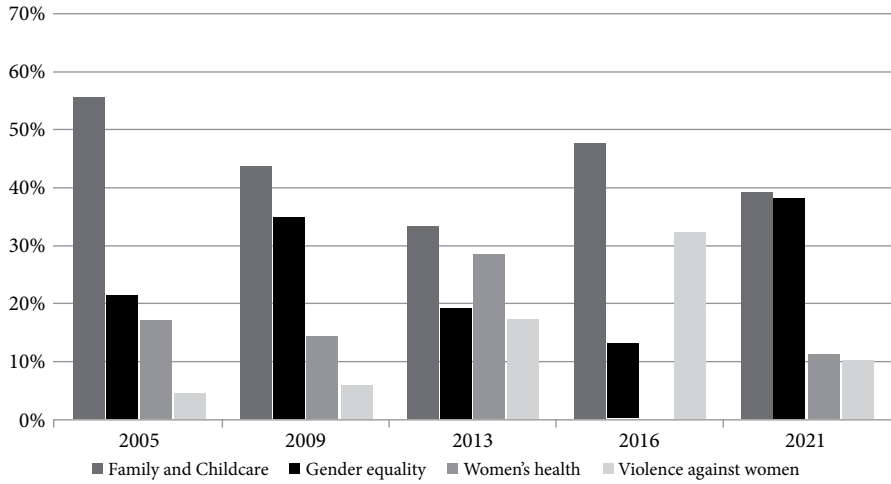


Figure 5. The Percentage of Speeches Related to Each Category of Women’s Interests Out of All Speeches Related to Women’s Interests

related to family (Law on Family and Law on the Prohibition of Domestic Violence, respectively), men participated more actively in the discussions than women, influencing the outcomes of the passed laws. On the other hand, the probability of men engaging in discussions related to family and childcare decreased over time, while the likelihood of women addressing the subject of family and childcare remained consistently high throughout the observed period.

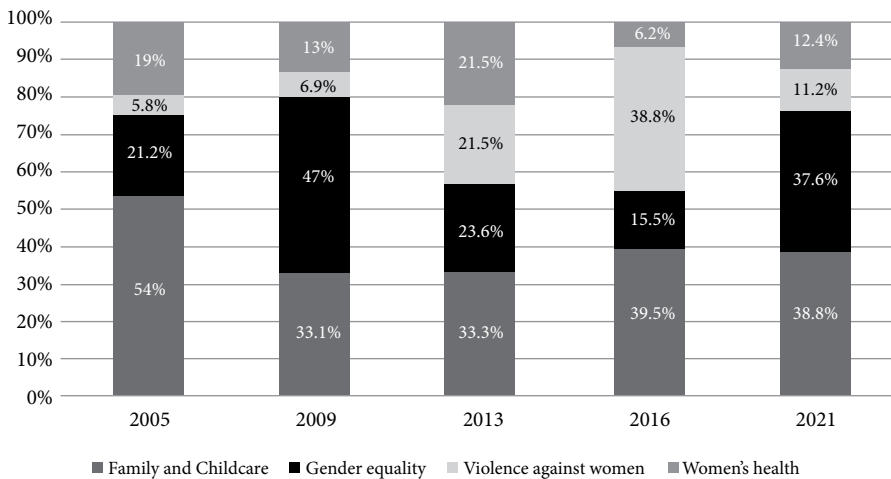


Figure 6. The Percentage of Speeches Related to Each Category of Women’s Interests Out of All Speeches Related to Women’s Interests Delivered by Female MPs

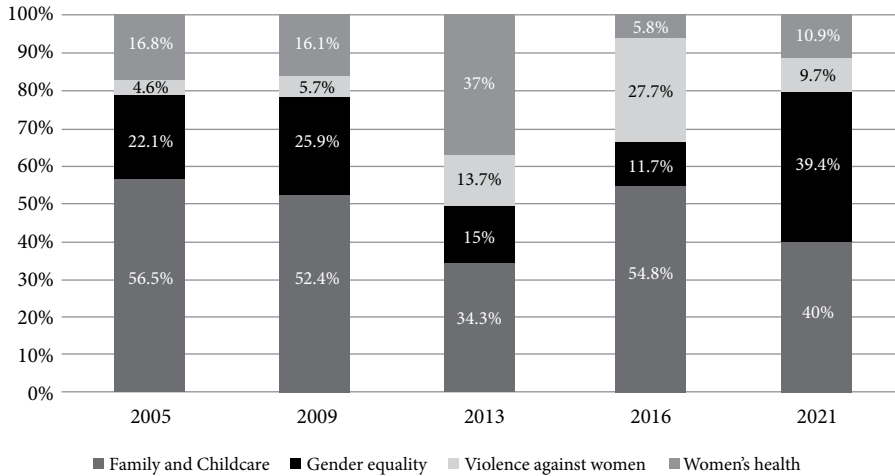


Figure 7. The Percentage of Speeches Related to Each Category of Women's Interests Out of All Speeches Related to Women's Interests Delivered by Male MPs

On the other hand, it is notable that the category of gender equality received less attention throughout all the observed years compared to the family and childcare category. This finding is significant because even in 2021, a year when the Law on Gender Equality was passed, there was less emphasis on the topics related to gender equality compared to those concerning family and childcare. This observation reinforces the notion that there is a persistent focus on reinforcing traditional gender roles, where the role of 'motherhood' is considered the primary women's interest and the domain of family takes precedence. Meanwhile, gender equality issues in the public sphere remain relatively sidelined, receiving less attention.

Conversely, women MPs tend to prioritize gender equality more than their male counterparts. This indicates a greater emphasis on advocating for equal rights and opportunities between genders in their speeches. The number of speeches on gender equality by women was consistently higher compared to their male counterparts. Women's engagement with gender equality increased over time, while men's participation declined. Moreover, women were consistently more likely than men to address gender equality when discussing women's interests in the observed timeframe. Still, the likelihood of MPs addressing gender equality gradually declined.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the issue of violence against women became more visible and gained greater attention on the political

agenda over time. The analysis of the data showed a significant increase in the involvement of female MPs in addressing violence against women over the years. Moreover, women were also more likely to speak about violence against women when addressing women's interests compared to men. They dedicated a larger portion of their speeches to addressing the issue of violence against women compared to men, suggesting that female MPs place a stronger emphasis on raising awareness and combating violence targeted at women. On the other hand, the likelihood of men addressing this issue when speaking about women's interests only slightly increased in the observed timeframe.

These findings indicate that both men and women became more engaged in addressing this issue over time, with a sudden decrease in the probability of both men and women addressing violence against women in the last convocation, contrary to the overall trend. Moreover, it is worth noting that Serbia has been experiencing alarming rates of femicide, as reported by "Autonomni ženski centar" (2023). Given this context, it is surprising to observe that the topic of violence against women is not even more frequently discussed in debates concerning women's interests.

The number of speeches concerning the category of women's health has exhibited fluctuations over the years. It is significant to acknowledge that the majority of speeches within this category are closely linked to the broader category of family and childcare, mainly focusing on topics such as pregnancy and abortion. Only a tiny portion of these speeches address issues related to the prevention of cervical and breast cancer. Indeed, this observation further reinforces the notion that discussions on women's health primarily revolve around reproductive health matters, thereby prioritizing and reinforcing the traditional role of women as mothers and caregivers. This narrow focus on reproductive health can inadvertently sideline other crucial health concerns that affect women, such as cervical and breast cancer. It is alarming to note that Serbia ranks fifth in Europe in terms of the number of women affected by cervical and breast cancer, with high mortality rates associated with these diseases (United Nations in Serbia 2023). Despite this concerning situation, the attention and discussion surrounding these health issues appear to be relatively limited within parliamentary debates and policy considerations.

Orientation	2005	2009	2013	2016	2021	Average
Center	0.3%	9.6%	4.3%	0.5%	–	3.7%
Center-Left	26.5%	7.5%	37.4%	44.6%	32.3%	29.7%
Center-Right	9.5%	22.6%	40.9%	24.8%	36.2%	26.8%
Ethnic	–	2.3%	1.3%	2.0%	18.3%	6.0%
Far-Right	61.1%	45.6%	0.3%	18.8%	–	31.4%
Right	2.6%	12.5%	15.8%	9.4%	13.2%	10.7%

Figure 8. The Percentage of Speeches Related to Women's Interests Delivered by MPs with Different Party Affiliations

Orientation	2005	2009	2013	2016	2021
Center	14.3%	4.1%	1.7%	1.4%	–
Center-Left	6.3%	4.8%	4.2%	5.8%	9.0%
Center-Right	5.2%	4.7%	6.7%	3.3%	4.2%
Ethnic	–	8.5%	2.1%	7.3%	6.5%
Far-Right	4.8%	4.2%	0.4%	2.7%	–
Right	2.3%	3.1%	4.2%	2.2%	8.2%

Figure 9. The Percentage of Speeches Related to Women's Interests Delivered by MPs with Different Party Affiliations Out of the Total Number of Speeches Made by Them

Interestingly, men tend to prioritize issues related to women's health more than women themselves. However, this goes in line with family and childcare being a priority for male MPs since during speeches about women's health, the most discussed issues are related to, as mentioned, reproductive health. This alignment suggests that the emphasis on family and childcare by male representatives reinforces traditional gender roles, where women are primarily seen as mothers and caregivers. However, the findings indicate that the distribution of speeches on women's health has changed over time, with a shift towards increased engagement of women and decreased engagement of men. Women have become more active in addressing women's health. However, men still show some interest in the topic, which can be seen in the likelihood of them speaking on the topic when speaking about the interests of women. As the data suggests, on average, male MPs are

more likely to talk about women's health than female MPs. Still, both men and women showed a decrease in the likelihood of speaking about women's health when addressing women's interests over time, but the decrease was more pronounced for women.

The analysis of MPs' party affiliation and their representation of women's interests does not show clear patterns (Figure 8). On average, the MPs who are most active in representing women's interests are affiliated with far-right or center-left parties, followed by center-right parties. On the other hand, MPs from center parties tend to have less engagement on the topic of women's interests. An intriguing observation is that even when center parties held the majority in parliament in 2009 and had the largest proportion of female MPs, MPs from those parties spoke significantly less about women's issues compared to MPs affiliated with far-right parties.

It is important to note that these results can be significantly influenced by the fact that MPs receive varying amounts of speaking time based on the percentage of seats held by their respective parties. Therefore, it does not necessarily mean that the party agenda of less active parties on women's issues does not prioritize them. It simply suggests that these parties had less opportunity to engage in debates compared to parties holding the majority of seats. The impact of this can be clearly seen by analyzing the proportion of speeches made by MPs from different parties concerning the interests of women compared to other issues.

By examining the percentage of speeches dedicated to the subject of women's issues relative to the total number of speeches made by MPs from different parties (Figure 9), a distinct perspective emerges on how different political parties prioritize this topic in parliamentary debates. Notably, despite MPs from center parties delivering the fewest speeches on the matter in 2005, they displayed more than double the likelihood of addressing the topic in debates compared to the MPs from other parties. Conversely, in 2021, MPs from center-right parties delivered the highest number of speeches concerning women's interests but were the least likely to engage with the topic during their participation in debates. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that, on average, MPs from ethnic parties exhibited the highest inclination to address the topic, allocating 6% of their speeches to women's issues. In contrast, MPs from far-right parties, with a mere 3% of their speeches ad-

dressing the subject, emerged as the least likely to participate actively in discussions concerning women's concerns during debates.

Additionally, the analysis examining the representation of women's interests by male and female MPs from different parties reveals intriguing shifts in their engagement as women's descriptive representation increased. The likelihood of women speaking for women's interests decreased across most parties, except for far-right parties. On average, men from center-right and center-left parties displayed the highest likelihood of actively participating in discussions on women's interests. Conversely, women from ethnic and right-wing parties exhibited a greater inclination toward advocating for women's interests.

A more thorough examination of the interests represented by MPs from different parties sheds light on distinct trends. Irrespective of party affiliations, MPs were most inclined to address the category of family and childcare when delving into discussions about women's interests. They also demonstrated a lower likelihood of discussing the topic of domestic violence, with the notable exception of MPs from center parties, who were identified as the least likely to engage in discussions about the category of women's health.

Moreover, when addressing women's interests, men affiliated with ethnic parties and women associated with center-left parties exhibited the highest likelihood of speaking on the topic of gender equality. In contrast, both men and women from far-right parties demonstrated a lower likelihood of addressing the issue of gender equality. On the other hand, when choosing to address women's interests, men from right-wing parties and women from center parties were most inclined to speak on the topic of violence against women. Conversely, MPs affiliated with ethnic and far-right parties were the least likely to address this issue.

On average, it was noted that men from right-wing parties and women from ethnic parties were most likely to address concerns related to women's health. Conversely, men from ethnic parties and women affiliated with center parties showed the least inclination to actively participate in discussions on this specific issue. Regarding the topic of family and childcare, male MPs from far-right parties and female MPs from center parties exhibited a higher inclination to discuss this issue when considering women's interests,

while members of ethnic parties were less inclined to focus on this aspect. Notably, the likelihood of MPs discussing family and childcare within the context of women's interests remained relatively high throughout the observed period. This indicates a sustained focus on the importance of these issues across the observed years.

The main findings from this section suggest that the majority of speeches by both male and female MPs, irrespective of party affiliation, revolve around the category of family and childcare, reinforcing traditional gender roles that emphasize women as mothers. On the other hand, the category of gender equality receives less attention compared to family and childcare topics, with women prioritizing the topic of gender equality, on average, more than men. Moreover, the category of violence against women has shown a gradual increase in the observed timeframe. Notably, women allocate a more significant portion of their speeches to addressing the issue of violence against women compared to men. Furthermore, the number of speeches concerning women's health exhibits fluctuations, with a narrow focus on reproductive health matters. On that note, men tend to prioritize issues related to women's health, aligning with their focus on family and childcare, which reinforces traditional gender roles.

Regarding the party affiliation of the MPs, the analysis shows that MPs most active in representing women's interests are, on average, affiliated with far-right or center-left parties, followed by center-right parties. On the other hand, MPs from center parties tend to show less engagement on the topic of women's interests. However, the observed patterns can be significantly influenced by varying speaking times MPs receive based on their party's seat percentage. Examining the proportion of speeches dedicated to women's issues relative to total speeches provides insights into party priorities in parliamentary debates. On average, MPs from ethnic parties exhibited the highest inclination to address women's issues, while far-right parties were the least likely to participate in discussions concerning women's concerns during debates.

Overall, the analysis reveals notable differences in the prioritization of issues between male and female MPs, with women demonstrating a stronger emphasis on gender equality and combating violence against women. However, family and childcare remain the dominant focus of parliamentary

speeches, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive representation of women's interests beyond traditional gender roles. Still, a more comprehensive analysis is needed to understand the complex dynamics, considering variables such as societal context and critical actors outside of parliament, since statistical analysis alone might not capture the complexity of these dynamics.

CONCLUSION

The topic of substantive representation of women has received considerable attention since the 1980s. The research was primarily focused on Latin America and Western Europe, with the Western Balkans being relatively under-researched. In the case of Serbia, previous studies on the representation of women mainly revolved around the descriptive representation in political institutions, while the topic of substantive representation was only superficially addressed (Lončar 2020; Čičkarić 2016; 2023; 2020).

The main findings from this research indicate that, in contrast to previous research, it was observed that men tend to advocate more for women's interests. Still, it should be taken into account that women, in general, participate less in debates than men. Nevertheless, when women do engage in debates, they are twice as likely as men to prioritize women's issues. This aligns with previous research on the substantive representation of women, which suggests that women tend to prioritize women's issues to a greater extent compared to their male counterparts (Wäckerle and Castanho Silva 2023). Additionally, it has been observed that, over time, the likelihood of female MPs speaking for the interests of women increased while the likelihood of men doing so decreased.

In terms of specific categories of women's interests, intriguing patterns were observed. The topic of family and childcare received the most attention throughout the observed period, with male MPs addressing it slightly more frequently. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that the likelihood of men speaking on this topic decreased over time, while women's inclination to discuss it remained high. These findings are somewhat counterintuitive, as they challenge the assumption that men predominantly advocate for issues related to traditional gender roles, primarily motherhood, and childcare, with the purpose

of reinforcing patriarchal norms. However, it appears that women themselves prioritize these issues, considering them to be of primary interest.

On the other hand, the topic of violence against women saw an increase in attention during the observed timeframe. Women were more likely to address the topic, and their engagement exceeded that of men. In contrast, regarding women's health, although women spoke more on this topic, men were more likely to address it compared to women when they did speak on women's interests. However, the likelihood of MPs addressing this topic decreased over the years. It is important to note that this category of women's interest is closely connected with the category of family and childcare since most of the speeches delivered in this category were related to pregnancy and reproductive health.

These findings suggest that the traditional interests of women dominate the discourse on the substantive representation of women. However, further research should include a broader array of actors, such as women's organizations and networks, different sites outside of parliament, and a broader societal context to include public opinion.

In this case, since women prioritize women's issues more than men but participate less in debates, men tend to dominate the discourse. This aligns with some previous research suggesting that women may be marginalized in parliament and primarily included in debates traditionally associated with women's concerns (Itzkovitch-Malka and Friedberg 2018). On the other hand, it has also been noted that the behavior of MPs can be heavily influenced by party discipline (Clayton, Josefsson, and Wang 2017). Therefore, more profound research into the interests and motivations of MPs regarding their actions on women's issues in parliament is necessary.

Concerning the party affiliation of the MPs acting for the interests of women, the analysis reveals that MPs from far-right and center-left parties tend to act for the interests of women the most. However, the observed trends could be notably affected by the differing speaking times MPs receive based on their party's seat percentage. Examining the ratio of speeches focused on women's issues versus the overall speeches provides crucial insights into each party's stance in parliamentary debates. On average, MPs associated with ethnic parties showed the strongest inclination to address women's issues, whereas far-right parties displayed the least likelihood of engaging

in discussions about women's issues when they decided to participate in the debate. Additionally, as the percentage of women in parliament increased, the engagement of MPs from far-right parties in women's interest topics decreased, although parties from this orientation experienced a more considerable increase in the percentage of women elected. On the other hand, MPs from center parties engage the least in these topics, even in the year when they had the largest proportion of women in the parliament, indicating that the inclination towards substantive representation of women is highly dependent on the party affiliation of the MP regardless of their sex.

Furthermore, it is interesting to highlight that although there was no significant change in the substantive representation of women at the agenda-setting level, significant laws were passed, indicating an impact at the policy outcome level. Having in mind that in this case, most of the laws are proposed by the government (Otvoreni parlament 2021; Orlović et al. 2012), these findings align with the conclusions from previous research that the commitment of the government is sometimes more important than the behavior of individual MPs (Devlin and Elgie 2008). Nevertheless, given the contested state of democracy in Serbia, further investigation of substantive representation in such contested spaces would be valuable.

Future research should also encompass debates and/or policy outputs from the entire duration of convocations. The inclusion of the current convocation is particularly crucial due to the presence of opposition parties, which had boycotted the previous elections and were not represented in parliament. By examining a larger dataset, a more comprehensive understanding of the substantive representation of women in Serbia can be achieved, as the scope of this paper was limited.

This research provides a starting point in the under-researched topic of substantive representation of women in the case of Serbia and aims to contribute to the field. However, further in-depth research is necessary to fully grasp the complexity of women's substantive representation in Serbia.

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APPENDIX:

KEYWORDS RELATED TO WOMEN'S INTERESTS (IN SERBIAN)

Violence against women: nasilje u porodici, porodično nasilje, maltretiranje u porodici, nasilje nad bračnim partnerom, nasilje u braku, nasilje nad ženama, nasilje prema ženama, žene žrtve nasilja, seksualno zlostavljanje, seksualno maltretiranje, seksualno nasilje, seksualno prisiljavanje, silovanje

Women's health: dojenje, rak dojke, rak grlića materice, porođaj, poroditi, trudnica, trudnoća, reproduktivno zdravlje, reproduktivna prava, kontracepcija, abortus, HPV, veštačka oplodnja, vantelesna oplodnja

Gender equality: pol, rod, seksistički, seksualna diskriminacija, rodna ravnopravnost, rodna diskriminacija, diskriminacija na osnovu pola, diskriminacija na osnovu roda, diskriminacija na polnoj osnovi, diskriminacija na rodnoj osnovi, rodna neravnopravnost, rodno-senzitivni, ravnopravnost i žena, diskriminacija i žena, trudničko bolovanje, porodijsko bolovanje, prava žena, ženska prava

Family and childcare: brak, bračni, razvod, porodica i žena, majka, majčinstvo, briga o deci, dečiji dodatak, roditeljstvo, materinstvo, rađanje i žene

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Nina ĐORĐEVIĆ

Univerzitet u Lajpcigu

Sažetak: Suštinsko predstavljanje žena dobilo je veliku pažnju u istraživanjima o predstavljanju od 1980-ih. Međutim, ta istraživanja su uglavnom bila fokusirana na Latinsku Ameriku i Zapadnu Evropu, dok je Zapadni Balkan nedovoljno proučavan. Ovaj rad ima za cilj da doprinese istraživanju suštinskog predstavljanja žena u Srbiji ispitivanjem suštinskog predstavljanja žena u Skupštini Srbije u pet izabranih saziva, sa ciljem da istraži koji poslanici (muškarci ili žene) deluju u interesu žena i koji interesi su predstavljeni. U cilju odgovora na ovo pitanje, kvantitativna analiza sadržaja skupštinskih rasprava u Skupštini Srbije u izabranim godinama je sprovedena. Glavni rezultati istraživanja ukazuju na to da poslanici imaju veću tendenciju da se zalažu za interese žena nego poslanice. Međutim, postoji veća šansa da će žene govoriti na tu temu onda kada učestvuju u debatama. Dalje, može se primetiti da tradicionalni interesi žena dominiraju diskursom o suštinskom predstavljanju žena, uglavnom se odnoseći na kategoriju porodice i brige o deci.

Ključne reči: suštinsko predstavljanje, interesi žena, predstavljanje žena, Srbija