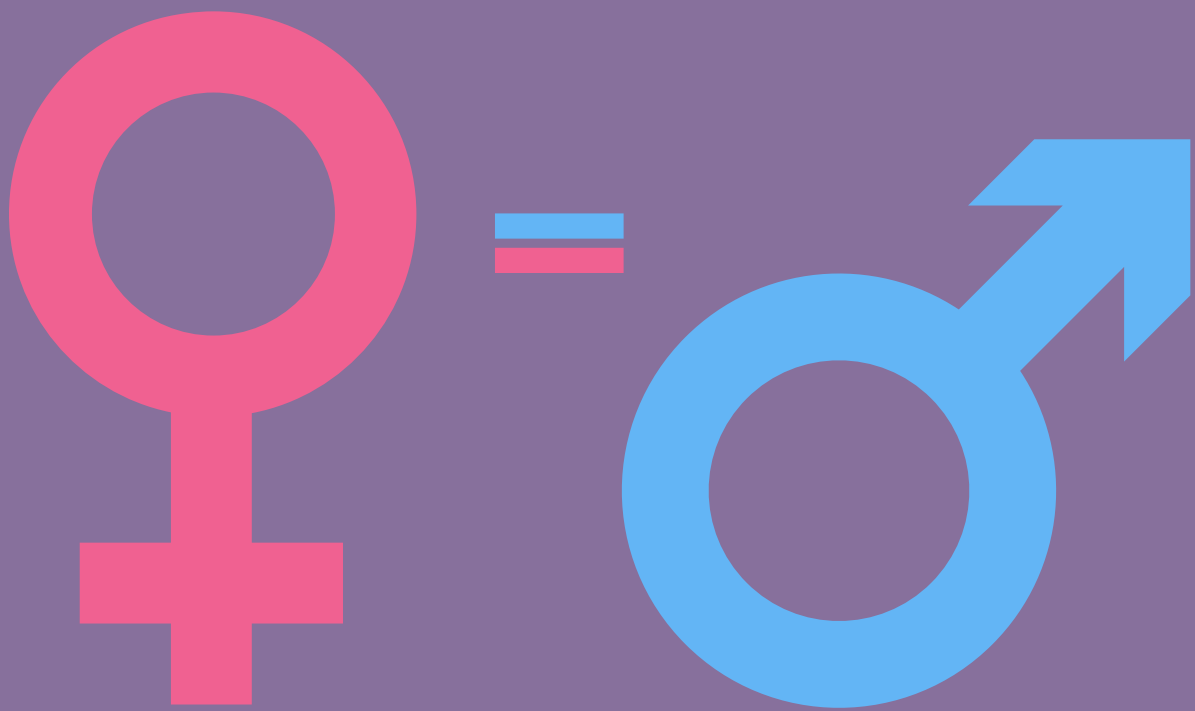# Party Building and Candidate Selection

Intraparty Politics and Promoting Gender Equality in Myanmar

Working Paper 1 by

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Executive Summary

This study examines why women remain underrepresented in Myanmar politics. Unlike most studies, we go beyond the structural and cultural reasons by revealing the dynamics of intra-party politics –- the role of the selectorate and processes of candidate selection that affect both the demand and supply of women candidates at the party and local levels. The findings for this study is based on qualitative analysis of in-depth 72 interviews conducted from November 2018 to March 2019 with members of nine political parties.

Acknowledgements

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1. Introduction

In November 2015, Myanmar held nationwide elections for its national and subnational parliaments. Vote-rigging and corruption were generally seen to be lower than in the 2010 elections, and violence was not widespread. Further, many of the political parties that boycotted or prevented from running in the 2010 elections, competed in 2015. The National League for Democracy (NLD), which boycotted the 2010 elections, was hugely successful, and won the majority of elected seats in both the national parliaments and 12 out of 14 subnational parliaments.[1] Although the 2015 elections were largely credible and open, and generated huge optimism inside and outside the country, they were not open to everyone. Around 500,000 voters (largely ethnic minority) in Bago Region, Kachin State, Kayin State, Mon State and Shan State did not have the opportunity to vote because of security concerns, or because the electoral authorities could not access the areas to check voter lists. Further, around 500,000 Muslims – primarily from northern Rakhine State – were denied their previous right to vote.[2] Although the elections were less violent than expected, there were scattered violent incidents in various parts of the country, as well as violent threats against politicians by certain armed actors, especially in parts of Kachin and northern Shan States.[3]

The NLD's victory meant that Aung San Suu Kyi became the (de facto) head of government – the first time a woman has led the government in Myanmar's history. The number of women member of parliament (MPs) has more than doubled. However, women remain only around one in ten of Myanmar's MPs, and Aung San Suu Kyi is the only female cabinet member at the national level.

Research Aim and Organization

This report investigates why Myanmar politics remains male dominated. Organized into 8 sections, the introduction explains why gender inequality in politics matters and summarizes the statistical gender breakdown in Myanmar's parliaments. Aside from an overview of Myanmar's parliamentary and electoral systems, the introductory section also highlights key findings from existing research on gender and political participation in Myanmar. Section 2 follows with an outline of the research methodology used for this study and the background information on the nine political parties included for study. To demonstrate the importance of intra-party politics, Section 3 examines politicians' backgrounds and motivations, while Section 4 and 5 compares the candidate selection methods between the different political parties. Section 6 studies the experiences of men and women candidates on the campaign trail while Section 7 highlights the unique experiences of women and men MPs in parliament. Conclusions and recommendations are provided in Section 8.

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[1] International Crisis Group, *The Myanmar Elections: Results and Implications* (Yangon/Brussels, 2015), pp.15-16.

[2] Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar: What Now for Ethnic Politics?* (Transnational Institute, December 2015), p.5.

[3] See Section 6 below. See also, The Carter Center, *Observing Myanmar's 2015 General Elections* (The Carter Centre, 2016), pp.50-51; Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar: Women and Men Candidates in the 2015 Elections* (Yangon: Gender Equality Network, August 2017), p.44; Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar*, pp.3-4.

Gender Equality and Importance of Party Politics

In 1995, the UN World Conference on Women was held in Beijing, China. This meeting of global leaders spurred an unprecedented push for gender equality in a number of areas. Specifically, the conference highlighted women's persistent political underrepresentation as a democratic problem as well as a hurdle for economic and human development. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action noted that women were underrepresented despite making up half of the electorate, and despite movement toward democratization in many countries. It outlined that,

> "Women in politics and decision-making positions in Governments and legislative bodies contribute to redefining political priorities, placing new items on the political agenda that reflect and address women's gender specific concerns, values and experiences, and providing new perspectives on mainstream political issues."[4]

In 1995, women made up about 10% of the world's parliamentarians. Today, after the adoption of electoral gender quotas in more than 130 countries, women now occupy 24%.[5] While still only about a quarter of the seats, it means that women's descriptive representation has more than doubled in 25 years. The rise in women's representation worldwide was largely a consequence of advocacy from the UN system, women's movements, democracy activists and donors. The push has been underpinned by a surge in research on how women come to power and their substantive impact. Almost unanimously, most research has found political parties to play a key role in ensuring political gender equality. Political parties are the gatekeepers to women's political representation and the manner in which they select candidates for elections is key to understanding the (lack of) diversity in the ensuing parliament.[6]

Yet, women's under-representation has often been attributed to women themselves. When asked about the lack of women candidates, political parties often lament that no women are willing to step forward, or that there are too few qualified women. These explanations , sometimes labelled as 'supply-side' explanations – blame women's representation on a perceived lack of supply of eligible or qualified women.[7] Others have suggested that more should be placed on the 'demand-side' explanations. That is, to understand what kind of

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[4] The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, p.79.
https://www.un.org/en/events/pastevents/pdfs/Beijing_Declaration_and_Platform_for_Action.pdf
[Accessed 20th February 2020].
[5] www.ipu.org [Accessed 20th February 2020].
[6] Joni Lovenduski, *Feminizing Politics* (Polity, 2005); Pippa Norris and Jon Lovenduski, *Political Recruitment. Gender, Race, and Class in the British Parliament* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995); Pippa Norris and Joni Lovenduski, '"If Only More Candidates Came Forward": Supply-Side Explanations of Candidate Selection in Britain', *British Journal of Political Science*, 23.03 (1993), 373–408 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400006657>; Miki Caul, 'Women's Representation in Parliament: The Role of Political Parties', *Party Politics*, 5.1 (1999), 79–98.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068899005001005>; Drude Dahlerup, 'Electoral Gender Quotas: Between Equality of Opportunity and Equality of Result', *Representation*, 43.2 (2007), 73–92
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00344890701363227>; Michael Gallagher and Michael Marsh, *The Secret Garden: Candidate Selection in Comparative Perspective* (London: Sage Publications, 1988); Elin Bjarnegård, *Gender, Informal Institutions and Political Recruitment: Explaining Male Dominance in Parliamentary Representation*, 2013 edition (Hampshire, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Elin Bjarnegård and Meryl Kenny, 'Revealing the "Secret Garden": The Informal Dimensions of Political Recruitment', *Politics and Gender*, 11.4 (2015), 748–53.
[7] Bjarnegård, *Gender, Informal Institutions and Political Recruitment*; Norris and Joni Lovenduski.

candidates parties are looking for, and the type of formal and informal criteria used when selecting candidates to compete in elections.[8]

Increasingly, there is a realization that supply and demand factors interact – when parties want to recruit women, they also motivate and shape women's ambition, leading to more women stepping forward.[9] Programs that focus solely on raising the skills of potential women candidates, rather than reforming parties in a more gender equal way would miss the point.[10] This report, thus begins with the assumption that we need to first view political parties as male-dominated institutions, and understand the ways which women enter party politics, be nominated as a candidate and compete in elections.

Myanmar's Parliaments, Geography and Electoral Systems

Myanmar's Union or National Parliament is collectively referred to as the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, comprised of the Pyithu Hluttaw (lower house) and the Amyotha Hluttaw (upper house). The Pyithu Hluttaw is designed to have 330 elected MPs and 110 MPs that are appointed by the military.[11] The Amyotha Hluttaw has 168 elected MPs and 56 MPs that are appointed by the military. Myanmar's State/Region Hluttaws vary dramatically in size, but all also reserve 25% (or slightly more) of seats for military appointees. In addition to the 'regular' elected MPs, many State/Region Hluttaws have elected Ethnic Affairs Representatives, to represent specific ethnic groups residing in those States/Regions.[12]

All of Myanmar's elected MPs are elected via a first-past-the-post system. For the Pyithu Hluttaw, each of Myanmar's 330 Townships is a single constituency.

For the Amyotha Hluttaw each State/Region has 12 constituencies – most States/Regions have more than 12 Townships, resulting in some Townships being grouped together to form single constituencies, but in other States/Regions the opposite is true, and some Townships are split into two constituencies. For the State/Region Hluttaws each Township is split into two constituencies.

Since 2008, ethnic identities have been institutionally represented in four different forms: ethnic states, self-administered areas, ethnic affairs ministers, and constituencies won by ethnic parties. Geographically, the country is separated into seven Regions, located in the central area and dominated by the Bamar ethnic majority population, and seven States within the

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[8] Elin Bjarnegård, 'Who's the Perfect Politician? Clientelism as a Determining Feature of Thai Politics', in *Party Politics in Southeast Asia: Clientelism and Electoral Competition in Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines*, by Dirk Tomsa and Andreas Ufen (Routledge, 2013); Elin Bjarnegård and Pär Zetterberg, 'Political Parties, Formal Selection Criteria, and Gendered Parliamentary Representation', *Party Politics*, 25.3 (2019), 325–35 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068817715552>; Elin Bjarnegård and Pär Zetterberg, 'Political Parties and Gender Quota Implementation: The Role of Bureaucratized Candidate Selection Procedures', 2016 <https://doi.org/info:doi/10.5129/001041516818254400>.

[9] 4/18/2020 11:51:00 PM

[10] Carmen Geha, 'The Myth of Women's Political Empowerment within Lebanon's Sectarian Power-Sharing System', *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy*, 40.4 (2019), 498–521 <https://doi.org/10.1080/1554477X.2019.1600965>.

[11] Note that in 2015 elections were only held in 323 constituencies, and were cancelled in the other seven due to security concerns. However, two of these constituencies were able to elect an MP in the 2017 by-elections.

[12] For further information on how Ethnic Affairs Representatives are elected, see, Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar*, p.7.

borderlands dominated by ethnic minority groups. The 2008 Constitution created six Self-Administered Zones/Districts (SAZ/SAD) for the smaller ethnic groups considered minorities within a State or Region, which have a majority within specific townships[13]. There are now self-administered zones or districts for the Wa, Kokang, Naga, Pa-O, Palaung and Danu[14].

Gender Breakdown in Myanmar Parliaments

The 2015 elections resulted in women becoming 10.5% of MPs in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw, up from 4.9% at the end of the previous parliament, and only 2.7% immediately after the last general election in 2010.[15] Across all of the State/Region parliaments women became 9.7% of MPs, up from less than 3% in the previous parliament.[16]

There is considerable variation between States/Regions – for example, in Mon State women are nearly 20% of MPs, but in Chin, Kayah and Rakhine States there are no women MPs at all.[17] The reservation of seats for military appointees notably decreases the proportion of women parliamentarians – women were 13.6% of the MPs elected to the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw in 2015, but only 1.2% of military appointees. Similarly, women were 12.7% of all the MPs elected to the State/Region Hluttaws, but only 0.9% of military appointees.[18] The combined impact of the 2017 and 2018 by-elections has been a slight decrease in the proportion of women in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw to 9.9%, with women falling from 10.6% to 9.7% of Pyithu Hluttaw MPs, and 10.3% of Amyotha Hluttaw MPs.[19]

The proportion of female MPs is now much higher than at any time in Myanmar's past.[20] However, it is still extremely low by international standards – as of 7th February 2020 the IPU's global database indicates that Myanmar ranks 166 out of 191 countries for the level of women's representation in the national lower house.[21] For Asia, the average proportion of women MPs in the national lower house is 20.1%, i.e. double the level in Myanmar.[22] Within ASEAN, only Brunei (9.1%) ranks lower than Myanmar, and some countries are far ahead, e.g. Timor-Leste (38.5%), Philippines (27.8%) and Laos (27.5%).[23]

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[13] Kim Jolliffe, *Ethnic Armed Conflict and Territorial Administration in Myanmar* (San Francisco, United States: The Asia Foundation, July 2015), p. 120 (p. 32)
<https://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/ConflictTerritorialAdministrationfullreportENG.pdf>.
[14] Kyi Pyar Chit Saw and Matthew Arnold, *Administering the State in Myanmar*, Subnational Governance in Myanmar Discussion Paper Series (Yangon, Myanmar: The Asia Foundation, 2014), p. 59 (p. 14).
[15] Renaud Egreteau, 'Legislators in Myanmar's First "Post-Junta" National Parliament (2010–2015): A Sociological Analysis', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 33.2 (2014), pp.99-101; Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, p.11.
[16] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, p.12; Paul Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar* (MDRI-CESD and The Asia Foundation, June 2014), p.11.
[17] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, p.12.
[18] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, pp.11-12.
[19] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, p.11; Corazon H. Ignacio and others, *2018 Myanmar By-Elections; Building the Foundation for Successful 2020 Elections* (Yangon: ANFREL, 2019); 'Results of 2017 By-Elections', *The Global New Light of Myanmar* (Nay Pyi Taw, 3 April 2017).
[20] Paul Minoletti, 'Women's Participation in Burma/Myanmar's Political Systems, 1920s-2010s', in *Global Handbook on Women's Political Rights*, ed. by Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Netina Tan (Palgrave, 2019).
[21] https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=1&year=2020 [Accessed 7th February 2020]. The IPU's database lists Myanmar in joint 160th place. However, this database is outdated for the proportion of Myanmar's lower house women MPs. The correct figure for the 2015 election results is 9.7%.
[22] http://archive.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/world011019.htm [Accessed 7th February 2020].
[23] https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=1&year=2020 [Accessed 7th February 2020].

While this study focuses on Myanmar's gender equality in politics, it is worthwhile to highlight other aspects of political representation. Although we do not have exact data on the ethnic composition of MPs or on the total Myanmar population, the proportion of MPs that are Bamar and non-Bamar appears to roughly correspond to the proportion of the population that is commonly thought to be from Bamar and non-Bamar groups (i.e. Bamar being around 60-65%). Further, the three ethnic minority groups that probably have a larger population than any others account for the largest shares of non-Bamar MPs, e.g. Shan (6.5% of Pyidaungsu Hluttaw MPs), Rakhine (5.7%), Kayin (4.7%). In terms of religious groups, the Christian minority are overrepresented among the MPs, whereas Muslims are not represented at all despite being over 4% of Myanmar's population. The share of MPs that are Buddhist roughly corresponds to the share of the general population – i.e. close to 90%.[24]

Clearly, numerical representation in parliamentary bodies does not entail substantive representation. For example, although ethnic Bamar are not overrepresented among MPs, many ethnic minority leaders feel that decision-making within the dominant and highly top-down NLD is controlled by a small Bamar elite that pays insufficient attention to ethnic minority interests.[25] Further, the Myanmar Armed Forces (Tatmadaw) continues to wield significant influence over policy-making and implementation in Myanmar, and is widely seen to focus on Buddhist and Bamar interests.[26]

Existing Research on Gender and Political Participation in Myanmar

Previous research to explain women's low parliamentary representation in Myanmar has found the following to be important:
- Cultural norms and biases that lead most citizens to prefer male political leaders, for females to have less confidence and ambition to try and become parliamentarians, and for it to be harder for women to travel to remote areas and/or overnight.[27]
- The difficulty of balancing family and household responsibilities that women are typically expected to perform with participating in public life.[28]
- Men dominate key leadership positions within parties at both national and local levels.[29]

Gender differences in education do not explain the low number of women MPs – although women are more likely than men to have little or no education (e.g. never attended school or illiterate), they are more likely than men to be highly educated (e.g. completed high school and hold an undergraduate degree or above), which is of greater relevance for participation in

[24] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, pp.14-15.

[25] Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar*, p.12.

[26] Martin Smith, *Burma: Insurgency and the Politics of Ethnicity*, 2nd edn (London, 1999), p.441; Matthew J. Walton, *Buddhism, Politics and Political Thought in Myanmar* (Cambridge, 2017), pp.33-34.

[27] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, pp.23-24, 30-31, 32-33, 37, 41-42; Gender Equality Network, *Taking the Lead: An Assessment of Women's Leadership Training Needs and Training Initiatives in Myanmar* (Yangon, September 2013), pp.9-10; Gender Equality Network, *Raising the Curtain: Cultural Norms, Social Practices and Gender Equality in Myanmar* (Yangon, 2015), pp.59-63; Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, pp.25-32; The Asia Foundation, *Myanmar 2014: Civic Knowledge and Values in a Changing Society* (Yangon, 2014), pp.78-79.

[28] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, pp.32-33; Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, pp.25-27.

[29] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, p.36.

parliamentary politics.[30] Although women have a lower labour force participation rate than men, the gender gap is lower (and in some cases reversed) in many of the occupational backgrounds that parliamentarians are most commonly drawn from.[31]

Political campaigning is expensive. Many parliamentary candidates have to use their own funds to cover some or all of their costs. This may pose a bigger barrier for women's political participation than men. Research by Gender Equality Network (GEN) has found that party rather than gender difference matter. That is, parties' varied financial capacity to support their candidates affect their abilities to campaign effectively.[32] Although men and women parliamentary candidates both frequently face various forms of harassment, it may be the case that this is more likely to be a problem for women than men – a clearer finding is that harassment of women public figures is often gendered.[33]

Myanmar was ruled by the military from 1962 to 2010. Although there is an elected government now, the military-drafted 2008 Constitution still reserves at least 25% of parliamentary seats for military appointees, and ensures that several key government ministers are appointed by the military (i.e. Defence, Home Affairs and Border Affairs). Further, the Constitution can only be changed with the military's approval.[34] Since very few women are appointed by the military to parliament, the reservation of seats reduces women's numerical representation. The Tatmadaw's long and intimate involvement in Myanmar's politics has had a broader impact on political participation by reinforcing traditional concepts of male authority and superiority as part of a militarization of public space.[35]

Although the majority of Myanmar citizens have a preference for male leaders, in the 2015 elections, vote choice was largely based on party allegiance rather than on candidate's characteristics.[36] This may change for the 2020 elections but most voters are still likely to vote along party lines. This means that how and who the parties recruit, and the extent to which this process disadvantages women relative to men is critical. Our study thus addresses this gap that is understudied in the existing literature.[37]

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[30] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, p.25.
[31] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, pp.26-29.
[32] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, p.40
[33] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, p.44.
[34] It has recently been suggested by one analyst that the Tatmadaw's constitutional veto is not as secure as has often been assumed. However, this veto is very much de facto in place, and probably applies de jure as well. See, Jesse Hartery, 'The NLD Cannot Circumvent the Military's Veto Over Constitutional Amendments', 4 April 2019 <https://teacircleoxford.com/2019/04/04/military-seats-in-the-pyithu-hluttaw-the-limits-of-strict-constitutional-construction/> [accessed 8 February 2020].
[35] Jessica Harriden, *The Authority of Influence: Women and Power in Burmese History* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), especially pp.175-79; Zin Mar Aung, 'From Military Patriarchy to Gender Equity: Including Women in the Democratic Transition in Burma', *Social Research*, 82.2 (2015), pp.543-45.
[36] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, p.42.
[37] For a very brief discussion of this issue, see, Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, pp.36-37.

2. **Overview of Political Parties and Methodology**

Since 2010, a proliferation of parties have been formed to advance democracy or reclaim lost rights of their respective communities. Broadly, three types of parties have emerged: nationwide multi-ethnic parties such as NLD and USDP; ethnic-based parties such as ANP, SNLD and MNP; and smaller Bamar dominated parties.

In our study, we chose to focus on nine parties of different sizes, organizational structures, ages and ideological platforms. This study is drawn based on the data collected in 72 interviews conducted November 2018 to March 2019 with members of nine political parties – Arakan National Party (ANP), Kachin State Democracy Party (KSDP), Lisu National Development Party (LNDP), Mon National Party (MNP), National League for Democracy (NLD), Pa-O National Organization (PNO), Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD), Ta'Ang National Party (TNP), and Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP). This included the six parties that won the most seats across all of Myanmar's parliaments in the 2015 election (NLD, USDP, ANP, SNLD, TNP, PNO), as well as the most electorally successful ethnic Kachin, Lisu and Mon parties (KSDP, LNDP and MNP).[38] In addition to their electoral success, these parties were chosen to capture the range of sizes, organizational models, regional and political interests within Myanmar politics (see below).

The interviews covered interviewees' personal and political backgrounds; intra-party rules, promotion, and recruitment of candidates for the 2015 elections; and experiences as a politician. Our interviewees were grouped into two categories: i) 'candidates' – people who ran as candidates in the 2015 elections, including both those who won and lost the election;[39] ii) 'gatekeepers' – those who hold positions of authority in the party but did not compete in the 2015 election. Most of our gatekeepers hold positions at the central level (e.g. party chairman, general secretary, central executive committee member, central committee member) or Township level (e.g. Township chairman or Township secretary). However, a few gatekeepers hold positions at the State/Region or District level of their party. The intention was to interview six candidates and four gatekeepers from each of the largest and most electorally successful parties in our study (NLD, USDP, ANP and SNLD) and four candidates and two gatekeepers from the smaller parties (TNP, PNO, LNDP, KSDP, MNP). This target was met, and one additional gatekeeper from MNP and one additional candidate from TNP were also interviewed, as it was convenient for the field researchers to conduct these additional interviews.

Ideally, we would have liked to have interviewed approximately equal numbers of women and men. However, the strongly male dominated nature of Myanmar politics means that the pool of available women interviewees is much smaller. This is particularly the case for party gatekeepers, and we decided it was important to interview individuals in senior positions within their party, even though they are overwhelmingly male. Thus, 25 of our gatekeeper interviewees were men while only two were women. Our candidate interviews were more evenly divided: 28 of our candidate interviewees were men and 17 were women. We were able to achieve gender parity in our candidate interviewee selection for KSDP, MNP, NLD and SNLD, but not for the other parties in our study.

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[38] UEC database on successful candidates in the 2015 election (Hereafter, "UEC database").
[39] N.b. one candidate interviewee from SNLD had been chosen by his party to run in the 2015 election for Kyethi Township, but UEC cancelled elections due to security concerns. This interviewee than successfully ran in this Township in the 2017 by-elections. All other candidate interviewees ran in the 2015 elections.

The interviews were all conducted in Myanmar language by researchers from EMREF, and then translated by these researchers into English. The data analysis was conducted by one researcher from EMREF and three international researchers based on the English language data. When conducting the data analysis, it became clear that a few issues had not been covered clearly enough in the original interviews, and there were a few that needed clarifications. In February 2020 EMREF researchers followed up with telephone calls to a senior official from the central party apparatus from each of the nine parties to clarify the issues.

Profile of Nine Parties Included in the Study

The parties in our study include those that are: i) relatively highly institutionalized and have clear rules that are followed most or all of the time (e.g. MNP, NLD); ii) those that have a low level of institutionalization and processes frequently being performed in an ad-hoc manner (e.g. KSDP, LNDP, TNP); iii) parties that are between i) and ii) (e.g. ANP, PNO, SNLD, USDP). The parties in our study also have significantly different histories, political organizations, outlooks and internal party cultures – for the purposes of this paper the following categorization can be suggested: i) parties that are "old" by Myanmar standards, having competed in the 1990 elections, and were then suppressed by the military government in the 1990s and 2000s (e.g. MNP, NLD, SNLD); ii) newer ethnic-based parties founded since 2010 (e.g. KSDP, LNDP, TNP); iii) parties with strong connections with the military establishment (e.g. PNO, USDP).[40]

Arakan National Party (ANP)

The Arakan National Party (ANP) was the product of a merger between the Rakhine National Development Party (RNDP) and the Arakan League for Democracy (ALD), and was registered with the Union Election Commission (UEC) on 6th March, 2014.[41] At the time of their founding, ANP's goals were announced as 'federalism', 'democratisation' and 'development'; but in practice the party has had a strong focus on Rakhine nationalism.[42] Previously, the Rakhine National Development Party (RNDP), led by Dr. Aye Maung, was registered on 6th May, 2010, and won a total of 32 seats in the 2010 elections.[43] The ALD was founded in 1989 and ran in the 1990 election, winning 11 seats.[44] The ALD re-registered with the UEC in 2012, before then combining with the RNDP to form the ANP in 2014. As of February 2020, the party claimed to have TECs in 17 Townships and more than 20,000 members.[45]

Kachin State Democracy Party (KSDP)

In 2010, Dr. Manam Tu Ja, former Vice President of Kachin Independence Organization (KIO), attempted to register the Kachin State Progressive Party with the UEC in time for the 2010 elections, but was controversially prevented from doing so, along with other ethnic

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[40] The ANP does not fit easily in the above schema, as it was a merger between the ALD – which would go in category i) – and the ANP – which would go in category ii).
[41] Information on party registration taken from www.uec.gov.mm [Accessed 17th February 2020].
[42] Martin Smith, *Arakan (Rakhine State): A Land in Conflict on Myanmar's Western Frontier* (Amsterdam: Transnational Institute, December 2019), pp.88-90.
[43] Enlightened Myanmar Research, "Factbook of Political Parties in Myanmar, 2010-2012" (Yangon: Enlightened Myanmar Research, March 2014), p.207
[44] Enlightened Myanmar Research, "Factbook of Political Parties in Myanmar, 2010-2012" (Yangon: Enlightened Myanmar Research, March 2014), p.95.
[45] Telephone conversation with senior central party official, February 2020.

Kachin parties trying to register.[46] In 2013 Dr. Manam Tu Ja founded the Kachin State Democracy Party (KSDP), and, at the second attempt, this party's registration was accepted by the UEC on 13th January, 2014.[47] The KSDP claimed to have around 13,000 members in 2015.[48] The KSDP has now merged with three other ethnic Kachin parties to form the Kachin State People's Party.[49]

Lisu National Development Party (LNDP)

The LNDP was registered with the UEC on 17th December 2013, with the stated intention of representing the Lisu people in Myanmar and to lead the development of that ethnicity.[50] The LNDP has a close cooperative relationship with the USDP.[51] As of February 2020, the party claimed to have TECs in 18 Townships and around 11,000 members.[52]

Mon National Party (MNP)

The Mon Democratic Front was established in 1988, and ran in the 1990 elections, winning 5 seats.[53] The party re-registered with the UEC after the 2010 elections, using the name the Mon Democratic Party. In 2014 the party joined with a few MPs from the All Mon Region Democracy Party and changed its name to the Mon National Party.[54] In 2018 the MNP merged with other ethnic Mon parties to form the Mon Party.[55]

National League for Democracy (NLD)

The NLD was established in late 1988, in the wake of the popular uprising against the military government. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi became the focal point of the protest movement and was one of the founders of the NLD.[56] She continues to lead the party today. NLD won a landslide victory in the 1990 election, winning 80.8% of the available seats, but the military government did not recognize the result of the election.[57] Daw Aung San Suu Kyi spent most of the 1990s and 2000s under house arrest, and many other NLD leaders and ordinary

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[46] Martin Smith, 'Reflections on the Kachin Ceasefire', in *War and Peace in the Borderlands of Myanmar*, by Mandy Sadan (ed.) (Copenhagen, 2016), pp.87-88.

[47] BNI Election Newsroom, "KSDP leader Dr.Tu Jar calls for peace in Kachin State during the election campaign", October 14, 2015: https://www.bnionline.net/en/2015-election/kachin-state/item/935-ksdp-leader-dr-tu-ja-calls-for-peace-in-kachin-state-during-election.html

[48] Telephone conversation with senior central party official, February 2020.

[49] Kachin News Group, 'Another Kachin Political Party Merges with KSPP', *BNI* (Chiang Mai/Yangon, 23 December 2019) <https://www.bnionline.net/en/news/another-kachin-political-party-merges-kspp> [accessed 20 February 2020].

[50] www.uec.gov.mm [Accessed 17th February 2020].

[51] Emily Fishbein, '"The Blood Spoke": Lisu Deaths Stir Unrest in Kachin', *Frontier Myanmar* (Yangon, 11 July 2019).

[52] Telephone conversation with senior central party official, February 2020.

[53] Derek Tonkin, 'The 1990 Elections in Myanmar: Broken Promises or a Failure of Communication?', *Contemporary Southeast Asia: A Journal of International and Strategic Affairs*, 29.1 (2007), p.35.

[54] Susanne Kempel, Chan Myawe Aung Sun, and Aung Tun, *Myanmar Political Parties at a Time of Transition: Political Party Dynamics at the National and Local Level* (Yangon: Pyoe Pin, April 2015).

[55] Naw Betty Han, 'Three Political Parties Merge Under Mon Party Banner', *Myanmar Times* (Yangon, 26 September 2018) <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/three-political-parties-merge-under-mon-party-banner.html> [accessed 20 February 2020].

[56] Bertil Lintner, *Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma's Struggle for Democracy* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2011), p.64.

[57] Lintner, *Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma's Struggle for Democracy*, pp.6-10.

members were imprisoned during this period. NLD decided not to compete in the 2010 general election, believing that it was not free and fair, including objecting to the requirement that parties must expel all members who were imprisoned or under detention orders.[58] Immediately after the 2010 elections Aung San Suu Kyi was released from house arrest, and the party participated in the 2012 by-elections, winning 43 out of 44 of the seats it contested.[59] As of February 2020, the party
claimed to have TECs in around 300 Townships and at least 3 million members.[60]

Pa-O National Organization (PNO)

The PNO was established in 1949, and its armed wing – the Pa-O National Army (PNA) – fought against the central government for much of the next five decades. However, in 1991 the PNO/PNA made a ceasefire agreement with the military government, under which the PNA became a 'People's Militia Force', i.e. closely allied with the Tatmadaw.[61] The 2008 Constitution established a Pa-O Self-Administered Zone (SAZ), consisting of three Townships in Southern Shan State: Hopong, Hsiseng, and Pinlaung. The PNO competed in the 2010 and 2015 elections and in both elections won all of the seats that are elected from constituencies located in the Pa-O SAZ, meaning that it also occupied all of the elected seats on the SAZ leading body.[62] As of February 2020, the party claimed to have TECs in 17 Townships and more than 80,000 members.[63]

Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD)

The SNLD registered with the UEC in 1998 and ran in the 1990 election, winning 23 seats.[64] The party re-registered with the UEC on 12th June 2012.[65] At the time of the 2015 elections the SNLD primarily focused on trying to appeal to ethnic Shan people, but in March 2019 the party announced that they, "…are trying to change into a state-oriented or policy-oriented party."[66] As of February 2020, the party claimed to have TECs in more than 40 Townships and around 60,000 members.[67]

Ta'ang National Party (TNP)

The Ta'ang National Party was registered with the UEC on 24th May, 2010.[68] The TNP seeks to represent the Ta'ang ethnic group, and to work together with other ethnicities to establish a federal system of government in Myanmar.[69] In the 2010 election the party won 6 seats,[70]

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[58] Burma Fund UN Office, "Burma's 2010 Elections: A Comprehensive Report" (New York: Burma Fund UN Office, January 2011), p.8.
[59] Enlightened Myanmar Research, "Factbook of Political Parties in Myanmar, 2010-2012" (Yangon: Enlightened Myanmar Research, March 2014), p.133.
[60] Telephone conversation with senior central party official, February 2020.
[61] Kim Jolliffe, *Ethnic Armed Conflict and Territorial Administration in Myanmar* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation, 2015), p.61.
[62] Kim Jolliffe, *Ethnic Armed Conflict and Territorial Administration in Myanmar*, p.61.
[63] Telephone conversation with senior central party official, February 2020.
[64] Tonkin, 'The 1990 Elections in Myanmar', p.35.
[65] www.uec.gov.mm [Accessed 17th February 2020].
[66] Myat Moe Thu, 'SNLD to Change Focus from Ethnic- to Policy-Oriented Party', *The Myanmar Times* (Yangon, 1 March 2019) <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/snld-change-focus-ethnic-policy-oriented-party.html> [accessed 31 December 2019].
[67] Telephone conversation with senior central party official, February 2020.
[68] Union Election Committee's website: www.uec.gov.mm
[69] Union Election Committee's website: www.uec.gov.mm

and this rose to 12 in 2015.[71] As of February 2020, the party claimed to have TECs in 12 Townships and more than 30,000 members.[72]

Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP)

The Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) was founded in 1993, and although it claimed to be a mass social organisation, it was led by Than Shwe – the chairman of the ruling military State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) government – and other top positions were filled by SLORC government ministers. Further, membership of the USDA, "…was essentially compulsory for civil servants and those who sought to do business with or receive services from the state."[73] In 2010 the USDA was reorganized into a political party and on 8th June of that year was registered with the UEC as 'Union Solidarity and Development Party'.[74] In the 2010 general election USDP won 883 out of 1154 total available elected seats.[75] USDP fared much worse in the 2015 elections, taking only 117 seats that time round.[76] As of February 2020, the party claimed to have TECs in all of Myanmar's Townships.[77]

Table 1 shows the proportion of women and men candidates and MPs across all parliaments in the 2015 elections for each of the parties in our study. It is striking that women were less than 20% of candidates in all of these parties, and only one party has more than 20% women MPs – the KSDP, which only has four MPs in total. The average proportion of candidates that were women across all parties and independents in the 2015 election was around 13%.[78] Five of our parties were higher than average (MNP, LNDP, SNLD, NLD and KSDP), and four of our parties (TNP, USDP, ANP and PNO) were below average. Women's participation as both candidates and MPs is strikingly low in ANP, PNO and USDP.

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[70] Kudo Toshihiro, *Results of the 2010 Elections in Myanmar: An Analysis* (The Institute of Developing Economies, January 2011) <https://www.ide.go.jp/English/Research/Region/Asia/20110104.html> [accessed 17 May 2019].

[71] See Table 1, below.

[72] Telephone conversation with senior central party official, February 2020.

[73] Robert H. Taylor, *The State in Myanmar* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2009), p.446.

[74] www.uec.gov.mm [Accessed 17th February 2020].

[75] Toshihiro, *Results of the 2010 Elections in Myanmar*.

[76] See Table 1, below.

[77] Telephone conversation with senior central party official, February 2020.

[78] Enlightened Myanmar Research, *Important Data of 2015 General Election Myanmar* (Yangon: Enlightened Myanmar Research, October 2015), p.9; International Foundation for Electoral Systems, *Elections in Myanmar: 2015 General Elections - Frequently Asked Questions* (Washington, D.C: International Foundation for Electoral Systems, November 2015), p.2. Note that there is a slight discrepancy between these two sources for how many of the 6072 candidates were women – Enlightened Myanmar Research states that it was 805 (i.e. 13.3%), whereas International Foundation for Electoral Systems gives the number as 800 (i.e. 13.2%), .

Table 1: Parties, Women Candidates and MPs Included in this Report

Party	Total Candidates (N)	Women Candidates (N)	Women as % of Candidates	Total MPs (N)	Women MPs (N)	Women as % of MPs
MNP	54	10	19%	3	0	0%
SNLD	151	27	18%	42	7	17%
LNDP	28	5	18%	5	1	20%
KSDP	55	8	15%	4	1	25%
NLD	1152	167	14%	886	134	15%
TNP	27	3	11%	12	1	8%
USDP	1151	69	6%	117	3	3%
ANP	79	4	5%	45	2	4%
PNO	24	1	4%	10	0	0%

Sources: UEC database.

3. Politicians' Backgrounds, Experience and Motivations

This section presents basic demographic information our interviewees, before briefly discussing their family backgrounds, their political role models, previous experience in politics and public life. This information helps us to understand what types of women and men become political leaders, and the formative experiences they have gone through. Research from around the world has demonstrated that these characteristics matter. In a study of developing countries, Bjarnegård and Zetterberg demonstrate that parties that select candidates who have held party office tend to have fewer women candidates than parties who do not use this as a criterion [79]. In many countries family connections constitute one of the few ways in which women can gain political legitimacy and reach powerful positions.[80] In another study on Singapore's hegemonic party system, Tan shows that electoral incentives and party pragmatism can drive a party to nominate more women candidates to win elections.[81] Other studies also shown that women, once in public office, serve as role models for adolescents and younger women.[82]

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[79] Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 'Political Parties, Formal Selection Criteria, and Gendered Parliamentary Representation'.

[80] Farida Jalalzai, *Shattered, Cracked, or Firmly Intact?: Women and the Executive Glass Ceiling Worldwide* (Oxford University Press, 2013); Farida Jalalzai and Meg Rincker, 'Blood Is Thicker than Water: Family Ties to Political Power Worldwide', *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung*, 43.4 (2018), 54–72.

[81] Netina Tan, 'Why Are Gender Reforms Adopted in Singapore? Party Pragmatism and Electoral Incentives', *Pacific Affairs*, 89.2 (2016), 369–93.

[82] Christina Wolbrecht and David E. Campbell, 'Leading by Example: Female Members of Parliament as Political Role Models', *American Journal of Political Science*, 51.4 (2007), 921–39 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5907.2007.00289.x>; David E. Campbell and Christina Wolbrecht, 'See Jane Run: Women Politicians as Role Models for Adolescents', *The Journal of Politics*, 68.2 (2006), 233–47 <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00402.x>.

Interviewees' Party Positions, Age Education and Occupational Background

23% of our female candidate interviewees but only 7% of male candidate interviewees were not married. The rest of the candidate interviewees and all of the gatekeeper interviewees were married. The youngest gatekeeper interviewee was 33 years and the eldest person was 76 years, with a mean age of 58.5 years.[83] 37% of gatekeeper interviewees were aged 66 and above. Candidate interviewees tended to be younger than gatekeepers, ranging from 29 to 69 years, and a mean age of 52.6 years. Only 13% of candidate interviewees were aged 66 and above. There was little gender difference in the age of our interviewees. In terms of age, our candidate interviewees fairly closely match Union parliamentarians as a whole – in the Pyidaungsu hluttaw the mean age of MPs is 53.5, with minimal gender difference.[84]

Two of the male gatekeepers in our study had only attended primary-level education, but the rest of our interviewees had attended secondary-level education or above. Among our interviewees, women and men were approximately equally likely to have completed a university degree, but women (32%) were significantly more likely than men (9%) to have completed a post-graduate degree. The greater tendency of women than men to hold postgraduate degrees is a clear feature of Myanmar politics – in the Pyidaungsu hluttaw 22.7% of women but only 8.5% of men MPs have post-graduate degrees, and across the State/Region hluttaws these figures are 10.7% and 3.2% respectively.[85]

The findings for our interviewees' occupational backgrounds were categorized with the occupational codes used to present the 2014 census data.[86] The most common occupational backgrounds for our women candidates were i) education (24%) and ii) wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles (24%). Wholesale and retail trade and repair of motor vehicles was also the most common background for men candidates (18%), but men were noticeably less likely to have a background in education (11%). Only 11% of men candidates, 1% of women candidates, and zero men and women candidates and gatekeepers worked in agriculture, forestry and fishing compared to 55% of men and 47% of women workers for the Myanmar population in general.[87]

Family's connection with politics[88]

60% of the gatekeepers interviewed for this study, including both of the female gatekeepers, had a family member(s) that had been involved in politics. Women candidates (47%) were more likely than men candidates (32%) to have a family member that had been involved in politics.

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[83] N.b. all ages referred to in this paragraph are calculated as of 1st February 2016 – i.e. the first day the MPs elected in the 2015 elections sat in the new parliament.

[84] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar: Women and Men Candidates in the 2015 Elections* (Yangon: Gender Equality Network, August 2017), p.16.

[85] Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar: Experiences of Women Parliamentarians* (Yangon, Myanmar: The Asia Foundation, April 2017), p.37.

[86] Government of Myanmar - Department of Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, The Union Report: Occupation and Industry* (Nay Pyi Taw: Ministry of Immigration and Population - Department of Population, March 2016), especially p.11.

[87] Government of Myanmar - Department of Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census*, p.11.

[88] This analysis mainly builds on Q5 (for candidates): "Has anyone else in your family been involved in politics? If so, please give details." The same question was asked as Q4 of gatekeepers. 'Family member' was defined as including any of the following: parents, siblings, grandparents, aunts, uncles.

This is in line with politics in many countries of the region, where political dynasties and familial succession are common as ways to legitimize new political leaders [89]

Role Models[90]

Historic national leaders such as General Aung San, U Nu, Thakhin Than Tun and Dee Dote U Ba Cho were given as role models by some interviewees. Somewhat similarly, the party founders and/or leaders of armed ethnic movements were also mentioned as role models by some interviewees from parties representing that ethnic group, for example: U Aung Kham Hti (Pa-O/PNO); U Sai Leik (Shan/SNLD); U Naing Ngwe Thein, U Naing Thein Maw and U Naing Tun Thein (Mon/MNP); and U Aye Thar Aung (Rakhine/ANP).

Five women candidates but only one man candidate mentioned their father as their role model.[91] Previous research on Myanmar also indicates that father's political participation has a particularly large influence on the likelihood of daughters to become politicians, the most famous example of which is Aung San Suu Kyi.[92]

Aung San Suu Kyi herself was the individual most commonly mentioned as a role model by our interviewees: 2 women and 1 man interviewee from NLD; 1 woman and 1 man interviewee from TNP; and (somewhat surprisingly) 1 man MP from USDP.[93]

> "We, the ethnic people, like Daw Aung San Suu Kyi. If our parties would not win, we wanted her party win." (TNP candidate, female)[94]

> "I heard a lot about General Aung San when I was young. Then I heard a lot about Aung San Suu Kyi. That's why I wanted to join NLD but unfortunately there was no space for me. At that time, USDP invited me to join their party. So, I decided to join USDP." (USDP candidate, male)[95]

Previous experiences in politics or public life[96]

As expected, the vast majority of our interviewees had some form of experience in politics or public life before taking a current position. One woman and one man candidate did not have such experience. The man candidate's occupational background was as a lawyer[97]. Similarly, the woman candidate had a law degree, and said felt that this, together with being 'a well-known

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[89] Mark R. Thompson, 'Asia's Hybrid Dynasties', *Asian Affairs*, 43.2 (2012), 204–20 <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2012.682366>..

[90] This analysis mainly builds on Q2 (for candidates): "Did you have any role model or leader who inspired you to join politics?". This question was not asked to gatekeepers.

[91] Interviews HM-MMP10, LR-FMP03, LR-FMP06, LR-FMP07, SS-FMP01, SS-FMP03

[92] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar: Women and Men Candidates in the 2015 Elections*, pp.34-35.

[93] Interviews HM-FMP14, HM-MMP02, LR-FMP02, LR-FMP03, LR-MMP01, LR-MMP04.

[94] Interview HM-FMP14.

[95] Interview LR-MMP04.

[96] This analysis mainly builds on Q3 (for candidates): "Did you have any experience participating in politics or public life before joining the party?" The same question was asked as Q2 of gatekeepers. 'Politics or public life' was defined as including any of the following: joining student demonstrations; being members of ethnic armed groups; being a member of a political party founded since 1989 onwards and/or having been a member of the, Burma Socialist Programme Party (BSPP); being members of the ethnic culture and literature groups; or participating in community development groups.

[97] Interview SS-MMP03.

person in my village' and speaking three languages (Shan, Ta'ang and Myanmar), led leaders from her party (TNP) to approach her and encourage her to become a candidate.[98]

Many interviewees from parties that have origins tracing back to the late 1980s (e.g. MNP, NLD, SNLD, and parts of ANP) described their political experience as including one or more of the following: being party members or candidates in 1990 election;[99] as activists in protest movements such as the U Thant funeral movement,[100] the 1988 uprising,[101] or Saffron revolution;[102] or being a member of an ethnic armed-group.[103] Their previous experience in political activities encouraged them to join political parties, for example:

> "In 2007, I actively participated in saffron revolution. Actually, my ambition was just for better education, it is not the politics. But I realised that we need to set up a good system, I joined the politics which I believe that every citizens should have responsibilities." (ANP candidate, female)[104]

Aside from political experience, a number of interviewees mentioned having a background in social or religious groups, or as teachers, as a means through which they had gained experience in public life and trust and respect from their community.[105] Interviewees from ethnic-based parties (especially KSDP, LNDP, MNP, SNLD and TNP) were particularly likely to describe having experience in community groups such as: ethnic literature and cultural committees; ethnic youth committees; or church-based social groups.[106]

4. Party Gatekeeper Selection Processes

Party bodies at Township and central levels – especially the central executive committee (CEC) and Township executive committee (TEC) – play a key role in candidate selection, and as described later in this section, also influence party promotion. Therefore, understanding the process of who becomes members of these key party bodies can help us identify the hurdles for women to access higher political positions and to uncover the dynamics of complex intra-party politics. Previous research has shown that when senior party positions are primarily held by men, this tends to reproduce male dominance. First, it sends a symbolic and discouraging signal to women.[107] Second, people in senior party positions are the ones who have the most say over who gets in and who gets promoted, but they also exert a great deal of influence over policy priorities and internal party culture.[108] It has been demonstrated in a number of different studies from various contexts that men gatekeepers will not just select men successors, but that

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[98] Interview HM-FMP14. See also interviewee HM-FGK03, saying that her experience as a lawyer gave her an advantage relative to other women for becoming a politician, particularly for giving her the confidence to speak to crowds of people.

[99] Interview SS-GKTECM01.

[100] Interview LR-MMP01.

[101] Interviews HM-FGK03, LR-FMP01, LR-GKCECM03, LR-MMP01, LR-MMP03, SS-GKCECM03, SS-GKTECM03, SS-MMP06, SS-MMP07.

[102] Interview SS-FMP02.

[103] Interviews SS-FMP03, SS-MMP02.

[104] Interview SS-FMP02.

[105] For example, see Interviews HM-MMP05, HM-MMP10, LR-FMP05, LR-FMP06, LR-GKCECM02, LR-MMP04, LR-MMP07, SS-FMP01, SS-GKCECM03.

[106] For example, see Interviews HM-MMP02, HM-MGK06, HM-MMP07, LR-FMP05, LR-FMP06, LR-MMP06, LR-MMP11, SSGKCECM01, SS-GKTECM01.

[107] Christine Cheng and Margit Tavits, 'Informal Influences in Selecting Female Political Candidates', *Political Research Quarterly*, 64.2 (2011), 460–71.

[108] Bjarnegård, *Gender, Informal Institutions and Political Recruitment*.

they will also protect the existing internal party culture and the existing practices.[109] Such a status quo is favorable to insiders who know the rules of the game, but tends to disfavor newcomers, such as women.[110] When there are more women in senior positions, more women will be nominated and selected,[111] and new party priorities may emerge.[112]

Who Becomes a Central Executive Committee (CEC) Member and How are They Chosen?[113]

Table 2: CEC Membership by Gender[114]

Parties	Total CEC Members (N)	Females on CEC (N)	Females on CEC (%)
KSDP*	36	11	31%
MNP*	27	6	22%
NLD*	21	4	19%
SNLD	25	4	17%
LNDP	31	5	16%
PNO	48	5	10%
TNP	19	1	5%
ANP*	39	2	5%
USDP*	45	1	2%

As seen in Table 2, all of the parties in our study have male-dominated CECs, although there is significant variation between parties in the extent of this. Of the six parties for which we have complete data, KSDP has the highest proportion of female CEC members (31%), and ANP and TNP have the lowest (5%). Only two parties (KSDP and MNP) have over 20% women

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[109] Tània Verge and Sílvia Claveria, 'Gendered Political Resources: The Case of Party Office', *Party Politics*, 24.5 (2018), 536–48 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068816663040>; Bjarnegård and Kenny, 'Revealing the "Secret Garden"'; Geha.

[110] Elin Bjarnegård and Meryl Kenny, 'Comparing Candidate Selection: A Feminist Institutionalist Approach', *Government and Opposition*, 51.3 (2016), 370–92 <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2016.4>.

[111] Cheng and Tavits.

[112] Tali Mendelberg, Christopher F. Karpowitz, and Nicholas Goedert, 'Does Descriptive Representation Facilitate Women's Distinctive Voice? How Gender Composition and Decision Rules Affect Deliberation', *American Journal of Political Science*, 58.2 (2014), 291–306 <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12077>; Amanda Clayton and Pär Zetterberg, 'Quota Shocks: Electoral Gender Quotas and Government Spending Priorities Worldwide', *The Journal of Politics*, 80.3 (2018), 916–32 <https://doi.org/10.1086/697251>; Ana Catalano Weeks, 'Quotas and Party Priorities: Direct and Indirect Effects of Quota Laws', *Political Research Quarterly*, 72.4 (2019), 849–62 <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912918809493>.

[113] This analysis mainly builds on: i) Q13 (for candidates) – "Please tell me how people in your party get chosen to be members of central committee (CC) or central executive committee (CEC)?"; ii) Q15 (for candidates) – "Have you held any position within your party? If so, how did you get chosen for that position?". The same questions were asked as Q8 and Q10 of gatekeepers.

[114] SNLD, LNDP, PNO and TNP all provided us with a complete list of the names of the CEC members, from which we extracted the data in Table X. However, we were not able to get such a list from the parties marked with * and the numbers for them are derived from what a senior party figure told us via phone call in February 2020 and we were not able to independently verify.

members. In some parties women hold senior positions within the CEC, e.g. chairperson (NLD), vice-chairperson (ANP, LNDP); and in some others women hold CEC positions of some authority. e.g. treasurer (KSDP) and auditor (SNLD). However, in all parties the majority of senior positions are held by men. And, in PNO and USDP all senior positions are held by men, with women only being basic members of the CEC.[115]

> "The positions for president, Vice President, and secretary etc were assigned to men … The women don't possess that kind of important roles. Women are just members in CEC and CC." (PNO candidate, female)[116]

Previous research indicates that across all of the 91 parties that competed in the 2015 election, only three parties (the Mon Women's Party, the NLD and the Danu National Organisation Party) had a woman in any of the three most senior positions, i.e. leader, deputy-leader, or chairperson – these were the Danu National Organisation Party, the Mon Women's Party, and the NLD.[117] Of these parties only the NLD won any seats in the 2015 election. As has been argued elsewhere, Aung San Suu Kyi's position as leader of the NLD and Myanmar's civilian government is a highly unique case and it is extremely unlikely that she would have reached this position if she were not the daughter of Myanmar independence hero Aung San.[118]

As Table 2 shows, the size of the CECs for the nine parties under study vary considerably, from 19 members for the TNP to 48 members for the PNO. How these parties chose their CEC members varies considerably, ranging from the highly democratic and systematic process of the MNP, to the wholly unelected and non-systematic process of the LNDP. LNDP is the only party in our study not to have at least some elected members on its CEC – interviewees gave slightly different accounts of exactly how CEC members were appointed, but it is clear that this did not follow a strict procedure:

> "We have not had a party conference since the party was established … and there was no systematic way of electing CEC members as well."[119]

In contrast to LNDP, all of the members of the MNP's CEC were elected, following a systematic bottom-up procedure. The members of each Township Committee are elected from Village and Ward level parties. Each Township Committee sends around 20 delegates to the party conference. At the party conference, the delegates elect the CC and then the CC elect the CEC from among themselves.[120] Several USDP interviewees claimed that their party followed a broadly similar bottom-up process to MNP,[121] with one interviewee specifying that in 2012 this bottom-up approach replaced the former centrally-appointed process. [122]

ANP and SNLD both elect the majority of their CEC members, with Township CECs having a key role for nominating candidates and for sending delegates to vote on CC and/or CEC

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[115] The data on CEC composition provided by MNP to the authors of this paper only specified who held the position of chairperson and secretary (both of whom are male), and the data provided by TNP did not specify the positions held by any of the CEC members.
[116] Interview HM-FMP15.
[117] Phan Tee Eain, *Report on Observing Women's Participation in Myanmar's November 2015 General Election*, 2016.
[118] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar*, p.34.
[119] Interview LR-GKCECM05.
[120] See, especially, Interviews SS-FMP04, SS-GKCECM01, SS-GKTECM01, SS-MMP02, SS-MMP07.
[121] Interviews LR-GKCECF01, LR-GKCECM01, LR-MMP04, SS-GKDM01, SS-GKSM01.
[122] Interview SS-GKSM01.

candidates at party conference.[123] However, SNLD also reserve 7 CEC positions for the founders of the party, and ANP reserve 5 positions for former members of ALD and 5 for former members of RNDP.[124] ANP and SNLD both have some form of mechanism to ensure representation of different geographical areas – ANP has a guarantee of 1 CEC representative for each of its 7 Districts, and SNLD's CEC automatically includes the chairpersons of their three biggest branch offices (i.e. Northern Shan, Eastern Shan, and Southern Shan).[125]

NLD interviewees gave conflicting answers for the selection of the CEC. For example: i) two interviewees described the same kind of bottom-up election process used by MNP, culminating in CC members electing the CEC members;[126] ii) another interviewee said that the previous CEC members selected the new CEC members;[127] iii) another said that although the step-by-step bottom-up was used from village/ward up to CC level, "…for CEC Daw Aung San Suu Kyi formed it with whom she likes."[128] A further interviewee gave a response that supports iii) but also suggests that i) is partially correct, i.e. "…CEC's chair Daw Aung San Suu Kyi selects CEC members by herself from CC members. Then she gets confirmation from the CC."[129]

PNO CEC members are nominated and then subject to confirmation at the party conference.[130] Interviewees were often not explicit as to who nominates candidates, or whether nominated candidates are ever rejected by conference attendees, but this appears to be a highly top-down process and one CEC interviewee stated that he was offered his position by party leaders.[131] Since 2012, the party has reserved CEC positions for representatives from five sectors, including, the Literature and Cultural Committee, the Blood Donation Group, the Traditional Medicine Department, and military representatives from the PNA.[132] One CEC member interviewed described how a democratic CEC election process is not used, and he felt this was a good thing, as it would threaten party discipline:

> "If a voting system is practiced [for CEC or CC], a person could launch a lot of campaign. It could result in deviation from party policy. To become a strong and firm party, the party policy should be controlled by a trusted person."[133]

KSDP's CEC and CC were chosen at the party conference. The party chairman described a fairly democratic process,[134] but this was contradicted by several other interviewees from this party, who described a 15-member executive board having the primary role in choosing the CEC and CC members, with some members being directly appointed and others being subject to a confirmatory vote that was probably largely a rubber-stamping exercise.[135] Several CEC members interviewees described being directly appointed to their position by the chairperson.[136]

[123] Interviews HM-FGK03, HM-MGK05, SS-GKTECM04, SS-GKTECM05, SS-FMP01, SS-MMP01, SS-MMP06.
[124] Interviews HM-MMP07, SS-GKCECM03, SS-GK-CECM04.
[125] Interviews HM-MMP07, SS-GKCECM03, SS-GK-CECM04.
[126] Interviews LR-FMP03, SS-GKTECM02.
[127] Interview LR-GKCECM03.
[128] Interview LR-FMP01.
[129] Interview LR-GKCECM02.
[130] Interviews HM-MGK04, HM-MGK07.
[131] Interview HM-MGK04.
[132] Interview HM-MGK04.
[133] Interview HM-MGK04.
[134] Interview LR-GKCECM04.
[135] Interviews LR-FMP06, LR-GKCECM06, LR-MMP10.
[136] Interviews LR-GKCECM06, LR-MMP11.

Another interviewee went as far to claim that:

> "There was not a systematic process. He [the party chairperson] just appointed the ones who would listen to him."[137]

Interviewees from TNP gave quite unclear and sometimes contradictory answers for how their CEC members are chosen.

Who Becomes a Central Committee (CC) Member and How Are They Chosen?[138]

The size of CCs varies considerably, from only 58 for the TNP,[139] to more than 200 for the PNO and 350 for USDP.[140] For this study we were only able to collect complete CC membership lists for three parties, which shows that women are: 15% of SNLD CC members, 7% of NLD CC members, and 5% of TNP CC members.[141] Previous research found that women were 9% of ANP's CC members.[142]

As described above, the MNP has a highly democratic bottom-up process for choosing CC (and CEC) members. ANP, NLD and USDP all have a fairly bottom-up process for selecting their CC members, with most or all CC members elected via a process in which Village/Ward parties nominate members for the TEC, and then the TEC nominates members for District level, District level nominates to State/Region level,[143] and then State/Region level committees nominate/elect CC members.[144] The interviews are not fully clear but it seems that in USDP State/Region committees directly elect CC members for their State/Region,[145] whereas ANP and NLD State/Region committees nominate candidates for election to the CC, and there is then some kind of vote at the party conference to choose the CC members.[146]

PNO's TECs each nominate 2 or 3 CC members, however these account for only a small proportion of the more than 200 members of this body.[147] The PNO reserves positions on its CC for a wide range of bodies, including (but not limited to) the Women's Department, the Literature and Cultural Committee, the Blood Donation Group, the Traditional Medicine Department, and military representatives from the PNA.[148] It is not clear from our interviews how the rest of the CC members are chosen. Interviewees from KSDP, LNDP and TNP gave inconsistent answers for how CC members of their party are chosen, likely indicating a lack of systematic process, with strong roles for party leaders.

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[137] Interview LR-FMP07.

[138] This analysis mainly builds on Q13 (for candidates) – "Please tell me how people in your party get chosen to be members of central committee (CC) or central executive committee (CEC)?". The same question was asked as Q8 of gatekeepers.

[139] Complete CC membership lists shown to field researchers by party officials.

[140] Telephone conversations with senior central party officials, February 2020.

[141] Source: complete CC membership lists shown to field researchers by party officials.

[142] Minoletti, *Gender (In)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar*, p.10.

[143] N.b. note that ANP goes straight from District to CC level, it does not have State/Region level committees.

[144] Interviews LR-FMP03, LR-GKCECF01, LR-GKCECM01, LR-GKCECM02, LR-MMP01, SS-FMP01, SS-GKCECM04, SS-GKDM01, SS-GKTECM02, SS-GKSM01, SS-GKTECM04, SS-MMP06.

[145] For example, see Interviews LR-GKCECF01, LR-MMP04, SS-GKSM01.

[146] Interviews LR-FMP03, LR-MMP01, SS-FMP01, SS-FMP02, SS-MMP03, SS-MMP06, SS-GKTECM04.

[147] Interviews HM-FMP15, HM-MMP12.

[148] Interviews HM-MGK04, HM-FMP15.

Who Becomes a Township Executive Committee (TEC) Member and How are They Chosen?[149]

We do not have complete information on the size of parties' TECs, and within some parties this seems to sometimes vary by Township – for example the SNLD's TEC in Hopong has only 13 members, in Taunggyi 21 members, and Hsenwi 35 members.[150] NLD's TEC size also seems to vary, but not so dramatically – three interviewees gave the number on their TEC as 15, 'about 19', and 21.[151] However, USDP interviewees consistently described their respective TECs as having 15 members, with a further 15 members on a 'reserve' list.[152] The two interviewees from ANP that specified the number of TEC members both put it at 25.[153]

This study was only able to collect limited information on the composition of TECs, and we only have exact data on TEC composition for two Townships of one party (SNLD). SNLD's Taunggyi TEC has a high level of female representation, with nearly 40% of members being women, and women present in the positions of vice-chairperson and joint-secretary no.1. Whereas, women are less than 25% of the members of the SNLD's Hopong TEC, and do not hold any senior positions within it.[154] Given, the overall fairly high level of female representation in SNLD compared to most other parties, it seems reasonable to expect that many parties in this study will have more male-dominated TECs than is the case for SNLD in Hopong and Taunggyi.

ANP, MNP, NLD and USDP interviewees all consistently described each village/ward party sending delegates to a Township meeting to elect the TEC.[155] The election of TEC members seems to typically be done via: i) potential candidates nominating themselves; ii) delegates voting for their preferred candidates; and iii) those with the highest number of votes being chosen for the TEC. One ANP interviewee mentioned that larger villages are allocated more delegates than smaller villages.[156] Somewhat similarly, an NLD interviewee said that larger villages/wards are allowed to nominate more candidates for the TEC.[157] For ANP, in some Townships the most important positions on the TEC (e.g. chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary) are voted for by the TEC members only,[158] but in others all delegates' votes count[159] – it is not clear from the interviews which process is more common. The three NLD and two USDP interviewees that mentioned how these important positions were chosen all said that this was voted on by TEC members only.[160]

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[149] This analysis builds on: i) Q15 – "Have you held any position within your party? If so, how did you get chosen for that position?"; and ii) Q16 (for candidates) - "How do people in your party get chosen to become members of the party's township committee?". The same questions were asked as Q10 and Q11 of gatekeepers.

[150] N.b. figures for Hopong and Taunggyi are from complete TEC membership lists shown to field researchers by Township party officials, whereas the data from Hsenwi comes from an interview with an SNLD MP from Hsenwi.

[151] Interviews LR-FMP03, SS-GKTECM02, SS-GKTECM03.

[152] Interviews LR-MMP04, LR-MMP08, SS-GKDM01, SS-GKSM01.

[153] Interviews SS-FMP01, SS-GKTECM04.

[154] Source: complete TEC membership lists shown to field researchers by Township party officials.

[155] Interviews LR-FMP02, LR-FMP03, LR-FMP04, LR-GKCECF01 LR-GKCECM01, LR-GKCECM02, LR-GKCECM03, LR-MMP04, LR-MMP08, SS-FMP01, SS-FMP02, SS-GKCECM01, SS-GKCECM02 SS-GKCECM03, SS-GKCECM04, SS-GKCECM05, SS-GKDM01, SS-GKTECM01, SS-GKTECM02, SS-GKTECM03, SS-MMP02, SS-MMP04, SS-MMP06, SS-MMP07, SS-MMP08.

[156] Interview SS-GKTECM04.

[157] Interview LR-MMP01.

[158] Interviews SS-GKTECM05, SS-FMP01.

[159] Interviews SS-FMP02, SS-GKTECM04.

[160] Interviews LR-FMP03, SS-GKDM01, SS-GKSM01, SS-GKTECM02, SS-GKTECM03.

NLD and SNLD have a policy to ensure that their elected MPs are automatically appointed to their respective TECs.[161] Although PNO does not have such a policy, in practice all of their MPs are members of a TEC. Other parties do not have a policy to automatically include MPs on TECs, although MPs are frequently in such positions. SNLD and TNP have policies to prevent elected MPs from being chairperson or secretary of TECs, but in the case of SNLD this is not always enforced.[162]

KSDP, LNDP and TNP all have highly inconsistent procedures for choosing their TEC members and who should fill senior positions – in most cases central party members went to the Townships to organize the formation of the TEC, but how these meetings were organized seems to have been highly variable. These parties are fairly small, and in some areas struggled to find many people interested in belonging to their TEC, which limited the scope to have a formal selection procedure:

> "Our party is too small and is ethnic minority. So, it was not easy to find people who would like to be involved. We are still a long way from being able to compete with the other parties." (TNP)[163]

> "Since the party just started, there were not many people to participate in our party. So, we chose some of the individuals that showed up in the meeting and no one [that was nominated] was rejected." (LNDP)[164]

> "We did not really have proper procedures for township level party's committee. Due to limited time we had, we just recruited randomly. We also got recommendations from religious leaders." (LNDP)[165]

SNLD's TEC selection process is not fully institutionalized, with one interviewee remarking in this context that, 'The *ah-na-shin* mindset is not gone yet [among local leaders].'[166] Nevertheless, it seems that in all Townships a meeting is held every one or two years to select the TEC, to which all party members can attend. The most common method of choosing the TEC members seems to be self-nomination, followed by attendees being asked to confirm or reject the nominees. Deciding who should fill the senior positions on TECs seems to frequently be done through informal negotiations among the TEC members.[167]

In some locations the PNO's process appears on the surface to have been somewhat democratic and bottom-up, with villages/wards sending delegates to the Township meeting and these delegates then either voting for preferred candidates or giving a confirmatory vote on

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[161] Interviews LR-FMP01 LR-FMP02, LR-FMP03, LR-MMP03; Telephone conversations with senior central party officials, February 2020. N.b. for NLD Amyotha Hluttaw MPs representing multiple Townships are asked to choose the TEC of one of the Townships they represent, whereas SNLD do not expect their Amyotha Hluttaw MPs to be members of TECs.

[162] Interview HM-FMP11; Telephone conversations with senior central party officials, February 2020.

[163] Interview HM-MGK08. N.b. The interviewee later mentioned that conflict had made Ta'ang people wary of participating in politics.

[164] Interview LR-FMP05.

[165] Interview LR-MMP07.

[166] Interview HM-FGK03. This issue was also referred to in the telephone conversation with senior central party official, February 2020. N.b. *Ah-na-shin* can be translated as 'dictatorial', and in this context refers to local party leaders wishing to have unchecked power and autonomy.

[167] See all interviews with SNLD interviewees.

candidates.[168] However, the comment of one TEC chairperson suggests that this process is not very active or meaningful:

> "The election procedures practiced by various townships were different … We Pa-O people are not interested in politics. No one complained about the election of TEC. The less we have to do, the better it is."[169]

Further, in some cases there seems to have been considerable involvement by central party figures – for example, the same TEC chairperson describes having been nominated for his position by the party president. A PNO CEC member described what he saw as the dangers of bottom-up TEC selection processes:

> "Some townships such as [X] Township practiced a voting system. The person who got the highest vote became Township party chairman and he had no political experience but got people's support … The person who got the third highest vote was a 19-year old girl. She became a secretary but has not graduated yet."[170]

It is probably not a coincidence that the Township referred to above is outside of the Pa-O SAZ – in both the 2010 and 2015 elections the PNO won all available Amyotha, Pyithu and State hluttaw seats in their SAZ stronghold, but none anywhere else. Central party leaders probably care less about the composition of TECs in constituencies where they do not expect to win elections, and there are also likely to be fewer Pa-O people with political experience interested in participating in the local parties in such areas.

While most parties adopt electoral mechanisms to form their CECs, this does not necessarily prevent senior/charismatic party leaders playing an important role in the appointment or confirmation process. Interviewees from the more personalistic NLD reported the strong role of Aung San Suu Kyi in the selection of CEC members. Similarly, KSDP interviewees described the strong influence of the party chairperson and deputy chairperson in the CEC selection process. It is likely that senior party figures are also able to strongly influence CEC elections in some of the other parties in our study as well, but this was not clearly reported by our interviewees.

In some smaller parties senior party figures played an important role in selecting Township leaders and or TEC members in at least some of their Townships. Whereas, in the larger parties and MNP, Township leadership selection is more locally controlled, and for ANP, MNP, NLD and USDP this process is quite well systematic.

The extent to which the selection of CEC, CC and TEC members is democratic and systematic varies not just between parties, but also within them – for example NLD can be characterized as having a democratic and systematic process for TEC and CC selection but this is not the case for their CEC selection. This highlights the need to pay careful attention to each party's processes if trying to raise women's participation – for example:

i.   If parties have systematic processes at township level, there is potential to work with the central level party to issue rules, guidelines or targets to township level, whereas such

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[168] Interviews HM-MGK07, HM-MMP10.
[169] Interview HM-MGK07.
[170] Interview HM-MGK04.

an approach is not likely to be effective if there are not already systematic processes at Township level.

ii. If CEC and/or TEC selection processes are strongly influenced by party leader(s) then that leader(s) need to be convinced of the importance of promoting gender equality in the rank and files of the party organization.[171]

5. Candidate Selection Processes

The ways in which political parties recruit and select candidates shape representative bodies. While it is often assumed that women lack ambition or capacity, not least by parties themselves, it has been demonstrated that the problem of underrepresentation of certain groups usually lies more with the parties themselves.[172] Party demand for a certain type of candidate will create a supply of that type of candidate, by means of encouragement signal-sending. When parties are guided by patronage and clientelism, there tend to be fewer women.[173] The way in which candidates are selected also matters. It is much easier for new candidates to enter a bureaucratized party which follows a set of formal and specific rules than it is to get in to a party where only insiders know what it takes to be a candidate. These parties are also much easier to reform, as a rule change is more likely to result in de facto changes.[174]

The first half of this section outlines the processes used by Myanmar political parties for choosing candidates in the 2015 elections. The second half of this section discusses what type of candidates are preferred by parties, and what parties are doing to try and promote women's political participation. This section finishes by discussing the implications these formal selection processes and aspects of institutional culture have on women's and men's opportunities to become parliamentary candidates.

Overview of Parties' Candidate Selection Processes

In theory, the 'standard process' used by most parties for nominating candidates to State/Region and Pyithu Hluttaws was for the Township level party to arrange some form of candidate election process, after which the nominated candidates would be sent to CC and CEC level for scrutiny and then approval/rejection. Interviewees from LNDP, NLD and TNP described their party consistently following the 'standard process'. Whereas, interviewees from MNP, PNO, SNLD mentioned that when Townships were unable to find enough candidates the central party would appoint them instead.[175] KSDP was disorganized, which seems to have resulted in the 'standard process' not being followed– instead, direct appointment by the central party and candidates nominating themselves unopposed seem to have been widespread.[176] The ANP followed the 'standard process' for choosing candidates for the State/Region parliaments, but had a cooperative process between Township and Central level party for

[171] Joni Lovenduski and Pippa Norris, *Gender and Party Politics* (London: Sage Publications Ltd, 1993); Sheri Kunovich and Pamela Paxton, 'Pathways to Power: The Role of Political Parties in Women's National Political Representation', *American Journal of Sociology*, 111.2 (2005), 505–52 <https://doi.org/10.1086/444445>.

[172] Geha; Cecilia Josefsson, 'How Candidate Selection Structures and Genders Political Ambition: Illustrations from Uruguay', 2020 <https://doi.org/info:doi/10.1332/251510819X15693187680761>.

[173] Bjarnegård and Kenny, 'Comparing Candidate Selection'.

[174] Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 'Political Parties and Gender Quota Implementation'.

[175] Interviews HM-MGK01, HM-MGK04, SS-GKCECM01.

[176] Interviews LR-FMP07, LR-GKCECM04, LR-MMP11.

choosing Pyithu Hluttaw candidates.[177] USDP interviewees gave highly inconsistent descriptions of the respective roles of Township and Central level party.[178]

For choosing candidates for Amyotha Hluttaw, most parties had to choose candidates for some constituencies that covered more than one Township.[179] PNO and SNLD dealt with this issue by having the central-level lead the candidate selection process, and in the NLD this was led by the State/Region-level party. ANP and USDP both had cooperative processes between central level and the relevant Townships. This issue did not affect MNP, as all of the Amyotha Hluttaw constituencies they ran in were in single Townships only. For KSDP, LNDP and TNP we were unable to get clear information on how Amyotha Hluttaw candidate selection differed from Pyithu and State/Region Hluttaw candidate selection.[180] Except, where specified otherwise, the remainder of Section 5 is focused on Pyithu and State/Region Hluttaw candidate selection.

Organization of Candidate Nomination at Local Levels[181]

For most parties the key body for candidate selection at the Township level is the TEC. However, this is not the case for NLD and USDP. In the NLD a separate committee/selection team is established in each township, comprising, '…some TEC members, ordinary members and elder respectable people in the township.'[182] The USDP also has dedicated candidate selection teams at Township level, as well as at District and State/Region levels.[183] The Township Chairman is a key individual in the candidate selection process – around 85% of both candidate and gatekeeper interviewees described this individual as having an important role.

An interviewee from TNP reported that that the internal electorate in his Township included various non-party members – e.g. village elders, Ward/Village Tract Administrators, NGO, literature and cultural committee, and 'bachelors and maidens' leaders.[184] A PNO interviewee also said there was an important role for local non-party members, with abbots or monks sometimes nominating potential candidates.[185]

When describing the role that Township-level parties had for candidate selection, interviewees from six parties (ANP, MNP, NLD, PNO, SNLD and TNP) mentioned their village/village tract/ward parties having a significant role for nominating candidates. Interviewees that gave details of this process described multiple villages/village tracts/wards in each Township nominating potential candidates, and then the final decision on candidate selection being made at Township level.

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[177] Interview SS-GKTECM04.
[178] For example contrast interview LR-GKCECM01 with SS-GKDM01 and SS-GKSM01.
[179] Typically, such constituencies covered two or three Townships, but in some cases this was much higher, especially in Shan State, with Shan State 2 constituency covering 11 Townships. See, MIMU, 'Constituency Boundaries Amyotha Hluttaw, Elections 2015' (MIMU, 2015) <https://themimu.info/sector/governance> [accessed 12 August 2019].
[180] Telephone conversations with senior central party officials, February 2020.
[181] This analysis mainly builds on Qs 14b, 14c and 17 (for candidates): "Did your Township Chairman play an important role in selecting candidates?"; "Were there other individuals who played a key role in the candidate selection process?"; and, "Can you explain more of your party's rules, criteria and procedures in selecting candidates for the last general election?". The same questions were asked as Qs 9b, 9c and 12 of gatekeepers.
[182] Interview SS-GKTECM02.
[183] Interview LR-GKCECM01,
[184] Interview HM-MMP05.
[185] Interview HM-MMP10.

The Role of Central Committee (CEC) and Central Executive Committees (CCs)[186]

The interview questions used for this study did not clearly distinguish between the roles of CEC and CC in candidate selection, which limits how specific our analysis can be of the respective roles of these committees at the central level. This issue is exacerbated by interviewees from the same party often having conflicting perspectives regarding the relative importance of the central-level committees to Township-level committees, and/or the relative importance of CEC to CC at central level. For example, compare the following responses from two NLD candidate interviewees:

> "In my opinion, the CC has no role to play in candidate selection. … [but the] CEC … plays a key role."[187]

> "The CC has an important role. The remarks given by CC members and CEC are essential."[188]

Despite the limitations of our data, it can be confidently stated that for ANP, MNP, NLD, TNP and USDP the CEC had a more important role than the CC. For KSDP, LNDP, PNO and SNLD the interview data is unclear on this issue.

Interviewees from three parties – ANP, MNP and NLD – mentioned that their party created dedicated candidate selection/election winning teams at the central level. These bodies were closely linked to, but separate from the CEC.[189] Although USDP has dedicated candidate selection teams at Township, District and State/Region levels, the State/Region candidate selection team submits their recommendations directly to the CEC – i.e. there is no dedicated candidate selection team at central level.[190]

It has been noted above that non-party members, including religious leaders, could sometimes influence candidate selection at Township level. Similarly, although candidate selection processes at central level are primarily organised by party members, interviewees from some parties in our study described external advice also being sought, for example:

> "There were some foreign advisors who made some suggestions and some experts from NGOs got involved too." (KSDP candidate)[191]

> "There are people from outside who … were involved in candidate selection at central level. They worked together with CEC members in examining the candidates' profiles and analyse them … This included law experts." (NLD candidate)[192]

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[186] This analysis mainly builds on Qs 14a and 17 (for candidates): "Did your central committee play an important role in selecting candidates?"; and "Can you explain more of your party's rules, criteria and procedures in selecting candidates for the last general election?". The same questions were asked as Qs 9a and 12 of gatekeepers.
[187] Interview LR-MMP01.
[188] Interview LR-MMP03.
[189] Interviews LR-MMP01, SS-GKCECM01, SS-GKTECM05.
[190] Interview LR-GKCECM01.
[191] Interview LR-MMP11.
[192] Interview LR-MMP01.

Preferred Candidate Traits[193]

When interviewees were asked what characteristics their party prefers candidates to have, a wide variety of answers were given. The most common response was for candidates to be well-educated (36% of interviewees), followed by young (22%), of a certain ethnic group (17%), and be popular/well-respected with the people (15%). Only 10% of interviewees mentioned candidates' occupational background, only 10% mentioned their political background/experience, and only 8% mentioned gender. There were generally not major differences between male and female interviewees regarding the characteristics their party likes candidates to have.

As indicated above, many parties put emphasis on choosing candidates with a high level of education – given that women are more likely than men to be highly educated (see Section 3), this should not pose a barrier to women's political participation. Further, among the interviewees that wanted their party to introduce specific criteria that candidates should meet, several said that they would like their parties to introduce a rule to only have university graduates as candidates.[194]

At the time of the 2015 election 7 of the 9 parties in our study were ethnic-based parties, and only recruited candidates from the ethnic group they seek to represent – e.g. ANP (Rakhine), KSDP (Kachin), LNDP (Lisu), MNP (Mon), PNO (Pa-O), SNLD (Shan), TNP (Ta'ang). The other two parties in our study (NLD and USDP) are 'national' parties that seek to represent all ethnicities, and have candidates from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Nevertheless, the USDP gave preference to recruiting candidates from the predominant ethnic group residing in a given constituency,[195] and the NLD had a general policy that was supposed to give preference to non-Bamar ethnic candidates.[196] In 2019 SNLD announced that they will try to shift from being, "… focused on ethnic Shan people and Shan State … into a state-oriented or policy-oriented party."[197] In the coming years it will be interesting to see to what extent this party is able to broaden its appeal to voters and potential candidates from non-Shan ethnic groups.

In late 2013 the NLD introduced a policy to promote women, youth and ethnic minorities in their recruitment of parliamentary candidates, and one of our NLD interviewees mentioned that this was included in the party guidebook produced for the 2015 elections. However, only 5 out of 10 NLD interviewees mentioned 'women' when they were asked what type of candidates their party prefers. Further, when NLD interviewees were directly asked about whether they had a policy to promote women candidates, 3 of the MPs interviewed said that their party had no such policy. This suggests that that this policy was not complied with in all Townships. This interpretation is supported by one female NLD MP (in response to a different question) saying that:

> "We do have the priority or preferences for women, ethnic people and youth but the rule should be straight and make sure its implement in practice."[198]

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[193] This analysis mainly builds on Qs 20 and 23 (for candidates): "In your opinion, what kind of candidates does your party prefer? Are there specific criteria or skills your party is looking for?"; and "In the 2015 elections did your party have policies to increase the number of female candidates? If so, how effective do you think these were?". The same questions were asked as Qs 15 and 18 of gatekeepers.

[194] Interviews HM-FMP08, HM-FMP11, LR-MMP11.

[195] Interview LR-FMP04.

[196] Interviews LR-FMP01, LR-FMP02, LR-GKCECM02, LR-MMP01, SS-GKTECM03.

[197] Myat Moe Thu, 'SNLD to Change Focus from Ethnic- to Policy-Oriented Party'.

[198] Interview LR-FMP02.

As expected, party experience was a significant factor for candidate selection – 80% of the candidates interviewed for this study had previously held a specific position within the party (e.g. CEC, CC, District Committee, or TEC member). One GK interviewee from USDP acknowledged that their party gives preference to potential candidates with a background in the Tatmadaw.[199]

Promotion of Women's Political Participation[200]

Only one of our interviewees thought that his party had an effective policy to increase the number of female candidates in the 2015 election.[201] And, only two interviewees thought that their party had got the gender balance about right for their list of candidates. These were both men candidates – one from SNLD and one from TNP.[202] Only 18% of SNLD and 11% of TNP candidates were women.[203] The MP from SNLD incorrectly claimed that 30% of his party's candidates were women.

Members of the same party often gave highly inconsistent answers when asked if their party had a policy to increase the number of female candidates in the 2015 election. LNDP was the only party for which interviewees give consistent answers – all six interviewees saying that their party had no such policy. Among interviewees from NLD (which, in theory at least, had a fairly clear policy to promote women candidates), all 4 GKs and the 3 women MPs said that their party had a policy but it was not very/at all effective, whereas all 3 of the men MPs thought that their party had no such policy.

Among SNLD interviewees the majority said that their party had no policy to increase the number of women candidates. Despite the lack of awareness among our SNLD interviewees about such a policy, it appears party leaders at central level and at least some Townships were making ad-hoc efforts to raise the number of women candidates. For example, one female SNLD candidate described her experience of being directly appointed to a winnable constituency, even though she had not sought such a role:

> "In my Township, I was a Township party officer but I didn't know they nominated me. I did not even say I wanted to be elected. I was so surprised when I received the letter from CC. I did not get a chance to refuse at that time. I requested to the Township party that if I was selected as a candidate, please assign me for Shan State hluttaw because I have a baby and I can't go to Naypyitaw. However, the Township party didn't listen to me. They sent the [candidate] list to the CC. Finally, I was assigned as a Pyithu Hluttaw candidate."[204]

One woman interviewee from USDP mentioned at two points in her interview that the party had allocated women candidates to unwinnable seats, just to increase their number of female candidates.[205] Support for this claim can be seen in women being 6.1% of USDP's total

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[199] LR-GKCECM01.

[200] This analysis mainly builds on Qs 23 and 24 (for candidates): "In the 2015 elections, did your party have policies to increase the number of female candidates? If so, how effective do you think these were?"; and "Does your party have any plans or policies to try and increase the number of female candidates for 2020?". The same questions were asked as Qs 18 and 19 of gatekeepers.

[201] Interview LR-MMP10.

[202] Interviews HM-MMP03, HM-MMP04.

[203] UEC database.

[204] Interview HM-FMP09.

[205] Interview LR-GKCECM01.

candidates but only 2.6% of their successful candidates in the 2015 elections.[206] This is in contrast with the aggregate trend for the 2015 election – women were 13.6% of successful candidates and 13.5% of total candidates for the Pyidaungsu hluttaw.[207]

Nearly 60% of our interviewees said that their party had some kind of plan or policy to try and raise their number of women candidates for the 2020 election, around 25% said that their party had no such policy, and the remainder either did not know or did not answer this question. There was almost no gender difference for interviewees' response whether their party had such a policy for 2020. Interviewees who mentioned such policies typically gave vague answers, or if being specific, mentioned workshops or trainings.[208] While such activities can sometimes be beneficial, their level of impact is variable or limited, and in some cases non-existent. Further, these are often organized and/or financed by external organizations, so tend to involve limited effort or financial contributions by the party. Three interviewees from SNLD said that their party was targeting having 30% women candidates for the 2020 election,[209] and the recently merged ethnic Chin party (the Chin National League for Democracy – CNLD) also publicly announced that it will follow such a policy.[210] If these parties strictly enforce these policies they will be a much stronger attempt at raising women's participation than workshops or trainings.

Multiple interviewees from each of KSDP, NLD and USDP mentioned the positive role that they felt their women's committee/wing could play for promoting the number of women candidates, and women's participation in the party.[211] These bodies may have such an effect, but there is also a risk that these become silos and actually limit gender equality within the parties.[212]

Implications of Candidate Selection Processes

There is not an exact relationship between how parties are organized and arranged their candidate selection. Nevertheless, four of the five parties in our study with the highest percentage of female candidates in the 2015 elections have a fairly bottom-up candidate selection process (e.g. LNDP, MNP, NLD and SNLD). Further, it is notable that this category includes the three parties in our study that participated in the 1990 elections, were then pushed underground for most of the following two decades, and can be categorized as highly pro-democracy in their policy positions (i.e. MNP, NLD and SNLD). Whereas, the two parties in our study that are most closely linked to military organizations and have probably the least democratic outlook of the parties in our study – PNO (the PNA/People's Militia Force) and USDP (the Tatmadaw) – have very few women candidates, and very low levels of women's participation in their parties overall.

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[206] Extracted from Enlightened Myanmar Research, *Important Data of 2015 General Election Myanmar*, p.27; UEC database.
[207] Paul Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation, April 2016), p.6.
[208] Interviews HM-MGK01, HM-MGK04, SS-GKTECM04, SS-MMP06.
[209] Interviews HM-FMP08, HM-FMP11, HM-MGK01.
[210] Swe Lei Mon, 'Women To Make Up 30% Of Chin Party Candidates', *Myanmar Times* (Yangon, 22 October 2019) <https://www.mmtimes.com/news/women-make-30-chin-party-candidates.html> [accessed 20 February 2020].
[211] Interviews LR-FMP03, LR-FMP06, LR-GKCECM02, LR-GKCECM06, LR-MMP02, LR-MMP03, SS-GKDM01, SS-GKSM01, SS-GKTECM01
[212] N.b. this risk was highlighted by an individual who has given trainings to many Myanmar political parties, in conversation with one of the authors of this paper.

Cultural differences between ethnic groups may explain some of the difference in women's representation within parties – for example, Pa'O and Rakhine culture tends to be highly patriarchal,[213] and the ANP and PNO both have very low levels of female participation. However, such cultural effects do not fully determine women's level of participation, and for exampleKachin society is traditionally highly patriarchal,[214] but KSDP does not have particularly low levels of female participation.

Overall, parties' histories and political outlook are probably more important for the level of women's representation than traditional gender relations within the ethnic group(s) they represent. Further, parties can work to change gender relations within the communities they represent – Chin society is also traditionally highly patriarchal,[215] but the CNLD target of 30% women candidates for the 2020 election represents an attempt to challenge that.

As with gatekeeper selection processes, there is considerable heterogeneity both between and within parties for how candidates are selected. Within-party heterogeneity is particularly common for how Amyotha hluttaw candidates are selected relative to other candidates, but also arises in some parties for various other reasons as well. Again, this points to the importance of paying attention to individual parties' candidate selection methods if trying to work with parties to raise the number of women candidates.

Parties adopting targets to achieve 30% of women candidates has the potential to significantly raise the percentage of parliamentarians that are women, and this should be further promoted – both in encouraging more parties to adopt such policies, and helping those that have to implement it well.

6. Experiences on the Campaign Trail and as an MP

It is a big step to decide to become politically active and it may also be difficult to foresee the consequences of this decision. This section will look at some of the personal consequences for the candidates and it will seek to discern whether the experiences are different depending on your gender or party affiliation. The decision to become a candidate can have both positive and negative consequences for the individual, but while the positive consequences are acknowledged, the section focuses on negative consequences that need to be tackled in order to strengthen democracy and reduce the cost of becoming a politician. While it is clear that political activity comes at a cost, this cost should be as low as possible, and it should be evenly distributed between different candidates to ensure a fair electoral race. Research in the area has highlighted that many of the costs of politics are, in fact, gendered.[216] This section looks more closely at whether this is also true in the Myanmar context.

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[213] Interview HM-FMP15; Annami Löfving, *Women's Participation in Public Life in Myanmar* (Yangon: ActionAid, CARE and Oxfam, 2011), p.30.

[214] Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, pp.19, 20, 25.

[215] Myanmar Institute for Integrated Development, *Support to Chin State's Comprehensive 5-Year Development Plan and Annual Planning 2016-2021, Vol.1* (Yangon, October 2014), p.30.

[216] Gabrielle S. Bardall, 'Violence, Politics, and Gender', *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*, 2018 <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.208>; Gabrielle Bardall, Elin Bjarnegård, and Jennifer M. Piscopo, 'How Is Political Violence Gendered? Disentangling Motives, Forms, and Impacts':, *Political Studies*, 2019 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321719881812>; Mona Lena Krook, 'Violence Against Women in Politics', *Journal of Democracy*, 28.1 (2017), 74–88 <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0007>; Mona Lena Krook and Juliana Restrepo Sanín, 'The Cost of

Politics – a Cost or Benefit?[217]

In Myanmar, most candidates seem to think that the personal costs outweigh the benefits. Over 80% of both women and men candidates agreed that there were no significant improvements in their personal lives as a consequence of their political activities. Among candidates of older and bigger parties (e.g. NLD, SNLD, USDP), about one third had noticed some improvement, while only three candidates from smaller ethnic parties noticed any benefits at all.

In a country that has been under military rule and that has experienced oppression of political opposition and widespread armed conflict, politics has long been recognized as a potentially dangerous activity. Some of our interviewees had spent considerable time in prison, although not in relation to this particular election campaign.[218] It does however colour their own as well as others' perceptions about what it implies to be in politics. Some candidates even expected a very difficult situation, including threats and intimidation, and maybe even imprisonment. One woman candidate from the ANP said:

> "When I reached the political field, I had seen attacks to get positions and authority. I had already prepared my mind if I am arrested because of someone's attacks, I had already told my daughters not to meet me at the prison."[219]

The results indicating that only about one third of candidates encountered difficulties should be interpreted with a pinch of salt. Most candidates seem to view certain difficulties as "a way of politics" to the extent that they do not even think it is worth mentioning. Similar patterns have been discerned elsewhere in research on violent elections – violations that are perceived as "everyday experiences" are simply not noted by respondents, because they happen all the time.[220]

It is also important to note that the benefits that are mentioned are associated not with being candidate, but with being an MP. None of the nine interviewed candidates who lost the election experienced any improvements at all.[221] Several candidates say that although the campaign itself may have been troublesome, they have gained respect, honour and recognition in the community once they were elected to become Members of Parliament.[222] One noticeable difference has been that the mothers and wives of elected Members of Parliament have been treated with more respect; such as now being called *Sayama*.[223] An NLD candidate joked that old friends, co-workers and even people who did not like him before all of a sudden got back in touch when he was elected.[224] An SNLD candidate expressed his pride in being an MP.[225]

Doing Politics? Analyzing Violence and Harassment against Female Politicians', *Perspectives on Politics*, undefined/ed, 1–16 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592719001397>.

[217] This analysis mainly builds on Q10 (for candidates): "Has your participation in politics resulted in any difficulties or improvements in your home life?". The same question was asked as Q6 of gatekeepers.

[218] Interviews HM-MGK01, HM-MGK06, LR-FMP03, LR-GKCECM02, SS-MMP07.

[219] Interview SS-FMP01.

[220] Bjarnegård, Elin. 2018. Gender and Election Violence. Advancing the Comparative Agenda. *Comparative Politics Newsletter* 27(1).

[221] Interviews HM-FMP14, HM-FMP15, HM-MMP06, LR-FMP04, LR-FMP06, LR-MMP10, SS-FMP03, SS-FMP04, SS-MMP10.

[222] Interviews HM-MMP07, LR-MMP01.

[223] Interviews HM-FMP09, HM-MMP05. N.b. *Sayama* is addressed to a female teacher, but is also commonly used to indicate that the (female) being spoken to is knowledgeable and worthy of respect. The male equivalent is *Saya*.

[224] Interview LR-MMP03.

Gatekeepers most commonly mentioned gaining respect as their main reward.[226] A TNP gatekeeper and member of the CEC talked about how he enjoyed being able to explain how politics works to others and it was a symbolic act to be able to bring his parents to Nay Pyi Taw.[227]

While there are some benefits associated with being in politics, they are rather intangible, related to increased self-respect as well as respect from others. They are also reserved for elected politicians, whereas campaigns seems to be considered difficult without any benefits. The cost of politics, i.e. the difficulties that you encounter when you enter the political area as a candidate, Member of Parliament, or gatekeeper, are of different character. We will analyse personal costs associated with changes in your family life, costs associated with travelling, and different forms of illegitimate methods of intimidation, harassment and violence. All are important for understanding the hurdles that politicians face, but they may need to be tackled very differently. In the remainder of this section, we will explore the difficulties, the perceived cost of politics, in more detail.

Family Life[228]

Both male and female politicians feel that they have sacrificed family time for politics.[229] One male candidate from the Pa-O National Organization (PNO) expressed regret at not having been able to spend time with his son, causing him to fail a high school matriculation exam.[230] Women seem to express that this sacrifice comes with a feeling of guilt to a higher extent. One woman candidate from LNDP said:

> "I have not been able to take care of my son who is now at grade 11. I often travelled and left him at home for various social affairs. Therefore, I feel guilty for not being a good wife to my husband and children."[231]

Regarding support from the family, it can be discerned that women are more dependent on supporting families and partners than men are. Very few women would probably be able to have a political career without the support of their families, whereas this seems to be possible for at least some men who say that their wives have disapproved, and sometimes for several years.[232] One gatekeeper from the KSDP says that his wife sometimes tells him to "…grab your stuff such as bed sheet, pillow, blanket and go to sleep at your office," because he does not have time for his family after getting involved in politics.[233] Some male candidates also acknowledged that their wives took domestic responsibility, helped to support the family and helped them in their campaigns.[234]

A woman gatekeeper, and member of the CEC in the incumbent Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP) related that her husband has had to do all the domestic work, such as taking care of the children, washing clothes, and dropping and picking up the kids from

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[225] Interview HM-MMP04.
[226] Interviews HM-MGK02, HM-MGK04, HM-MGK07, LR-GKCECF01, LR-GKCECM01.
[227] HM-MGK04.
[228] Q10. Has your participation in politics resulted in any difficulties or improvements in your home life?
[229] Interviews HM-MMP10, HM-MMP12, LR-FMP05, LR-FMP06. HM-MMP10.
[230] Interview HM-MMP12.
[231] Interview LR-FMP05.
[232] Interviews HM-MGK05, LR-GKCECM06.
[233] Interview LR-GKCECM06
[234] Interviews LR-MMP06, SS-MMP02, SS-MMP06, SS-MMP07.

school while she has been an active politician. He did this besides working at a clinic. It is clear that both the politician and the husband feel that this is quite remarkable. The husband allegedly says "there is no husband like me."[235] Other women, however, also talk about the support they have been given from husbands or brothers.[236]

Difficulties travelling[237]

One important reason why family life is affected by a political career is that politicians need to spend a lot of time away from home. Running a campaign can be both time-consuming and difficult. This dynamic becomes accentuated in constituencies that cover remote areas, where access to basic services and to accommodation may be a problem. In certain areas, in particular, travelling to remote areas of the constituency can be challenging if the infrastructure is not developed. Additional difficulties may include weather-related difficulties. Some areas of Myanmar are also conflict-affected, meaning that it is either difficult or dangerous to travel there, or that there are travel restrictions imposed by the military authorities.

About half of the candidates reported that they encountered difficulties when they travelled around the constituency campaigning. There were no large gender differences in this regard. The parties from which most candidates seem to experience difficulties were parties for which a large proportion of the constituencies they compete in cover remote areas and areas where there is or has been ongoing armed conflict. Three examples are KSDP, LNDP and TNP, who are based in Kachin State (KSDP and LNDP) and northern Shan State (TNP) – both areas of intense conflict in recent years. All candidates interviewed from LNDP and TNP reported difficulties travelling. Two women candidates from the KSDP party claimed they had no difficulties travelling while both men from their party said that they did – this is probably due to the fact that the two women ran in constituencies in Myitkyina township, which is flat and largely urban and less conflict-affected, whereas the constituencies in which the men ran are mountainous with several remote and hard-to-reach communities and considerably more conflict-affected.[238]

Thus, while there are no immediately discernible gender differences in the extent to which candidates experience difficulties while travelling for your campaign, travel difficulties are clearly associated with campaigning in remote areas. Previous analysis of the Pyithu Hluttaw MPs elected in 2015 suggests that women are approximately as likely as men MPs to represent strongly rural/remote constituencies.[239]

The security situation is something that is naturally primarily raised by candidates who have had to campaign in areas where fighting is still ongoing, or where the Tatmadaw and/or EAOs have a lot of influence. Some candidates had to campaign with security in certain areas, others were followed by local military authorities during their campaigns.[240] In some areas it was not possible to campaign at all. One woman LNDP candidate had assisted her party colleague to campaign in an area controlled by a local militia, whose leader was the sitting Amyotha Hluttaw MP. This

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[235] Interview LR-GKCECF01.
[236] Interviews HM-FMP09, LR-FMP03, LR-FMP05.
[237] Q11. Did you face any difficulties travelling around your constituency during the campaign?; q12 Did you face any harassment or intimidation during your campaign?
[238] Interviews LR-FMP06, LR-FMP07, LR-MMP10, LR-MMP11.
[239] Gender Equality Network, *Gender and Politics in Myanmar: Women and Men Candidates in the 2015 Elections.*, p.41.
[240] Interviews HM-MMP06, HM-MMP12.

militia leader publicly threatened candidates from rival parties from running in 'his' constituency.[241] After our interviewee won her election, there were worries about her security. When they travelled around the constituency there were stones blocking the roads and they decided to travel with eleven different vehicles so that they could let her change vehicles often to make it more difficult to ambush the one she was sitting in.[242]

Importantly, although everyone experiences practical difficulties when travelling to such remote or conflict-affected areas, there are additional gender aspects if not in the extent of difficulties, then at least in the content. In certain remote places it is difficult with water supply and hygiene.[243] Travelling at night is also not seen as appropriate for many women, and one woman SNLD candidate said that women always need to be accompanied by at least one man when you are campaigning. She usually brought her husband or son, but sometimes she could go with other men from the party.[244] The perception that it is not appropriate to travel alone as a woman seems to be fairly widespread.[245]

Financial Difficulties

Quite a few candidates mentioned financial difficulties as a result of their choice to become politically active. Many candidates could not afford to continue with their business to the same extent and they were also expected to care for constituents.[246] Women were clearly dependent on the financial support of husbands and relatives and mentioned this as a prerequisite for their career quite often.[247] Some of those who were elected claim that the MP salary is not enough, but the campaign was of course even more of a loss for those candidates who spent a lot of money without being elected.[248]

Violations of Personal Integrity[249]

While debate and criticism are natural parts of democratic election campaigns, personal harassment and intimidation is not.[250] Intimidation and harassment during election campaigns imply that someone tries to impact on the election by violating the personal integrity of a candidate. This can be done through physical violence but also through threats and degrading talk.[251] A majority of our candidate interviewees reported experiencing some form of intimidation during their 2015 election campaign. Verbal or online harassment reported by our interviewees quite frequently included ethnic or religious aspects.

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[241] Ye Mon.
[242] Interview LR-FMP05.
[243] Interview SS-FMP01.
[244] Interview HM-FMP11.
[245] E.g. see Interview HM-FMP14. See also, DIPD, *Women's Participation in 2015 Election in Myanmar: An Assessment* (DIPD, 2016); Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar*, p.18; Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.28; Emilie Röell, *Women and Local Leadership: The Leadership Journeys of Myanmar's 42 Female Village Tract/Ward Administrators* (Yangon: UNDP, 2015), p.34.
[246] Interviews HM-FMP08, HM-MMP07, LR-MMP09, LR-MMP05; LR-MMP04, LR-MMP09. HM-FMP08 and HM-MMP07.
[247] For example, see, Interview LR-FMP05.
[248] Interview SS-MMP05.
[249] Q12. "Did you face any intimidation or harassment during your campaign?"
[250] Mona Lena Krook, 'Violence Against Women in Politics', *Journal of Democracy*, 28.1 (2017), 74–88 <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0007>.
[251] Bjarnegård, Elin. 2018. "Making Gender Visible in Election Violence: Strategies for Data Collection", *Politics & Gender. Critical Perspectives* 14(4): 690-695.

While it is difficult to discern any gender differences in the *extent* of harassment and verbal abuse, there seem to be differences in the *type* of harassment that men and women face. Women are more often the victims of personal accusations, including degrading talk directed against family members as well as rumours about their person. One 29 year old woman TNP candidate experienced belittling talk, hearing rumours saying that she was no more than a child and that one cannot trust a child.[252] In KSDP, the men reported that it was their party that was being criticized, while the woman was personally attacked and accused of land-grabbing by other Kachin parties.[253]

As late as 2012, less than 5% of Myanmar's population were using the internet, but by 2015 this had risen to more than 20%,[254] and online harassment was common in the 2015 elections. Such harassment included spreading fake photos and issuing rumours via the mobile phones as well as accusations and attacks on Facebook.[255] One NLD woman candidate recounts that people used social media to tell the community that she was arrogant and not liked by anyone in her neighbourhood.[256] Another woman candidate from NLD said she was harassed on Facebook and someone produced a fake news article defaming her in order to convince people to vote for someone else.[257] A man candidate for SNLD was accused online for meddling with foreigners, due to his background working with NGOs.[258]

Ethnic intolerance was clearly present online as well. One SNLD gatekeeper was called a "Shan Racist" on Facebook.[259] A (Buddhist) USDP male candidate said that rumours were spread about him having a Muslim name on Facebook.[260] He interpreted it as an attempt to make people misunderstand his ethnicity. Both men and women experienced online threats but it seems to be somewhat more common for women to report online intimidation (although it is difficult to establish any trends with such a small sample).

There were also isolated incidents of more serious threats and physical violence. One man LNDP gatekeeper received a death threat after having organized events that criticised the Kachin Independence Army (KIA) and after having suggested that a Lisu Social Service Society be established.[261] A woman NLD candidate recounted how the Association for Protection of Race and Religion, better known as *Ma Ba Tha*, came to her rallies armed with knives. Some people were wounded, and in other places she had to cancel public meetings. Some of her campaign workers were also threatened because they were working for her.[262]

Notably, quite a few candidates also said they did not experience any harassment. To be well-known and respected helped in certain cases. Two candidates who were long-time teachers

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[252] Interview HM-FMP14.
[253] Interviews LR-FMP07, LR-MMP10, LR-MMP11.
[254] https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.USER.ZS?locations=MM [Accessed 5th February 2020]
[255] Interviews HM-MMP04, HM-MMP10, HM-FMP15, LR-FMP01, LR-FMP02, LR-FMP03, HM-FMP11, LR-GKCECM05, SS-GKCECM04, SS-MMP04, SS-MMP08.
[256] Interview LR-FMP02.
[257] Interview LR-FMP03.
[258] Interview HM-MMP04.
[259] Interview HM-MGK05.
[260] Interview SS-MMP08.
[261] Interview LR-GKCECM05.
[262] Interview LR-FMP02.

said that with so many former and current students in the area, and with the respect they had gained, they were protected from violence, intimidation or harassment.[263]

All politicians in contemporary Myanmar have lived in a conflict-prone political environment for a long time. They have become accustomed to expecting conflict, hardship or even torture and imprisonment when they engage politically. Political activity has not only put themselves, but also their family members at risk. One male TNP candidate recounts his experience of campaigning in KIA controlled areas in 2010, when KIA members pointed their guns at him, but he was able to persuade them to allow him to campaign in their area. Whereas, in what he referred to as 'USDP-controlled areas' the local militia pointed their guns at him and refused to allow him to campaign in their area. However, he did not face such issues in 2015.[264] One SNLD candidate said that he is used to having inspectors watching and tracing every step, always passing by his house, but that this was more common from 1988 to 2004 than it was in the most recent election.[265] Many candidates, particularly from NLD, simply, and perhaps understandably, focused on the improvement they have seen in their ability to participate in politics.[266] These narratives demonstrate that Myanmar politicians may have normalized attacks and abuse, and as such, difficult to compare to narratives with politicians in other contexts.

Implications of Experiences Campaigning and as an MP

The costs of political participation in Myanmar have been extremely high, for a long period of time. Being politically active is closely associated with personal risk, and the harassment of politicians is something that many expect when going into politics. While systematic repression of opposition politicians is no longer the norm, harassment of candidates has become normalized and other costs of political participation are high. The violent legacy of politics in Myanmar means that a new norm has to be institutionalized. Given the expectations of politicians, we are likely to see an underreporting of incidents.

The expansion of Internet usage has also changed the way which public figures, including politicians, can be reached - and harassed. This is true in Myanmar as elsewhere, but in Myanmar internet and elections appeared at about the same time, and are both new phenomena. Since 2015, internet access has increased even more, so online harassment is likely to be a challenge for the future.

In Myanmar, as elsewhere, women are more dependent on family support than men are if they are to become political leaders. Women need the permission of their husband to use savings for the campaign, whereas men very rarely seem to ask for permission. Women also need a man who can accompany them on sometimes long and difficult campaign travel, as it is not seen as appropriate and safe for a woman to go alone or without her husband.

7. Being an Elected Representative

This section looks at the priorities of elected MPs. Specifically, we examine if gender and/or ethnic issues are prioritized by the MPs. This is an attempt to study the substantive

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[263] Interviews LR-MMP01, LR-MMP04.
[264] Interview HM-MMP05.
[265] Interview HM-MGK01.
[266] For example, see, Interview SS-GKTECM02.

representation of elected women and men MPs.[267] The more specific they are, the more certain can we be that the issues they raise is something that they do care about and work for, rather than something that "sounds nice".

Both gatekeepers and candidates were asked which issues they would prioritized if/once they were elected. There was a discernible difference between gatekeepers and candidates in most parties. As expected, gatekeepers are mainly concerned with organizing party members and promoting the capacity of their respective parties, whereas MPs need to take care of the needs and interests of their constituency members. Community development issues, such as infrastructure, schooling, healthcare and electricity, are thus prominent among most MPs.[268] For instance, in the MNP party, gatekeepers mentioned party merger as a prioritized issue, while candidates mentioned representing their constituents. An MNP MP says that your image becomes more important once you are an MP. You have to demonstrate that you know the difficulties of your constituency and that you are able to use your professional and creative skills to create job opportunities.[269] One elected TNP Pyithu hluttaw MP seemed to think that it was difficult to actually accomplish anything.:

> "I am a member of the Ethnic Affairs and Internal Peace Implementation Committee. This is just for show, we did not make much improvement."[270]

A woman SNLD representative, a member of the same Pyihtu hluttaw committee expressed similar frustrations.[271]

Members of parliaments representing ethnic parties, in particular, emphasize ceasefire and decentralization as important issues.[272] Women are a little more likely to mention issues like maternal and childcare issues,[273] including sending cases of child rape and divorces to relevant departments.[274]

When asked about what issues they thought should be debated more, the most common answer among elected Members of Parliament was ethnic peace and economic development. However, only two women replied ethnic peace and three women replied economic development. Men were more likely to give these answers than women were, with over a quarter of all men mentioning economic development and over 40% answering ethnic peace. The politicians mentioning that ethnic peace should be debated more come from all parties.

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[267] Michelle M. Taylor-Robinson and Roseanna Michelle Heath, 'Do Women Legislators Have Different Policy Priorities than Their Male Colleagues?', *Women & Politics*, 24.4 (2003), 77–101 <https://doi.org/10.1300/J014v24n04_04>; Manon Tremblay, 'Do Female MPs Substantively Represent Women? A Study of Legislative Behaviour in Canada's 35th Parliament', *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 31.03 (1998), 435 <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423900009082>; Waikeung Tam, 'Do Female Legislators Have Different Policy Priorities Than Their Male Colleagues in an Undemocratic/Semi-Democratic Legislature? The Case of Hong Kong', *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 23.1 (2017), 44–70 <https://doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2017.1283174>.

[268] For example, see, Interviews SS-MMP01, SS-MMP06.

[269] Interview SS-MMP07.

[270] Interview HM-MMP02.

[271] Interview HM-FMP08.

[272] For example, see, Interviews HM-MMP02, HM-MMP07, HM-MMP12, HM-MMP13, LR-FMP06; LR-FMP07; SS-FMP01, SS-MMP02, SS-MMP03. However, note that some USDP members emphasize these issues, e.g. Interviews LR-MMP05 and LR-MMP08.

[273] For example, see, Interviews LR-FMP06, SS-FMP04

[274] Interview SS-FMP04

Over 40% of the women candidates mention women's/gender issues as something that should be debated more, but only four men candidates (i.e. around 15%) mention issues that can be interpreted as gender issues in some way – two mention domestic violence, and one equal opportunities.

8. Key Findings

Interviewees' Background. Education, and wholesale and retail trade are the most prevalent occupational backgrounds for the women candidates interviewed for this study. A majority of gatekeeper interviewees had a family member(s) involved in politics. For candidates, women were more likely than men to have a family member involved in politics. This suggests familial succession and networks are common channels of recruiting political leaders.

Motivations for joining politics. For women, the role of father is found to play a key motivating factor for their participation in politics. For both men and women, previous experience in political activities play a key role. Additionally, those with a background in social or religious groups, or as teachers are more likely to join public life, while those from ethnic-based parties with experience in community/church based groups are more likely to join politics.

Intraparty Politics. The extent to which the selection of CEC, CC and TEC members is democratic and systematic varies not just between parties, but within them – for example NLD have a largely democratic and systematic process for TEC and CC selection but this is not the case for their CEC selection.

Gender Balance of CEC. All the CECs in our study are male-dominated. Of the six parties with complete data, the KSDP has the highest proportion of female CEC members (31%) while the ANP and TNP have the lowest (5%). Only two parties (KSDP and MNP) have over 20% women.

Formation and Selection of CEC. The sizes of the CECs for the nine parties under study vary considerably, from the smallest 19 members for the TNP to 48 members for the PNO. How parties select their CEC members also varies considerably, ranging from the highly democratic and systematic process of the MNP, to the wholly unelected and non-systematic process of the LNDP.

Formation and Selection of CC. The size of CCs also varies, from 58 for the TNP, to more than 200 for the PNO and 350 for USDP. Comparatively, the MNP has the most democratic bottom-up process for choosing CC (and CEC) members. ANP, NLD and USDP all have a fairly bottom-up process for selecting their CC members, with most or all CC members elected via a process in which Village/Ward parties nominate members for the TEC, and then the TEC nominates members for District level, District level nominates to State/Region level, and then State/Region level committees nominate/elect CC members.

Formation and Selection of TEC. We do not have complete information on the size of parties' TECs, and within some parties this seems to sometimes vary by Township. The most common selection method is self-nomination, followed by attendees being asked to confirm or reject the nominees. TEC selection meetings are typically held every one or two years.

Candidate Selection for Pyithu and State/Region Hluttaws. Theoretically, most parties follow a 'standard process' to nominate candidates to State/Region and Pyithu Hluttaws – beginning with the Township level party arranging a candidate election process, after which the nominated

candidates would be sent to CC and CEC level for scrutiny and then approval/rejection. LNDP, NLD and TNP largely follow the 'standard process', whereas the MNP, PNO, SNLD mentioned appointment of candidates by central party if Townships are unable to find enough candidates. KSDP's disorganization led to a largely appointment process while there was inconsistent response from the USDP. The ANP followed the 'standard process' for the State/Region parliaments and has a cooperative process between Township and Central level party for choosing Pyithu Hluttaw candidates.

Candidate Selection for Amyotha Hluttaw. Most Amyotha Hluttaw constituencies in Myanmar cover more than one Township, making the role of Township parties for candidate selection less straightforward than for selection of candidates to Pyithu and State/Region Hluttaws. While the PNO and SNLD have the central-level party lead the candidate selection process, the NLD has the State/Region-level party leading. The ANP and USDP have cooperative processes between central level and the relevant Townships. For the MNP, all of the Amyotha Hluttaw constituencies they ran were in single Townships only, so they could follow the same process used for Pyithu and State/Region Hluttaw candidate selection. We were not able to establish how the KSDP, LNDP and TNP select candidates for Amyotha Hluttaw.

Selectorate. Parties vary considerably on the selectorate – who has the most power in candidate selection. Despite our data limitations, the CEC is largely seen to be more important than the CC in nominating candidates. This is the case for the ANP, MNP, NLD, TNP and USDP. For KSDP, LNDP, PNO and SNLD the process is unclear. Additionally, the ANP, MNP and NLD also mentioned a "candidate selection/election winning teams" at the central level, separate from the CEC, to manage candidate selection. The USDP also has a candidate selection teams at Township, District and State/Region levels that submits the recommendations directly to the CEC. Some parties also mentioned that non-party members such as religious leaders who may influence candidate selection at Township level.

Preferred Candidate Traits. There was no major gender difference between interviewees regarding the preference for candidate traits. Many prefer candidates with a high level of education. Other traits, in descending order of preference include: being young; ethnicity; popularity/respectability; occupational background; political background/experience. Only a small number highlighted gender as a preferred trait.

Campaign and Political Experiences. Most candidates know there are high personal costs from participating in politics. Over 80% of women and men candidates reported no significant improvements in their personal lives because of their political activities. Both male and female politicians feel family time have been sacrificed for politics. While both male and female candidates in constituencies covering remote or conflict-affected areas faced travel difficulties, there are additional gender aspects on the extent of difficulties. Travelling at night is seen inappropriate for women.

Financial Difficulties. Financial difficulties have been mentioned by some as a result of their choice to become politically active. A number of women mentioned that they relied on the financial assistance of husbands and relatives to support their political career. Some also claim that the MP salary is not enough.

Violations of Personal Integrity. It is difficult to discern any gender differences in the extent of harassment and verbal abuse faced by candidates. However, there are gender differences in the type of harassment reported. Increased Internet use has also changed the way politicians are harassed. Both men and women experienced online ethnic- or religious-based intimidation

speech. However, women are more likely to be the victims of personal accusations, including degrading talk directed against family members.

Substantive representation. Gatekeepers and candidates highlighted different priorities and issues that they champion. Gatekeepers are concerned with organizing party members and promoting the capacity of their parties, whereas MPs/candidates highlight the needs and interests of their constituency members and community development issues, such as infrastructure, schooling, healthcare and electricity. MPs also largely highlight ethnic peace and economic development as key priority issues for debate in parliament. Over 40% of the women candidates mentioned that women's/gender issues should be debated more.

9. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Build party organization and establish rules
There is large heterogeneity between and within parties on candidate selection to key party positions and also national/local elected bodies. A key priority for parties to improve gender equality is to establish clear rules on *who* and *how* one gets elected to key party positions and publicize candidate selection processes to State/Region Pyithu Hluttaw and Amyotha Hluttaw as widely as possible. Having clear rules will encourage transparency, accountability and attract more potential candidates to self-nominate or run for elected positions.

Recommendation 2: Expand and diversify candidate pool from bottom-up
Parties need to move away from informal networks of identifying candidates through family or community networks to develop formal ways to recruit, nominate and select their candidates to improve gender balance at the party, local and national levels. The bottom up, democratic process with clear selection rules and local participation will help to expand the pool of candidates and also the quality, diversity and supply of candidates. Local politicians with local knowledge and networks are more likely to be more effective representatives of their constituencies. After elected, local women MPs are more likely to prioritize local gender issues for debate in parliament.

Recommendation 3: Establish party quota or targets
Parties adopting a quota or target to achieve 30% of women candidates are more likely to significantly raise the percentage of women MPs. Party leaders should take the lead to promote and encourage the CEC, CC and TECs to adopt a quota or targets in electing the candidates to key party bodies and ensure the candidate list has at least 30% women. The CNLD target of 30% women candidates for the 2020 election is an example of this approach.

Recommendation 4: Provide financial support to women candidates
While education level is not a barrier to women joining politics, financial dependency on husbands is one barrier to women joining politics. Hence, parties can help to reduce the financial burden by providing a small subsidy for women to self-nominate as candidates. We Many Myanmar political parties have limited financial resources, and so international donors should consider funding such initiatives.

Recommendation 5: Improve security and provide women candidates a party aide during campaign in the rural area

Being politically active and running campaigns is difficult, time consuming and potentially dangerous. Candidate harassment is a problem and there are still cultural norms that can act as a barrier to women travelling at night. Given Myanmar's violent past, there is a need to establish new norm and improve security for candidates, especially for women. One way to address the security of candidates is for the parties to establish a norm of providing candidates, especially women, a party aide to travel to rural areas to campaign.

Recommendation 6: Provide training classes and establish best practices for candidates to campaign with social network and develop online presence
While all candidates face harassment, women are more likely to face personal accusations, degrading talks and criticisms about family members and their personal lives on social network platforms. Parties should consider hiring consultants to provide training classes for ethnic minority and women candidates to develop their professional online image and establish best practices to respond to disinformation, online hate and harassment during campaigns.

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