

WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICAL LEADERSHIP: STANDPOINTS FROM CENTRAL ASIA AND CENTRAL EUROPE

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ABSTRACT

This article aims at determining the influence of power distribution within families on women's views of politicians. The work represents the first cross-cultural study of gender stereotypes about political leaders embracing post-socialist Central Asian and Central European countries. The responses of 6,869 women to the Life in Transition Survey III were analyzed using a quantitative research study. A multivariate linear regression model and correlation coefficients allowed us to identify the relationship between patriarchal and patrilocal families with a high level of gender stereotypes and the impact of individual women's decisions on their lower bias. No positive effect of spouses' mutual decisions on the level of gender stereotypes was revealed. The theoretical importance of the work lies in expanding the existing knowledge about the influence of family power on women's internal beliefs, which broadens the understanding of the Western Role Congruity Theory in emerging economies.

Keywords: decision-making; gender stereotypes; power; leadership; Visegrad Group; women's empowerment

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15549/jeecar.v10i3.1179>

INTRODUCTION

Women's political empowerment is vital for developing the state's economy and the nation's competitive advantage. With the rise of the democratic transition since the 1970s, the number of women in leadership positions has slowly become a global trend (Montecinos, 2017). Women are increasingly elected to office

but female politicians "still face significant challenges compared to their male counterparts", often engendered by gender stereotypes (Liu, 2019). At the same time, women's empowerment initiatives are often criticized and seen as relegated to the background and essentially turned into a tool for achieving other public policy goals (Elomäki & Ylöstalo, 2021).

The states of Central Asia (CA) - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan - demonstrate good performance in gender equality in education and health, average economic participation and opportunities, and low women's political representation (GGGR, 2022). After gaining independence in the early 1990s, the CA republics set a course for retraditionalization: the revival of the people's cultural traditions and religious values. The CA gender policy is designed to strike a balance between international requirements in the field of gender equality and patriarchal values, which often gives it a two-pronged character (Zharkynbayeva et al., 2020).

Among the CE states, the countries of the post-socialist bloc that are members of the Visegrad Group (hereinafter V4), initiated in the early 1990s to strengthen the dynamics of socio-economic transformation and integration into the European Union, are most similar to Central Asia in some factors. The V4 countries, united by a common culture, history, religion, territorial proximity, and political similarity, include Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic (Skrzypek & Skóra, 2017).

The CA and CE regions are characterized by a common socialist past, ongoing economic transformations, and a course toward the revival of traditions. At the same time, CA and CE have differences in gender policies: in CA countries, gender and family strategies are closely intertwined in one direction, and the family is inextricably associated with a woman (Zharkynbayeva et al., 2020), while in CE gender policy was based on the Western European approach and has recently taken the course for "familiarity" in which women do not exist anymore, they become part of the family (Petó, 2017: 51).

Previous studies have confirmed the significant influence of the family on women's gender beliefs (Górska et al., 2021) and identified the relationship between women's decision-making and their well-being (Li, 2021). However, papers about CA and CE in the subject under consideration are isolated. To our best knowledge, there are only two cross-cultural studies of gender stereotypes (GS) between these regions, and both cover not political but business leadership (Lipovka & Buzady, 2020; Yanovskaya & Lipovka, 2022).

To fill in the above-mentioned knowledge gap we aimed to determine the level of GS in the CA and CE regions and to identify the relationship between the power distribution in making decisions in families on women's GS in transforming economies. This study covers all V4 members (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia) and four Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan). The exclusion of the 5th CA republic - Turkmenistan - was caused by the deficit data on this country (Pomfret, 2019).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender stereotypes lead to slow progress of CA women at the decision-making level in politics, the concentration of power in the hands of men, and reinforcing traditional gender roles (Moniruzzaman & Farzana, 2019). The gender beliefs of the CA population are very heterogeneous: progressive and egalitarian attitudes coexist with deeply patriarchal opinions about the roles of men and women in public and political domains (Gurevich & Kaplan, 2022). Patriarchal views prevail more often among the rural population, representing the majority in some CA countries (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan), which significantly affects the results of surveys of citizens on gender equality.

Women's leadership in politics in CA and CE has received low scholarly coverage, and the topic of gender bias toward politicians has been little studied. The recent values survey in CA revealed weighty GS: 51.6% of respondents view men as more suitable for political positions, against 44.1% consider women as a good fit, while 35.5% of respondents believed that women with young children should not work (Gurevich & Kaplan, 2022). A large-scale study in CA by Uskembayeva et al. (2016: 70) determined that the main reasons for the inadmissibility of women in politics were their distraction from maternal duties (14.4%), the complexity of politics (9.6%) and the interpretation of politics as "kingdom of men" (6%).

Zharkynbayeva et al. (2020) postulated that the impact of retraditionalization in CA led to the strengthening of GS and the consolidation of women's family roles exclusively, reducing their chances of occupying positions at the decision-making level. The study on leadership in the Uzbekistani academia concluded that family (marriage, having children, maternity leave) did

not have an impact on an employee's career progression along with a higher level of academicians' non-latent GS and their higher preference over men managers (Kerimova, 2021). Gender bias and the mother's penalty were also revealed as the greatest challenge for women leaders in universities in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan (Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2019).

Despite women's advancement in CE, the main obstacles to their political leadership are populism, illiberalism, and a departure from democratic values (Gwiazda, 2021). In CE public institutions, GS about women leaders are grounded on the social expectations about their primary mother's duties (Mihalčová et al., 2018). Bego (2015) found that CE citizens saw men leaders as more determined, goal-oriented, strong-willed, and freer from family duties than women. The research findings of women's successful careers in CE showed a steady relationship with their egalitarian socialization in childhood (Šidlauskienė & Pocevičienė, 2018). The case studies of successful women leaders in Poland suggested that support for a wife's professional development by her husband had a beneficial effect on a woman's career (Górska et al., 2021). The family plays a vital role in the formation and advancement of women in politics: with the support and approval of family members, women are more successful in moving up the career ladder in CE (Frankienė et al., 2020) and CA (Millier & Bellamy, 2014). The only study which embraced CE and CA on the influence of women's power within families and their GS about managers identified higher gender bias in CA compared with CE women, the negative influence of patriarchal families, and the positive effect of egalitarian families on women's opinions about good business leaders (Yanovskaya & Lipovka, 2022).

Based on the above, *hypothesis 1* was formulated: Central Asian women possess higher GS about political leaders than Central European women.

The theoretical framework of the study

The conceptual basis of this study lies in the typology of families by power distribution and the Role Congruity Theory by Eagly and Karau (2002). Gender stereotypes are the result of the mental activity of distributing people into groups based on their gender and attributing common

characteristics to individual women and men depending on their gender (Eagly & Koenig, 2021). Following the Role Congruity Theory, people associate leaders with men due to projecting their roles within families onto other life areas, including politics (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Accordingly, the distribution of gender roles in the family is relayed to the perception of men as bearers of agency qualities (endurance, perseverance, independence, willingness to take risks, dominance) and women as bearers of communicative properties (caring, attentiveness, sociability, compassion, willingness to help) (Eagly & Koenig, 2021: 2).

Based on the distribution of power between members of the household and their specific gender roles, families are divided into:

1. Patrilocal (Turaeva, 2020);
2. Traditional/patriarchal;
3. Egalitarian (Bornatici & Heers, 2020).

The patrilocal family implies the coexistence of several generations under one roof: men who have already created their families live in the house with their parents, spouses, and children. Patrilocal families are spread in CA and as a rule, share patriarchal traditions. In this case, decision-making power belongs primarily to the husband's parents. In such households, daughters-in-law (kelins) bear the burden of servicing household members, and the norms of behavior for kelins are obedience, humility, helpfulness, modesty, and closeness (Turaeva, 2020).

The traditional family, observed both in CA and CE, is oriented toward patriarchal gender roles, where the wife is the keeper of the hearth, caring for children and the household, and the husband is the breadwinner and the family head (Bornatici & Heers, 2020). An egalitarian family is a form of spouses' mutually beneficial partnership, where free will and respect are at the heart of the marriage union. In egalitarian families, spouses are equally responsible for providing income, child- and elderly care, running the household, and making decisions (Bornatici & Heers, 2020).

Following the Role Congruity Theory and typology of families, we assume that women's roles in households are significantly reflected in their opinions about gender and leadership. Women's sharing of patriarchal values hinders their decision-making in families and negatively

affects their level of happiness (Li, 2021). In the absence of egalitarian views in society, there is a circular reproduction of traditional gender norms, the activation of patriarchal values, and the emergence of GS (Evertsson, 2014). Existing studies in CA and CE proved that gender bias toward women leaders was directly related to women's family responsibilities (Mihalčová et al., 2018; Tokbaeva, 2020).

Family decision-making reinforces women's self-confidence (Gayatri, 2020). Relationships between spouses, their views, and employment form the basis for equitable or sole decision-making about financial expenditures and investments in the household (Pepin, 2019). Women's sole decisions positively reflect on the family's well-being, women's financial independence (Shuai et al., 2018), the spouses and children's leisure time (Gayatri, 2020) and reduce work-family conflicts (Bornatici & Heers, 2020).

Taking into account the results of previous studies and the chosen theoretical framework, hypotheses 2 and 3 were constructed:

Hypothesis 2: Women who make decisions on their own or on an equal footing with a partner have lower gender stereotypes.

Hypothesis 3: Women who make decisions jointly with someone else in the household and whose family decisions are made solely by partners or someone else living in the household have higher gender stereotypes.

METHODOLOGY

In this paper, an exploratory research design was applied: the data from the Life in Transition Survey conducted by the World Bank, Transparency International, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development were analyzed (LiTS III, 2016). For this purpose, the raw data of the respondents were subjected to the analysis of Spearman's correlation coefficients and multiple linear regression.

The initial data from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan were processed as a part of this study. The opinions of 6,869 women, with a minimum number of participants in Kyrgyzstan - 805 and a maximum of 975 people in Kazakhstan, about political leaders and their answers about decision-making in their households were subjected to a thorough

study. The CE respondents were approximately 10 years older than the CA peers, around 47 and a half years old. On average, among CE participants there were 29% more "ever or currently working" women compared to the CA sample (88.2% and 59.1% respectively).

To assess the level of women's GS the participants' responses about political leaders were analyzed. The degree of agreement with the statement "Men are better political leaders than women" is defined as a dependent variable, where "agree" and "strongly agree" equal to 1; "strongly disagree," "disagree," "refuse to respond" and "don't know" equal to 0. In their turn, the power of decision-making and Central Europe and Central Asia (the region) was considered as the independent variables. Primarily, regression models were developed for all the countries, afterwards, the "region" was appended to the regressors: 1 - CA countries, and 2 - CE countries.

The responses to the question "Who makes decisions on these issues in your family?" were utilized to identify who possesses the power to decide about: 1) managing daily expenses and bills; 2) purchasing large household items (for example, automobiles, large household equipment); 3) raising children; 4) social activities and free time; 5) saving, investing and loans; 6) childcare. The following versions of answers were offered to respondents: mainly me; shared equally between me and my partner; mainly my partner; shared equally between me and someone else in the family; mainly someone else in the family; mainly someone who doesn't reside in my house.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 23 was used with the installation of an automatic step-by-step method for selecting statistically significant variables. The united multiple linear regression model consisting of 8 sequential steps was elaborated for testing hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. The regression models were calculated for each sub-question, and for every group of answers, the sub-questions were transformed into dummy variables.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Before the mathematical testing of H1, an analysis of descriptive statistics was conducted. The conversion of descriptive data into percentage values made it possible to determine

that GS in CA are more pronounced than in CE (75% and 36%, respectively). The distribution of

views within the studied countries is depicted in Figure 1.

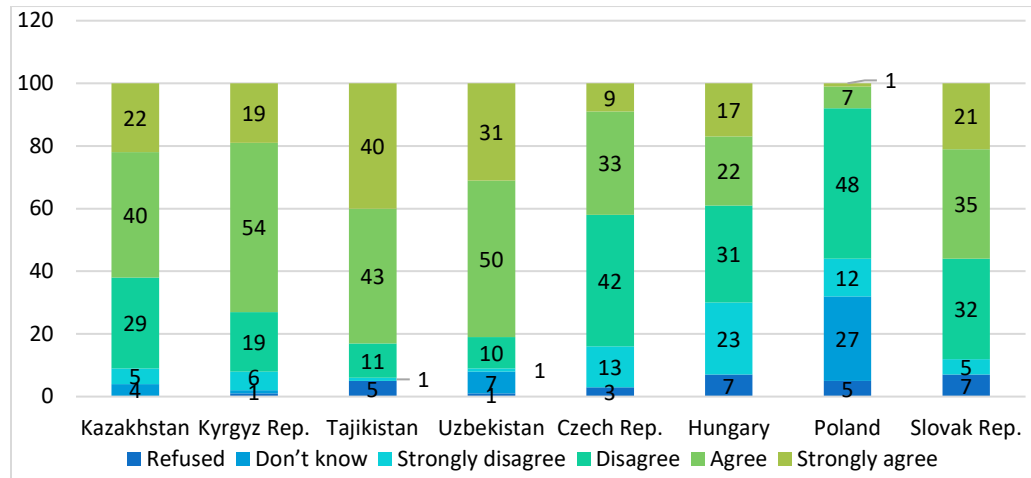


Figure 1: Agreement with the statement "Men are better political leaders than women", %
Source: LiTS III (2016).

Following Figure 1, the strongest GS were observed in the responses of Tajikistan (83%) and Uzbekistan (81%), while Kyrgyzstan occupied an intermediate position in CA (73%) and Kazakhstan designated the lowest bias (62%). In CE, Poland displayed the most egalitarian views with an agreement of 8%, whereas Hungary (39%), the Czech Republic (42%), and Slovakia (56%) demonstrated less gender progressive opinions. It is noteworthy that the distribution of Kazakhstani women's answers coincides in much with Slovak responses: strongly disagree (5%), disagree (29% and 32%), agree (40% and 35%), and

strongly agree (22% and 21% respectively). The revealed differences are significant since they evidence a higher level of gender bias and a stronger intensity of agreement among women in Central Asia that men are better political leaders.

For further hypotheses testing, a linear regression model was developed. This model was performed in 8 steps, at each step a statistically significant variable was added. Table 1 depicts the final step of the model.

Table 1: Regression coefficients identifying the influence of the region and decision-making on gender stereotypes

Independent variables	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	4.632	0.070		66.257	0.000
Region	-0.919	0.034	-0.342	-26.658	0.000
Childcare (mainly me)	-0.098	0.044	-0.033	-2.237	0.025
Purchasing large household equipment (mainly my partner)	0.214	0.059	0.043	3.610	0.000
Childcare (shared equally between me and someone else in the family)	0.281	0.063	0.059	4.441	0.000
Saving, investing, and loans (mainly someone else in the family)	0.221	0.071	0.038	3.100	0.002

Table 1: Continued

Independent variables	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Childcare (shared equally between me and my partner)	0.215	0.048	0.072	4.467	0.000
Managing daily expenses and bills (shared equally between me and my partner)	-0.134	0.040	-0.045	-3.323	0.001
Childcare (mainly my partner)	0.214	0.074	0.038	2.879	0.004

Source: Authors' findings.

Following Table 1, the region was defined as the most significant independent variable of the regression model with the highest influential coefficients. The calculated model contains a negative standardized coefficient (Beta=-0.342) justifying the net effect of the region variable equally with the unstandardized coefficient (B=-0.919) indicating that CE women disagree with the statement "Men are better political leaders than women." Therefore, H1 is proved.

Analyzing the compliance of the findings with H2 (Table 1), lower GS are possessed by women who independently make decisions about childcare (B=-0.098; Beta=-0.033) and decide together with their partners about daily expenses and bills (B=-0.134; Beta=-0.045). At the same time, a correlation coefficient (B=0.215;

Beta=-0.072) between stronger GS and making equal decisions with a partner regarding childcare was designated.

According to Table 1, stronger bias towards women in politics is demonstrated by respondents who make decisions about childcare on an equal basis with someone else in the family (B = 0.281; Beta=0.059), as well as in the case when saving and investing are made by mainly someone else in the house (B = 0.221; Beta=0.038) and when the power of buying large household equipment (B = 0.214; Beta=0.043) and childcare belongs solely to the husband (B = 0.214; Beta=0.038).

For further testing of H2, Spearman's correlation coefficients were calculated (Table 2).

Table 2: Spearman correlation coefficients for verification of H2

Independent variables	Mainly me		Shared equally between me and my partner	
	rho	Sig.	rho	Sig.
Managing daily expenses and bills	-0.068**	0.000	-0.023	0.074
Purchasing large household equipment	-0.099**	0.000	-0.002	0.891
Raising children	-0.063**	0.000	0.088**	0.000
Social activities and free time	-0.114**	0.000	0.008	0.550
Saving, investing, and loans	-0.082**	0.000	-0.008	0.514
Childcare	-0.061**	0.000	0.078**	0.000

Source: Authors' findings.

** Statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.01$ (2-tailed);

* Statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$ (2-tailed)

Following Table 2, women who independently make decisions regarding finance (rho=-0.068; rho=-0.099; rho=-0.082), social activities and free time (rho=-0.114), raising children (rho=-0.063), and childcare (rho=-0.061) have weaker stereotypes. However,

making decisions equally with a partner about raising children (rho=0.088) and childcare (rho=0.078) has a positive relationship with stronger stereotypes. Thus, women's power to make their own decisions demonstrated a stable relationship with their lower gender bias along

all the independent variables compared to those women who make equal decisions with their partners.

Testing H2 showed that the regression and correlation coefficients are consistent with each other. Both research analytical tools confirmed it partially: women's sole decisions are directly

related to weaker GS but making decisions equally with a partner about caring for and raising children denotes a connection with more intensive women's GS, which contradicts the hypothesis. The results of testing H3 with an application of correlation coefficients are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Spearman correlation coefficients for verification of H3

Independent variables	Mainly my partner		Shared equally between me and someone else in the family		Mainly someone else in the family		Mainly someone else not currently residing in my house	
	rho	Sig.	rho	Sig.	rho	Sig.	rho	Sig.
Managing daily expenses and bills	0.081**	0.000	0.054**	0.000	0.062**	0.000	0.014	0.273
Purchasing large household equipment	0.094**	0.000	0.052**	0.000	0.059**	0.000	0.020	0.113
Raising children	0.084**	0.000	0.085**	0.000	0.054**	0.000	-0.012	0.362
Social activities and free time	0.094**	0.000	0.065**	0.000	0.074**	0.000	0.015	0.230
Saving, investing, and loans	0.077**	0.000	0.041**	0.001	0.074**	0.000	0.018	0.160
Childcare	0.092**	0.000	0.106**	0.000	0.056**	0.000	-0.009	0.456

Source: Authors' findings.

** Statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.01$ (2-tailed);

* Statistically significant at $\alpha = 0.05$ (2-tailed)

According to Table 3, strong GS are associated with the opinions of those women whose partners make sole decisions regarding all issues under consideration. All these decisions are strongly correlated with a high level of gender bias, the most significant of which are: purchasing large household equipment ($\rho=0.094$), childcare ($\rho=0.092$), and social activities ($\rho=0.094$). A significant relationship was also found between strong GS and sharing decision power between women and someone else in the family, with the most powerful coefficients: raising children ($\rho=0.085$) and childcare ($\rho=0.106$). A significant correlation with women's strong GS was identified between decision power about all examined issues held by someone else in the family. Therefore, the results of the regression model and Spearman's correlation coefficients fully confirm H3.

It is noteworthy that in the case of decision-making by someone who does not currently reside in the woman's home, it lacks any

statistically significant effect on her gender stereotypes (with ρ ranging from -0.009 to 0.020). The explanation for this result might be related to the fact that those who do not live in the respondent's home could be hired professionals - nannies, kindergarten teachers, financial consultants, house assistants, etc.

The present study identified a higher level of GS about politicians among CA women than among Central European participants. This difference among other reasons might be caused by the lower level of CA average respondent's employment compared to CE participants since the earlier study proclaimed that employed women had more power in their households (Gayatri, 2020) and therefore lower gender prejudice. The intermediate position of Kazakhstan represents a curious finding, which is consistent with the previous study about business leaders in CA and CE (Lipovka & Buzady, 2020; Yanovskaya & Lipovka, 2022) and likely related to the Kazakhstani gender gap in politics

and economics that is the smallest in the CA region (GGGR, 2022).

Another finding is the positive impact of women's independent decisions on their views of their peers in politics. Women who make sole decisions have a low level of GS, which can be traced to all the examined issues: finance, social activities, free time, and raising and caring for children. An interesting result is the revealed high level of association of GS with decisions to make large purchases and social life and leisure. Both analysis tools were used to confirm the importance of these links. Thus, the two types of decisions mentioned are most strongly associated with women's low stereotypes who alone decide how to conduct social life, spend their free time, and make large purchases, which is an essential addition to previous studies (Gayatri, 2020; Li, 2021; Shuai et al., 2018). This finding indicates that the more power women have in making decisions about strategic finance and social life within the family, the more egalitarian their views are.

However, the second part of H2 about the positive impact of spouses' equal power was confirmed only about daily spending, investing, and paying bills and only by one analytical tool that is in line with Pepin's (2019) but contradicts Yanovskaya and Lipovka's (2022) findings regarding the positive impact of partners' equal decisions on women's gender bias towards business leaders. This deviation can be triggered by a higher general prejudice towards women politicians compared to managers as the former are more rare species than the latter.

Additionally, it is worth noting that partners' equal decisions about childcare and upbringing do not have a relationship with low stereotypes but, on the contrary, relate to higher bias against women politicians. The revealed finding can be explained by the high-context culture (Hall, 1989) of Central Asia, where a lump sum of information is transmitted by non-verbal communication. Kinship ties are highly valued in CA societies, and, as a result, deep GS can be hidden behind women's formal independence. Hence this issue should be the subject of future research.

The husbands' sole power negatively reflects on their wives' opinions about their peers in politics within all the considered issues. The study testified that women, who made decisions together with someone in the house or instead of

whom someone else (not a partner) in the household decided, shared higher GS. Therefore, patrilocal, and patriarchal families negatively impact not only women's external life but also their inner world, including their views, and judgments about their peers which expands the preceding research (Bornatici & Heers, 2020; Kuzhabekova & Almukhambetova, 2019; Mihalčová et al., 2018; Tokbaeva, 2020; Turaeva, 2020; Zharkynbayeva et al., 2020).

This study has some limitations. The men's viewpoints of political leaders and their power of decision-making in families were not covered by our analysis along with their spouses. This issue can provide new insights on gender, family power, and stereotypes about political leaders in post-socialist states in a prospective investigation since the equal representation of women and men in politics depends in many respects on egalitarian families and necessitates the evolution of both partners' mindsets. Another limitation lies in non-consideration of the scope of decision-making power in families separately in CE and CA that could be a fruitful domain for future studies, as, despite the common socialist history and the emerging economy's status, different cultural characteristics, and diverse gender policies lay grounds for differences in social roles of women and men in CE and CA families and translate these images into other areas of human life, including society, economics, and politics.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The present article contributes to expanding knowledge about the influence of power distribution within families on the views of political leaders, representing the initial cross-cultural study in CA and CE regions. The results of the study confirm the relevance of the Role Congruity Theory (Eagly & Karau, 2002) for the studied regions and extend its application: the functions that women play in their families do not only project on their professional roles but further toll on women's positions in the society.

The study proved the negative impact of patrilocal and traditional families on women's empowerment. The deficit of women's independent decisions in families engenders limitations of their mindsets, shackles their self-esteem, and hits their views of their gender group representatives. Lacking elementary power in their households on an everyday basis,

those women do not believe their peers can have the power to lead the state. This study's findings further develop the "family cage" phenomenon (Lipovka & Buzady, 2020: 30) with the knowledge that patriarchal family forms not only external (discrimination, bias) but also internal (GS and prejudice against members of their gender group) obstacles to women's leadership in politics.

The family, being the central place of residence and upbringing of a person, has the most critical function in representing the role models of women and men. The distribution of decision-making power in families directly affects women's perception of their role in a given household and society. The reproduction of gender roles in families bears an imprint on the leadership of men and women in the state's public, political, and economic life. Consequently, women lacking decision-making power in families will have less inclination to vote for women politicians; on the contrary, women-decision-makers in their families will highly likely support their peers in politics. Therefore, women's economic and political empowerment in CA should start with the reconsideration of women's roles in families through the separation of family agenda from gender policy, supporting the egalitarian family model financially and in mass media, and more equal distribution of economic and caring functions between spouses in households.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was funded by the Science Committee of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Grant No. BR18574168).

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