

PARTY NOMINATION AND LEGISLATIVE GENDER QUOTAS IN THE 2020 LOCAL ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE: THE CASE OF RIVNE REGIONAL COUNCIL

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Abstract

This article analyzes the impact of legal gender quotas on party policies regarding the positioning of candidates on electoral lists for the 2020 local elections in Ukraine, and voters' reaction to this. This research utilizes a unique dataset on elections to one of Ukraine's self-government bodies (Rivne Regional Council) because the Central Election Commission of Ukraine does not publish detailed data on the results of local elections. The 2020 local elections in Ukraine showed that the introduction of legislative gender quotas did not fully work because political parties demonstrated gender bias by nominating predominantly male candidates for viable positions. The difference between the share of women candidates and the share of women deputies did not increase significantly in favor of women deputies compared to the 2015 local elections in Ukraine. In addition, voters did not show a gender bias, and, in most cases, were guided by political parties' proposed order of candidates. The article contributes to the understanding of gender dynamics in local elections in Ukraine under a new electoral system.

Keywords: Political parties, Local elections, Gender quota, Party nomination, Ukraine.

INTRODUCTION

The 2020 local elections in Ukraine were held under a new electoral system with a new administrative-territorial division. They were preceded by two key institutional changes. The first was the entry into force of the Electoral Code (1 January 2020), which introduced a proportional electoral system with flexible lists and gender quotas (Central Election Commission of Ukraine, 2020a). A voter at the local level must first vote for a party and, if they wish, can also exercise the right to preferential voting by choosing one candidate.

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The second key change was the amalgamation of territorial communities in accordance with a procedure established by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2020b). The new administrative-territorial division significantly reduced not only the number of territorial units, but also the number of local deputies. Thus, political parties had to consider several legislative innovations in the process of nominating candidates.

The legislative gender quotas introduced in 2020 formally worked, as the number of women deputies increased due to an increase in the number of women candidates (Central Election Commission of Ukraine, 2020b). The share of candidates increased from 34% to 43.9%, and the share of deputies increased by the same amount from 22.7% to 31.6% in the regional, district, and city councils in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine (Table 1). This raises the research question of whether political parties promoted or opposed gender quotas in the process of placing candidates on ballots during the 2020 local elections in Ukraine.

Table 1: *The share of women among candidates and the share of mandates received in the local elections of 2015 and 2020*

Local councils	2015			2020		
	Candidates (%)	Elected (%)	Difference (%)	Candidates (%)	Elected (%)	Difference (%)
Regional councils	29.9	15.0	-14.9	43.2	27.8	-15.4
District councils	35.6	24.0	-11.6	44.0	34.3	-9.7
City councils	36.6	29.2	-7.4	44.6	32.6	-12.0
Total	34.0	22.7	-11.3	43.9	31.6	-12.3

Source: Official election results obtained from the Central Election Commission of Ukraine.

The new electoral system with flexible lists allows us to test the behavioral patterns of political parties in nominating candidates for their respective positions on the electoral list and the behavioral patterns of voters during preferential voting. The 40% gender quota introduced obliged political parties to adhere to this principle when compiling lists of candidates for deputies. Two candidates for the five positions on the list had to be of different genders (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2020a). Preferential voting was not mandatory, but its impact was significant: 52.6% of candidates

from all parties in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine passed the statutory threshold of 25% of preferential votes from the electoral quota necessary for the list order to be changed (Opora, 2020).

The purpose of this article is to explain the strategy political parties followed in placing their candidates in constituencies on the one hand, and how voters reacted to this proposal using the right to preferential voting on the other hand.

This study addressed the following research questions:

- *Q1: Did political parties demonstrate gender bias in ballot ranking patterns?*
- *Q2: Were there equal chances for politically experienced female and male candidates to take viable positions on the electoral list?*
- *Q3: Did voters follow political parties' suggestions by giving preferential votes to candidates in the top positions on the list, or did they reject the parties' suggestions?*

Our hypotheses concern the placing of candidates in viable positions by parties and the electoral chances of being elected.

- *H1: Women candidates are less likely to be in a viable position on the electoral list regardless of their political experience.*
- *H2: Voters are gender-biased toward female candidates even when controlling for a candidate's political experience and position on the electoral list.*

To answer these research questions and test our hypotheses, we collected a unique dataset based on elections held to the Rivne Regional Council of the Rivne Region (oblast)³. The dataset contains information about candidates included in the electoral lists for the Rivne Regional Council in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine, which contained a total of 631 candidates (Rivne Oblast Council, 2020). This methodological step was taken because there are no detailed electoral results for local elections in Ukraine. The Central Election Commission of Ukraine does not publish detailed information on candidates, but only provides the aggregate results of local elections (Central Election Commission of Ukraine, 2020a). A detailed operationalization of the variables is presented in Section 2.

³ According to the Electoral Code of Ukraine, during local elections, voters elect representatives to local self-government bodies: regional councils, district councils, city councils, district councils in cities (in cities with district divisions), village councils and settlement councils (Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2020a).

Studies have shown that gender quotas should not be seen as the main way to promote gender equality in politics (Pansardi, Pedrazzani, 2023), although they can also be used to increase the number of women in representative bodies (Schwindt-Bayer, 2009), and the effectiveness of gender quotas in increasing women's representation in parliament has been demonstrated in several European countries (Murray, 2010; Gwiazda, 2017). However, the effects of quotas on women's representation are different in proportional electoral systems. In proportional systems with open lists, a party selects candidates for a viable position higher on the electoral list depending on the candidate's personal characteristics, which may hinder the representation of women in high positions (Gendźwiłł, Żółtak, 2020; Thames, Williams, 2010). The party leadership, when determining the order of candidates on the ballot, is guided by a pragmatic approach to maximizing the party's result in the elections (Marcinkiewicz, 2014; Thames, Bloom, 2023).

Most studies on women's representation in Ukrainian politics focus on parliamentary elections (Kostiuchenko et al., 2015; Thames, 2018; Birch, 2003), while there is little research on women's participation and representation in local elections (Dean, Dos Santos, 2017; Thames, Bloom, 2023). There are no studies on the impact of gender quotas and the new electoral system in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine on women's representation in local representative bodies. This study thus contributes to the understanding of gender dynamics in local elections in transition countries by providing empirical evidence of the effects of legislative gender quotas and a proportional representation system with flexible lists in the 2020 Ukrainian local elections.

The article is structured as follows. The first section provides an extended literature review. The second section is dedicated to a review of the specifics of the electoral system in the 2020 Ukrainian local elections. The third section describes the methodological approach, data and statistical methods used to test the hypotheses and answer the research questions. The fourth section presents the empirical results of the analysis. The final section outlines the conclusion, discussion and further research directions.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

Proportional representation (PR) systems with flexible lists provide for two key stages of the electoral process: the placing of candidates in certain positions on each party's electoral list and selecting candidates by voters through preferential voting (Gendźwiłł, Żółtak, 2020; Dvořák, 2023). These

two selection processes are interconnected, as political parties offer a list of candidates ranked according to their own criteria, and voters respond to these offers according to their own demands. Voters can change the ranking of candidates proposed by the parties through preferential voting. Existing research shows that parties tend to be biased against women candidates and place them in disadvantageous positions on electoral lists (Luhiste, 2015; Krook, 2010; Kjaer, Krook, 2019; Meserve et al., 2020), even when the women are in office and have previous electoral experience (Gendźwiłł, Żółtak, 2020; Dahlerup, 2007; Górecki, Kukołowicz, 2014; Gherghina, Chiru, 2010; Chiru, Popescu, 2017). If political parties have not been gender-biased in the placement of candidates on the electoral list, women candidates should have the same chance as men of being placed in viable positions provided that they have an equivalent level of political experience.

At the same time, it is not clear how voters make their choices. On the one hand, voters rely heavily on the order of the list of candidates nominated by political parties (Kukołowicz, 2013; Dvořák, Pink, 2023); on the other hand, voters tend to favor female candidates slightly based on their political experience (Shugart et al., 2005; Stegmaier et al., 2014; Jankowski, Marcinkiewicz, 2019). Therefore, as Gendźwiłł and Żółtak (2020, pp. 5–6) argue, an increase in the share of women candidates due to the introduction of gender quotas should significantly improve their chances of entering the representative body if other factors do not impede this process. The position of a candidate on the electoral list may affect voting behavior, since candidates placed in high positions on the list may receive more attention and votes because of their position (Górecki, Kukołowicz, 2014). The gender bias of political parties, which manifests itself in the placing of male candidates in higher positions on the electoral list, can serve as a signal to voters to support these candidates. If voters are not gender biased, the gender of a candidate does not affect the distribution of preferential votes, even when the candidate's political experience and position on the electoral list are considered.

Gender bias in local elections manifests itself in various ways, affecting both the representation and the perception of female candidates. Gender bias in the placing of candidates on electoral lists can be defined as a candidate's gender having a significant impact on the probability of them being placed in a viable position on the electoral list, and gender bias in voter preferences can be defined as a candidate's gender having a significant impact on the probability of them winning a mandate (Gendźwiłł, Żółtak, 2020; Buisseret et al., 2022). Studies of candidates' placement on electoral lists operationalize

the concepts of “viable position” or “realistic position” in different ways (Dvořák, Pink, 2023). For example, van Erkel (2017) argues that, in addition to the top position on the electoral list, the last position can also be a viable position, as it is often used to appoint well-known and influential politicians who can easily overcome the electoral threshold. At the same time, there are discussions in the literature regarding the number of first positions on the electoral list. Górecki and Kukołowicz (2014) suggest that the number of “viable” positions should be gender-balanced, and at least the first two positions on the electoral list should demonstrate gender parity. Kunovich (2012) believes that the first three positions on the electoral list are decisive as he bases his view on the size of the gender quota, which is 35% for Polish elections. Gendźwił and Żóltak (2020) propose a more focused approach to the definition of a “viable position” as they believe that it should be based on the party magnitude, i.e. the number of seats won by parties in a particular constituency. If gender quotas and the same electoral system are applied in more than two election cycles, the number of “viable” positions is determined by the number of seats won by parties in the previous elections (Put et al., 2021).

Political parties exhibit varied behaviors when forming candidate lists under gender quota systems, influenced by both the design of the quotas and the internal dynamics of the parties (Aldrich, 2020). Despite the intention to promote gender equality, parties often find ways to circumvent these measures. For instance, in Italy, parties have used multiple candidacy to hinder women’s chances of election despite strong quota laws (Pansardi, Pedrazzani, 2023). Similarly, in France, parties initially nominated women in less-winnable districts, a strategy that persisted longer in right-wing parties than left-wing ones (Lippmann, 2021). The bureaucratization of candidate selection processes within parties also plays a crucial role: parties with more bureaucratized procedures tend to comply better with quota laws, although this does not necessarily translate into more women being elected (Bjarnegård, Zetterberg, 2016). In Portugal, the Parity Law has led to moderate compliance, but implicit and explicit resistance have limited its success in empowering women beyond mere numerical representation. The interaction between party and legislative quotas, as seen in Portugal and Spain, shows that existing gendered practices and norms within parties can limit effective compliance with legislative quotas (Verge, Espírito-Santo, 2016). In Belgium, strict gender parity rules have not always resulted in women-friendly candidate selection procedures, highlighting the importance of who controls the selection process and how it

is organized (Vandeleene, 2014). Additionally, non-quota strategies such as women's sections, mentoring programs and campaign funding for women, along with the influence of central party gatekeepers, significantly impact the representation of women, as evidenced by local elections in Germany (Ruf, 2021). The rational choice and selectorate bias theories suggest that parties may support gender quotas to increase incumbency advantages or respond to electorate demands, but male bias at the selectorate level and the effects of incumbency and ideology can affect implementation levels (Brennan, Elkins, 2015). Overall, while gender quotas have been effective in increasing the number of women candidates, the behavior of political parties in forming candidate lists often involves strategies to mitigate the impact of these quotas, influenced by internal party dynamics, electoral system characteristics and broader socio-political contexts.

2 THE FLEXIBLE-LIST PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SYSTEM IN LOCAL ELECTIONS IN UKRAINE

In July 2020, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine made institutional changes to the territorial organization of power and the functioning of the electoral system⁴. The new administrative-territorial division in Ukraine not only reduced the number of administrative units, but also substantially reduced the number of local deputies. There were 1,469 territorial communities (including 31 communities in temporarily occupied territories) instead of 10,721 local councils at various levels. Consequently, the number of mandates to local governments decreased by 78% compared with the previous local elections in 2015. This, in turn, led to more intense competition between candidates for preferential votes as the weight of the mandate increased. For example, for the councils of territorial communities throughout the country, where elections were held under the proportional electoral system with flexible lists, nine candidates ran for one mandate, which was 18% more than in the previous elections in 2015, where the ratio was 1 to 7.

The new electoral code, adopted almost three months before the local elections of 25 October 2020, provided several innovations. The main changes were related to both the algorithm of the electoral system and ballot design. The main difference concerned the territorial communities in which elections would be held under the majority electoral system or the proportional electoral system with flexible lists. Different electoral

⁴ As in the previous local elections in 2015, voters were electing deputies to municipal and regional (oblast) councils.

systems have been applied to representative bodies at different levels. A proportional electoral system with flexible lists was introduced in elections to village, town and city councils in communities with 10,000 or more voters, as well as in the elections to regional, district and city councils, and a majority electoral system was introduced in communities with up to 10,000 voters. Compared to the 2015 local elections, the threshold for proportional elections was lowered from 90,000 to 10,000 voters. Consequently, political parties played a key role in territorial communities with more than 10,000 voters due to the fact that self-nomination was retained only in territorial communities with up to 10,000 voters. Simultaneously, the proportional electoral system with flexible lists gave political parties more power to influence who would be elected to the representative body. The reason for this was the legal requirement that a candidate should receive a number of preferential votes that was at least 25% of the electoral quota in order to “improve” their position on the party list (Table 2). Thus, party leaders play a decisive role both in the selection of candidates and in determining the order of candidates on the electoral list, which affects their electoral chances. Their positions on the electoral list are determined by their loyalty to the party. The proportional electoral system with flexible lists that was introduced in Ukraine provides that each candidate for deputy is placed in order on a single-party list (except for the first number, which was automatically assigned to the leader of the party list) and is accordingly placed in a certain position in the territorial electoral lists. In each constituency, a political party may place five to twelve candidates on their list. Each candidate can run simultaneously for two levels of council (for example, city and region).

The ballot design was divided into two parts. In the left part of the ballot, voters had to choose one political party, and in the right part of the ballot, they could (but were not obliged to) write the number of candidate from the political party’s territorial electoral list (a voter can choose only one candidate by putting his or her the list number of the candidates in the ballot). The system for calculating the mandates won by a political party comprised two stages. First, the number of votes cast for a particular political party list from a constituency was divided by the electoral quota. At this stage, we find out how many mandates a political party has received in a particular constituency. In local elections in Ukraine, the territory covered by each local council is divided into several multi-member constituencies. The number of multi-mandate constituencies depends on two factors: the number of deputies to be elected to the council, and the number of

voters residing in the territorial communities or administrative units⁵. In the second stage, the residuals from the division are distributed among the lists of political parties. Voters had little influence on this part of the electoral algorithm, as the congresses of political parties determined the single-party lists. However, if a candidate passed the threshold of 25% of the electoral quota, they could move up in ranking order. If a candidate failed to “improve” their position on the electoral list, the party list was not changed and remained in the order determined by the political party. Out of 52.6% of candidates who passed the statutory threshold of 25% of preferential votes from the electoral quota only 42% received a mandate. (Opora, 2021).

Table 2: *Comparison of legislative features in the 2015 and 2020 local elections*

Legislative features	2015	2020
Electoral system	Majoritarian in elections to councils with up to 90,000 voters. Proportional to closed lists in elections to councils with more than 90,000 voters.	Majoritarian in elections to communities with up to 10,000 voters. Proportional with flexible lists in elections in communities with more than 10,000 voters.
Electoral threshold	5%	5%
Subject of nomination	Political party or self-nomination in elections based on the majority system. Political party in elections based on the proportional system.	Political party or self-nomination in elections based on the majority system. Political party - in elections under the proportional system with flexible lists.
Type of gender quota	Legislated candidate quotas	Legislated candidate quotas
Gender quota	30% on a single electoral list (proportional representation).	30% of the list of candidates nominated by the party (in territories with up to 10,000 voters). 40% in the single-party list and territorial electoral lists (under the proportional system with flexible lists).

⁵ The number of local council deputies ranged from 22 deputies in communities with fewer than 10,000 voters to 120 deputies in communities with more than 2 million voters. The number of multi-mandate electoral districts for each council is determined by dividing the total number of council members by 3 for communities with fewer than 10,000 voters or by 10 for communities with more than 10,000 voters.

Sanctions for non-compliance with the gender quota	Not provided.	Refusal to register an electoral list.
Type of ballot paper	The closed electoral list is determined by the party.	Two types of lists: a single closed party list and an open territorial electoral list.
Type of preferential voting		Preferential voting with the possibility to choose one candidate, although this is not compulsory.
Formation of the final order of candidates in the territorial election lists		The ranking of candidates determined by the party is preserved for candidates who do not receive 25% of the votes from the electoral quota.

Source: Authors, based on data from the Electoral Code of Ukraine.

The 40% gender quota introduced for the candidate lists (in both single closed party list and an open territorial electoral lists) was mandatory, unlike in the 2015 local elections, when a 30% gender quota was applied without appropriate sanctions for non-compliance. The gender quota stipulates that two of five candidates on the list must have a different gender. Thus a political party must nominate at least five candidates for each electoral district. For example, in a election for seats on an average city council with 42 deputies, a party must nominate at least 26 candidates, of whom at least 10 are women. The effect of quotas was an increase in the share of female candidates on electoral lists, but other characteristics of candidates (previous experience as an election candidate, party affiliation, incumbency) can significantly counteract the effect of this and reduce the chances of women candidates being placed in viable positions on the electoral list and thus entering the representative body.

3 DATA, MEASUREMENT AND METHOD

In our study, we used the results of the elections to the Rivne Regional Council in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine. Owing to the publicly posted protocols of the Rivne Region Territorial Election Commission on the official website of the Rivne Regional Council, we were able to obtain information on the placement of candidates on the individual party lists in constituencies⁶, their electoral results and their socio-demographic characteristics (Rivne

⁶ In elections to the Rivne Regional Council, the territory of Rivne Region was divided into eight constituencies.

Regional Council, 2020). Moreover, the PolitHub platform, developed by the CHESNO Social Movement, allowed us to collect data on the political experience of candidates (CHESNO, 2020).

Ukrainian researchers have conducted a general analysis of the main effects of the introduction of the new electoral system in local elections based on the example of the elections to Lviv Regional Council (Boyko, 2020), Rivne Regional Council (Lebediuk, 2022) and Kharkiv Regional Council (Fisun, Avksentiev, 2021). These studies provide only an overview of the results of local elections in three oblasts of Ukraine, but none of them investigate or test hypotheses about the factors that explain party nomination policies. In this article, we try to bridge this research gap. Therefore a deeper analysis of how candidates were placed on the electoral lists and the preferential votes they received in the Rivne Regional Council elections is a starting point for understanding the gender bias of political parties and voters toward candidates in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine as a whole.

In our study, we used a combined approach and considered “viable” positions based on electoral results. In our case, these were the first or the first two positions in the territorial electoral list, since no political party had won more than two mandates in a particular territorial district. We created three dependent variables. To test for gender bias in the placing of candidates on the electoral lists, we estimated the odds of a candidate being nominated for the first position and of being placed in a “viable” position on the electoral list (one of the first two positions). To test for gender bias in preferential voting, we estimated the odds of being elected. Given that our dependent variables are categorical, we used a binary logistic regression to analyze candidates’ electoral chances.

The main explanatory variable in our analysis was the candidate’s gender. We distinguished between two continuous variables: the candidate’s age and a standardized measure of party size⁷. We operationalized political experience through several variables that reflected candidates’ personal attributes (party affiliation; current elected office at the local level; participation in previous elections; and winning a mandate in previous elections). Moreover, we considered the additional personal experience the candidate had of holding a managerial position in a budgetary institution (local office). It was important to control this in view of the procedure for appointing heads of budgetary institutions (e.g., chief physicians, school principals, etc.). For example, the head of a municipal institution

⁷ Constructed around the overall mean and standard deviation to account for the number of nominated candidates in the constituency.

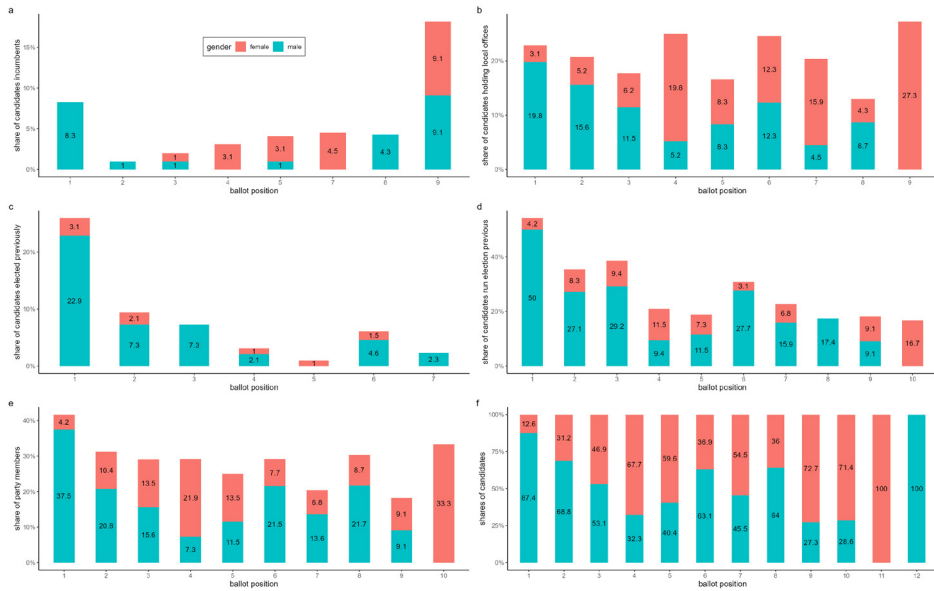
or institution financed by the city budget is appointed and dismissed by the head of the territorial community, while the plenary sessions of the regional council decide on the appointment and dismissal of the heads of budgetary institutions managed by the regional council. Since budgetary institutions are the main places of work in most territorial communities, the heads of such institutions and agencies may have a significant advantage in the struggle for preferential votes or the opportunity to be nominated for viable positions on the electoral list. In this way, political parties try to capitalize on their influence by appointing or influencing the appointment of heads of institutions and agencies that provide basic public services. We distinguished between the status of a candidate depending on whether they were nominated by a parliamentary or a non-parliamentary party. We assumed that parliamentary parties have more resources to recruit politically experienced candidates, which may create an additional advantage in the struggle for preferential votes. To estimate the chances of winning a mandate, we controlled for the effects of the first and last positions in the electoral list.

4 EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The analysis of the placement of candidates on election lists showed that, on average, political parties favored politically experienced male candidates (Graph 1), which is in line with our initial expectations. The results showed that female candidates are an absolute minority in viable positions on the electoral list in terms of having won a mandate in previous elections (4.2 times less frequently than male candidates) and having participated in previous elections (2.6 times less frequently than male candidates).

Candidate data on party membership and holding local offices showed a clear pattern (graph 1, chart e and b), in which the share of female candidates increased only from the fourth position on the electoral list. The aggregate data on the placement of candidates on the electoral lists demonstrated a significant disproportion in the share of female candidates in viable positions, while in the next positions, we observed a tendency to smooth out this effect. The identified patterns indicated that equally politically experienced female candidates were placed in lower positions on the electoral lists than were male candidates.

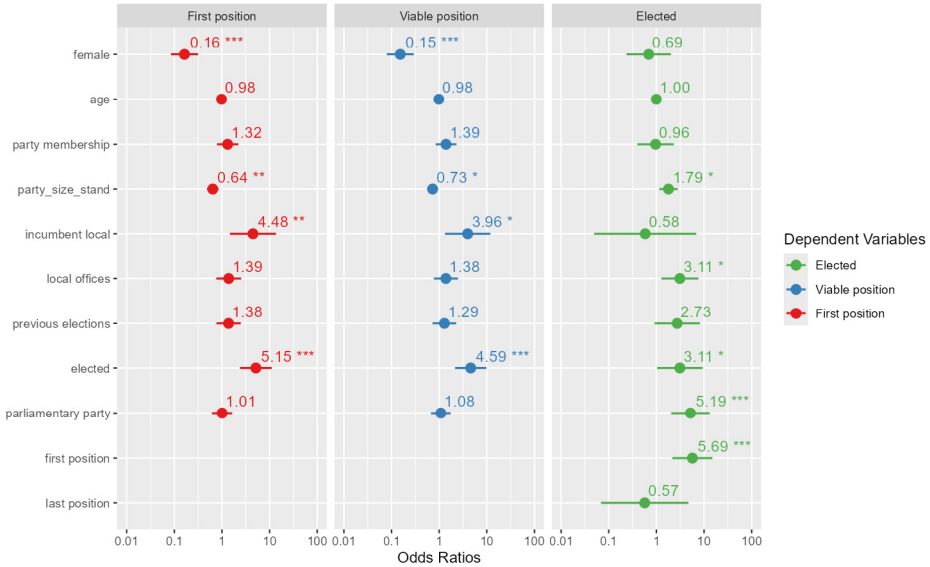
Graph 1: Shares of candidates placed at different ballot positions in the 2020 local elections in Ukraine to the Rivne Regional Council



Source: Rivne Region Territorial Election Commission, authors' calculations in R.

Graph 2 presents the results of binary logistic regression analysis. The models differ depending on the explanation of the chances of obtaining a first position (model 1), a viable position on the electoral list (model 2) and the chances of winning a mandate (model 3). Model 3 additionally includes variables describing candidates' positions on the electoral list. At the same time, all models take into account the candidate's political experience. We transformed the regression coefficients into log odds ratios to facilitate the interpretation of the results since the relationship between the dependent and independent variables was not linear. Thus, we interpreted the results in terms of their probabilities. If the value is statistically significant and greater than one, the probability of the influence of a certain independent variable increases, and if it is less than one, the probability decreases.

Graph 2: Estimation of the impact of legislative gender quotas on ballot positions and preferential voting



Significance codes: * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$

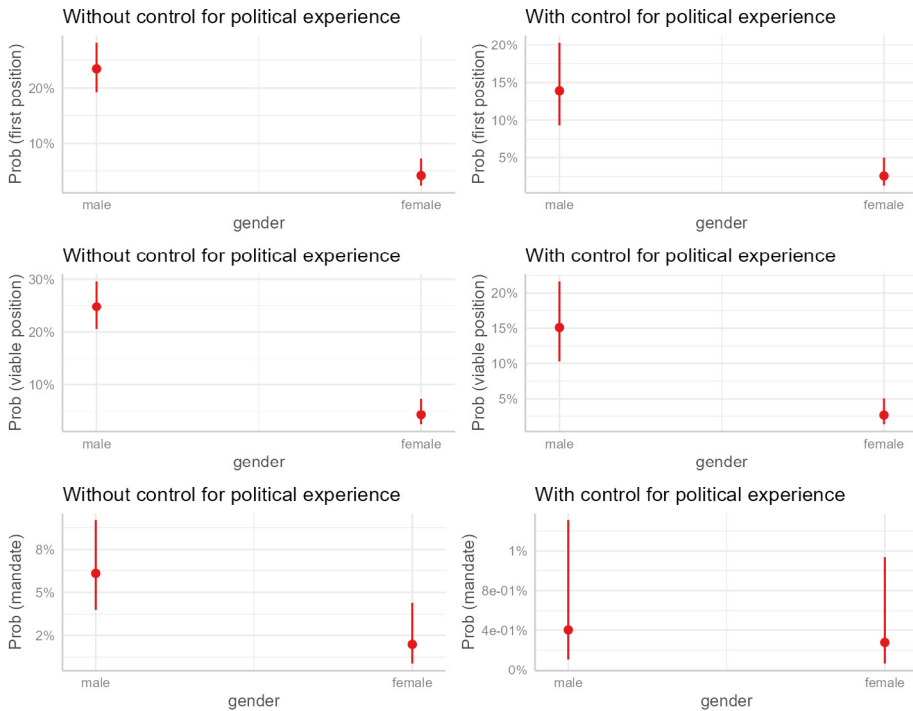
Source: Rivne Region Territorial Election Commission, authors' calculations in R.

Regardless of whether we controlled for the political experience of the candidates, the probability of nominating female candidates for viable positions on the electoral list was significantly lower than in the case of male candidates (Graph 2). The results confirmed our first hypothesis, meaning that political parties counteracted the legal gender quotas and systematically placed female candidates in lower positions on the electoral list.

We visualized the results and calculated the probabilities of candidates taking viable positions on the electoral list and receiving a mandate based on the results of preferential voting (Graph 3). For example, the probability of a politically inexperienced male candidate taking the first position on the electoral list was on average 23.4%, while for a female candidate it was 4.1%. When looking at the probability of a candidate taking a viable position on the electoral list, the gap between politically inexperienced male and female candidates increased (for a male candidate, the probability was 25% and for a female candidate 4%). Thus, political parties were gender-biased in placing candidates in viable positions on the electoral list even if they did not have relevant political experience. During the local elections, there was

a mechanically determined effect of the number of nominated candidates on the electoral list, which, on the one hand, increased the electoral chances of women candidates and, on the other hand, reduced the chances of them getting a viable position.

Graph 3: *Marginal effects⁸ of gender on being placed in a viable position and winning a seat*



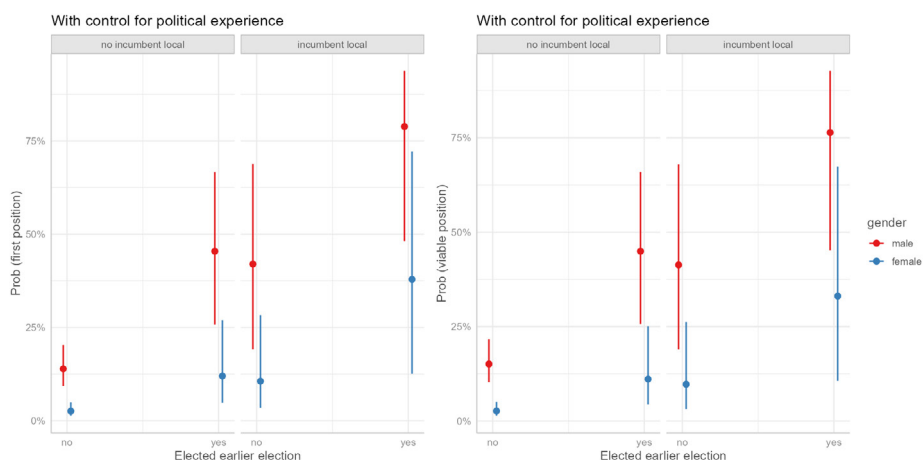
Source: Rivne Region Territorial Election Commission, author's calculations in R.

When controlling for candidates' political experience, we also observed significant disparities in the probability of being nominated for viable positions on the electoral lists (Graph 4). For example, the probability of taking the first position in the electoral list for an incumbent male deputy was on average 42%, while for a female deputy it was 11%. For candidates

⁸ When calculating marginal probabilities, we take into account the values of all other independent variables in the model, which are equal to their average values in the entire data set.

who had won a mandate in the previous election, the probabilities were 45% and 12% respectively. If these two types of political experience were combined, the gap became even larger (79% and 38% respectively). The likelihood of taking a viable position on an electoral list did not significantly reduce the gap between politically experienced candidates. For example, the probability of taking a viable position on an electoral list for an incumbent male MP was on average 41%, whereas for a female MP it was 10%. For candidates who had won a mandate in the previous election, these probabilities were 45% and 11% respectively, and in the case of a combination of political experience, the gap became even more significant (76% and 33% respectively). Thus, these results indicated that the effects of political experience were much greater when candidates were placed in viable positions than gender effects.

Graph 4: *Marginal effects of gender on being placed in the first or a viable position*



Source: Rivne Region Territorial Election Commission, authors' calculations in R.

When it came to how political parties placed candidates on their election lists, no particular differences were observed. No political party had gender parity when placing candidates in the first position on the electoral list. Among all candidates nominated for the first position on the electoral list, 87.4% were men. For example, the political party “Freedom” placed only male candidates in viable positions, while the political party “Servant of the People” filled the first three positions on the electoral list with male

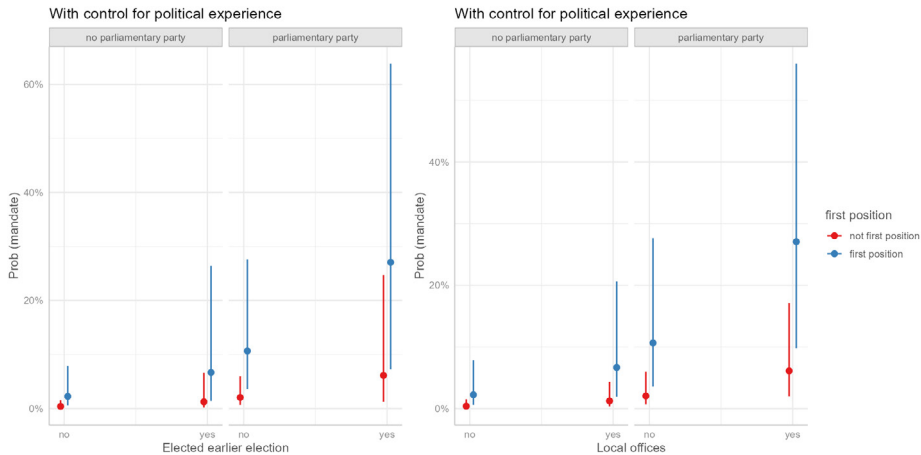
candidates. When examining whom political parties recruit to run as candidates, there was a significant disparity in the distribution of their political experience. For example, the political party “Voice” equally placed male and female candidates from the second to the fifth positions on the election lists, but almost all female candidates had no political experience. At the same time, the political party “Opposition Platform – For Life” also placed the majority of female candidates from the second to the fourth positions on the electoral list, but almost all of them had political experience (they had participated in previous elections and were members of a political party).

Political parties took a formal approach to the process of complying with legislative gender quotas, placing politically experienced candidates, who were overwhelmingly male, in viable positions. Thus, the decline in the share of women in representative bodies of power at the local level was related to the uneven distribution of political experience among candidates. The distribution of electoral capital was influenced by previous candidate nomination strategies and existing gender biases in the political sphere (Kukovič, 2023). Despite the fact that the 2015 local elections used a proportional electoral system with closed lists, political parties adhered to the gender quota in those city councils with more female deputies (Thames, Bloom, 2023). The proportional electoral system with flexible lists in the 2020 local elections created additional challenges for political parties, as they had to comply with the legal gender quota on the one hand, and, on the other hand, place candidates on the electoral lists in such a way as to maximize the electoral result. Therefore, the gender bias of political parties has been manifested through the systematic placement of women candidates in unfavorable positions on the electoral list from election to election, creating a cumulative effect of uneven distribution of political experience among candidates, which counteracted the desired effect of gender quotas on increasing women’s representation in representative bodies of power. An interesting question is whether political parties will change their strategies for placing candidates on election lists if the overall share of female candidates with political experience increases.

According to the regression analysis, we found no empirical evidence that voters were gender-biased toward female candidates, even when controlling for candidates’ political experience and positions on the electoral list (Graph 3). Thus, we reject the second hypothesis. When the political experience of the candidates and their positions on the electoral list were considered, the effect of gender became insignificant. The gap in the probability of winning

a mandate by preferential voting was minimal in the case of politically inexperienced male and female candidates (4%) and absent when their political experience was considered (Graph 3). Voters generally did not oppose the order of candidates on the electoral list established by the party as only 20.3% of deputies received a mandate as a result of a change in their position on the electoral list.

Graph 5: Marginal effects of gender on seat-winning behavior



Source: Rivne Region Territorial Election Commission, authors' calculations in R.

In Graph 5, we observe asymmetry in the probability of winning a mandate based on the results of preferential voting. For example, the probability of winning a mandate for a candidate nominated by a parliamentary political party for the first position on the electoral list was, on average, 11%, whereas for a candidate who held a senior position in a budgetary institution or who had been elected in the previous election, the probability increased on average to 27%. Candidates nominated for other positions on the electoral list with similar political experience were less likely to receive a mandate, at 6%. In the case of a combination of candidates' political experience (holding a managerial position in a budgetary institution (local offices), having been elected in previous elections, and having been nominated by a parliamentary political party), the probability of winning a mandate increased on average to 54%. Therefore these results support our third hypothesis, that the effect of a candidate's position on the electoral list is more important than the candidate's political experience. Moreover, almost all female candidates

who received a mandate as a result of preferential votes were ranked first, and in one case second. on the electoral lists.

CONCLUSION

This study delved into the critical question of whether political parties exhibited gender bias in how they ranked candidates on ballots during the 2020 local elections in Ukraine. Political parties were found to have a gender bias in placing candidates for viable positions on the electoral list, showing a preference for male candidates over female candidates regardless of their political experience. This indicates a clear pattern of gender bias in the ballot ranking. Despite the introduction of a 40% gender quota aimed at increasing female representation, the bias in ballot ranking by political parties suggests that the quota alone was not sufficient to overcome gender biases in the candidate selection and ranking processes.

Thus, the first hypothesis confirmed that women candidates were indeed less likely to be placed in viable positions on the electoral list, irrespective of their political experience. This was observed through the analysis of candidate placements, where female candidates were systematically placed in lower positions than their male counterparts, even when they had comparable political experience. In addition, the study showed that in most cases, voters tended to follow the proposals of political parties, giving preference to candidates in higher positions on the electoral list. The overall trend suggests that voters did not significantly alter the initial rankings provided by the parties, thereby supporting the parties' candidate placement strategies.

The second hypothesis was not confirmed, as voters did not show gender bias in their voting patterns. This suggests that the issue of gender bias in candidate placement was more on the part of political parties than the electorate. Voters were generally guided by the parties' proposals without discrimination based on candidate gender. The gender bias issue lies more with the political parties' nomination strategies rather than with the electorate's voting behavior.

At the same time, the unclear institutional mechanism for ensuring compliance with the legal gender quota creates unfavorable conditions for ensuring equal opportunities for candidates. Electoral law does not clearly state that electoral lists must comply with the legally established gender quota at the time of the elections, but only at the time that the entire candidate list for the respective council is registered. According to

the Central Election Commission of Ukraine, about 17% of political party election lists did not meet gender quota requirements at the time of the local council elections. This is further evidence of our finding that political parties do not pay sufficient attention to women's involvement in political life. Therefore, political parties exploited loopholes in electoral rules, and more often withdrew female candidates after the registration of the electoral list. Women candidates are thus at a disadvantage because their lack of political experience prevents them from taking higher positions on the electoral list.

Although the share of female candidates in the electoral list increased in the 2020 local elections, their overall political experience was significantly less than that of male candidates. A study of Ukrainian cities conducted during the 2015 elections indicated that the share of women deputies elected in the 2010 local elections had the strongest effect on the likelihood of parties' complying with the gender quota (Thames, Bloom, 2023). Thus, we can argue that political parties paid less attention to internal party democracy regarding equal opportunities for women and men to be nominated for viable positions, both before and after the introduction of legislative gender quotas. Informal selection criteria and the placement of female candidates in unattractive positions on the electoral list contribute to the underrepresentation of women in politics.

This study makes several significant contributions to the existing body of knowledge on legislative gender quotas and their impact on electoral dynamics, particularly in the context of local elections in Ukraine. By focusing on the specific case of the Rivne Regional Council under a new electoral system, this article enriches the discourse on how legislative interventions such as gender quotas interact with party nomination practices and voter behavior. This contributes to a broader understanding of the challenges and opportunities for enhancing women's representation in politics in a country during democratic transition.

The results obtained from the example of one region may differ from those of other regions, but the overall effect is likely to be similar. Therefore, there are still open questions which can be tested after the next election (assuming that the current electoral system remains in place): will political parties change their strategies for placing women candidates on election lists if women's political experience has increased significantly, and will voters remain gender-neutral in their choice of candidates?

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