

GENDER & POLITICS

In Myanmar

Women

and

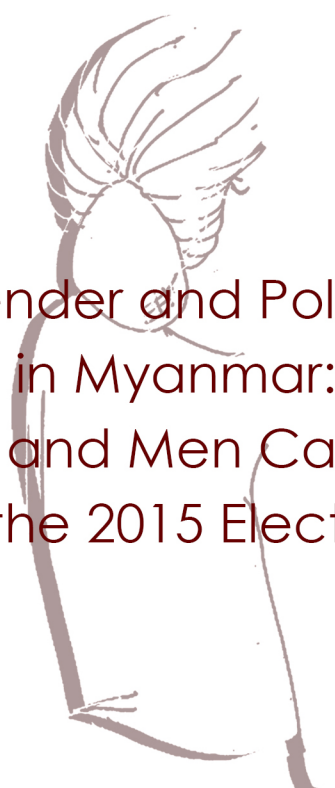
Men

Candidates

in the 2015 Election

August 2017





Gender and Politics in Myanmar: Women and Men Candidates in the 2015 Election



The Gender Equality Network

Yangon, Myanmar

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Executive Summary

Following the November 2015 elections, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi became the *de facto* leader of Myanmar, the first time a woman has held this position. However, representation in Myanmar's parliaments remains highly gender unequal. Women make up only 1 in 10 of Myanmar's MPs, and Myanmar is ranked 159 out of 191 countries on the proportion of national-level parliamentarians that are women, i.e. it is in the bottom 20% of countries globally.

A number of cultural norms affect men's and women's political participation in Myanmar including a widespread preference for male leadership among (female and male) citizens, and women being associated with domestic and supporting roles. Cultural norms strongly shape several of the most important factors for explaining why there are so few women MPs in Myanmar, for example;

Expectations within most families that women perform 'their' domestic tasks regardless of what other responsibilities they have. These rigid expectations result in most women having insufficient time to pursue a political career. Most of the women candidates from Myanmar's 2015 elections that were interviewed for this study reported having flexible and supportive families, and it is very difficult have a political career without this family support.

Political parties' recruitment of electoral candidates typically favours men. In some cases, potential women candidates face outright discrimination from male party members. More often women, lose out in subtler ways, for example the vast majority of key positions at all levels of most political parties are filled by men, and they are likely to encourage their friends and contacts (which also tend to be men) to become candidates.

Females have less confidence and ambition than males to try and become politicians. This is influenced by a number of cultural norms including those that associate political leadership with males, and encourage males to be confident and assertive while females are encouraged to be subservient.

Another highly important factor that limits women's parliamentary representation is the reservation of a minimum 25% of seats in all parliaments for military appointees: only 2 of the military's 166 appointees (1.2%) to the national parliament are women.

Women are considerably less likely than men in Myanmar to work outside of the home, which reduces the pool of potential women MPs. Nevertheless, women are employed in large numbers in many of the occupations that MPs are most commonly drawn from, and so gender differences in employment patterns should not be overstated as a factor for women's low level of political participation.

In Myanmar women are more likely than men to have completed high school and to hold a bachelor's degree or above. Gender differences in formal educational attainment cannot explain why there are so few women MPs.

The common association of leadership with ‘maleness’ means that women frequently have to do much more than men to convince others that they are qualified to be leaders. Women that do become MPs in Myanmar tend to be exceptional in a variety of ways, for example: women MPs are more highly educated than men MPs; women that become MPs are much more likely to have families that support them being politically involved than the average Myanmar family; they are more confident and politically ambitious than the average Myanmar woman; they are more likely to be willing to transgress traditional social norms regarding what behaviour is ‘appropriate’ for females; and they are disproportionately likely to have male relatives (particularly fathers) that were previously well-known politicians.

Achieving gender equality in political participation is widely recognised as an important development objective in itself, and can be a powerful means to achieve other development objectives. This importance is recognised in the Sustainable Development Goals, and is a key objective of Myanmar’s National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women, 2013-22 (NSPAW). Key recommendations for promoting more gender equal political participation are:

For Political Parties:

- Work with LNGOs, INGOs and/or relevant experts that can provide assistance to devise and implement internal party policies and strategies aimed at raising women’s participation.
- Consider introducing internal party targets that stipulate a minimum level of female participation as electoral candidates, and committee members at Township and national levels.

For the Government of Myanmar:

- Introduce mandatory gender quotas for elections to the Pyidaungsu and State/Region hluttaws. These can be designed as temporary special measures (TSMs), e.g. for two or three parliamentary terms. TSMs are included in the recommendations from the recent CEDAW committee review of Myanmar. TSMs are also a great way to work towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 10.
- Ensure that NSPAW is effectively implemented at all levels, in coordination with Myanmar civil society, political parties and other stakeholders. This has been recommended by the CEDAW committee, and will help Myanmar to achieve SDGs 5 and 10.
- Adopt and implement the draft Prevention and Protection of Violence Against Women Law including the provisions targeting online harassment.

For the Government of Myanmar, and LNGOs, INGOs and UN agencies:

As the CEDAW committee has called for Myanmar to do, work to change cultural norms that reinforce gender inequality and suppress female leadership. Potential strategies include:

- Deliver programs targeted at women and girls that encourage them to aim for political careers, and support female politicians.
- Deliver programs targeted towards men and boys that encourage them to be more accepting of females pursuing professional and political careers, and that encourage males to be more willing to perform domestic labour.
- Revise educational curricula so that they do not reinforce gender norms that associate males with the public sphere and leadership, and females with domesticity.

For LNGOs, INGOs and UN agencies:

- Encourage, and provide financial support to, political parties to carry out activities to raise female members' confidence and political skills.
- Provide funding and other support for cross-party initiatives that bring together women MPs and candidates.

Acronyms Used in This Report

ANP	Arakan National Party
CEC	Central Executive Committee
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
EAOs	Ethnic Armed Organisations
FPtP	first-past-the-post
GoM	Government of Myanmar
MIGS	Myanmar Institute of Gender Studies
NCDDP	National Community Driven Development Project
NLD	National League for Democracy
NSPAW	National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2022)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SNLD	Shan Nationalities League for Democracy
UEC	Union Election Commission
USDP	Union Solidarity and Development Party

1. Introduction

1.1 Myanmar's 2015 Elections

In November 2015, Myanmar held nationwide elections that resulted in a sweeping victory for the National League for Democracy (NLD). The election was generally peaceful, and vote-rigging and corruption were not widespread. This is in contrast to the previous nationwide elections, held in 2010, which ‘... were generally viewed as illegitimate, featuring widespread irregularities,’ and were boycotted by many political parties (including the NLD).¹

Although voters in most of the country were able to participate in a largely credible and open election, it is important to acknowledge that this was not the case everywhere. In some areas of Kachin States and Shan States armed groups were accused of intimidating their local political rivals.² For security reasons, or because the electoral authorities could not gain access to check voter lists, around 500,000 (largely non-Bamar ethnic) voters in parts of Bago Region, Kachin State, Kayin State, Mon State, and Shan State did not get the chance to vote.³ And, around 500,000 Muslims (most of whom live in northern Rakhine state) lost the right to vote, due to a decision by the government in March 2015 to cancel the ‘White Card’ forms of identification that many Muslims held, and a ruling by the Constitutional Tribunal that restricted voting rights only to those who are defined as full citizens under the 1982 citizenship law.⁴

The NLD's victory has resulted in their leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, becoming the head of government, and Myanmar is now led by a woman for the first time. The 2015 elections saw the number of women MPs in Myanmar more than double. However, there are only a very few women in senior political positions, and women still make up only one in ten Myanmar MPs – despite some recent gains for women, political participation remains highly gender unequal.

This report explores men's and women's motivations for becoming parliamentarians (Section 3); examines the factors and processes that shape men's and women's opportunities to become parliamentarians (Section 4); and suggests potential strategies for making political representation more gender equal in the future (Section 5). Before addressing these topics, Section 1 discusses: why gender inequality in parliamentary representation matters; the structure of Myanmar's parliamentary system; the numbers of women and men that have been elected to Myanmar's parliaments; and other important forms of inequality and difference in parliamentary representation to consider. Section 2 outlines the main data sources used to write this report, and Section 6 provides conclusions and recommendations.

¹ The Carter Center, *Observing Myanmar's 2015 General Elections* (The Carter Centre, 2016), p.20.

² See Section 4.11, below.

³ Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar: What Now for Ethnic Politics?* (Transnational Institute, December 2015), p.5.

⁴ Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar*, p.5.

1.2 Why Gender Inequality in Politics Matters

Achieving gender equality in political participation is widely recognised as an important development goal in itself, and can also be a powerful means to achieve other development goals. This importance is reflected in one of the targets of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5: ‘Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life.’⁵ One of the key objectives of Myanmar’s National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-22) is to, ‘...improve systems, structures and practices to ensure women’s equal participation in decision-making and leadership at all levels of society.’⁶

This report primarily focuses on the factors that shape women’s and men’s opportunities to be elected to Myanmar’s Union and State/Region hluttaws. The relative numbers of men and women within a political institution (such as a parliament) can be referred to as the gender equality of *statistical representation*.⁷ Statistical representation is currently highly gender unequal in Myanmar’s parliaments, with women being only 10.5% of the MPs elected to the national parliament in 2015, and only 9.7% of MPs elected to the State/Region parliaments. The gender inequality of statistical representation in Myanmar matters for a number of reasons:

1. On average, men and women tend to have different preferences on laws and policies, and how budgets should be allocated. This difference is evident in both developed and developing countries.⁸ Women leaders are typically (although not always), more responsive than men leaders to women’s preferences.⁹ The evidence we have for Myanmar strongly suggest that here as well, men and women have different preferences,¹⁰ and women leaders are typically more responsive to women’s preferences.¹¹ Making political participation more gender equal in Myanmar, is thus likely to result in laws, policies and budgets becoming more *equitable*.
2. Increasing women’s presence in governance institutions often helps to increase the *efficiency and effectiveness* of government, partly through incorporating more and different information in decision-

⁵ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/> [Accessed 2nd May 2017].

⁶ Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs, ‘National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2022)’ (Nay Pyi Taw, 2013), p.21.

⁷ N.b. more advanced measures of statistical representation can also incorporate measures of what types of men and women are represented, by including data on variables such as their age, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic class.

⁸ For example, see, Raghabendra Chattopadhyay and Esther Duflo, ‘Women as Policy Makers: Evidence from a Randomized Policy Experiment in India’, *Econometrica*, 72.5 (2004), p.1429; L. Edlund and R. Pande, ‘Why Have Women Become Left-Wing? The Political Gender Gap and Decline in Marriage’, *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 2002, p.917-220; Patricia Funk and Christina Gathmann, ‘Gender Gaps in Policy Making: Evidence from Direct Democracy in Switzerland’, *Economic Policy*, 2015, p.152-55; J. R. Lott and L. W. Kenny, ‘Did Women’s Suffrage Change the Size and Scope of Government?’, *Journal of Political Economy*, 107 (1999), p.1163.

⁹ Chattopadhyay and Duflo, ‘Women as Policy Makers’, p.1431; Esther Duflo, ‘Why Political Reservations?’, p.674-75, *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 3.2–3 (2005), 668–78; Susan Franceschet and Jennifer M. Piscopo, ‘Gender Quotas and Women’s Substantive Representation: Lessons from Argentina’, *Politics & Gender*, 4.3 (2008), p.407-17; Jennifer L. Lawless, ‘Female Candidates and Legislators’, *Annual Review of Political Science*, 18.1 (2015), p.358-59; Irene Tinker, ‘Quotas for Women in Elected Legislatures: Do They Really Empower Women?’, 2004, p.539.

¹⁰ Paul Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar* (ActionAid, CARE, Oxfam and WON, Unpublished 2015); Paul Minoletti, *Women’s Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar* (MDRI-CESD and The Asia Foundation, June 2014), p.16-20.

¹¹ Section 3, below. See also, Minoletti, *Women’s Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.20-23.

making.¹² In addition, although hard evidence is lacking, there is a common perception that women leaders in Myanmar are less likely to be corrupt than their men counterparts.¹³ Given the high rates of corruption in Myanmar,¹⁴ if women are less corrupt than men their increased participation could have large benefits for the governance of Myanmar.

3. The gender equality of political participation can affect the *style* of political debate and decision-making. In the US, women mayors have been found to be more willing to acknowledge and address fiscal problems; and women chairpersons of government committees are more likely to facilitate broader discussion whereas men chairpersons are more likely to control and direct the discussion.¹⁵ Direct evidence from Myanmar's hluttaws is lacking, but previous research indicates that women and men leaders here also tend to have a different leadership style, with women tending to be less confrontational and more patient.¹⁶
4. The gender equality of political participation can affect citizen's perceptions of the *legitimacy* of Myanmar's hluttaws. Women citizens may find it easier to communicate with women MPs; perceive that women MPs are more responsive to their needs and preferences; and if there are more women MPs derive confidence and ambition in their own opportunity to participate in politics. All of these factors may affect how legitimate Myanmar's hluttaws are perceived to be as decision-making bodies,¹⁷ as well as how easily citizens can communicate with their elected representatives and local authorities.
5. Having the opportunity to actively participate in public decision-making is a key aspect of citizens' *agency and well-being*.¹⁸ Women's limited opportunities for political participation in Myanmar (including becoming MPs) thus reduce their agency and well-being.

Myanmar's budget allocations and outcomes reflect the extent to which decision-making positions are overwhelmingly filled by men. Despite large increases to health and education budgets in recent years, the share of the budget allocated to these ministries remains extremely low by international standards.¹⁹ As is the case in many countries, such social sector spending is generally given higher priority by Myanmar women than

¹² Bina Agarwal, 'Participatory Exclusions, Community Forestry, and Gender: An Analysis for South Asia and a Conceptual Framework', *World Development*, 29.10 (2001), p.1636-37; Lori A. Beaman and others, 'Powerful Women: Does Exposure Reduce Bias?', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 124.4 (2009), p.1518-20; Wendy Janssens, 'Women's Empowerment and the Creation of Social Capital in Indian Villages', *World Development*, 38.7 (2010), 983-86.

¹³ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*; Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.21-22.

¹⁴ For example, Myanmar is currently ranked 136 out of the 176 countries on Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index; www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2016 [Accessed 31st March 2017].

¹⁵ Lawless, 'Female Candidates and Legislators', p.359.

¹⁶ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.22; Emilie Röell, *Women and Local Leadership: The Leadership Journeys of Myanmar's 42 Female Village Tract/Ward Administrators* (Yangon: UNDP, 2015), p.31-33.

¹⁷ Jane Mansbridge, 'Should Blacks Represent Blacks and Women Represent Women? A Contingent "Yes"', *The Journal of Politics*, 61.03 (1999), especially p.651.

¹⁸ Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford University Press, 1999), p.31-33, 152-59; The World Bank, *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development* (Washington, 2011), p.151.

¹⁹ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*; The World Bank, *Myanmar Public Expenditure Review 2015* (The World Bank, September 2015), p.31-32.

men.²⁰ State/Region government budgets are also strongly aligned with male preferences, with road building the predominant form of expenditure.²¹

Increasing the gender equality of statistical representation is likely to raise women's voice in the government decision-making process, and result in more equal and better policy-making, budgeting and public service delivery. However, it is important to acknowledge that this effect is not automatic or guaranteed, and additional strategies may be needed to ensure that an increase in women's statistical representation results in an increase in women's voice.²²

1.3 An Overview of Myanmar's Parliamentary Systems

Myanmar has two parliaments at Union (national) level: the Pyithu hluttaw (lower house) and Amyotha hluttaw (upper house), which are collectively referred to as the Pyidaungsu hluttaw. The Pyithu hluttaw is designed to have 330 elected MPs, and 110 MPs that are appointed by the military. Elected MPs in the Pyithu hluttaw each represent one of Myanmar's 330 Townships.²³ The Amyotha hluttaw has 168 elected MPs, and 56 MPs that are appointed by the military. Each of Myanmar's States and Regions are represented in the Amyotha hluttaw by 12 elected MPs. Myanmar has 14 State/Region hluttaws, the size of which vary dramatically. State/Region hluttaws have two elected MPs per Township, and military appointees constitute an additional group equal to 25% (or slightly higher) of total MPs. Many State/Region hluttaws also contain Ethnic Affairs Representatives (see Section 5.4). Additional details on Myanmar's electoral system can be found in the Appendix.

There is no sex discrimination in Myanmar citizens' constitutional or legal rights to run for elected office, or to vote.²⁴ Myanmar's constitution has several paragraphs dedicated to equal opportunities and non-discrimination including a provision that, 'The Union shall not discriminate any citizen of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, based on race, birth, religion, official position, status, culture, sex and wealth.'²⁵ However, the provisions for gender equality are seriously undermined by the vague qualification that, '...nothing in this Section shall prevent appointment of men to the positions that are suitable for men only.'²⁶

The minimum voting age for Myanmar's hluttaws is 18, but the Constitution has several provisions requiring a higher minimum age for elected office. Candidates for Pyithu and State/Region hluttaws must be aged 25 or above; candidates for the Amyotha hluttaw must be aged 30 or above. The Union President and Vice-Presidents must be 45 and above; Union-level Ministers must be aged at least 40 years or above; and Union-

²⁰ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

²¹ Minoletti, *Gender Budgeting in Myanmar*.

²² It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss such strategies here. However, some suggestions for how this can be done in Myanmar are given in, Paul Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation, April 2016), p.23-28, 33-37

²³ Please note that in the 2015 elections, elections for Pyithu Hluttaw MPs were cancelled in seven Townships due to security concerns, and so only 323 Pyithu Hluttaw MPs were elected.

²⁴ 'Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008)', Sections 120-22, 152-53, 169, 391-92.

²⁵ 'Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008)', Sections 347-52, especially Section 348.

²⁶ 'Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008)', Section 352.

level Deputy Ministers, State/Region Chief Ministers, and State/Region Ministers must all be aged at least 35 years or above.²⁷

1.4 Women's and Men's Statistical Representation in Myanmar's Hluttaws

Myanmar's 2015 elections saw huge wins for the NLD, with the party winning 79.4% of elected seats, and 59.4% of total seats, in the Pyidaungsu hluttaw, which gave the party a clear majority in both the Pyithu and Amyotha hluttaws.²⁸ The NLD's highly popular female leader, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, is constitutionally barred from becoming president, and the NLD nominated a man (U Htin Kyaw) as president. However, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is widely regarded as the *de facto* leader of the country, and the NLD quickly passed legislation that created the position of State Counsellor for her to give greater official legitimacy to this state of affairs. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is also Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the President's Office.

In addition to Myanmar now having a woman as *de facto* president, the 2015 elections saw the percentage of MPs that are women in Myanmar's hluttaws more than double. However, as can be seen in Table 1, women are still only one in ten MPs at Union level (10.5%). As Table 2 shows, this is well below the Asian average (19.4%) and the global average (23.3%). It is also well below the average for Sub-Saharan African countries (23.6%), Arab States (18.0%), and Pacific countries (17.4%). Women are a higher proportion of national-level parliamentarians in Myanmar than in neighbouring Thailand (4.8%), but less than in countries such as Philippines (27.1%), China (24.2%), Bangladesh (20.3%), Indonesia (19.8%), Malaysia (13.1%), and India (12.2%). As of 1st February 2016, Myanmar was ranked 159 out of 191 countries on the proportion of national-level parliamentarians that are women, i.e. in the bottom 20% of countries globally.²⁹ Moreover, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is the only woman in the Union-level cabinet, and the Vice-Presidents, the Speakers and Deputy-Speakers in the Pyithu and Amyotha hluttaws are all men.³⁰

²⁷ 'Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008)', Sections 59c, 120a, 152a, 169a, 232a, 234a, 261a, 262a. Please note that while these ministers can be drawn from MPs in the respective hluttaws this is not mandatory.

²⁸ Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar: What Now for Ethnic Politics?* (Transnational Institute, December 2015), p.6.

²⁹ Author's analysis based on IPU archival global data for 1st February 2016 [<http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/arc/classif010216.htm#1>, Accessed 27th April 2017], and Myanmar data taken from Table 1 of this report. The calculations are based on all parliamentarians at national level, i.e. in countries with two houses of parliament, MPs from both houses are counted.

³⁰ 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.

Table 1: Women's Statistical Representation in the Union Hluttaws (1st February 2016)

	Total MPs (N)	Elected MPs (N)	Elected MPs that are Women (N)	Women as % of Elected MPs	Military MPs (N)	Military MPs that are Women	Women as % of Total MPs
Pyithu Hluttaw	433	323	44	13.6%	110	2	10.6%
Amyotha Hluttaw	224	168	23	13.7%	56	0	10.3%
Pyidaungsu Hluttaw	657	491	67	13.6%	166	2	10.5%

Sources: Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar*; Paul Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar*, p.7.

Table 2: Women's Representation in Myanmar's National Parliament, with International Comparisons (1st February 2016)³¹

	Women as % of MPs in National-level Parliaments
Rwanda	55.7%
Bolivia	51.8%
Philippines	27.1%
China	24.2%
Bangladesh	20.3%
Indonesia	19.8%
Malaysia	13.1%
India	12.2%
Myanmar	10.5%
Thailand	4.8%
Global Average	23.3%
Asian Average	19.4%

Sources: <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/world.htm> [Accessed 25th April 2017]; <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/classif.htm> [Accessed on 25th April 2017].

On average, women's statistical representation in State/Region hluttaws is similar to that in the Pyidaungsu hluttaw. However, as can be seen in Table 3, there is considerable variation between States/Regions. The Mon

³¹ N.b. The figures in Table 2 refer to all parliamentarians at national level, i.e. in countries with two houses of parliament, MPs from both houses are counted. The figures for individual countries are all correct as of 1st February 2016 (i.e. the first day of Myanmar's new parliament). The global average and Asian average are the latest average figures provided on the IPU website, as of 25th April 2017.

State hluttaw has the highest percentage of MPs that are women (19.4%), and then the next five highest are all Regions (Yangon, Ayeyarwady, Sagaing, Magway, and Bago). Three States have no women MPs whatsoever (Chin, Kayah, and Rakhine). Of the 225 military-appointed MPs in the State/Region hluttaws, only 2 (0.9%) are women. Two of Myanmar's 14 State/Region Chief Ministers are women (in Kayin State and Tanintharyi Region), and only one State/Region parliament has a woman Speaker of the House (Mon State).³²

Table 3: Women's Statistical Representation in State/Region Hluttaws (1st February 2016)

State/ Region	Total MPs	Elected MPs (N)	Elected MPs that are Women (N)	Women as % of Elected MPs	Military MPs (N)	Military MPs that are Women (N)	Women as % of Total MPs
Mon	31	23	6	26.1%	8	0	19.4%
Yangon	123	92	18	19.6%	31	1	15.4%
Ayeyarwaddy	72	54	10	18.5%	18	0	13.9%
Sagaing	101	76	14	18.4%	25	0	13.9%
Magway	68	51	8	15.7%	17	0	11.8%
Bago	76	57	8	14.0%	19	0	10.5%
Kachin	53	40	5	12.5%	13	0	9.4%
Kayin	23	17	2	11.8%	6	0	8.7%
Tanintharyi	28	21	2	9.5%	7	0	7.1%
Mandalay	76	57	4	7.0%	19	0	5.3%
Shan	142	103	7	6.8%	39	1	5.6%
Chin	24	18	0	0.0%	6	0	0.0%
Kayah	20	15	0	0.0%	5	0	0.0%
Rakhine	47	35	0	0.0%	12	0	0.0%
Total	884	659	84	12.7%	225	2	9.7%

Sources: Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar*; Paul Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar*, p.8.

Some political parties have a much higher proportion of female MPs than others. However, no party that competed in the 2015 elections and won five or more seats across Myanmar's hluttaws has more than 16.7% women MPs; these parties are the Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD, 7 women out of 42 MPs), and Zomi League for Democracy (1 woman out of 6 MPs). The NLD comes shortly behind with women accounting for 15.1% of their MPs. The parties that had a significant level of electoral success in 2015 with the lowest proportion of women MPs are: Arakan National Party (ANP, 4.4%), Union Solidarity and Development Party (USDP, 2.6%), and the Pa'O National Organisation (0%).

On April 1st 2017, Myanmar held by-elections for nine Pyithu hluttaw seats, three Amyotha Hluttaw seats, one Kayah State hluttaw seat, and six Shan State hluttaw seats. Four of the new Shan State hluttaw MPs and two

³² Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change*, p.7.

of the new Pyithu hluttaw MPs represent Kesi and Mong Hsu Townships in Shan State, where voting was cancelled in the 2015 elections due to security concerns. The other constituencies to hold by-elections were those in which the sitting MP had been appointed to the Union-level cabinet or had died. All nine of the newly elected Pyithu hluttaw MPs are men, and the number of women MPs has fallen to 42 out of 435 total MPs (9.7%). One of the new Amyotha hluttaw MPs is a woman, and the number of women MPs has risen to 24 out of 224 MPs (10.7%). Women are now 68 of the 659 total MPs in the Pyidaungsu hluttaw (10.3%). The MP elected to the Kayah State hluttaw is a man, and so this hluttaw still has no women MPs. One of the seven newly elected MPs to the Shan State hluttaw is a woman, and women are now eight out of 146 total MPs (5.5%). The MPs in the other State/Region hluttaws remain unchanged, and so women now make up 87 of the 888 total MPs found across all of Myanmar's State/Region hluttaws (9.8%).³³

Women's representation in Myanmar's hluttaws is extremely low relative to their share of the population (51.8%),³⁴ and is also very low by international standards. Nevertheless, Table 4 shows that women's current level of statistical representation in Myanmar's parliaments is considerably higher than in any previous period.

Table 4: Women's Representation in Myanmar's Hluttaws 1948 to January 2016³⁵

Period	Total Number of Seats	Number of Seats Held by women	% of Seats Held by Women
1948-50	255	7-8	2.7-3.1%
1951-52	380	8	2.1%
1953-56	375	2	0.5%
1957-61	375	2-4	1.1%
1974-87	444-489	7-15	1.5-3.1%
2011-Mar 2012	659	18	2.7%
Apr 2012-Dec 2013	657	30	4.6%
Jan 2014-Jan 2016	657	32	4.9%

Sources: Figures for 1948-87 from Central Statistical Organisation, *Statistical Profile of Children and Women in Myanmar*, p.151; figures for 2011-16 taken from Renaud Egretieu, 'Legislators in Myanmar's First "Post-Junta" National Parliament', p.99-101.

³³ All 2017 data extracted from, 'Results of 2017 By-Elections', *The Global New Light of Myanmar* (Nay Pyi Taw, 3 April 2017).

³⁴ Ministry of Immigration and Population - Department of Population, *The Union Report: Census Report, Volume 2* (Nay Pyi Taw: Ministry of Immigration and Population - Department of Population, May 2015), p.18.

³⁵ N.b. there were no sitting parliaments during the periods 1962-73 and 1988-2010, hence these years not appearing in Table 4. The data for the years 1948-87 is taken from a 2009 publication by the Government of Myanmar's Central Statistical Organisation. The citation they provide for these figures is 'national archives department' and we have not been able to independently verify their accuracy.

1.5 Other Important Forms of Inequality and Difference to Consider

The primary focus of this report is looking at differences and similarities by *gender* for citizens' opportunities to participate in, and be represented by, Myanmar's hluttaws. However, it is vital to remember that a number of other factors are important influences on citizens' sense of identity, their policy-making and budgeting preferences, their opportunities to become political leaders, and their behaviour as political leaders. Such factors include: age, ethnicity, religion, geographical location, and socio-economic status. Parliamentarians' legislative behaviour also tends to be strongly correlated with their party affiliation.³⁶

Ethnicity has long been a key factor in Myanmar politics, and has been articulated both in the calls of many Bamar leaders for a unitary state of 'national races' with power concentrated in lowland central areas, and by many non-Bamar leaders that have mobilised opposition to this centralised state around ethnic and/or religious claims.³⁷ Ethnic identity is also a key source of individual and group self-identity and cultural expression in Myanmar. It is vital to understand that ethnic identity in Myanmar is highly complex. For example, while the public discourse on ethnic identity in Myanmar frequently conceptualises citizens as belonging to a single ethnic group, many citizens' ancestry is in fact drawn from multiple ethnic groups, and the definition of who belongs to each ethnic group or sub-group is often imprecise and can be contested. Furthermore, there is no word in the Myanmar language that is a precise translation of the English word 'ethnicity': although the Myanmar word *lu-myo* is widely translated into English as 'ethnicity', the meaning of *lu-myo* is actually much closer to 'race'.³⁸ In this report frequent reference is made to ethnicity, but it is important to remember that this form of identity is more complex and more contested than is often assumed.

According to the ethnic identity candidates declared when registering with the Union Election Commission (UEC), 64% of the current MPs in the Pyidaungsu hluttaw are ethnic Bamar.³⁹ The data on Myanmar's ethnic composition that was collected in the 2014 census has still not been published, and accurate data on Myanmar's ethnic composition is absent. However, the proportion of the population that is Bamar is commonly estimated to be around 60-65%, and so it does not seem that a disproportionately large number of elected MPs are ethnic Bamar. Data on the ethnicity of the current military appointees to the Pyidaungsu hluttaw is not publicly available, but data from 2013 showed that ethnic Bamar were disproportionately represented in this group, accounting for 88% of these MPs.⁴⁰ It seems unlikely that the ethnic composition of military appointees to the Pyidaungsu hluttaw has changed dramatically since 2013.⁴¹

³⁶ Lena Wängnerud, 'Women in Parliaments: Descriptive and Substantive Representation', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 12 (2009), p.62.

³⁷ Transnational Institute, *Ethnicity without Meaning, Data without Context: The 2014 Census, Identity and Citizenship in Burma/Myanmar* (Transnational Institute, February 2014), p.3-4.

³⁸ Transnational Institute, *Ethnicity without Meaning, Data without Context: The 2014 Census, Identity and Citizenship in Burma/Myanmar*, p.4.

³⁹ Renaud Egretau, 'Myanmar Parliament Preserves Old Patterns', *Nikkei Asian Review*, 3 April 2016 <<http://asia.nikkei.com/Viewpoints-archive/Viewpoints/Renaud-Egretau-Myanmar-parliament-preserves-old-patterns>> [accessed 10 March 2017].

⁴⁰ Renaud Egretau, 'Legislators in Myanmar's First "Post-Junta" National Parliament (2010–2015): A Sociological Analysis', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 33.2 (2014), p.110.

⁴¹ N.b. the appointment of military MPs to Parliament is not tied to the election cycle, and the Commander-in-Chief can replace appointees at any time. Such 'reshuffling' of military appointees has occurred quite frequently since the Pyidaungsu hluttaw opened

In the current Pyidaungsu hluttaw, more elected MPs identify as Shan (6.5%) than as any other ethnic minority. The next most highly represented ethnic minorities are Rakhine (5.7%) and Kayin (4.7%). Considerable numbers of elected MPs declared a mixed ethnic identity, such as Pa'O-Bamar, or Kachin-Shan-Bamar. Some smaller ethnic groups that were represented in the previous Union hluttaws do not occupy the seats in the current hluttaws (e.g. Wa and Intha). However, certain smaller ethnic groups that were previously not represented now are, such as Manu Manaw, Li-Shan, Kayan-Yintaleh, and Thet.⁴²

A little over 88% of elected MPs in the current Pyidaungsu hluttaw are Buddhist,⁴³ which is the same as the estimated proportion of citizens that are Buddhist.⁴⁴ Christians are overrepresented in the current hluttaws, accounting for a little over 11% of elected MPs,⁴⁵ despite only being around 6.2% of the population.⁴⁶ Data on the religious affiliation of the current MPs appointed by the military has not been published, but data from 2013 showed that all of the military appointees at that time were Buddhist.⁴⁷ If, as seems likely, this is still the case, Christians are still over-represented among total MPs (around 8.5%), and Buddhists are slightly over-represented (a little over 91%).⁴⁸ Muslim citizens (estimated to be 4.3% of the population)⁴⁹ are noticeably underrepresented, now having no MPs in the Pyidaungsu or State/Region hluttaws. There are also no MPs that are Animist or Hindu (0.8% and 0.5% of the population respectively).⁵⁰

in 2011. See, Renaud Egretau, 'Who Are the Military Delegates in Myanmar's 2010-2015 Union Legislature?', *Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 30.2 (2015), p.339.

⁴² Egretau, 'Myanmar Parliament Preserves Old Patterns'.

⁴³ Author's calculation, based on UEC dataset translated into English by Open Myanmar Initiative. The author would like to thank Open Myanmar Initiative for sharing this dataset. Please note that there is one elected MP whose religion is not recorded in the UEC dataset so it is not possible to say exactly what percentage of MPs are Buddhist and Christian.

⁴⁴ Ministry of Immigration and Population - Department of Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, The Union Report: Religion* (Nay Pyi Taw: Ministry of Immigration and Population - Department of Population, July 2016), p.5.

⁴⁵ Author's calculation, based on UEC dataset translated into English by Open Myanmar Initiative.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Immigration and Population - Department of Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, The Union Report: Religion*, p.5.

⁴⁷ Renaud Egretau, 'Legislators in Myanmar's First "Post-Junta" National Parliament (2010-2015): A Sociological Analysis', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, 33.2 (2014), p.109.

⁴⁸ Author's calculation, based on UEC dataset translated into English by Open Myanmar Initiative.

⁴⁹ Ministry of Immigration and Population - Department of Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, The Union Report: Religion*, p.5

⁵⁰ Ministry of Immigration and Population - Department of Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, The Union Report: Religion*, p.5.

Table 5: Age of Myanmar's Union Elected MPs (1st February 2016)

	Women (N)	Women (%)	Men (N)	Men (%)	Total (N)	Total (%)
26-30	0	0	9	2.1%	9	1.8%
31-40	10	14.9%	62	14.6%	72	14.7%
41-50	17	25.4%	91	21.5%	108	22.0%
51-60	15	22.4%	123	29.0%	138	28.1%
61-70	25	37.3%	125	29.5%	150	30.5%
71-81	0	0	14	3.3%	14	2.9%
Mean	53.6		53.5		53.5	
Median	54.0		55.0		55.0	

Source: UEC dataset translated into English by Open Myanmar Initiative, subsequently edited by author.

Table 5 shows that there is very little gender difference in the mean and median age of MPs in the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw. However, men are more likely to be found at the extremes of the age distribution: at the beginning of the current parliament (1st February 2016), all of the women MPs were within the age range 32-70 whereas there were 15 men MPs aged 26-31, and 14 aged 71-81.⁵¹ Elected MPs are considerably older than the average voter, but this is to be expected, and the median age of Myanmar's MPs is about the same as the international average.⁵²

Socio-economic class of MPs is not easy to directly measure. However, several (imperfect) proxies for socio-economic class can be noted: MPs are unusually likely to be highly educated and to have previously worked in high status jobs, such as medical doctor, vet, lawyer, business owner (see Section 4.2).

Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to address in any detail, it is important to appreciate how multiple forms of difference and discrimination can interact. As mentioned by one of our interviewees (see Section 4.9), it is harder for a young female to be taken seriously as a political leader than an older one. A woman from a low status family living in a remote village faces more obstacles to becoming a political leader than a woman from an elite family living in an urban centre. And, a poor Muslim man is likely to have less opportunity for political participation than a wealthy Buddhist woman.

⁵¹ Source: UEC dataset translated into English by Open Myanmar Initiative, subsequently edited by author.

⁵² Egretreau, 'Legislators in Myanmar's First "Post-Junta" National Parliament (2010–2015): A Sociological Analysis', p.102.

2. Data Used in This Report

The primary research conducted for this report included 50 interviews with successful and unsuccessful candidates for the Pyidaungsu and State/Region hluttaws in the 2015 elections. These interviews lasted 2-3 hours. A further 10 interviews were conducted with staff from Myanmar CSOs that had been involved in election preparation activities, voter education, supporting candidates' election campaigns, election observation, and/or post-election activities.⁵³ These interviews lasted around 45 minutes on average. An interview was also conducted with the Director General of the Union Election Commission in Nay Pyi Taw, which lasted for 90 minutes.

All of the interviews for this report were conducted November 2016 – January 2017. The draft interview guides were initially written by the international consultant, and then revised following discussions with the interviewers and GEN staff members. The two interviewers were from Myanmar Institute of Gender Studies (MIGS), and are both Myanmar nationals with considerable experience in interviewing for research purposes and on gender equality issues. All interviews were audio-recorded. Interview responses were written up and coded in Myanmar language, and analysis of this data was provided to the international consultant (in English language) by MIGS according to a scheme provided by the international consultant.

28 of the candidates interviewed were women and 22 were men. This is considerably different to gender balance of candidates in the 2015 elections and current MPs, but having a sample that is approximately gender equal enables us to more fully explore gender differences. The age of our interviewees (at the time of interview) ranged from 27 to 70, and their mean age is 50.9. There was little gender difference in either mean or distribution of our interviewees' age, and it is quite similar to the age range and distribution of current MPs.

23 of the candidates interviewed won the election in their constituency in November 2015 while the other 27 were unsuccessful. The candidates interviewed come from a total of 25 political parties. A higher number of interviews were conducted with the most electorally successful parties, e.g. NLD (7 interviews), USDP (6), SNLD (4), ANP (3). 22 of the candidates interviewed were from national parties; 25 were from ethnic-based parties; and 3 were independents.

Interviews with candidates were conducted in 4 States (Kachin, Kayin, Rakhine and Shan), 2 Regions (Sagaing and Yangon), and the Union Territory (Nay Pyi Taw). As well as our interviews covering candidates that ran for election in all

⁵³ 6 of these CSOs are based in Yangon, 3 in Shan State, and 1 in Kachin State.

of these locations, they also include candidates that ran in 2 additional States (Chin and Mon) and 2 additional Regions (Ayeyarwady and Bago). Our interviews thus provide broad geographical coverage although it should be noted that candidates that ran in the following States/Regions are strongly overrepresented: Kachin (13 interviewees), Shan (10), Rakhine (8), Yangon (7).

Compared to Myanmar's population and the MPs in Myanmar's hluttaws, candidates from non-Bamar ethnic groups are somewhat overrepresented in our sample (56%). Bamar candidates still make up close to half of the candidates interviewed (44%). 41 of our interviewees are Buddhist; 8 are Christian; and 1 is Hindu: this is quite similar to the religious affiliation of MPs currently sitting in the Pyidaungsu hluttaw.

Among the candidates interviewed for this study, as is the case among MPs in the Pyidaungsu and State/Region hluttaws, women tended to be more educated than men (see Section 4.2). Of the 6 interviewees that had not studied beyond high school, four are men and two are women. Five of the candidates interviewed had attended University but not managed to graduate (three women and two men),⁵⁴ and 28 hold a bachelor's degree (14 women and 14 men). Seven of the candidates interviewed have a masters' degree and two have a doctorate – all of these were women.⁵⁵

The occupational backgrounds of the candidates interviewed are mostly similar to that found among current Pyidaungsu and State/Region elected MPs (see Section 4.2). However a major difference is that none of the candidates we interviewed had a background in agriculture. The occupational backgrounds of our interviewees can be summarised as follows: business (15); education (12); politicians and activists (6); lawyer (4); medicine (3); artist (1); journalist (1); NGO worker (1); auditor (1).⁵⁶ As with current MPs, in our sample men are more likely to have a background in business (9 men vs 6 women) whereas women are more likely to have a background in education (8 women vs 4 men).

Overall, interview data provides quite broad coverage, and in most aspects approximately represents the current composition of Myanmar's parliaments. It has been possible to extract a variety of quantitative and qualitative information that helps us to explore gender differences in candidates' motivations, experiences and opportunities. However, our sample of 50 candidates cannot fully represent the more than 6,000 candidates that ran in the 2015 elections. The fairly small number of interviews means that conclusions sometimes have to be tentative. This problem of sample size is

⁵⁴ N.b. these were typically those that had tried to attend university in the 1990s, but abandoned their studies due to the frequent university closures during this decade.

⁵⁵ N.b. two interviewees did not give a clear response when they were asked to describe the highest level of education that they had obtained.

⁵⁶ Six interviewees gave an unclear answer to this question.

exacerbated by the fact that for most questions a minority of interviewees failed to provide clear answers (this was particularly a problem among men interviewees). In all of the interviews, the interviewer repeated the question if the interviewee's initial answer was vague/unclear, but it was not feasible or appropriate continue repeating the same question additional times.

Given the fairly small number of interviews/interviewee responses, it is particularly difficult to have much certainty regarding how the other forms of difference and inequality discussed in Section 1.5 interact with gender. Nonetheless, where it is feasible to discuss these interactions, this report tries to do so.

In addition to the primary data collected specifically for this research project, this report draws on published and unpublished data collected by a number of organisations in recent years. The increase in political, social and economic research in Myanmar in recent years means that we now have considerably better evidence from which to draw on than was previously the case.

3. Women and Men Candidates' Political Priorities

This section examines differences in women and men candidates': reasons for wanting to become MPs; priorities for policy action in Myanmar; and issues focused on during their campaigns. These differences support the view raised in Section 1.2, that making political representation in Myanmar more gender equal is likely to change the content of political debate both within Myanmar's Hluttaws and in the wider public sphere.

3.1 Motivation for Becoming Candidates

When asked why they wanted to be a candidate in the 2015 elections, 8 of the female candidates (28%) reported working to promote women's rights as their key motivation while only 1 male candidate (4.8%) gave this answer.⁵⁷ Three women candidates gave improving education as their primary motivation, and two gave working for peace while none of the male candidates gave these as their primary motivation. Men (29%) were more likely than women (14%) to say that raising ethnic minority voice was their primary motivation. 31% of women and 29% of men spoke in broad terms, describing their political 'commitment' or 'desire'.⁵⁸ The four laws 'For the Protection of Race and Religion' passed in 2015 contain several provisions harmful to women's rights and gender equality, and have been widely condemned by national and international women's rights and gender equality organisations and activists. Nevertheless, these laws have been supported by considerable numbers of Myanmar women and men,⁵⁹ and one of the women candidates interviewed said that her concern that these laws might be repealed was one of her primary motivations for running in the 2015 elections.

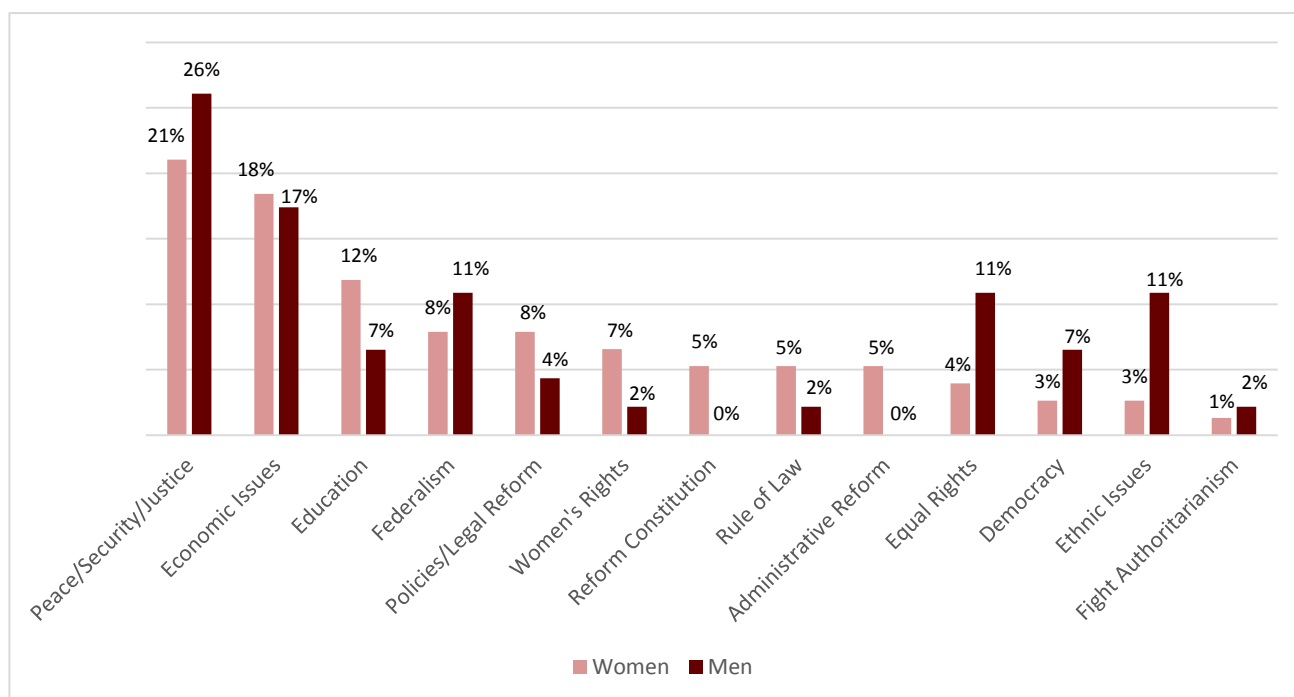
⁵⁷ N.b. although it could possibly be the case that this man reported this answer out of a desire to please the interview team rather than this being his genuine motivation, it can be noted that he has actively worked to promote women's rights and opportunities in his constituency area.

⁵⁸ N.b. around one third of the men candidates interviewed, and one quarter of the women candidates, gave responses that focused on *how they were chosen* as candidates rather than their motivation *for wanting to become* candidates.

⁵⁹ Matthew J. Walton, Melyn McKay, and Daw Khin Mar Mar Kyi, 'Women and Myanmar's 'Religious Protection Laws'', *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, 13.4 (2015), p.36–49.

3.2 Policy Priorities

Figure 1: Which Three Policy Issues Do You Think Are Most Important for Myanmar? by Gender⁶⁰



Source: Interviews with Candidates

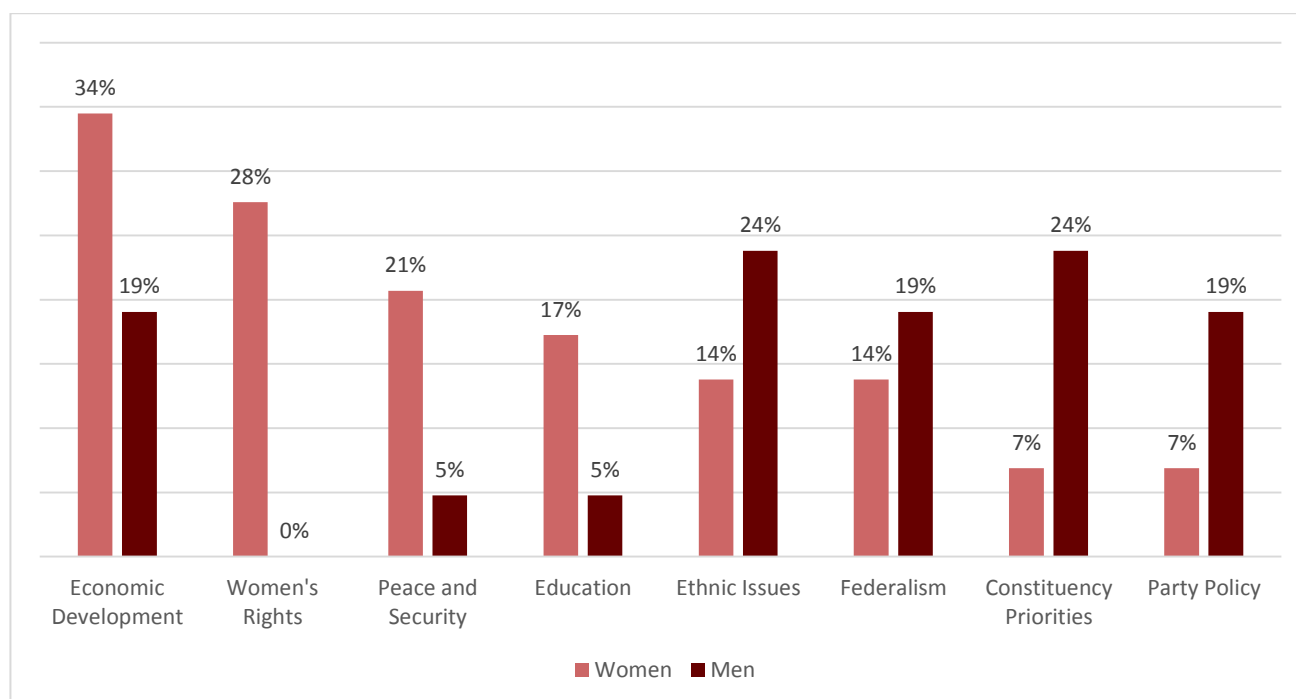
As Figure 1 shows, gender differences are also apparent in candidates' perceptions of which policy issues are most important for Myanmar. Women interviewees were more likely than men interviewees to say education (12% vs 6.5%); and women's rights (6.6% vs 2.2%). Men were considerably more likely than women to say equal rights for all (11% vs 3.9%); ethnic issues (11% vs 2.6%); and were somewhat more likely to say peace/security/justice (26% vs 21%). However, there was little gender difference for seeing economic issues as high priority (18% of women vs 17% of men). None of the men or women candidates said healthcare was a top priority issue. This is somewhat surprising given the importance of this sector for citizen welfare, and the notoriously bad state of Myanmar's health system.⁶¹

⁶⁰ N.b. Candidates were asked which three policy issues they think are most important for Myanmar. Some interviewees only gave two or one policy issues in their answers. Women interviewees were more likely to give complete answers than men interviewees, with the total number of women's answers being 87.4% of the possible maximum whereas for men the equivalent figure is 73.0%. The percentages given in Figure 1 are calculated differently to those elsewhere in this report. Here, the percentages given are the number of women/men interviewees that said this policy issue is a priority, as a percentage of the total number of priority policy issues given by women (76 issues in total) or men (46 issues in total).

⁶¹ For example, see, The World Bank, *Myanmar Public Expenditure Review 2015* (The World Bank, September 2015), p.58-64.

3.3 Focus of Election Campaigns

Figure 2: Which Issues Did You Focus on in Your 2015 Election Campaign?, by Gender (multiple answers possible, top 8 responses shown here)⁶²



Source: Interviews with Candidates

Gender differences can also be seen in the issues which women and men candidates focused on during their campaigns. Figure 2 shows that women were more likely than men to report focusing on economic development; women's rights; peace and security; and education. Whereas men were more likely than women to report focusing on ethnic issues; local constituency priorities; federalism; and, somewhat general answer of, 'party policy'. It can be further noted that the two interviewees that said fighting corruption was one of their campaign focuses were both women.

3.4 Overall Trends

The evidence presented in this section strongly suggests that women candidates are more likely than men candidates to prioritise education and women's rights. In contrast, men are more likely to prioritise ethnic issues. Gender differences on other issues are less consistently clear-cut, but this is likely to be partly attributable to the sample size not being larger.

⁶² Figure 2 reports the 8 most common responses when candidates were asked which issues they focused on in the 2015 election campaign. All of the focus areas in Figure 2 were reported by 6 or more interviewees. A further 11 focus areas were reported by up to 4 interviewees, but for reasons of space and clarity these are not listed above. The percentages given in Figure 2, report the percentage of women/men interviewees that reported this area as one of the focuses of their campaign.

4. Factors and Processes That Shape Women's and Men's Opportunities to Become Parliamentarians

4.1. Cultural Norms and Biases

Studies in both developed and developing countries typically find that citizens have a bias in favour of male political leadership.⁶³ This bias also appears to be present in Myanmar, and a 2014 citizen survey by The Asia Foundation found that 42% of survey respondents strongly agreed with the statement that men make better political leaders than women, and 29% agreed somewhat. There was almost no difference between male and female citizens in this perception; no significant differences between States and Regions or between individual States/Regions; and only minor differences between those living in rural and those living in urban areas.⁶⁴ Such perceptions do not necessarily reflect reality of women and men leaders' performance: for example, research on local leaders in neighbouring India shows that citizens there report being less satisfied with female than male leaders even though objective measures of leaders' performance showing female leaders to be as or more effective than male leaders.⁶⁵

A number of traditional Myanmar proverbs illustrate a tradition of opposition to women taking on public leadership roles. For example:

*If a woman wrecks a country it is well and truly wrecked.*⁶⁶

*The sun does not rise with a hen's crow.*⁶⁷

Cultural norms not only affect how males and females are perceived by others and they also affect their own self-perception and ambition. In Myanmar, as in many other countries, cultural norms that associate women with domestic tasks and men with public decision-making contribute to men typically having more ambition and confidence than women to try to become political leaders.⁶⁸

Myanmar had almost five decades of continuous military rule, 1962-2011, which tended to reinforce traditional cultural norms that associate men with public leadership and women with domestic and supporting roles. The Tatmadaw was (and continues to be) extremely male dominated, with the small number of women who employs primarily assigned to medical and lower level administrative jobs. Combat roles and high level

⁶³ Sarah F. Anzia and Christopher R. Berry, 'The Jackie (and Jill) Robinson Effect: Why Do Congresswomen Outperform Congressmen?', *American Journal of Political Science*, 55.3 (2012), p.479; Esther Duflo, 'Women Empowerment and Economic Development', *Journal of Economic Literature*, 50.4 (2012), p.1062.

⁶⁴ The Asia Foundation, *Myanmar 2014: Civic Knowledge and Values in a Changing Society* (Yangon, 2014), p.78-79. See also, Gender Equality Network, *Taking the Lead: An Assessment of Women's Leadership Training Needs and Training Initiatives in Myanmar* (Yangon, September 2013), p.9-10.

⁶⁵ Lori A. Beaman and others, 'Powerful Women: Does Exposure Reduce Bias?', *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 124.4 (2009), p.1514-21; Esther Duflo, 'Why Political Reservations?', *Journal of the European Economic Association*, 3.2-3 (2005), p.674.

⁶⁶ Hla Pe, *Myanmar Proverbs*, p.24.

⁶⁷ The Gender and Development Initiative, *Gender-Based Constraints in Rural Areas and Women's Empowerment in HDI of UNDP Myanmar* (Yangon, 2011), p.25. N.b. please note that the English language translation of this quote above differs slightly from that given in the GDI report.

⁶⁸ See, Section 4.3.

leadership positions in the Tatmadaw have been occupied by men only.⁶⁹ “The military’s top-down command structure reinforced existing Burmese concepts of male superiority and authority,”⁷⁰ and the military government’s economic and educational policies further reinforced such cultural norms.⁷¹

Restrictions on Myanmar’s media have been relaxed in recent years, and there is now increased access to independent print media, the internet and cable television. These changes give Myanmar citizens far easier access to alternative viewpoints, and cultural, social, political and economic arrangements including greater exposure to female leadership. Such exposure is likely to have some positive effect on cultural norms regarding female leadership.⁷²

The large role played by cultural norms and biases in limiting women’s political participation in Myanmar has frequently been noted in existing research,⁷³ and was reiterated in many of our interviews with candidates, CSOs, and the UEC. Cultural norms vary according to multiple factors including gender, ethnicity, religion, age, and urban/rural dweller.⁷⁴ However, the widespread similarity in perceptions that men make better leaders than women, also found in The Asia Foundation survey, indicates the commonality of many prevailing attitudes regarding gender. Cultural norms and biases influence all of the factors and processes that shape women’s and men’s opportunities to participate in Myanmar politics, and are explored in more detail throughout the remainder of Section 4.

Cultural norms can shape expectations and perceptions so strongly that they lead some people in Myanmar to give apparently false or irrelevant reasons for why so few women do or should take on political leadership roles. For example, one of the men candidates interviewed for this study referred to the education gap between men and women supposedly being ‘so different’ in favour of men when justifying his opposition to gender quotas (see Section 5.4.2); and a woman candidate described facing opposition from her male party colleagues on the irrelevant basis that as a woman she would (supposedly) not be able to deal with night-time emergencies (see Section 4.6).

It is often difficult for women in Myanmar to successfully negotiate and/or challenge the various strong and pervasive cultural norms that directly and indirectly favour male political leadership. The common association of leadership with ‘maleness’ means that women frequently have to do much more than men to convince others that they are qualified to be leaders. As can be seen in Sections 4.2 – 4.9, women that do become candidates and MPs tend to be exceptional in multiple ways.

⁶⁹ Jessica Harriden, *The Authority of Influence: Women and Power in Burmese History* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), p.175-79.

⁷⁰ Harriden, *The Authority of Influence*, p.179.

⁷¹ Harriden, *The Authority of Influence*, p.204, 269-70.

⁷² The World Bank, *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development* (Washington, 2011), p.268.

⁷³ For example, see, Gender Equality Network, *Raising the Curtain: Cultural Norms, Social Practices and Gender Equality in Myanmar*, p.59-63; Paul Minoletti, *Women’s Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar* (MDRI-CESD and The Asia Foundation, June 2014), p.25-32; Mon Women’s Organisation and UN Women, *Women’s Political Participation in Mon State* (MWO & UN Women, Forthcoming).

⁷⁴ ActionAid, CARE and OXFAM, *Women’s Participation in Public Life in Myanmar* (Yangon: ActionAid, CARE and OXFAM, 2011), p.8-12; Gender Equality Network, *Raising the Curtain: Cultural Norms, Social Practices and Gender Equality in Myanmar*, p.27-29; Minoletti, *Women’s Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.28-29.

4.2. Education, Skills and Experience

Men's dominance of political leadership positions in Myanmar cannot be explained by gender differences in formal educational attainment. Women are slightly less likely than men to have ever attended school, and they are more likely to be illiterate.⁷⁵ However, women are slightly more likely than men to have completed high school (13.5% vs 13.1%) and almost 50% more likely than men to hold a undergraduate degree or above (6.8% vs 4.6%).⁷⁶ As the following paragraph shows, the vast majority of MPs hold an undergraduate degree or above, and so this is the most relevant educational measure for assessing women's and men's qualifications to become MPs.

Among the parliamentarians elected in 2015, women are more educated than men. At Union level, women MPs are more likely than men MPs have obtained an undergraduate degree or above (94% vs 80%) and are also more likely to have obtained a masters' degree or above (23% vs 9%).⁷⁷ A similar pattern is observable among State/Region MPs where 94% of women MPs but only 68% of men have an undergraduate degree or above, and 12% of women MPs but only 4% of men MPs have a masters' degree or above.⁷⁸ The small proportion of MPs at Union and State/Region levels that did not complete tenth standard are all men.⁷⁹ In the previous parliament, women MPs had also typically achieved a higher level of education than their male counterparts.⁸⁰

21% of the women candidates interviewed for this study said that they felt that their education was a key factor in enabling them to become a candidate whereas no men mentioned this.⁸¹ In a cultural context in which political leadership is typically associated with men rather than women, it can be expected that women need to do more than men to 'prove' that they are qualified to be leaders – i.e. in this context there is probably a greater need for women than men to be highly educated, if they are to be selected by parties as candidates, be accepted and supported by party colleagues, and for voters to vote for them. Achieving a high level of education can also be important for women's political participation by giving them greater confidence to try to take on leadership roles.

Although gender differences in access to education do not seem to be able to explain gender differences in political participation, the current education system is likely to contribute to male dominance of leadership positions in other ways. Teaching materials frequently reinforce traditional gender norms that associate males

⁷⁵ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.24; MOLES, CSO, and ILO, *Myanmar Labour Force, Child Labour and School-To-Work Transition Survey, 2015: Executive Summary Report* (Nay Pyi Taw: MOLES, CSO & ILO, 2017), p.8-9. N.b. the MOLES, CSO, and ILO presents apparently inconsistent data on illiteracy levels: the data on literacy levels presented on p.8 implies that 12.7% of females and 7.7% of males aged 15-64 are not literate; whereas the data on p.9 states that 14.1% of females and 10.0% of males are not literate. Nevertheless, the figures are consistent in showing that more females than males are not literate.

⁷⁶ MOLES, CSO, and ILO, *Myanmar Labour Force, Child Labour and School-To-Work Transition Survey, 2015*, p.9.

⁷⁷ Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar: Experiences of Women Parliamentarians 2011-2016* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation & Phan Tee Eain, Forthcoming 2017).

⁷⁸ Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar: Experiences of Women Parliamentarians 2011-2016* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation & Phan Tee Eain, Forthcoming 2017).

⁷⁹ Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar*. N.b. in the Union parliament men MPs are more likely than women MPs to have completed a doctorate, but the opposite is true for State/Region MPs.

⁸⁰ Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar*.

⁸¹ N.b. nearly one-third of women interviewees, as well as exactly one-third of men interviewees, did not give a clear answer to this question. If we consider only the women that gave a clear answer, 30% of them said that their education was a key factor.

with leadership, and females with domestic tasks and other typically ‘feminine’ behaviour and occupations.⁸² The way that teachers interact with students also often reinforces traditional gender divisions – for example, boys are more likely than girls to be chosen as classroom leaders.⁸³

Women’s widespread exclusion from leadership roles in Myanmar means that on average they have less leadership experience than men. This tends to limit their confidence to become parliamentary candidates as well as how the public perceive them as candidates. In this study, it was not possible to accurately establish any gender differences in the amount of leadership experience our interviewees had, but differences in the quantity of leadership experience are likely to be lower between women and men candidates, than among men and women in general. This is because leadership experience is important for candidates to be taken seriously by voters and party colleagues, and affects an individual’s confidence and ambition to try to become a parliamentary candidate.

Females in Myanmar have a considerably lower ‘labour force participation rate’⁸⁴ than males – only 51.6% of females aged 15-64 are recorded as participating in the labour force while the equivalent figure for males is 80.2%.⁸⁵ Experience working outside of the home is important for those that aspire to become MPs, and females lower labour force participation rate is likely a relevant factor for explaining their lower political participation. However, occupational background is probably not as important a factor as these figures for male and female labour participation may suggest. As the evidence presented in the remainder of this section demonstrates, women are already employed in large numbers in most of the occupational categories in which current MPs previously worked in, and in some of these key occupational categories women actually outnumber men.

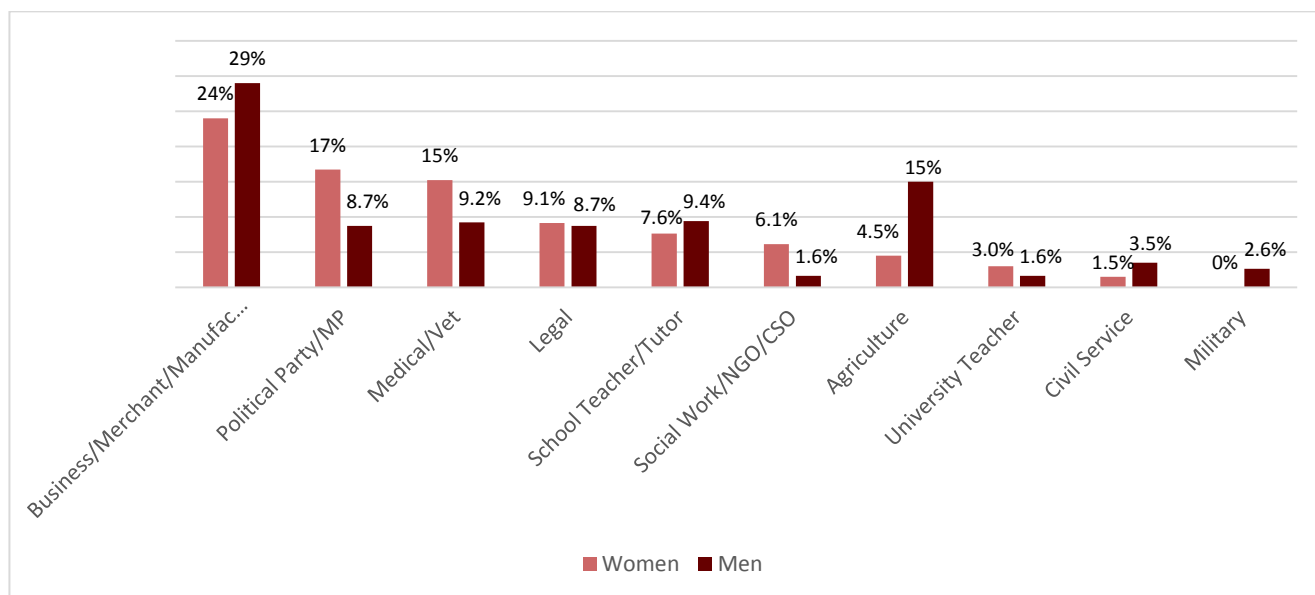
⁸² Gender Equality Network, *Raising the Curtain*, p.87-90.

⁸³ Gender Equality Network, *Raising the Curtain*, p.91.

⁸⁴ The ‘labour force participation rate’ measures the percentage of those within the relevant age category that are employed in non-household work, or are looking for such work.

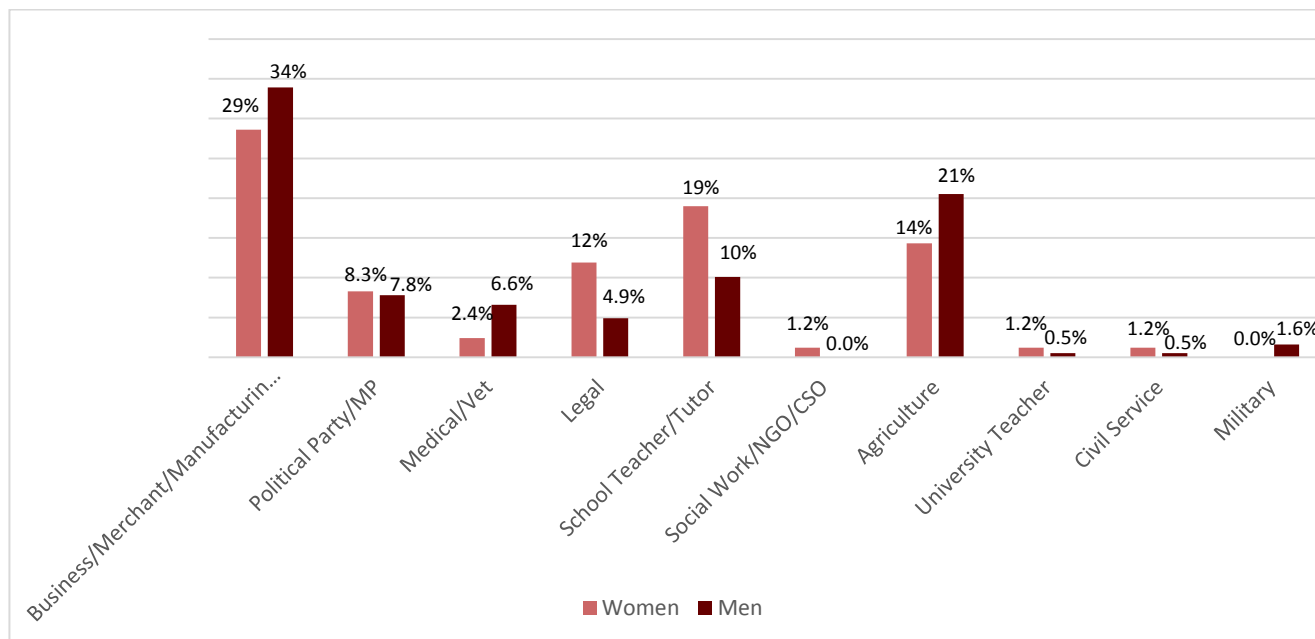
⁸⁵ MOLES, CSO, and ILO, *Myanmar Labour Force, Child Labour and School-To-Work Transition Survey, 2015: Executive Summary Report* (Nay Pyi Taw: MOLES, CSO & ILO, 2017), p.11.

Figure 3: Occupational Background of Elected Union MPs that Were Elected in November 2015 (10 Most Common Categories), by Gender



Source: Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar: Experiences of Women Parliamentarians 2011-2016* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation & Phan Tee Eain, Forthcoming 2017)

Figure 4: Occupational Background of Elected State/Region MPs that Were Elected in November 2015 (10 Most Common Categories), by Gender



Source: Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar: Experiences of Women Parliamentarians 2011-2016* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation & Phan Tee Eain, Forthcoming 2017)

Figures 3 and 4 show the 10 most common categories of previous occupation held by successful candidates in the 2015 elections.⁸⁶ At Union and State/Region levels, the most common occupational background for men and women elected MPs is 'Business/Merchant/Manufacturing/Shop Keeping', with men somewhat more likely than women to have this background (29.4% vs 24.2% at Union level, and 33.9% vs 28.6% at State/Region level). Agriculture is the second most common occupational background for men elected MPs at Union (15.3%) and State/Region levels (20.5%), and this is also the case for women elected MPs at State/Region level (14.3%). However, relatively few women elected MPs at Union level come from an agricultural background (4.5%). Only men elected MPs have a background in the Myanmar military – 2.6% at Union level and 1.6% at State/Region level.

The overwhelming majority of women and men MPs are recorded as being employed prior to becoming MPs. However, 4.5% of women elected MPs at Union level, 3.6% of women elected MPs at State/Region level, and 0.2% of men elected MPs at State/Region level, were previously 'dependents' (n.b. no elected men MPs at Union level are recorded in this category.) Moreover, 3% of women MPs at Union level were previously 'homemakers' (n.b. no other elected MPs are recorded in this category.)⁸⁷

Myanmar's 2014 Census shows that more males (79,500) than females (48,900) work as 'managers': this category includes business owners and senior managers in the private sector, and so has considerable overlap with the category of 'Business/Merchant/Manufacturing/Shop Keeping' in Figures 3 and 4.⁸⁸ This Census category also includes senior government officials, and senior CSO leaders. Published census data does not provide such information, but anecdotal evidence on the private sector and the Myanmar civil service suggests that males are disproportionately likely to be found in the most senior positions within this category. Nevertheless, although there are considerably more males than females in this category in absolute terms, it can be remarked that females that are participating in the labour force are just as likely as males in the labour force to be working in this category (0.6% of both).⁸⁹ In sum, although males make up the majority of 'managers', females are far from excluded from these occupations, which Figures 3 and 4 show to be a common route in to politics.

Although large numbers of MPs of both sexes have an agricultural background, this is considerably less than the share of the labour force employed in this sector (52.2%).⁹⁰ Males are slightly more likely than females to be employed in the sector (55.4% of the male labour force vs 47.4% of the female labour force),⁹¹ but this

⁸⁶ N.b. this data is derived from information submitted by candidates to the UEC. Shwe Shwe Sein Latt et al. include an additional 12 occupational categories, as well as 'retired' and 'none/blank/unknown'. However, for reasons of space, only the 10 most common responses are included in the above figures.

⁸⁷ Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar*.

⁸⁸ Ministry of Immigration and Population - 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), p.9, 99.

⁸⁹ 85.2% of men aged 15-64 consider themselves to be in the labour force, but only 50.5% of women aged 15-64 describe themselves thus. See, Ministry of Immigration and Population - Department of Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, The Union Report: Occupation and Industry*, p.9.

⁹⁰ Ministry of Immigration and Population - Department of Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, The Union Report: Occupation and Industry*, p.11. N.b. please note that this census category includes a wide range of agricultural workers, from subsistence farmers and daily-wage agricultural workers, up to large land-owning farmers. Myanmar's MPs with agricultural backgrounds can be expected to be predominantly drawn from the more prosperous end of this spectrum.

⁹¹ Ministry of Immigration and Population - Department of Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, The Union Report: Occupation and Industry*, p.11.

difference is not as large as the gender gap for parliamentarians' likelihood to have an agricultural background.

The Census shows that females are much more likely than males to be found working in 'professional' occupations, both absolutely (353,000 females vs 135,000 males) and relatively (4.3% of the female labour force vs 1.1% of the male labour force).⁹² This category includes vets, teachers, lawyers, and many kinds of medical staff – i.e. some of the most common occupational backgrounds of current MPs (see Figures 3 and 4). Overall, it does not seem that gender differences in occupation in Myanmar are a major factor driving the gender differences we see in women's and men's likelihood to seek or win elected office.

As shown in Figures 3 and 4, elected women MPs are considerably more likely than elected men MPs to have a background as a social worker, NGO worker or CSO worker (6.1% vs 1.6% at Union level, and 1.2% vs 0% at State/Region level); and are more likely to have previously worked for a political party and/or have previously been an MP (16.7% vs 8.7% at Union level, and 8.3% vs 7.8% at State/Region level.) As has been highlighted in other research, NGOs and CSOs offer greater opportunities for women to take on senior leadership positions than most other organisations in Myanmar. Such positions can play an important role in providing women with the confidence, experience and skills to move into politics, and enables them to get recognition and respect from the community.⁹³ The greater tendency for elected women MPs than elected men MPs to have previously worked for political parties may be at least partially due to there being a greater need for women than men to prove to party colleagues that they have relevant experience. Working for political parties may also be particularly important for women as a means to become familiar with the predominantly male party 'gatekeepers' (see Section 4.6), and so have greater confidence, ambition and opportunity to be selected as electoral candidates for that party.

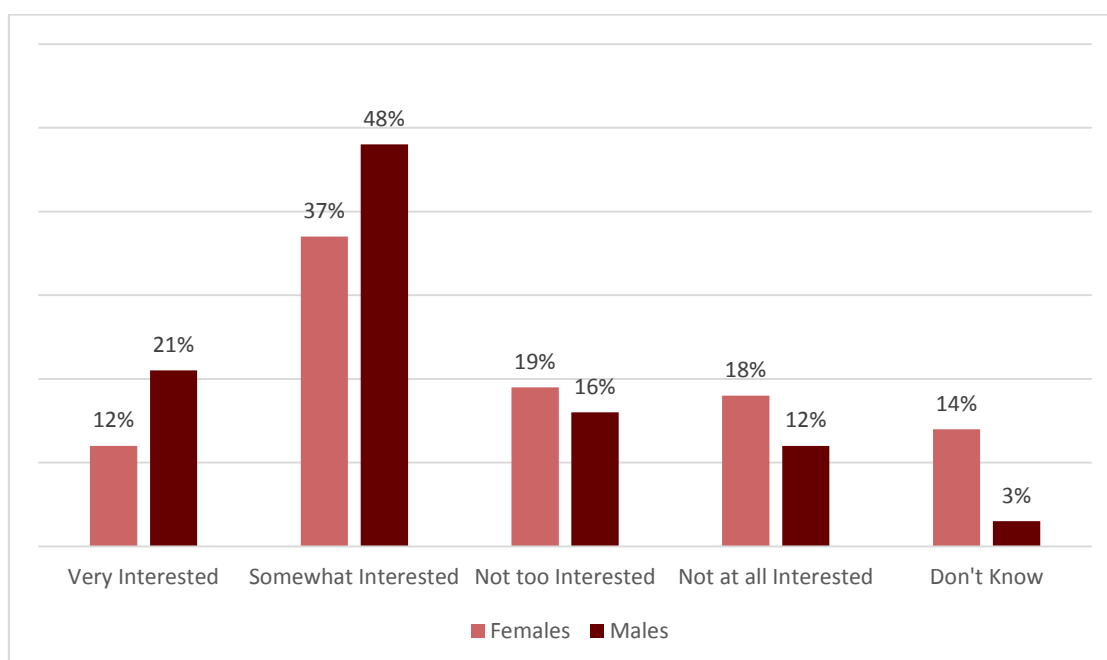
⁹² Ministry of Immigration and Population - Department of Population, *The 2014 Myanmar Population and Housing Census, The Union Report: Occupation and Industry*, p.9, 99.

⁹³ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.24-25; Mon Women's Organisation and UN Women, *Women's Political Participation in Mon State*.

4.3 Confidence and Ambition to Become Parliamentarians

Across Myanmar traditional culture has tended to associate women with domestic tasks, and not with public decision-making roles; this reduces women's confidence to participate in politics.⁹⁴ Women's lack of confidence is regularly cited as a significant barrier to their greater participation in Myanmar politics.⁹⁵

Figure 5: Female and Male Citizens' Interest in Politics, by Gender



Source: PACE, *Public Opinion on Elections and the Expectations of the New Government* (PACE, July 2016), p.26.

Figure 5 shows the responses of Myanmar adult males and females to a nationally representative survey conducted in 2016, that asked them to describe how interested they are in politics. Men were considerably more likely than women to say that they are 'very interested' (21% vs 12%) or 'somewhat interested' (48% vs 37%) in politics.⁹⁶ Women were also less likely than men to report participating in community gatherings; less likely to know the name of the MP that represents them in the Pyithu Hluttaw; and less likely to say that they have confidence in key Union level political institutions (i.e. the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw and the UEC).⁹⁷ A study of the 2015 elections in Mon State found that a number of male and female parliamentary candidates, as well as citizens that participated in focus group discussions, believed that for the number of women in politics to increase, women need to change their mindset and become more ambitious to work in the community and

⁹⁴ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.29.

⁹⁵ For example, see, Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others; *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar*; Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.29-30; Phan Tee Eain, *Report on Observing Women's Participation in Myanmar's November 2015 General Election*.

⁹⁶ PACE, *Public Opinion on Elections and the Expectations of the New Government* (PACE, July 2016), p.26.

⁹⁷ PACE, *Public Opinion on Elections and the Expectations of the New Government*, p.31, 53, 63.

political parties.⁹⁸ Similarly, several male and female candidates interviewed for our study, mentioned the need for women to become more ambitious:

Opportunity is there [for women to participate more in politics]. However, women are less interested than men (Woman Candidate, Karen State)

Our party needs dedicated women members. [However] most women are not available, and free women [i.e. those that have available time] do not come out to participate in politics (Man Candidate, Rakhine State)

Women's lower level of political ambition is strongly influenced by cultural norms, and these impact on men's and women's ambition through multiple channels. The following description of men's and women's political ambition in the USA, is also highly relevant for Myanmar, and is worth quoting at some length:

Not only do women continue to bear the responsibility for a majority of household tasks and childcare, but they also face a more complicated balancing of these responsibilities with their professions than do men. A masculinized ethos in many public and private institutional settings reinforces traditional gender roles. Political organizations and institutions that have always been controlled by men continue to promote men's participation in the political arena and do not sufficiently encourage women to break down barriers in traditionally masculine spheres and environments. Further, whereas men are taught to be confident, assertive, and self-promoting, cultural attitudes toward women as political leaders continue to suggest that these characteristics are inappropriate or undesirable in women. Traditional gender socialization, in short, creates a set of circumstances in which the complexities of women's lives, both in terms of their self-perceptions and how society perceives them, depress their political ambition.⁹⁹

Previous research on subnational governance in Myanmar has claimed that women's lower level of confidence affects not only the quantity of women present in public decision-making bodies, but also results in women's participation being less active.¹⁰⁰ However, this may not apply to women parliamentarians at Union and State/Region levels – the willingness to run as parliamentary candidates marks them out as highly unusual, and so the lower levels of political ambition and confidence we observe among women than men in the general population may not apply so strongly (or at all) to them. Comprehensive data to answer this question is lacking, but this speculation is partially supported by evidence on men and women MPs' in the Pyidaungsu hluttaw of 2011-16: women MPs were actually more likely than men MPs to ask questions in parliament despite facing various forms of gender discrimination from their male colleagues.¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ Mon Women's Organisation and UN Women.

⁹⁹ Jennifer L. Lawless, 'Female Candidates and Legislators', *Annual Review of Political Science*, 18.1 (2015), p.353-54.

¹⁰⁰ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.29-30.

¹⁰¹ Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar*.

4.4 Role Models

Exposure to role models that do not conform to traditional gender stereotypes can increase women's and girls' confidence and ambition to take on leadership roles.¹⁰² Previous research has indicated the importance of Daw Aung San Suu Kyi for inspiring other females to become involved in politics,¹⁰³ and this was reiterated in our research: 13 of the women candidates interviewed (45%) cited Daw Aung San Suu Kyi as their primary political role model while only 3 men candidates (14%) said the same. Daw Aung San Suu Kyi's leadership of Myanmar is likely to have a powerful effect in encouraging more females to try and pursue a political career. Men candidates were more likely than women candidates to say that non-Bamar ethnic leaders (19% vs 0%) or historical international political figures (14% vs 7%) were their role models.

4.5 The Role of Families

The gender gap in labour force participation is much smaller among those people that become MPs than among the population as a whole (see Section 4.2): among Pyidaungsu hluttaw MPs only 9% of women's and 1.2% of men's previous occupations are categorised as 'retired', 'dependent', or 'homemaker'; for State/Region MPs the equivalent figures are 3.6% of women and 1.6% of men.¹⁰⁴ Even when Myanmar women are busy with work outside of the home, most domestic chores and care of family members are typically assumed to still be "women's" responsibility, leaving little time for participation in other activities such as politics. Thus, if other family members are not willing to be flexible and help perform domestic chores and care of family members, it is difficult for women to have the time to engage in political activities.¹⁰⁵

Whether or not candidates have the support of their close family members can also make a considerable difference to candidates' emotional well-being and confidence. In Myanmar, men are much more likely than women to receive psychological and practical support from their families for political activities. The frequent absence of support for women helps to explain why having the support of their families is more frequently reported as an important factor for women to participate in politics than it is for men.¹⁰⁶ The member of the UEC interviewed for this report recognised the need for specific support targeted towards women that recognises their family responsibilities, but confessed that he was currently unsure of how best to provide such support.

¹⁰² The World Bank, *World Development Report 2012: Gender Equality and Development* (Washington, 2011), p.175.

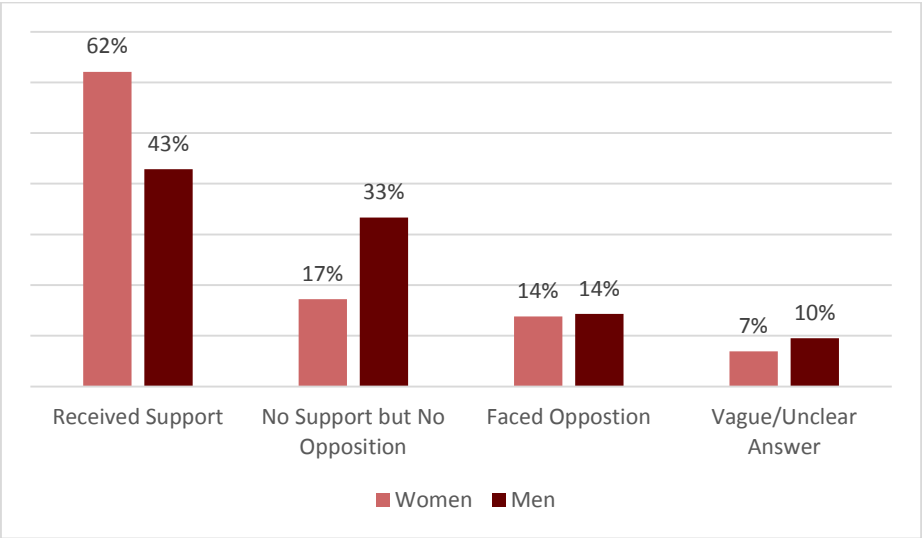
¹⁰³ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.32.

¹⁰⁴ Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar*.

¹⁰⁵ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.26-28; Phan Tee Eain, *Report on Observing Women's Participation in Myanmar's November 2015 General Election*.

¹⁰⁶ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.26; Mon Women's Organisation and UN Women, *Women's Political Participation in Mon State*; Phan Tee Eain, *Report on Observing Women's Participation in Myanmar's November 2015 General Election*.

Figure 6: Did Candidates Receive Support or Opposition from their Families for Their Political Activities?, by Gender



Source: Interviews with Candidates

Figure 6 shows that among the candidates interviewed, women (14%) were no more likely than men (14%) to report that they faced opposition from family members to their political activities. And, the women interviewees were somewhat more likely than men to say that their family members had actively assisted them (62% vs 43%). When candidates were asked to describe the main challenges they faced to be chosen as a candidate only one woman mentioned opposition from her family.¹⁰⁷ Thus, it seems that women that become candidates typically have the support of their families, and in the absence of such support it is difficult and therefore relatively unusual for women to try and become candidates.

I think that support from family members is vital for women candidates. Family members can support financially, physically, and mentally. (Woman candidate, Shan State)

My husband helped me. During my campaign, my family members distributed pamphlets for me. (Woman candidate, Yangon Region)

No one [from my family] helped me during the election... My family did not oppose me strongly, but they were afraid I might be arrested. My family said that they do not understand politics, and did not want to get involved. This [attitude] pulled me down instead of helping me to go forward. (Woman candidate, Ayeyarwady Region)

¹⁰⁷ N.b. no men mentioned this as a main challenge.

Daw Aung San Suu Kyi is the leader of the party that was by far the most successful in the 2015 elections, and is Myanmar's *de facto* president. While her own abilities as a politician are considerable, it is difficult to imagine her having attained this position if she had not come from a famous political family. In her first major public political speech in Myanmar (August 1988) she drew on her father's status as the country's pre-eminent independence hero when stating that, 'I could not, as my father's daughter, remain indifferent to all that was going on. This national crisis could, in fact, be called the second struggle for independence.'¹⁰⁸ Since its inception, the NLD has successfully emphasised the connection between father and daughter, and during the 2015 election many of their campaign posters featured side-by-side images of father and daughter.

During the last five decades it has been the norm for women political leaders in South and South-East Asia to be daughters or widows of male political leaders. Indeed, this is the case for all of the most prominent women political leaders in this region since at least as early as the 1980s (i.e. those women that were elected as presidents or prime ministers, and/or led democratic uprisings): Begum Khaleda Zia (Bangladesh); Sheikh Hasina Wajed (Bangladesh); Indira Gandhi (India); Sonia Gandhi (India); Megawati Sukarnoputri (Indonesia); Daw Aung San Suu Kyi (Myanmar); Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan); Corazon C. Aquino (Philippines); Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo (Philippines); Sirimavo Ratwatte Dias Banadaranaike (Sri Lanka); and Chandrika Banadaranaike Kumartunga (Sri Lanka).¹⁰⁹ With the exception of Jawaharlal Nehru (the father of Indira Gandhi) the father/husbands of these women were all 'martyrs' – i.e. they had been assassinated, executed, or imprisoned by political opponents or a non-democratic government.¹¹⁰ Similarly, the father of East Asia's first, and hitherto only, female premier (Park Geun-hye, South Korea) is also a former president that was assassinated.

Prominent women political leaders in Myanmar's past have also typically been related to prominent male leaders. Most of the fairly small number of women that attained prominent political positions in the post-independence period, '...were wives or relatives of male Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League, communist and ethnic leaders.'¹¹¹ For example, Ba Maung Chain, the only woman to have ever held a cabinet position in Myanmar prior to 2011, was the daughter of the (deceased) Karen nationalist leader San Crombie Po, a man who has been described as, 'perhaps the most prominent Karen of his time', and 'widely regarded as the "father" of the Karen nation.'¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Bertil Lintner, *Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma's Struggle for Democracy* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2011), p.1-2.

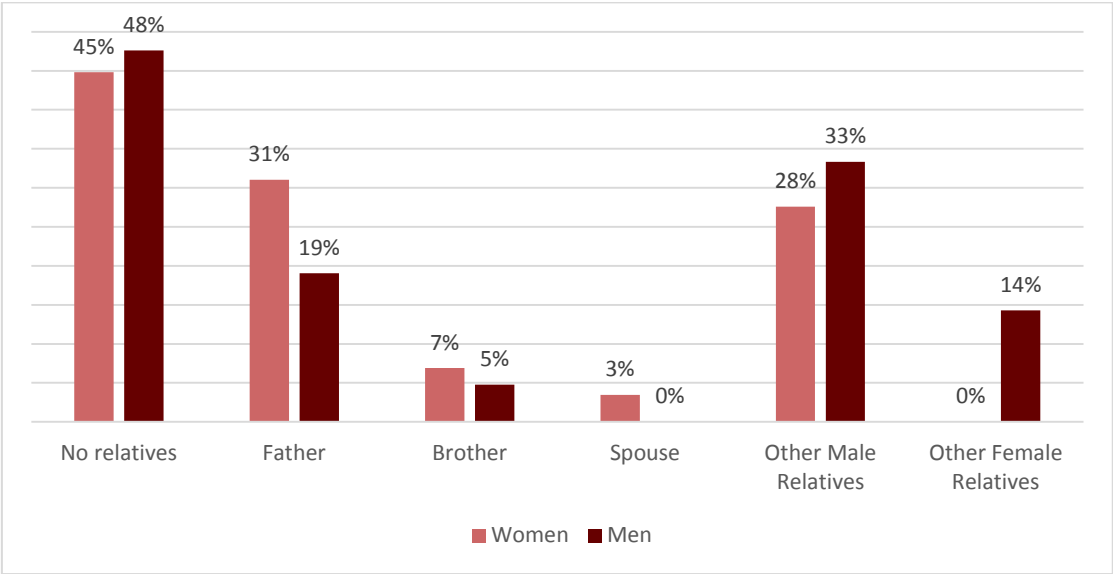
¹⁰⁹ Andrea Fleschenberg, 'Asia's Women Politicians at the Top: Roaring Tigresses or Tame Kittens?', in *Women's Political Participation and Representation in Asia: Obstacles and Challenges*, ed. by Kazuki Iwanaga (Copenhagen, 2008), p.24; Mark R. Thompson, 'Female Leadership of Democratic Transitions in Asia', *Pacific Affairs*, 75.4 (2002), p.539-41.

¹¹⁰ Thompson, 'Female Leadership of Democratic Transitions in Asia', p.540.

¹¹¹ Harriden, *The Authority of Influence*, p.154.

¹¹² Cited in Christina Fink's 'Introduction' in, San C. Po, *Burma and the Karens* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 2010), p.ix.

Figure 7: Involvement of Candidates' Relatives in Politics, by Gender (multiple answers possible)



Source: Interviews with Candidates

Figure 7 shows that among the candidates interviewed for this study women were noticeably more likely than men to say that they had a close family member that had been involved in politics (41% of women candidates vs 24% of male candidates). Almost one-third of the women candidates interviewed (31%) had a father that had been involved in politics.

My father was popular for fighting against corruption since I was young ... I think I inherited this from my father. Since he is a politician, he had various political books and I had the opportunity to be familiar with those books from a young age. (Woman Candidate, Yangon Region)

Since I was young I admired and was inspired by my father ... I respected his political philosophy and his consideration for Myanmar. By serving on his personal staff, I was able to meet many leaders and got ideas from them. I received rich experiences and thinking from my father. (Woman Candidate, Kachin state)

As these quotes indicate, having a well-known politician father can stimulate daughters' interest and ambition in pursuing a political career. Besides, being related to a well-known politician can also give the daughter a level of renown that helps to encourage citizens and influential figures from their community to accept and respect them as political leaders – i.e. it makes it easier for these women to be selected as candidates by parties, and to be voted for by citizens. The high proportion of women politicians that come from elite political families highlights the lack of opportunity for political participation for most Myanmar women.

4.6 Support and Opposition to Candidates from Within Their Parties

'Gatekeeper positions'¹¹³ in Myanmar's political parties are overwhelmingly occupied by men. A study of more than 30 Myanmar political parties conducted in late 2014 found that on average, around 90% of the members of these parties' Central Executive Committee (CEC) members are men, albeit that NLD is a significant outlier with 35% of their CEC members being women.¹¹⁴ Comprehensive data is lacking, but women rarely occupy the key local party gatekeeper positions of Township Chairperson or Secretary. Seeing these positions overwhelmingly filled by men is likely to discourage women from trying to take on decision-making positions due to its symbolic effect. Because men's personal and professional networks tend to be male dominated, men gatekeepers are more likely to notice other men as having potential to become MPs and encourage them to try and become candidates, thus further depressing women's participation.¹¹⁵

Our interviews with candidates suggest that men (81%) are much more likely than women (45%) to think that men and women already have equal opportunities in their party. Among the men and women that saw opportunities as being equal, they often attributed women's low representation as being due to gender differences in skills or motivation:

There are many opportunities for women nowadays but they need to have capacity. (Man candidate, Shan State)

[Equal] opportunity is available, but women have less interest. (Woman candidate, Kayin State)

Several of the women candidates interviewed described facing quite strong gender-based discrimination from within their local party:

I was the only woman candidate representing my party in my constituency, and I faced opposition from both fellow party members and from outsiders. The worst opposition was from inside my party: local party members that were not nominated were angry with me, and even ended up going to houses in the constituency to persuade them not to vote for me. (Woman candidate, Mon State)

I was chosen by my party's central committee to run as a candidate in my native city. However, my party's Township committee objected to me being a candidate. The reason that they didn't want me is that they think that women could not deal with emergencies at night time and cannot make decisions well. Also, my occupational background is a nurse and so they do not think I can be concerned with ethnic affairs. (Woman candidate, Sagaing Region)

¹¹³ 'Gatekeeper positions' is used here to refer to positions in political parties that are particularly influential for encouraging people to try to become candidates, and influencing other party members to subsequently select a particular candidate. In Myanmar, such positions typically included CEC members, Township Chairperson and Township Secretary.

¹¹⁴ Phan Tee Eain, *Report on Observing Women's Participation in Myanmar's November 2015 General Election*.

¹¹⁵ For a summary of evidence on how these networks affect women's political participation in the USA, see, Lawless, 'Female Candidates and Legislators', p.355.

It is not clear why a diminished ability to deal with night-time emergencies is a relevant objection to a woman being an MP. Such activities are normally performed by Ward/Village Tract Administrators and/or local GoM officials, not by MPs representing a constituency. Indeed, it would be impossible for MPs from most constituencies to fulfil such a role during the times they are attending parliament in Nay Pyi Taw, or the State/Region capital. Thus, a woman being told by their local party colleagues that she should not be a candidate for this reason seems to highlight the strong cultural bias and hostility that can operate against women taking political leadership roles.

As Section 4.3 describes, women's lower level of political ambition is an important reason for the lower level of parliamentary representation. However, this is by no means the only reason. Men's tendency not to be aware of the extent and variety of challenges that women can face further means that their dominance of party leadership positions is likely to limit women's participation because they are then probably less likely to take action to reduce barriers to women's participation. Support for this interpretation can be seen in candidates' responses when they are asked whether they thought their party should do more to promote women's participation: 52% of women answered yes, but only 38% of men did so.¹¹⁶ Given that women candidates have been as likely as men candidates in Myanmar to win elections,¹¹⁷ if political parties can take concrete and effective steps to raise their number of women candidates, this is likely to result in significant improvement in the gender equality of parliamentary representation in Myanmar.

Slightly more than half of our interviewees (54%) reported that their party had a policy to promote women's participation in general and/or as candidates in the 2015 election.¹¹⁸ However, many of these policies are quite vague, and have not necessarily resulted in much practical action to promote women's participation.¹¹⁹ When we asked the candidates whether they thought their party should do more to promote women's participation, women were somewhat more likely than men (52% vs 38%) to clearly answer 'yes'.

¹¹⁶ N.b. only one woman and one man explicitly said no to this question. 57% of men interviewees and 45% the women interviewees gave vague or unclear answers.

¹¹⁷ For 2015 elections, see Section 4.7 below. For 2010 elections, see, Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.8.

¹¹⁸ Similarly, a study of women candidates only, found that over half of the parties had some sort of policy to promote women's participation. See, DIPD, *Women's Participation in 2015 Election in Myanmar: An Assessment*.

¹¹⁹ N.b. A small number of parties adopted voluntary targets aimed at achieving a minimum number of female candidates, but of these parties, only the National Democratic Force met its target. See, Phan Tee Eain, *Report on Observing Women's Participation in Myanmar's November 2015 General Election*.

4.7 The Candidate Selection Process

The candidate selection process was quite competitive in some parties, and considerable media attention was given to the decision made by senior NLD figures not to approve the proposed candidacy of certain high-profile individuals including Daw Nyo Nyo Thin and U Ko Ko Gyi.¹²⁰ Among those that were selected as candidates, some continued to face opposition from elements within their own party afterwards (see Section 4.6). However, most of our interviewees described a fairly straightforward process in being selected as candidates by their respective parties.

Two of the women candidates interviewed described one of the forms of gender discrimination they faced within their party as being assigned to constituencies in which they/their party had little chance of winning. However, there is no strong evidence to show that such behaviour was widespread, and it can be observed that the percentage of MPs elected to the Union hluttaws that are women (13.6%) is almost identical to the percentage of candidates that were women (13.5%).¹²¹

Previous research on Myanmar's 2015 elections found that some political parties required prospective candidates to pay a fee to the party's Township office if they wanted to be considered as a candidate.¹²² However, among our interviewees (which come from a total of 25 parties), none of them reported having to pay such a fee. As can be seen in Figure 8, more than half of our interviewees reported having to pay the 300,000 kyat candidate registration fee to the UEC themselves, which is a barrier to less wealthy individuals who may want to become candidates. There was almost no gender difference in our interviewees' likelihood to have to pay themselves, but given that women in Myanmar tend to have lower income/access to financial resources than men, this is likely to limit women's participation more than men's.¹²³

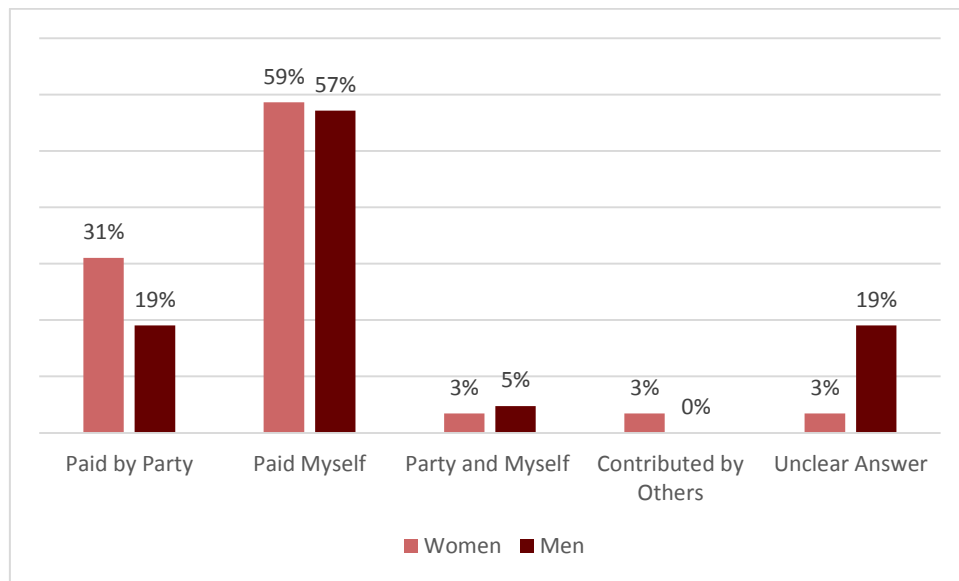
¹²⁰ Kyaw Phyto Tha, 'Cast Aside by NLD, Nyo Nyo Thin Eyes Lower House as Independent', *The Irrawaddy*, 7 August 2015 <<https://www.irrawaddy.com/election/news/cast-aside-by-nld-nyo-nyo-thin-eyes-lower-house-as-independent>> [accessed 14 March 2017]; Ei Ei Toe Lwin and Ye Mon, 'Complaints Continue over NLD's Controversial Candidate List', *Myanmar Times*, 10 August 2015 <<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/15901-complaints-continue-over-nld-s-controversial-candidate-list.html>> [accessed 14 March 2017].

¹²¹ Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change*, p.6.

¹²² DIPD, *Women's Participation in 2015 Election in Myanmar*.

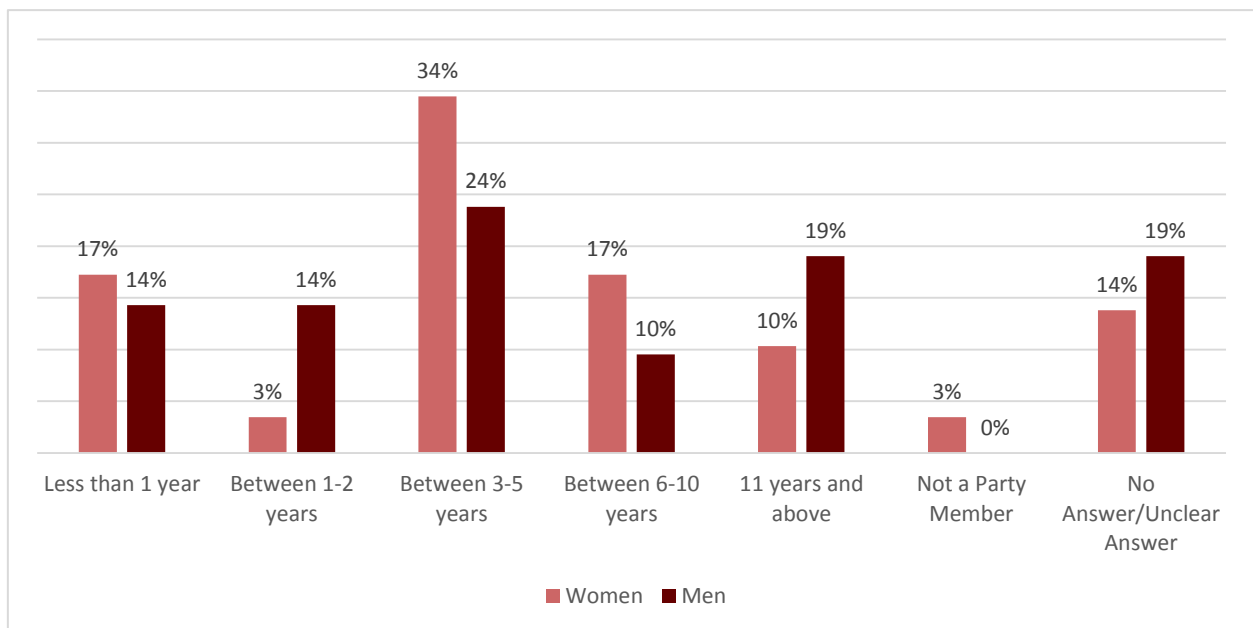
¹²³ MOLES, CSO, and ILO, *Myanmar Labour Force, Child Labour and School-To-Work Transition Survey, 2015*, p.14; author's interview with woman MP, 2014.

Figure 8: Who Paid Candidates' Registration Fees to UEC?, by Gender



Source: Interviews with Candidates

Figure 9: How Long Candidates Belonged to Their Parties Prior to November 2015?, by Gender



Source: Interviews with Candidates

Political parties can be expected to attach considerable value to how long prospective candidates have belonged to the party. As Figure 9 shows, among our interviewees there was no clear pattern in gender differences for how long the candidates had belonged to their respective parties.

4.8 Campaign Finance and Travel

Women candidates were more likely than men candidates to report having to entirely fund their campaigns themselves (52% vs 33%), and three of the four candidates that reported that their party had covered all of their campaign costs were men. In addition, as noted in Section 4.7, women in Myanmar tend to have lower income and access to financial resources than men. Nevertheless, five of the male candidates interviewed mentioned finance as a major challenge faced during their election campaign whereas only two women candidates did so. Among our interviewees, there was a fairly broad agreement that candidates' access to campaign finance varied most strongly according to party affiliation, with many small parties struggling to finance their campaigns.¹²⁴

Supporting the findings of previous research, most of our interviewees reported spending less than the 10 million kyat limit on campaign spending and a number of campaigns were conducted very frugally.¹²⁵ However, it can also be remarked that one of the women candidates interviewed from a major national party reported receiving quite generous financial support from her party, which enabled her to buy medicine, provide medical treatments, and give towels to elders in her constituency: such vote-buying activities are illegal under Myanmar law and are likely to have given her a considerable advantage over less well-funded opponents.¹²⁶

Among our interviewees men were more likely than women to say that they have faced no problems in travelling around their constituency during their campaigns, but this difference was not extreme (57% vs 45%). Seven of the candidates interviewed said that transport and communication was one of the main challenges they faced in running their campaigns. Five of these interviewees were female, but moreover all seven interviewees were from ethnic-based parties, and their struggle would seem to stem from a combination of such parties typically having less financial and administrative resources, and such parties being more likely to campaign in areas that are remote, mountainous, and/or where multiple armed actors present. For similar reasons, nine interviewees that reported feeling unsafe during their campaign were all from ethnic-based parties (5 of these were women and 4 were men).¹²⁷ Feeling unsafe frequently arose due to harassment, threats, and/or attacks by rival political parties, militias, and/or Ethnic Armed Organisations (EAOs) – this is discussed further in Section 4.11.

Restrictions on women's travel (which are partly a result of fears for their safety) have been claimed to be an important factor in explaining women's low representation in Myanmar politics.¹²⁸ Our interviews suggest that parliamentary candidates' safety and ability to travel varies most strongly according to where they are

¹²⁴ See also, Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar*, p.3.

¹²⁵ The Carter Center, *Observing Myanmar's 2015 General Elections* (The Carter Centre, 2016), p.52.

¹²⁶ Vote-buying activities by wealthy/well-funded candidates have also been reported elsewhere, e.g. see, The Carter Center, *Observing Myanmar's 2015 General Elections*, p.52.

¹²⁷ However, it is important to note that no type of geographical location can be considered fully safe, and for example urban lowland Yangon witnessed knife attacks on an NLD candidate running in Thaketa Township, and another knife attack on a member of an NLD candidate's entourage in Insein Township. Sources: author's conversation with Insein Township candidate (2016); 'Myanmar Election: Opposition MP Attacked at Rally', *BBC News Website* <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34672915>> [accessed 14 March 2017].

¹²⁸ For example, see, DIPD, *Women's Participation in 2015 Election in Myanmar: An Assessment*; Paul Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change* (Yangon: The Asia Foundation, April 2016), p.18; Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.28; Röell, *Women and Local Leadership*, p.34.

campaigning, and which party they represent, but that gender can nevertheless also be significant. The gender gap in ability to travel is particularly strong in remote areas where villages are far apart and no guesthouses are available: while it is socially acceptable for male candidates to stay overnight in village's houses or other temporary accommodation, this is often not the case for women. Even in non-remote areas, some women candidates reported facing criticism and gossip due to them travelling and canvassing with otherwise all-male teams. Besides, several of the women candidates interviewed described the additional financial cost and inconvenience they faced in having to be accompanied by male relatives on their campaign travels for reasons of safety and/or social acceptability.

Analysis of Pyithu hluttaw MPs elected in 2015 suggests women candidates were approximately as likely as men to win election from rural and remote areas: the median urbanisation rate of Townships represented by women MPs is 17.2%, which is very similar to the median urbanisation rate of all 323 Townships that elected Pyithu hluttaw MPs (16.2%); 27.3% of women MPs versus 28.2% of all MPs elected to the Pyithu hluttaw represent constituencies with an urbanisation rate of less than 10%, and 6.8% of women versus 6.2% of all Pyithu hluttaw MPs represent constituencies with an urbanisation rate of less than 5%.¹²⁹ Thus, the additional travel barriers faced by women in remote areas do not seem to have been a significant barrier to them successfully winning seats in the 2015 elections.

It is important to remember that women that have become electoral candidates are exceptional and can be expected to typically be more willing to challenge traditional norms regarding travelling away from home than is the case for the average Myanmar woman: women's relatively restricted opportunities for travel reduce the supply of women trying to take on public leadership roles.

4.9 Public Response to Candidates

Many of our men and women candidate interviewees spoke positively of the response they received from voters in their constituency. Numerous women still reported facing discriminatory attitudes that are in line with the survey evidence showing a clear preference for male leadership reported in Section 4.1, for example:

Some people looked down on me because I am a woman. (Woman candidate, Kachin State)

I had to face questions such as 'What will a woman be able to do?' and 'What can women do to change the country?' (Woman candidate, Ayeyarwady Region)

[I faced] some traditional views that a woman should not run in election, and instead should stay in the house and do housekeeping. (Woman candidate, Kachin State)

Section 1.5 discussed how multiple forms of discrimination can operate, and some additional forms of discrimination from the public were mentioned by candidates:

¹²⁹ Author's analysis based on: Pyithu hluttaw MP data taken from UEC dataset, translated and supplied to the author by GEN; urbanisation data taken from MIMU baseline data <http://www.themimu.info/baseline-datasets>.

*Because I am Hindu they called me 'Kalar'¹³⁰ and tore down my pamphlets.
(Woman candidate, Yangon Region)*

People underestimated by ability because I am young and because I am a woman. (Woman candidate, Rakhine State, emphasis added)

It is notable that when candidates interviewed for this study were asked to describe the main factors that enabled them to become electoral candidates, 12 women (41%) but only 1 man (5%) mentioned their 'commitment'. This may point to women needing to do more than men to prove to citizens and/or party colleagues that they deserve to be leaders.

Despite the general preference for male political leaders, party allegiance was generally a much stronger predictor than gender of a candidates' success/popularity with voters in the 2015 elections. The importance of party affiliation was particularly clear in all of Myanmar's seven Regions, where the NLD won 95.1% of available elected seats in the Union and State/Region hluttaws; and in Mon, Kayin and Kayah States, where NLD won 82.6% of available elected seats.¹³¹ If the NLD continues to be as popular in future elections as they were in the general election of 2015 and the by-elections of 2012, in much of Myanmar a woman or man's opportunity to be elected as an MP will again largely depend on whether they are chosen as a candidate by this party.

In addition to facing discrimination from inside their own party (see Section 4.6) and from voters, women MPs can also face discrimination from other parliamentarians and civil servants. A number of women MPs that served in the Pyidaungsu or State/Region hluttaws (2011-16) reported facing various kinds of such gender discrimination including: disrespect, verbal abuse and being patronised; and being excluded from policy discussions.¹³² Such discrimination makes it harder for women to be effective in their role as MPs, and is likely to have negative effects on their well-being. Furthermore, it is reasonable to expect that many females will be aware that they are likely to face such challenges if they pursue a political career, which will tend to discourage them from trying to become electoral candidates.

¹³⁰ 'Kalar' is a derogatory term that refers to Myanmar citizens of South Asian descent.

¹³¹ Source: UEC data, translated supplied to the author by GEN.

¹³² Shwe Shwe Sein Latt and others, *Women's Political Participation in Myanmar*.

4.10 Media Coverage

Print and broadcast media (hereafter ‘traditional media’) were able to report quite freely on the 2015 election process. Assessments of print media have found that privately-owned traditional media tended to favour the NLD for quantity of coverage, and state media favoured USDP for quantity of coverage and tone.¹³³ NLD’s campaign included a strong focus on its leader (Daw Aung San Suu Kyi), and media coverage followed suit with images of this woman politician being published very frequently.¹³⁴ A small number of media outlets (such as Mizzima, and Democratic Voice of Burma) had coverage that specifically tried to promote gender equality in the elections.¹³⁵

Traditional media in Myanmar has sometimes been criticised for presenting stereotypical portrayals of women that narrowly associate them with the family and domestic work while political coverage largely focuses on the voices of numerous men but just one woman (Daw Aung San Suu Kyi).¹³⁶ It was beyond the scope of this research project to explore media coverage of the 2015 election in detail. However, it can be remarked that in our interviews with candidates, gender unequal media coverage was not raised as a major concern by any interviewees. Although two women candidate interviewees mentioned having problems with traditional media, these do not have an obviously gendered component: one interviewee’s problem arose from a print media source misquoting her to make her sound more ethno-nationalist; another complained that media coverage focused only on the most famous candidates.

Existing research on the 2015 elections has noted that harassment of candidates on social media was often gendered including some women candidates being portrayed as sex workers.¹³⁷ Among the candidates interviewed for this study, four women and zero men reported having been harassed via social media during their campaign. As described in Section 4.11, one woman candidate described her rivals giving smartphones to trishaw drivers for the express purpose of harassing her on social media. Harassment via social media negatively affects women’s ability to campaign effectively, and is likely to discourage women from trying to become parliamentary candidates.

¹³³ Cited in, The Carter Center, *Observing Myanmar’s 2015 General Elections*, p.49.

¹³⁴ DIPD, *Women’s Participation in 2015 Election in Myanmar*.

¹³⁵ DIPD, *Women’s Participation in 2015 Election in Myanmar*.

¹³⁶ Gender Equality Network, *Media Coverage of Women Candidates and Women’s Issues during the 2015 Election Period in Myanmar* (Yangon: Gender Equality Network, 2016), p.2, 8; Gender Equality Network, *Raising the Curtain: Cultural Norms, Social Practices and Gender Equality in Myanmar*, p.133-34.

¹³⁷ DIPD, *Women’s Participation in 2015 Election in Myanmar*.

4.11 Harassment and Intimidation of Candidates by Rival Political Parties, EAOs, Militias, and Local Government Officials

44% of our interviewees described experiencing some form of harassment or intimidation by rival political parties, local government officials, EAOs and/or militias.¹³⁸ Harassment and intimidation was conducted: verbally; through social media; through print media; via telephone calls; disturbing campaign events; and theft. Harassment often sought to attack the candidates' moral character, and for women candidates this frequently focused on her behaviour not conforming to traditional expectations of femininity. Threats of physical assault, and actual instances of physical assault, do not seem to have varied much or been primarily motivated by gender – instead these arose largely out of opposition to certain parties. However, it is notable that the women candidates that we interviewed were more likely than men candidates to report experiencing any kind of harassment, and considerably more likely to report experience multiple forms of harassment. This affects women's ability to campaign effectively, and the knowledge of such treatment occurring is likely to discourage women from trying to become electoral candidates.

Threats of physical assault and/or actual physical assaults of varying degrees of severity were an issue in many different parts of Myanmar. However, such behaviour was particularly common in certain Townships in Shan and Kachin States, where EAOs and/or militias issued violent threats to political parties that they opposed, seriously impinging on their ability to campaign freely: such intimidation was reported to us by men and women candidates from Shan State, and by an election monitoring CSO from Kachin State.¹³⁹

Four of the candidates interviewed (two women and two men) described local government officials preventing them from campaigning in certain villages in their constituency. Such interference was conducted with the aim of promoting the chances of local USDP candidates, and does not appear to have had a gendered component.

Several candidates that ran as independent candidates or were representing smaller parties reported being harassed by one or both of the two largest national parties (i.e. NLD and USDP). One such independent candidate reported how these parties harassed and spread negative stories about her supposed lack of morals by going house-to-house in her constituency, and through the use of social media. Indeed, she reported that her opponents provided some local trishaw drivers with smartphones, with the instruction to attack her reputation on social media. This interviewee was upset at the lack of support she received from women's rights organisations over these incidents, which she believes can be attributed to their unwillingness to challenge the NLD. However, she felt that she was able to get fair coverage of her problems in the traditional media.

¹³⁸ There are around 20 EAOs operating in Myanmar ranging from those that control considerable chunks of territory and have tens of thousands of soldiers, to those with little or no territory and only a few hundred soldiers. Some EAOs have ceasefires with the government, but others do not, and some have signed the current National Ceasefire Agreement, but others have not. There are hundreds of local militias in Myanmar, most of which have a direct or indirect relationship with the Tatmadaw or a certain EAO. See, John Buchanan, *Militias in Myanmar* (The Asia Foundation, July 2016), p.2.

¹³⁹ See also, The Carter Center, *Observing Myanmar's 2015 General Elections*, p.50-51; Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar*, p.3-4. Perhaps the most well-known example of intimidation in the 2015 elections was the violent threat by U Zakhaung Ting Ying, the leader of the NDA-K militia and sitting Amyotha Hluttaw MP, that no other candidates should campaign in his constituency. He was re-elected in November 2015, but was subsequently stripped of his seat by the UEC due to his threatening behaviour. See, Ye Mon, 'Kachin State Militia Leader Ousted from Parliament', *Myanmar Times* (Yangon, 28 June 2016) <<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/21097-kachin-state-militia-leader-ousted-from-parliament.html>> [accessed 30 March 2017].

4.12 Interventions by Local Figures, LNGOs, INGOs and Government of Myanmar (GoM)

Previous research has described the important role that local religious figures can have in promoting women's political candidacy. Although most religious leaders are not actively involved in promoting women's political participation, when they do so they can have a significant impact by giving women more confidence to become candidates; by encouraging local party members to select her; and by encouraging local citizens to vote for her.¹⁴⁰ One of the women candidates interviewed for this report said that having the support of a local religious leader was a key factor in her being selected as a candidate. In villages where parties did not have their own resident coordinators, Buddhist monks also often helped them arrange their 2015 election campaign, and this role was also often played by Village Tract Administrators and (in areas with a history of conflict) EAO leaders.¹⁴¹

A little over half of candidates interviewed reported that they had received some kind of training from INGOs and/or LNGOs – there was only a slight gender difference in this regard (59% of women vs 53% of men).¹⁴² Around one-fifth of the candidates interviewed said that they had received some trainings from INGOs and/or LNGOs specifically designed to help them with their 2015 election campaign – again, there was very little gender difference (21% of women vs 19% of men). Almost all of the direct support to candidates by LNGOs and INGOs took the form of trainings/workshops, although WON and WCDI organised some fundraising activities to provide funding and some media coverage to 10 women candidates from various parties.

One of the LNGOs interviewed for this study, that carried out voter education and election monitoring in one of Myanmar's States, reported that although they are keen to promote much higher women's participation, and the majority of their own staff are female, sometimes when they arranged village-level voter education meetings only men attended. This occurred when local community leaders that the LNGO works through issued invitations to heads of households only, resulting in very few or no women being invited. This points to the need for awareness of how traditional forms of behaviour may result in unequal gender outcomes if NGOs (or GoM) do not adopt deliberate strategies to counteract this.

Myanmar's UEC has very low levels of female representation in decision-making positions: 14 out of 15 of the members of the Union level committee are men; at State/Region level women typically only occupy one or two senior positions; and at Township level women are only 2.4% of chairpersons and secretaries.¹⁴³ The member of the Union-level UEC committee interviewed for this report says that when the UEC meets with political parties it encourages them to choose more women candidates. And, since March 2015 the UEC has had a (somewhat vague) gender policy.¹⁴⁴ The male domination of senior positions in UEC is undesirable as it is likely to have some effect as a symbolic barrier to women's participation. Efforts ought to be made to encourage greater female representation within the UEC. However, there is currently not that much scope for the UEC to do more external work to raise the gender equality of political participation: women already vote

¹⁴⁰ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.33-34.

¹⁴¹ The Carter Center, *Observing Myanmar's 2015 General Elections*, p.48-49.

¹⁴² N.b. The research team found many of the candidate interviewees through their civil society networks. Therefore, it is likely that these figures are somewhat overstated relative to all candidates.

¹⁴³ Phan Tee Eain, *Report on Observing Women's Participation in Myanmar's November 2015 General Election*.

¹⁴⁴ The Carter Center, *Observing Myanmar's 2015 General Elections*, p.63-64.

in large numbers;¹⁴⁵ there are no government laws or policies that directly mandate greater levels of female participation; and Myanmar does not currently have public funding of political parties (see Section 5.1).

In 2013, GoM published NSPAW, which is designed to help Myanmar meet its international policy commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), and the Beijing Platform for Action.¹⁴⁶ As noted in Section 1.2, NSPAW calls for the improvement of, ‘systems, structures, and practices to ensure women’s equal participation in decision-making and leadership at all levels of society.’ NSPAW suggests a variety of practical actions to achieve this objective including: mentoring programs of female parliamentarians; capacity building for future women leaders; and the, ‘Application of quota systems to ensure women’s participation in decision-making in legislative, judicial and executive bodies.’¹⁴⁷ However, apart from the application of quotas to the Village Tract-level committees set up for National Community Driven Development Project (NCDDP, see Section 5.4), little has been done to implement NSPAW commitments on promoting women’s leadership. Most GoM ministries have low levels of awareness and/or interest of NSPAW and gender equality issues more broadly. The NLD has a much higher level of female participation than the previous ruling party (USDP), and its new intake of MPs include several prominent women’s rights activists. However, the Pyidaungsu Hluttaw has still not taken legislative action designed to promote women’s political participation.

4.13 Institutional Factors

The design of a country’s electoral system can influence men’s and women’s likelihood of becoming MPs. Cross-country studies have found that first-past-the-post (FPTP) electoral systems, in which candidates are competing for a single seat tend to result in fewer women being elected, than proportional representation electoral systems, in which multiple MPs are elected from a single constituency.¹⁴⁸ The elected MPs in the Pyithu Hluttaw, Amyotha Hluttaw and State/Region Hluttaws are all chosen through FPTP elections which can be expected to reduce women’s parliamentary representation.

In Myanmar’s Union and State/Region hluttaws, a minimum of 25% of seats are reserved for military appointees. Only two women have been appointed at Union level (i.e. 1.2% of Union military appointees), and only two women have been appointed at State/Region level (i.e. 0.9% of State/Region military appointees.).¹⁴⁹ The reservation of seats for the military thus acts to considerably reduce the gender equality statistical representation in Myanmar’s parliaments.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Gender Concerns International, *Gender Election Observation Mission (GEOM): Myanmar, November 2015* (The Hague: Gender Concerns International), p.6.

¹⁴⁶ Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs, ‘National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2002)’ (Nay Pyi Taw, 2013), p.2.

¹⁴⁷ Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs, ‘National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2002)’, p.23.

¹⁴⁸ ‘Conceptualizing the Impact of Gender Quotas’, in *The Impact of Gender Quotas*, ed. by Susan Franceschet, Mona Lena Krook, and Jennifer M. Piscopo (New York, 2012), p.7.

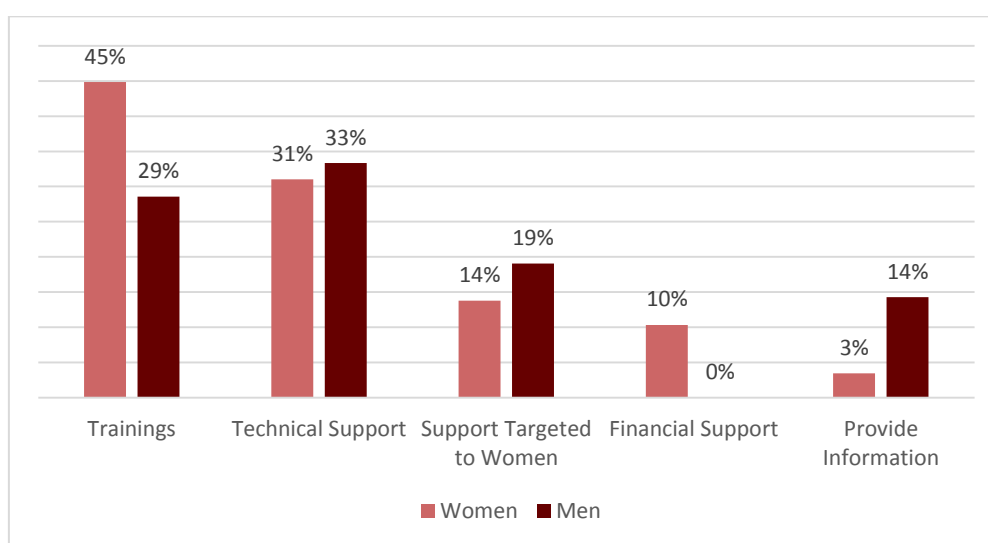
¹⁴⁹ See Section 1.4.

¹⁵⁰ N.b. Given the tight controls on the legislative behaviour of military MPs, and male dominance of senior military positions, it is questionable as to whether an increase in the number of women military appointees would have much effect on the gender equality of substantive or symbolic representation.

5. How Can Participation in Future Elections Be Made More Gender Equal?

5.1 Candidates' Suggestions for Future Forms of Support

Figure 10: Forms of Support That Candidates Think Should Be Provided To Potential and Actual Candidates By LNGOs, INGOs, UN Agencies, and/or GoM For Future Elections, by Gender (multiple answers possible)

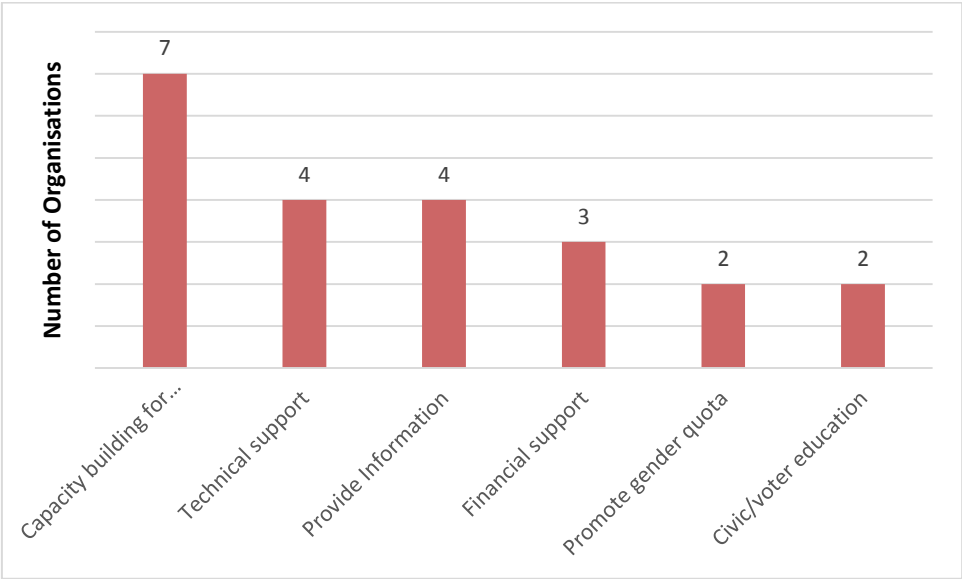


Source: Interviews with Candidates

Figure 10 shows that among the candidates interviewed, the most common suggestions for types of support to be provided to potential and actual candidates in future elections were trainings, and technical support. Overall, there were not dramatic gender differences in suggestions – although women were more likely than men to suggest trainings (45% vs 29%) and financial support (10% vs 0%) whereas men were more likely to request that information be provided (14% vs 3%).

Figure 11 below shows what forms of support the LNGOs interviewed think should be provided to potential and actual candidates in future elections. Their responses indicate that the LNGOs interviewed are quite closely attuned to the forms of support that candidates desire, with the three most common responses being: ‘capacity building’ for candidates (which often takes the form of training), technical support to candidates, and provide information to candidates. In answer to this question, in contrast to the candidates interviewed, no LNGOs mentioned providing support specifically targeted to women. However, when they were asked whether, for future elections, any forms of support should be specifically targeted towards women potential and actual candidates, all 10 of the LNGOs said yes.

Figure 11: Forms of Support That LNGOs Think Should Be Provided To Potential and Actual Candidates By LNGOs, INGOs, UN Agencies, and/or GoM For Future Elections (multiple answers possible)



Source: Interviews with LNGOs

Although a small number of the candidates interviewed spoke strongly in favour of financial support being provided to women or all candidates in the future, this was not a common demand. The member of the UEC that was interviewed described some of the complexities involved when deciding at which price to set the registration fee for candidates. For the 2015 election, in response to requests from smaller parties, the UEC reduced the candidate registration fee from 500,000 to 300,000 kyats. However, he described how, ‘I think everyone raised objections about the reduced fees’: the reduction in price encouraged some non-serious candidates to stand for election, but at the same time some smaller parties still struggled to pay it.

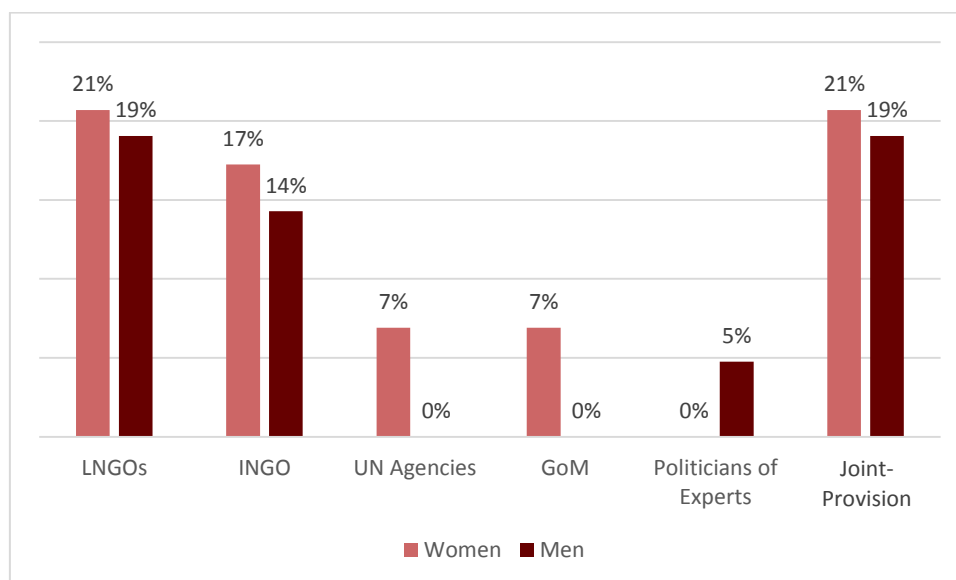
When thinking about financial support in general, it is potentially highly controversial for LNGOs to fund specific candidates or parties. The risks are even higher for INGOs and UN agencies. While it can be acceptable for LNGOs to provide some limited funding or fundraising support to candidates from certain disadvantaged groups (such as women), it is not appropriate to do this on a large scale, and it is important that any such support be given in a clearly non-partisan fashion.

Myanmar does not currently have any public funding of political parties, but such funding is increasingly common internationally: a 2012 study found that at least 116 of 180 countries examined (64.4%) had some sort of public funding for political parties, with the vast majority of these countries linking such funding to parties’ past electoral success.¹⁵¹ At least 16 of these countries require that parties meet certain gender equality targets if they are to receive funding.¹⁵² Public funding of political parties is typically designed to reduce parties’ reliance on private donations, and therefore reduce corruption and distortions to policy-making. It is essential that if public funding is introduced it is completely transparent, rules-based and non-partisan.

¹⁵¹ International IDEA, *Political Finance Regulations around the World: An Overview of the International IDEA Database* (International IDEA, 2012), p.24-25.
¹⁵² International IDEA, *Political Finance Regulations around the World*, p.29.

5.2 Which Organisations Should Provide Support?

Figure 12: Which Types of Organisations Candidates Think Should Provide Future Support, by Gender



Source: Interviews with Candidates

As indicated in Figure 12, there were not big gender differences among candidates in their opinion for which organisations should provide future support. The most popular suggestions were joint-provision, LNGOs, and INGOs. There was much less interest expressed in receiving support through GoM or UN agencies.¹⁵³ The relative lack of interest in receiving support from GoM probably reflects a previous lack of activity in such activities by GoM and/or a lack of trust in GoM to effectively provide such support. Regardless, it represents a potential barrier to effective implementation of NSPAW's provisions for raising women's political participation.

¹⁵³ N.b. The small number of mentions of UN agencies may be partially attributable to many candidates having had less (or zero) previous interaction with them relative to LNGOs, INGOs, and GoM.

5.3 Should There Be Support Specifically Targeted Towards Women?

Among the candidates interviewed, 38% of the women and 29% of the men gave specific suggestions for forms of future support that could be targeted towards female potential and actual candidates.¹⁵⁴ The most common suggestions for such support were training, followed by financial support, and then technical support.

All of the LNGOs interviewed saw some value in providing support specifically targeted towards women, and the specific recommendations included: providing cross-party networking activities for women; reducing the registration fee for women candidates; assisting parties in introducing internal gender equality policies; training on how to organise an election campaign; political and historical education; training and practice in public speaking. Although these were suggested as activities targeted towards women, many of them would be useful for both male and female potential and actual candidates, and in some cases it will be more appropriate to offer such services to both women and men. When delivering training jointly to men and women, it is important for trainers to recognise that in many cases men will tend to be more vocal than women and have more active participation in the training – training should be designed in ways that facilitates fully active participation from both women and men.

The interviewee from the UEC thought that it could be beneficial for support targeted towards women to be provided. Although he was unsure of exactly what support to provide, he thought that this should be related to easing the burden of women's responsibilities to her family.

¹⁵⁴ N.b. the other 62% of women interviewees and 71% of male interviewees did not give a clear answer to this question.

5.4 Quotas

In recent decades the use of gender quotas in governance bodies has spread rapidly to many countries around the world. Legislative or constitutional gender quotas (hereafter ‘gender quotas’¹⁵⁵) require either that a certain number/percentage of seats in a governing body (such as a parliament) are reserved for women, or that all political parties must have a minimum percentage of women among their electoral candidates. Gender quotas that apply to national-level parliaments have now been adopted in 77 countries.¹⁵⁶ 60 of these countries also have gender quotas that apply to subnational governing bodies, and an additional 9 countries have gender quotas that apply to subnational governing bodies only.¹⁵⁷

Myanmar seems to be a country where gender quotas are both needed and could have large positive effects: the gender gap in parliamentary representation is very large; women are as well educated as men, and women are employed in large numbers in occupations that are common sources of employment for current elected MPs – i.e. large numbers of women appear to have the relevant skills and occupational experience to become effective MPs. By exposing citizens to greater numbers of women leaders, quotas could have a large role in reducing citizens bias in favour of male leaders (see Sections 4.1, 4.9 and 5.5),¹⁵⁸ and in giving females more desire and confidence to try and become political leaders (see Section 4.3). However, it should be recognised that the top-down nature of decision-making and intolerance of internal dissent in many of Myanmar’s major political parties (including the NLD),¹⁵⁹ is likely to limit the effect that gender quotas (or other forms of quotas) can have on MPs’ actions – i.e. because many parties’ policy positions and legislative behaviour are largely decided by those at the top of the party, this tends to limit the effect that a change in the composition of its MPs has on legislation and policy.

¹⁵⁵ N.b. in the academic literature, a distinction is often made between ‘quotas’ and ‘reservations’. In this literature, quotas refer to requirements that for all parties a minimum certain percentages of candidates are of a certain group (such as women or ethnic minorities). But reservations directly reserve seats in a parliament (or other governing body) for candidates from a certain group. However, for the sake of simplicity, in this report ‘quotas’ is used to refer to both ‘quotas’ and ‘reservations’. For additional details of the academic distinction between quotas and reservations, see, Mala Htun, ‘Is Gender like Ethnicity? The Political Representation of Identity Groups’, *Perspectives on Politics*, 2.3 (2004), p.441-42. Further, in this report, ‘quotas’ is only used to refer to legislative or constitutional quotas. Such quotas are mandatory and designed to apply to all political parties. In 54 countries one or more political party has adopted voluntary gender quotas or targets (23 of these countries also have mandatory quotas at national and/or subnational level). However, in this report the discussion of quotas focuses on legislative and constitutional quotas only. Source: Author’s calculations on database downloaded from <http://www.quotaproject.org/searchDb.cfm#> [Accessed 14th March 2017]

¹⁵⁶ Author’s calculations on database downloaded from <http://www.quotaproject.org/searchDb.cfm#> [Accessed 14th March 2017]

¹⁵⁷ Author’s calculations on database downloaded from <http://www.quotaproject.org/searchDb.cfm#> [Accessed 14th March 2017]

¹⁵⁸ For evidence from Italy showing the effect that quotas can have in reducing negative stereotypes regarding women’s leadership, see, Maria De Paola, Vincenzo Scoppa, and Rosetta Lombardo, ‘Can Gender Quotas Break down Negative Stereotypes? Evidence from Changes in Electoral Rules’, *Journal of Public Economics*, 94.5–6 (2010), especially p.347-48.

¹⁵⁹ Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar: What Now for Ethnic Politics?*

Although NSPAW includes the application of quotas to ‘legislative, judicial and executive bodies’,¹⁶⁰ as yet gender quotas have not been applied to parliamentary seats or candidates. The first, and to date only, application of quotas to GoM governance bodies has been for the Village Tract level committees created to decide on planning and budgeting under the NCDDP, in which 50% of seats are reserved for women and 50% are reserved for men.¹⁶¹

Some countries have adopted parliamentary quotas designed to ensure a minimum level of political representation for ethnic and/or religious minorities. Ethnic quotas are found across a diverse range of countries, for example including: Belgium, Colombia, Ethiopia, India, and New Zealand.¹⁶² Religious quotas tend to be found in predominantly Muslim countries such as Jordan, Lebanon, and Pakistan. Ethnic and religious quotas are present in fewer countries than gender quotas are.

Myanmar’s 2008 Constitution already includes a provision that reserves certain positions at State/Region level for individuals that represent certain ethnic groups. Ethnic Affairs Ministers represent constituencies that are:

*...designated in accordance with section 161 of the constitution, according to which minority populations of more than 51,500 in each Region or State each have the right to elect a representative to their regional legislature, provided that they are not the main group in that Region or State and do not already have a self-administered area in that Region or State.*¹⁶³

Ethnic Affairs Ministers sit in the State/Region hluttaw, and should also serve in the State/Region cabinet. However, their position is poorly defined, and typically does not carry much authority. And under the previous government, in certain States/Regions some of these ‘ministers’ were not included in the cabinet at all.¹⁶⁴ The seats reserved for Ethnic Affairs Ministers are not technically quotas: although only citizens from the respective ethnic group are eligible to vote for them, candidates for these positions can come from any ethnic group.¹⁶⁵ However, in practice, the vast majority of candidates have come from the ethnic group that they seek to represent.

Unsurprisingly, the ethnic composition of Myanmar’s hluttaws does not precisely mirror the ethnic composition of Myanmar’s population. Nevertheless, as discussed in Section 1.5, these hluttaws include large numbers of ethnic minority MPs and a wide range of ethnic minorities are present. As such, there does not appear to be a pressing need to institute ethnic quotas for MPs. However, in spite of the considerable statistical representation of non-Bamar MPs, there are concerns about how much substantive representation there is for non-Bamar ethnic groups. This issue and potential remedies are discussed further in the Appendix.

Among the MPs in the Pyidaungsu hluttaw, Christians are overrepresented and Buddhists are slightly overrepresented, while Muslims are the most underrepresented group (see Section 1.5). However, in the current political climate any affirmative action targeted at raising Muslim parliamentary representation would

¹⁶⁰ Myanmar National Committee for Women’s Affairs, ‘National Strategic Plan for the Advancement of Women (2013-2002)’, p.23.

¹⁶¹ N.b. as of 14th March 2017, this project was active in 47 of Myanmar’s 330 Townships. Source: author’s email correspondence with World Bank staff.

¹⁶² Htun, ‘Is Gender like Ethnicity?’, p.441.

¹⁶³ Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar*, p.7.

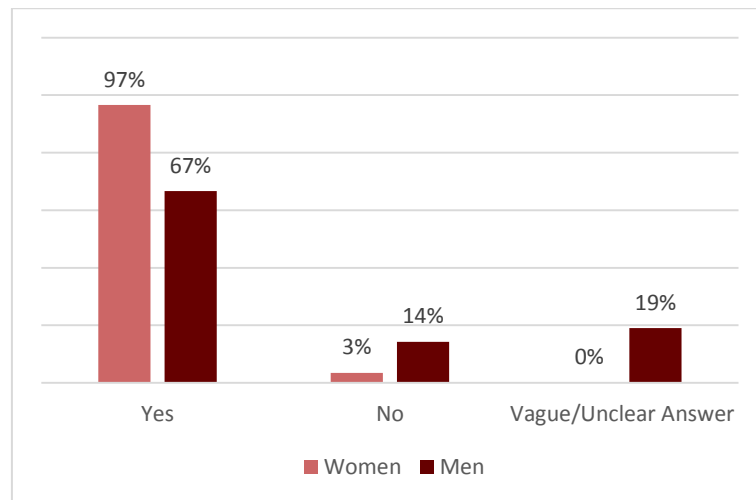
¹⁶⁴ Hamish Nixon and others, *State and Region Governments in Myanmar* (MDRI-CESD & The Asia Foundation, 2013), p.55-56.

¹⁶⁵ Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar*, p.7, n32.

be extremely unpopular and it is difficult to imagine any of the major political parties agreeing to such a measure. As described in the Appendix, religious quotas are not used in many countries.

5.4.1: Awareness of Gender Quotas Among Candidates Interviewed for This Report

Figure 13: Candidates' Awareness of Gender Quotas, by Gender



Source: Interviews with Candidates

Figure 13 shows that a large majority of the candidates interviewed for this report said that they were already familiar with the concept of parliamentary quotas for women. This was particularly so among women candidates, with 28 out of 29 women having heard of them. Two-thirds of the men candidates were familiar with the concept.

5.4.2 Support/Opposition to Gender Quotas

No major political parties in Myanmar have come out clearly in favour of legislative or constitutional quotas, and many of them (including the NLD) have publicly opposed them.¹⁶⁶ Previous research has found strong opposition to quotas among Myanmar political parties, and for example a 2016 Phan Tee Eain Study reported that:

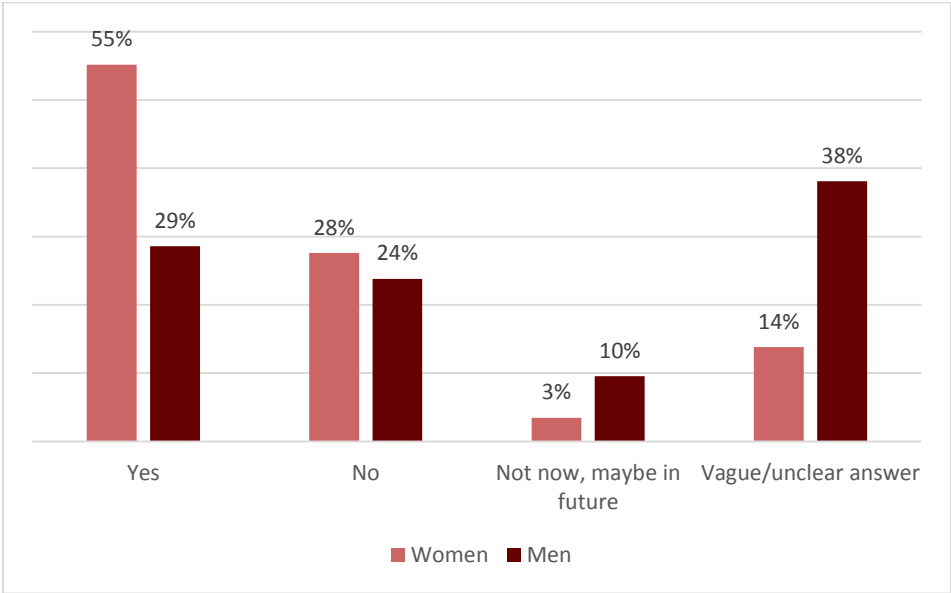
Almost all those party representatives or candidates ... interviewed were against the concept of gender quotas or other affirmative action mechanisms for women in the legal framework, or within political party policies. Respondents were largely supportive of more women in politics, and recognize that women face larger barriers than men, but still did not support the concept of affirmative action.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ N.b. however, in a 2015 interview, the general secretary of the SNLD said that he would not be opposed to the introduction of mandatory gender quotas for all parties. See, Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change*, p.21.

¹⁶⁷ Phan Tee Eain, *Report on Observing Women's Participation in Myanmar's November 2015 General Election*.

Figure 14 shows that a much higher proportion of the candidates interviewed for our study being supportive of quotas than has been found in previous studies. This may be partially due to bias in our sample, and/or interviewees in our study possibly being particularly likely to give an answer that they thought the interviewer wanted to hear rather than their true feelings. However, it may also be due to how the question was phrased in our interviews – candidates were asked, ‘Do you think that legislation should be passed that requires parties to meet a quota to ensure that a minimum percentage of candidates are female?’ – it may be that specifying that such a quota would apply to parties’ selection of candidates, rather than reserving seats for women, encounters less resistance.¹⁶⁸ However, further research would be needed to prove or disprove this.

Figure 14: Candidates’ Views on Whether Gender Quotas Should Be Introduced, by Gender



Source: Interviews with Candidates

More than half of the women candidates interviewed (55%) supported the introduction of gender quotas, as did 29% of men candidates. Around one-quarter of candidates (28% of women and 24% of men) were explicitly opposed to gender quotas.

¹⁶⁸ N.b. the question was phrased in this way because such a quota would require the least amount of change to the current electoral system – see Appendix.

We have seriously studied about quota systems. I think that if a quota system is used for three government terms [15 years], that will be best. If there are many positions for women they will participate more. At first [some women elected under quotas] will be shy, but I firmly believe that they can do as well or better than men if they receive training. So, we should implement a quota system for a minimum of two terms [10 years]. (Woman Candidate, Yangon Region)

It would be great if we can get a quota – women need to get a chance to show their skills and capacities. (Woman Candidate, Yangon Region)

I believe there are various voices that must be heard and included in parliamentary discussions, and I support a quota system that can include ethnic voices and women's voices. (Woman Candidate, Ayeyarwady Region)

[A gender quota] should be used as a stepping stone ... to encourage women candidates. Women are more hard-working than men in the current parliament. There is currently not much tradition encouraging women [to participate in politics] and a quota system should be put in place in this time of weak tradition. After three terms of parliament [15 years], and a tradition respecting women has clearly emerged, the quota system should then be removed. (Woman Candidate, Yangon Region)

It is good to include women but those women need to have skills. Therefore, when we choose women we need to look at skills and competencies, rather than [have it driven by quota] policy. (Woman Candidate, Rakhine State)

We [i.e. my party] do not want to limit with a quota. It is like the military ... Do not make bounds. (Man candidate, Shan State)

No [I do not think that quota legislation should be passed] ... I worry because of the 25% reservation for the military. (Woman candidate, Shan State)

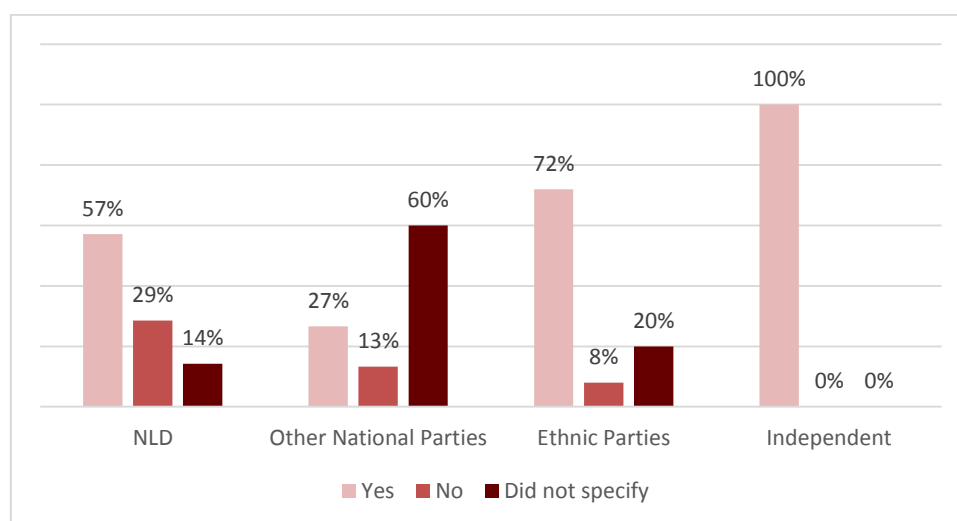
It is not easy to set a gender quota while the education [level of women and men] is so different. If a quota is implemented, our party will be ruined. (Man candidate, Yangon Region)

The above quotes indicate the diversity of opinions among the candidates interviewed, regarding whether gender quotas should be introduced. It is notable that two of the candidates that were opposed to quotas specifically mentioned their dislike of the current reservation of seats for the Tatmadaw as a reason for their opposition to gender quotas.¹⁶⁹ Finally, it is also worth remarking on the (man) candidate that justified his opposition to gender quotas because the education level of women and men is 'so different' – as can be seen in Section 4.2, this is not a valid objection.

¹⁶⁹ N.b. interviewees were not asked any question specifically addressing a link between the current reservation of seats for military appointees and their views on quotas. Therefore we cannot say whether or not opposition to the reservation of seats for military appointees influences any of the other interviewees' opposition to quotas.

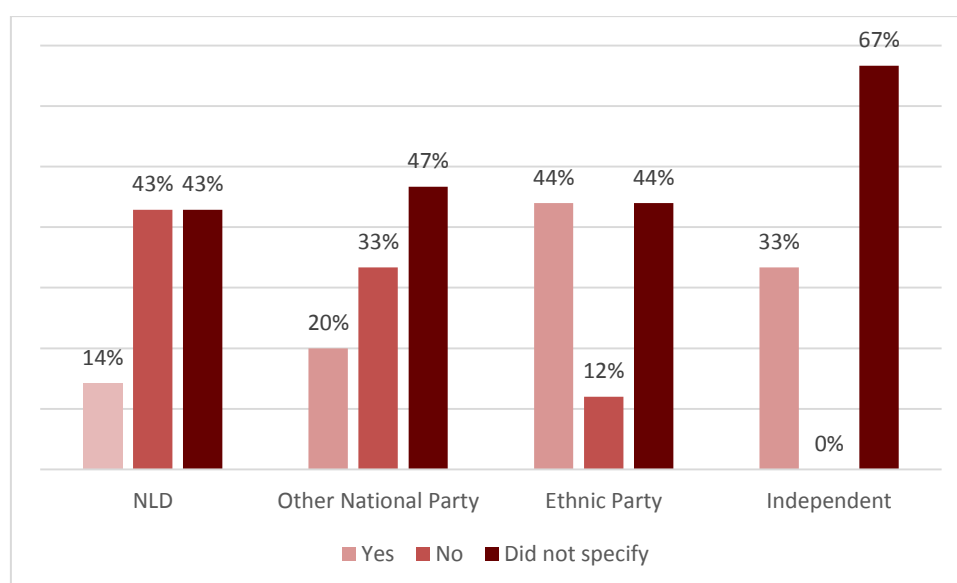
5.4.3 Candidates' Perspectives on Ethnic and Religious Quotas

Figure 15: Candidates' Support for Ethnic Quotas, By Party Type



Source: Interviews with Candidates

Figure 16: Candidates' Support for Religious Quotas, By Party Type



Source: Interviews with Candidates

Figures 15 and 16 show candidates' responses to the question: 'Do you think that quotas should be used to ensure a minimum level of representation of any other groups (e.g. ethnic, religious)?'.¹⁷⁰ The open wording of

¹⁷⁰ N.b. interviewees were asked this question directly after they were asked the questions regarding gender quotas.

this question resulted in many interviewees not explicitly saying ‘yes/no’ as to whether they agreed with religious quotas, hence the large number of responses categorised as ‘did not specify’ in Figure 15 (ethnic), and even more so in Figure 16 (religious).

29 of the candidates interviewed (58%) supported the introduction of quotas for non-Bamar ethnic groups, and 16 of them (32%) supported the introduction of quotas for religious minorities. The tendency to support ethnic quotas was approximately equal for women and men (59% vs 57%). As Figure 15 shows, candidates from ethnic-based political parties (72%) and independent candidates (100%) were highly likely to support the introduction of ethnic quotas. Four of seven interviewees from NLD supported ethnic quotas, but support for ethnic quotas was low among candidates from other national parties (27%).

The women we interviewed were somewhat more likely than men to support religious quotas (38% vs 24%). As can be seen in Figure 16 support for religious quotas was strongest among candidates from ethnic-based political parties, but even here it was less than half (44%). Candidates whose own religious affiliation was non-Buddhist were somewhat more likely than Buddhists to support religious quotas: 4 of the 9 non-Buddhist interviewees¹⁷¹ explicitly supported religious quotas (44%) whereas only 12 of the 41 Buddhist interviewees did so (29%).

The following quotations from candidates interviewed for this paper illustrate some of the range of views regarding the implementation of quotas based on ethnicity. The final quote raises the potential difficulty in implementing ethnic quotas due to the complexity of ethnic identity in Myanmar – this issue is also discussed in Section 1.5 and the Appendix.

We should implement an ethnic quota because in every high office it is mostly Bamar people. For people from other ethnic groups it is very difficult to reach those levels. (Man Candidate, Kachin State)

Religion and politics should not be mixed up. However, we should set an ethnic quota. (Man Candidate, Rakhine State)

It would have messy consequences ... Because Mon ethnic group have their ego and Kayin also have their ego. If we have ethnic quotas the problems will never be solved. (Woman candidate, Rakhine State)

It would be good to have a quota system for the inclusion of ethnic representatives. However, a weakness is that in our Shan we have 90 tribes. If Shan gets a certain percent, those 90 tribes in Shan State would have to share that percent, and this will be difficult. Now we [Myanmar] are moving to a federal union; if a federal union is fully achieved I think that equal representation would already be resolved. (Woman Candidate, Bago Region)

¹⁷¹ These are 8 Christians and one Hindu.

5.5 Changing Cultural Norms

Cultural norms limit Myanmar women's political participation through multiple key mechanisms including: most citizens have a bias in favour of male leadership, which seems to result in women needing to be more qualified than men to be considered as acceptable leaders (see Sections 4.1 and 4.9); females are less likely than males to have the confidence and ambition to become political leaders (see Section 4.3); women are expected to perform the majority of domestic chores and family caring even if they have busy careers or are engaged in political activity (see Section 4.5). Women can also face gender discrimination from their party colleagues (see Section 4.6), and can face gendered harassment when campaigning – such behaviour is also shaped by cultural norms (see Sections 4.8 and 4.11).

Changing cultural norms can be a difficult and slow process. Nonetheless, some optimism can be gained from the experience of a number of other countries where increased exposure to women leaders appears to have helped to break down negative stereotypes regarding their capabilities as leaders.¹⁷² Seeing women holding positions of political leadership can also change women's and girls' ambition and self-perception. Thus, the recent increase we have seen on women's political participation should have some positive effect in changing cultural norms regarding women's leadership.

The positive effect described in the previous paragraph is likely to be quite slow and somewhat limited, and there are multiple ways that those who are interesting in advancing in gender equality can take proactive action to try and change cultural norms. Engaging men (and boys) in gender equality issues is now increasingly recognised by gender equality advocates in Myanmar as a highly important process, and for example GEN now convenes a Working Group on this topic. Engaging men will be a key aspect of, among other things, changing expectations that women do 'their' domestic and caring tasks regardless of what other demands they have on their time. However, the absence of a gender gap in Myanmar citizens' stated preference for male leadership (see Section 4.1) highlights the importance of also continuing to target advocacy efforts at women and girls.

Working with individuals that are influential at local levels (including religious leaders) can be a highly effective way of positively changing cultural norms.¹⁷³ Traditional and social media can be utilised to challenge discriminatory norms. And, although its effects on women's leadership will take time to materialise, there is considerable need to reform both the content of schools' curriculum and how boys and girls are taught, to promote more gender equal perceptions of leadership.

¹⁷² Beaman and others, 'Powerful Women: Does Exposure Reduce Bias?', p.1526-30; Maria De Paola, Vincenzo Scoppa, and Rosetta Lombardo, 'Can Gender Quotas Break down Negative Stereotypes? Evidence from Changes in Electoral Rules', *Journal of Public Economics*, 94.5–6 (2010), p.351.

¹⁷³ Minoletti, *Women's Participation in the Subnational Governance of Myanmar*, p.33-34.

5.6 Working with Political Parties

There is noticeable variation between political parties in the opportunities currently available to women and their attitude towards promoting women's participation (see Sections 1.4 and 4.6). It is desirable to try and encourage greater gender equality in all parties; advocacy efforts can be targeted towards all parties that raise awareness of why this is a worthwhile goal, and why parties should implement internal policies aimed at promoting gender equality. However, it is also worthwhile targeting more specific and in-depth assistance to parties that express a clear interest in promoting gender equality: INGOs, LNGOs and relevant experts can work with interested political parties to assist them to devise and implement internal party policies and strategies aimed at raising women's participation. Suggested specific activities include: carry out a gender-sensitive training needs assessment of key party members; deliver trainings and share information that increase key party members' awareness of how gender inequality negatively affects women's participation in their party and in Myanmar politics more broadly; develop a gender equality training action plan with a clearly defined timeframe, and that includes strategies for engaging men; produce clear targets for increasing women's representation on party committees and in other gatekeeper positions; produce clear targets for the proportion of candidates running in winnable constituencies that are women.

5.7 Promoting Women's Participation in Local Governance

In 2012 the position of Ward/Village Tract Administrator was made an elected one, and in recent years' elections have also been introduced for positions at the municipal level (i.e. Development Affairs Organisations and City Development Corporations).¹⁷⁴ In the Townships in which NCDDP is operating, elected bodies are also present at Village and Village Tract levels. These lower levels of governance enable men and women to gain valuable experience and credibility, and may possibly serve as a springboard into parliamentary politics at State/Region or Union levels. With the exception of NCDDP, local elections have tended to overwhelmingly elect men.¹⁷⁵ The strategies discussed in Sections 5.1 – 5.6 can also be considered for application at local levels.

¹⁷⁴ N.b. under the Thein Sein government, elected positions on Township bodies were also introduced, but this was ended by the new government in June 2016. It is not yet clear if Township elected bodies will be reintroduced.

¹⁷⁵ Minoletti, *Gender (in)Equality in the Governance of Myanmar: Past, Present, and Potential Strategies for Change*, p.8-9.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusions

Women's representation in Myanmar's hluttaws is now higher than previously, but remains extremely low, with women making up only one in ten MPs. Myanmar is in the bottom 20% of countries around the world for the gender equality of parliamentary representation. This unequal representation is likely to result in decision-making on policies and budgets being biased towards the preferences of male citizens at the expense of female citizens. The highly gender unequal representation in Myanmar's hluttaws is also likely to negatively affect the quality of debate and decision-making; may facilitate corruption; affect how female citizens perceive the parliaments; and limit female citizens' confidence and ambition to actively participate in politics.

The research conducted for this report indicates that women candidates are more likely than men candidates to prioritise education and women's rights whereas men are more likely to prioritise ethnic issues. A study with a larger sample size is likely to find clear gender differences on some other issues too. It was beyond the scope of this study to examine to what extent gender differences in policy priorities translate into different legislative activity by MPs in Myanmar's hluttaws, and this is an important area for future research.

A number of cultural norms act to powerfully constrain women's participation in Myanmar's hluttaws including: a widely-held bias in favour of male leadership; women facing criticism for travelling away from home, especially if this is with men other than their husband; and expectations that women continue to do 'their' domestic work, irrespective of whether they have other demands on their time. Cultural norms shape how citizens perceive and respond to men and women politicians; whether males and females perceive themselves as potential politicians; the level of support/opposition they receive from their families; and the attitudes they face from fellow party members, other politicians, and civil servants.

Another major factor limiting women's Parliamentary participation is men's dominance of 'gatekeeper' positions in political parties. Men's dominance of these positions negatively affects women's political participation through several channels. Men's personal and professional networks tend to be male dominated, and so they are more likely to notice other men as having potential and encourage them to try and become candidates. Men's dominance of senior roles can be expected to have a symbolic effect, reducing women's confidence and ambition to try to become parliamentarians. Besides, men are less likely to perceive that women face unequal opportunities within their party, and are therefore less likely to try to take steps to counteract this disadvantage.

The research conducted for this report strongly suggests that gender differences in formal educational attainment or in the sectors that men and women work in are not a significant cause of the gender unequal political participation that we observe. However, women's lower level of labour force participation is probably significant. Male dominance of senior management jobs in many sectors is also probably also significant although we lack adequate quantitative data on this measure.

Harassment and intimidation of candidates while they were campaigning was fairly common, and was particularly intense in certain locations in Kachin and Shan States. Threats and acts of physical violence were largely motivated by opposition to certain political parties, and did not seem to have been motivated by

gender. However, harassment of candidates on social media tended to have a much more clearly gendered aspect.

Recent increases in the number of women politicians, and increased exposure to the internet and international media, gives Myanmar citizens greater exposure to examples of female leadership. Such exposure is likely to have some effect in encouraging acceptance and recognition of female political leadership, and help to increase females' confidence and ambition to become involved in politics. However, there is much scope for deliberate action to more quickly and more comprehensively promote gender equality in Myanmar's politics.

6.2 Recommendations

For Political Parties:

- Work with LNGOs, INGOs and/or relevant experts that can provide assistance to devise and implement internal party policies and strategies aimed at raising women's participation.
- Consider introducing internal party targets that stipulate a minimum level of female participation as electoral candidates, and committee members at Township and national levels.
- For parties that are not able to pay the registration fees for all candidates, consider prioritising financial assistance to female candidates.

For the Government of Myanmar:

- Introduce mandatory gender quotas for elections to Pyidaungsu and State/Region hluttaws. These can be designed as temporary special measures (TSMs), e.g. for two or three parliamentary terms. TSMs are included in the recommendations from the recent CEDAW committee review of Myanmar.¹⁷⁶ TSMs are also a great way to work towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 5 and 10. Options for how to design a gender quota system in Myanmar are discussed in the Appendix.
- Ensure that NSPAW is effectively implemented at all levels, in coordination with Myanmar civil society, political parties and other stakeholders. This has been recommended by the CEDAW committee,¹⁷⁷ and will help Myanmar to achieve SDGs 5 and 10.
- Adopt and implement the draft Prevention and Protection of Violence Against Women Law, including the provisions targeting online harassment.
- Consider the introduction of public funding for political parties. Receipt of such funding could possibly be tied to parties meeting certain basic gender equality objectives.
- The UEC needs to appoint more women to senior positions at Union, State/Region and Township levels.

¹⁷⁶ CEDAW and GEN, *Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of Myanmar* (Yangon, December 2016), p.10.

¹⁷⁷ CEDAW and GEN, *Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of Myanmar*, p.9.

For the Government of Myanmar, and LNGOs, INGOs and UN agencies:

- As the CEDAW committee has called for Myanmar to do, work to change cultural norms that reinforce gender inequality and suppress female leadership.¹⁷⁸ Potential strategies include:

Deliver programs targeted at women and girls that encourage them to aim for political careers, and support female politicians.

Deliver programs targeted towards men and boys that encourage them to be more accepting of females pursuing professional and political careers, and that encourage males to be more willing to perform domestic labour.

Utilise various forms of media to amplify the role model effect of current female leaders, and to challenge norms that favour male leadership more broadly.

Revise educational curricula so that they do not reinforce gender norms that associate males with the public sphere and leadership, and females with domesticity.

- Promote awareness of, and provide training and follow-up support to, women and men MPs to give them the ability to propose and debate legislation in a gender-sensitive manner.

For LNGOs, INGOs and UN agencies:

- Encourage, and provide financial support to, political parties to carry out activities to raise female members' confidence and political skills.
- Provide funding and other support for cross-party initiatives that bring together women MPs and candidates.
- Provide leadership training to potential women candidates.
- Provide training to media organisations so that they can improve their ability to cover political issues in ways that do not reinforce stereotypes that associate political leadership with men.
- Women and men MPs and candidates can benefit from a variety of trainings that can improve their skills as politicians. In some instances it will be appropriate for trainings to be targeted at women only or be delivered to single-sex groups. However, many trainings (especially those covering technical policy issues) can be given to mixed-sex groups. When delivering trainings to mixed-sex groups, it is important to take steps to ensure that women and men can participate equally.
- When working on political and governance activities be aware of how prevailing gender inequalities may effect female participation, for example if a village meeting is called, how many females will attend, and will they actively participate? If there are likely to be significant gender inequalities, adopt strategies specifically designed to counteract this.

¹⁷⁸ CEDAW and GEN, *Concluding Observations on the Combined Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of Myanmar*, p.10-11.

Appendix: Options for Implementing Parliamentary Quotas and Voting Reform in Myanmar

Options for Gender Quotas Under Myanmar's First-Past-the-Post Electoral System

For elected MPs, Myanmar currently uses a 'first-past-the-post' (FPTP) electoral system in which the country is divided up into constituencies that each elect one representative to a given hluttaw. FPTP systems can be contrasted with proportional representation systems in which each constituency elects multiple representatives to a given hluttaw. Myanmar's constituencies are currently allocated as follows:

- Amyotha Hluttaw: Each State/Region is divided into 12 constituencies, and each of these constituencies elects one MP to the Amyotha Hluttaw. Depending on the number of Townships in a particular State/Region this can result in MPs representing a constituency smaller than a single Township (e.g. Kayah State, Kayin State) or MPs representing constituencies that span several Townships (e.g. Shan State, Yangon Region).
- Pyithu Hluttaw: Each Township in Myanmar is treated as a single constituency and elects one MP to the Pyithu Hluttaw.
- State/Region Hluttaws: Each Township is divided into two separate constituencies, and each of these constituencies elects one MP to the State/Region Hluttaw.
- Ethnic Affairs Ministers: The position of Ethnic Affairs Minister is created in State/Region parliaments and in States/Regions where an ethnic group meets all of the following criteria:

It is recognised as one of Myanmar's 'national races'.

Its population in that State/Region is equal to or above 0.1% of the national population.

It is not the 'main' ethnic group in that State/Region.¹⁷⁹

It does not have a Self-Administered Area in that State/Region.

Each State/Region Ethnic Affairs Minister is elected as the sole representative of a constituency that includes all members of their ethnic group living in that State/Region.

¹⁷⁹ I.e. Bamar citizens are not allocated an Ethnic Affairs Minister in any of the Regions (although they do have Ethnic Affairs Ministers in some States), and non-Bamar ethnic groups do not receive an Ethnic Affairs Minister in States that share their name, e.g. there is no Kayin Ethnic Affairs Minister in Kayin State, no Kachin Ethnic Affairs Minister in Kachin State etc.

Under Myanmar's current FPTP electoral framework, there are several different means through which gender quotas could be introduced. Each of these could be applied to elections for the Pyithu Hluttaw; Amyotha Hluttaw; and/or State/Region Hluttaws:

- Require that for all political parties, a minimum percentage of their electoral candidates are women. This could probably be enacted through legislative change, without the need for constitutional change.¹⁸⁰
- Create additional parliamentary seats that are elected from constituencies reserved for women only. Under such a system voters would continue to elect a (man or woman) MP from their existing constituency, and would also vote for a woman only from a newly created constituency that covers multiple existing constituencies. This would require constitutional change.
- Before each election randomly select a certain percentage of existing constituencies, and require that these constituencies only have women candidates/only elect women. This would require constitutional change.

A version of Option 1 is in place in Mexico and applies to the parliamentary seats that are elected through FPTP, as well as to those elected through proportional representation. Versions of Option 1 are present in many countries that use proportional representation electoral systems. Option 1 would require the least drastic change to Myanmar's current electoral and parliamentary system. However, it is still likely to face strong resistance from many political parties in Myanmar (for example, see Section 5.4.2). It is important to note that even if the rule for women representing a minimum percentage of parties' candidates is strictly enforced, this form of quota is not guaranteed to significantly raise women's participation: parties may assign their women candidates to constituencies that they think they have little or no chance of winning, and under a FPTP system it is quite complicated and difficult to prevent parties from doing this.

The system described in Option 2 is in place in Uganda and Kenya, both of which use FPTP to elect their parliamentarians. If properly implemented, it would result in women MPs holding at least as many seats as they are guaranteed under the quota. In most Myanmar hluttaws we could expect the proportion of women MPs to exceed that amount, because women would also probably continue to be elected from some of the non-reserved constituencies. A potential downside of this approach is that it is clear which women were elected due to the quota and which were not, and the 'quota MPs' may be stigmatised as less capable or less deserving by voters and/or fellow MPs.

Option 3 would be the most controversial and strongly opposed option. This approach has been applied to local-level elections in India and (briefly) in Lesotho only,¹⁸¹ and has not been applied to elections for national or subnational parliaments in any countries. The strong opposition this approach would face from many parties and citizens, and would be likely to generate substantial backlash against both women MPs and policies designed to raise women's participation. As such, it is not recommended for elections to Myanmar's Union or State/Region hluttaws.

Options for introducing gender quotas to Myanmar under a proportional representation electoral system are discussed below, under 'Options for Electoral System Reform.'

¹⁸⁰ Although it could possibly be argued that this violates Section 406a of the Constitution, i.e. a political party's right to 'organize freely'.

¹⁸¹ Amanda Clayton, 'Women's Political Engagement Under Quota-Mandated Female Representation: Evidence From a Randomized Policy Experiment', *Comparative Political Studies*, 48.3 (2015), p.335.

Although they are not as widespread as gender quotas, a number of developed and developing countries have quotas to ensure representation of minority ethnic groups. Peru is the only country in which ethnic quotas are designed so that a minimum percentage of all parties' candidates must be from a particular ethnic minority group(s); in all other countries with ethnic quotas, seats are directly reserved for ethnic minorities.¹⁸² Ethnic identity is often quite closely correlated with political preference, much more so than gender, and so requiring all parties to include members from a particular ethnic group is generally not to be recommended.¹⁸³ It can be further added that in Myanmar the large number of different ethnic minority groups would make it extremely difficult for all parties to field candidates from all of the different minorities.

As outlined in Section 1.5, statistical representation is not biased towards the Bamar majority: in the Union hluttaws the percentage of MPs that identify as Bamar (64%) is approximately equal to estimates of the proportion of the population that is Bamar (60-65%). Although a little over 35% of Union MPs are non-Bamar, only 11% belong to dedicated ethnic-based parties. Certain ethnic-based parties benefitted from Myanmar's FPTP system, with ANP, SNLD, Ta'ang (Palaung) National Party, and Pa'O National Organisation, all receiving a higher percentage of seats than votes. However, for most ethnic-based parties the reverse was true, with their share of seats being less than their share of votes.¹⁸⁴

The NLD are not only highly dominant in the Union and the Region hluttaws, they also have a majority of total MPs in three State hluttaws (Kayah, Kayin, and Mon), 50% of total MPs in the Chin State hluttaw, and almost half (49%) of total MPs in the Kachin State hluttaw. The only hluttaw in which an ethnic-based party has the largest number of MPs is Rakhine State, but even here the ANP falls just short of having a majority of total MPs.¹⁸⁵ Under the 2008 Constitution, the Union President has the right to appoint all of the State/Region Chief Ministers, and NLD members were chosen to lead all of the State/Region governments – this decision was particularly controversial in Rakhine State, where the ANP won more seats than any other party.¹⁸⁶

Citizens' political preferences, and thus their votes, are not solely determined by their ethnicity. Moreover, in the 2015 election the NLD benefitted from the extremely high popularity of its leader Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, the NLD's successful use of local non-Bamar candidates in many constituencies, and the limited financial and administrative resources of many ethnic-based parties.¹⁸⁷ Nevertheless, the current FPTP electoral system delivers a significant advantage to the NLD, and just a few non-Bamar parties whose ethnic populations are geographically concentrated. In addition, the reservation of 25 per cent of all seats in the legislatures for Tatmadaw delegates increases Bamar and Buddhist representation due to the Bamar and Buddhist overrepresentation within the national armed forces.

Although non-Bamar MPs currently make up an approximately 'fair' share of elected MPs [see Section 1.5], there are concerns that substantive representation of non-Bamar groups remains weak: many ethnic leaders

¹⁸² Htun, 'Is Gender like Ethnicity?', p.442.

¹⁸³ Htun, 'Is Gender like Ethnicity?', p.442-46.

¹⁸⁴ Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar*, p.13.

¹⁸⁵ Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar*, p.7-8.

¹⁸⁶ Nyan Lynn Aung and Swan Ye Htut, 'ANP Fails to Block Chief Minister', *Myanmar Times*, 31 March 2016 <<http://www.mmmtimes.com/index.php/national-news/19735-anp-fails-to-block-chief-minister.html>> [accessed 17 March 2017].

¹⁸⁷ Adam Burke, *Why Didn't Ethnic Parties Do Better in Myanmar's Elections?* (New Mandala, November 2015), p.7-8.

perceive that Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD do not fully understand ethnic concerns, and the top-down Bamar-led nature of the party constrains its ability to represent minority interests.¹⁸⁸ However, it is highly questionable if ethnic parliamentary quotas are the best means of increasing non-Bamar voice in hluttaws. They may not do much to change substantive representation because such seats may be primarily filled by non-Bamar candidates belonging to large hierarchical Bamar-led national parties (such as the NLD and USDP). Furthermore, given the current ethnic composition of MPs, reserving additional seats for non-Bamar MPs may be seen as unfair by many Bamar citizens.

Ethnic identity is extremely varied and complex in Myanmar, with the (disputed) official Government tally of ethnic groups and sub-groups standing at 135. Instituting quotas for specific ethnic groups would thus be likely to result in an extremely complicated electoral and parliamentary system. Even if seats were only reserved for the 7 non-Bamar ethnic groups that have States named after them this would be quite complex. In addition, such a simplification would be likely to privilege certain dominant non-Bamar elites at the expense of other sub-groups. As noted by one of our interviewees in Section 5.4.3 the ethnic mosaic of sub-groups is particularly complex among those officially designated as belonging to 'Shan', but it is also highly complex among other groups including but not limited to: Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, and Naga. Finally, reserving seats for non-Bamar ethnic groups:

*... could have negative political consequences by further entrenching the politicisation of ethnicity and limiting cooperation and coalition-building across nationality lines.*¹⁸⁹

Instead of quotas, a better means of increasing substantive representation of ethnic minorities may be to change to a proportional representation electoral system, and this is discussed more in the following subsection. However, it may be still be worth considering ethnic quotas, or some other form of affirmative action, for civil service positions. Unfortunately, no data is published on the ethnic or religious identity of civil servants, but there is a common perception that, '...the civil service is disproportionately staffed by ethnic Bamar Buddhists,'¹⁹⁰ and this seems to be particularly so at senior levels. If quotas were to be adopted for civil service hiring, it would likely to be too complicated to have them targeted towards specific ethnic minorities, but it would be relatively simple to have a target that a particular percentage of staff are non-Bamar and/or non-Buddhist.

Options for Electoral System Reform

In a proportional representation system constituencies are fewer and larger than under FPTP, with each constituency electing multiple MPs. The vast majority of countries that use proportional representation have a 'party list' system. A small number of countries use instead a 'Single Transferable Vote' system but this is more complex and difficult for voters to understand, and the only developing country parliaments for which these are in use are the Upper Houses in India and Pakistan. Under a party list system each party nominates multiple

¹⁸⁸ Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar*, p.12.

¹⁸⁹ Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar*, p.13.

¹⁹⁰ David Hook, Tin Maung Than, and Kim N. B. Ninh, *Conceptualizing Public Sector Reform in Myanmar* (MDRI-CESD & The Asia Foundation, June 2015), p.26.

candidates per constituency: for example if the constituency is represented by 10 MPs, each party can typically nominate up to 10 candidates for that constituency. Gender quotas under party list systems are typically designed to require that in every constituency, each party's list of candidates includes a minimum percentage of women. For such quotas to be effective in significantly raising women's representation, it is important that there is a requirement that parties distribute women evenly in their candidate lists – otherwise some parties are likely to place most or all of their women candidates at the bottom of their candidate lists, from where they have little chance of getting elected.

Proportional representation electoral systems can have certain disadvantages including: the tendency to elect coalition governments which can become factionalised and unable to agree on pass legislation; they can grant political influence to extremist parties; small parties can sometimes obtain disproportionately large influence on policy; and more complicated forms of proportional representation can be difficult for voters to understand.¹⁹¹ However, proportional representation has many significant advantages over FPTP including: it avoids giving unfair advantages to the biggest parties; gives greater opportunities for smaller parties which promotes inclusion of minority voices; there is less pressure for voters to vote tactically for their 'least bad' option, they can vote for the party they most strongly believe in.¹⁹²

Myanmar's FPTP system not only results in smaller parties receiving a smaller (or zero) share of MPs than their share of votes; the knowledge of this is a disincentive for citizens to vote for them. Currently, only 11% of elected seats in Myanmar's Union hluttaws are held by MPs from ethnic-based parties, and almost two-thirds of these are held by just two parties (ANP and SNLD).¹⁹³ The low level of ethnic-based political party representation in the Union hluttaws and most State/Region hluttaws threatens political inclusivity, and is a potential threat to achieving a sustainable peace agreement:

... [Myanmar's] peace process with the ethnic armed groups is predicated on the possibility of their pursuing their objectives through political means (that is, in the legislatures) rather than armed struggle. Representation of ethnic constituencies is therefore a key issue for the peace process.¹⁹⁴

Introducing proportional representation for elections to Myanmar's Amyotha Hluttaw would not seem to require any constitutional change, and could be achieved through legislative change only. However, it appears that constitutional change would be required for any form of proportional representation to be introduced for elections to the Pyithu Hluttaw, and for almost all forms proportional representation to be introduced for elections to the State/Region Hluttaws.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹¹ <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/es/esd/esd02/esd02b> [Accessed 9th March 2017]

¹⁹² <http://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/es/esd/esd02/esd02b> [Accessed 9th March 2017]

¹⁹³ Transnational Institute, *The 2015 General Elections in Myanmar*, p.6-7.

¹⁹⁴ Horsey, *Shifting to a Proportional Representation Electoral System in Myanmar?*, p.2.

¹⁹⁵ Horsey, *Shifting to a Proportional Representation Electoral System in Myanmar?*, p.3.

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Gender Equality Network

A faint, stylized illustration of a woman in a blue sari is positioned behind the title text. She is shown from the waist up, with her hands clasped in front of her. The sari has a subtle pattern and a dark border.

Gender and Politics in Myanmar: Women and Men Candidates in the 2015 Election

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