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Women in Public Service in Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract: Women represent the majority of the electorate of Kyrgyzstan; however their political representation remains low at both the executive and legislative levels. This paper examines advancement of women in public service in Kyrgyzstan. The first part of the paper analyzes factors that impact gender representation in Kyrgyzstan. The second part examines legislative changes that took place after the implementation of gender quota at the legislative body in 2007. In particular, we study the responsiveness of women parliamentarians to the priorities related to women issues. For this we employ Swers' (2002) approach and study the nature of bills co-sponsored by the Kyrgyzstani women. The analysis of bills cosponsored by Kyrgyzstani parliamentarians from 2005 to 2010 illustrates that the women parliamentarians tend to sponsor bills related to women's issues. We also find that in comparison with the U.S. legislative practices, men parliamentarians in Kyrgyzstan sponsor these groups of bills in a lesser number. Therefore, we argue that for countries with a weak party ideology it becomes even more imperative to have strong women representation in their legislative institutions.

Keywords: women representation, quota, legislative body, Kyrgyzstan, bills, gender

1. Introduction

Although women represent 54 percent of the electorate in Kyrgyzstan, their political representation in Kyrgyzstan continues to remain low. Many factors may influence the political advancement of women. An electoral system, voter attitudes to female candidates, and a government ideology are some of the most frequent explanations offered. Political advancement of women can vary across different historical periods. However, as many cases in post soviet countries illustrate, the progress in promoting women's rights in one period does not guarantee continuity of this trend. For example throughout Kyrgyzstan's history, a parliamentary representation of women underwent from zero percent at the beginning of the century to 35-40 percent during the Soviet period and to zero percent in 2005.

An international discourse and the pressure of international organizations in promoting women participation is instrumental in advancing women in low-income countries such as Kyrgyzstan¹.

This research examines the state of women's advancement in the public service of Kyrgyzstan. This study will proceed in the following format. First, we will provide an overview of the situation with the advancement of women in decision-making positions in Kyrgyzstan at the executive branch level. The paper utilizes a longitudinal statistical data of the National Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan, which captures information on Kyrgyz women in political decision making positions

¹ Kyrgyzstan became a party (acceded) to CEDAW (Convention of Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women) in 1997. Article 18 of the Convention imposes an obligation to the member party to report on measures undertaken as the Convention requires.

from 2005 to 2010, which also covers years prior to implementation of the quota system in the Parliament.

Second, we will investigate the responsiveness of women parliamentarians to the priorities related to women constituents. Following Swers (2002) we will examine the nature of bill cosponsorship in Kyrgyzstan. In particular, we analyze all the bills co-sponsored by women legislators from 2008 to the first half of 2011. We hypothesize that given the weakness of ideological foundation of political parties of Kyrgyzstan; no pressure will be imposed on men legislators to cosponsor projects related to women and social issues. We therefore argue that in countries such as Kyrgyzstan it becomes even more imperative to have stronger political representation of women in the parliament.

2. Literature Review

Studies of women in leadership positions are growing, however most of the existing research focuses on studies of high-income countries of the western hemisphere. With the increase of the elected women in some of Latin American countries there is a growing number of comparative research. Against this background, the literature on the state of advancement of women in decision-making positions in Central Asian countries is scarce.

The existing literature on women in leadership positions in legislative bodies focuses primarily on the US. For example, Jones (1997) analyzes policy priorities of women legislators in the US House of Representatives and the Argentinean Chamber of Deputies during

the 1993-94 legislative years. The author examines the adopted bills to measure policy priorities of the legislators. The author notes that even though this approach is not a perfect method, bills represent the best available representation (Jones, 1997: 624). Jones (1997) separates bills into policy and non-policy oriented bills, as well as micro-level legislative laws. Other variables in the model include individual characteristics of legislators and their party affiliations. The main finding of this comparative study is that women legislators in both countries place a significantly higher priority than men in the areas of women's rights and children and families.

A similar study was conducted for Honduras by Taylor-Robinson and Heath (2003). They studied the policy priorities of women legislators in the Honduran Congress from 1990-93 and 1994-97. This study is a replication of Jones' (1997) study of legislator-women priorities in the Argentinean Parliament. The authors examine two hypotheses: a) Women deputies place a significantly higher priority on legislating for women's rights and the needs of children and families, than male deputies do; b) Differences between women and men deputies in other policy areas traditionally of interest to women, such as education, health care, and the environment, will be less pronounced. Like Jones (1997), Taylor-Robinson and Heath (2003) measure legislator policy priorities using the bills introduced during the studied legislative period. The authors divide bills into policy and into non-policy issues. The authors also incorporate into the analysis individual characteristics of members of parliament, which includes tenure and membership in a party. With the results obtained, they find that there is no difference between women and men parliamentarians in Honduras in placing a higher priority on initiating

legislation related to children and family issues. However, women parliamentarians appear to be more active in participating in the debates related to women and children issues than in other debates.

A study which focuses on the US situation is Tolbert & Steuarnagel's (2001) research. They examine the impact of female legislators in promoting legislation concerning women's health. The authors develop several types of health policies and employ the statistics of fifty states. Controlling for many factors that may explain the growth of health related legislation, the authors find that the presence of a democratic control of the legislative body and the existence of a large medical establishment (implying a powerful lobby) is associated with the increasing number of health related policies. In contrast with previous studies, these authors find that male and female *state* legislators are equally willing to support policies related to women's health.

Dodson and Carroll (1991) study the impact of women in the legislative offices across the US in 1988. The authors find that in general women legislators tend to be more liberal in supporting issues that are not considered gender related. However, women legislators are more willing to support the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment and oppose parental consent for adoption as well as oppose prohibiting abortion. The authors also find that a legislator's support for some policy issues such as child care and increased taxes tended to be affected by party orientation, rather than by gender (p.14). The authors also examine the individual characteristics of female legislators, and posit that the legislators closely connected to women's communities/ organizations were more likely to support "feminist policies" (p. 32."). Finally, the authors also find that representing the districts of the same political ideology, women still

demonstrated high support for liberal policies in the areas of feminist and non-feminist policy issues².

Jewell & Whicker (1994) focuses on women's leadership style in the state legislative body. They conclude that the most frequent leadership style observed among female leaders is consensus process and consensus-policy styles. The authors also point out that many institutions, including legislative bodies and corporations are moving towards a more consensual and conciliatory style and, therefore, facilitating the entry of women in the leadership positions (Jewell and Whicker, 1994: 188)³.

Thomas (1991) highlights several factors that may impact the behavior of public officeholders⁴. Thomas (1991) conducted a survey of members of the lower houses of the state legislatures in 12 states, which represent three major political cultures: the traditionalistic, the individualistic, and the moralistic. The findings of illustrate that political culture has no impact on the types of bills adopted and the influence of women legislators on the adoption. However the results indicate that women legislators *introduce* bills related to issues of women, children, and the family *only* when they know that they will find the support

² Empowering effect of elected women legislators may also be reflected on women constituents political behavior. For example, High-Pippert and Comer (1998) analyze National Election Study of early 1990s and find that women represented by women tended to be "more likely to engage in number of political activities, feel that they can influence the political process, and feel that they are sufficiently competent to do so than women represent by men (p.61)."

³ For additional research on working style of women in legislative bodies see Kathlene (1994) and Rosenthal (1997)

⁴ Thomas (1991) refers to Kanter (1977) who argues that number matters. For instance, a skewed group (which can range up to 15 percent) will be perceived as "tokens", and, therefore, will not blend into the mainstream. However, when organization develops a balanced distribution, members of minority, ranging from 15 percent to forty percent, will not be perceived as aberrant and will be "able to respond to the environment in an unrestrained fashion (Thomas, 1991: 959)."

among other legislators⁵. Similar thought can be found in Taylor-Robinson and Health (2011), who highlight that a small number of female members in the legislative body will leave “women members relegated to “token” status” and “that they may not feel that they have enough support to rock the boat and bring up topics of interest to women (p. 81).”

Finally, Little et al (2001) examine whether the women leaders in the legislative body continue to support issues of traditional concern to women even when they hold the leadership position. Via analysis of *The Handbook of State Legislative Leaders: 1997-1998*, this empirical study demonstrates that even after controlling for variety of institutional, political, and personal characteristics of leaders, gender appear to have a statistically significant effect on supporting legislative agenda related to issues related to women. The authors also find that leader’s individual characteristics such as being non-white, and being a senior leader have positive impact on supporting traditional female issues.

3. Overview of the State of Advancement of Women in Kyrgyzstan

The importance of the advancement of women in public service has been highlighted by many scholars. Women represent the majority of

⁵ Thomas (1991) also refers to the Flammang’s (1985) study that demonstrates that a larger number of women “appear to alter the kind of legislation brought to the agenda (p. 960).” Similarly, a larger number of women impacts policy orientation of other women “who never viewed themselves as representatives of women or women’s issues (Thomas, 1991: 961).”

electorate in most countries and specifically Kyrgyzstan this number is close to 54 percent. Though Kyrgyzstani women have been granted both the right to vote and stand for election since 1918⁶, the state of women advancement in the decision-making process still leaves much to be desired.

The advancement of women in politics is important from the representative democracy point of view. However there is also a rationale for the advancement of women from an economic point of view. For example the women-headed households tend to be less poor than men-headed households in Kyrgyzstan. Indeed, in 2009, 27.5 percent of households headed by men are reported to be poor, while only 19.1 percent of household headed by women fell under the category of poor household (National Statistics, 2010). The effectiveness of women as the heads of household may be due to their higher education level, higher rate of versatility, or their high level of participation in microcredit financing programs. For example, according to the Kyrgyz statistical data on migration, the rate of *internal* and *external* migration is higher for women than for men. In 2009, for example, the percentage of women among migrants leaving Kyrgyzstan exceeded 58.1 percent. Similarly, women account for slightly over 50 percent of the *internal* migrants. Kyrgyz women also represent the largest portion of microcredit recipients: 77.9 percent in 2005, 78.3 percent in 2006, 77.7 percent in 2007, 73.7 percent in 2008, and 72.9 percent in 2009 (Men and Women in Kyrgyzstan, 2010).

Advancing women in higher levels of public service is also viewed as an effective way to promote ethnic consolidation in multiethnic

⁶ <http://www.ipu.org/wmn-e/suffrage.htm>

countries. On this particular issue, Handrahan (2001) empirically demonstrates that in comparison to men, women in Kyrgyzstan are more likely to reject ethnic identity in favor of gender identity. The author contends that if promoted and advanced at higher levels of government service, women can work better across contested ethnic lines. Therefore the philosophy of gendered ethnicity may become a powerful device to prevent ethnic conflicts in countries like Kyrgyzstan (p. 1).

Kyrgyzstan's gender policy has been impacted by many historical circumstances. Imanaliev (2008) highlights three sources of ethical behaviors and institutional development in Kyrgyzstan. These sources are *nomadism*, *islamism*, and *sovietism*. Imanaliev highlights that these three sources contradict to each other, however they are able to co-exist. According to the author, any political behavior, including philosophical conceptualization of the notion of gender, will be impacted by the magnitude of the influence of any of these three phenomena.

Sovietism

Naff (1994) studied the case of women in the public service in the US and suggested that public service was exclusively a male domain a century ago. In comparison to the US, the Kyrgyz government sector began to emerge as the country became a part of the Soviet Union during the second decade of the 19th century. The creation of the public service was heavily influenced by the ideology of equal opportunities for men and women. In other words, in Kyrgyzstan the creation of the state and advancement of women rights evolved in parallel. Soviet industrialization and emancipation of women created some unique consequences. For example, some empirical studies point out that in Uzbekistan, women tended to have a high level of education and a high

fertility rate. This implies that women in this country had education levels similar to that of the industrialized countries, with the birth rate level of the developing countries (Kandiyoti, 2007). This was possible due to a heavy state intervention in provision of services and generous maternity leaves (Kandiyoti, 2007). Although the Soviet ideology supported the employment of women outside the home and education of women, the areas of employment of women tended, and still continue, to be concentrated in service and “redistributive” areas.

Nomadism

In addition to communist ideology, the state of advancement of women in the Kyrgyz public service should also be viewed from the prism of its past nomadic tradition. From anthropological perspective, nomadic pastoral cultures are believed to view men and women as equal in contribution to the household due to the fact that these cultures do not separate social economic roles in society between men and women⁷. The majority of the Kyrgyzstan’s population had originally a nomadic form of life style. Therefore, in most of the Kyrgyz households, women traditionally had equal rights to men. Wood and Eagly (2002) point out that the pastoral societies tend to have egalitarian or hierarchical structure depending on the political system. Wood and Eagly (2002) also refers to Knauf’s study of 39 pastoral societies. According to it, pastoral societies lacked recognizable leadership role among adult men, and had open, flexible and cooperative arrangements. Wood and Eagly (2002) go on and cite Knauf’s research that found that pastoral societies lacked differentiation by sex and age (p. 711). In comparison with

⁷ Please see the following for more information on role differences of women in sedentary and nomadic cultures <http://www.peacefulsocieties.org/Archtext/Draper75.pdf>

sedentary society, in pastoral nomadic societies every member of the clan must contribute heavily. This historical precondition may explain the difference in level of advancement of women across Central Asia, which encompassed the ethnic groups with pastoral and sedentary lifestyles.

Islamism

Finally, the population of Kyrgyzstan consist of many ethnic groups, with some more traditional, such as those residing in the southern parts of Kyrgyzstanis and those residing in rural areas. The analysis of the advancement of women in politics cannot accurately be examined without incorporating “conservatives” perspective on gender. Indeed, examining the socialization of women and promotion of certain legislation, as well as voting behavior of the Kyrgyz population can be explained by understanding the impact of the religion. For example, in the last decade, several unsuccessful attempts were made to legalize polygamy⁸.

In general, a more patriarchal or traditional public opinion of the role of women discourages participation of women candidates in the election. It will therefore decrease political ambition of women and may depress the supply flow of women at different stages of political process (Matland, 2003: 325).

4. State of Advancement of Women in Politics in Kyrgyzstan

What is the nature of impediments in advancing women in public

⁸ Radio Free Europe, March 9, 2007, retrieved at <http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1075173.html>

service in Kyrgyzstan? What factors advance women in public service in Kyrgyzstan? As in other countries, the advancement of women in Kyrgyzstan is impacted by a host of factors. These factors include ideology, historical, social, cultural, religious conditions, election mechanisms, and other conditions. Eighty years of Soviet policy in advancing women in professional careers has been a significant event in Kyrgyzstan. However, despite some progress is achieved during the soviet state-led emancipation, Kyrgyzstan's case is still viewed as a case of a developing democracy (Matland, 2003: 340).

Morris (1999) emphasizes three levels of analysis that explain the level of women's political participation. The first level is situational. This level examines women in a particular situation or role, such as mother, homemaker, wife, widow, to enumerate any few, which limits accessibility to resources, time, and skills, which are required for high political participation. The second level studies the specific nature of socialization women and men go through in traditional cultures. The third level examines social institutions, which includes economy, election system, and education, among other institutions. The level of education of women in Kyrgyzstan is similar and slightly above of that of men, 99.80% versus 99.70 % (2009). However, the rate of employment for women is lower than the rate of employment for men 42.5% versus 57.5 % (2008). As in many other places, gender differences are observed in wages. On average, men in Kyrgyzstan receive 1.6 times more than a female worker. The difference is explained by the industry concentration of women and the likeliness of women to occupy junior and administrative levels⁹.

⁹ Please see more details see Second Report on Progress towards Achieving the

Reid et al (2001) highlight several factors that prevent women to advance professionally. This include “lack of commitment to affirmative action, a lack of developmental assignments which would enhance qualifications, gender-biased culture and stereotypes, outright discrimination and the distribution of opportunities and power (Reid et al, 2011: 5)”. The impediments are therefore believed to be institutional in nature. In developing countries the institutional impediments to advancement of women are elementary in nature and include things such as increasing influence of the religion, poverty, limited level to health services and low level of economic development. The policies of emancipation of women in Central Asia began early in the 19th century and resulted in abolishing religious customs, such as bride-wealth, unilateral male divorce, polygamy, child marriages, among other custom (Edgar, 2006). Although some of the traditional customs were eliminated, others such as child marriages and bride-wealth continued to remain unsolved.

The last issue that needs to be highlighted is the difference in advancing the women at the municipal and central government levels in Kyrgyzstan. This problem exists in many other countries, but in Kyrgyzstan it is especially acute. In this respect, Reid at al (2001) analyze the state of advancement of women in the US municipal bureaucracies. The authors develop theoretical framework which distinguishes occupation segregation in the areas of distributive, regulatory, and redistributive policy. Based on the empirical analysis of a sample of municipalities, the authors find that “glass ceiling impediments for administrators are strongest and most pervasive across cities in

distributive and regulatory agencies (Reid et al, 2001:14).” At the same time, the redistributive area of function in the studied cities demonstrated gender balance, although glass ceiling impediments still existed in highest administrative levels of redistributive agencies of municipalities.

As in the case of the US, underrepresentation of women at higher levels of the municipal and local government is also the case in Kyrgyzstan. As table 1 demonstrates, in several regions of Kyrgyzstan political representation of women is absent at the policy-decision making levels in local governments. The majority of female municipal workers are concentrated at the administrative levels. Many factors need to be considered in order to understand the main reasons for a high-level underrepresentation of women in municipal governing institutions. According to the study of political representation of women at the legislative body in Russia, *rural* regions tend to have a higher proportion of women in the legislative assemblies, than in the legislative assemblies’ of urban region (Nowacki, 2003). The author explains this phenomenon by the fact that the election at the urban election districts requires financial resources, which most women lack. On the other hand the election process in rural districts emphasizes a close interaction of the candidates with the electorate. Therefore, at the rural level, “women are able to compensate for their economic disadvantages through personal contacts (Nowacki, 2003).”

Insert Table 1 about HERE

In sum, the factors preventing the advancement of women in Kyrgyzstan at municipal and local government decision making levels can be connected to poverty, to flaws in the election procedures, and to a more patriarchal public opinion of the role of women.

5. Election System and the Impact of Quota System

The political and electoral systems of all post-soviet countries have been impacted by the legacy of the soviet system. In fact, the quota system has been one of the widely used tools by the soviet political apparatus to promote representativeness. Nechemias (1994) underscored several features within the electoral system of the Soviet Union. These include: 1) direct election; 2) employment of quota system to represent gender, age, social, and professional composition of the population; 3) representation of national republic through bicameral parliament; and 4) nomination of candidates by profession-based collectives. Due to both the proactive policy and the promotion of representation, in 1984 the Soviets elected 32.8 percent of women, to the 1984 Supreme Council (Parliament) (Nechemias, 1994: 91). The deputies of the Supreme Council of Union Republics consisted of 36 percent of women (election in 1985). The members of the Supreme Councils of Autonomous Republic had 40 percent women members, while the Councils of regional and local governments had 50 percent of women as members (Umetalieva et al).

This was a significant achievement for “representativeness” in this historical point of time. However, as Nechemias (1994) highlighted, the political apparatus promoted “the appearance, though not the substance” of representation. Indeed, despite the level of representation, association of elected women with proverbial milkmaid or textile professions, rather than active political professions, was never eliminated (Nechemias, 1994).

Post-soviet evolution of the election system in Kyrgyzstan

can be divided into several periods. After independence, the quota system was eliminated and the government began advocating the policy of “meritocracy” in employment policies (citation is needed). The election quota was reintroduced in 2008, partly due to a decade long underrepresentation of women in the parliament, which attracted continuous criticism from local non-governmental organizations and international organizations. The quota system increased women presence up to 25 percent during the 2007 parliamentary election and to 23 percent during 2010 parliamentary election. Kyrgyzstan utilizes a “reserved seats” instrument to guarantee the election of women candidates. The legislative foundation for this (election) practice is based on an electoral law. Currently more than 18 countries employ reserved system mechanism to guarantee political participation of women in the parliament. A detailed chronology of the elections system changes is presented in figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about HERE

As a result of the 2010 parliamentary election, five parties were elected to the parliament; 28 of 120 elected members of parliament or 23.33% of the parliament were women (see table 2 for more details). Among 16 committees of the Kyrgyz Parliament, four committee chairs are women, which represent 25%. These committees are: 1) committee on constitutional legislature, government structure, law, and local self-government; 2) committee on education, science, culture, information, and religion; 3) committee on health, social welfare, labor, and migration; and 4) committee on youth politics and sport¹⁰.

Insert Table 2 about HERE

¹⁰ Parliament of Kyrgyzstan, www.kenesh.kg

The advancement of women in Parliament also suggests an influence on the advancement of women at the executive position (Asylbekova, 2009). The parliamentary 2008 quota resulted in the appointment of multiple women to the executive level, and in 2008-2009, 21 percent of seats of the Cabinet of Ministers were women (Asylbekova, 2009) (see see table 3 and 4 for overview of number of women in the executive bodies).

Insert Table 3 about HERE

6. Legislature procedure

According to the Kyrgyz Constitution, individual members of both the parliament and of the executive government have a right to initiate a bill. The constitution also permits 10,000 citizens (electorate) to initiate a bill. This instrument is known as people's initiative¹¹. In a typical year, the Parliament adopts on average 300 bills and resolutions. The legislative body adopts each initiated bills in three readings. To be adopted, a bill must be supported by the majority of the members present at the session. However, a bill cannot be passed if less than 50 members of parliament vote for it¹². Given previous studies, we hypothesize the election of the women legislators may have two effects. First women legislators may begin to initiate legislations that relates to women issues. Second, ministries and other executive institutions may also begin to promote women related bills given the increased confidence that this

¹¹ Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic

¹² Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic

type of a bill will find the support of legislators.

The initiation of bill is the first stage. However, the most important is the ability to successfully adopt an initiated legislation. An example below demonstrates a case of a bill promotion by an individual women legislator.

Example: In 2009 a women legislator G. Derbisheva has initiated a bill to introduce a gender quota of 70 percent to the court of elderly wise people¹³. In particular, the recommendation states that the court of wise elderly people should not have more than 70 percent of one gender. In the explanation of the proposed legislation Derbisheva stated that given the fact that these courts deals with many family issues, such as violence in the families, divorce, inheritance, among others, it is required that the court has some proportion of female members too. Derbisheva also stated that due to traditional mentality, a Kyrgyz woman may not easily speak about many family types of issues with a man. (Debsiheva G. Explanatory Note, www.kenesh.kg). The existing language of the law of the court of elderly wise people, which was adopted in 2002, states that any Kyrgyz citizen above 18 years old who has business-like and moral qualifications can be elected by the citizens to the court of elderly wise people. The draft bill was withdrawn by the author. In the same year, Derbisheva initiates another draft proposal which recommended “hiring women and men as members of the court of wise elderly people,” which was adopted due to the fact that the quota condition was removed from the language.

The following is the example of legislative initiative on women

¹³ Sud Aksakalov (Суд аксакалов) is literally translated from the Kyrgyz language as courts of elderly wise men. This institution was introduced in early 1990 as a need to revitalize national traditions. The courts of wise elderly were intended to serve as people’s ombudsmen (Toroev, 2005).

issues which promoted through employment of people's initiative:

Example: In 2003, in recognition of the need for legal protection for persons subject to domestic violence, a women's NGO, the Diamond Association, in partnership with the Association of Independent Lawyer-Scientists of the Kyrgyz Republic, submitted a draft bill to the Parliament on protection against family violence. Using for the first time a constitutional provision that requires the collection of 30,000 signatures to submit a draft bill for consideration, the NGOs, using a network of crisis centers and a range of other public information tools, collected 36,000 signatures, laying the legal basis for submission of the draft bill, which was subsequently adopted by Parliament as the "Bill on Social and Legal Protection Against Family Violence" (2003). The law provides legal protection in the form of court orders and establishes a system of administrative and civil tools (including NGO-government partnerships), to prevent and address family-based violence.¹⁴

7. Method

We collected and analyzed all bills proposed for consideration for the Parliament from 2007 to the first six month of 2011. Following Dodson & Carroll (1991) we divided all legislative proposals into two groups of general policy issues and feminist policy issues. The feminist policy issues includes among others, child care, economic and education equity, equal employment and credit opportunities, family health and

¹⁴ The example is adopted from Asian Development Bank Country Gender Assessment, 2005:59.

domestic violence, comparable worth and wage discrimination, the representation of women in public offices and others (Donson & Carroll, 1991: 14). Similar division can be found in Swers (2002), who includes to the group of women's issue bills the following categories: children & family, civil rights/affirmative action, women's health, crime, education, economic equity & employment benefits, health, and welfare (p.36). The general policy issues include policies that are outside of the scope of traditional feminist issues.

Following Swers (2002), this paper focuses on gender differences in co-sponsorship. As Swers (2002) highlights, "the examination of gender differences in cosponsorship provides more evidence that the election of more women to Congress could make the national policy agenda more open to gender-related legislation (p.57)." Swers cites previous research of US Congress (Nemacheck (1999) and Wolbrecht (2000, 2002), which found that cosponsorship was reflective of gender differences in Congress.

Swers (2002) also highlights that party membership may also impact co-sponsorship. This implies that men legislators representing the Democratic Party would tend to sponsor traditional women issues. In comparison to the United States, party membership in Kyrgyzstan is not as developed and membership in the parties is not consistent across various election periods. In addition most political parties have non-distinguishable or identical political platforms. Consequently, men legislators would experience no ideological pressures to support women related issues. Therefore the election of women legislators becomes even more imperative in countries with weak party systems as in Kyrgyzstan.

We examine all the bills that were included in the group of

feminist policy issues (see table 5). Then we isolate a group of bills that has a women legislator's name as a cosponsor (see table 6). Because this research focuses on the process of initiation of bills by women parliamentarian, the procedure of successful or unsuccessful adoption of proposals initiated is not discussed here. We justify the choice by the following. First, we study the chronological period that covers the 4th and 5th Parliaments. The members of the 4th Parliament were elected in December of 2007 and it began working in the beginning of 2008. The 4th Parliament was prematurely dissolved in April 2010. The 5th Parliament was elected in the end of 2010. This implies that the period that we cover is relatively short for a parliament member to pursue a successful implementation of proposals. Second, women legislators that were elected to the 4th and 5th Parliament were elected through a quota, which implies that many of them are new to the system and require more time to get adjusted to the rules and procedures. Therefore, the analysis of the initiation and sponsorship of a bill may serve as the most optimal indicator of a parliamentarian's policy orientations.

8. Results

Women legislators in Kyrgyzstan introduced several initiatives (amendments and additions to the existing laws) that pertain to women rights from 2008 to 2011. The three main initiatives include: 1) gender representation in composition of the court of wise elderly people; 2) administrative responsibility for marriage without state registration; and 3) requirement of necessity of state registration prior to religious form of

registration of a marriage. Table 5 illustrates that most of the cosponsors of these proposals are primarily women legislators. In fact the number of men legislators co-sponsoring these bills is limited to one percent. In comparison, in 103rd and 104th US Congresses, almost 23 percent of democratic men legislators and 12 percent of republican men legislators' cosponsored feminist bills (Swers, 2002:39).

Insert Table 5 about HERE

Kyrgyz women legislators tend to initiate and co-sponsor legislature related to women's right. However, not every female parliamentarian appear to be on the list of co-sponsors of a proposal related to women's rights. From the evaluation of other legislative proposals which contained at least one name of a woman legislator as a cosponsor, we demonstrate that women legislators cosponsored a wide range of issues which include procurement, election procedures, social welfare, housing, corruption, taxes, and education, as well as proposals of symbolic nature, such as changing the streets name. The complete list of bills that are not considered as traditional areas of women legislators focus, but were co-sponsored by women legislators is provided in the table 6.

Insert Table 6 about HERE

9. Conclusion

Women represent more than a majority of the electorate of Kyrgyzstan. Most of the non-governmental organizations operating in Kyrgyzstan are also headed by women¹⁵. However political

¹⁵ According to journalist sources women head 90% of NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, retrieved

representation of women especially in the legislative body was insignificant until the introduction of mandatory gender quota for the parties.

The affirmative action in promoting women in public service in Kyrgyzstan has played a significant role. Implementation of affirmative approach in advancing women's right in the form of quota has impacted the election of women at the ministry levels. The introduction of gender quota in the parliament become even more imperative¹⁶ as the country began its transition to parliamentary democracy from old presidential system. At the same time, the analysis of co-sponsorship practices of parliament members in Kyrgyzstan demonstrates that given the weakness of ideological affiliations of parties, the percentage of men cosponsoring feminist legislature is lower than the co-sponsorship rate for similar types of bills by men legislators in the US. The analysis of other bills (non-feminist bills) demonstrates that women parliamentarian still co-sponsor these bills, although in lower numbers.

This research focuses on bill co-sponsorships; however, a future research needs to analyze qualitatively the actual proceeding and hearings at the parliament to understand the dynamics of negotiations on each particular bill proposed by women legislators. Additional research is required to study the individual characteristics of the elected women parliamentarians. Among these characteristics the membership of women in the non-government organizations dealing with women issues emerges is the most important. As the existing research indicates, prior

at http://www.swaneehunt.com/articles/FA_LetWomenRule.htm

¹⁶ An example of a quota in the executive system employed in Kyrgyzstan is a requirement according to which every third deputy of the governor needs to be a woman. For more information please see the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men And Women (2008)

membership on organizations dealing with women issues may serve as an education/training for women joining the parliament. This may also determine the success rate of adopting bill proposals related to women issues.

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Table 1: Government workers employed at the municipal levels as of January, 2011 (%)

	Total		Number of municipal government workers		Number of employed at political jobs		Number of employed at administrative types of work	
	women	men	women	men	women	men	women	men
Kyrgyzstan	36.1	63.9	34.1	65.9	4.0	96.0	36.0	64.0
Barken Region	25.9	74.1	22.1	77.9	5.6	94.4	22.9	77.1
Jalal-abad	25.0	75.0	21.8	78.2	3.6	96.4	22.7	77.3
Issyk-kul region	45.7	54.3	46.3	53.7	1.6	98.4	49.5	50.5
Naryn Region	39.0	61.0	36.6	63.4	5.9	94.1	39.3	60.7
Osh Region	24.9	75.1	21.5	78.5	1.1	98.9	22.5	77.5
Talas region	39.0	61.0	38.6	61.4		100.0	41.6	58.4
Chui Region	55.4	44.6	56.6	43.4	7.4	92.6	60.3	39.7
Bishkek (city)	67.7	32.3	67.9	32.1		100.0	73.1	26.9
Osh (city)	42.9	57.1	38.5	61.5		100.0	41.7	58.3

Figure1: Chronology of an Electoral System Changes

*Chronology of an Electoral System**Period 1991-2000*

Since 1991 women participation in the decision making decreases significantly. The quota system that existed went away after 1991. As a result, only 4 women were elected to the 105-seat Parliament in 1995 (CEDAW, 1998 report: p. 16). The new economic environment and the election procedure required financial resources. Against this background, privatization that began in 1991 left out women from the distribution of livestock, land and other prosperities. Being more than 50 % of the population women owned only 37.9 percent of land (CEDAW,

1998: 16). Therefore, the growing economic inequality further disenfranchised women from the political process.

2000 Election

The second election took place in 2000. The bicameral parliament consisted of the Legislative Assembly with 60 seats and the People's Representative Assembly with 45 seats had in total seven women legislators.

2005 Election

In 2003 Kyrgyzstan implemented institutional changes which resulted in a new unicameral parliamentary system and a 75-seat Supreme Council, which replaces previous bicameral structure. As a result of 2005 election, 73 members of parliament were elected, with no women among the elected.

2007 Election

In 2007 a referendum was conducted according to which a constitutional reform and a new electoral code was adopted. As result of the reforms the parliament underwent an increase to 90 seats (up from 75), with the members elected based the pure proportional representation system. "To gain representation parties need to win a minimum of 5 per cent of votes nationwide and 0.5 per cent of votes in each of the seven regions" (Inter-parliamentary Union". *Three parties were elected to the 90 seats parliament, among them 23 women were elected, which represents over 25%.* According to the new system a party running for the election was required to have every fourth member in the party list as a woman¹⁷.

2010 Election

As a result of 2010 referendum a proportional representation system (party list) was introduced. It is a unicameral parliament with 120 seats. This new election system in particular highlighted that "No political party can be formed on religious or ethnic grounds, and members of the armed forces, police, and the judiciary are not allowed to join a political party. No party list can comprise more

¹⁷ Women Support Center in Kyrgyzstan: <http://wsc.kg/46>

than 70 per cent of candidates from one sex and every fourth candidate on the party list must be of the other sex (Ex. 1. male, 2. male, 3. male and 4. female; or 1. female, 2. female, 3. female and 4. male). In addition, each party list must comprise at least 15 per cent of candidates from other ethnic minorities” (Inter-parliamentary Union). At the same time the voters are expected to vote for the party list, and no single party can occupy more than 65 seats in the Parliament¹⁸.

Table 2: Number of Women Legislators in Four Parliaments in Kyrgyzstan (2000-2010)

	2000	2005	2007	2010
Total	98	73	90	120
Women legislators	7	0	23	28
Percent of women out of total members	7.14%	0.00%	25.56%	23.33%

Table 3: Percent of women in the executive body (Statistical Committee of Kyrgyzstan)

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Women	40.2	43.7	43.2	43.3	44.4	39.1	39.9
Men	59.8	56.3	56.8	56.7	55.6	60.9	60.1

Table 4: Women employed at various sectors of government in 2003 and 2005 (adopted from CEDAW 2005 Report)

	2003		2005	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Total employed at the public administration	37.8	62.8	43.7	56.3
State administration of a general nature	36.3	63.7	43.4	56.6
of which:				
Legislative work	6.7	93.3		100

¹⁸ Quota project: <http://www.quotaproject.org/uid/search.cfm>

Executive work	36.4	63.6	43.5	56.5
including:				
At the oblast, (district municipal),and rural administrative bodies	37.1	62.9	40	60
Tax-related work	36.1	63.9	37.4	62.6
Customs work	16.2	83.8	18	82
Socio-economic administration	37.9	62.1	49.6	50.4
International work	47	53	45.1	54.9
Judicial bodies and tribunals	42.8	57.2	41.3	58.7
Social insurance and security	50.3	49.7	53.1	46.9

Table 5: Co-sponsorship of selected bills which are most related to the issues of social welfare and women's right from 2008 to 2011

	Men Legislator	Women Legislator
2008		
On provision of free meal at schools the secondary schools	1	4
On administrative responsibility	0	1
On gender representation at the court of auditors	2	6
2009		
On the court of wise elderly people (gender representation)	0	1
On taxes (tax relief for secondary and elementary schools)	5	2
On banning of import of fruits, berries, nuts and other food products containing hazardous chemicals, toxic and carcinogenic substances that have harmful effects on human health and life	2	2
On introduction of amendments to the Code of Administrative Liability	1	7
2011		
On elderly people	3	4

On volunteer activity	0	1
On education (sport)	0	1
On taxes (sport activity)	0	1
On local self-governing body	8	4
On electricity	2	2
On administrative responsibility (carrying out a religious marriage ceremony without the marriage state registration is punishable by an administrative fine of ten estimates)	1	8
On amendments to the law of the KR “on freedom of conscience and religious organizations”	1	8

Table 6: Co-sponsorship of selected bills which are of non-traditional focus for women but were co-sponsored by at least one women legislator

	Men Legislator	Women Legislator
2008		
On corruption	0	1
On the Central Commission for Elections and Referenda	1	1
On education (language issue)	3	2
On political parties	3	1
On housing code	1	1
2009		
Tax	7	1
Changing the name of the district	3	2
Changing the name of the district	2	3
Changing the name of the district	2	3
On amendments and additions to the Criminal Code Procedure	0	1
On amendments and additions to the Land Code	2	1
On public chamber	6	1

On procurement	3	1
2011		
On people's initiative	3	2
On election at the local self-governing bodies	8	4
On Kurultai ¹⁹	0	1

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¹⁹ Kurultai is an official terminus to define a Congress or Assembly, or Convention can be initiated by people as well as by the government.