

IMPACT OF THE FEMINIZATION OF POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ON THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: EVIDENCE FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract

This paper investigates the relationship between female participation in political management and the quality of the regulatory framework in European Union countries. Our research is designed as a comparative impact study in which we simultaneously quantify the contribution of female political commitment expressed by the share of women in national parliaments, on four referential indicators, namely the quality of the rule of law, the quality of legislative regulations, the control of corruption and the quality of the business environment/ economic freedom. In this sense, we operated a quantitative analysis of correlation and determination, based on the data provided by the World Bank and the Heritage Foundation, with the aim of evaluating the explanatory contribution of the feminization of political management on the quality of the listed public environment components, in different areas within the European Union. Our findings highlight the transformative potential of increased female representation in shaping a more inclusive and effective legislative framework within EU.

Keywords: share of women in parliament, quality of the rule of law, quality of legislation, corruption control, economic freedom

1. INTRODUCTION

The global social emancipation in recent decades has brought gender equality at the forefront of public and academic debate. In this context, the most representative criterion for quantifying the advancement of women in the public sphere is the weight of women in national parliaments and other public administration institutions. The dynamics of female participation in political management has, however, followed a difficult path. From the world's first female member of the Finnish legislature in 1907 (Paxton, Hughes & Barnes, 2020, p. 79) until the end of the 20th century, the share of women in national parliaments remained relatively low, reaching only 13% (Clayton, 2021, p. 235). However, in the first two decades of the 21st century, the female share in the world's legislatures almost doubled, reaching 25.8% in 2021 (IPU Parline). This upward trend can be largely attributed to the introduction of gender quotas in electoral lists (Bagues & Campa, 2021; Baltrunaite et al., 2014, p. 62). The system of gender quotas was widely adopted after 1990 throughout the world, with 137 countries currently practicing electoral gender quotas through constitutional provisions, electoral laws, or party regulations (International IDEA, 2023; Hughes et al., 2019, p. 219).

Over the past few decades, the issue of women's political participation in Europe has gained significant attention, leading to the adoption of gender quotas on electoral lists as a solution (Lépinard & Rubio-Marín, 2018, p. 8). While the origins of political correctness can be traced back to the United States in the 1960s, Europe has emerged as a key driver in the adoption of gender quotas during the 1990s and 2000s. This approach has gradually extended beyond elections to encompass administrative bodies and corporate boards. Because of the introduction of gender quotas, in the last three decades we are witnessing a "revolution" of the increasingly active participation of women in contemporary public life. This has led to an increase in the representation of women in political bodies, a phenomenon commonly referred to as the feminization of the political elite in the literature. According to Lovenduski (2002), the concept of feminization of politics refers to "the way in which the political representation of women is understood, debated and practiced, paying particular attention to the obstacles to the promotion of women and the masculine culture of parliamentary and party politics" (p. 207).

IMPACT OF THE FEMINIZATION OF POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ON THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: EVIDENCE FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

Thus, despite the professional qualifications and the native capabilities of women to relate and manage conflict situations (Păceșilă, 2015, p. 15), female political participation is conditioned by the different national legislative contexts, which either facilitate or restrict women's participation in the process decisional and legislative (Barnes, 2016, p. 24).

Our analysis aims to investigate the link between the share of women in national parliaments and the quality of legislative regulations in EU countries. This topic is significant in the current discourse on women's emancipation and political empowerment (Paxton, Hughes & Barnes, 2020). It also relates to academic controversies regarding the political and economic impact of gender quotas and the increase presence of women in legislative bodies (Cella & Manzoni, 2023; Dahlum, Knutsen & Mechkova, 2022; Hessami & Lopes da Fonseca, 2020).

In the current parliamentary electoral landscape of the European Union (EU), two out of the three globally recognized types of gender quotas are practiced. These include the legislated candidate quota system (in France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Belgium, Ireland, Greece, Slovenia, Croatia, Poland), respectively the voluntary party quota system (in Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Cyprus). On the other hand, countries such as Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic, and Bulgaria do not operate a gender quota system. It is worth noting that the third type, known as the system of reserved seats, it is not utilized in any European country (International IDEA; IPU Parline; Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2009). Without a mandatory norm of parliamentary representation established at the EU level, each of the 19 member countries that have already adopted one of the two gender quota systems aims to ensure a critical female minority of at least 30 - 40% or even a gender parity of 50%-50% in their legislative bodies (Dahlerup, 2005, p. 150). The responsibility for implementing these specific regulations lies with the decision-makers who control the recruitment process of electoral list (Wängnerud, 2009, p. 51; Xydias, 2007; p. 53). While the EU as a whole has made progress towards this objective, with the share of women in national legislatures increasing from an average of 26.5% to 30.7% between 2014 and 2021, the territorial distribution of women representation remains highly varied within the Union. Only 13 member states register a share of female parliamentarians over 30% and just 3 states have a share between 40 and 50%. These figures indicate that the goal of women's political empowerment is still an unfulfilled aspiration. Furthermore, the quality of political-legislative products shows significant disparities. Only 15 states have values above the European average in terms of quality of the rule of law and the quality of legislation. Similarly, only 12 states exceed the community average in terms of corruption control, and only 14 states surpass the Union average in terms of the quality of the business environment/ economic freedom. This uneven distribution highlights the need for further improvement and consistency across the EU (EIGE, 2023).

In addition, female political participation is recognized as a premise for reducing corruption and increasing the degree of fairness and social justice (Merkle, 2022; Pereira & Fernandez-Vazquez, 2022). On the other hand, the share of women in legislative forums catalyzes the emergence of broad changes in the behavior of both male and female legislators, reshaping the essence and meaning of political leadership (Clayton, 2021; Rosenthal, 1998). Although there is a wide range of evaluations in the literature that analyze the relationship between female participation in parliaments and the reliability of the legislative framework, there is a lack of studies that quantitatively measure this relationship. Consequently, many questions regarding the functional-legislative impact of women's representation in legislative forums remain inadequately explained.

Our study addresses this gap by conducting a multi-faceted analysis to quantify the contribution of female legislators to the quality of the rule of law, legislation, corruption control and business environment in the EU member states. By utilizing a matrix of quantitative analysis, including correlation and determination coefficients, our study seeks to evaluate the impact of the feminization of legislative bodies on the variables mentioned above. Our findings indicate a differentiated impact on these four benchmarks, accompanied by significant disparities among countries. These results demonstrate the still underutilized potential of gender political emancipation within the EU.

The structure of our study is designed on dedicated panels, including the review of the theoretical and epistemological framework, the research methodology with the presentation of the proposed quantitative models proposed for testing the working hypotheses, followed by the presentation of the results obtained, and finally, a comprehensive conclusions section.

2. SCHOLAR REVIEW ON FEMALE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

2.1. *Political dimension of gender emancipation: from political correctness to political engagement*

The epistemic body of gender political literature includes four main paradigms that try to explain the underrepresentation of women in political institutions. The first theory claims that women are less willing than men to engage in competitive situations (Niederle & Vesterlund, 2007). This can be attributed to societal norms, customs, and traditional gender roles that discourage women from competing with men (Fox & Lawless, 2004). However, it should be noted that this assertion could only be valid for some less economically developed and less socially emancipated Eastern states within the EU (Rueschemeyer & Wolchik, 2009), while Western nations with less adherence to traditionalist customs and norms may not exhibit the same pattern. Other scholars, such as Eagly and Carli (2007), have also emphasized the role of societal expectations and stereotypes in shaping women's reluctance to engage in competitive domains. However, the second explanatory paradigm admits the existence even in Western Europe of the gender bias of voters as a reason for the political underrepresentation of women (Frechette, Maniquet & Morelli, 2008); in context, Le Barbanchon and Sauvagnat (2019) invoke anti-feminist voter attitudes to explain the gender gap in French parliamentary elections, and Baskaran and Hessami (2019) claim that a series of similar biases influenced local elections in Germany. In their study, Liu and Banaszak (2016) investigate the impact of female ministers on women's political engagement. They argue that female ministers, with their high visibility and policy influence, serve as role models for women and can inspire them to participate in politics. The third theory claims the existence of gender prejudices among party leaders and their impact on the biased formation of electoral lists, even in today's liberal countries. Research by Casas-Arce and Saiz (2015) and Esteve-Volart and Bagues (2012) highlight these practices, even in countries considered liberal but still influenced by conservative characteristics. By acknowledging and addressing these biases, efforts can be made to promote greater gender equality in political representation. The fourth theoretical paradigm highlights the influence of institutional regulations as either barriers or catalysts in shaping the political representation of women. Reynolds (1999) emphasizes that electoral systems in Western European states have a more significant impact on women's political representation compared to other regions (p. 559). Similarly, Profeta and Woodhouse (2022) and Baltrunaite et al. (2014) argue that proportional electoral systems tend to favor female representation in legislative bodies. Their research demonstrates that Italy's transition from a majoritarian to a proportional electoral system in 2005, coupled with the implementation of gender quotas in 2013, resulted in an approximate 5% increase in women's share in parliament and an 18% increase in their representation in local councils. Importantly, these changes were achieved without compromising the overall qualifications of politicians or impacting public expenses.

The application of gender quotas, as the main institutional tool for balancing female political representation, has generated both positive and negative effects. While these gender quotas have contributed to increased female influence in legislative decision-making, they have also been associated with limited political changes or even reverse gender inequalities (Clayton, 2021). Referring to the impact of gender quotas adopted in Spain, Bagues and Campa (2021) show that the introduction of 40% gender quotas for local councils starting in 2007 resulted in an increase of the share of women in councils. However, this increase did not correspond to an improvement in the quality of politicians, as measured by their level of education. Furthermore, the gender quotas did not lead to women reaching positions of power such as party leaders or mayors, nor did they bring about any improvement in the structure of public finances. Analyzing the same issue, Casas-Arce and Saiz (2015) conclude that gender quotas did not significantly improve the electoral results of parties, suggesting the existence of other internal party structural problems. In a related study, Esteve-Volart and Bagues (2012) introduced the concept of strategic nominations of women on electoral lists, arguing that such nominations can attract more votes. Baltrunaite et al. (2014) highlight that the gender quotas introduced in Italy for local elections in 1993 and then abolished in 1995, brought to a certain increase in terms of the quality of politicians. The quotas decreased the share of men with little education and increased the share of women in councils, the positive effect persisting in the long term. An identical conclusion was reached by Besley et al. (2017) in Sweden, noting that the use of voluntary gender quotas imposed by parties on their own lists led to a reduction in the mediocrity of male politicians. However, Lassébie (2020) delivers relatively different findings demonstrating that in France,

IMPACT OF THE FEMINIZATION OF POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ON THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: EVIDENCE FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

gender quotas in local elections have little effect on the composition of local councils and failed to impose women mayors or political leaders. Additionally, these quotas had little effect in terms of socio-economic background, age and political experience of the council members.

At the same time, some authors revealed that the equalization of gender treatment leaves perceptible consequences in political and electoral terms not only in economic terms. Thus, Becker (1971) discovered in the 1960s - 1970s the negative economic effects of discrimination, including gender discrimination, demonstrating that discrimination on the market reduces the real incomes of those who discriminate to the same extent as those who are discriminated against, leading to the contraction of economies. Also, Dahlum, Knutsen and Mechkova (2022) argue that political empowerment of women stimulates technological change and economic growth by increasing ideas introduced into the economic environment and improving the selection of these ideas. Hicks, Hicks and Maldonado (2016) show that as parliaments in the EU rich donor countries become more feminized, the volume of foreign aid destined to developing countries is increasing, especially for education and healthcare. Concerning the dimension of sustainable and ecological development, the effects of women's political empowerment are interpreted in correlation with the governance effectiveness. Lv, Jiang and Xu (2022) show that the relationship between the share of women in national parliaments and the reduction of CO₂ pollution is significant in states with good governance quality, like most EU states, but it is not as strong in the case of deficient governance, indicating that pollution levels depend especially on the quality of governance rather than the gender representation in legislative or executive positions. For the eastern EU countries, unlike the western ones, it is noticeable that there is a disconnect between the economic and political empowerment of women. Nassar, Nastacă and Nastaseanu (2021) emphasize that, although from the perspective of the economic empowerment of women, Romania is among the EU states with the smallest gender gaps, there is still a low share of female representation in parliament and in government structures, as well as a horizontal and vertical segregation on the labor market, respectively a low share of women in leadership positions in the public and private environment (p. 66).

The matter of women's political participation ultimately depends on the moment of its initiation, as demonstrated by Dahlerup and Freidenvall (2009). Once the objective of enhancing women's political representation is set in motion, it becomes a matter of international reputation that significantly influences political elites. This influence prompts them to pursue structural and even constitutional reforms. The concern for supporting vulnerable or disadvantaged groups that emerged in the United States in the 1960s quickly generated the concept of political correctness, which was ideologically linked to the support of cultural Marxism. Women were identified as one of the target groups of this ideology, and, with the emergence of the New Left American from the 1970a, they were at the forefront of the political discourse on gender emancipation that spread throughout the world in the following decades (Scalcău, 2020, p. 29). Against this background, specialized studies have primarily focused on the obstacles that stand in the way of women's political representation and the consequences of female political empowerment (Hessami & Lopes da Fonseca, 2020).

The emergence of the feminization of political elites has brought to the forefront of gender research the concepts of descriptive representation and substantive representation of women in legislative forums. Wängnerud (2009) shows that the conceptual delimitation between the descriptive representation and the substantive representation of women in parliaments is given by the difference between simple numerical presence and feminist awareness (p. 59). In the case of substantive representation, it is about the impact of women's political participation on the legislative promotion of women's interests (p. 65). Kim (2022) translates these concepts from political analysis to the sphere of women's representation in the legislature: descriptive representation is purely nominal, while substantive representation is what ensures the economic emancipation of women by creating economic opportunities in the business environment (p. 583). When discussing the issue of representativeness and political legitimacy, Diaz (2005) examines the effects of female participation in legislative bodies, the number of women needed for a significant impact, and how representative women are elected to parliaments. The author shows that in order to start institutional reforms, a minimal preexisting socio-economic development context is needed, explaining that contrary to the critical mass theory, smaller groups can have an influence in the legislative process. Thus, the fundamental question is whether a descriptively representative parliament, i.e. where parliamentarians share certain characteristics with the electorate, is also a substantially representative parliament, i.e. where parliamentarians mirror the views of the electorate. In this

epistemic allegory, the author places the debate regarding the representativeness of women in national parliaments. Particularizing Diaz's analysis in the case of Germany, Xydias (2007) finds that the increase in the descriptive/numerical presence of women in the Bundestag as a result of gender quotas also leads to the increase of substantial female representation by promoting women's interests in society (p. 52). However, the EU ex-communist countries diverge from this trend. Rueschemeyer and Wolchik (2009) show that after a relatively high share of women participation in political life in communism era, driven by ideological-propagandistic reasoning, there was a decline of female participation in the immediate post-communist years. Although the situation has improved over time, the main factor controlling women's political recruitment is party leadership. Consequently, in Eastern countries the representation of women in national parliaments is predominantly descriptive and less substantive (p. 241). Within the same evaluation framework, Viterna, Fallon and Beckfield (2008) emphasized that democracy plays an even more important role in increasing the political representation of women, particularly in economically disadvantages nations (p. 472). Thus, the democratization and westernization processes in Eastern EU countries become essential element in increasing the weight of women in the legislative bodies (p. 473).

The importance of female political commitment derives primarily from its ability to reshape the political management system. Rosenthal (1998) suggests that women are capable of leadership in an innovative way that redefines the meanings of political leadership. The author contradicts the assumption of transactionalism as an inherent way of practicing legislative leadership that depends on the gender context, iterating that "women committee chairs come with their own experiences, motivations, tactics and visions of leadership different from the male ones, which make them more responsible and more slightly inclined only to satisfy private interests" (p. 57). Wolbrecht and Campbell (2007), on the other hand, consider the importance of the weight of women in parliaments as an inspirational model for women in society, as greater number of female legislators tend to encourage women's inclination towards civic and political participation (p. 921). Cella and Manzoni (2023) argue that once elected women prove to be more competent and above all more correct than men, which determines their re-election with a higher probability than men. In this context, Paxton and Kunovich (2003) emphasize that gender ideology is not only a factor influencing the share of women in national parliaments, but also a predictive factor for the differences in political representation of women (p. 87). In terms of the relevance of the determining factors of women's political empowerment, Paxton, Hughes and Barnes (2020) suggest that, in addition to internal cultural, structural and political factors, women's political participation is also influenced by the international context that puts pressure on countries' internal regulations along the lines of facilitating women's access to legislative forums (p. 216). Against this background, Reynolds (1999) shows that democracy itself is not necessarily a mandatory premise for ensuring a robust presence of women in political life, but rather the sociocultural and sociopolitical factors of acceptance of women as leaders, with the specification that the variables sociocultural factors are more important for the election of women in the legislature, while for access to ministerial positions the political orientation of governments and the success of women in the legislature matter mainly (p. 572). At the same time, the author identified three critical levels of transparency for the evaluation of women's political representation: the first level is the share of women in parliament, the second level is the access of women to key ministerial positions (such as ministers of defense, interior, finance or foreign affairs), and the third level is that of women reaching top decision-making positions (such as president or prime minister) (p. 558).

Evaluating the impact of the managerial and political empowerment of women, Hessami and Lopes da Fonseca (2020) highlight significant gaps between the social preferences and priorities of women and men in decision-making positions, gaps that contribute to gender gaps in political preferences and priorities, as Ranehill and Weber (2022) highlighted. A specific feature of female politicians in Western Europe is the social appetite for equalizing earnings compared to male politicians who are more inclined to maximize efficiency (Andreoni & Vesterlund, 2001), a fact that is reflected in the political plan by the increase of the political left with the increase of the weight of women in legislative bodies (Edlund, Haider & Pande, 2005). The inclusion of women in national parliaments across EU countries has been postulated to bring about a diversification and progressive shift in the EU legislative agenda. This trend can be attributed to the influential role women play in decision-making positions, leading to an increase in the adoption of egalitarian redistributive policies and environmental policies with the lowest possible degree of risk (Ranehill & Weber, 2022). Also, there is increased attention given to addressing issues affecting women and vulnerable groups, such as women's rights and social protection (O'Brien &

Piscopo, 2018), increasing logistical supplies and public spending for childcare, reducing infant mortality, or increasing the vaccination rate (Rustagi & Akter, 2022; Baskaran & Hessami, 2019). Although these priorities of female political management visibly improve the public perception of women as social leaders, O'Brien and Piscopo (2018) highlight that the presence of women in legislatures meets some resistance even in European countries. The resistance comes mainly from the internal parliamentary culture and predominantly male leadership structures. In this context, gender quotas, although they represent a solution for accelerating social and political changes, can also cause negative reactions (p. 68). However, the effects of diversifying the political-decisional gender agenda are different between the developed world and the developing world. Hessami and Lopes da Fonseca (2020) reveal that the impact of increasing the share of women in national legislatures is more visible in developing countries, being found in a better quality of public products delivered, while in developed countries the impact is less quantifiable based on the general good situation in these countries. If in EU states the impact of feminized legislative management is more visible in the field of redistributive policies and children's health (Ranehill & Weber, 2022; Rustagi & Akter, 2022), for emerging and developing states no conclusive evidence has emerged that increasing the share of women in the legislature would lead to increased economic performance (Baskaran et al., 2023), but it generated a decrease in the phenomenon of corruption (Merkle, 2022; Pereira & Fernandez-Vazquez, 2022). In the EU this phenomenon is visible mainly in the eastern states, but Bjarnegård, Yoon & Zetterberg (2018) confirm that to be effective, the gender quota mechanism can reduce corruption only if "candidates for the quota are recruited from new networks, otherwise it is possible that quotas reproduce corruption if quota candidates are recruited from existing networks and expected to protect an already corrupt party line" (p. 106).

The scholar concerns of the last years related to the political representation of women aimed at finding some methods of measuring female political participation. Thus, Sundström et al. (2017) developed a measurement index of women's political empowerment that includes information on women's civil liberties, civil society participation, and political participation globally (p. 321), but without determining the impact of women's political participation on the quality of the legislative framework. The World Economic Forum (2022) designed the Global Gender Gap Index that evaluates gender parity through four variables: educational attainment, health and survival, economic participation and opportunity, and political empowerment. According to the values of this index, compared to the global average of gender parity (68.1%), Europe (76.6%) along with North America (76.9%) was at the top of the world hierarchy of gender parity, but this indicator also does not provide details on the relationship between the share of women and the results of legislation. The quality of legislative outcomes is the most representative parameter for evaluating the impact of the female share in the legislature. Thomas (1994) shows that a significant difference in legislative results appears only when the share of women exceeds a certain threshold in parliament, a difference derived from "differences between women's and men's backgrounds before entering public office, as well as from differences in their agendas, priorities, working styles, and leadership" (p. 68). In a contrary way, but insufficiently argued, Reingold (1996) states that there are no significant differences between the behavior of female legislators and that of male legislators in terms of the application of institutional norms within the political-legislative process, a thesis that we appreciate requires an investigation additional evaluation.

Considering the aforementioned (sometimes contradictory) observations, our study aims to further on investigate the relationships between the share of women in national parliaments within the EU and the quality of regulations, taking into account four main factors that influence the decision-making process: the quality of the rule of law (expressed by the Rule of Law Index), the quality of legislation (defined by the Regulatory Quality Index), the degree of corruption control (parameters provided by the World Bank), and the quality of the business environment (Economic Freedom Index delivered by the Heritage Foundation).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data and variables

To investigate the relationship between women's political empowerment and the quality of the regulatory framework in the EU, we use a set of established indicators in the specialized literature (International IDEA; IPU Parline; Dahlum, Knutsen & Mechkova, 2022; Dahlerup & Freidenvall, 2009; Dahlerup, 2005), expressed by the corresponding proxy variables. Thus, the degree of political empowerment of women is expressed by

IMPACT OF THE FEMINIZATION OF POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ON THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: EVIDENCE FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

the weight of women in national parliaments - a parameter provided by the World Bank and IPU Parline, and the quality of the regulatory framework is evaluated by means of four quantitative indicators: the quality of the rule of law expressed by the Rule of Law Index, the quality of legislation defined by the Regulatory Quality Index, the state of corruption by the degree of corruption control (parameters provided by the World Bank) and the quality of the business environment highlighted by the Economic Freedom Index (delivered by the Heritage Foundation) (Table 1). To express the mentioned variables, we use the available data for the period 2014-2021, for the reference sample of the 28 EU member states in the specified period.

TABLE 1 - CORRELATION VARIABLES BETWEEN THE SHARE OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT AND THE QUALITY OF REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Variables used	Unit of measurement	Data source
Share of women in parliament (WP)	percent (%)	The World Bank; IPU Parline
Rule of Law Index (RL)	points (-2.5 – 2.5)	The World Bank
Regulatory Quality Index (RQ)	points (-2.5 – 2.5)	The World Bank
Control of Corruption (CC)	points (-2.5 – 2.5)	The World Bank
Economic Freedom Index (EF)	points (0 – 100)	The Heritage Foundation

Source: Authors' own representation, 2023

In the period 2014-2021, the share of women in national legislatures registered an upward trend throughout the EU: compared to the average of the period of 28.36% (Table 2), female parliamentary representation increased from 26.5% (in 2014) to 30.7% (in 2021), but with a very inhomogeneous spatial geography distributed among the states of the Union. Thus, by referring to the goals of the egalitarian gender policy aimed at parity of gender political representation or at least a decent share of women of 30-40% in parliaments (Dahlerup, 2005), we notice that this share of "minimum decency" overlaps with European average of 28.3%. Depending on the level of these value thresholds, three categories of states with very different values of the share of women in the legislature can be distinguished. Only in 13 European countries do women occupy over 30% of parliamentary seats (of which only 3 countries with over 40%: Sweden, Finland, Spain), in 11 countries the female share is between 20-30%, and 4 countries (Romania, Cyprus, Malta, Hungary) have a female parliamentary participation below 20%; nowhere in the EU has the desired 50%-50% gender parity been achieved to date. The highest average share of women in the EU in the reference interval was found in Sweden (45.34%) with a maximum of 47.28% in 2019, and the most precarious female representation is held by Hungary with an average of 11.32%, but with a minimum absolute female parliamentary participation of 10.05% recorded in 2014 and 2017 (Table 2).

TABLE 2 - STATISTICAL TABLE OF THE VARIABLES USED IN THE CORRELATION BETWEEN THE SHARE OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT AND THE QUALITY OF REGULATORY FRAMEWORK IN THE EU-28 (2014-2021)

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum	Obs. (years)
Share of women in parliament (WP)	28.36	1.74	26.52 [10.05]	30.74 [47.28]	8
Rule of Law Index (RL)	1.11	0.03	1.07 [-0.14]	1.19 [2.12]	8
Regulatory Quality Index (RQ)	1.16	0.02	1.13 [0.14]	1.21 [2.05]	8
Control of Corruption (CC)	0.99	0.01	0.98 [-0.32]	1.01 [2.37]	8
Economic Freedom Index (EF)	70.44	1.30	68.96 [53.00]	72.68 [82.00]	8

Source: Authors' proceedings based on The World Bank and Heritage Foundation, 2014-2021
[...] - the values in brackets represent absolute minimum values and absolute maximum values

Among the variables of the quality of the regulatory framework, corruption control and the quality of the rule of law have the most heterogeneous distribution among the EU states, despite the close variation around the average for the EU as a whole. Although at the level of the Union the control of corruption seems rigorously applied (average value of 0.99 on a scale between -2.5 – 2.5 points) and with a reduced union amplitude between 0.98 and 1.01 points, the average intra-community gap between states is between 2.24 points (Denmark - the best control of corruption) and -0.24 points (Bulgaria - the weakest control of corruption), and only 12 states are above the EU average; the absolute gap, however, is between an absolute maximum of corruption control of 2.37 points exhibited in Denmark in 2021 and the absolute minimum record of weak corruption control of -0.32 points recorded in Bulgaria in 2015 (Table 2).

The quality of the rule of law circumscribes a similar developer. Compared to the satisfactory European average of 1.11 points (above which only 15 states are located), the best rule of law is found in Finland (2.07 points)

IMPACT OF THE FEMINIZATION OF POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ON THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: EVIDENCE FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

and Denmark (1.92 points), and the weakest in Greece (0.23) and Bulgaria (-0.09 points), the latter being the only country in the EU with a negative value of the quality of the rule of law in the analyzed interval; the absolute amplitude, however, is between the record of the highest quality of the rule of law recorded in Finland in 2014 (2.12 points) and the most unfeasible rule of law recorded in Bulgaria in 2015 (-0.14 points).

And the quality of the business environment hypothesized by the indicator of economic freedom has a similar projection, but somewhat more moderate. Compared to the European average (70.44 points), the most favorable business environment appears in Ireland (79.5 points), and the most unfavorable in Greece (57.5 points), with an absolute gap between the laxest economic freedom recorded in Ireland in 2021 (82 points) and the most restrictive business environment configured in Greece in 2015 (53 points).

3.2. Empirical analysis

In our research we test two working hypotheses: a) the null hypothesis according to which there is no relationship between the share of women in legislative bodies and the quality of the regulatory framework; b) the hypothesis according to which the political-legislative empowerment of women impacts differently on the states on the quality of the four indicators of the regulatory framework.

In order to quantify the impact of the weight of women in parliament on the quality of normative regulations in the EU, we use an empirical analysis matrix that includes three successive stages of work, namely: identifying the correlations between the indicators used, establishing and ranking the contribution of the weight of women legislators in explaining the quality of each indicator of the regulatory framework and finally the identification of the elements of the regulatory framework eligible for quality improvement in case of increasing the parliamentary weight of women.

We evaluate the relationship between the variables taken into account by means of Pearson correlation coefficients (R) and determination coefficients (R²) calculated with the help of EViews 10 Standard Edition software. We associate the share of women in the legislature with each of the four indicators of the regulatory framework and for each of the four configured pairs we calculate the coefficients R and R² to establish the intensity of their connection, respectively the explanatory contribution of the share of women legislators on each of the variables. We operate this algorithm at the EU level and then at the level of each member state to identify differences in input in the case of each indicator in relation to the share of women in national parliament.

The interpretation of the correlations found between the variables, according to Davis' grid (1971), reveals that at the EU level, the quality of legislation and the quality of the rule of law are substantially related to the weight of women in parliament (according to the value of 0.651 and 0.632 respectively of the Pearson coefficient). Likewise, the quality of legislation and the quality of the rule of law are very strongly interdependent (R=0.861), which validates their dependence on the performance of women politicians, but at the same time their role as essential determinants of stimulating the political-legislative arrangement of women.

Corruption control has a relatively weak positive relationship with the share of female legislators (R=0.164), while economic freedom/the quality of the business environment assumes a similarly weak but negative relationship (R=-0.152) in relation to the legislative participation of women (Table 3), a phenomenon that also occurs in the case of the majority of member states and which, combined with the fact that the two terms (corruption control and the quality of the business environment) maintain a very strong correlation with each other (R=-0.921) reveals both the important role of women legislators in the design of fair and sustainable societies, as well as the other side of the coin, i.e. transparent societies with feasible socioeconomic environments ensure a better political promotion of women.

TABLE 3 - PEARSON CORRELATION (R) BETWEEN THE SHARE OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT AND THE QUALITY OF REGULATORY FRAMEWORK IN THE EU-28 (2014-2021)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Share of women in parliament (WP)	1				
Rule of Law Index (RL)	.632	1			
Regulatory Quality Index (RQ)	.651	.861	1		
Control of Corruption (CC)	.164	.589	.659	1	
Economic Freedom Index (EF)	-.152	-.495	-.588	-.921	1

Source: Authors' proceedings based on The World Bank and Heritage Foundation, 2014-2021

IMPACT OF THE FEMINIZATION OF POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ON THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: EVIDENCE FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

Therefore, the null hypothesis (which disproves the existence of any relationship between the political-legislative empowerment of women and the quality of the regulatory framework) is inoperable, in the context in which we proceed to identify the correlations and the impact between the share of women in parliament and the variables of the regulatory framework at the level of each member state of the EU. The spatial distribution of these correlations by state suggests a different picture of the relationships between female participation in the legislative process and the quality of the regulations, as well as their consequences, which we analyze and interpret further.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

To quantify and interpret the relationships between the share of women in parliament and the quality of normative regulations, we use the values of the correlation coefficients (R) and the coefficients of determination (R²) shown in Table 4.

TABLE 4 - THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE SHARE OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT AND THE QUALITY OF REGULATORY FRAMEWORK IN THE EU EXPRESSED BY PEARSON CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS (R) AND DETERMINATION COEFFICIENTS (R²) (2014-2021)

States	Women in Parliament & Rule of Law Index		Women in Parliament & Regulatory Quality Index		Women in Parliament & Control of Corruption		Women in Parliament & Economic Freedom	
	R	R ²	R	R ²	R	R ²	R	R ²
Belgium	-.562**	.316**	-.679**	.461**	-.645**	.417**	.705**	.497**
Bulgaria	.430**	.185**	.631**	.398**	.471**	.221**	-.683*	.467*
Czechia	-.114	.013	-.360*	.129*	-.140	.019	.080	.006
Denmark	.321**	.103**	.222*	.049*	.318*	.101*	-.098*	.009*
Germany	.571**	.326**	.637**	.406**	.632**	.400**	-.617*	.381*
Estonia	.648**	.420**	.715**	.511**	.742**	.551**	-.749**	.561**
Ireland	.545**	.297**	.355**	.126**	.427**	.182**	-.373**	.139**
Greece	.522**	.273**	.752**	.566**	.449**	.202**	-.721**	.519**
Spain	-.097*	.009*	-.263**	.069**	-.496**	.246**	.526**	.277**
France	.321**	.103**	.546**	.298**	.224**	.050**	-.312**	.097**
Croatia	.586*	.343*	.443*	.196*	.459*	.210*	-.540*	.291*
Italy	.836***	.699***	.869***	.756***	.557	.310	-.875***	.765***
Cyprus	.870***	.758***	.239	.057	.899***	.808***	-.865***	.749***
Latvia	-.823**	.678**	-.845***	.715***	-.874***	.764***	.934***	.873***
Lithuania	.296*	.087*	.362*	.131*	.592*	.351*	-.437*	.191*
Luxembourg	-.404**	.163**	-.531**	.282**	-.172**	.029**	.428**	.183**
Hungary	.320*	.102*	.224*	.050*	.025*	.006*	-.264*	.070*
Malta	.500***	.250***	.599***	.358***	.764***	.584**	-.847***	.718***
Netherlands	-.153*	.023*	.291*	.085*	-.202*	.040*	.234*	.054*
Austria	.369**	.136**	.367**	.135**	.414**	.171**	-.411**	.169**
Poland	.302**	.091**	-.005*	.002*	.247**	.061**	-.271*	.073*
Portugal	.154**	.023**	.406**	.165**	.371**	.137**	-.313*	.098*
Romania	.930***	.865***	.888***	.789***	.806**	.649**	-.940***	.884***
Slovenia	.344***	.118***	.738***	.544***	.903***	.816***	-.913***	.835***
Slovakia	.321**	.103**	.405**	.164**	.336**	.113**	-.273**	.074**
Finland	-.315*	.099*	-.582*	.339*	-.528*	.278*	.583*	.340*
Sweden	.296*	.088*	.279**	.078**	.257**	.066**	-.338*	.114*
UK	.135*	.018*	.097*	.009*	.082	.006	-.122	.015
UE-28	.632**	.399**	.651**	.424**	.164**	.027**	-.152**	.023**

Source: Authors' proceedings based on The World Bank and Heritage Foundation, 2014-2021

Note: ***, **, * represent the significance level of 1%, 5% and 10%, respectively

To illustrate the extent to which women's political-legislative empowerment explains the quality of normative regulations, we evaluate the values of the coefficients of determination (R²) according to the value ranges

IMPACT OF THE FEMINIZATION OF POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ON THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: EVIDENCE FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

established by Chin (1998). The analysis of the values of these coefficients shows a functional dichotomy between the European level and the national level from the perspective of the impact of the weight of women in the legislature on the quality of regulations. Our evidence shows that on the EU as a whole the female share in parliaments has a moderate explanatory contribution to the quality of legislation (42.4%), but at the level of 4 countries (Latvia, Romania, Italy and Cyprus) the impact in question has a substantial/strong intensity, in while in 16 other states the contribution of the feminization of parliaments exerts a weak and very weak impact on the quality of legislation (Figure 1).

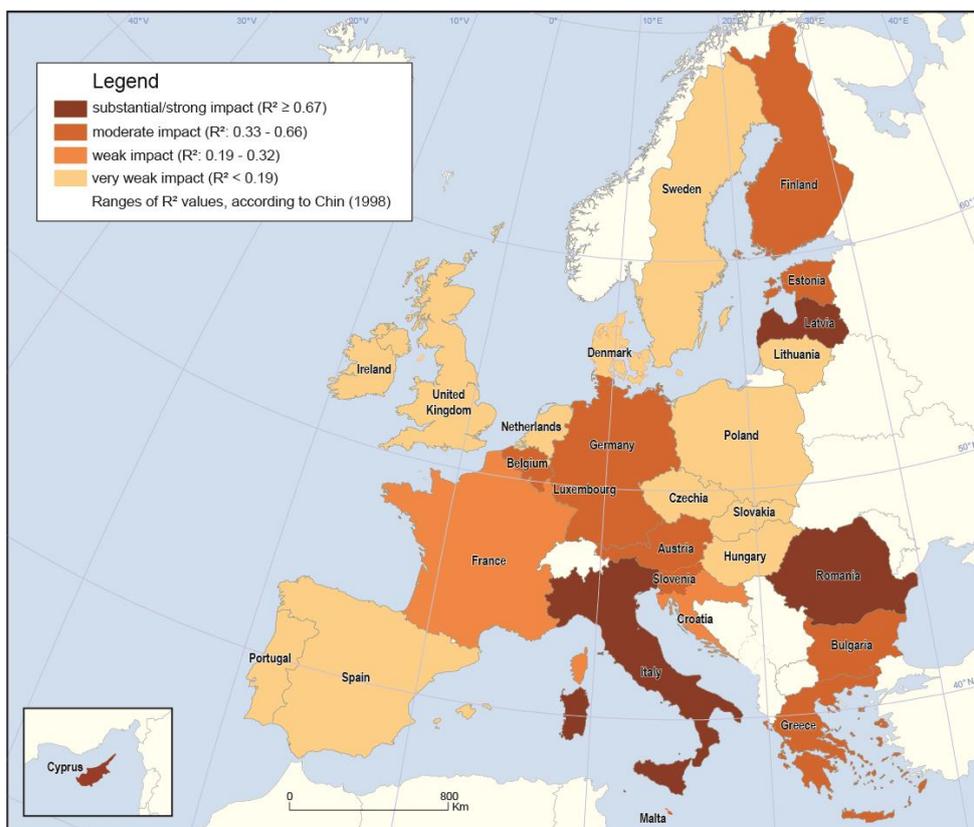


FIGURE 1 - IMPACT OF THE SHARE OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT ON THE REGULATORY QUALITY
Source: Authors' proceedings based on The World Bank and Heritage Foundation, 2014-2021

A similar functional pattern also appears in the case of the female contribution to the quality of the rule of law in the amount of 39.9% at the EU level, but found as a strong impact only at the level of the same 4 states (Latvia, Romania, Italy and Cyprus) and in the form of an impact weak and very weak in the situation of 21 EU states (Figure 2), while the impact on corruption control is only 2.7%, and on economic freedom/quality of the business environment 2.3%. This impact model is multiplied, however, in a differentiated manner at the level of the EU member states. In this evaluative context, it is striking that countries with a relatively small margin of the weight of women in parliament register a much more robust impact on the quality of legislation and the rule of law compared to countries with a much higher weight of women in the legislative bodies, which demonstrates that the political participation of women does not necessarily represent a mandatory panacea for improving the legislative framework, but, to be effective, it must come together with other pre-existing socio-cultural and socio-economic conditions (Diaz, 2005) and even a favorable international context (Paxton, Hughes și Barnes, 2020).

The impact of the female presence in the legislature on the control of corruption is inconclusive at the community level (2.7%), a cliché replicated at the intra-community level, where only in 3 states (Slovenia, Latvia and Cyprus) does it provide a substantial contribution, and for 20 states the impact is weak and very weak (Figure 3). Similarly, the contribution of women's legislative empowerment to economic freedom is minimal at the EU level (2.3%), where in only 5 states it is substantial, and in 17 states it is weak and very weak (Figure

IMPACT OF THE FEMINIZATION OF POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ON THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: EVIDENCE FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

4), confirming the assumptions of recent studies regarding the concerns women legislators rather for egalitarian and redistributive policies at the expense of economic efficiency (Ranehill & Weber, 2022; Andreoni & Vesterlund, 2001).

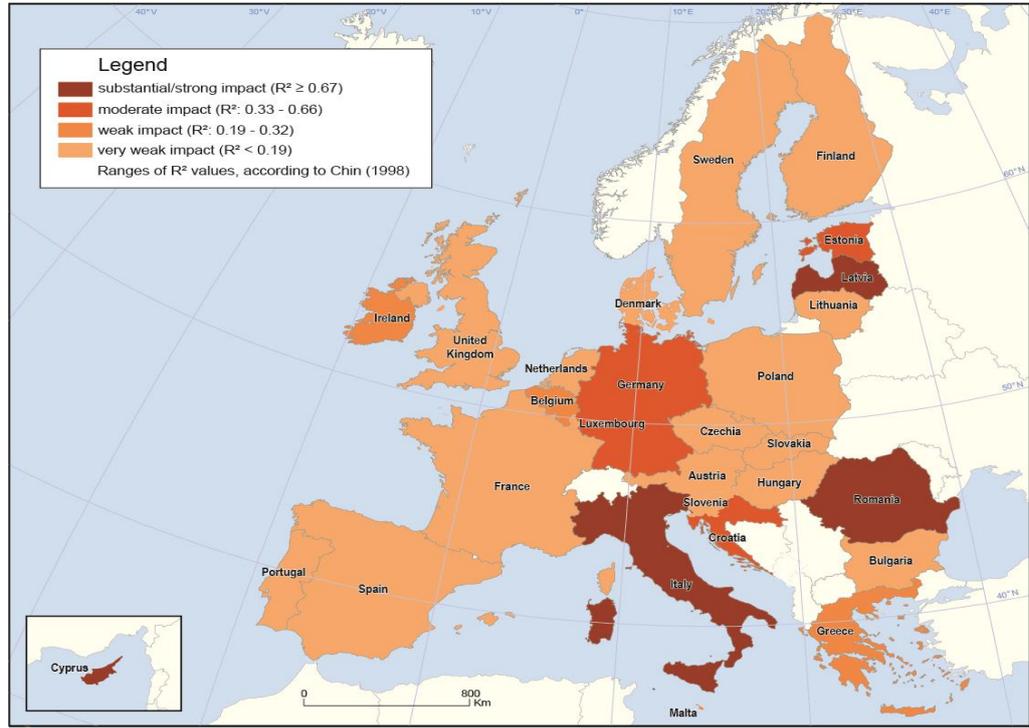


FIGURE 2 - IMPACT OF THE SHARE OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT ON THE QUALITY OF RULE OF LAW
Source: Authors' proceedings based on The World Bank and Heritage Foundation, 2014-2021

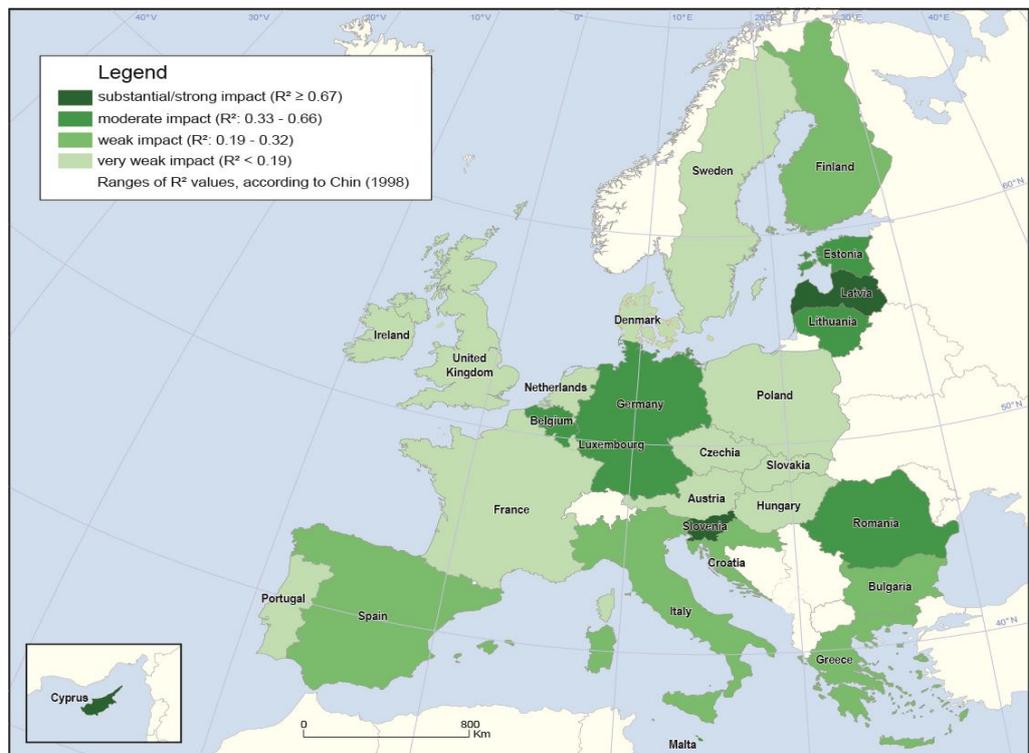


FIGURE 3 - IMPACT OF THE SHARE OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT ON THE CONTROL OF CORRUPTION
Source: Authors' proceedings based on The World Bank and Heritage Foundation, 2014-2021

IMPACT OF THE FEMINIZATION OF POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ON THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: EVIDENCE FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

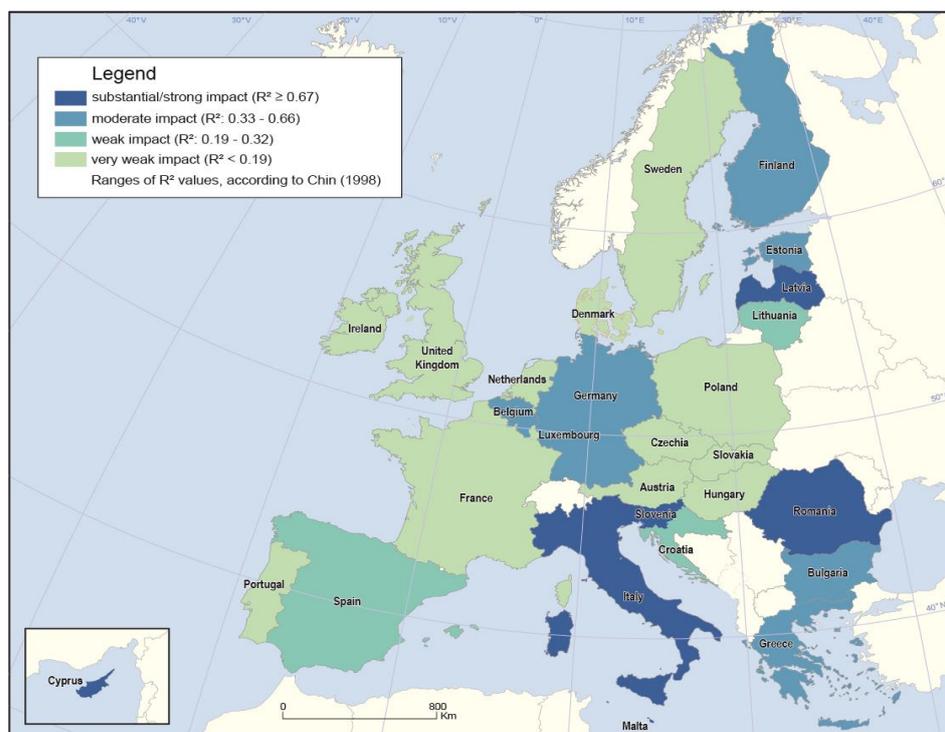


FIGURE 4 - IMPACT OF THE SHARE OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT ON THE ECONOMIC FREEDOM
Source: Authors' proceedings based on The World Bank and Heritage Foundation, 2014-2021

However, surprisingly, the apert of the feminization of parliaments to economic freedom is predominant in 11 states against the backdrop of lower contextual impacts exerted on the other regulatory indicators (Figure 5).

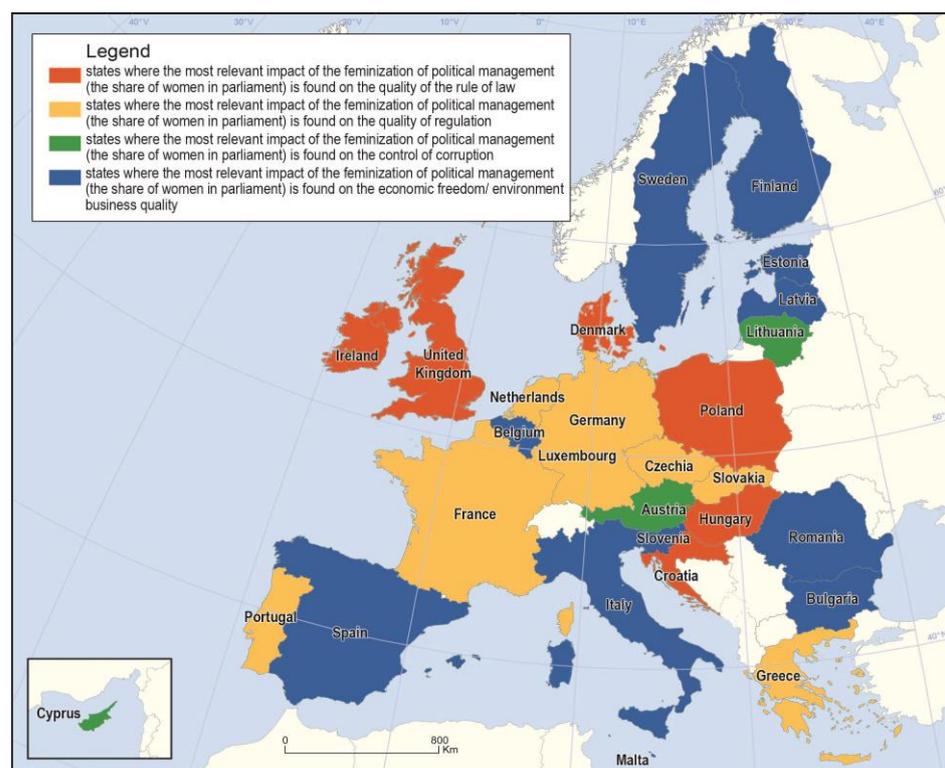


FIGURE 5 - DISTRIBUTION OF THE IMPACT OF THE SHARE OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT ON THE QUALITY OF THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK IN EACH EU STATE
Source: Authors' proceedings based on The World Bank and Heritage Foundation, 2014-2021

IMPACT OF THE FEMINIZATION OF POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ON THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: EVIDENCE FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

At the same time, we are interested in finding out in which countries and on which regulatory indicators it is possible to maximize the contribution of the share of female legislators. The smallest female shares in national parliaments, but which have the greatest impact on a certain indicator in a country, represent the best exploitable potential for increasing that parameter. To identify this, we interpolated the states with the lowest values of the share of women in the legislature (below the first value quartile) with the states where, for each individual indicator, the impact of the feminization of parliament is the highest (Table 5).

TABLE 5 - CLASSIFICATION OF EU STATES BY THE QUARTILES OF SHARE OF WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT WITH THE GREATEST IMPACT ON THE INDICATORS OF REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

Categories of states	States by the quartiles of share of women in parliament			
	Below Quartile 1	Between Quartiles 1 - 2	Between Quartiles 2 - 3	Above Quartile 3
States where the share of women in parliament has <i>the greatest impact on the quality of rule of law</i>	Hungary	Croatia, Poland, Irlanda	UK	Denmark
States where the share of women in parliament has <i>the greatest impact on the regulatory quality</i>	Greece, Slovakia	Czechia	France, Germany	Netherlands, Portugal
States where the share of women in parliament has <i>the greatest impact on the control of corruption</i>	Cyprus	Lithuania	Austria	–
States where the share of women in parliament has <i>the greatest impact on the economic freedom/ quality of business environment</i>	Malta, Romania	Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia	Italy, Luxembourg, Slovenia,	Belgium, Spain, Sweden, Finland

Source: Authors' proceedings based on The World Bank and Heritage Foundation, 2014-2021

By applying this analysis procedure, our findings highlight for each state the regulatory indicators that would benefit significantly from increasing the share of women in the legislature. Thus, from the group of states with the highest impact of political feminization on the quality of the rule of law, Hungary and Ireland are below the first value quartile of the weight of women in parliament, therefore increasing female political representation in these countries would induce the proximate effect of increasing the quality of the rule of law. Similarly, we found that increasing the share of women in national legislatures would improve the quality of legislation in Greece and Slovakia, would increase the degree of corruption control in Cyprus and would offer a higher level of economic freedom, i.e. would improve the quality of the business environment in Romania and Malta.

Complementary to the investigated topic, we suggest that the positive contribution of the feminization of legislative bodies on the quality of normative regulations is reflected consecutively through cascading regional development effects. Indeed, an improvement of the quality of the normative framework and the business environment in the south-eastern areas of the Union would stimulate the concentration of integrated territorial investments (Păceșilă, Colesca & Popescu, 2022) generating spill-over effects on socio-spatial relations and sustainable territorial development (Jessop, 2016).

Our conclusions regarding the impact of women's political empowerment on the quality of regulations in the EU are confirmed by recent analyzes that attest to the emergence of social improvements in the legislative agenda with the increase in the share of female legislators (Ranehill & Weber, 2022; Hessami & Lopes da Fonseca, 2020; Andreoni & Vesterlund, 2001), as well as increasing the degree of social fairness and reducing the phenomenon of corruption (Merkle, 2022; Pereira & Fernandez-Vazquez, 2022; Bjarnegård, Yoon & Zetterberg, 2018). The improvement in the quality of the business environment quantified by us as a consequence of female participation in the legislative process was validated by Dahlum, Knutsen and Mechkova (2022) and Becker (1971) who showed that the added value brought by women politicians resides in increasing the ideas introduced in economic legislation and the elimination of gender discrimination generating economic setbacks.

Pursuing the development of a procedure for measuring the contribution brought by women's participation in the legislative act, the current analysis attempts to x-ray the quality of the results of legislation in the EU, being burdened, however, by the following procedural limits: (a) not placing the study in a wider framework of analysis

compared internationally and (b) the use of variables whose data are based on the perception of the interviewees and may be affected by the subjectivity inherent in such an approach.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER DEBATE

Against the background of the emergence of gender political emancipation in the contemporary world, women's political participation is not only an element pending equal rights, but also a tool for improving and adapting the legislative framework to today's diverse realities. Therefore, the impact of women's political empowerment on normative regulations structures a critical relationship that we analyzed with the help of correlation and determination coefficients. Our evaluation expands the current knowledge in the field of gender political management by establishing the impact hierarchy of the weight of women in national parliaments in the EU on four indicators of the regulatory framework, namely the quality of the rule of law, the quality of legislation, the degree of control of corruption and economic freedom / the quality of the business environment.

Across the EU, female political-legislative empowerment has a moderate impact on the quality of legislation and the quality of the rule of law, and a limited impact on the degree of corruption control and economic freedom against the background of a well-structured pre-existing political-institutional and socioeconomic context. However, our evidence highlights the existence of striking inhomogeneities within the EU regarding the contribution of the weight of female legislators on the reference variables. The most relevant contributions of women's parliamentary participation can be found in the states in the east and south-east of the EU, where, although the share of women in the legislative bodies is not as consistent as in the west of the EU, still against the background of the weakness of other socio-institutional structures, the spatial design of the impacts identified by us configure several "islands" of the benefits of female political-legislative participation. Thus, the share of female politicians leaves the most robust imprint in recent years on the quality of legislation, the quality of the rule of law and the quality of the business environment in Latvia, Romania, Cyprus and Italy, while the most consistent impact on corruption control appears in Latvia, Slovenia and Cyprus.

In many of the eastern and southeastern states, although the share of women in parliament is relatively low, it has a great impact on the evaluated variables, which allowed us to identify the spaces where the increase in legislative empowerment of women would lead, with a high probability, to the significant improvement of normative regulations. Thus, an increase in the parliamentary weight of women would generate a further improvement in the quality of legislation in Greece and Slovakia, an improvement in the quality of the rule of law in Hungary, an increase in corruption control in Cyprus and a significant improvement in the quality of the business environment in Romania and Malta.

Our research provides the projective image of a comparative impact study that captures the holistic diagram of the contribution of women legislators to the diversification and improvement of the legislative agenda in the EU. The analysis carried out, however, only refers to the European space without being comparatively investigated and similar situations in other socio-cultural spaces, which is why a comprehensive comparative evaluation of the impact of the political empowerment of women constitutes the argument for the continuation of the scholarly debate that would allow a coherent understanding of the social mechanisms -institutions that are the basis of gender political-managerial phenomenology. In conclusion, this study reinforces the significance of women's political empowerment as a catalyst for societal progress and calls for sustained scholarly debate and further research to understand its broader implications beyond the European context

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IMPACT OF THE FEMINIZATION OF POLITICAL MANAGEMENT ON THE REGULATORY FRAMEWORK: EVIDENCE FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

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