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**TICKING ALL THE BOXES: INDIVIDUAL FACTORS IN SELECTION
OF SLOVAK MINISTERS FROM THE GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

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ABSTRACT

This paper is a longitudinal case study of the Slovak Republic, where I test existing theories and empirical findings from other countries about women's representation in the cabinet. I examine individual factors enabling or disabling women's appointments as ministers. My findings are based on an original dataset covering all of the 193 governmental appointments of ministers between June 1st, 1992 to March 21st, 2021. Consistent with the theoretical expectations, the empirical findings show that individual factors such as education or previous political experience leading to appointment of Slovak ministers differ based on gender. Women in Slovakia are systematically denied the equal opportunity to become cabinet ministers. Appointed female ministers are in general more professionally prepared in the policy field than their male peers, are equally frequent members of political parties, but have less experience from high political positions, which could negatively influence their political career prospects.

Key words

Gender, Descriptive representation, Government, Political Career, Slovakia, Case study.

Introduction

The governmental cabinet is an institution that has historically excluded women and except for a handful of temporary cases, women have not reached parity there - male-dominated cabinets remain a reality worldwide (Franceschet and Thomas 2015). The feminine and masculine characteristics associated with one's biological sex create power inequalities within political institutions and the ministerial cabinet is no exception (e.g. Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor–Robinson 2009). The rulers commonly believe that the ideal minister should have masculine characteristics such as decisiveness or toughness (O'Brien and Reyes Housholder 2020, pp. 252; Sjoberg 2014) and, therefore, without understanding the role gender plays in cabinet one cannot fully grasp the functioning of the institution.

Scholarship on the female representation in cabinets has been quickly growing in the recent years and it is becoming a mainstream research area that combines feminist and governmental knowledge. The representation of women in the government is worthy of scholarly attention also because ministers wield the biggest chunk of political power in parliamentary democracies. The government sets the political agenda, directs policy-making, and decides on the use of a large portion of the state budget. Ministers¹ are not mere agents of their parties who 'execute', they can and do personally influence the ministerial agenda and policy results of the portfolio (Andeweg, et al. 2020, pp. 13). Moreover, the remit of portfolios

¹ Ministers are politically responsible for their departments. They are expected to manage them with the help of their political nominees, usually State Secretaries, General Secretary of the Service Office (575/2001 Z. z. Law on the organization of governmental duties and organization of public service, § 4).

is gendered, too, enabling and disabling certain ministerial appointments based on gender (Arriola and Johnson, 2014).

In this article I acknowledge that women have been unfairly excluded from the executive position to the detriment of society because of gender biases and stereotypes. Their underrepresentation has normative, pragmatic, and political implications. The underrepresentation of women based on their gender is also undemocratic. Phillips (1995) argues that women have the same amount of political and intellectual qualities and talent as men, and, moreover, it is not even clear what objective merits in politics are. Therefore, their systematic underrepresentation means that the society is not governed on the basis of merit and there are costs in lost talent. Secondly, women's underrepresentation reaches beyond descriptive representation alone. Women's underrepresentation in the cabinet sends a powerful signal to the society and to other women that governing is a men's business. As the natural experiment in Uruguay of Hinojosa et al. (2020) shows, sudden significant improvement in women's representation leads, at least temporarily, to higher participation of women in politics, trust in the political system, and strengthening of democracy.

Even though the surge in women's ministerial representation in Slovakia in recent years might seem optimistic to many, it has been far from linear. The number of female executives remains volatile – during the last 5 years the share of female ministers has varied from a record low of 0%, to a record high of 30.77%. The more pessimistic overview is that five years ago Slovakia had a government without women and they have never gained parity in any Slovak cabinet. However, on a more optimistic note, the CEE countries along with Latin American ones have been defying the usual way of women entering cabinets first through elections to legislatures, hacking the Putnam's 'Law of increasing disproportion'² (Putnam 1976). Women have been directly entering the government in the CEE, which caught the interest of scholars like Bego (2014) and Goddard et al. (2014). In recent years, in Slovakia the share of female MPs has outnumbered the share of female ministers twice (See Figure 1). This phenomenon implies that area and case studies on women's representation in government is justified. More interestingly, there are no previous studies which have explored individual factors influencing the appointment of Slovak female ministers.

The Slovak case can be seen as important from three reasons. Firstly, Slovak practitioners and selectors can use the results to understand the underrepresentation of women

² The representation of women is expected to be lower at higher political positions (Putnam, 1976).

in Slovak government better and employ targeted measures to combat it. Secondly, as I mentioned above, government is an important institution in the political system and it is important for Slovak political scientists to understand it profoundly. Thirdly, the Slovak case study can inspire broader research – variables such as the age of ministers in relation to gender have not been examined in any study yet.

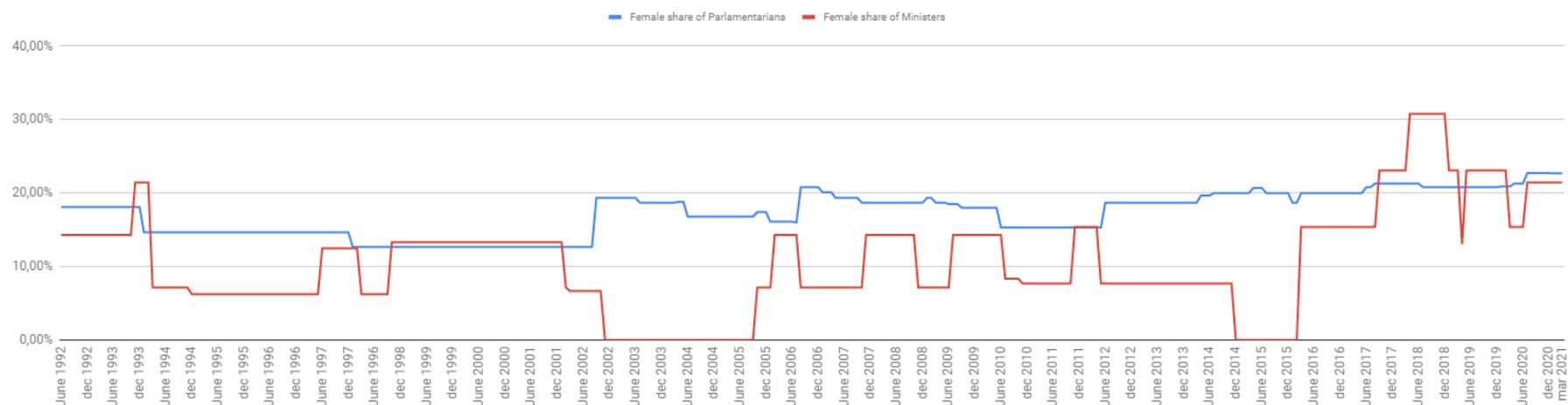
It is important to understand the conditions of when and why women are selected to ministerial posts and to their portfolio respectively, and what is the role of gender in the selection matrix in Slovakia. There are still significant gaps in our understanding of individual factors that result in women's nomination as ministers to the Slovak government.³ Even though this paper focuses solely on the individual level I acknowledge there are also institutional factors that influence the selection of ministers.

Slovak scientists, practitioners or the general public who want to contribute to change in representation of women in executives lack an updated analysis of the factors that influence ministerial selection. This study represents systematic, longitudinal and up-to-date effort to examine underlying conditions for gendered selection of ministers in Slovakia. **I aim to examine gendered differences in ministerial careers and profiles leading to cabinet appointments in Slovakia and assess their underlying factors.**

I will test 4 hypotheses focusing on factors that influence ministerial nominations. The analysis draws on an original dataset of 193 cases – all cabinet nominations in Slovakia between June 1992 and March 2021. I conclude by discussing the implications of my findings for research of women's representation in Slovak cabinets and the larger CEE region.

³ The second section of the Slovak constitution delineates the role of the government. Besides the government, only members of parliament in the National Council of the Slovak Republic have the right to propose legislation (Constitution of the Slovak Republic, Article 87). If the government has a firm majority in parliament, it fully controls the enactment of legislation, as opposition members of parliament and committee members can be outvoted. The Slovak government also most frequently initiates country-wide legislation.

FIGURE 1: Percentage of Female Ministers in Slovak Governments (June 1ST 1992 – March 21ST 2021)



Source: www.vlada.gov.sk; Dataset available here: <https://bit.ly/32Z7TOK>

1. The state of the art

Although researchers have conducted cross-national research on women's appointment to governments (see e.g. Borrelli 2002; Davis 1997; Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor Robinson 2005; Reynolds 1999; Siaroff 2000), such studies remained rather rare and did not enter the mainstream of political science research until 2008 when Jalalzai (2008) published *Women rule: Shattering the executive glass ceiling*. However, this book mostly limited itself to descriptive statistics of women in governments world-wide. In recent years, political scientists and gender scholars have been focusing heavily on the role of gender in executive nominations – especially prime ministers, presidents and ministers. One reason for this increase of studies is rising number of female representation in the executive branch of government (e.g. Bauer and Tremblay 2011; Jalalzai 2013; Krook and O'Brien, 2012). A growing number of studies have also analyzed women's nominations in the whole CEE region (Bego 2014; Goddard 2015, 2018), including Slovakia but not exclusively in Slovakia.

Representation of women in Slovak governments remains under-researched, except for a few older studies on women in politics that have included descriptive statistics of women at ministerial positions (see Bitušíková, 2005, 2011; Filadelfiová, Puliš, Radičová 2000; Holubová 2010). Filadelfiová, Radičová, and Puliš (2000) conducted a detailed study that includes descriptive statistics of women's representation at all levels of the Slovak politics, including the executive branch – government, political parties and the ministries. They have also interviewed women and other political actors from all levels of Slovak political life to explain their underrepresentation revealing that the underrepresentation at the pinnacle of political power is manifested also at lower levels of ministries and at the civil service. The study was broad and did not offer answers specific for the (under)representation of ministers, rather to the underrepresentation of women in Slovak politics in general. I focus solely on ministers and individual factors that lead to their appointment and at the same time. Therefore, I attempt to reveal and explain differences and I conduct statistical analysis that goes beyond mere descriptive statistics of female underrepresentation in Slovak governments.

2. Theory and hypotheses

All ministerial careers can be divided into three periods – before the appointment (selection to office), during the appointment (duration in office) and after the appointment (exit

from office and further career). In this study, I will focus on the first period of ministerial careers – the selection procedures and determinants.

Studies on office selection usually suggest two types of explanations: “actor-oriented” and “context-oriented” (Bakema 1991, pp. 71; Müller-Rommel, Kroeber, Vercesi 2020, pp. 229 – 230). Success in getting selected for office depends on actor-oriented personal factors such as ambition, education, political socialization, and political experience. Context-oriented factors that influence one’s success include the political system, the internal dynamics of the political parties, and other institutional settings that is enabling and disabling executive careers. As I have mentioned previously, this study focuses on actor-oriented or individual factors that come into play during the same period, when party leaders negotiate about the personal nominations to the particular portfolios of the new cabinet, or when they need to fill a vacant seat.

2.1. Individual factors

Some people are more likely than others to become ministers. Blondel and Thiébault name four key personal characteristics – education, age, occupation and also gender (Blondel and Thiébault 1991, p. 17). Gender should not be a relevant factor in a just democratic society; however, in reality it is and thus, it is worth studying. Higher education and certain occupations can be objectively beneficial for a candidate's readiness to become a minister, however, gender and age are not personal qualities, therefore, they have a potential to be discriminatory.

2.1.1. Age

The private lives of women can interfere with their professional lives. Young women can face difficulties in becoming ministers if they have or want to have children, although the influence of age varies depending on the country. I base the theory on the case of Slovak and Czech female politicians. Based on interviews with Czech female politicians who were leaving politics, Václavíková-Helšusová and Rakušanová (2008) concluded that for most of them it was too difficult to combine child rearing with their political careers. Most of the partners of female politicians tolerated their political careers but had not actively overtaken the role of the caregiving in the family. Filadelfiová, Radičová and Puliš (2000) support this conclusion in case of Slovak female politicians on different political levels. I expect that young female politicians in Slovakia, who would be qualified enough to become ministers, would not enter

political careers as often as would young men due to lack of support in their private life. Therefore, I expect female ministers on the average to be older than their male peers.

H1: Women joining the cabinet in Slovakia were on average older than men.

2.1.2 Previous career factors

Some studies have investigated how the previous experience of ministers before their nomination influences their selection (e.g. Escobar-Lemmon and Taylor Robinson 2005). To become a minister it helps to have a certain set of qualities, usually education, previous achievements, public recognition or political support from voters. There is a strong relationship between holding an executive position and having had a previous career in politics, which has led researchers to enact various typologies to distinguish nominees with previous political experience or without it (see e.g. the typology of Blondel and Thiébaud 1991 or Gerlich and Muller, 1998).⁴

Does previous political (in)experience, party membership and expertise translate equally for males and females to be nominated for cabinet positions in Slovakia or not? I predict that women need higher credentials to ensure the party leaders about their readiness to take the ministerial job while having less previous experience from high politics that is difficult for them to penetrate.

I therefore expect women will have a higher educational level than men and have more often experience in the field of their civic profession to prove their worth to male party leaders. This is also connected with the second expectation: women also need to prove their worth because they are not as well politically connected as men. This is because they are almost always a minority in all Slovak political parties and besides they have difficulties to succeed in male-dominated political culture within political parties. Filadelfiová, Radičová and Puliš

⁴ Blondel and Thiébaud (1991) distinguish two types of recruiting systems to government – specialist and generalist. Whereas specialist systems of government recruit cabinet members from parliament and the party, but also from outside, generalist systems are mostly exclusive – they nominate cabinet ministers almost entirely from parliamentary benches. Thus, there is no clear division between specialist and generalist system of government - they can be perceived as a continuum.

When Blondel and Thiébaud or similarly Gerlich and Müller (1998) describe important career features, they consider three factors. Firstly, it is party membership which is typical for generalists. Secondly, it is specialization in the field (education or professional experience) that typically possess specialists in the field and lastly, previous experience in high political positions that is typical for generalists.

(2000) examined Slovak political parties and they have found that there is no relation between higher number of women among members and number of top female politicians of the political party. I expect that women ministers will less frequently be party members than men because political party structures are not particularly welcoming in Slovakia.

I also expect that women will be appointed to the ministerial position less often with previous experience in high political positions than men. The reason for my expectation is similar as for the first hypothesis – the environment within organization of political parties is oftentimes masculine and it is more difficult for women to succeed in such environment (OSCE ODIHR, 2014). While it is possible to enter ministerial position as a nonpartisan expert, I expect women to exploit this possibility more often.

H2: Female ministers will be less often party members than male ministers.

H3: Female ministers will be more often experts in their field before they were appointed to the cabinet.

H4: Female ministers will have less experience from previous high political positions before the appointment to cabinet.

TABLE 1 Hypotheses summary

<p><u>Hypotheses on individual level</u></p> <p>H1: Women will be joining the cabinet older than men.</p> <p>H2: Female ministers will be less often party members than male ministers.</p> <p>H3: Female ministers will be more often experts in their field before they are appointed to the cabinet.</p> <p>H4: Female ministers will have less experience from previous high political positions before the appointment to cabinet.</p>
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3. Data collection, variables and methods

The unit of analysis on the individual level is one ministerial appointment beginning with official appointment and ending – either called off the office, deceased or stepped down. If one nominee became minister more than once, I counted each nomination as a separate case. If the minister did not have an assigned portfolio, I have excluded them from the dataset. I decided to exclude also interim ministers as their nomination is motivated by different purposes and expectations. On the individual level, I have collected data about 24 female and 169 male ministers, 193 cases total between 1.6. 1992 and 21.3. 2021.

The data on ministerial careers comes from various sources. I have gathered the information needed from media outlets, mostly from online media archives such as the Slovak newspaper *SME*, which had been the largest newspaper in Slovakia during the studied period and had been offering free online archive since 1998. Some ministries have CVs of their previous ministers on their website.

TABLE 2 Variables used to assess individual factors

Dependent variable	Type of variable
Gender of the appointed minister	Binary
Independent variables	
Age	Scale
Party member before nomination	Binary (yes, no)
Education or experience in the field of portfolio remit ⁵	Binary (yes, no)
Experience from high political position before the appointment ⁶	Binary (yes, no)

Sources: Public sources, media outlets, Slovak Statistical Office.

⁵ I regarded relevant education to be a university degree from the field of the portfolio remit. Alternatively, if the nominee had a previous professional experience of any kind in the portfolio remit, I would accept such expertise as relevant.

⁶ I define the high political position as one of these occupations: member of the parliament, speaker of the parliament, deputy speaker of the parliament, state secretary, having an advisory function to government members, belonging to the party leadership/secretary. Plain party membership was not accepted as I measure it elsewhere. I did not accept army ranks and diplomatic service as high political position, because I regard them as an education/work experience.

The statistical method to assess the effect of age (H1) will be a one-tailed t-test. The variables party membership, professional experience in the portfolio field, experience from high political position are all binary variables and to examine their effect on the dependent variable, I will use Chi-Squared Test of Independence and logistic regression.

4. Analysis

H1 hypothesis about age has not been confirmed even though the youngest female minister who entered the cabinet was 38 years old and the youngest male minister was 29. However, when I examined the average age at which women entered the government, I found that they were slightly younger than men when nominated – 46.5 years versus 47.2 years old. Comparing the age of 24 female ministers ($M = 46.54$, $SD = 33.56$) to the 169 male ministers ($M = 47.24$, $SD = 65.6$) results in no significant difference between the average age, $t(1) = 0.405$, $p = .686$.

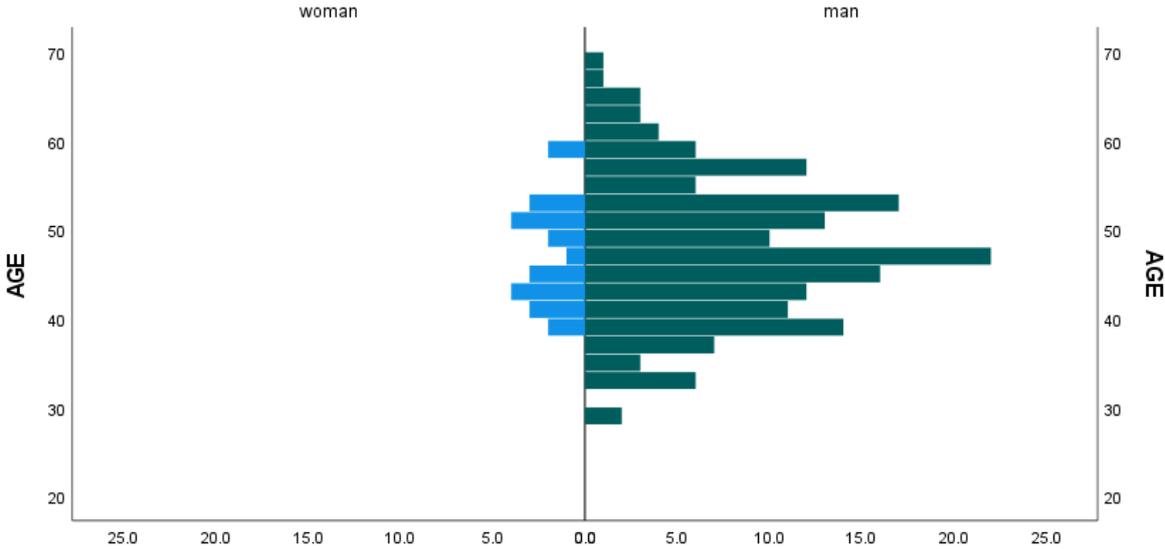
I examined the ministerial age of the first nomination of both genders also by descriptive statistics. Women have been nominated to the cabinet between 38 and 58 years of age. The range of the first male nomination is much wider – between 29 and 68 years. This could have been caused by a significantly larger sample. But I also need to consider a different explanation – stereotypical gender expectations of young men and women. Whereas young men in this powerful positions can be perceived as promising talents to the party leaders, young women might be perceived incompetent and risky candidates.

Another factor to consider could be that women's political career is constrained by their traditional gender roles in the society not only by child rearing but also by taking care of elderly parents. Interestingly, the start of a female's ministerial career is also constrained by an upper-limit, which has contributed to the fact that the average age of women was lower than men's: male ministers started their careers even after 60 years of age whereas there was no such case with a female minister. This might have been again caused by the small number of women in the sample, but also by the traditional role of women as caregivers when they as the sandwich generation take care of their ageing parents. The alternative explanation could also be simply looks – older men are considered more attractive than older women.

If the trend of women having a narrower opportunity to become minister was confirmed on a larger sample later in Slovakia or similar countries, it would mean that even at the top

political positions endowed with privilege and higher salaries, it is difficult for women to escape their stereotypical gender role to the detriment of the Slovak society.

Figure 2 Population Pyramid Frequency – Age of Slovak Ministers by Gender



Source: Own data collection from media sources.

The inconclusive relationship between gender of ministers and party membership of appointed ministers defied my expectations and I fail to support H2. Even though the relationship has the expected direction, a Chi-squared test of independence showed that there was no significant association between these variables (see Table 4 below). I conclude that women are not members of a political party before appointment significantly less often than male ministers are. Interestingly, this means that women also do need to succeed in their parties similarly as men do before they become ministers.

Regarding H3, I have found a significant relationship between gender and professional specialization. Women having university education or previous professional experience are appointed much more often than male ministers in the policy topic of their portfolio $\chi^2(1, N = 193) = 6.953, p < .01$. Müller-Rommel, Kroeber, and Vercesi (2020, pp. 233) argue that female ministers tend to have similar characteristics as male ministers regarding education and social background. They might have, in general, finished similar universities or have similar positions in their CVs, but that is not the end of the story in Slovakia. The more interesting part is to examine which type of education and which previous experience men and women entering

cabinets have and I have found that in Slovakia women need to prove their worth with more credentials in their policy field.

Female ministers are also significantly less politically experienced when appointed ministers. I have found a difference between female and male ministers who had more often a previous experience in high political positions.

TABLE 4 Differences between Male and Female Ministers in Previous Careers

N=193	X ²	df	Significance	Cramer's V
Party member before appointment	3.259	1	.071	.105
Education or experience in the field of portfolio remit	6.953**	1	.008	.190
High political position before the appointment ⁷	4.694*	1	.03	.156

*Significant at $p < .05$ ** Significant at $p < .01$

⁷ I defined the high political position as one of these occupations - MP, Mayor, Speaker of the Parliament, Deputy speaker of the Parliament, State Secretary, Advisory function to government members, Party leadership/secretary. Plain party membership was not accepted as I measure it elsewhere. I did not accept army ranks and diplomatic service as a high political position, I regard them as professional expertise.

TABLE 5 Logistic Regression

Log likelihood = -161.43648		Number of obs	=	429		
		LR chi2(3)	=	17.02		
		Prob > chi2	=	0.0007		
		Pseudo R2	=	0.0501		

Gender	Coef.	Std. Err.	z	P> z	[95% Conf. Interval]	

Member	-.6042663	.3374141	-1.79	0.073	-1.265586	.0570533
Experience	1.234241	.4579255	2.70	0.007	.3367236	2.131759
Highpol	.1024081	.3311114	0.31	0.757	-.5465584	.7513746
_cons	-3.140574	1.087695	-2.89	0.004	-5.272418	-1.008731

The logistic model is significant as a whole and we can see that experience has a significant effect. When selectors choose from among experienced candidates, women have significantly higher chance of success. The variable of party membership is almost significant at the $\alpha=.05$. When selectors are deciding from among party members for a ministerial position, party membership is also important for women to succeed.

Conclusion

In this article I have examined Slovak ministerial appointments using the gender lens for the first time in Slovakia. Previous studies on Slovakia have looked into descriptive statistics of women in Slovak politics (Bitušíková, 2005; Filadelfiová, Radičová, Puliš, 2000) including the Slovak cabinet, and thus this case study pioneers the understanding of individual factors that influence appointments to Slovak cabinets.

It shows a rather grim picture – female candidates need to tick all the boxes much often than men to receive ministerial appointment. Appointed female ministers are more often specialized in the field of their portfolio, but they have been previously less often in high political position than their male counterparts. Lack of relevant political experience could mean that women can have difficulties when they are appointed into ministerial position. In further research, I encourage researchers to explore how differences between male and female ministers translate into their performance in the office and into the durability of their careers.

What is more, women seem to be constrained also by their age, the range when they become ministers is narrower than the age range of male nominees although to confirm this with more certainty I would need to examine more than 24 cases of female ministers. I am inclined to explain it by the stereotypical roles in their private lives. For women who are often expected to take on the role of caregivers it would be difficult to combine it with ministerial positions. However, there are also other explanations such as ageism intersecting with gender stereotypes that require further qualitative research. The factor of age could be looked into in other CEE countries to increase the number of cases.

To conclude, Slovak society loses the talent of women who do not rise to ministerial positions. Similarly, as in other public and private areas, promising women are given the chance only after they prove more credentials than their male colleagues. If party leaders recognized and supported their talent sooner, Slovak society could be better off. To change the fact of underrepresentation of women in cabinets we must first thoroughly understand it, this study being the first step on the ladder.

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STATISTICAL OFFICE OF THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC (2021). Election results.

ANNEX

TABLE 1: Slovak Governments and their Basic Characteristics (30st October 1998 – July 16th 2020)

Beginning	End	Prime Minister	Average number of ministries	Parties of the government
March 21 st 2020	Ongoing as of March 2021	Igor Matovič	13, later 14	OĽaNO, Sme rodina, SaS, Za ľudí
March 22 nd 2018	March 20 th 2020	Peter Pellegrini	13	Smer-SD, SNS, Most-Híd
March 23 th 2016	March 23 rd 2018	Robert Fico	13	Smer-SD, SNS, Most-Híd, Siet' (Siet' left the coalition shortly after elections)
April 4 th 2012	March 23 rd 2016	Robert Fico	13	Smer-SD
July 9 th 2010	April 3 rd 2012	Iveta Radičová	12, later 13	SDKÚ-DS; SaS; Most - Híd; KDH
July 4 th 2006	July 8 th 2010	Robert Fico	14	Smer-SD; SNS, HZDS
October 16 th 2002	July 4 th 2006	Mikuláš Dzurinda	15, later 14	SDKÚ; ANO; SMK; KDH. KDH left the coalition earlier
October 30 th 1998	October 15 th 2002	Mikuláš Dzurinda	15	SDK; SOP; SMK; SĎĽ

Source: Office of the Government 2020 (www.vlada.gov.sk)