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The representation of female leaders in the media in the USA

Bachelor's thesis

International Business Administration

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Tallinn 2022

I hereby declare that I have compiled the thesis/paper independently and all works, important standpoints and data by other authors have been properly referenced and the same paper has not been previously presented for grading.

The document length is 8217 words from the introduction to the end of the conclusion.

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ABSTRACT

This is the study on the representation of female leaders in the media in the USA and the following effect of the representation on the gender inequality in politics, This research provides the reviewing previous research from sociology, business and politics to raise the question of how the negative representation of women politicians is related to other areas of life and gender equality in general. The aim is to look into the representation of female leaders by the media in the USA and describe how it affects gender equality. The research questions to be answered are “How female leaders are represented in the media in the United States of America?” and “In what way representation of female leaders can affect gender inequality?” In many ways, there is a difference between the perception of male leaders and women leaders, which directly affects the preservation and maintenance of historical stereotypes in society.

The research is Qualitative analysis using Qualitative Content Analysis – The sample of the study comprises articles gathered from two major US and UK newspaper publications “The Washington Post” and “The Guardian US”. The selection is based on an example of some of the most widely read political publications in America.

The research method is based on Relational analysis and collected data in accordance with the categories recognised by national research on political media coverage. The major findings of this research correspond with previous works and show that women in politics tend to be underrepresented and in many respects receive different coverage than their male counterparts.

KEYWORDS: Leadership, gender equality, female politicians, gender representation, media.

INTRODUCTION

The gender imbalance in politics may seem unremarkable and unworthy of investigation precisely because it appears to be a permanent feature of the political system. Despite some slow progress in the last few decades, leader stereotypes are predominantly masculine. Indeed, in most countries, women are still far behind in taking even half of the political arena. Even though there are more women than ever in leadership roles the reality is only 25% worldwide of members of parliament are female (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2020).

The study is structured to analyze the problem of the underrepresentation of females in the political arena and see the connection of representation with the gender inequality of women in politics in the United States. Despite the fact that there were several previous inquiries, there were no researchers who put the representation and discussion of current female political leaders in the media articles and the representation of male political leaders in the article of the same media publisher. (Krivkovich *et al.* 2018) Since political influence has a direct impact on other areas of life, such as culture and business sphere and the treatment of women in those spheres, it is easy to see why the analysis of the political representation of women is an important topic for discussion. As women are underrepresented in the majority of business sectors and are less likely to be taken to the higher leadership positions, (Berger, Kuckertz 2016) the positive representation of women in power would give an opportunity to reduce this problem. The influence of female politicians is just as important as that of male politicians, but politicians receive different reviews depending on their gender. When we talk on a global scale, the greatest example of modern progress in all areas of activity is America. This is a developed country that sets trends and new trends for the rest of the world. That is why this country was chosen for analysis. In addition, on the examples of vice-presidents, who both contributed to the development of the country, you can see how media resources treat them and how they are presented by the authors of articles, keeping in mind what they write about them as a man and how about women

The topic of this bachelor's thesis is the investigation of the direct relations between the poor or unequal representation of female politicians, compared to men and how drastic the consequences

are for the gender gap it naturally contributes to. The focus of the research questions is “How female leaders are represented in the media” and “Gender inequality in politics” The objective of the research is to find out how the representation of female leaders in the media in the USA and describe how it affects gender equality.

The first chapter of the thesis is the theoretical foundation and explanation of the existing problem, the history of women coming into politics and the start of gender inequality that follows. Statement of direct issues that exist not only in the United States but on a global level and the discussion of a number of solutions that may bring new modern gender changes that we, in the 21st century, still lack in the political arena. Moreover, the discussion of bringing up new solutions and raising previously mentioned suggestions and the actions that already had been taken by several other developed countries.

Further, the research focuses on data summary and description of how the gathered information relates to the underrepresentation of female leaders in the United States, what are the key elements of such underrepresentation and in which way it can be distinguished from male leaders’ representation.

The last chapter concludes with the methodology, research findings and the discussion of the results. It starts with the description of the Qualitative Content Analysis methodology with an explanation of the data summary and gathering by applying relational content analysis. Followingly expressing the into the representation of female leaders in the media in the USA and see how the representation varies for their male counterparts. Using coding methods as a part of relational content analysis.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND OF UNDERREPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

When we look at the statistics of women who work and develop professionally in the political sphere, we can see how much they are in the minority in relation to the male part. In 2019, women constituted 23.7 percent of the United States Congress compared with a global average of 24 percent. (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2020) Despite the fact that this number is close to the global average, women in politics face not only underrepresentation, but also they face the manifestation of sexism, the glass ceiling factor, and physical, sexual and emotional abuse. (Sanbonmatsu 2020) Women are also subjected to toxic attacks from the press on more occasions than men, which applies to the political arena as well as in the social media eye.

This study concentrates on the direct representation of women in politics and its effect on political gender inequality, and the importance of quotas in politics. For that, the research is designed on several previous studies and governmental reports.

There is a correlation between the representation of female leaders and the rise of women in politics. Women have long been active voters and even surpass men in the voting activity, thus breaking the stereotype that women are generally less politically involved than men. (Center for American Women and Politics 2019) However, the inequality in the media, the introduction of a quota and the underrepresentation of female leaders in the media space are still far from the principles of equality.

The question is how different ways of representation affect the gender inequality imbalance and the treatment of a persona by society. Massive, even global opinion influencers such as The Guardian daily news construct a great input in the problem of underrepresentation by treating female politicians in a different way than male ones.

One of the most influential works that have been previously accomplished is “Women, Power and Decision-Making” (United Nations 1995) Considered the most progressive paper ever written for advancing women’s rights. This comprehensive work and published discussions with

defining the outlines of the problems that women face in the modern world, guidelines for the protection of women's human rights and reduction of violence against women in politics and society.

They are associated not only with women in politics, but they affect women in power all over the world, including the business sphere. (Chattopadhyay, Duflo 2004) The fact that women are exposed to more negative attention from the press, the public, social networks, and are also less protected by the law. It only confirms that gender equality has not yet reached its potential and is only on the way to its development. The “glass ceiling” phenomenon still exists in many large corporations, eliminating the opportunity for women to occupy higher leadership positions due to stereotypes ingrained in society. (Cotter *et al.* 2001) Poor representation of women in politics becomes a benchmark for the representation of women in other areas of work and business. Because politicians are the people we look at as opinion leaders who are in the spotlight, when they are getting attacked by the press, we consider it as a normal practice. This attitude is appropriately extended to other women who are working their way up the career ladder. (Ribes-Giner *et al.* 2018) Hence, such practice, unfortunately, reinforced stereotypes against women in leadership. (Bergeron *et al.* 2006)

Violence against women in politics spread not only throughout America, but it is a global issue that has been studied and proved. Surveys with verified cases of harassment and violence against women in parliament from 39 countries across five regions and 42 parliaments corroborate that there is not only a gender inequality problem in the politics but human rights violations. (Violence against women in politics 2018)

Among a variety of theoretical contributions in the business and political literature, it is vital to give attention to Downs's median voter theory (Downs 1957). It predicts that in an ideal political world in which this theory holds, black or white, female or male politicians, all agree to a unique policy platform independent of personal characteristics. Gender is as irrelevant to policy in this world as skin color.

What is more, with a recent study (Krivkovich *et al.* 2018) it was defined that 279 American companies show that while women comprise 39% at the next management level. Moreover, when we look at the higher-level jobs, women hold fewer and fewer executive positions, only 23% of them are occupied by women. Hence, more women specialists are left behind with each step up to the top. Such unwillingness to compete for the best place under the sun is likely connected to the sustainable societal gender norms and set traditional gender roles. (Auschra *et al.* 2022) Based on societal inequalities, (Fox, Lawless 2004) Presents that even equally competent and experienced women specialists end up running for higher positions with less frequency than their male coequals, merely because men are explicitly motivated to run for higher positions and women are not. (Hoyt, Blascovich 2010) Motivation comes from the human environment, in the same way influencing the personal motivation of a person. (Steele 1997) Stereotypes about women exist and are repeated everywhere. (Hippel *et al.* 2011) For example, they are not able to hold high managerial positions due to the peculiarities of their gender. Insufficient information from the press about women leaders only allows stereotypes to take root and progress. (Kray *et al.* 2001)

Naturally, every idea has supporters and naysayers. Despite the fact that fight for gender equality and equal rights for men and women has been going on for more than a century, there are still some supporters of the idea that the women's rights come at expense of men, creating a group of people, who consider that feminism activity has gone too far. Among the lines, such opinions differ, depending on the political view. (Erikson 2006) Strong opinion about gender equality deviates across party lines with 38% of Republican men expressing that women's parity has come at the expense of men, compared to 19% of Democratic men. (Pew Research Center 2020)

1.1. What is representation?

To further discuss the problem of inequality and underrepresentation of female leaders, it is necessary to establish the meaning of the word "representation", because in subsequent work I will refer to this term with enviable regularity.

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines representation as “the action or fact of one person standing for another so as to have the rights and obligations of the person represented.” (Merriam-Webster 2022)

In the modern political sphere, the representation can vary from the representation in the political arena to the look, created in the media by reporters and presented to the social media. If we are talking about the first one, the political presentation can happen along with different types of representation such as substantive representation and descriptive representation. (Pitkin, Fenichel 1967) Substantive representation is defined as the tendency of selected lawmakers to advocate on behalf of particular groups. (Stokes, Miller 1962) Descriptive representation on the other hand is the idea that a group selects a person to represent them. This person in their characteristics mirrors more frequent backgrounds and external embodiments of the elective group. (Pitkin, Fenichel 1967)

When we talk about the representation in the media, the borders for the boundaries of the advertised information become more transparent and the media delivers what is most divergent among the mass audience. (Kepplinger, Viererbl 2018). During the development of the media space, which in our time is very closely connected with personal life, business and political activism, it is very difficult to remain unnoticed. If earlier representation influenced active observers of political actions, now information is spreading throughout the media zone and has a wider audience interested not only in politics but also in scandals associated with the big names of politicians. (Kumlin, Esaiasson 2012).

In the media, the portrayal of women has been and remains entirely in line with what the media chronicles have always done and will continue to do. (Tumber, Waisbord 2004) The authors understand a specific audience and operate through the considerable applicable, culturally influential issues confronting them - whether it be political or business issues, or current issues of healthiness, finances and beauty. And yet the content now reflects the general changes taking place in society. (Roderick 2017)

After the Fourth World Conference on Women (United Nations 1995) one of the highlights contained the discussion about the underrepresentation of female politicians in the media. With the understandable gap between men and women occupying places in the parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2020) and already existing gender inequalities, the media sphere

should concentrate not on belittling business women and women in politics but become an asset. For now, the way to equal representation can be also forced with the help of media sources. The media should become an agent of change through their approach to women or rather to gender at large. Instead of acting as mirrors of the social and cultural traditional patterns, that are still stuck in the 21-century society.

1.2. Female politicians in the media

Already in 1995 the report of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action defined the issue of sexist stereotypes of women and inequality of women in entrance and participation in a variety of communication procedures, particularly in the media. It was anointed as one of the critical areas of concern. The evident lack of gender sensitivity in the mass media brings up the failure to reduce and eliminate all gender-based stereotyping. Such prejudices that we still enforce in our society can be easily found in both private and public local, international and national, and mass and online media organizations. (United Nations 1995)

Many media depictions of women focus on sexuality and emotion, not only in the political eye, but also when women occupy high leadership positions. Other media focus on their relationships with children or romantic partners. Various leaders of news sources use the image of a politician as a news story that will attract a large audience of readers. People tend to react to and remember negative or scandalous statements with more enthusiasm than more blatant daily news. (von Sikorski 2020) One of the so-called "interest triggers" is the objectification of the appearance or behavior of female politicians.

The media focuses more on the appearance, lifestyle and family of female politicians than on the political agenda. A suitable example of such practice is the case of Sarah Palin. (Meeks 2012) Newsweek 22.4% of the time, and Time 19% discussed the private life and appearance of Sarah Palin, the running mate. (Wasburn, Wasburn 2011) The private life and appearance of former Democratic Vice President Joe Biden did not interest them at all.

The continuous promontory of damaging and impairing impressions of women politicians and female leaders in general in media communications affects other women with less influence and

their participation in the society. (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2020) In the vast majority of countries both print and electronic media do not provide a well-balanced representation of female politicians' diverse lives and their contributions to the community in a rapidly changing world. (Utah Women & Leadership Project 2021) The Utah research on the representation of female politicians in the local media spheres shares common conclusions that women in politics are fairly underrepresented. Throughout different political parties, women face attacks from the media, oppression and sexist commentary on a more regular basis than men politicians. The 2021 Utah research uncovered that forty-three articles out of 383 samples included sexist comments towards female politicians and 52 articles put an emphasis on the physical appearance with the discussion of a woman's clothes, age, and ethnicity being mentioned most repeatedly. (Utah Women & Leadership Project 2021)

Women are severely harmed by their sexualization in the media. 27.3% of women parliamentarians, according to a survey in 39 countries, believe that the media spread disrespectful comments about them with sexual overtones. (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2020)

One of the reasons that the underrepresentation of female politicians is so blunt and not as heard of is the fact that we as a society are used to seeing women in leadership positions. Negative commentary from the media can be attributed to the fact that throughout history men were associated with the majority of the principal political leadership and decision-making qualities. Hence, each time a woman stepped into political lights as a leader of opinion and woman of power, it did not match with the old-fashioned stereotypical view of the majority. Such social impediment reinforced the current actions of women politicians receiving more negative media coverage.

There are many answers to the question of why the representation of women in the political arena is such an important headline for action and discussion. One of them is the direct dependence on the presence of a leader on whom you can orient yourself and rely on gives motivation to other women to strive to occupy more high leadership positions. (Hessami, Lopes da Fonseca 2020)

1.3. Gender inequality in politics

Gender inequality is one of the most important global issues that we face in current reality. As a matter of fact, gender equality stands in fifth position on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. According to the Global Gender Gap Report from 2021, there has never been a woman head of state in our world in 81 countries. As well, the report claims that with the current state of gender equality rate and feminism activism, the World Economic Forum estimated that humanity would need over 140 years in order to only reach the worldwide gender parity in politics. (Global Gender Gap Report 2021)

Despite the fact that the war for equality in politics and the social sphere, as we are used to understanding it, commenced at the beginning of the last century, over more than a century humanity has made negligible progress in relation to the attitude and representation of women in society, not to mention politics. It is worth mentioning that in America since 1776, counting the day of the signing of the "Declaration of Independence" of the United States, there has not been a single woman president. Moreover, the current Vice President Kamala Harris took office as the first woman with the highest political rank only in 2022. This is 246 years of power, in which the patriarchal majority is at the head of the state, to which 140 more years are added until gender equality is achieved in parliament.

Some studies show a positive trend. (Reeves 2020) Indeed, women politicians have become more talked about in the media, but they are still presented as “other”, different from men. (Ross, Comrie 2012) Images of women politicians are often based on gender stereotypes. (Opyd 2013) At first glance, gender characteristics are harmless, but they affect the attitude of voters. The media use gender roles against women politicians. One of the main problems here is motherhood. (Trimble 2018) And it's impossible to win. If a woman has children, then the media calls into question whether she can combine work and family. If a woman does not have children, then the media accuse her of not fulfilling her biological destiny. Most of all go to women who go against gender attitudes: without children, not married or other sexual orientation.

Due to the fact that the media follows gender patterns, it is difficult to see women in politics as anything more than just women. This undermines the political authority of women and makes them less visible. (Johnson-Myers 2019)

“Women are underrepresented as voters, as well as in leading positions, whether in elected offices, the civil service, the private sector or academia. This occurs despite their proven abilities as leaders and agents of change, and their right to participate equally in democratic governance.” (UN Women 2013) The media is more likely to question whether a woman will be able to influence if she is elected to office and whether she can win elections at all. If voters do not believe that a candidate can win, they will not vote for her, so as not to waste their vote. (Wasburn, Wasburn 2011)

With the latest changes of rotation in the American parliament, and the inauguration of President Biden and his Democratic party, there are more new initiatives for women to make their careers in politics. There is seemingly progress in accepting women into higher ranks, which is clearly seen with Kamala Harris becoming a new vice president. She is the first female vice president and the highest-ranking female official in US history. She also became the first African American and the first Asian American to serve as Vice President of the United States. Despite this fact, progress in the American Congress remains painfully slow. There is a need to put on official quotas for women in order to move the needle here. Presented in the Global Gender Gap Report 2021 analysis was based on a methodology integrating the latest at the moment of research statistics from a variety of international organizations and following a survey of executives.

To continue talking about gender inequality, I must state the fact that “gender equality” is a part of the European Convention on Human Rights. Gender equality is an indispensable requirement for the full completion of the human rights pact. The implementation of the rights as granted by the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and in its protocols shall be protected without any discrimination, including on grounds of sex. This pact secures the maintenance of any right identified by law without discrimination. (Protocol No. 12 to the Convention (ETS No. 177))

When we speak about gender inequality in politics, the most obvious and direct example to point out is the fact of the absolute difference in the number of women and men sitting in the United States Parliament. By the end of the year 2021 out of 435 statutory number of parliament members, only 28.14% of all were women members. Despite the fact that gender equality has advanced plenty since its launch at the beginning of the last century, women have not achieved a full right to vote at the head of the state level, remaining in a numerical minority and giving way to men. It is quite possible to justify such discrepancy in the number of men and women in parliament by the fact that there are several times fewer women politicians than men. (Gelb, Lief-Palley 1996) However, there is no shortage of women politicians and a similar distinction is the lack of quotas for chairs in parliament. Since the U.S. Congress is still lagging behind other countries in terms of female representation in politics. Even countries such as Namibia, Mexico and Bangladesh. (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2020)

Quotas to promote female representation in the parliament are the gateway key to the more official level of reducing the gender inequality in Parliament and attribute an equal amount of seats to men and women. Depending on the country's current political path, one of three types of quotas can be implemented, such as seat reservations, legitimate candidate quotas, or political party quotas. (Dahlerup 2009) The other countries' example gives a clear view of how implementing gender quotas actually makes a difference in female representation. Even though naysayers may doubt the usefulness of quotas, from the UAE example of 2014 – quotas improve gender equality with no loss in the quality of legislators. (IPU Women in Parliament Report 2018)

On the one hand, media sexism only reflects the already existing sexism in society, but on the other hand, the media are responsible for maintaining and strengthening gender stereotypes. As a result, the media themselves already produce sexism and negatively affect the representation of women in politics. Since voters do not see women politicians on TV channels, they do not know them and are not ready to vote for them. Undermines the confidence of voters and the negative representation of women in the media. (Haraldsson, Wängnerud 2019) Media sexism kills women's political ambitions and negatively affects the motivation of parties to attract more candidates: once they suffer from negative representation, they are less likely to nominate

women. No individual measures, like party quotas, can ensure equal representation of women in politics. (Reeves 2021) To achieve significant change, the media must be included in this process.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative content analysis – is the method which studies different written, spoken and/or graphic data without directly extracting data from participants. The utilized types of qualitative content analysis are relational content analysis, which is focusing on proximity analysis that identifies certain phrases and the patterns in terms of how they co-originate in the collected. Such an approach helps to clearly see repetitive patterns in the language that media used to express themselves. As well as to separate from the text reflected in the data, opinions and common themes to draw conclusions regarding the way the media represents one or another politician.

The phenomenon that is considered in this thesis contains the aim to look into the representation of female leaders versus male counterparts in the media in the USA and describe how it affects gender equality. Due to the fact that the United States is one of the leading countries with a developed economic and political position, it is one of the levers of influence on other countries in the developed and developing world. In addition, if we take the rapid globalization, a lot of actions carried out in one country or another directly entail subsequent changes in other countries.

2.1 Research method – relational analysis

In order to conduct such an analysis, I collected data from current and former female and male Vice-Presidents of the United States to learn more about the experiences and the difference between the representation of a woman and a man who served in the same position. The study focused on current female Vice-President Kamala Harris and former Vice-President Mike Pence. A sampling was collected from UK and US 2 major newspapers — The Washington Post and The Guardian US to evaluate media coverage of female candidates in political campaigns from 2021 to the present day of 2022.

News articles were examined and coded using categories recognised by national research on political media coverage to distinguish movements and patterns within USA media. Relational analysis looks for the patterns within the words to determine any relationships between concepts

found in words. This method is the most suitable for the deep analysis of several different media sources since it allows us to see similarities in the text and the way the media describes two concepts. In case of this research relational analysis allows seeing similar characteristics between the description of two political leaders. Characteristics were based on the most common words and expressions, the topics that were mentioned in the articles and crossed over all the used news articles. They were divided into specific categories by the author for further analysis. News sources used for the sample size were taken precisely based on the popularity among readers in the United States. Sample size of 50 was determined by the author and searched by two initial criteria. Firstly, the specific time period of two candidates during the period of them occupying the post of the vice-president of the United States. Secondly, using names of two politicians – Kamala Harris and Michael Pence as keywords to search the articles.

I had an intention for the picked articles not to be specially selected to support the opinion that women are strongly underrepresented in the media. On the other hand, I was unbiased while taking any articles from several divisions of the newspaper: lifestyle, business, politics, opinions, education, and both local and national news. Mainly, I was looking into similar patterns in the description of the political candidates and similar phrasing that different authors used referring to them [Kamala Harris and Mike Pence]. With analysing all pieces of text from the articles, the relational analysis looks for meaning in different relationships. By stating the characteristics, it was easier to put meanings to words and phrases used in the newspaper articles and then to create an analysis on the basis of the most often used phrases and how they correlate with the representation of politicians.

A limitation of this research is that it did cover a small sample size to analyze, as the current vice-president stepped into the position at the beginning of 2021. However, each section does provide a comparison with media focused on former male vice-presidents.

The results are presented in accordance with the frequency the topic was mentioned in the media sphere as follows: candidate's background, general tone, mention of gender and race, leadership traits, physical appearance, and family life. The brief comprises the summary of research findings and the conclusion of the US media representation of gender discrepancy.

2.2. Empirical analysis

Candidate's background

Out of the 50 articles identified for this Qualitative Content Analysis, 35 (70%) of them have mentioned the politician's background in one way or another. Out of them, 20 (58%) were articles dedicated to the female candidate and the other 15 (42%) were describing the male politician's background life. That indicates that the background of a female politician is more discussed and often mentioned by the media, concentrating on her college experience and past political actions. Articles were talking about their previous professional experience and history, education and past advancements or defeats, degrees, political and social experience, or non-family related personal history. Moreover, nearly all articles had touched upon political history, including past and present positions held, leading projects, policies and issues they have been working on. As well as adding the length and success or failure of their political involvement. To continue speaking about the political background, in particular, professional accomplishments were included and described with precision – especially the mentioning of a college experience and whether a politician holds an advanced degree. Aside from political history, the media covered the religious affiliation side by side with the political position and the political party. The affiliation was characterized as a more positive notion in the media sphere.

Both Kamala Harris and Michael Pence – received an enormous volume of reporting and displaying their life stories, educational backgrounds and previous projects details. The two of them without a doubt had a huge portion of their life presented by the media. Furthermore, while the coverage was often displayed in a more positive light, there was a fairly large margin of detail on the side of a female politician, Kamala Harris. General research on media coverage of female politicians has shown that women more often receive coverage that is more dedicated to their background, personality, previous education and family or personal life, than coverage of men does. (Kittilson, Fridkin 2008)

General tone

The news media were rated for the general tone in regards to determining whether the politicians received either a positive or a negative overall portrayal. Out of the 50 articles, 15 (30.5%) of them were tagged using more positive related words and descriptions of the politician, while 13 (26.1%) were tagged for applying phrases and words that portrayed the politician in a rather negative way. Despite the negative campaigns, the media focused more on positive commentary about Michael Pence's persona, his portrayal by the media was by far richer with the positive feedback with the appliance of such words: "a great guy", "he [Mike Pence] knows what's right"¹ and "ardently loyal"². Despite the fact that he has been working closely with a controversial president Trump, his representation stayed more positive and respectful. On the other hand, female vice-president Kamala Harris seemed to attract more negative media coverage than her predecessor.

Negative comments by the media towards Kamala Harris were more often attributed to the fact that she was running a more negative campaign, and consequently, her leadership abilities were questioned and mocked with more regularity. Media sources have mentioned on several occasions that Harris had: "a frustrating start as vice-president"³ or even bold comments that the "presidential campaign had been a fiasco"⁴. Such comments can be freely considered questioning of her leadership qualities, as women tend to get more negative feedback when entering a higher leadership role as political leadership qualities have been historically subscribed to by men. Hence, when a woman is stepping into political leadership, as Kamala Harris has stepped into being the first woman vice-president, it hardly matches with the stereotypical view of a woman being a leader, and the result is – the woman is in a position, where she may receive more negative coverage.

¹ Tumulty, K. (2021, October 6) Mike Pence did a service to democracy on Jan. 6. Why is he trying to undo it now? *The Washington Post*.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2021/10/06/pence-january-6-riot-backtracking-trump-appeasement/>

² Smith, D. & Beaumont, P. (2021, January 5) Pence won't interfere with election certification despite Trump's pressure, officials say. *The Guardian US*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/jan/05/trump-protesters-warned-not-to-carry-guns-as-washington-dc-cal-ls-up-national-guard>

³ Pengelly, M (2021, November 15) White House defends Kamala Harris after reports suggest she is struggling in role. *The Guardian US* <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2021/nov/15/white-house-defends-kamala-harris>

⁴ Pengelly, M. (2022, March 22) Jill Biden criticized husband's choice of Kamala Harris as running mate, book says. *The Guardian US*

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/mar/22/jill-biden-kamala-harris-runing-mate-vice-president-book>

Mention of gender and race

A half of the articles (50%) of all articles mentioned the politician's gender and race (25 out of 50). What is more troubling, all 25 articles were commenting only on Kamala Harris's race and gender. There were no articles that would say "male vice-president" or "white male vice-president" on the contrary to how articles started introducing Harris as: the "first south Asian, black and female vice-president"⁵ This classic example can be found already in the opening lines of nearly all articles about Harris, which noted the obvious fact – that the vice-president is indeed a female. A little less than a half 24 (48%) of the articles called out racial references and the family heritage of the female politician. Moreover, such commentary specifically touched upon her heritage in relation to her position, describing her political success as: "Black woman rising through political ranks."⁶ highlighting both her race and gender.

In several cases, newspapers commentary mentioned that being the first woman vice-president had increased Kamala's electability and had a direct influence on her current political status. That was described as diluting the "whiteness" of the presidential circle. Ultimately, some articles suggested that her ethnic heritage gave Harris an advantage as a politician, because: "Harris brings racial diversity".⁷ The determination to repeatedly point out gender identity and racial background only corroborates the lack of female leaders in the political arena. As was mentioned earlier, male politicians, as represented by Michael Pence, are much less likely to be referred to by their gender or have labels such as "first". Consequently, that is due to the fact that men are accepted as a norm within the political and leadership circle, while women are still seen as something out of the ordinary or as unique individual historical figures. Previous research (Meeks 2012) underlined that novelty labeling, no matter whether it is negative or

⁵ Elan, P. (2021, February 2) Kamala Harris criticized for wearing controversial label Dolce & Gabbana. *The Guardian US*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2021/feb/02/kamala-harris-criticized-wearing-controversial-label-dolce-gabbana>

⁶ Byler, D. (2020, August 12) Harris is a small-c conservative, party-friendly pick — which makes her just right for Biden. *The Washington Post*.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/08/12/harris-is-small-c-conservative-party-friendly-pick-which-makes-her-just-right-biden/>

⁷ Byler, D. (2020, August 12) Harris is a small-c conservative, party-friendly pick — which makes her just right for Biden. *The Washington Post*.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/08/12/harris-is-small-c-conservative-party-friendly-pick-which-makes-her-just-right-biden/>

positive, only emphasizes and intensifies the gender contrasts in a political arena rather than accentuating a politician's leadership experience or career background.

Leadership traits

Aside from gender and racial identity, news articles were analyzed to look out for the description of the politicians and their leadership traits. In order to continue the analysis, I need to set a definition of leadership traits. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines leadership as “the office or position of a leader, the capacity to lead, and the act or instance of leading” (Merriam-Webster 2007). Followingly, the leadership traits of the politicians are the qualities that would appeal to the voters. Such traits include past experience, competence, charisma, leadership, compassion, political and speech skills, communicativeness and consistency.

A little less than a half of the articles (44%, 22 out of 50) attributed various leadership traits to both female and male politicians, nevertheless, for a woman vice-president, the leadership style and traits were closely connected to her “struggles” or achieving success through a tough experience: “displayed competence and command of the issues”⁸, “overcome the same old destructive patterns”⁹. On the other hand, Mike Pence's commentary on his leadership traits concentrated more on his rigorousness or effort, which were also frequently (12 out of 50, 24%) described him as: a “disciplined performer... he got all the qualifications' ".¹⁰, that he “ is not ashamed to speak up”¹¹. Such integrity and moral value-driven traits were more often connected to the positive view of a leadership style of a politician.

⁸ Rogin J. (2022, February 24) Partisan attacks against Harris won't help Ukraine. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/02/24/attacking-vice-president-kamala-harris-wont-help-ukraine/>

⁹ Wootson, C.R. Jr. & Pager, T. (2021, December 4) A Kamala Harris staff exodus reignites questions about her leadership style — and her future ambitions. *The Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/12/04/kamala-harris-staff-departures/>

¹⁰ Wolffe, R. (2020, October 8) Mike Pence struggles to defend the indefensible and please his disastrous boss. *The Guardian US*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/oct/08/mike-pence-debate-vice-president-struggles-to-defend-trump>

¹¹ Zak, D. (2018, November 2) ‘Hi, I’m Oprah’: The Georgia governor’s race is at full boil — and now the cavalry has arrived. *The Washington Post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/hi-im-oprah-its-full-boil-insanity-in-the-georgia-governors-race--and-now-the-cavalry-has-arrived/2018/11/02/05cbc080-de39-11e8-b3f0-62607289efee_story.html

Other vital leadership traits included competence, describing how a politician is prepared or aware of the duties or a task that they were faced with. More negative traits were directed towards Kamala Harris, calling her “ill-equipped...messy” or even “least popular vice president”¹². On the contrary, a dubious figure of a Republican Mike Pence got more positive comments, calling him “calm and respectful...prepared”¹³.

Overall, there was research conducted in the past (Aaldering, Van Der Pas 2020), which confirms that male politicians tend to receive more media coverage on their leadership traits, underlining their rationality and preparedness, which usually are associated with more masculine characteristics.

Physical appearance

Physical appearance of female politicians has always been one of the favorite topics for the media throughout the years. Within taken sampling, 9 (18%) newspaper articles touched upon physical appearance and clothing style, separately from taking the race into consideration. There were also references to the age, hair, makeup, shoes, physical beauty and attractiveness, looking energized or tired. Predictably, Kamala Harris came under a negative flurry of comments affecting her clothing preferences and commenting on her age. Unfortunately, the analysis suggests that the physical appearance of a woman is still a disputed criterion on which both media decided to focus. This can be considered as a still relevant topic, since we in a society still choose to ignore or favor a political candidate upon their physical attractiveness.

Per example, the media had discussed the fashion choices of Kamala Harris on several occasions, mentioning that as a Black representative, “she should be wearing non-American designers” and favor “black designers fashion labels”¹⁴. During an important event, the author of the article

¹² Blake, A. (2021, August 3) Is Kamala Harris really the most unpopular vice president in modern history? *The Washington Post*.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2021/08/03/is-kamala-harris-really-most-unpopular-vice-president-modern-history/>

¹³ Thiessen, M.A. (2020, October 8) Mike Pence’s debate master class. *The Washington Post*.
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2020/10/08/mike-pences-debate-master-class/>

¹⁴ Elan, P. (2021, January 23) ‘A new wave’: Kamala Harris elevates black designers on world stage. *The Guardian US*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2021/jan/23/kamala-harris-inauguration-fashion-coat-dress-designers>

decided to pinpoint that the vice-president is wearing a “an all-white pantsuit”¹⁵ or was shamed for wearing “wearing clothes by Dolce & Gabbana”¹⁶, as politicians should not wear clothing by high designer brands. Comments similar to that become another weapon in the hands of the press to prove that women politicians are responsible not only for their direct political and social activities, but also for creating an image/standard of beauty that should fit within the misogynistic perception of a woman. That perpetuates the problem that women are held to a different standard than male leaders. If we look at the comments on Mike Pence appearance, which is merely 3 articles (6%) briefly mentioned his appearance, only describing his hair as “arctic coiffure”¹⁷ or stating his age.

Overall, over the course years, female politicians receive more media coverage about their appearance than their male counterparts, which followingly creates an accumulative effect that reinforces gender stereotypes.

Family life

Within this study, articles were examined to see how the media reported on the family and personal life of female and male politicians, including the mentions of marital status, children, extended family relatives and spouses. Out of 50 articles, 8 (16%) of them referred to family life. The close family circle of Kamala Harris was discussed more frequently, with references to her caregiving roles as a stepmother to her and a wife. Speaking about spouses, the notion that Kamala’s husband is an ally and is helping her with the current post is mentioned as an unconventional family dynamic. As well, several articles called out that Harris’s husband is now “making history as America’s first male vice-presidential spouse.”¹⁸ While it is common that

¹⁵ Gambino, L. (2020 November 8) 'I won't be the last': Kamala Harris, first woman elected US vice-president, accepts place in history. *The Guardian US* <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/nov/07/kamala-harris-victory-speech-first-woman-vice-president>

¹⁶ Elan, P. (2021, February 2) Kamala Harris criticized for wearing controversial label Dolce & Gabbana. *The Guardian US*. <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2021/feb/02/kamala-harris-criticized-wearing-controversial-label-dolce-gabbana>

¹⁷ Judkis, M. (2020, October 8) Life imitates art, and so a fly landed on Mike Pence’s head. *The Washington post*. https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/life-imitates-art-and-so-a-fly-landed-on-mike-pences-head/2020/10/08/07bb328e-0918-11eb-9be6-cf25fb429f1a_story.html

¹⁸ Roig-Franzia, M. (2021, February 10) Doug Emhoff, Kamala Harris’s husband, is making history as America’s first male vice-presidential spouse. *The Washington Post*.

newspapers to touch upon the family life of a politician, it was mentioned on a number of occasions that Harris is the “daughter of Jamaican and Indian immigrants”¹⁹ Which is another time when the media has pointed out her heritage and family’s ethical background.

For Mike Pence, such representation is not as different, as it was mentioned that he has a close inner circle of family and relatives, as well as mentioning of his spouse. The similarity appears in one of the articles, which also touched upon the origin of the politician, mentioning “his Irish grandfather’s immigration to the United States.”²⁰ Nevertheless, there was less topics that would come close to sharing information on his family and personal life.

All in all, there are confirmations in the literature that news media is more involved in commenting on male politician’s occupation, experience and accomplishments rather than on their family and personal lives. In contradistinction to that, female politicians receive more comments attributed to their personal information, including marital and parental coverage. (Bligh, Casad, Schlehofer & Gaffney, 2012)

2.3. Data summary

Topic	Mentioned in # of Articles	Percentage of Articles
Candidate’s background	28	70%
General Tone	28	56%
Mention of gender and race	25	50%

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/doug-emhoff-kamala-harris-husband/2021/01/11/30ec038a-50e5-11eb-83e3-322644d82356_story.html

¹⁹ Gambino, L. (2020 November 8) 'I won't be the last': Kamala Harris, first woman elected US vice-president, accepts place in history. *The Guardian US*

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/nov/07/kamala-harris-victory-speech-first-woman-vice-president>

²⁰ Roberts, R. (2017, March 16) Mike Pence on his immigrant grandfather: He was right to come to America. *The Washington Post*

https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/mike-pence-on-his-immigrant-grandfather-he-was-right-to-come-to-america/2017/03/16/d0bf3d90-0a54-11e7-93dc-00f9bdd74ed1_story.html

Leadership traits	22	44%
Physical appearance	9	18%
Family life	8	16%

Table 1. Overview of the media representation collected from UK and US 2 major newspapers — The Washington Post and The Guardian US (source: made by the author)

Topic	Mentioned in # of Articles		Percentage of Articles	
	Kamala Harris	Michael Pence	Kamala Harris	Michael Pence
Vice-president				
Candidate’s background	20	15	58%	42%
Mention of gender and race	24	1	48%	2%
General tone	13	15	26%	30%
Leadership traits	10	12	20%	24%
Physical appearance	6	3	12%	6%
Family life	5	3	10%	6%

Table 2. Overview of the media representation separated for each vice-president (source: made by the author)

Overall, the representation of female leaders in politics is by far one of the utmost important topics, particularly in the current political environment with the rise of female politicians coming on the stage and newspaper media is one of the primary resources for obtaining information for potential voters. This highlights how incorrect representation by the media can feasibly affect electoral chances for women who are running for higher ranks in politics and has a chance of

undermining their accomplishments by commencing more on relatively unimportant factors such as physical appearance, gender, religious affiliation or ethnicity.

The findings of this research are not going against previously conducted research and only confirm that media representation is still rather distinguishable for male and female politicians, which can both unintentionally or intentionally reinforce gender prejudices and bias that create disadvantages and unnecessary complications for women to enter in politics. Despite the fact that this research has its limitations in terms of a relatively small sample size and mentioning only two vice-presidents of the United States, both current and previous, it gives a clear overview of the differences in the representation of two members of the US government which withhold the same position and the only vital difference – is their gender.

When we speak about recommendations, from the conducted analysis it is clear that there is room for improvement from the media side. For instance, upon this and previously made research (Johnson-Myers 2021), one can trace a more negative attitude towards women politicians, because their appearance, personal life and choice of clothes were discussed with enviable regularity, in contrast to the way in which male politicians were presented. Consequently, according to one of the past works, it can be said that in the media it is necessary to focus on emphasizing the leadership qualities of female candidates in a way that recognizes their leadership abilities, but not her marital status or physical appearance.

Active female political leaders continue to face impediments inside and outside of their political sphere of work, as they are getting underrepresented and challenged by the media. If this more familiar and frivolous treatment of women in politics continues to this day and will continue in the future, then it will be difficult to imagine gender equality in other walks of life, as for example. business. After all, women in business also suffer from a lack of unbiased representation. With the late developments in gender equality, discussions on implementing gender quotas and the representation that Kamala Harris sets as a vice-president of the United States, the national media are put in a unique and important position to ensure that social and cultural stereotypes are not perpetuated. To sum up, the words used to talk and describe female politicians tend to lean in a more negative or condemning light. Diversification, gender equality,

and a supportive environment in the political world create a chain reaction for other spheres of our lives, as a social and cultural. To prepare and support women in political leadership positions and provide more secure and representational media coverage for these politicians is in the best interest of our progressive society.

CONCLUSION

This research work begins with a theoretical analysis of what is the overall representation by the media sources, and in what way the representation can influence other spheres of life and have an effect on gender equality. Moreover, the theoretical background of the phenomenon is quite rich as the question of female underrepresentation in politics has been raised on numerous occasions since the beginning of the gender revolution in the beginning of the past century. Based on the rich gender inequality gap and the problems which arise from that, this study presented an overview of the representation of both male and female political leaders who occupied the same Vice-President position in the United States of America. The aim is to look into the representation of female leaders by the media in the USA and describe how it affects gender equality. The research questions to be answered were “How female leaders are represented in the media in the United States of America?” and “In what way representation of female leaders can affect gender inequality?”

The adaptation of Qualitative Content Analysis allowed to analyze articles from some of the largest and most widely read publications in America to see if there really is a difference between representation between men and women, which was eventually proven through Relational analysis. Also, the results can be used as a comparative analysis for the future studies, as it presents the existing differences in the representation which are directly attributed to the gender inequality.

Building on the sample size analysis taken from the largest US and UK newspapers (Doctor 2021) known for their political reporting and one of them being awarded with the National Newspaper of the Year several times since the beginning of this century, (Rawlinson 2014) the results confirms that media representation is still far from parity in terms of personal coverage for male and female politicians.

From the analysis, it can be seen that there is a difference on which criteria and topics newspapers tend to put an emphasis on while talking about male and female politicians. When we speak about the female candidate, her background was discussed by a larger of sample the

articles and touched upon her personal life, marital status, hers spouse status and highlighted her family background. Furthermore, authors of the articles chose to repeatedly mention her gender and ethnicity, only underlining the fact that a woman in a position as high as a Vice-president is something out of the ordinary. Especially considering the fact that she was assigned the title “ the first woman” , the Vice-president intentionally reinforced gender prejudice against women occupying leadership roles in politics.

On the other hand, the male Vice-president received close to none of the coverage that would raise or question his ethnic-racial affiliations. The study presents confirmations for the statement that news media would more likely and with regularity practice in sharing male politician’s occupation, experience and accomplishments rather than on topics which are mostly associated with female politician coverage, such as lifestyle, family and personal life. In other words, because the media is not interested in the views of candidates on economic and national security issues, voters may decide that women are not capable of coping with these issues. This is how the media perpetuate the stereotype of "female" and "male" areas of politics. This affects the outcome of the elections, as well as further appointments in the government.

Moreover, this study allows making several suggestions to the media leaders on how to become more gender-neutral and create a better representation framework when speaking about politicians or people in leadership positions. Becoming more aware of the gendered language provides a more respectful image for female representatives. There are several additional recommendations: Increase unbiased and gender-neutral media coverage of female leaders, thus helping to normalize women holding political office. Also, eliminates overall writing about any candidate’s appearance and skin colour. Lastly, rather than focusing on gender or non-political background, focus on the politician's contributions and political qualifications.

Limitations also place this study in a tight box, as it places the main analysis on the American public with a review of major American newspapers. Since no other similar statewide studies were found, I was unable to compare how media from other countries compares to media in terms of any topic included in this analysis. However, this study may help media sources become

more aware of potential gender phraseology that could negatively affect female politicians, as "leadership" is still perceived as a masculine trait.

Poor representation puts women in situations where they may receive fewer votes. Political parties are less likely to place women in media-worthy positions and less likely to put women in debates, therefore we see fewer women in the political arena. Women face difficulties and discrimination in all spheres and countries more than men. Nevertheless, women, along with men, are participants in the process of sustainable development of politics, economics, and cultural progress. and the proper functioning of society. Such representation in all decision-making roles should be encouraged.

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APPENDICES

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