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Master's Thesis of International Studies

**Women's political leadership
participation in the public sector:
A case study of Viet Nam**

여성의 공공부문 정치 리더십 참여
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**Women's political leadership
participation in the public sector
- A case study of Viet Nam -**

A thesis presented

By

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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Abstract

Women's political leadership participation in the public sector: A case study of Viet Nam

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It is acknowledged that closing the gender gap in political participation will take the longest, according to the 2021 Global Gender Gap Report. This paper principally aims to study the situation of Vietnamese women's political participation, especially in leadership, and the factors that lead to the underrepresentation of female civil servants in decision-making titles. It also expects to examine the role of international actors in shaping gender mainstreaming policies and promoting gender parity in politics. Finally, after examining institutional obstacles and assessing women's leadership in the Vietnamese public sector from an international perspective, the study seeks to make relevant recommendations to the present policies.

This research argues that the representation of key female leaders is undeniably essential to ensure gender equality in governments. Nevertheless, despite legal support for gender parity in women's leadership, Vietnamese women working in a male-dominated public sector confront institutional barriers such as the target system, personnel planning, and age of retirement regulation throughout their career path,

which contain hindrance factors against women and their leadership route. In addition to domestic factors, international aspects have a mission in enhancing gender mainstreaming in policies and overseeing the implementation of women's rights in politics.

Keyword: Political participation of women, Leadership, Women empowerment, Viet Nam

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Chapter I. Introduction

1. Study Background

Viet Nam is well-known for having robust and consistent legal frameworks that promote gender equality (UNDP, 2014; UNDP, 2012a; UNDP, 2012b). Following the country's independence in 1945, Decree No.14 – one of the country's earliest legislative documents – established equal rights for women in electoral matters, and the 1946 Constitution reiterated the gender equality's principle. Progress has been made in recent years, as seen by a higher rating in gender equality and the country's leadership in efforts to achieve gender leadership parity. Politburo Resolution No. 11-NQ/TW (2007) and The National Strategy on Gender Equality (NSGE) in the period of 2010-2020 are essential pieces of legislation that foster gender parity in the field of political participation, with the goal of having “95 percent of Ministries, Ministerial and Governmental bodies, People's Committees led by female key leaders.” Most recently, Strategy “on strengthening equal participation of female cadres in leadership and management positions at policy-making levels in the period 2021 - 2030” set the goal:

“By 2025, reaching 60 percent, and by 2030, reaching 75 percent of key positions held by women in state administration and local government at all levels.”

These are regarded as the most important legal frameworks and principles for promoting gender equality in the political arena.

Despite all these efforts, The Vietnamese government has not reached its goal of having a certain number of women in key positions. The Financial Times reported in 2017 that Viet Nam has the lowest female-to-male ratio in senior regional

management, with just one female for every eight males in such positions (Tu & Francois, 2019). In terms of political engagement, women make up 30.26 percent (151 out of 499 seats) in the recently elected 15th National Assembly (NA), which convened in June 2021. In addition, women have only one of the 18 seats on the Politburo of the Communist Party of Viet Nam (CPV)'s Central Committee (two fewer than in the previous tenure). By January 1, 2021, Viet Nam (ranked 182nd out of 193 surveyed countries) was one of the 12 countries globally with no women in ministerial positions. Since April 2021, 2 female ministers (Ministry of Home Affairs and Ministry of Health) and 1 Governor (State Bank of Viet Nam) have been appointed out of 18 Ministries and four ministerial-level bodies. By September 2022, women would account for 8.73 percent of the 97 Vice Ministers in 18 Ministries and 4 ministerial-level agencies and no ministries have two or more female Vice Ministers.

Furthermore, the existing legislation and policies for attaining gender equality in leadership and management are inconsistent. In contrast to the Law on the NA and People's Councils' Deputies Election in 2015, which sets a female candidates' quota, adequate mechanisms to encourage women's engagement in leadership positions is not provided in the Law on the NA's Organization in 2015 and the Organization of Local Governments Law in 2015. One such illustration of this is the absence of a comprehensive and gender-responsive strategy for the advancement cycle. This strategy would cover everything from recruiting and training to preparing the candidate pipeline (for leadership bodies) and the rotation of political appointments at all levels.

In the international arena, Viet Nam signed the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1980

and it was ratified domestically in 1982. Also, in 1980, Article 63 of the revised Constitution stated that:

“Women and men have equal rights in all respects, political, economic, cultural, social and family life. The State and society provide support to improving women’s political, cultural, scientific and technological and professional knowledge and skills, unceasingly raising their role in society.”

Furthermore, at the United Nations Fourth Conference on Women in 1995, Viet Nam committed to following the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action on Women’s Advancement. To fulfill its commitment as a member of international treaties, Viet Nam has made constant efforts to carry out activities to eliminate all discriminated against women forms and to become a global active participant in the gender equality promotion. In politics, the Vietnamese Government has adopted many Action Plans, Schemes as well as projects to encourage the women presence, especially in leadership and decision-making roles. As a result, the rate of women involved in politics and holding key leadership positions has increased positively.

2. Purpose of Research

In recent years, issues related to women, gender, and gender equality have become vital topics discussed in different forums. In Viet Nam, women’s political participation is a topic that attracts not only the attention of experts but also the concerns of political leaders as well as policymakers. In the framework of socioeconomic growth, there are few women present in leadership and management roles. Except for some specific reports conducted by the Vietnamese Government in collaboration with international organizations, most of the previous academic studies

in Viet Nam mainly praised women's efforts but did not show how women have the opportunity to participate more in national political life and exercise leadership, according to their own capacity and legitimate social recognition. In addition, very few pieces of research have mentioned and evaluated the influence of international factors on gender mainstreaming in making policies and strategies to enhance gender equality in politics.

Therefore, this paper principally aims to study the situation of Vietnamese women's participation in politics, especially in leadership, and the factors that lead to the underrepresentation of female civil servants in decision-making positions. It also expects to examine the role of external actors in shaping gender mainstreaming policies and promoting gender parity in politics. Finally, after examining institutional obstacles and assessing women's leadership in the Vietnamese public sector from an international perspective, the study seeks to make relevant recommendations to the present policies.

For the purpose of the study, women's leadership in politics will be examined based on the presence and proportion of women leaders in all key institutions, proving women's institutional capacity to obtain power. In other words, the author conceptualizes WPL in terms of the representation of female officials in holding decision-making positions and their representation's balance across institutions. To identify women's barriers at all levels of government, this study will define leadership positions as members of NA and Provincial People's Councils, senior officials of Party bodies, and deputy director level or above in central and provincial ministry departments (UNDP, 2012a).

Following that, domestic variables consist of political factors and institutional design, socio-economic factors and cultural factors. There is no doubt, however, that

education and training, as well as patriarchal ideology, are the most frequently cited factors for the underrepresentation of women in politics. Consequently, the research will concentrate on the institutional dimension in order to assess the drawbacks of a single-party state political system.

On the other hand, the national legal system is the mechanism through which the state's foreign policy can be put into effect in the global arena. When drafting legislation, the State must guarantee that the content of domestic laws does not conflict with international treaties that Viet Nam has ratified and that parties cannot rely on domestic laws to avoid fulfilling their responsibilities. In the terms of promoting gender equality, Viet Nam lacks gender experts at present. As an active country in international integration process, Viet Nam should take into account the involvement of international aspect in refining the national legal system. Therefore, the paper will study the role of international organizations regarding policies consultation and its contributions aimed at improving the country's performance as well as determining the extent to which international obligations are being implemented.

The above contradictory realities lead to the research questions of this paper, as follows:

- Why do we need key female leaders in the public sector?
- When it comes to advancing women in Viet Nam's public sectors, how do official institutions and their policies integrate discriminatory factors?
- To what extent do international factors contribute to the change in women's political leadership participation in Viet Nam?

This research argues that the representation of key female leaders is undeniably essential to ensure gender equality in governments. Nevertheless, despite

legal support for gender parity in women's leadership, Vietnamese women working in a male-dominated public sector still confront institutional barriers, which contain hindrance factors against women and their leadership route. These are the target system, personnel planning, and age of retirement regulation. In addition to domestic factors, international aspects have a mission to facilitate gender mainstreaming in policies and overseeing the women's rights performance in politics.

3. Methodology

The descriptive-qualitative method will be used to collect and assess data.

Chapter II will utilize the literature reviews to explain the framework and then solve the first research question. In the rest of this work, the author intends to do research by synthesizing data from government publications, annual country reports, and media articles from ministries and international organizations such as UN Women, UNDP, IPU, and World Bank. Furthermore, other related existing research from universities and academic institutions in Viet Nam is useful in demonstrating the author's arguments and analyzing data.

Chapter II. Literature Review

1. Feminist Institutionalism

Gender, according to feminist institutionalists, is a fundamental aspect of socially and culturally manufactured disparities that denote men's and women's hierarchical relationships (Hawkesworth, 2005). Thus, gender relations are "cross-cutting" and are incorporated into a variety of different types and levels of political institutions that are not just "institutional" but also "institutionalized," thereby constraining and altering social interactions (Mackay, Kenney, and Chappell, 2010). Meanwhile, Kenny (2014) and Thomson (2018) make the same argument that feminist institutionalism is a subset of neo-institutionalism that investigates how gender norms are reinforced inside institutions, how institutions themselves are gendered, and how formal and informal tenets impact political life. This theoretical framework also shows how institutionalism can help us understand how gender works in relation to a wide range of political dynamics by providing some novel insights for studies of women in politics and the function of political institutions (Krook, 2010).

To better understand and evaluate institutional dynamics, gender power, and the pattern of gendered inequities in political life, the feminist approach to institutionalism is crucial (Mackay, Kenney and Chappell, 2010). Correspondingly, according to Chappell (2006), political institutions generate legislation and policies that influence the "broader social and political gender expectation." while feminist institutionalism also has taken into account the importance of women in leadership roles in shaping policy (Thomson, 2018). Furthermore, scholars can utilize this framework to investigate variance in male overrepresentation (Adams & Smrek,

2018.) By defining what constitutes masculine and feminine forms of behavior, norms, and values, this method highlights how the interaction between formal regulations and informal practices provides differing chances for women and men (Bjarnegard and Kenny, 2015).

There has been a wealth of studies on gender and parliaments from a variety of perspectives (Erikson and Joseffson, 2018; Crawford and Pini, 2011), though, most of them have concentrated on Western democracies. The purpose of this study is to address the lack of literature on the topic by using a feminist institutionalism framework—with a focus on Viet Nam's formal institutions—to the country's current circumstances.

2. Descriptive Representation

Among the three forms of political representation, which are descriptive, substantive, and symbolic, descriptive political representation has been extensively explored due to its tangible nature (Krook 2010). The majority of research on the descriptive representation of women in politics has concentrated on electoral procedures, labor force participation, education, employment, and religion (Stockemer 2015), as well as gender quotas effectiveness and proportional representation in increasing the representation of women in legislative bodies (Krook 2009, Tremblay 2007). In the same way that social and cultural factors impact women's ability to enter politics, political systems and parties impact their ability to attain leadership positions. (Devin Joshi and Ryan Goehrung 2018). Since excluding or denying a group might make an organization illegitimate^①, several studies have focused on the effect of gender quotas (Dahlerup 2005; Krook and O'Brien 2010,

^① Mansbridge, Jane. 1999. "Should Blacks Represent Blacks And Women Represent Women? A Contingent "Yes"." *The Journal of Politics* 61 (3): 628-657. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2647821>.

Hughes 2011).

Many scholars have demonstrated that results from descriptive representation of women in politics may motivate women and overcome gender imbalance in political participation (Atkeson, 2003; Koch, 1997). Research by Reingold and Harrell (2010) came to a similar conclusion, finding that women can be significantly inspired to run for office when they see positive portrayals of themselves among the contenders. The greater the number of female candidates in an election, the more engaged, vocal, and well-informed the female electorate will be.^②

Women's descriptive representation in political organizations, however, is the subject of multiple literature that examine factors like national economic development and cultural pattern (Paxton, 1997), democracies versus authoritarian regimes (Bauer & Britton, 2006), western versus non-western nations (Stockemer, 2015), and so on. Whereas most of the aforementioned studies have been comparative, and as political systems vary from country to country, the goal of this research is to shed light on a single country, Viet Nam, and isolate the factors that influence how women are portrayed in this country.

3. Key female leaders in politics

Several studies have found a link between women's active participation in government and politics and an increase in a number of democratic outcomes that work to reduce social and economic inequality. In particular, the study of gender variations in leadership has also received the greatest interest from researchers in the domains of psychology and management.^③ Because women prioritize, interact with,

^② Reingold, Beth, and Jessica Harrell. 2010. "The Impact of Descriptive Representation on Women's Political Engagement: Does Party Matter?" *Political Research Quarterly* 63 (2): 280-294.

^③ Hardy-Fanta, Carol. 1995. "Latina Women and Political Leadership: Implications for Latino Community Empowerment." *New England Journal of Public Policy* 11 (1): 221-235.

and campaign for issues that have positive effects on society (such as family, health, and education), their influence over public policy and budget allocation enhances their constituents' quality of life and reinforces legislative institutions.

UN Women defines women's political engagement as crucial for gender parity and authentic democracy. Women's political accountability begins with expanding the number of women in key positions, but it does not end there. Women in politics, at all levels, play a crucial role in breaking down the obstacles that impede women and girls from achieving success in all aspects of life, not just politics. In addition, on September 25, 2015, succeeding the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations established the new 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which includes the aim of gender equality:

“Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life” (United Nations, 2015).

With the same view, Eliza Sharma (2020) believes political empowerment refers to the provision of a platform for all women to actively involved in the political sphere and assists them in recognizing their worth as agents of change and development at the national and worldwide levels.

Women in political leadership not only contribute their economic and political expertise to the improvement of legislative institutions but also set an example for future generations of women, encouraging them to join the workforce in greater numbers and a wider variety of occupations. Over the past several decades, there has been a worldwide uptick in interest and support for women's political empowerment,

which has led to a number of well-recognized firsts.^④ In the example of the United Kingdom, Blumenau (2019) presented testimony of a female "role model" influence in a legislative environment. Because of the historically low proportion of women in cabinet minister posts in the UK and elsewhere, the women who do make it to these positions are seen as role models of success, and their presence serves to excite and inspire the younger women who work for them. His findings also pointed to a potential mechanism that might be used to bring about a policy change, which is that female leaders encourage greater engagement and influence among other women in the process of policy formation.

In terms of leadership styles, women tend to have a more democratic, participatory, and collaborative style of leadership than men do, despite the fact that leadership responsibilities tend to encourage commonalities between male and female leaders (Eagly & Carli, 2007). One of the primary reasons that women entered politics, according to Cantor and Bernay's (1992) assessment of the "womanpower" of female politicians, was to push for policies that would benefit the prosperity of other people. In addition, women in leadership positions are keenly aware of the need of fostering an environment where all employees are treated fairly regardless of gender. In their paper, Cheung and Halpern (2019) confirmed that women are more likely to follow "a transformative leadership style" than men. The female leaders tied employee rewards to their actions in acceptable ways, allowing employees to recognize the relationship between their job efforts and rewards. Given that they are more inclined to adopt the approach that has been shown to provide

^④ Goryunova, Elizabeth, Robbyn T. Scribner, and Susan R. Madsen. 2017. "The current status of women leaders worldwide." In *Handbook of research on gender and leadership*. Cheltenham, England: Edward Elgar Publishing.

positive results, as a whole, it stands to reason that women would be better leaders. Consequently, it is essential to understand the distinctions between female and male leadership styles, particularly the higher tendency of women to share their knowledge, which may encourage greater performances and outcomes throughout the organization.

4. Women's Political Participation in Viet Nam

In 1986, the Wall Street Journal published a definition of the "glass ceiling", stating that it is an unseen barrier that hinders women and minority groups from achieving the career ladder. ^⑤ There are three types of obstacles that lead to a glass ceiling, according to Oakley's (2000) analysis, which includes: organizational practices (recruitment, retention, and promotion), behavioral and cultural factors (stereotyping and leadership style), and feminist structure and culture explanations. Likewise, Folke and Rickne (2016) contend that the concept of a "glass ceiling" proposes a unique pattern of career obstacles that could explain why there more women are not in leadership positions. To begin, there must be gender-based obstacles that hinder women from advancing further in their careers. Second, these discriminatory barriers must be eliminated for higher-ranking positions.

According to Hessami and Fonseca (2020), there are four major factors that explain why women are underrepresented in political leadership positions in both developing and developed countries. First and foremost, women may be less likely to run for election in a competitive environment. Another possibility is that people are predisposed to favoring male politicians over female ones. Then there is the issue

^⑤ Weyer, Birgit. 2007. "Twenty years later: explaining the persistence of the glass ceiling for women leaders." *Women in Management Review* 22 (6): 482-496.

of party leaders being anti-feminist. As a fourth factor, scholars have recently focused their attention on institutional hurdles to female involvement, which are in addition to the supply- and demand-side arguments discussed above. Alternatively, Grove and Montgomery (1999) suggested gender gap is an impediment to women pursuing and attaining leadership positions, while some other academics believed that conscious and unconscious attitudes and gender stereotypes significantly prevent women from gaining access to senior and executive-level roles (Marie, Christina, Tracy, & Michelle 2017).

Meanwhile, among scholars, social norms and preconceptions have been identified as one of the most important explanatory factors for Vietnamese women's political engagement. Even though women are more concerned about the gender discrepancy in political leadership, according to Tran and Le's (2020) research, attitude is the most significant barrier to women's political engagement in Viet Nam. In his 2008 paper, Truong emphasized the underappreciated role of the Viet Nam Women's Union and the National Committee for the Advancement of Women, as well as the age retirement law as structural and gender stereotyping as social setbacks (Truong 2008), whereas Vu (2019), Joshi and Timothy (2018) praised the historical contexts, quota policy, and media coverage of women leaders. Previous work on women's leadership in Viet Nam has been limited by the fact that it has been generalized rather than rigorously studied. Consequently, this work aims to develop a more systematic approach to the research concern that will focus on the problem's formal institutional limitations.

Besides, "lobbying" is a necessary activity in global politics and a critical part of parliamentary activities (Phan & Dang, 2022). While "interest" groups, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international intergovernmental

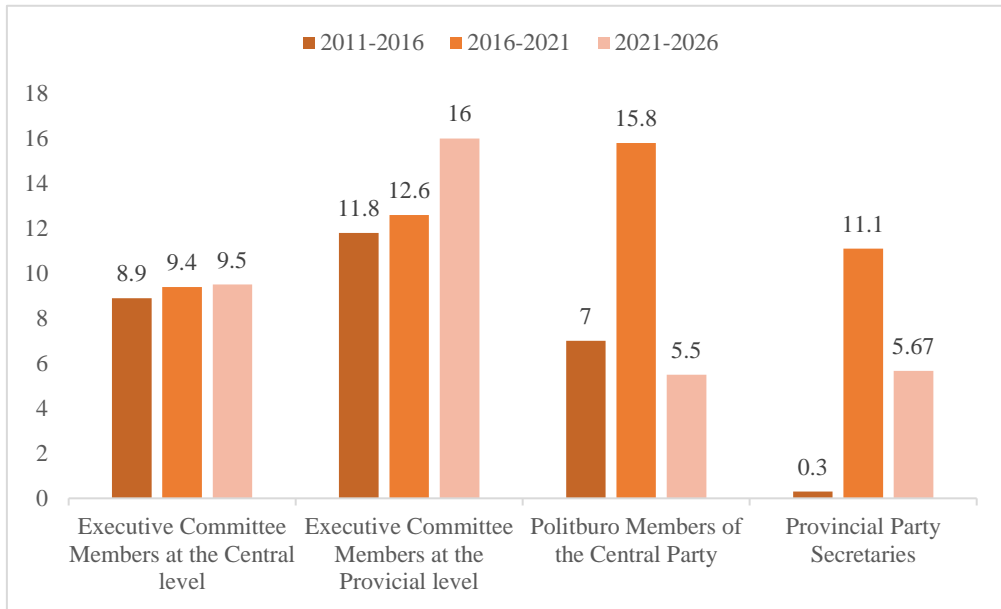
organizations, use “lobbying” as a useful mechanism to influence the development of state policies, this activity is not recognized by the Vietnamese government, and there are no regulations in place governing lobbying. Common methods of "lobbying" employed by these organizations include conducting assessments of current policies and laws to propose initiatives and recommend amendments and improvements to the law; enhancing the capacity of law-making officials in state agencies on policy and legal issues; and providing objective and independent advice on issues that must be resolved at the policy and strategic level. Specifically, intergovernmental international organizations and international associations serve as a bridge between national law and international law, bringing the country's laws and policies closer to the objectives of the international conventions that member states have ratified. Consequently, international organizations can "intervene" and effect on state agencies to make beneficial contributions and recommendations to interest groups during the policy formulation and lawmaking processes. In the case of Viet Nam, the necessity of receiving advice and assistance from gender specialists in addition to financial resources from international organizations has established the conditions necessary for international actors to participate in the process of revising legislation. Therefore, the focus of the study will also be on the impact of international commitments and the activities of international organizations, notably UN member organizations, and the effect of this perspective on the gender equality policies refinement in Viet Nam.

Chapter III. Domestic institutional factors

1. Target system

Gender quota is known as an effective method to ensure the balance of gender in government. Viet Nam, nevertheless, instead of having a gender quota policy at the start, set a gender target in government by specifying a target number of women who would be nominated for and elected to the Parliament and People's Councils at provincial level. This made it one of the first countries to do so. However, gender targets are integrated alongside the targets for ethnic minorities, youth, military, non-party members, religions, and so on in order to guarantee the diverse representation of each population group. This has made it harder for women to get elected since they often have to meet a number of other requirements on top of their gender and compete against men with better qualifications.

Figure 1. The Proportion of Female Members of the CPV’s Committees in the 3 latest tenures



Sources: *Country Gender Equality Profile (2021)*

Looking at the women’s involvement in the CPV over 13 national congresses with 13 elected General Secretaries, no women attained prominent positions in the most powerful bodies. Accounting for 15.8 percent with 3 out of 19 members, the 12th term (2016 - 2021) was notable for the largest proportion of female Politburo members. In the Central Committee of CPV for the current tenure, even though the number of female members is marked as higher than that in the previous term, there are 19 females out of the 200 members (making up 9.5 percent) and only 1 female Politburo member. In addition, only 9 women (5.67 percent) are chosen to be secretaries of city/provincial Party committees for the same term. Therefore, there has not been a notable change in the number of female leaders in the Party during the course of previous tenures.

A study on the results of the 15th National Assembly Elections in 2021 found that the success rate of female candidates was around half that of their male counterparts. Although women made up 45.38 percent of all candidates, only 30.26 percent were actually elected, a figure that is much lower than the rate at which males were elected (38.42 percent for women and 73.57 percent for men, respectively). Women have more barriers to the election than males do, including being minorities, not being members of the party, and being under the age of 40. Although 52.5 percent of women and 25.6 percent of men meet at least one requirement, the success rate of men who meet only one criterion is nearly double that of women (49.6 percent versus 28.5 percent). Therefore, there is a clear difference in the male-to-female ratio among individuals who meet more than two extra criteria (22.35 percent male: 77.65 percent female with two additional criteria, and 15 percent male: 85 percent female with three additional criteria). Even though there are many female candidates running for election at the local level, their prospects of being elected are much lower than those of women running at the central level, which is only one-third (Hoang & Do 2021).

In addition, the term “window dressing” for the targeted number of women set by the Government also leads to the lack of female leaders in public sectors. The NSGE for the period 2010-2020 and Resolution No. 11-NQ/TW dated April 27, 2007 of the Politburo set out:

"By 2020, striving to reach 25 percent or more female participation in Party Committees at all levels; 35 percent to 40 percent female members of the National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels; governmental bodies with a female ratio of more than 30 percent must have women leaders in key positions; and by 2020, striving to have female key leaders in 95 percent of ministerial-level agencies,

government agencies, and People's Committees at all levels.”

None of these goals have been accomplished, despite the fact that they are among the many national targets that have been set in the previous years to address gender equity in leadership positions in the public sector.

According to the results of the most recent Party Congress for the 2020–2025 term, the percentage of women serving on the Party Committees at the higher levels and the central level is 17.4 percent and 15.73 percent, respectively. In terms of state bodies, as shown in the results of the 15th election of NA and People's Councils at all levels for the period 2021-2026, 30.26 percent of the seats in the National Assembly and 29 percent of the seats in the Provincial People's Council are held by women. It can also be seen that when compared to their representation in the Cabinet and the Party's committees, women's involvement in the National Assembly has usually been higher. Nevertheless, the National Assembly's top five leaders for the current term, 2021–2026, all happen to be men (one chair and four vice chairs). Within the 18 members of the National Assembly Standing Committee, three women were chosen to serve. Regarding the Chairs of Committees in the National Assembly, two women have been selected to lead the Social Affairs and Judicial Committees, respectively.

Table 1. The number and proportion of female deputies
in the NA Committees, 2016 -2020

Committees	Committees Head		Committees Deputy Head		Standing Committee Members		Committee Members	
	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female No & (%)	Male
Legal	0	1	1	4	2	2	8 (25.8)	23
Judicial	1	0	0	5	2	1	6 (20)	24
Social Affairs	1	0	2	3	2	1	18 (43.9)	23
Economic	0	1	1	3	0	3	3 (8.82)	31
Finance and Budget	0	1	0	5	2	2	5 (15.2)	28
Culture, Education and Youth	0	1	1	2	1	3	18 (48.6)	17
Science, Technology and Environment	0	1	0	4	2	1	7 (24.1)	22
External Affairs	0	1	0	3	1	4	7 (33.3)	14
Security and Defense	0	1	0	4	1	3	2 (6.3)	30
Council of Ethnic Minorities	0	1	2	3	2	1	19 (51.4)	18
Total number	2	8	7	36	15	21	93	230
% Women	20		16.3		41.7		28	

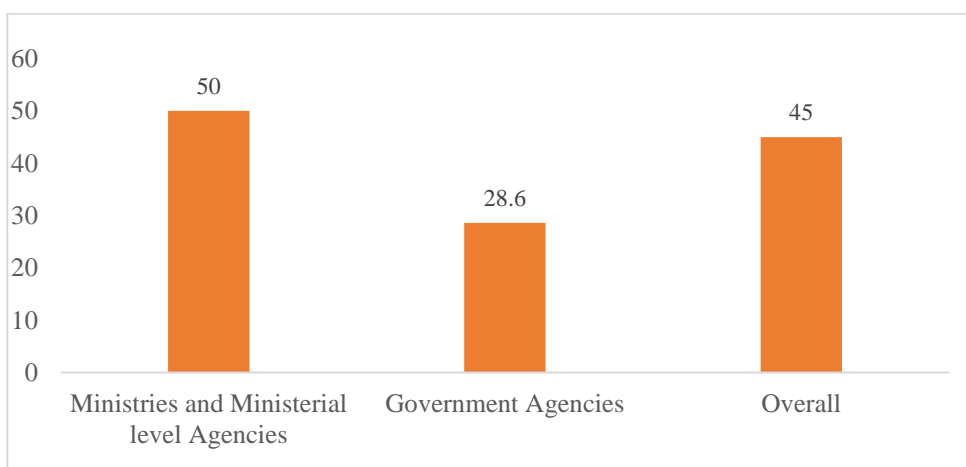
Source: The official website of the National Assembly (<https://quochoi.vn/>)

A deeper examination of the number of women's participation in National Assembly committees' term of 2016 - 2020 finds a gender disparity. The Ethnic Council has a majority of female representatives with 51.4 percent, as do the Committees for Culture, Education, and Youth with 48.6 percent, and 43.9 percent in Social Affairs. In the most influential committees such as Security and Defense,

Economics, Finance and Budget, the underrepresentation of female deputies is shown very clearly, accounting for 6.25 percent, 8.8 percent, and 15.2 percent, respectively. In terms of Heads of Committees, males make up the majority of committee chairs in eight out of ten committees, except Judicial and Social Affairs (Legal and Social Affairs). Similarly, males predominate in the role of Deputy Head of the Committees.

At the state's central and local administrative levels, in the first six months of 2021, just 45 percent of Ministerial and Government agencies were led by women. It was estimated that 28.6 percent of major leaders in government agencies were female, while women made up 50 percent of key leaders in ministries and ministerial-level agencies.

Figure 2. The Percentage of Ministries, Ministerial and Governmental Institutions led by women, 2021



Source: Ministry of Labor, War Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA)

As of September 2022, 2 female ministers (Ministry of Home Affairs, Ministry of Health) and 1 Governor (State Bank of Viet Nam) have been appointed

out of 18 Ministries and 4 ministerial-level agencies. Women would account for 8.73 percent of the 97 total Vice Ministers in 22 Ministries and ministerial-level agencies and no ministries have more than 2 female Vice Ministers. In People's Committees across all levels, by 2021, the percentage of Committees having key female leader at the provincial, district, and commune levels is 37.7 percent, 31.8 percent, and 24.9 percent respectively.^⑥ Although the legislative structure may guarantee that men and women have an equal political opportunity participation, women are still underrepresented in upper-level positions across the board.

Many studies have demonstrated that the weakness of quota policy as well as the lack of punishments or fines leads to the failure to achieve such targets (Ballington, 2004; Miguel, 2008.) In the case of Viet Nam, the term "striving" which was used to describe the desired outcomes but carried with it almost no legal weight, may be accountable for this scenario. This term was mentioned in all three targets of objective 1 regarding women's representation in managerial and leading positions and narrowing the political gender gap. Let's take a look at what the NSGE 2011–2020 has accomplished so far.

“Target 1: Strive to attain women’s proportion in all levels of Party Committees for the 2016 – 2020 tenure to be from 25 percent or higher; the proportion of female National Assembly deputies, female members of People’s Councils at all levels tenure 2011 – 2015 to be from 30 percent or higher and above 35 percent for the 2016 – 2020 tenure.”

^⑥ Country Gender Equality Profile Viet Nam 2021

Table 2. The percentage of women in the Party Committees and People’s Councils at all levels in 2 previous tenures

Level	Term	
<i>Party Committees Member</i>		
	2010 – 2015	2015 - 2020
Provincial Level	11.3	13.4
District Level	15.2	17.2
Commune Level	18	21.5
<i>People’s Council Member</i>		
	2011 – 2016	2016 - 2021
Provincial Level	25.2	26.6
District Level	24.6	27.5
Commune Level	21.7	26.6

Source: Review report on the NSGE implementation (2011 – 2020)

In the previous term, only two provinces/cities under the central government fulfilled the target of 25 percent of female members in the Provincial Party Committees; 11 out of the 42 the central government’s provinces/cities met the established aim at all levels. In the indicator of women participation in the People’s Council, only ten provinces/cities under the central government satisfied the assigned target of female member in the Provincial People’s Councils; and only one province/city reach the target of 35 percent at all levels.

“Target 2: Strive to accomplish 80 percent of ministries, ministerial and government agencies, and People’s Committees at all levels to have key

women leaders by 2015, and more than 95 percent by 2020.”

At the end of 2019, only 43.3 percent of ministries, ministerial agencies, and other government entities had senior female heads. In 2021, the proportion raised slightly to 45 percent but had not yet achieved the goal.

“Target 3: Strive to attain 70 percent by 2015, and 100 percent by 2020 of Party and State agencies, socio-political organizations that will have key female leaders if the proportion of female staff, civil servants, public employees and workers in those agencies or organizations is 30 percent or higher.”

With regard to governmental agencies, the Ministry of Home Affairs (MOHA) reported in 2019 that 53 percent (Ministries/sectors) had at least 30 percent female senior leadership positions. During the mandate that run from 2016 to 2021, the National Assembly was presided over by a woman for the first time ever, and three women were serving on the Politburo. However, in general, the goal that was set to improve the amount of female cadres in managerial and leadership roles did not meet the required threshold.

On the NSGE 2021-2030, the word "strive" has been eliminated:

“Objective 1: In politics

Target: The proportion of female key leaders in state management agencies, and local authorities at all levels by 2025 and 2030 will be 60 percent and 75 percent, respectively.”

In the new term, however, the National Strategy has just defined general goals in the realm of politics, without any particular resolutions or punishments, in order to attain the designated objectives.

2. Personnel Planning System

To be promoted in the public sector of Viet Nam, one must fulfill at least three of the following conditions: be nominated in a “structured” personnel list, complete a mandatory training program, and undergo a rotational term in municipal bodies.

1.1. Structured personnel list

To be included in the list of "structured" personnel, as per Document No. 06-HD/BTCTW of February 24, 2017, on the planning of leaders and managers in public sectors, potential cadres must be nominated by the higher divisions. The current Regulation 50-QĐ/TW on civil servant planning, released in 2021, mandates a female cadre planning ratio of at least 25 percent; at the district level and higher, female cadres must be included in the planning for the positions of the party committee, leader, and manager. However, women are underrepresented in all levels of leadership in Viet Nam, but especially at the highest levels. As mentioned above, only the Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Health and the State Bank of Viet Nam are led by female leaders. There are just 7.8 percent and 13.4 percent female department heads and equivalents, respectively. The Supreme People's Court is not led by a prominent woman. Only three out of twenty-one deputy heads are women in the mass organizations (excluding the Viet Nam Women's Union), and neither the Viet Nam Veterans Association nor the Central Committee of the Viet Nam Farmer's Union has any female leaders. This is owing to the decades-long practice of "male head – female deputy" among Viet Nam's leaders. It is more likely for men to elect among themselves rather than choose women for a leadership role in a workplace that is predominately occupied by men. This is in addition to the gender stereotypes of femininity and masculinity that influence the promotion assessment process, in

which women frequently tolerate higher expectancies compared to men (UNDP 2012a). As in many other nations, the public sector in Viet Nam has been "a self-reinforcing cycle of males picking males" (Joshi & Timothy 2018). Furthermore, in a patriarchal culture and workplace, women's leadership challenges the power and position of men, which in turn leads to further discrimination against women and less equality.

1.2. Training Course

An Advanced Political Theory level, as defined by the Ho Chi Minh National Academy of Politics' Conclusion No. 57-KL/TW, dated March 8, 2013, on training and cultivation of political theory for leaders and managers at all levels, must be attained through a concentrate or non-concentrate training course. This training is demanded by two groups: (1) those who occupy moderate to high-ranking posts, such as the equivalent of deputy director or higher in ministries, departments, mass organizations, and Party Committees at all levels; and (2) crucial officials and those who are listed in the "structured" personnel list. Officials who wish to further their careers within the CPV and within the management of the state are required to obtain a certificate in Advanced Political Theory. This is seen as a prerequisite for higher-level employment.

According to the latest Regulations on the subjects, standards, and decentralization of political training, planned cadres must have held the level of principal official for a full 4 years to be eligible for the advanced political training class. It indicates they must have worked for a minimum of 13 years or more (excluding probationary and probationary periods). Thus, cadres must be at least 35 years old to enroll in the advanced political course. Women in their late twenties, on the other hand, are statistically more likely to be engaged in marriage, having

children, and caring for a household. It causes women to participate in this training course at a considerably lower rate than men. Therefore, a gender disparity has emerged in government official evaluation, leadership planning, training, advancement, as a direct result of the training requirements of age and years in office.

Furthermore, for advancement in the public sector, diplomas from governmental training programs are essential, as stated in Article 18 of Decree 101, published in 2017, on training and promotion programs for civil servants. It reduces women's opportunities for advancement in government even more. Women have less opportunity to participate in these types of advanced training courses on leadership and management since they are less common in senior leadership positions in public service than males. According to UNDP's research in 2012, there were significantly more male officials (42 percent) than female (38.5 percent) who attended between one and two training courses. Officially, only 2.9 percent of women and 8.7 percent of men were enrolled in all three available training programs. To compare, just 49 percent of male government workers had never attended a training session, while the proportion of female civil servants was 58.6 percent. At the central level, the proportion of female participant in training courses in political theory and public administration accounted for only 10–20 percent.

Moreover, when discussing the draft version of the 2006 Law on Gender Equality, members of the NA evaluated this issue and took into consideration a women's target of 30% to assure the women's representation in the NA, People's Councils, and key roles in public institutions. However, the implementation of a quota was shot down due to opposition from some deputies and was just added to NSGE in the period 2010-2020. A National Assembly's deputy expressed concern that the quality of the cadre would suffer if the mandated quotas were implemented

because "If these quotas are mandated by legislation, we will be compelled to meet them, despite the fact that the qualifications and standards of women deputies are insufficient and the cadre quality would suffer as a result."^⑦ This criticism claims that the fundamental reason women are underrepresented in positions of power is their lack of capability and professional qualifications. By placing the blame on women for not holding important decision-making positions, the argument also obscures the systemic hurdles to women's success, such as discrimination in the workplace and a lack of opportunity for professional development and promotion. Furthermore, claiming that government action to raise the number of female official in governance is undesirable because it would reduce the quality of government decision-makers reinforces entrenched conceptions of male dominance.

1.3. Rotation period

Position rotation is considered a solution and strategy for training and developing "structured" officials, allowing them to get more experience and qualifications for their "structured" roles and titles. In accordance with Politburo's Regulation No. 98-QD/TW dated October 7, 2017 on the rotation of officials, in order to be promoted, one must also undergo a 3- to 5-year position rotation term in a local government body. As the primary caregiver for their family members, Vietnamese women are nonetheless subject to conventional gender standards influenced by Confucianism. The working rotation system poses a challenge to women and their socially built household responsibilities since they are required to stay away from home for extended periods, eliciting negative responses not only from their surroundings but also from inside themselves. Women are thus less likely

^⑦ Truong, Thi Thuy Hang. 2008. "Women's Leadership in Vietnam: Opportunities and Challenges." Symposium: Challenges to Women's Leadership: 16-21.

to engage in a working rotation procedure. According to a study conducted by the UNDP^⑧, women are less likely to take part in such endeavors. Compared to the rates of rotation for male officials, which are 1.3 and 1.2 times every five years, the ratio of female cadres' rotation at the provincial and central levels is 0.8 and 0.9 times, respectively.

In an effort to narrow gender disparity, in the latest regulation on cadre rotation^⑨ published this year, the age restriction of “50 years old for men and 45 years old for women” has been replaced by “have worked for at least 10 years from the time of rotation”.

3. Retirement Age Policy

Concerning discrimination against women and progress in public sectors, Viet Nam stands out as one of the few nations that enforce an age disparity in retirement age legislation. According to the amended Labor Code that was passed in 2019 and went into effect in 2021, the retirement age is “60 years and 3 months for men and 55 years and 4 months for women.” This age will be increased by 3 months for males and 4 months for females yearly as an effort on the part of the government to reduce the discrepancy between the sexes. This policy was initially implemented in the 1960s as a kind of compensation to women in recognition of “their domestic responsibilities as well as stereotypes about the physical weakness of older women in comparison with men” (Sabharwal & Huong, 2007). Regrettably, considering that women have a shorter professional span than men do, this presents a challenge for those who wish to advance in their careers. The International Labor Organization (ILO) claims that retirement age regulations and other forms of institutionalized

^⑧ UNDP. 2014. Women's Leadership in Viet Nam: Leveraging a resource untapped. UNDP (Ha Noi).

^⑨ Decision No 65-QD/TW on Cadre Rotation. 2022. edited by The Government of Viet Nam.

sexism exist because of harmful gender stereotypes regarding "femininity," which can lead to fewer opportunities for training and advancement as well as lower wages for workers (Tran 2019).

As was mentioned in the preceding section, the disparities in retirement age led to discrimination against women on the route to advancement. An UNDP study notes that the gap in retired age contributes to three vital issues with the preference for women's promotion: (1) the working inefficiency of women's time in office compared to men with 5 more working years; (2) the lack of suitable women's candidacy compared to men in higher positions; and (3) the unfair competition that exists between men and women owing to the fact that males have greater advantages in terms of working experience, time in office, and higher salary rate, in comparison with women who have insufficient professional life as a consequence of the retirement age, which can be made worse by the career interruptions that are necessary due to unavoidable commitments such as maternity leave or household duties.

In addition to the requirements regarding wage, position, and number of years in office that were presented before, the Advanced Political Theory course also imposes an age restriction on its participants. Women must be under the age of 35 and men must be under the age of 40 in order to be eligible to take the course. By the time women meet all these criteria, they are statistically more likely to be too old to apply to the training program. Likewise, in terms of the system of work rotation and cadre planning, people who are eligible to be nominated to the structured personnel list as well as participate in the rotation period must have at least two working terms (10 years) left in the office. Additionally, due to the fact that the retirement age policy is different for men and women, the age eligibility

requirements for work rotation are also distinct. Consequently, males should be below 50 years old, and women should be less than 45 years old in order to be rotated, meaning that women have a considerably shorter preparation period to achieve all the prerequisites and a shorter political life compared to men with the same starting spot.

4. Discussion

In Viet Nam, there is no doubt that the equality of men and women in politics has been stated in legal documents. However, certain regulations impede women's opportunities for job advancement. In the sphere of public sector in Viet Nam, there are few agencies with female heads since female cadres are not given priority positions on the planning list, are unable to attend relevant professional training courses, and lack the required working time and age. The discrepancy in actual working time between men and women was not considered by Vietnamese policymakers, even though women lose at least six months of their working years to childbearing and maternity leave on average. To adopt a policy or personnel planning, furthermore, the decisionmakers remain human. In some cases, the unspoken laws influence their judgment, which can have a particularly negative impact on female officials, especially in a society dominated by men. As a result, there is an urgent requirement for an improvement in the number of women holding key positions. These are the positions that have not only a voice but also the powerful votes necessary to propose policy revisions that are favorable to women. To tackle that problem, there are now internal policies in place for personnel planning in some Vietnamese ministries and branches, such as the requirement that female officials only need a referral rate of over 40% to be considered for inclusion in the planning

list (whereas the requirement for male employees is over 50%). Or, as part of a welfare strategy intended to facilitate and encourage women's participation, especially ethnic minority female officials, certain localities have increased the allowance given to female cadres who are assigned to participate in training courses. In addition, the lack of a monitoring mechanism also undermines the effectiveness of gender equality policies and objectives in Vietnamese politics. This is demonstrated by the fact that, in spite of a growth in the number of Vietnamese female officials participating in politics and holding managerial and leadership positions, the established goals have not been attained yet. Therefore, the government of Viet Nam still has to implement some legislative adjustments so as to improve the presence of female leaders in the public sector as well as to empower women in politics.

Chapter IV. International factors

1. International Commitments and Treaties

1.1. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

On December 18, 1979, the United Nations approved the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. After the 20th country ratified on September 3, 1981, this Convention entered into force as the most comprehensive international instrument regards women's human rights. The birth of the CEDAW Convention is the result of more than 30 years of struggle by the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Globally, the Convention is the only document that can adequately address women's rights within the perspective of political, civil, cultural, economic, and social life. Parties to the convention must commit not only to ensuring that existing laws do not directly discriminate against women but also to taking the necessary actions to enable women's equality. According to the CEDAW Committee, 186 countries around the world have ratified or signed the convention, accounting for more than 90% of the members of the United Nations. Viet Nam was one of the earliest countries in the ASEAN region and the world to sign the convention on July 29, 1980 and ratify it on November 27, 1981. It is important to note that this happened during a time when Viet Nam had only recently completed its reunification process. Due to the embargo, Viet Nam was still facing many difficulties in the process of recovering the country. The government's active engagement in signing and ratifying CEDAW demonstrated that the issue of women's rights was considered as an essential and vital one.

1.2. Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action

The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (BPfA), adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 with the participation of Viet Nam and other 188 countries, affirmed their commitment to advance toward the goals of equality, development, and peace for all women everywhere in the world for the benefit of all humanity. Consequently, governments, civil society organizations, and the general populace have endeavored to implement BPfA commitments into country-specific improvements. Although the Platform is not a required document, it is regarded as the most comprehensive and widely accepted statement on women's issues.

The Platform recognizes gender mainstreaming as a global strategy to promote gender equality. Accordingly, the Platform demands not only an agenda of action with the objective of eliminating all obstacles to the active involvement of women in all aspects of public and private life, but it also requires inclusive gender mainstreaming in poverty; education and training of women; economy; power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms in favor of women; human rights and the environment.

1.3. Analysis

To fulfill its commitment as a member of the CEDAW Convention and BPfA, Viet Nam has made constant efforts to carry out activities to eliminate all acts of discrimination against women and has become an active member of the international community in the enforcement of gender equality rights.

In 1996, right after the Conference in Beijing, Vietnamese Prime Minister ratified the National Action Plan for women's advancement toward 2000 consisting

of 11 objectives to enhance women's involvement in all aspects of politics, economics and their rights in society and family. It was an essential resource for ministries, sectors, and localities to implement initiatives for gender parity and the women's advancement. By 2010, the Vietnamese government has issued and implemented two Action Plans and National Strategies for the advancement of women toward 2010, each of which corresponded to a distinct socioeconomic development plan. In light of these achievements and the practical needs of gender equality efforts, the NSGE 2011-2020 and later 2021-2030, which has been promulgated and implemented, has become a powerful mechanism for promoting gender equality.

In the Vietnamese legal system, there are more and more laws related to the protection of women's legitimate rights and interests such as Law on Gender Equality 2006; Law on Domestic Violence Prevention and Control 2007; Law on Marriage and Family 2014; Penal Code 2015 and revised in 2017 and many other laws. The adoption of the Law on Gender Equality in 2006 marked a new phase in the evolution of Viet Nam's gender equality legislative framework. The Law fully mentions the rights of women as outlined in the Covenant, and its six fundamental principles of gender equality are based on the CEDAW principles. In addition to the Law on Gender Equality, numerous provisions on gender equality have been inserted in legal instruments from a range of fields in order to attain the substantive gender equality targets between men and women set out by the NSGE, in which the rights of women and girls have been recognized, basically ensuring conformity with the CEDAW Convention as well as the good legal tradition of the nation.

After publishing Law on Gender Equality (2006), gender mainstreaming has become a mandatory legal process when developing legal documents. It is a

significant improvement on enhancing more substantive and comprehensive gender parity in Viet Nam. Nowadays, in Viet Nam, all forms of gender discrimination and insulting women's dignity are outlawed. In the meantime, Viet Nam legislative system has been continuously revised to adapt principles of international commitments.

In politics, Vietnamese government has adopted many Action Plans, Schemes as well as Projects to encourage women's engagement, especially in decision-making and leadership roles.

The NSGE for the period 2010-2020 and Resolution No. 11-NQ/TW in 2007 of the Politburo set out: *“By 2020, striving to reach 35 percent to 40 percent female members of the National Assembly and People's Councils at all levels; governmental bodies with a female ratio of more than 30% must have women leaders in key position; and by 2020, striving to have female key leaders in 95 percent of ministerial-level agencies, government agencies, People's Committees at all levels.”*

To achieve these goals, the government rolled out a plan called “The Scheme on Measures to Ensure Gender Equality for Female Officials, Civil Servants and Public Employees in 2016-2020.” This plan had two primary objectives: (1) to close the gender gap in human resource planning, training, rotation, and usage of cadres in public organizations; (2) to contribute to the full and effective participation of women in all areas of society. In 2018, the Prime Minister signed Decision on amendments and supplements to the NSGE in 2011-2020 includes the detailed resolutions guideline as: (1) human resource planning, including the recruitment, usage, assessment, and training of female officials, civil servants, and public workers in positions of management and leadership at all levels in public agencies and institutions, should be made, approved, and put into action based on concrete criteria

and workable solutions; (2) managing human resource planning by doing Annual Reviews, modifications, and updates; (3) empowering female officials to boost their involvement in key positions, as well as in people's council bodies, particularly among young and ethnic minority female leaders.

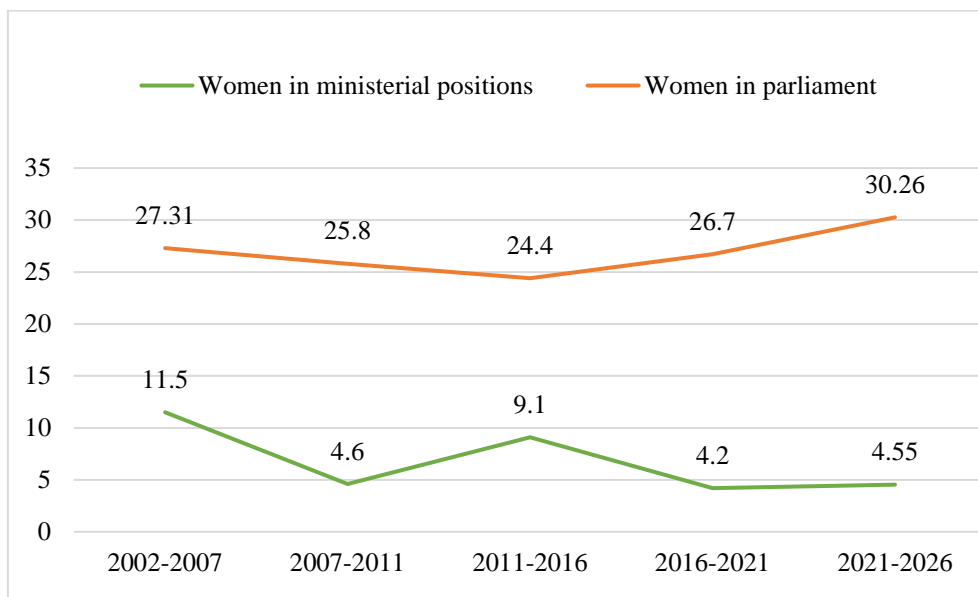
Additionally, the Prime Minister issued the Plan for Implementation of the Scheme titled “Enhancing the Party's Leadership in Gender Equality and for the Advancement of Women in the New Context”. This was done to make leaders in public agencies from the central to the local level more accountable for promoting gender parity and women’s advancement. In order to put the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development into action, the National Action Plan was officially released by Decision No. 622/QĐ-TTg (2017). One of the particular aims that it describes is “Guaranteeing women's equal access to decision-making roles in political, economic, and social spheres and their full and equal participation in those roles.”

Right after the accomplishment of the 13th National Congress of the CPV and the National Election in 2021, the new Government approved The NSGE for the period 2021- 2030 which stated a number of new targets for the government to achieve in order to make greater advancements in gender equality in a variety of sectors and to meet its Sustainable Development Goals by the year 2030. As a consequence of this, Viet Nam's political sector anticipates that by the year 2030, women would occupy important leadership roles in 75 percent of state management agencies and local administrations at all levels.

Along with National Strategies and Schemes, across the country, the “ Support for Realization of National Targets on Gender Equality” Project has been running since 2016, with a particular emphasis on the following areas: (1) boosting the

amount of women in vital roles, and in people's elected bodies; (2) increasing the number of agencies, institutions, and individuals engaged in communication activities regarding the organization, formulation, and implementation of plans for women in the workforce; and (3) increasing the number of agencies, institutions, and individuals engaged in capacity building training for women in elected leadership roles. The goal of these training programs is to increase the number of women in positions of political, managerial, and administrative leadership in regions where they are underrepresented. The NA's female deputies, the People's Councils' female members, and other female leaders at all levels will be able to network with one another and share their experiences through these training programs. Most recently, the Decision 2282/QĐ-TTg on ratifying the program of “enhancing women’s equal participation in managerial and leadership positions at all policy-making levels in the period of 2021–2030” aims to achieve: (1) The proportion of female key leaders in state management agencies, local authorities at all levels by 2025 and 2030 will be 60 percent and 75 percent, respectively. The specific sectors having less than 30 percent of female officials may adjust the target that meet your agencies’ current situation; (2) The proportion of female officials that are nominated in the “structured” personnel list will be at least 40 percent by 2025 and 50 percent by 2030; (3) By 2025, 75 percent and by 2030, 90 percent of potential female officials in the planning category for decision-making positions at all levels will participate in training and professional advancement program; (4) In the areas where there are ethnic minorities, there must be leaders who are ethnic minorities suitable to the population structure.

Figure 3. The proportion of women’s engagement in Viet Nam politics from 11th – 15th term



Source: Gender Statistics in Viet Nam 2021

Even though more women are being elected to office, there has been a steady decrease in the proportion of women who hold leadership positions at the national level. This goes against the global trend of increasing female representation. While initially ranking 79th out of 135 nations included by the research in 2011, Viet Nam's gender gap index has since dropped to 83rd out of 145 in 2015 and 87th out of 153 in 2020, according to the Global Gender Gap Report from 2011 to 2020. Thus, Viet Nam has not completely complied with its international commitments, as evidenced by the fact that it has failed to meet the objectives that it set for itself. First, treatment against women in the political and public life of the country, specifically not guaranteeing the right “to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government” and “to participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.” (Article 7,

CEDAW) Next, the government has not “to implement all necessary measures, including laws, to revise or eliminate current laws, policies, norms, and practices that are discriminatory against women” (Article 2, CEDAW) and has not yet guaranteed the “right to promotion” (Article 11, CEDAW) of women at work, has not “promoted the establishment and development of a network of child-care facilities” (Article 11, CEDAW) to create conditions for female public employees to be eligible to participate in politics. Additionally, there is still a disparity in the ages at which men and women are required to retire under the law, which at the present time are set at 60 for males and 55 for females.

2. International Organizations

2.1. International Organizations in Viet Nam

Since the Doi Moi reform in 1986, many international organizations have come to Viet Nam and worked in a variety of fields. The United Nations Country Team (UNCT) in Viet Nam comprises seventeen resident agencies, funds, and programs in addition to 6 non-resident organizations that assist Viet Nam in improving the country's capability to carry out international commitments that have been signed. This study will therefore concentrate on the activities of the United Nations and its bodies in Viet Nam to facilitate the country's implementation of international treaties and attainment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) target 5.5.

In accordance with the “Viet Nam Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2011-2020”, the “Viet Nam Socio-Economic Development Plan 2016-2020”, and the “2030 Sustainable Development Goals”, the “One Strategic Plan 2017-2021” was

developed based on the three main principles of “Comprehension”, “Equality”, and “Sustainability”. Based on the central themes of the Sustainable Development Goals, the plan prioritizes four focus areas: People, Planet, Prosperity, and Peace, with nine outcome groups for each. In which case, outcome 4.1.2^⑩ set up the targeted proportion of women in leadership positions (head of department and above) of governmental institutions as 35% by the year 2021 (SDG indicator 5.5.2). Following the success of One Strategy Plan 2017 – 2021, the Vietnamese Government and the UN continued to sign One Strategic Framework for Sustainable Development Cooperation 2022 – 2026 on August 11, 2022. It demonstrates a strong commitment to achieving sustainable development for all. The Cooperation Framework is a key strategic guidance document and orientation for cooperation between the Vietnamese Government and the UN in accelerating progress toward achieving SDGs. In accordance with Outcome 4.1^⑪, the percentage of women members in the NA and People's Council (as SDG5.5.1, SDG5.5.4) will surpass 30% by 2026.

2.2. Analysis.

Among the UN bodies in Viet Nam, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) are two organizations with many activities focusing on Women's Political Empowerment in Viet Nam.

The fourth of UN Women's five areas of support in Viet Nam is aimed at bolstering Vietnamese women's leadership by enhancing the number of key female leaders across the board. Even so, looking at the "Key results and Highlights 2017–

^⑩ One Strategic Plan 2017 - 2021 Between The Government of the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam And The United Nations in Viet Nam

^⑪ ONE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

2021" of UN Women in Viet Nam, their main research and publications in recent years have focused on the empowerment of Vietnamese ethnic minority women, women for climate-resilient societies, and women in economics. As the Chair of the Gender Thematic Group (GTG), which facilitates gender mainstreaming throughout the UN Country Team (UNCT) in Viet Nam, UN Women are serving as professional advisors in the fields of politics and the public sector. Over the past decade, UN Women has actively supported the Vietnamese Government in its efforts to strengthen legal systems in accordance with international standards so as to promote gender equality. One of the most important international standards is CEDAW. Not only does UN Women support Viet Nam in the design and development of policies and laws, but it also supports the implementation of policies, provides gender equality guidelines, and conducts research. In 2011, when Viet Nam's first NSGE was issued, UN Women provided support for the process of developing and implementing the Strategy. And the recently released next 10-year strategy is a continuation of a very lengthy process by the Government of Viet Nam and UN Women to implement the 2030 sustainable development goals. In addition, UN Women works closely with the Viet Nam Women Union and MOLISA to develop arguments for inclusion in draft laws. Article 169 of the Labor Code 2019 was updated based on the recommendations of UN Women experts to narrow the retirement age disparity between male and female workers from 60 and 55 to 62 and 60, respectively¹². Furthermore, UN Women provides consultation to Vietnamese governmental agencies on a termly basis in order to assist those agencies in the development of reports on the results of the implementation of the NSGE, CEDAW,

¹² UN Women Viet Nam: Key results and highlights 2017 – 2021

and BPfA.

With the task of capacity-building support, UNDP sponsored the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ho Chi Minh Academy of Politics and Public Administration from 2013 to 2017 to implement the Project on “Women’s Leadership: Empowerment of Women in the Period of International Integration” (WLP). Through the project, the organizer purposes: (1) to develop the capacity and empowerment of women in the public sector, particularly to broaden female cadres’ awareness and knowledge of about emerging challenges in the execution of international integration guidelines; (2) to promote the rise of women candidates and deputies MPs in the 2016 election, as well as gender mainstreaming in human resource planning; (3) to promote the policy formulation and performance in the sphere of women's leadership and to raise public understanding of the women’s role and contribution in leadership.

Table 3. Statistics on the number of trainings, workshops, law advocates, and studies conducted by WLP from 2014 to 2016

Year	Trainings	Workshops	Law Advocates	Studies
2014	15	3	4	3
2015	30	8	2	0
2016	4	1	0	0
Total	49	12	6	3

Source: WLP Report (2017)

After five years of the project, WLP accomplished the majority of its objectives. First, the project enhanced the institutional ability to create and conduct leadership programs for women in support of the NSGE's objectives. There were 49

training courses held in 30 provinces and cities, with 1,900 cadres and policymakers participating. The officers of the Center for Women in Politics and Public Administration (WiPPA) was sent abroad to attend gender mainstreaming and women's leadership training programs. At the end of the project, 3 policy briefs, 4 reports, 4 manuals and guidelines related to women in politics in Viet Nam were completed. Secondly, the 2016 election saw an increase in the number of female members in both the NA and the People's Councils. In the 2016–2021 term, the proportion of women in two elected bodies at all levels grew by 2.4% and 2%, respectively, in comparison with the previous term. A cooperative action plan was agreed by the Fatherland Front of Viet Nam and the Women's Union (WU) as part of the WLP's attempts to guarantee the enhancement of female candidates in the 14th national and sub-national elections. Meanwhile, a number of workshops have been convened to analyze the current state of women in politics and provide solutions for boosting the percentage of women in elected office in the future. In addition to this, Viet Nam Women's Union organized two training seminars specifically for first-time female candidates in the 2016 elections. Third, changes were made to Personnel procedures in order to improve women's participation in executive roles. Workshops on "Inputs for the Elections to the NA and the People's Councils Law" and "Gender mainstreaming in the draft Law on Promulgation of Legal Documents." were just two examples of the ways in which WLP's training equipped participants with the information they needed on gender problems and women's leadership. Last but not least, this Program boosted women's access to training and capacity-building opportunities that are not typically available or accessible to women. Through seminars and training, mid-level and senior female officials were assisted in doing research and identifying potential measures to be adopted within their particular

unit/agency. A fundamental part of WLP, this activity demonstrated the program's success in helping women achieve their educational and professional goals. As a result, it was anticipated that it would be one of the most effective means of empowering women. It should be noted that noteworthy contributions were also made by UN Women to all training, studies, and publications included in this project.

In light of the WLP's apparent success, UNDP, with the involvement of UN Women and related counterparts and stakeholders, continues to assist the Vietnamese authority in its efforts to carry out the Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Project (GEWE). This Initiation Plan includes three essential interventions: To enhance the leadership skills of newly elected female delegates to the Parliament and People's Provincial Councils for the period 2021-2025; To develop the policy framework and offer capacity enhancements with regard to Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and women's involvement in peacekeeping operations; To dismantle prevalent misconceptions and prejudices against women's leadership and public office involvement. One research on gender quotas at the local level based on worldwide norms and suggestions for Viet Nam was launched in 2021, as well as training programs for new female delegates to the 15th term of Parliament and the People's Councils at provincial level on critical roles and competences. A conference was also held to validate and distribute the study's findings.

In actuality, it is not simple to supplement and alter local legal laws in accordance with signed international treaties, as there are incredibly tough challenges that no single nation can handle alone. The UN member organizations have, however, assisted the Vietnamese government in conducting assessments of current policies and legislation by participating in formal review boards as advisors or by enhancing the capacity of state agency officials and policymakers through their

projects and programs, as evidenced by the activities that support women's political empowerment. Therefore, the group makes proposals and recommendations to alter and strengthen the law and provides objective and impartial advice on matters that must be resolved at the policy and strategic levels. In gender equality spheres, UN Women has achieved some success in law advocacy. Viet Nam adopted five UN Women's recommendations in the Labor Code, which are (1) re-defining sexual harassment at the workplace, (2) promoting equal access to daycare for working parents, (3) requiring the government and enterprising to disclose occupational hazards and allowing employees to choose for themselves, (4) providing maternal leave for male employees and (5) reducing the age disparity in retirement policy. The final accomplishment reduced the age gap in retirement regulation by gender from 5 years to 2 years, which is equivalent to women retiring at the age of 60 and men retiring at the age of 62.

Second, the UNCT, in general, and UN Women and UNDP, in particular, are autonomous, independent, and transparent organizations, unaffiliated with the state budget and any special interests. Simultaneously, this is the largest global multilateral organization in the world, which means that it is easier to mobilize and connect a network of specialists in many nations within the same region or at the same speed of growth to participate in legal and law advice, and the exchange of experiences. Moreover, these organizations frequently focus on enhancing the ability of minority interest groups in society, such as women, children, and groups of ethnic minorities; hence, the UNCT's actions strive to promote justice, equality, and a voice for the most vulnerable people in society. In Viet Nam, UNCT, UN Women in particular, has participated in much governmental training on gender equality and women leadership to enhance awareness and capabilities of Vietnamese female

cadres at all levels. Together with the Vietnamese government and Australia Aids, UN Women conducted an assessment of the NAGE (2011-2020) to learn from its experiences and shape its successor for the years 2021 through 2030.

Third, in addition to technical advisories, UNCT is able to mobilize financial support both from themselves and from partner organizations. Compared to the previous four years, the United Nations in Viet Nam has been able to raise roughly USD 88.5 million¹³, of which the expenditure for outcome 4.1, including the goal of gender equality in politics, accounts for 10%. This is more than the entire anticipated budget for 2021 of about USD 88 million. The majority of the UN's mobilization budget comes from non-core financing sources. Given the current ODA environment, this demonstrates significant effort on the part of the UN system in resource mobilization to provide meaningful assistance for Viet Nam's development program and SDG implementation. To address women's empowerment in politics in Viet Nam, UNDP has pledged 2.48 million USD over five years for WLD and over 170,000 USD over two years for GEWE.

3. Discussion

Thus, it is evident that international factors have also exerted some influence on the process of policy refinement in Viet Nam. Based on consultations with international experts and feedback from NA's deputies and representatives of ministries and branches at all levels, Viet Nam has modified and promulgated appropriate policies to improve gender equality as well as ensure the fulfillment of international commitments. With proposals from international organizations, the Vietnamese government always recognizes and assigns MOLISA, the governmental body

¹³ UN Annual Report 2021

responsible for gender equality in Viet Nam, to provide advice and collect opinions, then submit it to the National Assembly for approval, if appropriate. In addition to amending the law, the Vietnamese government also established government-subordinated committees to participate directly in the process of promoting gender parity and gender mainstreaming in the public sector. As a result of the establishment of the National Committee for the Advancement of Women, all ministries and sectors established a gender equality committee and are required to issue annual progress reports on the promotion of gender equality and gender mainstreaming within their respective agencies. This is one of the Vietnamese government's efforts to promote gender equality in the political arena in order to achieve SDG 5 by 2030. Alternatively, to achieve this aim, Viet Nam has enlisted assistance, ranging from technical advice to financial backing of international organizations. The participation of international actors in the development of annual reports on gender equality will objectively and honestly reflect the current situation from two perspectives. Officials are able to develop their skillsets, find motivation, and acquire new insights through participation in projects and training courses collaborated by international organizations and the Government of Viet Nam. It is also possible for Vietnamese specialists to share their expertise with other experts in international fora. Since then, I believe that international actors and Vietnamese government each have their own interests. International actors have a role to both monitor and partially influence the process of policy refinement in Vietnam, while at the same time, the Vietnamese government receives both financial and technical support from these actors.

Chapter V. Conclusion and Recommendation

1. Conclusion

It is essential for holistic social development to work toward increasing the number of female leaders in the public sector, where they can exercise legislative, supervisory, and decision-making responsibilities. Viet Nam possesses a policy and legal framework on gender equality that is fairly complete, and the country has signed a large number of international treaties on the subject of increasing the number of politically active women. Nevertheless, despite some improvements, these policies continue to make it more difficult for women to advance into management and leadership roles. To begin, the quota system performed admirably in the most recent election; however, the outcome did not reach the desired goal; in particular, the percentage of women in leadership positions still demonstrates an underrepresentation of women. Second, the regulations regarding career advancement continue to be a barrier to women's development. Although it is requested that cadres, both men and women, must claim required certificates and attend training courses provided by the government, female civil servants have fewer opportunities than males. In addition, the age requirements, which can be found not only in regulations governing training courses regulations but also in retirement policy, are one of the most significant obstacles that prevent women from participating in politics in general and in key positions in particular.

In terms of the international aspect, Viet Nam has shown its obligation to the goal of gender parity by signing and ratifying many international conventions and agreements. To accomplish these objectives, Viet Nam routinely solicits feedback from industry professionals and average citizens, with the intention of discussing and

modifying existing legislation to bring it into conformity with the social conditions of the country and fulfill the international commitments to which it has consented. Though, Viet Nam has not yet fully achieved gender equality obligations, especially in the political sphere. International organizations such as UN Women have expertise, techniques, and a large number of specialists in the field of gender equality, not only in Viet Nam and the region but globally as well. In addition to government partners, international organizations frequently maintain close relationships with a wide variety of other partners, including civil society organizations, business sectors, and development partners. Therefore, not only do they bring experience and expertise to support the Vietnamese Government, but they also provide financial aid. By collaborating, stakeholders can maximize their comparative advantages.

2. Recommendation

Globally, women are underrepresented at all levels of decision-making, and achieving gender equality in the political sphere appears to be a distant goal. Viet Nam needs to make additional efforts to raising the number of women leaders in the country's public sector. Based on the aforementioned obstacles, the author proposes the following recommendations for Viet Nam:

- Age equality in retirement policy
- Adopting gender quotas in the people's elected bodies (the NA and People's Council) at all level and it should be specified in the Laws on Gender Equality.
- Set particular/equal proportion of female and male participants in the training courses for the manager and leadership capacity development and professional advancement

- An accountability mechanism is required to guarantee the responsibilities of the agencies' heads in improving gender inequality, the representation of women in leadership and management, and women's involvement in recruitment, training, planning, rotation, and appointment; have solutions when the operation is determined to be ineffective.
- Gender mainstreaming should be taken into account not only in policies but also in the context of governmental training courses to raise both female and male participants' awareness of the necessity of women's presence in politics.
- Organize regional and international seminars, conferences, and forums to exchange experiences on women's political engagement in managerial and leadership roles with the consultation of gender specialists and policymakers.
- Develop extremely close relationships with the UNCT as well as other international organizations to conduct the Annual Reports on Gender Equality and consult on gender mainstreaming in the legislative processes toward advancing gender parity in Viet Nam.

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Abstract in Korean

Global Gender Gap Report(2021)에 따르면 정치 참여의 성별 격차를 줄이는데 가장 오랜 시간이 걸릴 것으로 알려져 있습니다. 이 논문은 주로 베트남 여성의 정치, 특히 리더십에서의 참여 상황과 의사 결정 직위에서 여성 공무원의 과소 대표성을 초래하는 요인을 연구하는 것을 목적으로 합니다. 또한 젠더 주류화 정책을 형성하고 정치에서 젠더 평등을 촉진하는 데 있어 국제 행위자의 역할을 조사할 것으로 기대합니다. 마지막으로 제도적 장애물을 검토하고 국제적 관점에서 베트남 공공부문의 여성 리더십을 평가한 후, 본 연구는 현 정책에 대해 적절한 권고를 하고자 합니다.

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