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Women's representation and gender stereotypes in the media: A comparison of South Africa and Botswana

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Bachelor Thesis – International Relations and Organisations

**“Women’s representation and gender stereotypes in the media: A comparison of South
Africa and Botswana”**

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Abstract:

The absence of gender equality in the political sphere is still a very big problem nowadays, however, there is not enough research done that would further investigate this issue. And even less research on this topic exists with the African countries as case studies. In this paper the media framing of the female political participation and whether it differentiates in countries with low and high number of women in politics is investigated based on the examples of South Africa and Botswana. After conducting the research of the existing sources, it was expected that the picture depicted in the media will be mostly negative in both countries which was then confirmed after conducting the content analysis of the articles from local newspapers in South Africa and Botswana, even though some positive tendencies were observed as well. Lastly, this paper offers ideas for further research and points out some factors that can also play a role in how the situation looks like, such as the vivid urban/rural divide in African countries and introduction of gender quotas by ANC, the biggest South African party.

Introduction:

Since the third wave of democratization in the 1990s, multiple African countries, such as South Africa, have become significantly more democratic than before and have a lot of features that are common to most of the prosperous democracies around the world (United Nations, 2022). However, even if we look at some of these more democratic countries, such as Botswana, the percentage of women in parliament is incredibly low, 11%, and it has always stayed at these low values (The World Bank, n.d.). Even if we look at the value for the world overall, 26%, it is still highly unsatisfying.

Gender balance and equal rights are very important for democracy to be successful, as women can bring different views, values and experiences into their elected roles that would help to strengthen the regime by ensuring better, more inclusive, policy making mechanisms (Wangnerud, 2009).

Even though overall women make up about half of the population on Earth, if not more, the proportion of them in the decision-making processes does not even come close to this ratio (Franceschet, et al., 2019, p. 35). There was research done previously by different scholars to understand what can cause the limited presence of women in politics. For example, explanations such as the low levels of education of women (Baslevent & Onaran, 2003), and different values that women have (Goksel, 2013) were widely explored by different authors. Patriarchal stereotypes have also been looked at by the scholars as one of the core factors, however, most of them mention that this factor needs further investigation. In this paper the focus will be directly on stereotypes and prejudice towards women and how they are portrayed in the local newspapers in South Africa and Botswana.

There is a common claim that it is very important to take the context within the country, the understanding of certain issues of the local population into consideration while trying to study a certain phenomenon (Okoi, 2021). However, the patriarchal social norms that are still prevailing in a lot of African societies (Owino et al., 2022) are not considered enough while discussing why there are so little women in politics, so more research needs to be done.

In his book, Milton (2022) brings up the fact that if we look at the percentage of women in politics in Africa overall, it will be very diverse, for some countries it is incredibly low, for other quite high, however, it is not enough to just take official numbers and formal institutions into account to understand the situation with political representation of women. The author claims that while talking about African countries it is important to take the informal life of the society into consideration, as it shows what opportunities women actually have to engage with politics at local levels that would subsequently lead to engagement on national level. This means that even though South Africa, for example, has a very high number of women in politics, the negative stereotyping, its expression and effects in the country can still be present. However, this claim is not only applicable to the African countries, as stereotypes towards women also exist in progressive democracies all over the world, which will be shown in multiple examples later in this paper.

Milton also discusses the gap that exist in the literature regarding searching for the explanation of low number of women in politics beyond formal political institutions (pp. 1-3).

Another important element in this research would be the influence of media and how the existing stereotypes and prejudice regarding female political participation are depicted in the media. Arriola et al. (2021) talk about the importance of the role of media in African countries in the women's political underrepresentation and how it is not receiving enough attention from scholars and the society. Therefore, it would be very valuable to investigate this dimension of the issue and see whether the media expression of female underrepresentation will differ in South Africa and Botswana. Therefore, the following research question can be posed: *How do media represent women in politics and are there differences between countries with high versus low number of women in politics?*

In order to answer the research question that was posed, qualitative research on the relevant articles from the local newspapers in Botswana and South Africa was conducted. Before doing that, an extant theoretical framework was created that includes the description of the excising bias and stereotypes worldwide, in Africa itself and, finally, specifically in the countries that were chosen for the analysis. The role of the media in depicting the bias has also been investigated. Based on that framework, the list of indicators that could be seen in the newspaper articles was created and the hypothesis of similar levels of negative representation in both countries was posed. In the end, after conducting the content analysis, the hypothesis has been confirmed.

This research can be a contribution to the existing literature on the topic, as most of the sources are pointing out to the fact that the presence of the stereotypes and prejudice towards women in the society prevent them from joining the politics, however, more research needs to be done to further investigate it (Milton, 2022). And there is even less existing research on media representation of women in politics in African countries.

As could be seen in the content analysis of the media reports from South Africa and Botswana, the depiction of women in politics is not necessarily better when the number of women in Parliament

is higher, as negative stereotyping was clearly present in both cases. Therefore, it is possible that the media undermines participation in each of the countries. It is interesting, as initially, based on the findings from existing literature, it was possible to assume that that media representation would be better in South Africa than in Botswana, which is not the case.

Prejudice towards women around the world, examples from Global North and Global South:

There are a lot of stereotypes regarding women's participation in politics that exist in many different countries all over the world and further prevent female inclusion. If we compare two studies that are talking about established democracies from the Global North, very similar patterns can be seen. Endo and Ono (2023) in their work investigate the case of Japan and the bias that exists among voters towards female political leaders, as they are extremely underrepresented. Turska-Kawa and Olszanecka-Marmola (2018) were trying to understand if the participation of women in politics in their home country, Poland, was seen in the light of gender bias and stereotypes. The results that the authors encounter align very well. In both studies it was noticed that the policy issues that women are generally considered to be good at, are connected to areas that in traditional understanding are connected to sustaining the household. For example, childcare, declining birth rate and education. Also, overall, people did not believe that most of the women have the characteristics that are needed for a good political leader, such as decisiveness. In addition, it is important to mention that the authors found that conservative and older voters had more gender stereotypes than the others, which is important in the context of this paper, as it highlights one more time that the conservative norms and stereotypes existing in a society do not let a political system to be fully inclusive for women.

The presence of bias and stereotypes towards women can also be seen in the Global South, in countries that are way less democratic. Dillard (2015, pp. 51 - 54), when investigating the case of Turkey, comes to the conclusion that the patriarchal norms and values that exist in the society or on the level of household are stopping women from joining the labor force in general and,

subsequently, participating in politics. She also makes a distinction between the rural and urban areas, noticing that the situation in rural ones is generally even worse, as if women there do work, it is without pay and under the control of their family. Lawrence and Hensly (2023) examine Northern India where gender-based seat reservation policies were implemented, as it was the only way to try and overcome the existing social structures and increase female representation in politics. These policies were not evenly successful, as the most conservative regions did not follow the recommendations. This finding clearly shows not only the fact that the problem of underrepresentation really exists but also the fact that it is very difficult to fight those patriarchal norms if they are placed deep inside the existing social structures.

Butler and Preece (2016) discuss the fact that this vivid presence of the stereotypes in a society leads to the fact that women themselves are aware of the situation and it makes them doubt the chances that they will ever be able to get elected even if they decide to try and participate in the process. They do not think that they are good enough and will ever be able to compete with the men if it comes to that. This so-called ‘ambition gap’ is a big problem that cannot be solved while these deep structures of bias and stereotypes still exist in the society. Pruyers and Blais (2016) have conducted an experiment with college students in the US to further investigate this issue and have come to the conclusion that the gap in the political ambition between men and women is indeed the result of the gender stereotypes existing in the society that make women doubt themselves.

Position of women in Africa and stereotypes towards them:

The argument that is posed by Owoo (2023) describes the position of women who live in rural African areas. The author investigates the influence of patriarchal norms on women’s behaviour and values in Ghana and comes to the conclusion that women who live in more conservative households or societies and are, therefore, under greater influence of the patriarchal norms, are generally less educated, live in rural parts of the country and are a part of poorer household.

Joireman (2008) in his work focuses on property rights that women have in Sub-Saharan Africa. There, because of the prevalence of customary law, especially in rural areas, it is structured in a way that women are viewed by the society simply as members of the household, not as rightful co-owners of the property or the house. If a divorce or death of the husband happens, the position of women becomes incredibly unstable, as they do not have autonomous access to property. This clearly shows how the existing patriarchal traditions, which in this case are supported by customary law, prevent women from being able to simply participate in the rural economy and subsequently the political life of the society.

Arriola et al. (2021) investigate what is the general position of women in African countries when it comes to politics, what are the general conditions for their engagement compared to men, how they structure their electoral campaigns, what are the factors that voters care the most about while making their choice etc. The conclusions that the authors make are incredibly valuable. In terms of existing gender stereotypes, it was expected that women can employ them to their advantage during the campaign, for example form it around motherhood, however, it was discovered that the concerns that women are not viable for taking a position in office was a bigger factor for voters. Another very important aspect when comes to the process of participation in politics that was covered in their research is the violence that women receive if they decide to be a part of the elections. They receive significantly more violence than male candidates, due to the gender bias, and as a result of that they generally choose to have less events with the live audience or not hold fundraising which negatively affects their popularity. It is possible that a lot of women who would in general like to participate in politics are afraid of excessive violence on the gender basis and choose not to participate, as they are simply afraid.

Toraasen (2019) describes the change that happened in the public opinion in Senegal after the introduction of electoral gender quotas. She shows that after the approval of new law the belief that men generally make better political leaders became even stronger, even though there was no such significant negative reaction in the Parliament itself. People became way less willing to vote

for the female candidates, their public images were significantly damaged. This fact has a significant implication for this research, as it basically means that even if the representation of women is high and supported by the government structures, the public opinion can be even more negative as well as depiction of women in media sphere.

Media could also play a role in this negative imaging. It cannot be overlooked that ANC, the biggest political party in South Africa for many years straight, has introduced gender quotas during the first democratic elections in 1994 and has followed it since then. Even though the quota is something that only exists on the level of the party and is not mandatory, as ANC is the biggest party, their decision could have been very impactful (Goetz & Hassim, 2003). Just as described in the work by Toraasen (2019), the introduction of gender quotas by ANC might have initiated the start of the public opinion backlash of the citizens in South Africa, and the picture that we will see in the news reports can actually be a reflection of that, not just the outcome of the existence of structural bias and stereotypes.

Stereotypes towards women in South Africa and Botswana in particular:

It has already been mentioned before that part of the existing bias is believing that women as politicians are in general worse than men, as they do not have the necessary qualities and that if they get elected, their focus should be on specific areas of issues, such as education and healthcare. Chitapi (2018) conducted a very interesting research of the ‘circle’ of law professionals in South Africa from which the judges are elected, trying to understand what the experience of women was, if they had equal chances with men to participate in the election process and become a judge. As a result, it was seen that there were a lot of stereotypes against women in the law community, they were considered to be better with ‘softer’ areas of law, such as family law, senior council members did not want to select them to the team just because of their gender etc. The author also highlighted how important it is to study South Africa as a case in this context, as there is almost no literature about it, which again shows the importance and relevance of this research.

Kanjere et al. (2011) in their work are talking about socio-cultural stereotypes that are present in South Africa towards women on the example of a case study of Limpopo Province. They describe the challenges women face while working at schools and communicating with the members of community they live in. Even if women are actively participating in leading the household alongside their husband or other male figure that is in charge, it is believed that they cannot be good leaders no matter what. The authors in their text provide a proverb that is very popular in the country when it comes to the attitude towards female leadership: *“if a leader is a woman, disaster is bound to happen”* (p. 245).

Rapoo (2002) in her work conducts an analysis of the Setswana language is one of the most common languages in Botswana. It is striking how even on the level of the words that exist or the constructions that are commonly used there is a serious difference between the roles that men and women are supposed to have on the societal level of understanding. It can be seen that there is an imbalance between ideological conceptions of “male” and “female”. The role that men are supposed to take in the society are expected to be significantly more important and useful for the society than the ones of women who are expected to only be valuable on the level of one single household. Hanson (2009) conducted research about the role of entrepreneurship in breaking gender stereotypes with Botswana as one of the case studies. In the end it was discovered that the effect in Botswana was way less than in other countries observed, the stereotypes in Botswana were not affected significantly, which can be explained by stronger, more stable patriarchal structures existing in the country.

The role of media in gender stereotyping:

All of the cases and examples that are mentioned before are very important, as they help to fully evaluate the situation for women who are trying to participate in politics in general and African countries in particular, and there is one more phenomenon that has an effect on it. Arriola et al. (2021) in their work empathize how important the role of media is in depicting the stereotypes and

bias towards women that negatively affect their participation in political processes. For example, they talk about the fact that media coverage for female candidates in most cases focuses on traditionally feminine policy areas no matter if the candidates actually focus on them or not. Moreover, male candidates generally tend to get better and more coverage.

A very good example of how media deliberately portrays female candidates in a negative light, especially compared to their male opponents, can be seen in the example of the work of Stabile et al. (2019). This example is highly valuable, as it again highlights that the problem that is discussed in this paper exists on the global level, not just in Africa itself. The authors conducted a content analysis of different pieces of newspaper articles published in the period of the 2016 Presidential Elections in the USA about Donald Trump and Hilary Clinton that differentiated significantly. Most of the 'fake news' about Trump was based on something that he actually said or done before, while the stories about Clinton were completely made up, using photo manipulations. In this example, authors showed how the media can create disinformation about a female candidate, based on just gender stereotypes existing in a society. The journalists portrayed women in general, and Hilary Clinton in particular, as unfit for leadership positions just because of her gender. She was, for example, portrayed as unable to face the difficulties that the country was facing, as she, being a woman, did not have an ability to take complex decisions in short periods of time.

Another example of the same phenomenon from the US is described in the book by Yates et al. (2018, pp. 35 - 54) where the authors investigate the portrayal of women in popular culture and how it is connected to the real-life politics. The authors say that even though American voters claim to be unbiased, their analysis of the most popular pieces of the popular culture in the US, such as the series *Veep*, clearly shows that the way women in politics are portrayed does not make them equal to men. There are a lot of traditional sexist jokes and stereotypes that are expressed in the show, female characters are not nearly as powerful as the male ones, their political ambitions are lower; There is clearly no gender equality. This popular culture image is very important, as if

the opinion of the majority of people towards it was negative, it would not be as successful as it is.

Byerly (2014), who investigates the reporting done by different newspapers in the middle of local electoral campaigns, also highlights that media coverage can be one of the main reasons why women are not able to be fully represented, as the public discourse, from which the social and political participation flows, can be structurally blocked for women. Heldman et al. (2018) in their research identified five primary forms of gender bias when it comes to media coverage: women are portrayed as less serious contenders; the overall coverage of female candidates is more negative; women are questioned way more than men whether they are valid candidates; the coverage that women receive is stereotypically gendered; they are portrayed as either too masculine or not masculine enough.

Overall, reflecting on everything said before, it can be seen that no matter of the number of women in Parliament, the presence of bias and stereotypes can vividly be seen in both countries, South Africa and Botswana, however, it might be possible that their number and expression in the media sources would vary significantly based on the amount of representation. The higher the number, the less the amount of stereotypes that could be seen in the media sources, meaning that the picture would be worse for Botswana than for South Africa. Moreover, the country is bigger, there are generally more sources available and, as the number of women in Parliament is higher, it means that there are more reasons to generally discuss it in press.

However, it is also possible that the public opinion in South Africa has been significantly influenced by the introduction of gender quotas, and even though there is a significant number of female representatives, the stereotypes have not been fully eliminated from the society. Women are elected in the office but people do not really believe that they are as good as the men for those roles. That would mean that the picture of public opinion that is going to be observed will be quite similar in both cases. Before conducting the empirical research this tendency looks more realistic, as there is theoretical background that supports that outcome. Therefore, based on everything that

was said before, the following hypothesis that will then be investigated can be formulated:
regardless of different levels of female political representation, media will be equally negative about women in politics in both countries due to prevailing patriarchal norms.

Research design and case selection:

As was mentioned earlier, the contents of media sources from both countries, South Africa and Botswana, will be analyzed. First of all, those would be sources that cover the situations that are unfolding from the local perspectives that help better to understand what narratives they propose to domestic audiences. It is possible that some of the sources analyzed are biased, as they were, for example, sponsored by stakeholders of the elections. However, including numerous different newspapers as sources for gathering the articles helps to make sure that the picture of media narratives about women in politics that will be seen is as close to reality as possible.

Based on the fact that the newspaper articles will be investigated in great detail, the most suitable research design would definitely be qualitative, as the context of stereotypes existing in a country is very complex, and it is important to really understand the meaning of the certain things that were said in the media in order to fully evaluate it. Also, the main point of this research is to understand better what are the different ways of how media frames political participation of women and, therefore, a qualitative content analysis would be the most suitable in this case.

It is important to clarify why these two particular case studies were chosen for the analysis. As we are talking about the number of women in power, it is important to take countries that are democratic into consideration, because in that case we can say that on the state level men and women had equal chances to get elected, and there was another factor, patriarchal norms, that did not allow for that to happen. Based on the reports made by Freedom House in 2023 (n.d), South Africa and Botswana are both classified as “free”, obtaining 79 and 72 points on the global freedom scale. Based on the data from the World Bank (n.d) for 2021, South Africa had 47% of women in

parliament, while Botswana stood at 11%, which is incredibly low and always was low, the highest it ever got was 17%, while the lowest value available for South Africa is 25%. The countries are neighbors with very similar levels of democracy and development (United Nations, 2022), therefore, it would be very valuable to compare them and see whether framing of female political participation in the media will be different or similar.

Methods of data collection and operationalization:

As was mentioned in the section above, articles from the local newspapers were chosen as the source of data for this research. *AllAfrica.com* was chosen as the data repository for extracting the newspaper articles, as most of the sources there are in English, and they come from all different sources, so it allows to avoid bias from having one particular point of view from a newspaper whose motivation or sponsorship cannot be assessed. Having various different newspapers as sources helps to increase the chances that the general picture displayed in them is as close to independent view as possible.

In terms of the selection of the sources for the analysis, it is not a very easy procedure, as it is important to not fall into the trap of only choosing the articles that talk about the issue from one particular perspective. For example, if one of the search terms is ‘*stereotypes*’ and another one is ‘*women*’, probably the context of the article can be influenced by opinion of people who think that females are not treated equally, while we are trying to understand the general framing that exist inside the country on a very specific issue. Therefore, the search terms that can be used are the name of the country we are interested in and then ‘*women*’ and ‘*politics*’ or ‘*political*’, if ‘*politics*’ itself will not provide a sufficient number of results. Searching in this way can allow to get a picture of media narrative towards female participation in politics in the two chosen countries, whether it is positive or negative, whether it is considered that females are underrepresented or everything is fine with it. In the case of South Africa it was enough to just focus on the articles that were published in 2023 in order to get a full picture and conduct the analysis. With the sources

from Botswana the situation is completely different, and it was necessary to include all the sources on the topic up to 2017 to gather the needed amount of information.

Overall, 36 newspaper articles from 16 different sources were collected, 21 for South Africa and 15 for Botswana (see Appendix 1). While talking about the results of the search, it is important to mention that Botswana, compared to South Africa, does not have a Freedom of Information law. That has huge implications for functioning of the media and whether the authorities in the country can actually be held accountable (South African National Editors' Forum, 2022). That is also a possible reason for the fewer number of sources available together with the fact that Botswana is mostly a rural country with less density of population compared to South Africa. The sub-selection was also conducted during the reading, as some of the articles were not relevant for the topic investigated, it just happened that the two terms of interest were both contained in them. Overall, the number of articles that were initially found with search terms was 34 for South Africa and 23 for Botswana.

There are three indicators of the presence of stereotypes that can be seen in the work of multiple authors. The first being the fact that women are generally not allowed/not able/not considered good enough to work outside of their household that was mentioned by Dillard (2015). The second being the fact that women are only considered to be good at certain areas, such as, for example, healthcare, or that they are not good enough to be political leaders/their qualities as political leaders compared to men are worse that could be seen in the work of Endo and Ono (2023), Turska-Kawa and Olszanecka-Marmola (2018), Chitapi (2018) and Kanjere, Thaba and Teffo (2011). Lastly, the existence of the 'ambition gap' between men and women because of the state of the society and whether other people see it as an existing problem that was discussed by Butler and Preece (2016) and Pruyssers and Blais (2016). During the analysis the presence of these indicators in all the media reports and how they are framed were investigated.

Analysis of the sources:

In three of the following subsections it is shown that the presence of each type of stereotyping can be seen in both countries, and that media framing regarding it is mostly negative in both of them as well. In each case firstly the pieces from South Africa will be analyzed and then the ones from Botswana.

Presence of general stereotypes against women in society that leads to them being unable to do anything outside of ‘traditional female’ jobs:

From the existing research it was clear that women in Africa are often considered incapable of doing most of the jobs available, not only the ones connected to the political arena. They can only do something that is connected to ‘traditional’ female duties. For instance, in the piece that was dedicated to the experience of a nurse from South Africa who has been in this role for more than 30 years, while talking about it she said that basically in Limpopo where she is from that is almost the only option women still have if they want to work. That aligns very well with the argument made by Kanjere et al. (2011), and even the geographical area of the country that was studied by the authors, Limpopo province, is the same in this case. *“In fact, virtually only two – become a teacher or become a nurse”* (Ho, 2023) The author, reflecting on her statement, says that it is something “quite common”, it does not seem that he disagrees with the state of the situation.

There is also evidence to the fact that even when women start working in other fields, there is still a lot of negativity towards them and people generally tend to disagree with it. *“Threats to women journalists have also been pervasive, including attacks and threats on journalist’s families, death threats and threats of rape”* (Tshwane, 2023). Even though something clearly negative is discussed, the author did not express any of his own thoughts regarding it, he was just covering the latest trends in the world of journalism. However, giving attention to the phenomenon is already a step in the right direction. There were other instances of women journalists being treated differently. For example, Ruth Weiss, who was one of the main journalist fighting against the apartheid regime, was already honored in other countries, such as Germany, many years ago, only

got her first official recognition in South Africa in 2023 (Boehi, 2023). In this case it is clear that the author is a big fan of the famous journalist, she vividly expresses her happiness about the fact that Ruth Wiess's efforts were finally valued enough in South Africa. Another author who was analyzing the economic situation in South Africa highlighted the fact that most of the women are not able to engage into economic relationship because of the existing social order. *"The most common barriers identified were related to: women's childcare responsibilities at home..."* (Patel, 2023). Just like in numerous previous cases, the author did not express any negative opinion towards it, he was just reporting on the facts. It is clear from the sources that very often women cannot decide what they want to do for themselves. *"While slavery has lost the ideological battle almost everywhere, women nevertheless continue to be subordinated under the protective cloak of 'marriage'"* (Rossi, 2023). The author's opinion about this fact is clearly very negative, she is expressing her hopes that this research can contribute to creating policies aimed at making the situation better, which is a good sign.

Lastly, it is important to mention that from the media reports in South Africa it is clear that the government acknowledges the presence of inequality of men and women in the country. In one of his recent speeches President Ramaphosa said: *"This is the fight we must all take up – both men and women – if we want to achieve equal rights, freedoms and opportunities for all"* (Tshwane, 2023). However, none of the sources mentioned any of the possible solutions of the problem offered by the government. And it can also be seen that the public opinion towards government officials who fail to see the problem is highly negative. *"In a country with soaring gender-based violence... I find it very concerning that minister of police would show such disregard for the potential impact of Bester's victims"* (Pikoli, 2023) wrote a South African journalist about the thoughtless comment regarding the too much attention being put to the female victims of rape. The creators of popular culture are also trying to do their best to confront the existing stereotypes and prejudice. *"Yako felt that it was important to challenge the negative stereotypes that surrounded*

this myth and showcase a more positive representation of a powerful female character” (Chironda, 2023).

When talking about the sources from Botswana, as it was mentioned before, there are considerably less of them that discuss this issue. “...*there are issues for women in Botswana and they are not considered equal to men. I would assume that this is especially true in the rural areas*” (Molokai, 2021) said the German ambassador to Botswana in one of her interviews. However, what is important to take into account here is that she is not a local politician. It is a good sign that an article with this position was published but it does not directly mean that the opinion of the local government is the same. The activists for the equal gender rights in the country definitely do see the problem and are willing to fight it. “*There are so many intersections and opportunities to shape and shift the world into what we want it to look like, as now it is really not ideal*” wrote Chukura (2022), clearly supporting the fight for the equality in her article.

There is evidence present that, just like in South Africa, women in Botswana, especially in the rural areas, do not work because of the traditional understanding of their place in the society. “*I asked her what work she does. She looked at me for a moment: “There is no work I do”*” (Davie, 2022). That is a piece of conversation between the researcher in one of the rare languages in Botswana country and a woman of 30 years old who had got her schools education but still was only doing household work. The researcher mentioned that her response “was expected”, as it is the general situation with work for women in that area of the country, and he did not challenge this state of events in any way.

It is clear from the literature that there is an understanding about the existing gender inequality, however, it does not seem to be the case that most of the people in the country realize that the political under representation is a big issue. “*Findings show that Botswana view gender based violence as the most important women-rights issue that the government and society must address*” (Mooketsane, 2023). This is the quote from the analysis of one of the latest issues of Afrobarometer survey that clearly showed that there is no understanding of the problem of political gender

inequality in the public discourse, and the journalist himself did not pay any extra attention to it in his article.

Women are generally considered worse leaders than men:

Something that was very clearly seen in the theoretical framework and has also found its evidence while looking at the newspaper articles, is the fact that people in general are way less willing to consider a woman to be a good political leader, to nominate them or vote for them. For example, in one of the recent articles about the mayoral elections in Johannesburg, it is mentioned that the male candidate who won was the only person who was actually considered by the main parties, which not only hurts the gender equality aspect of the process but also the main democratic principles, as elections always have to be inclusive and competitive. “... *Kabelo Gwamanda’s mayoral candidacy appeared to be set in stone for the ANC and EFF coalition...*” (Masuabi, 2023). While commenting on the horrible state of the second hospital in the country in terms of number of children deliveries, the health expert immediately blamed the female CEO and her inattentiveness, “*CEO herself should be held responsible*” (Rispel, 2023). Even though it is mentioned that there were a lot of reports from other experts about the lack of funding and public attention to the hospital that actually caused most of the problems, the author focused on blaming female CEO.

There are other examples from different spheres of life of the society when the possibility of female leadership is questioned. For example, in judge Mahube Molemela’s hearing to become the next head of the Supreme Court of Appeal, her at that time superior demonstrated his beliefs that women are not able to rule. “*During the hearing Petse questioned whether Molemela would truly command the respect of her colleagues*” (Davis, 2023). In this case the article was written by a female journalist, who was really unhappy with how the situation unfolded and was seriously questioning the behaviour of the judge. This situation directly follows on the example demonstrated in the work by Chitapi (2018) where it was described that female lawyers were not given equal chances and respect compared to their male colleagues. The article by Davis was also

a part of the search results, as it was mentioned that Supreme Court of Appeal can also deal with political issues. In a different article there is an example that shows that sometimes women are physically not able to express their opinion. *“Just mute her!”* (Thames, 2023) was said by a male committee chair towards his colleague during one of the recent meeting. And even though she had her lawful right to express opinion, the journalist supports the actions of the chair by mentioning that she *“attempted to interrupt but was timely stopped”*.

A very similar situation in terms of the lack of the belief that women can make leaders can be seen in Botswana. While reporting on the results of the Presidential Elections, the authors made it clear that Mokgweetsi Masisi was the only person who actually had a chance to win, except for his predecessor, who was also a man. *“Masisi came to power in April 2018 after Khama had served the maximum 10 years and was a predictable choice”* (Botswana Daily News, 2019), even though it is mentioned that on the first stages of the election process there were possible female candidates.

In the rare occasions when the news reports cover the women who take important positions of government officials, it is noted that it is not something that happens very often. For example, in the article about appointment of Tebeleo Mazile as a Botswana’s Ambassador to the United States, it is mentioned that she is the first women in many years to take up this title (The Patriot, 2021). Even though it is something important and exciting, the author did not give any personal comments.

There is a general understanding that for women it is highly difficult to participate in politics, that they do not have equal chances with men. *“Almost half considered that women will suffer criticism, harassment, or family problems if they run for political office”* (Mooketsane, 2023). Again, it is a horrifying trend, and the reporter did not comment anything regarding it. When talking about the democratic summit that would take place in Botswana the reporter used the following phrasing: *“It also opens up avenues for the inclusion of women, youth and other marginalized groups into the governance process”* (National Democratic Institute for International affairs, 2022), which

basically means that, in their opinion, at that point in time women as a group were excluded from the political sphere. However, attention to the issue is *definitely a good thing*.

Existing ‘ambition gap’ between men and women:

The article from South Africa that covered the general state of mental health in the country made it clear that the situation for women is way worse than for men because of the existing social structures and the fact that they are not treated equally. *“Research found the nearly one in every five women reported moderate to severe levels of anxiety”* (Craig, 2023) reported the author without expressing their opinion about it. Of course, if nearly 20% of female population are struggling with the mental problems because of their position in the society, they will not be able to participate in politics on the equal conditions with men.

While analysing the literature, it was clear that this indeed is the case and the reality is that women themselves in both countries believe that they are not capable of being good leaders. *“But the real change for the nation would in fact have to come from ordinary people, from every parent raising their boys to respect girls, from every father empowering his daughter and considering her equal to her brother, so they could believe it”* (Molosi, 2021) commented on the situation as an ambassador in Botswana during her interview. Media report highlighting this quote to give it more attention is of course a good sign by itself.

Discussion of the results:

As it was mentioned before, there are numerous reasons for the fact that there are way less sources available for Botswana. However, for this research this difference has an important meaning, as even though the gender balance in terms of representation in South Africa is way better than in Botswana, there is still a lot of discussion about it in the media, pointing out the existing problem and the fact that it needs to be solved, there are also comments from the side of the government. In the newspaper articles from Botswana that has incomparable 11% in Parliament (The World Bank, n.d.) there is no vivid picture of understanding of the existence of the problem either on the

level of government or general population, it does not seem that most of the people desire to improve female representation and the media did not really challenge this issue either.

Overall, it can definitely be seen from both cases that media in general tends to have a more negative framing. In some instances, the reporters just state the situation without clearly expressing their opinion, however, as they are talking about something clearly negative that happens and not say that they disagree, it means their general attitude is not strictly against it. All the articles where it was clearly seen that the author disagrees with the state of the situation were written by women, which is an interesting trend to observe. However, the fact that the attention is at least paid to this issue in media is a potential hopeful sign that means that maybe in the future it is going to be discussed more.

There are some other indicators that were drawn from the theoretical framework, as they were mentioned by multiple different authors, however, were not found even once during the analysis. For example, *'it is considered that, as politicians, women are only able to take care of things that traditionally connected with supporting the household, such as healthcare and childcare'* that could be seen in research of Endo and Ono (2023) and Turska-Kawa Olszanecka-Marmola (2018). This can mean two things, first being that there are actually no stereotypes towards women in the countries analysed which is clearly not the case. Second reason, which is probably very close to reality, is the fact that in general political headlines were way less common in the news than it was expected. In Botswana it is self-explanatory, as it was mentioned that the media in the country is not free, while a similar situation in South Africa is not that clear. Of course, it can also be explained by a lack of full objectivity of the news sources, however, this is probably not the main reason. During the analysis it was clearly seen that other areas, such as economic and ecological problems, or the Sudanese refugee crisis are getting way more attention of the press. While it is not ideal that female political under representation did not get that much attention, it is understandable that most of the African countries face other problems that are crucial for their, in some cases, survival and that those will get the most of the media headlines.

The hypothesis that was formulated in the beginning of the research was confirmed, the framing of the issue in the media reports was mostly negative in both cases. At the same time the general presence of understanding of the issue was higher in South Africa. There are some other reasons that could have affected this outcome, except for a general lack of sources, such as the higher number of women in politics in South Africa that would give press more reasons to discuss the problem or simply the bigger size of the country, meaning that there are more things happening that need to be covered. And it is important not to forget about the possibility of the public opinion backlash in South Africa generated by the introduction of quotas by ANC.

Conclusion:

This research is a contribution to the existing literature on the topic, as it strives to fill in the gap that exists in the literature in terms of focusing on African countries as case studies while talking about presence of negative stereotypes towards women in media and how it affects their political representation. I believe that the degree of generalizability of this paper is high, as it was demonstrated in the theoretical framework that similar mechanisms can be seen in countries all over the world, both in democracies and non-democracies.

There are some potential criticisms that can be pointed out regarding this work. First of all, the selection of sources can be considered as biased, as there was no second opinion about the applicability of each of the pieces of information. Moreover, it is not possible to say whether media messages reflect the existing negative opinion towards women or also reinforce it. Also, as it was mentioned before, it cannot be fully assessed whether the sources are objective or not. The method of selection of sources and number of sources analysed is something that can definitely be improved when doing further research on the topic. For example, it would also be valuable to select articles from other repositories, not only AllAfrica.com to see whether the picture that can be seen will look different and investigate more sources, from a broader time period. It would also be beneficial to try and conduct a separate quantitative research to see whether there is a casual

relationship between negative framing of female political participation and public opinion on this issue in South Africa and Botswana, as it is not clear yet whether one actually affects the other. Other moderators, such as the rural/urban divide and introduction of gender quotas by ANC can be included as possible moderators to see if they also have an effect on the public opinion. In terms of data sources, for this kind of research databases with the content of campaign news and public opinion surveys data can be used.

Appendix 1: Analysed Newspapers

List of the news articles that were found suitable for content analysis:

Title of the article	Date	Source
South Africa: Ruth Weiss, journalist who fought apartheid, finally honored in South Africa	27.04.2023	The Conversation
Botswana: President Masisi declared winner of election.	25.10.2019	Botswana Daily News
South Africa: Short film “Mamlambo” challenges gender-based violence in South Africa through mythological storytelling.	07.04.2023	AllAfrica
South Africa: “That iron suitcase saved my life” – retired nurse reflects on 37 years of service.	04.05.2023	Spotlight
Botswana: ‘Fully Embraced’? Botswana’s queer struggle since decriminalization	31.05.2022	African Arguments
South Africa: Depression, anxiety and childhood trauma. South Africa study explores links, prevalence and who’s most at risk.	09.04.2023	The Conversation
Botswana: Lessons from the oldest stories ever told.	06.01.2022	New Frame

South Africa: Appeal Court Frontrunner and female judge accused of being ‘abstractive’ at Judicial Service Commission.	17.04.2023	Daily Maverick
South Africa: City of Joburg’s attempt to elect mayor stalls again after ANC caucus throws Spanner in the works.	03.05.2023	Daily Maverick
Botswana: Every boy should be raised to respect girls – German Ambassador.	04.05.2021	The Patriot
Botswana: Batswana support gender equity, want greater government action to promote equal rights.	12.01.2023	Afrobarometer
Botswana: Batswana see gender-based violence as a priority for government and societal action.	24.01.2023	Afrobarometer
Botswana: Government of Botswana and National Democratic Institute to co-host International Summit on constitutionalism and democratic consolidation in Africa.	17.06.2022	National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
South Africa: 47% of South Africans rely on social grants. Study reveals how they use them to generate more income.	03.05.2023	The Conversation

South Africa: Thabo Bester saga – Bheki Cele needed to show empathy, not glib defensiveness.	23.04.2023	Daily Maverick
South Africa: Rahima Moosa – South Africa’ only mother and child hospital is falling apart. A veteran doctor reflects on why.	19.04.2023	The Conversation
South Africa: Slavery’s historical link to marriage is still at play in some African societies.	27.04.2023	The Conversation
Botswana: SAEF expresses shock at the criminal procedure and evidence bill before the Botswana Parliament.	30.01.2022	South African National Editor’s forum
South Africa: “Just mute her!” – Committee chair Qubudile Dyantyi virtual verbal scuffle with Mkhwebane.	04.04.2023	Daily Maverick
Botswana: President Masisi continues to deliver on his promise to empower women.	16.09.2021	The Patriot
South Africa: Freedom not meaningful without social progress, says President Ramphosa	27.04.2023	South African Government News
South Africa: Sanef Lauds media freedom.	04.05.2023	South African Government News

South Africa: Winnie and Nelson – new book paints a deeply human portrait of the Mandela marriage and South Africa's struggle	17.05.2023	The Conversation
South Africa: Elderly women picket outside Nyanja clinic demanding better service	17.05.2023	GroundUp
South Africa: Women beaten with knobkieries in battle over Wild coast lands, court hears	15.05.2023	GroundUp
South Africa: How three Ugandan women ended up stranded in South Africa	11.05.2023	NilePost
South Africa: Ex-Banyana star becomes first woman to lead Sifa	09.05.2023	Scrolla
South Africa: Pregnant immigrants say they have been turned away from the Joburg clinics	09.05.2023	GroundUp

South Africa: Mental health - almost half of Johannesburg students in new study screened positive for probable depression	07.05.2023	The Conversation
South Africa: Twenty nine pregnant women evacuated from overwhelmed hospital in Nelson Mandela Bay	07.05.2023	Daily Maverick
Botswana: Election watch briefing	19.03.2019	Africa Insiders
Botswana: “What this generation wants”: African authors publishing directly to the web	01.04.2021	African Arguments
Botswana: New Afrobarometer SDG scorecard shows impressive progress towards gender equality in Botswana	02.09.2021	Afrobarometer
Botswana: Pay more attention to fresh ideas from young people, majority of Botswana say, but elders have their doubts	15.06.2020	Afrobarometer
Botswana: More Botswana are turning to social media – for better and for worse	22.05.2020	Afrobarometer

Botswana: Intolerance of same-sex relationships may be on the decline in Botswana, Afrobarometer survey suggests	17.02.2020	Afrobarometer
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