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**Strengthening the Decision-Making Power of**

**Councilwomen in Albania**

**Research Report**

**April 2015**

**Tirana, Albania**

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**Abstract**

This study examines the decision-making power of councilwomen in Albania. It addresses the following questions: How do councilwomen perceive their decision-making power? Are women able to place issues that are important to them and other women on the agenda of the local council? What is the relationship between the number of councilwomen and their perceived decision-making power? To address these questions, a quantitative study was conducted in 137 local councils in the 12 regions of the country. The study did not find any support for the hypothesis that the higher the proportion of councilwomen, the higher the perceived decision-making power. Councilwomen were more likely to report “raising their voice” in councils with a high proportion of women. However, the relationship between the proportion of women and “having the voice heard” was not statistically significant. Councilwomen provided numerous suggestions on how to strengthen their power in local decision-making, such as increasing the competencies of local councils, organizing awareness-raising campaigns, developing informative sessions and mentoring programs for young councilwomen, and promoting collaboration with women in decision making and civil society organizations.

**Keywords**:perceived decision-making power, councilwomen, representation, Albania

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# 1. Introduction

N

umerous groups in Albania are advocating for greater participation of women in local decision-making. The assumption is that a critical mass of women will affect change – promote gender equality and development. Women will collaborate with one another, form coalitions, and gradually transform decision making. Women will share information, communicate with one another, generate ideas, and confront existing beliefs and attitudes towards women’s role in politics (Mansbridge, 1999). In practice, the increased presence of women in decision making might lead to a backlash from male counterparts (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers, 2007). Greater numbers might undermine collaboration because of different interests and priorities (Childs, 2006). Furthermore, men might use numerous tactics to undermine women’s power (Childs & Krook, 2006). But what happens in the case of Albania? How do women perceive their decision-making power? Does the number of women “make a difference” in local politics?

The government of Albania has ratified numerous international conventions, such as the Convention for the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women and the European Convention on Human Rights. In addition, the government has endorsed several human rights documents and strategic papers, such as the National Strategy for Gender Equality and Eradication of Gender Based Violence and Domestic Violence (2011-2015).

The Electoral Code has introduced the gender quota of 30 percent. The code specifies that at least 30 percent of candidates and one of the first three candidates in the multi-name list shall be women. The same rule applies to election management bodies. Moreover, the Law On Equality in Society (2008) specifies that at least 30 percent of appointed positions should be allocated to women. The gender quota for local councils has recently changed to 50 percent. The expectation is that a critical mass of women will transform local politics and bring about change in Albanian communities.

Currently, the number of women who hold leading positions at the local level is too small. In the local elections of 2011, women comprised only 12.27 percent of local council seats (754 out of 6144 councilors).[[2]](#footnote-2) Around 23.7 percent of local councils (91 out of 384) do not have any woman.[[3]](#footnote-3) The proportion of councilwomen is higher in municipalities than communes. The average proportion of women in municipal councils is almost two times higher than in communal councils. Eighty-seven communes (28.25 percent) do not have any woman in their local council. This number is 4 for municipalities (6.15 percent). In addition, the average proportion of councilwomen in the mountainous region is half the national average (Dauti & Gjermeni, 2015).

However, women’s involvement in politics is not just an issue of numbers but also of voices. Currently, there is a strong emphasis on promoting greater participation of women in decision making. However, little is known of what happens after women become part of decision-making structures especially at the local level. This study investigates the decision-making power of councilwomen in Albania by addressing the following questions: (a) How do women perceive their decision-making power? (b) Are women able to place issues that are important to them and other women on the agenda of the local council? (c) What is the relationship between the number of women in local decision-making and their decision-making power?

The purpose of the study is twofold: First, to provide an understanding of how councilwomen perceive their decision-making power. Second, to identify the areas of support that are critical for the political advancement of councilwomen. The interventions that are needed to empower women in Albania – not only increase their numbers, but also enhance their power in local decision-making – are not clear. This study will identify key areas of intervention to strengthen women’s voices and capacities. It will produce scientific evidence to inform interventions that focus on strengthening the decision-making power of councilwomen. The evidence will inform local, national, and international agencies committed to gender equality and development in Albania.

# 2. The descriptive and substantive representation of women

Evidence shows that there is a positive relationship between descriptive and substantive representation (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers, 2007; Cowell-Meyers & Langbein, 2009). The greater the number of elected women, the higher the likelihood of enacting women-friendly policies.[[4]](#footnote-4) The expectation is that a critical mass[[5]](#footnote-5) of women will “support public policy that is women-friendly or even feminist and ... give greater legislative attention to women’s issues” (Cowell-Meyers & Langbein, 2009, p. 491). Women will “make a difference” because legislative initiatives will address “women’s concerns.” A chain of reactions will follow: there will be positive changes in the attitudes of men towards women politicians, political culture, and women’s empowerment (Dahlerup, 2006).

The assumption is that women will act on behalf of other women because of their shared gendered experiences. Pitkin (1967) argues that women “have a distinct identity as women that is shared across the group, and that this identity generates a commonality of interest in women’s issues” (cited in Cowell-Meyers & Langbein, 2009, p. 495). Similarly, Mansbridge (1999) emphasizes that women “forge bonds of trust” (p. 641) with one another because of their shared experiences. Along the same lines, Childs (2006) contends that there is a “sense of affinity” (p. 12) among women: “I think there are common themes which touch upon the lives of many, if not most women; by and large women’s experiences of life are different from men’s” (p. 73).

A critical mass of women affects change through the following mechanisms: First, women affect the social dynamics within the group; they foster greater equality and collaboration. Women collaborate with one another, form coalitions and gradually transform group culture. Second, women share information, communicate with one another, generate ideas, and confront existing beliefs and attitudes towards women’s role in politics (Mansbridge, 1999). During this process, women “convince others – particularly members of dominant groups – that the perspectives or insights they are advancing are widely shared, genuinely felt, and deeply held within their own group” (Mansbridge, 1999, p. 636). The increase in the number of women affects the behavior of both men and women: men pay greater attention to women’s issues and women voice their concerns (Childs & Krook, 2006). Third, women represent different interests in decision making. The greater the number of women, the higher the likelihood of having diverse interests represented. Hence, the higher the chances of having those diverse interests reflected into decision making. Fourth, as the number of women increases, opportunities for interaction within the group increase as well. Interactions improve communication, foster trust, and gradually break stereotypes. Mansbridge (1999) suggests that “The deeper the communicative chasm between a dominant and a subordinate group, the more descriptive representation is needed to bridge that chasm” (p. 643). Overall, the increased presence of women will “start a chain reaction, leading to a new dynamic favorable to women” (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers, 2007, p. 553).

Descriptive representation matters for women’s voice as well. In studying legislative sessions in the US, Kathlene (1994) found that women “entered the discussion later, spoke less, took fewer turns, and made fewer interruptions than men” (p. 565). When women constitute a numerical minority, interactions are characterized by competition and dominance. In such a context, women do not feel comfortable expressing their opinions; they speak less and perceive less influence (Mendelberg et al., 2013). These dynamics might shift if women’s presence increases. Karpowitz et al. (2012) found that the greater the proportion of women, the greater the women’s speech participation and perceived influence.[[6]](#footnote-6) This study focuses on both speech participation and length. Councilwomen were asked to report the average number of times that they take the floor in a council meeting and the length of their speech. Findings will shed light on the relationship between the number of councilwomen and their speech participation and length.

Other scholars question the assumption that descriptive representation is translated into substantive representation. Indeed, the relationship between the two is conditioned by a set of other factors that go beyond the gender composition of the group. As Childs (2006) contends, “the differences that follow from the presence of women representatives are contingent and mediated” (p. 8). There is no threshold number, which guarantees that descriptive representation will be translated into substantive representation. What constitutes a critical mass? Should the percentage of elected women be 20, 30, 40, or 50?

There are instances of a lack of relationship between the two forms of representation (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers, 2007). Indeed, the efforts of increasing the presence of women might result into negative outcomes. First, the increased presence of women might lead to a backlash from male counterparts (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers, 2007). This is because women are perceived as a threat to male dominance. Second, diversity can undermine collaboration because of different interests and priorities (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers, 2007). Women’s experiences differ; gender interacts with ethnicity, class, and age for instance (Childs, 2006). The assumption that women share common experiences and interests is unwarranted. Third, politics might attract women who are not committed to advancing women’s interests (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers, 2007). Instead, they will seek to advance private interests. Fourth, the new cohort of elected women might not be welcomed by the old cohort; the latter might perceive the former with skepticism (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers, 2007). This is especially the case if the new cohort is inexperienced in politics. The outcome is a fragmented group of women who do not advance women’s interests. Fifth, even when the number of women increases, men use numerous tactics to undermine women’s power (Childs & Krook, 2006). For instance, women are assigned only to health and education committees; economic and political development remains the domain of men. The purpose of Party leaders, as Dahlerup (2006) notes, is not to recruit women and change their political priorities. Indeed, they want women “to work as loyal party representatives” (p. 517). We will shed light on other strategies as well, such as councilwomen being replaced with men or not being invited in council meetings.

Sheer numbers are not sufficient; they do not deliver substantive representation automatically. Scholars suggest looking into “critical acts,” not just “critical actors” (Childs & Krook, 2006; Celis & Childs, 2008). Critical acts refer to “initiatives that change the position of the minority and lead to further changes” (Celis and Childs, 2008, p. 420). For example, councilwomen voice women’s concerns, introduce new legislation or form coalitions with the purpose of advancing women’s interests. In this study, we capture the critical acts of councilwomen by asking them questions on their involvement in decision-making initiatives and their efforts to address the concerns of women and girls in the local council agenda.

Besides numbers, contextual factors, including civil society organizations, public opinion, and political environment affect women’s substantive representation. Women’s organizations can play an important role in strengthening the relationship between descriptive and substantive representation. They can articulate women’s concerns in public and political spaces, advocate for legislative changes, and support elected women to advance women’s interests (Cowell-Meyers & Langbein, 2009). Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers (2007) shows that women’s substantive representation will be greater in the presence of an active feminist movement. Indeed, such a movement can make significant changes even in the presence of a small number of elected women. Public opinion plays an important role as well. Cowell-Meyers & Langbein (2009) found that liberal public opinion is “a more consistent predictor of the adoption of women-friendly public policy than the percentage of women in the state legislatures” in the US (p. 514).

A good understanding of women’s substantive representation requires an analysis of the political context “within which elected women enact political representation” (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers, 2007, p. 557). Women’s acts and their ability to affect policy change are conditioned by Party identity (Childs, 2006). Evidence shows that left-wing coalitions (or Party) are more likely to support women’s substantive representation (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers, 2007). Electoral security also affects substantive representation: the greater the electoral security, the higher the likelihood that women legislators will enact women-friendly public policies (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers, 2007). Political conflicts and instability create an environment that is not conducive to women’s advancement. Institutional norms and rules play a critical role as well. As Childs (2006) contends, “in political institutions characterized by masculinist norms, indirect discrimination and sexism, heightened inter-party conflict and party-controlled systems of rewards, the space for women to act for women is likely to be reduced” (p. 13).

Battista (2011) refers to decision-making power as the “ability to achieve outcomes that would otherwise have been unattainable” (p. 103). Scholars distinguish between two types of power: formal and perceived power. While the latter refers to perceptions, the former is established in laws and regulations. The correlation between the two is not necessarily strong. In this study, we focus on perceived power. One of the disadvantages of using this measure is that perceived power might not correspond to the actual power. Power is an inherently subjective concept. For some, power means raising the voice and for others changing policies. In this study, councilwomen were asked to provide their own definition of power. Several other measures were used to capture the *critical acts* of women – women’s efforts to affect change within the council.

The rest of the report is divided into 4 sections. Section 3 focuses on the methodology; section 4 on research findings; section 5 on conclusions; and section 6 on the suggestions of councilwomen.

# 3. Methodology

A quantitative study was conducted in 137 local councils in the 12 regions of the country (see Appendix 1 for the list of local councils). Below is the description of the study design, methods, measurement, and analysis.

**Design**

All local councils in the country were stratified in three groups: local councils with low proportion (lower than .10 but higher than 0), medium proportion (between .10 and .30), and high proportion (higher than .30) of councilwomen.[[7]](#footnote-7) The rationale for this stratification was based on the assumption that women’s decision-making power will vary based on their proportion in the local council. The higher the proportion of councilwomen, the higher the perceived decision-making power.

Researchers randomly selected ½ of local councils that fell under each of the three categories (low, medium, and high proportion). This resulted in 62, 80, and 13 councils. Then, 1 woman was randomly selected in councils with a low and medium proportion of councilwomen and 5 women in councils with a high proportion of councilwomen.[[8]](#footnote-8) This resulted in a sample of 207 councilwomen (or 27.45% of the population of councilwomen in the country).

The sampling frame was obtained from the Central Election Commission.[[9]](#footnote-9) One of the challenges faced by the research team was the lack of compatibility between the data obtained from the Central Election Commission and local councils. Since 2011, some of the local councils have changed their composition. However, these changes have not been recorded in the Central Election Commission. To address this challenge, interviewers visited regional offices and mobilized their own network to obtain the contact information of each council and then the new list of councilwomen. Councilwomen were contacted on the phone. They were introduced to the purpose of the study and then asked to schedule an interview. When the selected woman was not in the council anymore, she was replaced with one of her colleagues (from the same council) who was randomly selected. If she was the only woman in the council, she was replaced with another woman from the region. This procedure, again, was based on random selection. Overall, 37 replacements were made (19.89 percent of councilwomen were replaced). These efforts resulted in a sample of 137 councils and 186 councilwomen[[10]](#footnote-10) (response rate = 89.85 percent).

The majority of women who were replaced left the council soon after local elections were over. In such instances, they were used as tokens to advance men’s interests. Party leaders elected women to demonstrate their ‘commitment’ to gender equality; however, their real intentions were revealed soon after elections were over. They replaced women with men. There were also instances of women negotiating with men; agreeing that after elections they would be replaced with men. For instance, young women were replaced with their relatives or family members, such as the father. Other councilwomen were replaced because they were not in the country, they found a job in a state institution, they had health problems and were not able to participate, or they passed away. In addition, a small group of councilwomen did not want to participate in the study. Interviewers reported that in such instances councilwomen were suspicious of the study’s intent.

**Methods**

Surveys were conducted with councilwomen in the selected councils. Questions focused on the following aspects: (a) participation in council meetings; (b) contribution in decision-making initiatives; (c) women’s role in the council; (d) perception of decision-making power; (e) women’s ability to reflect the problems of women and girls in the local council agenda; (f) relationships with councilors; (g) collaboration in the council; (h) areas of support that women consider critical for the advancement of their political careers; and (i) women’s characteristics (e.g., education, profession, and training experience). The survey was pretested in a small group of councilwomen. Feedback was also received from NDI (National Democratic Institute) staff in Albania and Washington, DC.

**Measurement**

Participation in council meetings. To measure participation in council meetings, women were asked to report their presence in meetings, speech participation (i.e. the average number of times they take the floor) and speech length (i.e. the average number of minutes they speak) in a council meeting. They were also asked to draw comparisons with their male counterparts on speech participation and length.

Decision-making initiatives. Councilwomen were asked on their involvement in decision-making initiatives: proposing changes to the council’s work program; initiating draft decisions; and proposing amendments to draft decisions. In addition, they were asked about barriers to initiating draft decisions.

Women’s role in the council. Councilwomen reported their role during public hearings and discussions held with the local administration. Specifically, they were asked if they would agree or disagree with a set of statements. For instance, “I feel comfortable sharing my opinion,” “I encourage participants to propose changes to the draft budget and fiscal package,” and “I hold municipal/communal staff accountable and demand that they take action to improve the situation.”

Perception of decision-making power. Councilwomen were asked to define decision-making power. Specifically, they were asked the following question: “What does it mean for a councilwoman to have decision-making power in the council?” As a second step, councilwomen were asked to assess their power in the council, commission, and political party on 5-point Likert scales (1 = *I do not have power at all* and 5 = *I have a lot of power*). Then, they were asked to assess the power of their male counterparts in the council, commission, and political Party on 5-point scales (1 = *I do not have power at all* and 5 = *I have a lot of power*). Two additional questions focused on women’s satisfaction with their power in the council and the power that they would like to have in the council.

Reflecting the problems of women and girls in the local council agenda. Councilwomen were shown a list of topics that are discussed in council meetings. Then, they were asked to select the topic for which they raise their voice in the council. Examples of topics include the budget, economic assistance, health, education, security, public services, environment, public investment funds, and assets owned by the municipality or commune. Then, councilwomen were shown a list of problems that women and girls face in Albania and they were asked to select the five main problems that women and girls face in their community. This question was followed by another one that focused on the problems of women and girls for which councilwomen have raised their voice in the council.

Relationship with councilors. To capture relationships with councilors, councilwomen asked them if they would agree or disagree with a set of statements. For instance, “I have felt discriminated against because of my gender,” “I always agree with the decisions of councilors who belong to the same political Party,” “I raise my voice in the council,” and “Councilors demand my expertise during discussions.” Councilwomen were asked to assess their relationships in the council on 5-point Likert scales (1 = *very tense* and 5 = *very good*). Specifically, they were asked to assess their relationship with councilwomen who belong to the same political Party, councilwomen who belong to the same political alliance, councilwomen who belong to the opposition, councilors (women and men) who belong to the same political Party, councilors (women and men) who belong to the same political alliance, and councilors (women and men) who belong to the opposition.

Collaboration. In this study, collaboration refers to instances of undertaking collective initiatives, for instance a group of councilors propose a draft decision or establish connections with local organizations to advance community interests. Councilwomen reported if they have participated in collaborative initiatives, the actors with whom they have undertaken collaborative initiatives, the focus of collaborative initiatives, the type of collaboration, and barriers to collaboration with the Woman’s Forum.

Capacity-building initiatives. Councilwomen provided information on their participation in capacity-building initiatives. In addition, they provided suggestions for strengthening the decision-making power of women in the local councils of Albania.

Data were also collected on the following individual characteristics: the number of mandates, the number of years in the council, membership in the commissions of the local council, position in the commission, age, education, civil status, number of children, profession, position, and organization. Councilwomen were also asked if they are planning to run for office in the local elections of 2015.

**Data analysis**

Univariate analysis was conducted to obtain a general understanding of the sample, for instance, the average age, number of mandates, and years in the council. Bivariate analysis, including chi-square, t-test, and correlation, was conducted to look at two variables simultaneously, such as education and perceived decision-making power, and the proportion of councilwomen and perceived decision-making power (see Drake & Jonson-Reid, 2007 for a description of these tests).[[11]](#footnote-11)

# 4. Findings

## Sample characteristics

The number of mandates ranges from 1 to 5 (*M* = 1.45, *SD =* .83);[[12]](#footnote-12) the number of years in the council ranges from 1 to 23 (*M* = 5.72, *SD =* 3.52); the number of children ranges from 0 to 6 (*M* = 2.17, *SD =* 1.18); and the mean value of age is 48.36 years (*SD* = 10.2, range: 24 – 70). The majority of councilwomen (52.40 percent) had college education and were married (88.46 percent) (see Table 1). Approximately, 26.14 percent of councilwomen (n = 40) held a leading position in one of the commissions of the council. The majority were members of the education and economic commission, 28.68 percent and 13.18 percent respectively (see Table 2).

## Participation in council meetings

More than half of councilwomen reported that they do not miss meetings. Specifically, 55.98 percent (n = 103) reported that they do not miss council meetings; 38.59 percent (n = 71) reported that they rarely[[13]](#footnote-13) miss council meetings; and 5.43 percent (n = 10) reported that they frequently[[14]](#footnote-14) miss council meetings. There were instances of councilwomen who were not notified about council meetings. This was especially the case in rural, remote areas.

## Speech participation and length

*Speech participation*

More than half of councilwomen reported that in a council meeting, usually, they take the floor 1 – 2 times. Meanwhile, their male counterparts take the floor 3 – 5 times. Figure 1 displays speech participation by gender.



Figure 1: Speech participation (in percentage) by gender

Approximately, 4.32 percent of councilwomen (n = 8) reported that they never take the floor; 52.97 percent (n = 98) take the floor 1 – 2 times; 26.49 percent (n = 49) take the floor 3 – 5 times; and 16.22 percent (n = 30) take the floor more than 5 times. Meanwhile, 12.97 percent of councilwomen (n = 24) said that their male counterparts take the floor 1 – 2 times; 51.89 percent (n = 96) said that their male counterparts take the floor 3 – 5 times, and 35.14 percent (n = 65) said that their male counterparts take the floor more than 5 times.

Two chi-square tests were conducted to examine the relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and speech participation. The relation between the proportion of councilwomen and the speech participation of women was not statistically significant.[[15]](#footnote-15) Similarly, the relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and the speech participation of men was not statistically significant. In other words, speech participation did not vary by the proportion of women in the council.

*Length of speech*

The majority of councilwomen reported that the length of their speech in a council meeting, usually, ranges from 3 to 5 minutes. Meanwhile, the length of speech of their male counterparts ranges from 6 to 10 minutes (see Figure 2).



Figure 2: Length of speech (in percentage) by gender

Approximately, 3.23 percent of councilwomen (n = 6) reported that they do not speak at all; 28.49 percent (n = 53) speak 1 – 2 minutes; 46.77 percent (n = 87) speak 3 – 5 minutes; 14.52 percent (n = 27) speak 6 – 10 minutes; and 6.99 percent (n = 13) speak more than 10 minutes. Meanwhile, 4.35 percent of councilwomen (n = 8) reported that their male counterparts speak 1 to 2 minutes; 24.46 percent (n = 45) reported 3 – 5 minutes; 49.46 percent (n = 91) reported 6 – 10 minutes; and 21.74 percent (n = 40) reported that their male counterparts speak more than 10 minutes.

Two chi-square tests were conducted to examine the relation between the proportion of councilwomen and the length of speech. The relation between the proportion of councilwomen and the length of speech of women was not statistically significant. Similarly, the relation between the proportion of councilwomen and the length of speech of men was not statistically significant. The length of speech did not vary by the proportion of women in the council.

## Contribution to decision-making initiatives

*Making proposals to the council’s work program*

Approximately, 78 percent of councilwomen (n = 145) reported making proposals to the council’s work program. However, the relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and “making proposals” was not statistically significant. Women’s contribution to the council’s work program did not differ by their proportion in the council.

*Initiating draft decisions*

More than half of councilwomen, 55.8 percent (n = 101), reported initiating a draft decision during their mandate. The number of draft decisions proposed by councilwomen ranged from 0 to 15 (*M =* 1.81, *SD* = 2.6).[[16]](#footnote-16) Draft decisions focused on social and economic assistance, school and kindergarten budget, soft loans for women in need, access to water, scholarships for students, road infrastructure, sewage, environment, sports, business support, domestic violence, taxes and tariffs, women’s health, public health, women’s employment, civil emergencies, the greenery service, support for persons with disabilities and orphans, school – law enforcement partnerships, heating standards in schools, access to land, social and cultural school activities, and health centers. The relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and “initiating a draft decision” was not statistically significant.

Councilwomen reported the following barriers to initiating a draft decision: (a) lack of knowledge of how to design a draft decision; (b) lack of time; (c) lack of trust (i.e. the council will not take their proposal into account, even if they propose a draft decision); (d) weak competencies of councilors; and (e) lack of funds.

*Proposing amendments to draft decisions*

Approximately, 30.6 percent of councilwomen (n = 56) reported that they have proposed amendments to draft decisions. The number of amendments proposed by councilwomen during their mandate ranged from 0 to 15 (*M =* 3.13, *SD* = 2.83). The relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and “proposing amendments” was not statistically significant.

## The role of councilwomen during public hearings and meetings with the local administration

*Women’s role during public hearings[[17]](#footnote-17)*

Referring to the reports of councilwomen, 49.2 percent of councils (n = 91) did not organize public hearings in 2014. The majority of councilwomen, 94.25 percent (n = 82), reported feeling comfortable sharing their opinion during public hearings. However, less than half of them, 47.62 percent (n = 40), mentioned that they demand that the council organizes public hearings. Approximately, 21.35 percent of councilwomen (n = 19) reported that they do not encourage participants to propose changes to the draft budget and the fiscal package, and 17.2 percent (n = 16) of councilwomen reported that they do not discuss the proposals of participants and suggest changes to the draft budget and the fiscal package (see Table 3).

The relation between the proportion of councilwomen and women’s role during public hearings was not statistically significant. Women’s role during public hearings did not vary by their proportion in the council.

*Women’s role during meetings with the local administration*

Referring to the reports of councilwomen, 22.58 percent of councils (n = 42) did not organize meetings with the municipal/communal administration in 2014. Communes, compared to municipalities and municipal units (*njesi bashkiake*), were less likely to organize meetings. For instance, 29.91 percent of communes (n = 35) did not organize meetings. This percentage for municipalities was 10.87 (n = 5) and for municipal units 8.7 (n = 2).

The majority of councilwomen, 93.75 percent (n = 135), reported that they request information that is useful for their community. In addition, they feel comfortable sharing their opinion, 90.21 percent (n = 129). However, 23.36 percent of councilwomen (n = 32) reported that they do not discuss the performance of the municipal/communal staff and 33.33 percent (n = 46) reported that they do not hold the staff accountable and demand that they take action to improve the situation. More than 40 percent of councilwomen (n = 56) reported that they do not request the organization of meetings with the staff even if they think it is necessary (see Table 4). Women’s role in meetings did not vary by their proportion in the council.

## Perceived decision-making power

### *The definition of decision-making power*

For councilwomen, decision-making power is about *serving the community and solving community problems, keeping election promises, and changing people’s perception that women should not be involved in politics.* In addition, decision-making power is about *voice, free expression and the power to act, trust, accountability, and responsibility*.

*Serving the community and solving community problems*. Councilwomen associated their decision-making power with the ability to serve the community and solve community problems. For instance, they mentioned that “women’s vote should serve the community” and “[decision-making power is about] using the vote with the purpose of supporting community initiatives.” Councilwomen emphasized the importance of finding support for people in need, such as the homeless, unemployed women, orphans, and children who drop out of school. Others focused on enhancing the quality of public services, such as the greenery service and street cleaning service.

*Keeping election promises*. Several councilwomen highlighted that decision-making power is about fulfilling election promises and working for the community. “Decision-making power,” said Ana, a councilwoman in the region of Kukes, “is about fulfilling what we have promised to the citizens; enhancing and improving public services.” Similarly, Mira, another councilwoman in the region of Kukes, said that decision-making power “is about being yourself, achieving goals, and justifying the vote that we receive.”

*Changing people’s perception that women should not be involved in politics*. For councilwomen, decision-making power is about challenging gender stereotypes. They established a strong relationship between the fight against gender stereotypes and social and economic development: fighting against gender stereotypes will result into greater levels of development.

*Voice.* For many councilwomen, power is associated with voice: the ability to voice their concerns and the concerns of marginalized groups. Eva, a councilwoman in the region of Fier, said: “[decision-making power is about] complementing the voice of those who are silent; who can’t speak for themselves.” Another councilwoman emphasized the importance of “having your voice heard and being the voice of the community.” The majority of councilwomen emphasized that decision-making power is not only about voicing community concerns, but also finding support for their policy proposals.

*Free expression and the power to act.* Decision-making power is about “freely expressing what you think and having the power to act,” said a councilwoman in the region of Elbasan. Another councilwomen in the region of Lezha defined decision-making power as “being independent in decision making, having capacity, and having good reputation.”

*Trust, accountability, and responsibility*. Councilwomen established a relationship between decision-making power, trust, accountability, and responsibility. Irena, a councilwoman in the region of Tirana, said: “[As decision makers] we have been trusted and people can hold us accountable.” Another councilwoman, Ana, in the region of Korça, defined decision-making power in the following way:“[a councilwoman who has decision-making power] should have a sense of responsibility for representing the community. She should know the legislation. She should have collaborative relationships with councilors, despite their political affiliation ... She should have good relationships with village elders, to listen to their problems, to advocate for and support the demands of citizens who have voted for her.”

Councilwomen drew comparisons with their male counterparts. They argued that compared to men, they are more collegial, responsible, and committed. In addition, they are less likely to be corrupt. “Women are more responsible and committed,” said Vera, a young councilwoman in the region of Shkodra. Then, she added: “They have better communication skills and they are determined to translate words into action.”

### *The proportion of councilwomen and perceived decision-making power*

Councilwomen perceived greater power in the commission than in the Party and the council. Figure 3 shows that the mean value of perceived power in the commission is 3.65 compared to 3.6 and 3.46 in the Party and the council respectively. Councilwomen reported that their male counterparts have greater power in the council, the commission, and the Party.



Figure 3: Perceived decision-making power by gender

A t-test test was conducted to examine the relation between the proportion of councilwomen and perceived decision-making power. The mean value of perceived power in councils with a low proportion of women is 3.52; in councils with a medium proportion of women is 3.47; and in councils with a high proportion of women is 3.41. Results do not support the hypothesis that the higher the proportion of councilwomen, the higher the perceived decision-making power. Figure 4 displays the mean value of perceived decision-making power by the proportion of councilwomen.



Figure 4: Perceived decision-making power by the proportion of councilwomen

The relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and perceived decision-making in the commission was not statistically significant. Similarly, the relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and perceived decision-making in the political Party was not statistically significant.

### *Individual-level characteristics and perceived decision-making power*

To explain their decision-making power, councilwomen referred to their individual characteristics, such as education, professional expertise, reputation in the community, and Party leadership and contribution.

*Education.* Councilwomen with higher levels of education were more likely to report greater decision-making power in the council and the commission. Councilwomen explained that they bring to the commission their professional expertise as doctors, teachers, and economists. The relationship between education and perceived decision-making power in the Party was not statistically significant.

*Age.* Old councilwomen, compared to young councilwomen, were more likely to perceive greater decision-making power in the council, the commission, and the Party.

*Participation in training sessions.* Councilwomen who have participated in training sessions[[18]](#footnote-18) were more likely to report greater decision-making power. Around 70 percent of councilwomen who reported a decision-making score of 4 or 5 have participated in training sessions.

*Leadership.* Women who held a leading position in the commission were more likely to report higher levels of decision-making power in the council and the commission. The relationship between the position in the commission and perceived decision-making power in the Party was not statistically significant.

Often, individual characteristics interacted with one another. For instance, education interacted with reputation in the community. “I have power because I am the only woman in the council and they [councilors] know and respect me” was a typical response. Or, education interacted with Party leadership. A councilwoman in the region of Dibra explained her decision-making power in the following way: “I am the only woman [in the council] and everyone listens to what I say. I am the only councilor with college education. I have power in the Party because I am the head of the Socialist Woman’s Forum of the commune.”

### *Explaining the low levels of perceived decision-making power*

Approximately, 68 percent of councilwomen (n = 127) reported that they are not satisfied with their power in the council. The relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and women’s satisfaction with their power was not statistically significant. Approximately, 62 percent of councilwomen (n = 114) reported that they would like to have more or significantly more power in the council. The relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and the power that women would like to have in the council was not statistically significant. Below are several explanations for the low levels of perceived decision-making power of councilwomen.

*Local councils have limited competencies.*“Competencies give you power,” said one of the councilwomen in the region of Tirana. Then, she added: “If you lack competencies, you are powerless.” Luljeta was part of a council where women comprised more than 30 percent of its members. While discussing her decision-making power, she said: “We [both women and men] do not have any competencies. Competencies belong to the central government or the municipality [of Tirana].” Despite her commitment to advancing community interests, Luljeta felt powerless. She reported a decision-making power of 3 (out of 5).

*Local governments lack funds.*Councilwomen shared the concern that their voice does not translate into action because local governments lack funds. This is how a councilwoman in the region of Tirana described the situation in her council: “The problems that we raise are not necessarily addressed because we lack funds.” Then, she added: “We don’t have power to change things.” Similarly, a councilwoman in the region of Vlora said: “we do not have any funds. Neither women, nor men can solve anything.”

*The decision making of councilwomen reflects the interests of Party leaders rather than community interests.* “We approve decisions because we have to but this does not mean that we have power,” said a councilwoman in one of the municipal units of Tirana. Approximately, 43.93 percent of councilwomen (n = 76) agreed with the statement “I always agree with the decisions of councilors who belong to the same Party.” One of the councilwomen in the region of Korça said: “In the majority of cases, councilors are influenced by their political force and not by the problems that they discuss.” Similarly, a councilwoman in one of the municipal units of Tirana mentioned that: “We approve decisions because we have to but this does not mean that we have power.” Councilwomen reported that opposing Party directives might have negative consequences for their job, especially if they are involved in the public sector.

*The decision-making power of councilwomen is affected by Party importance.* Those councilwomen who belonged to small Parties explained that they have low levels of decision-making power. However, this insight was not supported by the statistical analysis. The relationship between Party affiliation and perceived decision-making power was not statistically significant. In other words, Socialist councilwomen, Democratic councilwomen, and other councilwomen did not differ on the reported decision-making power.

*Party leaders do not select councilwomen to promote gender equality and strengthen Party democracy.* Rather, they select women to serve as tokens. One of the councilwomen said: “In our commune, we are not being invited in Party meetings. We are part of the council because they needed to have women.” Other councilwomen reported that they were elected because of their kinship ties. “To be honest with you, I have been elected because of my family origin and kinship support,” said a councilwoman in the region of Shkodra. There was a high level of dissatisfaction with women’s role in the Party. Councilwomen reported that the only time when their voices are heard is during election campaigns.

*Men’s backlash characterizes councils with a high proportion of women.*“Men fight against me, they don’t give me political space or professional space,” said Aferdita. She was part of a municipal council where women comprised 32 percent. Similarly, Rina, a member of a communal council where women constituted more than 30 percent, said: “My opinions are not supported; they are immediately challenged. I don’t know if I am a member of a committee.” Then, she added: “The same thing happens in my Party. My opinions and demands are not supported.”

There were instances of councils where, even though women comprised a small number, councilwomen reported high levels of decision-making power. Lindita was the only woman in a council of 15 members. This is how she described her decision-making power: “I am the only woman [in the council] and I think I am the only one who can raise the voice for them [women].” She reported a decision-making power of 4 (out of 5).

*Councilwomen are poorly organized, even when they constitute a significant number.* This stands in opposition to their male counterparts who “are organized in clans” and “negotiate with one another.” In addition, men’s groups are exclusionary and do not involve women, even when they belong to the same political Party.

## Reflecting the problems of women and girls in the local council

*Raising the voice in the council*

The majority of councilwomen reported raising their voice in the council when discussions focus on economic assistance (82.7 percent), budget (65.95 percent), scholarships (62.16 percent), water supply (52.97 percent), public investments (52.43), and public services (51.35 percent) (see Table 7).

*The main problems faced by women and girls in the community*

The majority of councilwomen reported that women and girls face the problems of unemployment (92.47 percent), poverty (70.43 percent), low representation in decision-making (61.29 percent), domestic violence (46.77 percent), discrimination in the labor market (43.01 percent), and lack of support for women’s businesses (31.18 percent) (see Table 8).

*The responsibility for representing the interests of women and girls in the council*

Approximately, 93 percent of councilwomen (n = 172) reported that they perceive it as their responsibility to represent the interests of women and girls in the council. The relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and “the responsibility for representing the interests of women and girls in the council” was not statistically significant.

*Raising the voice for the problems faced by women and girls in the community*

Approximately, 63.78 percent of councilwomen (n = 118) reported that they have raised their voice in the council to address the problems faced by women and girls in the community. The relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and women’s ability to raise their voice was not statistically significant. Despite this, a few comparisons can be drawn: 73.47 percent of women in councils with a proportion of 0.10 or lower reported that they have raised their voice for the problems faced by women and girls in their community. Meanwhile, this percentage for councils with a proportion of 0.30 or higher is 60.7.

*The problems for which councilwomen have raised their voice in the council*

Comparisons were drawn between the problems that councilwomen observe in the community and the problems for which they raise their voice in the council. The majority of councilwomen reported raising their voice for the problems of unemployment (82.05 percent), poverty (58.12 percent), and low representation in decision making (57.26 percent). There is a gap between the problems that women and girls observe in the community and the problems that they address in the council. While 30.73 percent of councilwomen reported that the lack of support for women’s businesses is a problem faced by women and girls in the community, 15.38 percent reported raising their voice in the council.

*Councilors’ attitudes towards women’s efforts*

Are women’s efforts of bringing the problems of women and girls in the council’s attention welcomed by their male counterparts? Half of councilwomen reported that men “have welcomed women’s efforts.” Meanwhile, 10.08 percent (n = 12) reported that men “have ignored women’s efforts” (see Table 10). The relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and the attitudes of councilors was not statistically significant.

## Relationships with councilors

*Experience in the council*

Approximately, 11.9 percent of councilwomen (n = 21) reported that they “feel discriminated” because of their gender and 18.29 percent (n = 32) reported that “councilors interrupt me while I share my opinion.” In addition, 43.93 percent (n = 76) reported they “always agree with the decisions of councilors who belong to the same Party” and 49.43 percent (n = 86) reported that councilors “demand my expertise during discussions” (see Table 10).

The relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and “raising the voice” was statistically significant. Councilwomen were more likely to report raising their voice in councils with a high proportion of women. Specifically, 96.72 percent (n = 59) of women in councils with a proportion of 0.30 or higher reported that they raise their voice in the council. Meanwhile, this percentage for councils with a proportion of 0.10 or lower was 82.61 (n = 38). Despite this, the relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and “having the voice heard” was not statistically significant. Specifically, 80.33 percent of women (n = 49) in councils with a proportion of 0.3 or higher reported that their voice is heard. Meanwhile, this percentage for councils with a proportion that ranges from 0.1 to 0.3 is 86.49 (n = 64) and for councils with a proportion of 0.1 or lower is 72.92 percent (n = 35).

*Relationships in the council*

Councilwomen were more likely to report a good relationship with women who belong to the same political Party (*M =* 4.48, *SD =* .66). This was followed by councilwomen who belong to the same political alliance (*M* = 4.43, *SD =* .64), councilors (women and men) who belong to the same Party (*M =* 4.37*, SD* = .69), councilors (women and men) who belong to the same political alliance (*M* = 4.32, *SD =* .66), and councilwomen who belong to the opposition (*M* = 4.14; *SD =* .81). Women were more likely to report a tense relationship with councilors (women and men) who belong to the opposition (*M* = 3.8; *SD =* .96) (see Table 11).

## Collaboration in the council

Approximately, 50.81 percent (n = 94) of women reported that they have participated in collective initiatives. The relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and participation in collaborative initiatives was not statistically significant.

*Collaborative actors*

Women were asked to indicate the actors involved in collaborative initiatives. The majority of councilwomen, 59.04 (n = 49), have collaborated with different councilors (women and men), despite their political Party. More than half of councilwomen have collaborated with other councilwomen to address the problems faced by women and girls in their community. The relationship between the proportion of women and collaboration between councilwomen was statistically significant. There were more instances of collaboration in councils with a greater proportion of councilwomen.

The majority of councilwomen, 86.59 percent (n = 71), have collaborated with other women who do not belong to the same political Party. Four types of collaborative efforts were reported: (a) organizing awareness-raising campaigns; (b) seeking funds for the improvement of public goods and services; (c) lobbying the central government; and (d) developing collaborative ties with civil society organizations and humanitarian organizations with the purpose of improving service provision in the community.

*Collaboration with the Woman’s Forum*

Approximately, 72.6 percent of councilwomen (n = 135) reported collaborating with the Woman’s Forum (22 councilwomen or 11.83 percent reported that their Party does not have a Woman’s Forum). Councilwomen reported the following barriers to collaboration: (a) the Woman’s Forum has not organized any activity in the municipality/commune; (b) the Woman’s Forum is not collaborative; (c) the Woman’s Forum does not represent women’s interests (in the region); and (d) the presence of discriminatory attitudes in remote, rural areas. Often, these barriers interacted with one another.

## Running for office in the local elections of 2015

Approximately, 55 percent of councilwomen (n = 100) reported that they are planning to run for office in the local elections of 2015. The relationship between running for office in the local elections of 2015 and perceived decision-making power was statistically significant. Women who perceived greater decision-making power, lived in urban areas, and held a leading position in one of the commissions of the council were more likely to report that they will run for office in the local elections of 2015. The relationship between running for office and political Party was not statistically significant.

## Participation in capacity-building initiatives

*Training sessions offered in the local government*

Around 34 percent of women (n = 63) reported that training sessions have been offered in their municipality/commune. Training sessions have been mostly offered in urban areas. The relationship between training sessions and the type of local government was statistically significant. Specifically, 65.22 percent of councilwomen (n = 30) in urban areas reported that training sessions have been offered in their local government. Meanwhile, this percentage for rural areas was 22.22 (n = 26).

*Participation in training sessions*

Less than 50 percent of women (n = 75) reported that they have participated in training sessions. The relationship between the type of local government and participation in training sessions was statistically significant. Urban councilwomen, compared to rural councilwomen, were more likely to report participating in training sessions. Specifically, 69.57 percent of urban councilwomen (n = 32) reported participating in training sessions. This percentage for rural councilwomen was 28.21 (n = 33). Councilwomen who have participated in training sessions, compared to those who have not participated, reported higher levels of decision-making power. For example, 75 percent of councilwomen (n = 15) who have participated in training sessions reported a decision-making power of 5 (out of 5).

Councilwomen reported that training sessions have focused on the following topics: leadership, electoral campaigns, women’s role in decision making, women in politics, women’s representation in politics and administration, budgeting, gender-based violence, women’s economic empowerment, the situation of women in rural areas, communication, lobbying and advocacy, public speaking, women’s rights, human trafficking, door-to-door campaign, information technology, organizing election campaigns, and organizing press conferences. In addition, councilwomen reported that training sessions have been offered by OSCE, NDI, USAID, UNICEF, and the European Commission.

# 5. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine the decision-making power of councilwomen in Albania. Tables 14 and 15 present a summary of the main findings, including the results of statistical tests. Results show that the proportion of councilwomen does not have a positive effect on the perceived decision-making power. Councilwomen face numerous structural barriers to their decision-making power. These barriers are related to the weak competencies of local councils, the poor fiscal capacities of local governments, the process through which Party leaders select women, and the restrictions that Party leaders set for local decision-makers. If these structural barriers are not addressed, there will be little change in the decision-making power of councilwomen.

One of the expectations is that women in decision making will act on behalf of other women and therefore advance collective interests. This study shows that the majority of councilwomen perceive it as their responsibility to represent the interests of women and girls in the local council. However, the impact of numbers is not in the expected direction: 73.47 percent of women in councils with a proportion of 0.10 or lower reported that they have raised their voice for the problems faced by women and girls in their community. Meanwhile, this percentage for councils with a proportion of 0.30 or higher is 60.7. There might be many explanations for why this is the case. If women are selected to fulfill a certain quota, then their participation in local politics might not be an expression of their commitment to gender equality. Rather, it serves the interests of Party leaders. Another explanation is that diversity undermines collaboration (Beckwith & Cowell-Meyers, 2007). Women’s interests differ across class and age for instance (Childs, 2006). These differences result into a heterogeneous group that does not consider gender equality as one of its main objectives.

Another expectation is that the increase in the number of women will affect the behavior of both women and men: women will voice their concerns and men will pay greater attention to women’s issues (Childs & Krook, 2006). This study found support for this expectation only in part. Councilwomen *raise their voice*; however, the relationship between their proportion and *having the voice heard* is weak. The relationship between the number of councilwomen and the extent than men pay attention to women’s issues is not clear. What this study shows is that when women constitute a significant number, they face the adverse reaction of men. Councilwomen reported several instances of men’s backlash in councils where they constitute a proportion of 0.3 or higher. However, this was not always the case. Future studies should focus on the extent that the presence of women affects the behavior of men.

Findings indicate that councilwomen are more likely to form collaborative ties with one another when they constitute a significant number. In addition, women’s collaborative efforts go beyond their own Party. The challenge is moving from small-scale collaborative efforts into well-organized initiatives that can be sustained over time. Increasing the number of women alone will not initiate a *chain reaction* – change the realities of women and girls in Albania.

# 6. Recommendations

Councilwomen gave the following suggestions for strengthening their decision-making power:

* *Increasing competencies.* Increasing the competencies of councilors is critical for their decision-making power. If councilors have weak competencies, then increasing the number of women will not result into positive outcomes.
* *Modifying the process of selecting women*. Party leaders should not just select women. Councilwomen suggested that leaders should consider women’s characteristics, such as education and Party contribution.
* *Increasing the fiscal capacities of local governments*. Women’s ability to address the needs of community members depends, in part, on the fiscal capacities of local governments. The “critical acts” of councilwomen will be influenced by the extent that Decentralization and Local Governance Reform, and the Territorial and Administrative Reform will result into financially strong municipalities.
* *Organizing awareness-raising campaigns.* Councilwomen suggested organizing awareness-raising campaigns that target (a) young women and (b) the general population. The former should focus on *the importance of being involved in local decision-making* and the latter on *why women should be equal with men in decision making*.
* *Developing a leadership program for young women who would like to become part of local politics.* This program should focus on cultivating the leadership skills of young women.
* *Organizing informative sessions for young councilwomen*. Informative sessions should focus on: how local governance works; women’s roles and competencies in the council; and the legal framework for women’s rights.
* *Developing a mentoring program for young councilwomen.* The purpose of this program should be to support young councilwomen during their journey in politics. For instance, experienced councilwomen can provide insights on the kind of challenges that women face once they become part of local councils.
* *Developing regional exchange programs.* Exchange programs will allow women to share experiences and build coalitions with councilwomen in the nearby regions.
* *Promoting collaboration with women in decision making.* Two types of collaboration were suggested: vertical collaboration – councilwomen collaborate with other women in decision-making at the central level – and horizontal collaboration – councilwomen collaborate with one another.
* *Strengthening collaboration with civil society organizations.* These efforts will help women bridge the gap that exists between the problems that they face in the community and address in the council.
* *Organizing training sessions with councilwomen.* The following topics were suggested by councilwomen: interacting and communicating with the media, improving communication skills, using technology, improving leadership and decision-making skills, strengthening collaborative skills, increasing self-confidence, and lobbying within the Party. Other topics include public speaking, gender budgeting, housing, and domestic violence.
* *Implementing cultural programs.* Councilwomen in rural areas suggested implementing cultural programs that will help women (not just councilwomen) to interact with one another and organize for collective interests.
* *Supporting women’s economic empowerment and rural development.* Councilwomen suggested creating job opportunities and strengthening women’s involvement in business. It was also suggested to provide incentives for well-educated young women to stay in rural communities.

Other interventions should focus on the following areas:

* *Supporting the participation of councilwomen in the discussion of legal changes, national reforms and strategies*, such as the Law on Local Finance, the Law on the Organization and Functioning of Local Governance, and the Territorial and Administrative Reform.
* *Monitoring the implementation of the gender quota.* The findings of this study suggest that monitoring the implementation of the gender quota during elections is not sufficient. It is critical to monitor the implementation of the gender quota over time.
* *Emphasizing women’s contribution to local development.* Public discussions often focus on the importance of implementing the gender quota. It is important that the attention shifts to the ways through which women contribute to local development. This study reveals the collaborative efforts of councilwomen and their attempt to represents the interests of women and girls in the council. Discussions should also focus on the importance of strengthening women’s role in public hearings and other forms of local organization, such as the citizens’ commission.
* *Supporting the organization of councilwomen.* If councilwomen are well organized, they will be able to support one another and advance their agenda. As their proportion in local councils will increase, women will have more opportunities to form collaborative ties with one another. However, it is open to question if women will organize for collective interests. In addition, the Territorial and Administrative Reform might result into greater disparities between urban and rural areas. Councilwomen in rural areas, compared to those in urban areas, were less likely to report that they will run for office in the local elections of 2015. Women in rural areas should not only be encouraged to run for office, but also supported through numerous capacity-building programs that should be tailored to their needs.

Several questions need further investigation. For instance, how do councilmen perceive the decision-making power of councilwomen? How do councilmen perceive women’s contribution to the local council? Are councilwomen able to foster collaborative ties with women deputies? What kind of barriers do they face? The new gender quota might affect power dynamics within the council. Future studies should focus on the impact of recent legal improvements.

In the field, interviewers faced problems obtaining the contact information of councilwomen. There were instances of Party leaders, secretaries of the local council, mayors, or other local leaders withholding the information. It is important to make the contact information of local representatives publicly available as well as update it to reflect the changes in the composition of the local council.

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# Appendix 1

The study was conducted in the local councils of the following communes, municipalities, and municipal units: Allkaj, Antigone, Armen, Bajram Curri, Ballsh, Berat, Berdice, Berxull, Bilisht, Brataj, Bulqize, Burrel, Bushat, Bushtrice, Buze, Çarçove, Çepan, Çorovode, Dajç-Lezhe, Derjan, Dhiver, Drenove, Dropulli i Siperm, Durres, Dushk, Frasher, Gjegjan, Gjepalaj, Gjerbes, Gjinar, Gjocaj, Greshice, Gryke-Çaje, Gur i Zi, Gurre, Hekal, Karbunare, Karine, Kelcyre, Kolonje, Kolsh, Korçe, Kote, Kruje, Ksamil, Kukes, Kuman, Kutalli, Kute, Lab. Fushe, Laç, Lazarat, Lekas, Leskovik, Levan, Lezhe, Libofshe, Libonik, Librazhd, Livadhja, Luftinje, Lukove, Lumas, Lunxheri, Lushnje, Luz i Vogel, Maliq, Maminas, Mamurras, Markat, Memaliaj, Moglice, Mollas, Nepravishte, Ngracan, Njesia Bashkiake 1, Njesia Bashkiake 3, Njesia Bashkiake 4, Njesia Bashkiake 5, Njesia Bashkiake 7, Njesia Bashkiake 8, Njesia Bashkiake 9, Njesia Bashkike 11, Novosele, Orenje, Orikum, Ostren, Pajove, Paskuqan, Patos, Permet, Perondi, Perparim, Preze, Picar, Pogradec, Polican, Portez, Proger, Proptisht, Qender Bilisht, Qender Çlirim, Qender Mallakaster, Qukes, Rashbull, Remas, Roshnik, Roskovec, Rrape, Rrethinat, Rubik, Sarande, Selishte, Shale, Shenkoll, Shishtavec, Shkoder, Shosh, Shupenze, Stebleve, Stravaj, Surroj, Synej, Terbuf, Terpan, Tirane, Topoje, Tropoje, Ulez, Ungrej, Velabisht, Velçan, Velipoje, Vendreshe, Vlore, Vore, and Zagori.

# Appendix 2

Table 1: Sample characteristics (categorical variables)

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | *M* | *SD* | *Range* |
| Number of mandates | 1.45 | .83 | 1 – 5 |
| Number of years in the council | 5.72 | 3.52 | 1 – 23 |
| Number of children | 2.17 | 1.18 | 0 – 6 |
| Number of councilors | 17.97 | 7.74 | 7 – 45 |
| Number of councilwomen | 3.83 | 2.97 | 1 – 16 |
| Age | 48.36 | 10.20 | 24 – 70 |

Table 2: Sample characteristics (continuous variables)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | *n* | *%* |
| Commission |  |  |
| Education | 37 | 28.68 |
| Education and other[[19]](#footnote-19) | 14 | 10.85 |
| Economy | 17 | 13.18 |
| Health | 8 | 6.2 |
| Other[[20]](#footnote-20) | 53 | 41.08 |
| Position in the commission |  |  |
| Head | 40 | 26.14 |
| Vice-head | 16 | 10.46 |
| Member | 97 | 63.40 |
| Running the local elections of 2015 |  |  |
| Yes | 100 | 54.95 |
| No | 41 | 22.53 |
| I don’t know | 41 | 22.53 |
| Education |  |  |
| Primary school | 5 | 2.75 |
| High school | 56 | 30.77 |
| College | 95 | 52.20 |
| Master | 19 | 10.44 |
| Doctorate | 7 | 3.85 |
| Civil status |  |  |
| Single | 15 | 8.24 |
| Married | 161 | 88.46 |
| Divorced | 1 | 0.55 |
| Widowed | 5 | 2.75 |
| Political Party |  |  |
| Socialist Party | 61 | 32.80 |
| Democratic Party | 55 | 29.57 |
| Other | 70 | 37.63 |
| Type of local government |  |  |
| Municipality | 46 | 24.73 |
| Commune | 117 | 62.90 |
| Municipal unit | 23 | 12.37 |
| Strata |  |  |
| Lower than 0.10 | 50 | 26.88 |
| Higher than 0.10 but lower than 0.30 | 75 | 40.32 |
| Higher than 0.3 | 61 | 32.80 |

Table 3: Women’s role during public hearings

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes  (%) | No (%) |
| I feel comfortable sharing my opinion | 82 (94.25) | 5  (5.75) |
| I encourage participants to propose changes to the draft budget and fiscal package | 70 (78.65) | 19 (21.35) |
| I discuss the proposals of participants and suggest changes to the draft budget and fiscal package | 77 (82.80) | 16 (17.20) |
| I introduce the idea of organizing public hearings | 40 (47.62) | 44 (52.38) |

Table 4: Women’s role during meetings with the local administration

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Yes  (%) | No  (%) |
| I request information that is useful for my community | 135 (93.75) | 9  (6.25) |
| I feel comfortable sharing my opinion | 129 (90.21) | 14 (9.79) |
| I discuss the performance of municipal/communal staff | 105 (76.64) | 32 (23.36) |
| I hold municipal/communal staff accountable and demand that they take action to improve the situation | 92 (66.67) | 46 (33.33) |
| I request the organization of meetings with municipal/communal staff when I think it is necessary | 80 (58.52) | 56 (41.48) |

Table 5: Perceived decision-making power of councilwomen

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *M* | *STD* | Range |
| Perceived power in the council | 3.46 | .88 | 1 – 5 |
| Perceived power in the commission | 3.65 | .93 | 1 – 5 |
| Perceived power in the Party | 3.60 | 1.0 | 1 – 5 |

\**Note:* Councilwomen were asked to assess their power on 5-point Likert scales (1 = *I do not have power at all* and 5 = *I have a lot of power*).

Table 6: Perceived decision-making power of councilmen

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *M* | *STD* | Range |
| Perceived power in the council | 4.20 | .69 | 2 – 5 |
| Perceived power in the commission | 4.11 | .75 | 1 – 5 |
| Perceived power in the Party | 4.43 | .76 | 1 – 5 |

\**Note:* Councilwomen were asked to assess the power of councilmen on 5-point Likert scales (1 = *I do not have power at all* and 5 = *I have a lot of power*).

Table 7: Issues discussed in council meetings

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | *n* | *%* |
| 1. Administrative structure | 62 | 33.51 |
| 1. Fiscal package | 57 | 30.81 |
| 1. Budget | 122 | 65.95 |
| 1. Economic assistance | 153 | 82.70 |
| 1. Scholarships | 115 | 62.16 |
| 1. Public investments | 97 | 52.43 |
| 1. Municipal/communal income and expenses | 73 | 39.46 |
| 1. Territorial control | 48 | 25.95 |
| 1. Water supply | 98 | 52.97 |
| 1. Assets administered by the municipality/commune | 21 | 11.35 |
| 1. Primary health care | 67 | 36.22 |
| 1. Law and order | 58 | 31.35 |
| 1. Education system | 102 | 55.14 |
| 1. Public services | 95 | 51.35 |
| 1. Environment | 75 | 40.54 |
| 1. Communication with citizens | 61 | 32.97 |
| 1. Tourism | 28 | 15.14 |
| 1. Sports | 29 | 15.68 |
| 1. Other | 5 | 2.72 |

Table 8: The main problems faced by women and girls in the community

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | *n* | *%* |
| 1. Poverty | 131 | 70.43 |
| 1. Unemployment | 172 | 92.47 |
| 1. Malnutrition | 34 | 18.28 |
| 1. Lack of housing | 35 | 18.82 |
| 1. Domestic violence | 87 | 46.77 |
| 1. Poor access to transportation | 21 | 11.29 |
| 1. Poor access to health services | 31 | 16.67 |
| 1. Discrimination in the labor market | 80 | 43.01 |
| 1. Low representation in decision making | 114 | 61.29 |
| 1. Lack of (physical) security | 15 | 8.11 |
| 1. School dropout | 29 | 15.68 |
| 1. Lack of support for women’s businesses | 58 | 31.18 |
| 1. Conflicts over land | 22 | 11.83 |
| 1. Lack of land titles | 21 | 11.29 |
| 1. Lack of access to technology | 30 | 16.13 |
| 1. Other\* | 9 | 4.84 |

*\*Note:* Other includes natural disasters, such as floods, and the destruction of houses by fire.

Table 9: Councilors’ attitudes towards women’s efforts

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | *n* | *%* |
| Men have opposed women by using offensive language | 3 | 2.52 |
| Men have ignored women’s efforts | 12 | 10.08 |
| Men have welcomed women’s efforts | 61 | 51.26 |
| Men have not only welcomed women’s efforts, but also responded in a positive way by encouraging them to share the problems of women and girls during discussions | 43 | 36.13 |

Table 10: Experience in the council

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | *n* | *%* |
| I have felt discriminated against because of my gender | 21 | 11.86 |
| I always agree with the decisions of councilors who belong to the same Party | 76 | 43.93 |
| I raise my voice in the council | 164 | 91.62 |
| My voice is heard | 148 | 80.87 |
| My voice is heard as much as men’s voice | 112 | 62.22 |
| Councilors respect me | 179 | 97.81 |
| Councilors support me during discussions | 147 | 83.52 |
| Councilors demand my expertise during discussions | 86 | 49.43 |
| Councilors interrupt me while I share my opinion (thoughts) | 32 | 18.29 |
| Councilors use sexist language | 8 | 4.57 |

Table 11: Relationships in the council

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | *M* | *STD* | Range |
| Councilwomen who belong to the same political party | 4.48 | .66 | 2 – 5 |
| Councilwomen who belong to the same political alliance | 4.43 | .64 | 3 – 5 |
| Councilwomen who belong to the opposition | 4.14 | .81 | 1 – 5 |
| Councilors (women and men) who belong to the same Party | 4.37 | .69 | 1 – 5 |
| Councilors (women and men) who belong to the same political alliance | 4.32 | .66 | 2 – 5 |
| Councilors (women and men) who belong to the opposition | 3.80 | .96 | 1 – 5 |

*Note:* Councilwomen were asked to assess their relationships in the council on 5-point Likert scales (1 = *very tense* and 5 = *very good*).

Table 12: Collaborative actors

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | *n* | *%* |
| Councilwomen who belong to the same Party | 9 | 10.84 |
| All councilwomen, despite their Party | 9 | 10.84 |
| Councilors (women and men) who belong to the same Party | 16 | 19.28 |
| Different councilors (women and men), despite their Party | 49 | 59.04 |

Table 13: Problems addressed in collaborative initiatives

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | *n* | *%* |
| 1. Poverty | 55 | 70.51 |
| 1. Unemployment | 60 | 76.92 |
| 1. Malnutrition | 2 | 2.60 |
| 1. Lack of housing | 21 | 26.92 |
| 1. Domestic violence | 40 | 51.28 |
| 1. Poor access to transportation | 4 | 5.13 |
| 1. Poor access to health services | 12 | 15.38 |
| 1. Discrimination in the labor market | 24 | 30.77 |
| 1. Low representation in decision making | 33 | 42.31 |
| 1. Lack of (physical) security | 3 | 3.85 |
| 1. School dropout | 21 | 26.92 |
| 1. Lack of support for women’s businesses | 18 | 23.08 |
| 1. Conflicts over land | 5 | 6.41 |
| 1. Lack of land titles | 3 | 3.85 |
| 1. Lack of access to technology | 7 | 8.97 |
| 1. Other\* | 3 | 3.85 |

\**Note:* Other collaborative initiatives have focused on the lack of access to water and health care.

Table 14: The relationship between the proportion of councilwomen and women’s contribution and role in the council

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | Test results | Relationship |
| Speech participation (women) | *χ2* (6, N = 185) = 8.37 | Nonsignificant |
| Speech participation (men) | *χ2* (4, N = 185) = 1.65 | Nonsignificant |
| Length of speech (women) | *χ2* (8, N = 186) = 12.48 | Nonsignificant |
| Length of speech (men) | *χ2* (6, N = 184) = 5.9 | Nonsignificant |
| Making proposals to the work program | *χ2* (2, N = 186) = .84 | Nonsignificant |
| Initiating draft decisions | *χ2* (2, N = 181) = 1.93 | Nonsignificant |
| Proposing amendments to draft decisions | *χ2* (2, N = 183) = 0.54 | Nonsignificant |
| Responsibility for representing the problems of women and girls | *χ2* (2, N = 185) = 0.20 | Nonsignificant |
| Raising the voice for the problems faced by women and girls in the community | *χ2* (2, N = 185) = 2.71 | Nonsignificant |
| Councilors’ attitudes towards women’s efforts | *χ2* (6, N = 119) = 10.44 | Nonsignificant |
| Raising the voice in the council | *χ2* (2, N = 179) = 7.13 | Significant |
| Having the voice heard in the council | *χ2* (2, N = 179) = 3.48 | Nonsignificant |
| Collaboration between councilwomen | *χ2* (4, N = 84) = 67.22 | Significant |

*Note:* The relationship is not statistically significant if *p* > .05. The relationship is statistically significant if *p* < .05. All results were based on chi-square tests.

Table 15: The relationship between individual-level characteristics and perceived decision-making power

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Variable | Test result | Relationship |
| Education | *χ2* (16, N = 180) = 29.82 | Significant |
| Age | *r* = 0.24 | Significant |
| Participation in training sessions | *χ2* (4, N = 181) = 12.09 | Significant |
| Leading position in the local council | *χ2* (8, N = 151) = 31.07 | Significant |

*Note:* The relationship is statistically significant if *p* < .05. All results were based on chi-square tests and correlation (in the case of age).

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2. Given the practice of replacing women with men soon after local elections are over (see the discussion under the section of methodology), this might be an overestimation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This might be an underestimation for the reason mentioned above. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Women-friendly policies can be broadly defined as policies that advance women’s interests. Such policies focus on child support, minimum wage, and pay equity, among others (Cowell-Meyers & Langbein, 2009). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Referring to Dahlerup (2006), “the term critical mass was borrowed from nuclear physics, where it refers to the quantity needed to start a chain reaction, an irreversible turning point, a takeoff into a new situation or process” (p. 512). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Karpowitz et al. (2012) refer to voice as speech participation and authority as perceived influence. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The proportion of councilwomen was calculated by dividing the number of councilwomen by the overall number of councilors. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Disproportionate stratified sampling was applied because of the small number of councils with a high proportion of councilwomen. The procedure allowed comparing the three groups of councils with one another. In 2011, the overall number of councilwomen in councils with a high proportion of women was close to the overall number of councilwomen in councils with a low proportion of women (115 *vs.* 123) (Central Election Commission, 2011). Over time, these numbers have changed – the number of councils with a low proportion of women has increased and the number of councils with a high proportion of women has decreased; however, the degree of change is unclear (see the discussion in the text). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Source: http://www2.cec.org.al/ [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. In the text, the names of councilwomen have been changed to maintain confidentiality. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The next step would be to conduct regression analysis: predicting perceived decision-making power from the proportion of councilwomen and individual-level characteristics, such as age, education, number of mandates, and Party membership. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. *M* refers to the mean value and *SD* to the standard deviation. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. In 2014, they missed 1 or 2 council meetings. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. In 2014, they missed half or more than half of council meetings. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The term “statistically significant” will be used throughout the text. A relationship is statistically significant if “the likelihood that ... [the] relationship can be attributed to chance is quite tiny” (Rubin & Babbie, 2013, p. 332). The likelihood is determined through statistical tests, which result into a probability level (*p*). If *p* < .05 for instance the probability that the results can be attributed to chance is lower than .05. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Draft decisions were mostly introduced by women who held a leading position in one of the commissions of the council. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Referring to Law 8652 on the Organization and Functioning of Local Governance, local councils must organize public hearings to discuss the budget and decide local taxes and tariffs. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Training sessions have focused on the following topics: leadership, electoral campaigns, women’s role in decision making, women in politics, women’s representation in politics and administration, budgeting, gender-based violence, women’s economic empowerment, the situation of women in rural areas, communication, lobbying and advocacy, public speaking, women’s rights, human trafficking, door-to-door campaign, organizing election campaigns, organizing press conferences, and information technology. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. For example, education and health, education and culture, education and mandates, education and order, and education and housing. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. For instance, social services and transportation, trade, public order, civil emergencies, agriculture, and urbanization. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)