

## **Women's Descriptive Representation Facilitates the Adoption and Implementation of Laws Relating to Violence Against Women: Evidence from Asian Countries**

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### **Abstract**

Violence Against Women (VAW) is a severe problem across the world. Despite its severity, however, some countries do not even have laws to combat VAW, and others have laws in name only. Why do countries adopt and implement laws addressing VAW? Previous studies have largely been based on case studies and cross-national studies, which limits the general applicability of their findings. Using a time-series cross-national analysis of 49 Asian countries from 1950 to 2016, this article tries to explain the variations among countries in the adoption and implementation of laws addressing VAW in the context of women's descriptive representation in parliaments. The empirical results demonstrate that an increase in the percentage of women in parliaments leads countries to adopt and implement laws addressing VAW. This relationship is consistently and statistically significant in alternative model specifications.

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### **Key words**

women's descriptive representation, violence against women, adoption and implementation of laws

## **Introduction**

Violence Against Women (VAW) has received great attention internationally because of its severity in both developing and developed countries, regardless of the social status of women (Musso, Proietti, & Reynolds, 2020). The high rates of VAW reported all around the globe<sup>1</sup> has led to the negative effects of VAW on

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<sup>1</sup> UN Women provides a series of facts and figures about the severity of VAW in the world. According to its analysis, 35% of women in the world experienced sexual violence including trafficking, stalking, child, early and forced marriage (CEFM), or female genital mutilation

individual victims, and its economic and social costs at the national level have continuously been discussed in the United Nations General Assembly and by other international organizations (Reeves & Meyer, 2021). Global agreement that VAW is an immediate and urgent problem has led many countries to adopt and implement laws combating it. However, some countries have domestic statutory laws<sup>2</sup> that address VAW in name only, while others have no such laws at all. Given that the law is the most fundamental tool in controlling violence, protecting human rights, and maintaining social justice, the absence of such laws makes it impossible to discern which behaviors are punishable, and exacerbates the problem of VAW.

Why do countries adopt and implement laws addressing VAW? Despite the increasing threat VAW poses to women's rights and women's political/social empowerment, empirical studies about this question are unexpectedly underdeveloped. Given that the adoption and implementation of laws largely depend on decision-making in the legislative body, this article tries to examine the variance in the probability of the adoption and implementation of laws addressing VAW through the lens of women's descriptive representation. Based on the results from logistic regressions and ordinary least square (OLS) models using data for 49 Asian countries<sup>3</sup> from 1950 to 2016, this article finds that women's descriptive representation leads countries to adopt and implement laws combating VAW. This relationship is statistically and substantively significant in various alternative model specifications.

This article is organized as follows. In the next section, a definition of VAW and previous literature on VAW and women's descriptive representation will be introduced. Then, theories and hypotheses about the influence of women's descriptive representation on the adoption and the implementation of laws addressing VAW will follow. In the Empirical Analysis section, a series of variables used in the empirical models, the operationalization of the variables, model specifications, and results are presented. Finally, the article concludes with policy implications and discussions about future research topics.

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(FGM) (UN Women, n.d.-a).

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this article, "laws" refers to domestic statutory laws.

<sup>3</sup> Afghanistan, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, East Timor, Egypt, Georgia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Lebanon, Malaysia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, North Korea, Oman, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, South Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Turkey, Turkmenistan, United Arab Emirates, Uzbekistan, Yemen, and Vietnam.

## Violence against Women and Women's Descriptive Representation

Throughout this article, VAW is defined as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life” (UN Women, n.d.-b). In other words, all acts of violence threatening women's physical and psychological integrity are identified as VAW. These include, for instance, domestic and intimate partner violence, trafficking, sexual violence and harassment, female genital mutilation (FGM), stalking, femicide, and any other harmful practices against women. VAW negatively affects women's health and rights in various ways by causing depression and thoughts of suicide, discouraging women's normal activities, and degrading their social and political status (Adekunle, Kalejaiye, Ogundade, Ogede, & Soyemi, 2020; Krahe, 2018).

The four world conferences on women—Mexico (1975), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985), and Beijing (1995)—attracted global attention about VAW and transformed it from a marginal to a central issue (Bunch & Fried, 1996; Qureshi, 2020). A total of 189 countries adopted the Beijing Declaration for gender equality including the problem of VAW, and domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) began to work actively to eradicate VAW (Alam, 2021; Wessells & Kostelny, 2021). Even though the influence of civil societies is somewhat limited because of state sovereignty, civil society activities are still regarded as important enterprises, and global or regional feminist movements also increased the level of attention paid to VAW (Burgess, 2012; Dankelman & Davidson, 1989; Htun & Weldon, 2012; Talpade, Russo, & Lorres, 1991; Weldon, 2002; Weldon & Htun, 2013).

With growing awareness of VAW, some scholars, through case studies or cross-national studies, examine how to control VAW and enhance women's rights (Fabian, 2010; Htun & Weldon, 2012; Krizsán & Roggeband, 2017; Montoya, 2013; Roggeband, 2021; Weldon, 2002; Weldon & Htun, 2013). Weldon (2002) emphasized the role of autonomous feminist movements in the policy provisions combating VAW using data on 36 democratic countries. Applying OLS regressions, she found that the autonomous feminist movements increase government responsiveness to the problem of VAW. More recently, Htun and Weldon (2012) conducted a large-N study on 70 countries with four-year cross-sectional data, finding that autonomous domestic feminist movements lead countries to provide public goods, including crisis services and one-stop service centers, to

tackle VAW. With the same data, Weldon and Htun (2013) supported their previous findings by demonstrating that feminist activism drives the policy changes addressing VAW. Moreover, Fabian (2010) argued that institutionalized global norms such as the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) prompt the activities of IGOs and NGOs among post-communist Central and Eastern countries. She supported her argument with a case study on NaNe (a women's rights NGO in Hungary), examining how NaNe gains support from international institutions. In addition, Montoya (2013) conducted a case study about how the issue of VAW becomes salient among European countries, arguing that the coercive global norms make individual countries recognize VAW as an urgent problem.

In addition, largely based on elaborated theories showing that increased women's descriptive representation promotes policy changes for women (Kanter, 1977; Mansbridge, 1999; Phillips, 1995), some scholars demonstrate the close relationship between women's descriptive representation and the policy promotion of women's issues through case studies or comparative approaches (Bauer & Burnet, 2013; Bolzendahl & Brooks, 2007; Bratton & Ray, 2002; Childs & Dahlerup, 2018; Cowell-Meyers & Langbein, 2009; Eckhouse, 2019; Höhmann, 2020; Nistotskaya & Stensöta, 2018; Osborn, 2012; Paxton, Hughes, & Barnes, 2020; Swers, 2013; Thomas & Wilcox, 2014; Thomsen & Sanders, 2020). For instance, Cowell-Meyers and Langbein (2009) examined 34 policies including VAW, child policies, and welfare policies, finding evidence that women's descriptive presentation in state legislatures tends to lead to state-level policies favoring women.

More recently, Bauer and Burnet (2013) conducted a case study on two different sub-Saharan African countries, finding that women's descriptive representatives are helpful in achieving substantive representation of women, even in non-democratic countries. Moreover, Nistotskaya and Stensöta (2018), Eckhouse (2019), and Höhmann (2020) demonstrated the connection between women's political representation and responsiveness to women's interests. Also, although not directly related to policy promotions, other studies showed that female representatives assign higher policy priorities to and have supportive political attitudes toward women's issues (Atkinson & Windett, 2019; Boas & Smith, 2019; Clayton, Josefsson, Mattes, & Mozaffar, 2019; Dolan, Deckman, & Swers, 2019; Homola, 2021; Poggione, 2004; Swers, 2016).

Clues to the link between women's descriptive representation and the adoption of policies addressing VAW can also be found in case studies focusing on Asian countries including Jordan (Alkubati, 2019), Malaysia (Zakuan, 2010), Hong Kong

(Tam, 2017), Singapore (Tam, 2020), Pakistan (Khan & Naqvi, 2018), Bangladesh (Akter, 2019), Indonesia (Kesuma Suci, Yamada, & Wibowo, 2020; Prihatini, 2021), Turkey (Bulut, 2020), Taiwan (Shim, 2021), and South Korea (Y. I. Lee, 2019). Even though some articles still raise questions about the association between women's descriptive representation and policy outcomes for women (Kanel, 2014; J. Lee, 2020; Tolbert & Steuernagel, 2001), the above-mentioned literature presents a possibility that such an association exists not only in democratic and developed countries, but also in non-democratic and developing countries. For example, by conducting a case study on Hong Kong, Tam (2017) found that female legislators in a non-democratic or semi-democratic legislature focus more on women's interests than male legislators do. In addition, Bulut (2020) demonstrated that female legislators are more likely to draft bills promoting women's interests even in Muslim-majority countries.

Given that VAW has conventionally been classified as a women's issue or women's interest (García-Moreno et al., 2015; Lowande, Ritchie, & Lauterbach, 2019; Swers, 1998; Volden, Wiseman, & Wittmer, 2018; Wiener, 2020), this article sheds light on women's descriptive representation as a driving factor in the adoption and implementation of laws addressing VAW through a large-N time-series cross-national statistical analysis of 49 Asian countries from 1950 to 2016. The focus is on the adoption and implementation of laws related to VAW, because the law is the fundamental tool in eradicating VAW (Richards & Haglund, 2015; Walsh, 2008). With this focus and a large body of time-series cross-national data, this article contributes to the literature on women in politics not only by unveiling the effect of women's descriptive representation on legal reforms addressing VAW, but also by testing the generalizability of the link between the presence of female representatives and the promotion of policies for women.

## Theories and Hypotheses

How does women's descriptive representation lead countries to adopt and implement laws combating VAW? Pitkin (1967)'s explanation of women's descriptive and substantive representation gives a clue to the conducive influence of women's descriptive representation on the adoption and implementation of laws related to VAW. She defines political representation as an activity that makes voters "present" in policy-making processes, descriptive representation as a body mirroring the characteristics including gender and race of the represented groups, and substantive representation as a body reflecting the interests of the community. Put

simply, substantive representation is “acting for” representation and descriptive representation is “standing for” representation (Celis & Childs, 2008). Pitkin (1967) argues that an increase in “descriptive representation” tends to lead to greater “substantive representation” (Bailer, Breunig, Giger, & Wüst, 2021).

In the same vein, the politics of presence theory developed by Phillips (1995) asserts that the gender of representatives is an influential factor in representative democracy (Mansbridge, 1999; Phillips, 1998; Tamerius, Duerst-Lahti, & Kelly, 2010; Williams, 2000; Young, 2002). Based on the assumption that female legislators and female citizens have shared life experiences such as child-rearing or exposure to violence, Phillips (1995, pp. 67–68) underlines that the entrance of women into politics is a prerequisite for the politicization of women’s issues. Some studies interviewing legislators and legislative staffers provide empirical evidence for the politics of presence theory (Burden, 2007; Grose, 2011; Lawless, 2015; Swers, 2016; Wangnerud & Sundell, 2012).

In addition to the politics of presence theory, critical mass theory has also been used as a theoretical framework to explain the association between women’s descriptive and substantive representation (Celis & Childs, 2008; Cowell-Meyers & Langbein, 2009; Espírito-Santo, Freire, & Serra-Silva, 2020; Homola, 2021). Critical mass theory posits that a certain proportion of female legislators in legislative bodies is needed for women to make their voice audible in the policy-making process (Dahlerup, 1988, 2006; Kanter, 1977). According to Kanter (1977, pp. 966–972), in skewed groups where a large preponderance of one dominant group exists, the dominant tends to control the minority (also termed “tokens”). Due to their minority status, the tokens with more visibility in a society tend to suffer from stereotypes, isolation from the society, and confirmation to dominant models, which, in turn, reinforce the skewed structure (Kanter, 1977, pp. 971–972). In this case, it is hard for female representatives to make their voice for women’s interests and rights heard.

On the other hand, when the number of “tokens” increases to a certain point, this prevents them from being isolated by the dominant group. The possible allies and coalitions among female representatives under this condition make it possible for them to break the vicious circle, escaping female stereotypes and role entrapment and pursuing their interests (Kanter 1977, p. 966). Therefore, once the proportion of female representatives reaches a certain point, female legislators politicize women’s issues including VAW more efficiently and can make their male counterparts take bills related to women’s issues more seriously (Celis, 2007; Dahlerup, Campbell, & Childs, 2014).

Theories developed by Gilligan (1982) and Mansbridge (1999) also supports the positive influence of women's descriptive representation on substantive representation. Gilligan (1982) argues that men and women have been taught differently regarding views on morality. The main thrust of her theory is that women, unlike men, tend to be taught empathy and compassion as the core of morality from childhood. This difference in the "ethic of caring" between men and women makes women pay more attention to issues such as welfare policies and the avoidance of using military forces. (Chorodow, 1978; Ruddick, 1980). In addition, Mansbridge (1999), using a case study of the U.S., theorizes that female representatives can appropriately reflect the needs of female citizens based on their shared experience. Mansbridge (1999) argues that because of their common female identity, female legislators are more likely than male legislators to understand the problems female citizens experience, to formulate legal solutions to those problems, and to incorporate the solutions into the legislative processes. She also demonstrates that female legislators tend to focus more on women's issues including education, health, and welfare, than male legislators do because female representatives facilitate conversations with female citizens and politicize the problems affecting them.

Even though the above-mentioned theories rely on different explanations, all aim to explain how women's descriptive representation can promote their substantive representation. It should be noted that a wide array of studies with data about individual representatives has highlighted heterogeneities among women representatives according to their partisanships (Barnes & Cassese, 2017; Osborn, 2012; Schilling & Osborn, 2020), individual characteristics (Costa, Greenlee, Nteta, Rhodes, & Sharrow, 2019; Dolan et al., 2019), or intersectionalities related to race and class (Barnes, 2016; Smooth, 2011). Therefore, taking on board the caveat that female representatives are not a homogenous group, this article tests whether, all other things being equal, higher levels of women's descriptive representation at the aggregate level leads countries to adopt and implement laws combating VAW.

*Hypothesis 1: Higher levels of women's descriptive representation leads countries to adopt laws addressing violence against women, all other things being equal (ceteris paribus).*

*Hypothesis 2: Higher levels of women's descriptive representation leads countries to implement laws addressing violence against women, all other things being equal (ceteris paribus).*

## Empirical Analysis

### Variables

#### Dependent Variables

To examine the influence of women's descriptive representation on the adoption and implementation of laws addressing VAW, this article uses three dependent variables: "Adoption of Law," "Adoption of NAP," and "Alternative Implementation Index." The binary variable named "Adoption of Law" is built on the UN Women database (UN Women, n.d.-a). This database provides an opportunity to conduct a large-N time-series cross-national analysis which has a higher strength to test the generalizability of theories and hypotheses (Lieberman, 2005). Countries adopting laws about VAW in a given year are assigned 1, otherwise they are assigned 0.

Measuring whether a country implements laws addressing VAW is more complex than measuring whether a country adopts such laws because it is hard to conceptualize implementation and find an equivalent measurement of implementation across 49 Asian countries. The UN Women dataset overcomes this problem. In addition to data about the adoption of laws addressing VAW, this dataset provides the list of countries which have enacted a National Action Plan (NAP) to eradicate VAW. UN Women defines an NAP as follows:

Laws on violence against women should require creation of a national action plan to eliminate violence against women. A national action plan can be an extremely useful tool with which to assess strengths and weaknesses, set targets, identify private organizations that can help implement new laws or priorities, and plot future initiatives to prevent violence against women. Action plans and strategies should also provide for consistent funding of implementation programs. (UN Women, 2010)

Thus, if a country has an NAP, it means that the country is trying to move toward successful implementation of laws addressing VAW because NAPs include several activities to implement these laws. A country-year observation when the country has an NAP is coded as 1 in measuring whether a country is implementing laws addressing VAW; otherwise, 0 is assigned.

In addition, given that the presence of NAP does not guarantee the implementation of law addressing VAW, an "Alternative Implementation Index" is



used as an alternative measure of the implementation of laws as a robustness check. The “Alternative Implementation Index” is based on four ground-level factors: the existence of policies about 1) Judicial protocols and guidelines, 2) Judicial training, 3) Police protocols and guidelines, and 4) Police training.<sup>4</sup> A value between 0 and 4 is assigned according to the presence of each policy in a country. The use of additive functions prevents the index from becoming opaque.

### **Independent Variable**

To estimate the influence of women’s descriptive representation on the adoption and implementation of laws addressing VAW, I use the percentage of women in legislatures.<sup>5</sup> *Women in Parliaments (%)* is measured using the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) database (Inter-Parliamentary Union, n.d.). This database provides information about when the first female legislator was elected in each country and the percentage of women in parliaments over decades. Country-year observations before a country had its first female representative in parliaments are assigned 0. If there are missing values between election terms, I use the percentage of women in parliaments of the previous election year to fill in the missing values.

### **Control Variables**

Other potential variables that can influence the probability of adopting and implementing laws about VAW should be controlled in order to appropriately estimate the independent impact of women’s descriptive representation, because the exclusion of relevant variables will bias the estimation of coefficients and standard errors (Wooldridge, 2016). Thus, this article includes a series of control variables studied as potential factors determining the adoption of policies related to women’s issues based on previous literature.

First, the level of democracy has been regarded as a determinant of the adoption of policies supporting women or other minorities (Haggard & Kaufman, 2008; Orenstein, 2008). The Polyarchy Index from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) dataset (Coppedge et al., 2019) is used to parcel out the anticipated positive influence of the level of democracy. Selecting appropriate measurements of the level of democracy is a matter of serious concern because it can totally transform the re-

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<sup>4</sup> The UN Women database provides detailed information about whether a country has those four ground-level factors or not.

<sup>5</sup> If a country has a bicameral system, the average percentage of women in both the lower and upper houses is used.

sults (Högström, 2013; Teorell, Coppedge, Skaaning, & Lindberg, 2016). The Polyarchy Index is used instead of either the Freedom House Index (Freedom House, n.d.) or Polity 2 score (Marshall & Gurr, 2020) for two main reasons. One is the issue of coverage: The V-Dem index covers from 1789 to the present, while the FHI covers only from 1972 to the present. The FHI coverage is not broad enough to take advantage of the large body of time-series cross-national data spanning 1950 to 2016. Second, both the FHI and Polity 2 scores have been criticized because of their methodological performances. The FHI is criticized by scholars because of bias and lack of consistency, and the Polity 2 score tends to overestimate the level of democracy (Knutson et al., 2019). Thus, this article relies on the V-Dem index.

In addition, in line with a branch of modernization theory, some scholars argue that economic development tends to lead countries to pay more attention to post-material values such as women's rights (Doepke, Tertilt, & Voena, 2012; Inglehart, Norris, & Ronald, 2003; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). Therefore, to capture the potential positive influence of economic development, this article controls for GDP per capita, using data from the Maddison Project Database (Inklaar, de Jong, Bolt, & van Zanden, 2018).

The effect of the proliferation of global norms about women's rights is also controlled for. Individual countries follow international human rights norms to avoid the pressure of being accused of violating those norms, which can lead to the imposition of economic sanctions. Moreover, a strong linkage between domestic and transnational actors generated from the proliferation of global norms related to VAW can also make countries adopt and implement laws addressing VAW (Fitzpatrick, 2012; Risse, Ropp, & Sikkink, 1999). The percentage of countries joining the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) treaty, the most prominent international treaty related to women's rights (Englehart & Miller, 2014; Och, 2018), is used to control for the anticipated positive influence of the proliferation of global norms about women's rights.

Women's participation in civil society organizations and women's property rights are also variables requiring attention, regarded as important factors promoting women's integrity and leading countries to adopt policies for women. Some scholars have demonstrated that women's property rights tend to increase their political efficacy and make governments pay more attention to women's issues (Mishra & Sam, 2016; O'Hara & Clement, 2018; Pradhan, Meinzen-Dick, & Theis, 2019), while others have shown that active women's participation in civil society

organizations or feminist autonomous movements leads countries to adopt progressive policies combating VAW (García-Moreno et al., 2015; Htun & Weldon, 2012; Weldon & Htun, 2013). The indices for women's participation in civil society organizations and property rights from the V-Dem dataset are employed to measure these concepts.

In addition, legislative party cohesion, or party discipline, has been studied as a factor substantially diminishing the efficacy of women's descriptive representation. In countries where the party discipline or party loyalty is relatively strong, individual representatives are likely to introduce bills according to the goals of their political parties, rather than to legislate based on their individual perspectives (Kam, 2014). Thus, in examining the independent impact of women's descriptive representation, the study controls for the degree of legislative party cohesion using the "Party Cohesion Index" from the V-Dem database.

Along with legislative party cohesion, the ruling party's political ideology on the left-right scale is included as one of the control variables. There have been conflicting arguments and findings about whether a party's political ideology has a significant impact on the promotion of policies for women. Some studies argue that left-leaning political parties are more likely to promote feminist policies and to politicize women's issues (Blofield, Ewig, & Piscopo, 2017; Hieda, 2013; Mazur, 2002), while others maintain that the political ideology of the ruling political party does not have a statistically significant influence on the adoption of feminist policies including laws related to VAW (Beer, 2017; Weldon & Htun, 2013). Rather than disregarding this controversial variable and running the risk of omitted variable bias, the study controls for the ruling party's political ideology through the binary variable named "Left Party" constructed based on data from the Quality of Government database (Teorell, Charron, Samanni, Holmberg, & Rothstein, 2010).

The level of political violence, such as wars, is included as a control variable because countries would be expected to pay less attention to the adoption and implementation of laws about VAW during wartime. The "total summed magnitudes of all societal and interstate MEPV score" from the Major Episodes of Political Violence (MEPV) dataset (Marshall, 2019) is used to model the influence of political violence. The total summed magnitudes of all societal and interstate MEPV score ranges from 0 to 20, a higher score indicating more violence.

Finally, time functions are included to control the unobserved effects of time based on the empirical findings from Carter and Signorino (2010). Using a Monte Carlo simulation, they found that the time polynomial in statistical models can control the influence of time more precisely than time fixed-effects and time

splines. Although the influence of time through the estimations of the time polynomial cannot be interpreted (Beck, 2010), the inclusion of time polynomials avoids omitted variable bias.

**Table 1**  
*Descriptive Statistics*

Variable	Types	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
<b>Dependent Variables</b>					
Adoption of Law	Binary	0.058	0.234	0.000	1.000
Adoption of NAP	Binary	0.014	0.119	0.000	1.000
Alternative Implementation Index	Continuous	0.279	0.808	0.000	4.000
<b>Independent Variable</b>					
Women in Parliaments (%)	Continuous	5.374	7.721	0.000	38.500
<b>Control Variables</b>					
Democracy	Continuous	0.296	0.231	0.010	0.877
GDP per capita	Continuous	1.067	1.963	0.052	22.072
CEDAW (%)	Continuous	47.809	41.193	0.000	95.897
Women's CSO Participation	Continuous	0.194	1.038	-2.986	2.430
Women's Property Rights	Continuous	0.199	1.300	-3.750	2.390
Party Cohesion Index	Continuous	0.366	1.450	-3.684	2.552
Left Party	Binary	0.156	0.362	0.000	1.000
MEPV	Continuous	1.445	2.532	0.000	18.000

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of all variables except time variables. The data covers 49 Asian countries from 1950 to 2016, which leverages the generalizability of the findings in the next subsection. The unit of observation is a country-year. Given that socio-economic and political factors are usually not translated into policy changes within a year, all independent and control variables are lagged by one year.

## Modeling Strategy and Empirical Results

Estimating models through simple Ordinary Least Square (OLS) regression can be problematic when a dependent variable is a binary variable. The direct application of OLS regression to binary outcome variables violates homoscedasticity and normality assumptions, and gives non-sensical predictions (Dougherty, 2011; Long, 1997; Wooldridge, 2016). To overcome these problems, this article uses lo-

gistic regression models when the adoption of law and NAP addressing VAW are used as dependent variables. Also, considering that time-series cross-national data are likely to violate the independent and identically distributed (I.I.D.) assumption, cluster standard errors are estimated instead of normal standard errors.

Table 2 shows the results from the four logistic regression models (Model 1–Model 4) and two OLS regression models (Model 5 and Model 6) with alternative measures of implementation. Models 1, 3, and 5 are estimated without control variables, while the other three include a series of control variables. A variance inflation factor (VIF) test, the most frequently used method to check multicollinearity (Salmerón, García, & García, 2018), is applied to detect problematic collinearities among independent and control variables.<sup>6</sup> The VIFs of each independent and control variable do not exceed 3, which indicates no problematic multicollinearities in the estimated models (O’Brien, 2007).

Across the six models presented in Table 2, the percentage of women in parliaments is statistically significant at the level of  $p < 0.05$  with positive signs as expected. The results from Model 1 to Model 4 demonstrate that an increase in the percentage of women in parliaments tends to enhance the probability of adopting and implementing laws addressing VAW. Even though the estimated coefficients of Women in Parliaments (%) in the models with control variables are slightly lower compared to those in the models without such controls, the percentage of women in parliaments is also statistically significant in the models with controls. Moreover, the coefficients of Women in Parliaments (%) are 0.057 and 0.025 in Model 5 and Model 6 where the alternative measure of implementation is used as a dependent variable. It indicates that a 1% increase in the percentage of women in parliaments increases the *Alternative Implementation Index* by 0.057 and 0.025 respectively. Given that the alternative index does not vary dramatically over years, those changes should be considered significant.

Does the increase in the percentage of women in parliaments have a substantive influence on the adoption and implementation of laws addressing VAW? To evaluate the substantive influence, the study estimates the Average Marginal Effects (AME) of Women in Parliaments (%), with all other variables held at the observed values. The AMEs of *Women in Parliaments (%)* in Model 2 and Model 4 are 0.191

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<sup>6</sup> Severe multicollinearity among independent and control variables reduces the precision of estimate coefficients and weakens the analytical power of the regression models (Wooldridge, 2016). Please also see Angrist and Pischke (2009) for more information about multicollinearity problem and the VIF test.

Table 2  
*Regressions with Cluster Standard Errors*

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
	Adoption of Law		Adoption of NAPs		Alternative Implementation Index	
<b>Independent Variable</b>						
Women in Parliaments (%)	0.066*** (0.010)	0.025* (0.013)	0.098*** (0.011)	0.043*** (0.010)	0.057*** (0.011)	0.025* (0.011)
<b>Control Variables</b>						
Democracy		0.879 (0.539)		0.780 (0.963)		-0.193 (0.390)
GDP per capita		-0.069 (0.049)		-0.212 (0.153)		0.081 (0.041)
CEDAW (%)		0.076*** (0.022)		-0.037 (0.288)		-0.010 (0.010)
Women's CSO Participation		-0.015 (0.161)		0.158 (0.249)		0.157 (0.120)
Women's Property Rights		0.269 (0.161)		0.537 (0.314)		-0.030 (0.067)
Party Cohesion Index		-0.030 (0.078)		0.265 (0.162)		0.051 (0.078)
Left Party		0.320 (0.353)		-0.112 (0.480)		0.121 (0.106)
MEPV		0.015 (0.053)		-0.091 (0.086)		0.026 (0.017)
Time Polynomials	×	○	×	○	×	○
Constant	-3.277*** (0.138)	1.427 (4.610)	-5.126*** (0.253)	-301.445 (228.554)	-0.029 (0.062)	4.004*** (0.601)
Number of Observations	2694	2347	2694	2347	2668	2347
R-squared					0.163	0.398
Pseudo R-squared	0.045	0.183	0.092	0.296		
AIC	1141.601	899.945	374.386	285.969	5170.950	3837.136
BIC	1153.398	969.076	386.183	355.100	5176.839	3900.506

*Note.* Cluster standard errors in parentheses. R-squared, Pseudo R-squared, Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), and Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) are provided for the model comparison. See Kuha (2004) for detailed information about model comparison. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

and 0.102 respectively, meaning that a 1% increase in Women in Parliaments (%) increases the probabilities of adopting and implementing laws addressing VAW by 19.1% and 10.2%. These percentage changes are not negligible because the adoption of laws and NAPs addressing VAW are rare events. The AMEs based on the results from Model 2 and Model 4 provide evidence that the percentage of women in parliaments is not only statistically significant, but also substantively meaningful.

Among control variables, *CEDAW (%)* has a statistically significant relationship with the adoption of laws combating VAW, which provides evidence for the argument that the increasing global norm against VAW makes individual countries take legal action to show their commitment to the issue of VAW (Fitzpatrick, 2012; Risse et al., 1999). However, the empirical results in Table 2 only give partial support for this argument because *CEDAW (%)* is not statistically significant in Model 4 and Model 6.

In relation to other controls, none of the control variables, except *CEDAW (%)* in Model 2, has a statistically significant relationship across the three models with control variables in Table 2. This result emphasizes the relative importance of women's descriptive representation in the adoption and implementation of laws related to VAW compared to other potential factors including economic development, the level of democracy, and the ruling party's political ideology.

Table 3 shows the countries adopting laws addressing VAW from 1950 to 2016 with the information about the specific years of the adoption, the percentages of female representatives in both lower and upper houses in those years, *Average (%)* which is the average percentage of female representatives in both houses in the adoption years, and the average percentage of women in each house in the three years preceding the adoptions years in parentheses. Among 49 Asian countries in the analysis, 45 adopted laws targeting VAW from 1950 to 2016. According to the database about legal reforms from UN Women, only Syria, Taiwan, North Korea, and Yemen did not introduce any laws to combat VAW between 1950 and 2016.

Even though we can never be sure about the exact percentage of female legislators that leads countries to adopt and implement laws addressing VAW, the information presented in Table 3 provides a valuable opportunity to examine the relationship between women's descriptive representation in parliaments and the introduction of laws relating to VAW in real cases. The means of *Average (%)* in democratic countries and non-democratic countries are 8.8% and 9.4% respectively. Although some variations exist, those percentages indicate that both democratic and non-democratic countries, in general, tend to legislate for VAW when the percentage of women in parliaments reaches around 10%. Indonesia is

**Table 3**  
*Countries and Years of the Adoption of Laws Addressing VAW*

<b>Democratic Countries</b>				
<b>Country</b>	<b>Year of Adoption</b>	<b>Lower or single House (%)</b>	<b>Upper house or Senate (%)</b>	<b>Average (%)</b>
East Timor	2009	29.2 (26)	×	29.2 (26)
Philippines	1998	10.8 (10.8)	17.4 (16.9)	14.1 (13.9)
Azerbaijan	2000	12 (12)	×	12 (12)
Indonesia	1999	11.4 (11.7)	×	11.4 (11.7)
Mongolia	2002	10.5 (9.6)	×	10.5 (9.6)
India	1986	8.3 (5.5)	10.2 (11.1)	9.3 (8.3)
Bangladesh	2000	9.1 (9.1)	×	9.1 (9.1)
Maldives	2012	6.5 (6.5)	×	6.5 (6.5)
Nepal	2006	5.9 (5.9)	×	5.9 (5.9)
Israel	1991	5.8 (5.8)	×	5.8 (5.8)
Thailand	1997	5.6 (5)	×	5.6 (5)
Cyprus	1994	5.4 (5.4)	×	5.4 (5.4)
Turkey	2000	4.2 (3)	×	4.2 (3)
Japan	1972	1.6 (1.6)	1.6 (1.6)	1.6 (1.6)
South Korea	1994	1 (1.3)	×	1 (1.3)
<b>Non-Democratic Countries</b>				
<b>Country</b>	<b>Year of Adoption</b>	<b>Lower or single House (%)</b>	<b>Upper house or Senate (%)</b>	<b>Average (%)</b>
Vietnam	2006	27.3 (27.3)	×	27.3 (27.3)
Turkmenistan	2004	26 (26)	26 (26)	26 (26)
Afghanistan	2009	27.7 (28.5)	22.5 (22.5)	25.1 (25.5)
Singapore	2008	24.5 (20.6)	×	24.5 (20.6)
Laos	2004	22.9 (22.3)	×	22.9 (22.3)
China	1996	21 (21)	×	21 (21)
Pakistan	2004	21.6 (15)	18.0 (12.8)	19.8 (13.9)
Tajikistan	2010	17.5 (17.5)	14.7 (20.6)	16.1 (19.1)
Bahrain	2008	2.5 (1.7)	27.5 (27.5)	15 (14.6)
Kazakhstan	1997	13.2 (12.8)	10 (10)	11.6 (11.4)
Cambodia	2005	9.8 (9)	13.1 (13.1)	11.5 (11)
Kyrgyzstan	2003	10 (7.4)	10 (10)	10 (8.7)
Jordan	2008	6.4 (5.8)	12.7 (12.1)	9.6 (9)



Bhutan	2004	9.3 (9.3)	×	9.3 (9.3)
Georgia	2003	7.2 (7.2)	×	7.2 (7.2)
Uzbekistan	1995	6 (2)	×	6 (2)
Malaysia	1989	5.1 (5.1)	5.1 (5.1)	5.1 (5.1)
Sri Lanka	2005	4.9 (4.6)	×	4.9 (4.6)
Armenia	2003	3.1 (3.1)	×	3.1 (3.1)
Iran	2010	2.8 (3.2)	×	2.8 (3.2)
Lebanon	1998	2.3 (2.3)	×	2.3 (2.3)
Egypt	1998	2 (2)	0 (0)	1 (1)
Brunei	1984	0 (0)	×	0 (0)
Iraq	1959	0 (0)	×	0 (0)
Kuwait	1983	0 (0)	×	0 (0)
Myanmar	2005	0 (0)	×	0 (0)
Oman	1974	0 (0)	×	0 (0)
Qatar	2004	0 (0)	×	0 (0)
Saudi Arabia	2009	0 (0)	×	0 (0)
United Arab Emirates	1987	0 (0)	×	0 (0)

*Note.* Based on the minimalist definitions of democracy (see O'Donnell (2001) for various definitions of democracy), I classify countries holding free and fair elections as democratic countries. Given that some Asian countries have experienced democratic transition or de-democratization over decades, the classification process was carried out based on the "Year of Adoption." The classification of bicameral or unicameral is also based on the "Year of Adoption." For instance, I classify the Maldives as a democratic country because the Maldives held free and fair elections in October 2008.

the best example of this trend. The percentage of women in the legislative branch in Indonesia increased from 0 in 1971 to 11.4 in 1988. Following the increased entrance of women into politics, the issue of VAW became salient, the National Commission for Eradication of Violence against Women (Komnas Perempuan) was set up in 1998, and Indonesia finally adopted Articles 285, 287, and 288 criminalizing acts of rape outside marriage in the Penal Code in 1999.<sup>7</sup>

Table 3 also raises an important question: Why do some non-democratic countries without a single female representative in their legislative branches adopt laws addressing VAW? One of the plausible answers to this question is that non-demo-

<sup>7</sup> Please see <https://www.icj.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Indonesia-Penal-Code-1999-eng.pdf> for detailed information on Indonesia's Penal Code.

cratic countries implement legal reforms tackling VAW to secure regime support and government trust. Some studies have theorized and tested the negative link between exposure to criminal violence including VAW and regime support or government trust (Corbacho, Philipp, & Ruiz-Vega, 2015; Gilley, 2006). Moreover, crime can even harm political legitimacy when governments do not provide public security (Bayley, 2001). Even though the lack of reliable measures of crime in non-democratic countries prevents us from empirically testing the relationship, it is feasible that non-democratic countries might use the adoption of laws addressing VAW as a tool to maintain their regime types. In addition, non-democratic countries might show their commitment to domestic respect for human rights for their regime survival when dictators or governing political parties face political opposition (Conrad, 2014; Vreeland, 2008).

### **Robustness Check**

The importance of a robustness check with alternative model specifications has recently been emphasized by scholars (Esarey & Danneman, 2015; Neumayer & Plümper, 2017). Therefore, rather than concluding only with the empirical results from Table 2 and information from Table 3, the empirical analysis in Table 2 is replicated with an interaction term between the percentage of women in parliaments and the existence of reserved seat gender quotas for legislative bodies.

Following the successful introduction of gender quotas in Latin American and African countries, many Asian countries including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Jordan, and Taiwan have adopted legislative gender quotas (Hillman, 2018; Tan, 2015). With increasing attention to gender quotas as a tool to promote proportionality in the legislative branch and to facilitate women's entry into politics, scholars have contributed to the understanding of the effects of such quotas in various aspects such as legislative diversity (Barnes & Holman, 2020), women's political engagement and efficacy (Franceschet, Krook, & Piscopo, 2012; Kerevel & Atkeson, 2017; Zetterberg, 2009), and international reputation (Bush & Zetterberg, 2020).

The influence of reserved seat gender quotas on the association between women's descriptive and substantive representation has been especially widely examined by previous literature on quotas (Clayton & Zetterberg, 2018; Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008; Krook, 2020). As has been the case for more general studies on the process of representation, the findings of previous studies on the impact of gender quotas on women's substantive representation in the policy-making process have been mixed at best. Some found that female legislators are more likely to propose

bills about women's rights after the introduction of gender quotas and that quota-elected women tend to frequently politicize women's issues (Barnes, 2012; Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008). On the other hand, other studies find that the adoption of gender quotas does not alter the legislative behaviors of female legislators (Clayton, Josefsson, & Wang, 2017; Kerevel & Atkeson, 2013), or even negatively affects women's substantive representation (Htun, Lacalle, & Micozzi, 2013).

Given this controversy regarding the impacts of gender quotas, this study estimates alternative models with an interaction term between Women in Parliaments (%) and the existence of reserved seat gender quotas to see whether the influence of Women in Parliaments (%) is conditioned by the presence of reserved seat gender quotas. The binary variable named *Reserved Seat Gender Quotas* is used: 1 is assigned if a country has reserved seat gender quotas in the given year, otherwise 0 is assigned.

Table 4 presents the estimations from the six alternative models with an interaction term between the percentage of women in parliaments and reserved seat gender quotas. While multicollinearity problems arising from the fact that the percentage of women in parliaments can be associated with the existence of reserved seat gender quotas might be a source of concern, the VIFs of the alternative models in Table 4 are less than 3, indicating no severe multicollinearity problem.<sup>8</sup> As before, I estimate three models (Model 7, Model 9, and Model 11) without control variables and other three models (Model 8, Model 10, and Model 12) with controls and the interaction term.

Throughout the models presented in Table 4, the percentage of women in parliament is statistically significant at the level of  $p < 0.001$ , and the AMEs of the percentage of women in parliaments in Model 8 and Model 10 are 0.182 and 0.098 respectively. Thus, the relationship between the percentage of women in parliament and the adoption and implementation of laws addressing VAW is consistent. On the other hand, although it has a positive direction, the interaction term between Women in Parliaments (%) and Reserved Seat Gender Quotas is not statistically significant. This result indicates that the positive influence of Women in Parliaments (%) is neither augmented nor diminished by the presence of reserved seat gender quotas. This finding is in line with previous studies providing evidence

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<sup>8</sup> Some previous studies also simultaneously include the presence of gender quotas and the percentage of women in parliaments as explanatory variables (Barnes & Burchard, 2013; Barnes & Holman, 2020).

Table 4  
*Robustness Check with Reserved Seat Gender Quotas*

	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12
	Adoption of Law		Adoption of NAPs		Alternative Implementation Index	
<b>Independent Variable</b>						
Women in Parliaments (%)	0.064*** (0.009)	0.019*** (0.005)	0.099*** (0.012)	0.037*** (0.013)	0.054*** (0.014)	0.025*** (0.008)
<b>Control Variables</b>						
Reserved Seat Gender Quotas	0.136 (0.799)	-0.540 (0.878)	-1.293 (0.844)	-4.966 (4.348)	-0.881 (0.485)	-1.326 (0.958)
Women in Parliaments (%) x Reserved Seat Gender Quotas	0.004 (0.038)	0.034 (0.042)	0.041 (0.032)	0.210 (0.120)	0.048 (0.028)	0.047 (0.053)
Democracy		0.879 (0.523)		0.619 (0.934)		-0.225 (0.403)
GDP per Capita		-0.064 (0.049)		-0.234 (0.243)		0.081 (0.041)
CEDAW (%)		0.076*** (0.022)		-0.043 (0.290)		-0.010 (0.015)
Women's CSO Participation		-0.011 (0.166)		0.100 (0.212)		0.182 (0.120)
Women's Property Rights		0.285 (0.164)		0.661* (0.318)		-0.027 (0.068)
Party Cohesion Index		-0.019 (0.077)		0.307 (0.432)		0.053 (0.078)
Left Party		0.347 (0.364)		-0.081 (0.444)		0.128 (0.108)
Conflicts		0.006 (0.047)		-0.107 (0.083)		0.029 (0.017)
Time Polynomials	×	○	×	○	×	○
Constant	-3.279*** (0.143)	1.312 (4.633)	-5.092*** (0.254)	-308.972 (231.395)	0.016 (0.067)	4.134*** (0.588)
Number of Observations	2694	2347	2694	2347	2668	2347
R-squared					0.040	0.341
Pseudo R-squared	0.046	0.184	0.094	0.309		
AIC	1145.103	902.747	377.596	285.320	5148.881	3792.498
BIC	1168.698	983.400	401.191	365.973	5166.548	3867.389

*Note.* Cluster standard errors in parentheses. R-squared, Pseudo R-squared, Akaike Information Criterion (AIC), and Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) are provided for the model comparison. \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

for the null finding that there are no substantial differences between quota-elected and non-quota-elected female legislators (Kerevel & Atkeson, 2013). In terms of control variables, CEDAW (%) and *Women's Property Rights* have statistically significant relationships with the adoption of laws and NAPs respectively, but not with the other two dependent variables.

In addition to the six alternative models, additional models with different model specifications were examined. Even though there are slight differences in the estimated coefficients and the AMEs, the percentage of women in parliaments also has a statistically and substantively significant relationship with the three dependent variables in models with different indexes for the level of democracy and with different combinations of the control variables. Regardless of whether the interaction term between the percentage of women in parliaments and reserved seat gender quotas is included or not, Women in Parliaments (%) is statistically and substantively significant.

Taken together, the empirical results presented in this article provide robust evidence for the relationship between women's descriptive representation and the adoption and implementation of laws addressing VAW as expected. This relationship is also statistically and substantively significant in the alternative models with an interaction term between the percentage of women in parliaments and reserved seat gender quotas, and for models with different model specifications.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

Even though the problem of VAW remains severe, threatening national security as well as women's rights, empirical studies about factors leading countries to address VAW are hitherto underdeveloped. This academic lacuna is unexpected, given the international consensus on the severity of the problem. This article aims to explain why countries adopt and implement laws addressing VAW in the context of women's descriptive representation in parliaments. With a large body of time-series cross-national data from 49 Asian countries in the period 1950–2016, this article finds that women's descriptive representation best explains the variations among Asian countries in the adoption and implementation of laws related to VAW.

The empirical results from this article contribute to the literature on women in politics. Over recent decades, many scholars have tried to empirically test the influence of women's descriptive representation in policy areas, but the lack of well-developed cross-national studies meant no academic consensus could be

reached (Courtemanche & Green, 2017; Wängnerud, 2009). The results from this article using the time-series cross-national analysis provides robust empirical evidence for the crucial role of women's descriptive representation in pro-women legal reforms and their implementation.

In addition to the academic contributions, this article also suggests policy implications for how to promote women's substantive representation. The introduction of gender quotas has been considered the most effective way to increase women's substantive representation in the short term (Barnes, 2012; Franceschet & Piscopo, 2008). However, as with some other studies (Clayton et al., 2017; Kerevel & Atkeson, 2013), this article casts a doubt on the link between reserved seat gender quotas and women's substantive representation in policy areas by highlighting the null effect of such quotas on the adoption and implementation of laws addressing VAW. Thus, rather than introducing legislative gender quotas, institutionalizing less obtrusive devices such as funding for female candidates and high-quality public daycare for women (Mansbridge, 1999), which can lower the societal and structural fences against potential female candidates, might be an effective indirect-way to approach the issue of addressing VAW in the long run.

While the results of this study make valuable academic contributions and policy implications, this article is not free from limitations. One potential limitation comes from the heterogeneity that exists among women representatives. Since this article focuses on testing the general influence of women's descriptive representation at the aggregated level, the individual level differences among women representatives such as their ethnicities, socio-economic classes, or partisanship could not be modeled. The absence of cross-nationally comparable measures of such differences also prevented testing of the conditional relationship between heterogeneity and women's descriptive representation. Given that female representatives are not a homogenous group (Barnes & Holman, 2020), the natural direction of future research would be to empirically test the conditional relationship between female representatives and their heterogeneities in various aspects.

In addition, as other empirical studies do, the empirical approach used in this article only tests the hypotheses but not the theories themselves. Thus, future research should adopt a qualitative approach to investigate the mechanisms of how and when individual female representatives focus on the adoption and implementation of laws. Given that some non-democratic countries adopted laws about VAW without the presence of women in their legislative bodies, examining or theorizing other potential factors leading non-democratic countries to take legal actions against VAW would also be promising.

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