

Critical Actors and the Challenges in Mainstreaming Gender in Taiwan's Parliament

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Abstract

Taiwan is currently Asia's leader in gender equality on three indicators: Its national legislature comprises 42 percent women, the largest proportion among all Asian countries; it was the first Asian country to legalize same-sex marriage; and it has a popularly elected woman president not from a politically established family. Despite these advances, efforts to make Taiwan's parliament gender-sensitive has encountered constraints. While new institutions were created to make the parliament a more gender-friendly workplace, little progress was made regarding gender mainstreaming in the legislative process. This article points out that parliamentary parties are missing actors in gender mainstreaming. The article concludes that unless all constitutional branches practice it, gender mainstreaming as a state strategy to promote gender equality remains challenging.

Keywords

gender; gender mainstreaming; gender-sensitive parliament; parliamentary groups; women's movement

1. Introduction: Babies in the Parliament's Meeting Chamber?

On February 1, 2016, the first day of the first session of Taiwan's 9th Legislative Yuan (Taiwan's national legislature, hereafter parliament), a newly elected party-list member of parliament (MP), Wan-ru Yu, pushed a baby stroller toward the parliament. She wanted to bring her six-month-old son into the meeting chamber. She did not succeed, but her action made news. Two days before she took the action, Yu had posted a picture of Italian politician Licia Ronzulli holding her baby in a meeting in the European Parliament in September 2010. She commented that such a scene could not happen in Taiwan (Liberty Times, 2016). And when Licia Ronzulli brought her babies into the European Parliament, her actions were allowed, but not in her own country. The Italian parliament did not allow women to bring their babies until the rule was changed in 2022, and the

first time a baby was present in the Italian parliament was in 2023 (“Italy welcomes baby to parliament,” 2023). Women politicians in various countries have brought babies into parliament over the past decade, and more and more countries now allow women politicians to bring their small children to parliament or even into the meeting chamber. Such change is related to the global increase of women in parliament—the global average proportion of women in parliament increased from 11.3 percent to 26.5 percent between 1995 and 2022 (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023, p. 2).

Moreover, when Yu attempted to bring her baby into the parliament’s meeting chamber in 2016, Taiwan was on its way to becoming arguably Asia’s most gender-equal country. That year, Taiwanese voters elected the country’s first female president, Tsai Ying-wen. Tsai did not come from a politically established family, which was unusual for an Asian female national leader. The proportion of women in Taiwan’s national legislature also passed the 40 percent threshold in 2016. When it reached 42 percent in 2020, Taiwan led in this category as Asia’s average was, and still is, less than 30 percent. Besides the achievement in women’s political representation, Taiwan also legalized same-sex marriage in 2019, a first among Asian countries. Taiwan leading Asia in gender equality has been reported on and recognized by the scholarly community and international media. Comparative studies on Asian women’s political representation and participation repeatedly showed that Taiwan had a higher proportion of women’s political representatives (Iwanaga, 2008; Joshi & Echle, 2023; Joshi & Goehring, 2018; Prihatini, 2019). Brysk (2021) called Taiwan Asia’s most gender-equitable nation in her study of Taiwan’s democratization experience, and Jacobs (2014) named Taiwan the beacon for Asia’s gays in his news report in *The New York Times*. Despite this impressive record, efforts to make Taiwan’s parliament more gender-sensitive, whether as a legislature or workplace, have encountered great challenges.

Based on interviews with critical actors and parliamentary records, this article identifies how critical actors brought about gender equality reforms in Taiwan’s parliament. In so doing, this article shows that their efforts were curtailed because while the government adopted gender mainstreaming as a mandate, the parliament has not. I interviewed five critical actors who were, and some still are, involved in mainstreaming gender in Taiwan’s parliament. Each interview lasted one to two hours and each interviewee’s background and role in the parliament is shown in the Supplementary File. Each interviewee’s background is described when their experiences or opinions are first discussed. Parliamentary records used for this article included information and data from the parliament’s website, meeting minutes of the parliament’s Gender Equality Commission (GEC), and parliamentary Gazettes.

Discussing Taiwan’s experience is important for three reasons. First, as Asia’s leader in gender equality, if mainstreaming gender in the Taiwanese parliament is challenging, other national legislatures in this region could also find it hard, or even harder, to achieve. Second, Taiwan is isolated from the international political community. Its data and experience usually do not appear in international documents and datasets, such as those compiled and published by the Inter-Parliamentary Union. A study on Taiwan’s experience enriches our understanding of the gender-mainstreaming experience of parliaments. Third, recent literature on gender mainstreaming in parliament has “focused on the role of gender-focused bodies within parliament” (Freidenvall & Erikson, 2020). And, as shown below, critical actors helped to establish an institution that looked like a gender-focused body in Taiwan’s parliament, but they encountered difficulties with getting MPs involved. This article shows why Taiwan’s experience adds to recent developments in the study of parliamentary gender bodies.

In the following sections, I first discuss the literature on gender-sensitive parliaments. Then, I provide a sketch of Taiwan's gender mainstreaming experience, focusing on the critical actors and the creation and expansion of gender policy machineries in the government. After I present how a group of critical actors brought about gender equality reforms within the parliament, I explain why institutional factors constrained them. I argue that creating new institutions had an impact, but the limitations were also clear. Individual MPs and their staff committed to gender equality, but it was not enough. Parliamentary political parties must also adopt the mandate of gender mainstreaming so that a gender-sensitive parliament can become a reachable goal. I conclude the article by pointing out that unless all constitutional branches practice it, gender mainstreaming as a state strategy to promote gender equality will remain challenging.

2. Critical Actors and Gender-Sensitive Parliaments

Research on gender-sensitive parliaments began with Palmieri's work for the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 2011 (Palmieri, 2011). The work illustrates essential areas of gender equality reforms in parliament and reports on good practices in various countries. In 2012, the Inter-Parliamentary Union assembly adopted a plan of action for gender-sensitive parliaments based on Palmieri's work and listed seven areas for action. Other international government organizations followed suit. The European Institute for Gender Equality established the Gender Sensitive Parliaments Tool in 2018, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe published the Guide for Realizing Gender Equality in Parliament in 2021. These action plans, tools, or guides had two goals, usually: making parliaments gender-equal workplaces and making parliaments' legislative work gender-sensitive. Studies on gender-sensitive parliaments discuss how either one or both goals could or could not be achieved. For the first goal, some studies developed analytical frameworks and indicators to identify how parliaments could be gendered workplaces (Erikson & Josefsson, 2022; Erikson & Verge, 2022), or how a gendered working environment affected the recruitment of MPs (Miller, 2022). Studies also found that even if MPs wanted parliament to be a more gender-sensitive and family-friendly workplace, they were concerned about the public perception of entitlement (Palmieri & Baker, 2022). Challenges in preventing gender violence and sexual harassment in parliaments were also shared in many countries (Berthet & Kantola, 2021; Collier & Raney, 2018; Raney & Collier, 2022; Erikson & Verge, 2022). For the second goal, studies about how parliament's legislative work could be gender-sensitive tend to treat the issue as part of the gender mainstreaming efforts. Elomäki and Ahrens (2022) studied the European Parliament and found that European Union political groups and standing committees have divergent understandings and practices of gender mainstreaming. Typical rhetoric in resisting implementing gender mainstreaming is the claim that gender is irrelevant to specific policy areas. Palmieri and Baker (2022) discussed the barriers to establishing gender-sensitive parliaments: the lack of political will, the lack of the collection and analysis of quality data, and the lack of a mechanism for gender-sensitive scrutiny. Johnson (2022) and Mousmouti (2022) discussed the importance of ex-ante and post-legislative scrutiny to ensure gender-sensitive legislation. Taiwan's experience in mainstreaming gender has achieved some success toward the first goal, making parliament a friendlier workplace. However, the second goal remains unreachable. Barriers like those described by Palmieri and Baker (2022) also exist in Taiwan, and the scrutiny presented by Johnson (2022) and Mousmouti (2022) does not exist in Taiwan.

Achieving gender-sensitive parliaments requires critical actors committed to mainstreaming gender in parliament. Current literature shows that institutionally, parliamentary committees, parliamentary groups, women's caucuses, or all-party parliamentary groups could be the critical actors that mainstream gender and

substantiate women's political representation in parliament (Freidenvall & Erikson, 2020; Sawyer, 2020; Sawyer & Turner, 2016). Sawyer and Turner (2016) listed the characteristics and constraints of the "gender-focused parliamentary bodies" and treated these groups as part of the success of the women's movement. They also showed that such parliamentary bodies' formation was related to insider instigators—feminists who had entered parliament. But Sawyer (2020) argued that the "gender-focused parliamentary bodies" could be precarious; their continuity relied on committed political leaders and support from the women's movement. Freidenvall and Erikson (2020), using the speaker's gender equality group in the Swedish parliament as an example, showed that an informal group could gradually be institutionalized and gain real influence and authority in making the parliament more gender sensitive.

If having a gender-sensitive parliament is the goal, and creating a gender-focused parliamentary body is the tool, then inside instigators are crucial in pursuing the goal and making the tool. Recent gender equality reforms in Taiwan fit this scenario though the newly created institution was not exactly a parliamentary body, as defined by Sawyer (2020) and Freidenvall and Erikson (2020). As discussed below, the critical actors in Taiwan encountered almost no opposition to creating a new institution. The challenge was limitations placed on the functioning of the newly created institution and the indifference of most MPs toward gender mainstreaming in parliament.

3. From Mainstreaming the Government to Mainstreaming the Parliament

Gender mainstreaming is an agenda mostly initiated and pushed by the women's movement at the global, national, or local levels. But Taiwan's political isolation shapes the relationship between the women's movement and gender mainstreaming. The country has not been a United Nations member since 1971. When the United Nations held the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, neither the Taiwanese government nor civil society actors were well aware of the resolution on gender mainstreaming. Several years later, when women's movement activists and gender scholars sought to join this new global agenda, the center-left Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) was in power. So activists, many of them gender scholars, captured the political opportunity and began pushing the government to practice gender mainstreaming. Though the DPP at that time did not control the parliamentary majority, Taiwan's semi-presidential system afforded the government enough power to implement gender mainstreaming. Before that, in 1997, a cabinet-level gender commission, the Commission on the Promotion of Women's Rights (CPWR), was established when the center-right Nationalist Party (KMT) was in power because of the women's movement's demands. The CPWR, which was comprised of ministers and representatives from women's organizations, was a platform for government members to interact with this NGO commission members. In its first few years, the CPWR met twice a year, and the NGO members made policy suggestions. But the commission did not have a clear direction.

After 2000, when the ruling party became the DPP, the CPWR was more active because more feminist activists became NGO members of the commission. When the activists introduced gender mainstreaming to the government around 2003, the cabinet commission became the main engine for Taiwan's gender mainstreaming. With the help of women's activists, the government established six major tools for gender mainstreaming: gender training, gender analysis, gender statistics, gender impact assessment, gender-responsive budget, and gender policy machinery. Since then, the use of these tools, or the practice of gender mainstreaming, has mainly taken place within the government. The civil servants received gender

training and learned gender analysis, statistics, impact assessment, and budgeting. The gender commission (CPWR), as an organizational model for gender policy machinery, also expanded. Gender mainstreaming became commission-driven because, by the late 2000s, a gender commission was established in every line ministry and every local government. They all followed the same composition principle as the cabinet gender commission, comprising both government and NGO actors and chaired by the highest executive officer of that ministry or government. These gender commissions opened up institutional space for women's organizations to participate in government decision-making, but the participation of women's movement activists was a key factor.

The extent to which the national government, a ministry, or a local government took gender mainstreaming seriously largely depended on how the NGO members in the gender commissions utilized their social capital. Hwang and Wu (2016) found that many of those who served as gender commissioners in the mid-2000s, when the center-left DPP was in power, knew one another from their participation in the women's movement and the trust and comradeship among them became important social capital when they became the cabinet gender commissioners. They shared the value of gender equality and took collective stands, if necessary, in commission meetings. Hwang (2020) also found that the NGO members in the gender commission of a local government could help withstand the commission's setbacks when the mayor was not gender sensitive.

When feminists wanted to mainstream gender in parliament, they first created a similar gender commission in the parliament. In 2012, a renowned feminist activist and lawyer (interviewee A), who had experience as an NGO member of the cabinet gender commissioner, was elected a party-list MP of the DPP. Interviewee B had previously worked with interviewee A in a feminist organization, and she entered the parliament as a staff member of interviewee A. They soon discovered that few people in parliament were familiar with gender mainstreaming, whether MPs, staff members of MPs, or civil servants. Interviewee A successfully motioned to establish a Gender Equality Task Force within the parliament. The task force's composition principle was similar to those of gender equality commissions in the government, with heads of the administrative units of the parliament as civil servant members and women's activists or gender scholars as NGO members. The task force chair was the general secretary of the parliament, the highest-ranking civil servant in the parliament.

This task force did not include MPs, and its guidelines focused on making parliament a more gender-friendly workplace. The task force's establishment encountered little opposition partially because it only aimed to mainstream gender in parliament's administrative units, and approximately 60 percent of the civil servants who worked in these administrative units were women (Legislative Yuan, 2024). Between 2012 and 2016, when the center-right KMT controlled the parliamentary majority, and the house speaker was a KMT member, the Gender Equality Task Force provided gender training for civil servants in the parliament mainly through lectures and discussion sessions. All lectures and discussion sessions were open to the MPs and their staff, but few attended (interviewee A). But interviewees A and B wanted MPs to get involved. In 2016, their opportunity came when the DPP controlled the parliamentary majority, and the house speaker was a DPP member. The idea of mainstreaming gender in the parliament also gained support from the new house speaker who also had experience in the cabinet gender commission. In the mid-2000s, when feminist activists introduced gender mainstreaming to the government, the house speaker was the Minister of Interior, serving as a government member in the cabinet gender commission. Therefore, he was familiar with and supported the agenda (interviewee A).

In 2016, the parliament's Gender Equality Task Force was reorganized into the GEC. The commission chair was the house speaker, each parliamentary party had MP members, and NGO members were still included. The commission had more power than the task force since it had MPs as members. Gender equality reforms were carried out by the newly created commission in the parliament, but the commission's limitations were also clear. The commission's establishment guidelines included making the parliament a gender-friendly workplace and providing consultation and policy recommendations to the parliament to ensure gender equality value in the legislative process. But the latter function never got underway.

4. Critical Issues in Gender Equality Reforms

A gender-sensitive parliament, as the above-mentioned action plans or guidelines of major international organizations show, includes two dimensions: making the parliament a gender-friendly workplace and making the legislative process a gender-sensitive process. The GEC in Taiwan's parliament only tackled work in the first dimension. After the GEC was established, the commission soon had resolutions on establishing childcare facilities and conducting sexual harassment surveys within the parliament. The former was quickly completed, though few MPs needed it. The latter aimed to strengthen the sexual harassment prevention mechanism within the parliament, but the reform was limited only to the prevention mechanism for civil servants in parliament.

Establishing a childcare center was the parliament's first gender equality reform. It was formed in response to Wan-ru Yu's attempt to bring her baby into the meeting chamber discussed above. She proposed a bill to change the parliamentary rules regarding the meeting chambers. The bill would allow children two years of age or younger to be brought into the meeting chamber if their MP or bureaucrat parent(s) needed to care for them while attending parliamentary meetings. The bill also cited the Australia lower house's rule to allow babies to be fed in the meeting chamber of the parliament as an example. When Yu stated her intention to propose the bill, she emphasized that raising a child was not a private matter of an individual woman. She candidly said that the purpose was not to bring babies into the meeting chamber per se because, as a mother of a young child, she was not sure that the environment of the meeting chamber, busy and sometimes noisy, was good for babies or small children. She wanted to show that achieving work and family balance needed institutional change, and the bill was just one small step to reducing the barrier (Zhonghua minguo lifayuan gongbao, 2016).

Before Yu's bill was deliberated, the parliament's Personnel Department responded by planning to establish a childcare center within the parliament. The plan began before the Gender Equality Task Force was reorganized into the GEC. The GEC's meeting minutes showed that during the first commission meeting, MPs from both the DPP and the KMT were concerned about the center's progress. The center was established in early 2017; however, MPs' childcare needs were limited because by the time they became MPs most had already passed the child-rearing age. Women MPs sometimes entered politics only because they no longer need to care about their children (Huang, 2023). Figure 1 shows the average age of MPs over the past 25 years, which actually increased.

Establishing the childcare center in the parliament got much media attention, though the center did not have enough children to care for at the beginning. Interviewee C is an NGO member of the parliament's GEC. She worked as an MP's staff member before becoming the general secretary of a major feminist organization specializing in care policies. According to interviewee C, many Taiwanese parents send their kids to

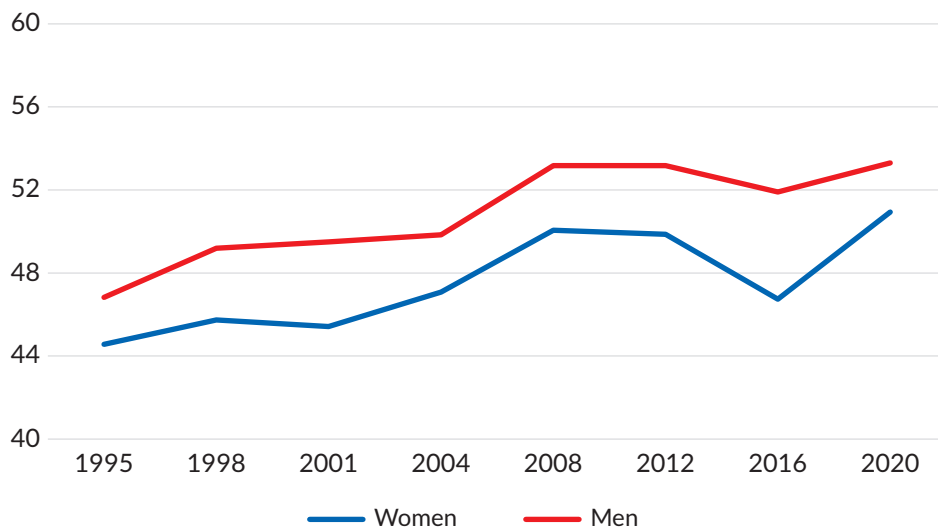


Figure 1. Average age of the Taiwanese MPs. Source: Central Election Commission (n.d.).

neighborhood childcare facilities instead of workplace childcare facilities. Even though the center accepted the children or grandchildren of MPs, staff members, civil servants who worked in the parliament, and journalists who reported on the parliament, there were still not enough children in the childcare center. The center ended up accepting children from families who lived in the parliament’s surrounding area. Despite all these issues, a childcare facility in a legislature is still an important symbolic function for women’s substantive representation (Verge, 2022), and it could be regarded as a facility that anticipates future needs.

The second parliamentary gender equality reform was strengthening the sexual harassment prevention mechanism. Interviewee B mentioned that not long after she entered the parliament as interviewee A’s staff member, another MP’s staff from their own party sought her advice on how to file a sexual harassment complaint. Because of interviewees A and B’s credentials in the women’s movement, interviewee A’s staff heard about sexual harassment cases more often than other MPs’ staff members. When interviewee B wanted to help the person who sought her advice, she realized that the parliament lacked a clear procedure for filing sexual harassment complaints. Because sexual harassment cases were often heard through whisper networks, interviewee A asked the parliament’s Personnel Department to conduct a sexual harassment survey. Survey questionnaires were distributed widely in 2017. Those who received the questionnaires included staff members of MPs, civil servants, contract workers, cleaning ladies, guards, and so on. The questionnaire was published on the parliament’s website, under the category “Gender Equality Zone,” but the survey results were not made public. Interviewee C suggested that the Personnel Department was likely to believe that if the survey results showed many unreported cases of sexual harassment, it meant that they had not been doing their job right in preventing sexual harassment in parliament. But the Personnel Department used the survey results as a reference to make the complaints filing system clearer and more straightforward (interviewees A and B). The problem is that this filing system cannot be used by MPs or their staff.

The filing system issues derived from Taiwan’s laws. Taiwan has three different laws governing sexual harassment prevention. Schools are required by the Gender Equity Education Act to investigate sexual harassment complaints if a student is involved, whether as an offender or a victim. Employers are required

by the Gender Equality Employment Act to investigate sexual harassment complaints if the offender was an employee or the harassment took place under a work-related circumstance. All other cases should be handled by the Sexual Harassment Prevention Act, which is usually the most difficult to mobilize because it requires the victim to file a complaint in the city or county government where the sexual harassment took place. These laws make sexual harassment prevention in parliament a complicated matter because if a person is harassed, whether they can file a complaint with the parliament's Sexual Harassment Review Committee depends on their identity and the offender's identity. Neither MPs nor their staff members, if being harassed, could file complaints with the parliament's Sexual Harassment Review Committee because the parliament is not their employer. The committee only handles cases that are filed by parliament employees, including civil servants, interns, and dispatched workers who work in the parliament's administrative units. MPs' staff members are excluded because their employers are individual MPs.

According to the parliamentary regulation, each MP can have 8 to 14 staff members and the parliament pays their salaries. The parliament provides a fixed amount of money for MPs to hire their staff members. MPs decide how many staff members they want to hire, and they also decide the salary for each staff member, as long as the total amount does not exceed an established limit. Though the parliament pays the staff members with the parliament's budget, the Ministry of Labor regards individual MPs as the employers in defining the employment relations of MPs' staff members. This definition affects how sexual harassment cases are handled. If a staff member is harassed in the parliament or under the circumstances that she is fulfilling her job duty, she should file a complaint with the MP she works for. The MP's office is supposed to respond to the staff member's complaint to fulfill their employer's duty.

It is understandable that, with such a sexual harassment prevention mechanism, few staff members seek redress for sexual harassment they experience in the parliament. According to interviewees A and B, many MPs relied on their senior staff members for support, and these senior staff members are usually men. Women staff members who have less power would be reluctant to come forward if senior staff members harassed them. The harassment could also come from donors or campaign volunteers who support the MPs (Tseng, 2022). Parliament liaison officers from ministries or government agencies could also be vulnerable because they need MPs' support for their ministries' bills. When these officers were harassed by MPs or staff members of MPs, they seldom reported the harassment to their supervisors or filed complaints in their ministries because they did not want their supervisors to feel that they could not handle the job of being a liaison officer (interviewee A).

When MPs were harassed, they could not file complaints within parliament. In Dalton's study about sexual harassment in Japanese politics, she pointed out that legislative assemblies in many countries "do not fit well inside the conceptual boundaries of 'workplace'" (Dalton, 2021, p. 155). Thus, victims of sexual harassment in Japanese politics found it hard to file complaints. The Taiwanese situation is different because Taiwan has a law, the Sexual Harassment Prevention Act, for those who are not covered by laws regarding workplace sexual harassment. The problem is, as mentioned above, that this law is difficult to mobilize. Interviewee D is a current MP, and she was elected in January 2024 for her second term as a party-list MP of the DPP. During her first term, a KMT male MP inappropriately jostled her when MPs from both parties fought for the podium in front of the house speaker's seat. At first, she openly complained about the inappropriate behavior because he used his belly to bump her back. She decided to formally file a complaint when that male MP and his staff members made further inappropriate remarks, such as "a belly would not impregnate a

woman” or “she should look in the mirror.” Interviewee E was also a KMT party-list MP when the incident happened. Like interviewee D, she was a college professor and participated in women’s organizations before she entered parliament. She thought jostling was not unusual in parliament, but she agreed that those remarks were inappropriate. Interviewee D eventually filed a sexual harassment complaint against that KMT male MP in the Taipei City government because the parliament did not employ her, so the parliament’s Sexual Harassment Review Committee could not handle her complaint. The Taipei City government’s sexual harassment prevention committee, after investigation, found her complaint valid. She also filed a suit against that male MP and won. Though she was redressed by both the Taipei City government and the court, she said that the process was taxing in both monetary and non-monetary terms (interviewee D).

In the summer of 2023, Taiwan experienced a belated #MeToo wave (Chen & Huang, 2023). The country was quiet when other countries experienced the #MeToo wave in 2017 and 2018 (Chen, 2021; Huang, 2021). After the wave broke out, the DPP government quickly submitted bills to the parliament to revise the three laws governing sexual harassment, partially because the breaking case took place inside the DPP. The bills clarified and increased penalties for power-based harassment and the revisions were passed in the parliament at the end of July 2023. The newly revised laws would go into effect on March 8, 2024, to celebrate International Women’s Day. However, the revised laws still did not require parliament to have a sexual harassment prevention mechanism covering MPs. Interviewee D decided to solve the problem by demanding parliament change its codes of conduct for MPs. She held a press conference before International Women’s Day and called it ironic that the codes of conduct for MPs in the parliament did not include articles on sexual harassment. She called for the Discipline Committee, one of the ad hoc committees in the parliament with MPs from each parliamentary party as members of the committee, to include sexual harassment as a disciplinary issue. She said the DPP incorporated her suggestion into the party’s parliamentary reform proposals. When and to what extent her efforts would have fruitful results remains to be seen. But this direction, treating sexual harassment as an issue of codes of conduct, has been the institutional response in many countries for elected assemblies where workplace regulations on sexual harassment do not cover elected politicians (Dalton, 2021).

While establishing the childcare center and strengthening the sexual harassment prevention mechanism were efforts to make the parliament a more gender-sensitive workplace, the parliament’s GEC’s impact was limited because most MPs, except the few critical actors, were hardly involved with the commission’s work. The parliament’s GEC looks like a “gender-focused parliamentary body,” as Sawyer (2020) or Freidenvall and Erikson (2020) noted, but not quite. Major institutional constraints limited the commission’s function and impact.

First, the GEC was created by the critical actors to mainstream gender in parliament, but institutionally it could only mainstream gender in the administrative units of the parliament. The critical actors, especially interviewee A, wanted the GEC to be like the gender commission in the cabinet, so that the cabinet gender commission would affect government policies, and the parliament’s gender commission would affect parliament’s legislation. Though the house speaker chaired the parliament’s gender commission like the premier chaired the cabinet’s gender commission, the difference was obvious and significant. The premier could direct ministers, but the house speakers could not direct MPs and their staff. The GEC could direct the parliament’s Personnel Department to provide gender-mainstreaming training for civil servants who worked in the parliament, but they had no power to demand MPs or their staff to attend those training

sessions though all those sessions were open to MPs and their staff members (interviewees A, B, C, D, and E).

The commission's position in the parliament structure is best illustrated on the parliament's website. It is placed under the column of the parliament's Personnel Department and has no institutional relation with the parliament's standing committees. According to interviewee A, besides the one or two DPP women MPs who cared about gender equality, only the house speaker and the outside experts, the NGO members of the commission, regularly attended the meetings. MPs from other political parties usually signed the attendance sheets and left. Interviewee E attributed MPs' indifference toward this commission to its powerlessness. She argued that politicians were usually busy, especially those elected in the district tier. They would not invest time and energy in an institution with little or no power over the legislative process.

Interviewees A, B, and C all thought the parliament's GEC could impact the legislative process, but it would take time. Interviewee A often used the commission's meeting time to educate civil servants in the parliament's administrative units on gender equality concepts, especially for those who worked in the parliament's Bureau of Laws and Statutes or Budget Center. The Bureau of Laws and Statutes routinely reviewed whether bills proposed by MPs were unconstitutional or in conflict with existing laws, and the Budget Center routinely wrote budget analysis. Interviewee A figured that if these civil servants could be more gender-sensitive, then it helped gender-mainstreaming work because the Bureau of Laws and Statutes' review could incorporate gender impact analysis, and the Budget Center's analysis could utilize the concept of a gender-responsive budget. Interviewees B and C echoed interviewee A's opinions. According to them, the analyses provided by the Bureau of Laws and Statutes or the Budget Center were underutilized by most MPs, and those analyses should have a greater impact on MPs' legislative deliberations. If those analyses were gender-sensitive, the legislative process would be more gender-sensitive. These expectations ironically showed that the commission's work had no direct impact on the legislative process, and it has not been institutionally linked to the legislative process. The meeting minutes showed that an NGO member of the commission, a renowned lawyer, motioned in the commission meetings about revisions or enactment of certain laws. She actually provided extensive written comments on laws and bills. Her analyses, however, were not even delivered to MPs like those written by the Bureau of Laws and Statutes and the Budget Center.

Second, MPs who served as members of the GEC were recommended by their parties, regardless of their qualifications. Though political parties tended to send MPs who cared about gender equality to the commission, there were no clear guidelines or regulations about the qualifications of commission members. Interviewee D once motioned in a commission meeting to disqualify a KMT female MP as a commission member because that MP mishandled a sexual assault case in which the director of her office assaulted a volunteer for her campaign after they drank together. The victim then asked for help from interviewee D's office. The commission did not reach a resolution to disqualify that MP based on the guideline that commission members were decided by every party caucus and the party caucus' decision should be respected. This differs from the Swedish Speaker's Gender Equality Group described by Freidenvall and Erikson (2020). Though that group was informal, the group members were invited by the house speaker, so eventually this informal group could exert real influence. This contrasts with the Taiwanese experience since the parliament's GEC was a formal institution with limited influence.

Third, MPs who care about gender mainstreaming in parliament are party-list MPs with term limits. Taiwan's electoral system is a mixed-member majoritarian system, and, conventionally, MPs elected in the single-member districts are more powerful than those elected through party lists. Most importantly, parliamentary parties all imposed term limits for their party-list MPs, except for the house speaker. The term limit is usually one or two terms (four or eight years) for each party-list MP. Both interviewee A and interviewee E are former MPs. Interviewee A served two terms and interviewee E served one term. The critical actors in mainstreaming gender in the parliament are mostly party-list MPs and their staff members, meaning their work needs others to continue. Interviewee D became a DPP party-list MP after interviewee A finished her terms. Continuity exists between them since they both were active in the women's movement and served on the board of the same women's organization before they entered parliament. But it is difficult to know how and whether the continuity would exist between interviewee D and future DPP party-list MPs when she finished her terms in parliament. In other words, the continuity of the critical actors' work is very much based on individual MPs' commitment, despite the existence of the GEC.

5. The Missing Actors: Political Parties

The Taiwanese parliament has enacted laws improving gender equality over the past three decades since the country democratized in the late 1980s. Most laws were enacted before the establishment of the parliament's GEC. Whether it was the revision of civil codes or penal codes to remove patriarchal elements in the laws (in the 1980s and 1990s) or the enactment of the Domestic Violence Prevention Act (in 1998), the Gender Equality Employment Act (in 2002), the Gender Equity Education Act (in 2004), the Sexual Harassment Prevention Act (in 2005), the Act for Implementation of Judicial Yuan Interpretation No. 748 (virtually Taiwan's Same-Sex Marriage Act after the ruling of the Judicial Yuan, Taiwan's Constitutional Court, in 2019), or the Stalking and Harassment Prevention Act (in 2021), these laws shared similar patterns. Women's organizations either helped draft the bills for the government or presented the draft bills to friendly MPs who submitted the bills as private bills. Except for the Domestic Violence Prevention Act, all major laws regarding gender equality were enacted when the government, and not necessarily the parliament, was controlled by the center-left DPP.

Though gender mainstreaming was adopted under the DPP government in the early 2000s, when there was a government change in 2008 and the center-right KMT won the presidential and general elections, the government continued its gender mainstreaming efforts (Huang, 2017). The decision to do gender impact assessments for major law revisions and major policies was made under a KMT premier in 2009. While both major parties, when each controlled the government, engaged in gender mainstreaming, neither party practiced gender mainstreaming in their own party or the parliament. At the end of May 2023, when the belated #MeToo wave broke out in Taiwan, the DPP's deputy general secretary mishandled the case when she was the director of the party's Department of Women's Affairs. After other cases appeared, the DPP, under a new director of the Department of Women's Affairs, apologized and promised to strengthen the sexual harassment prevention mechanism within the party and to revise the laws to increase penalties for offenders of power-based sexual harassment. Compared to the KMT, the DPP prides itself on supporting gender equality. The #MeToo wave was embarrassing, and it also showed the lack of gender mainstreaming within the party. For the KMT, during the #MeToo wave, a senior politician, the KMT's parliamentary party caucus leader, was named by a journalist as an offender. The KMT soon declared that they found no

evidence of the offense. Whether the KMT strengthened the party's sexual harassment prevention mechanism was unclear, and the party did not publicly commit to gender mainstreaming either.

Interviewees A, B, C, and D were, and still are, critical actors in Taiwan's gender mainstreaming in government and parliament, but they had little influence within the DPP. Before interviewees A and D became MPs, they were a lawyer and college professor, respectively. Interviewees B and C worked as women's movement activists before and after they went into the parliament as DPP MPs' staff. None had any experience working within the DPP or held any DPP party office. Interviewee E's relationship with the KMT was similar. She was a college professor and a women's movement activist before she became an MP. She also had no experience working or holding office within the KMT. These critical actors are insiders of the parliament because they have all worked for parliament before, but their influence in their own parties is limited. The most important decision-making bodies in both parties are the Central Standing Committees, and no critical actor has ever been a member. The house speaker who supported the GEC's formation was powerful within the party, but his support remained within the scope of having the commission's focus of its work on civil servants (interviewee A). His successor, also a senior DPP politician, held the same attitude. Interviewee D once suggested in the commission meeting that MPs and staff members should be able to file sexual harassment complaints with the parliament's Sexual Harassment Review Committee, but the house speaker disagreed. The picture was clear. The MPs most committed to gender mainstreaming in the parliament had no power to make the party care about gender mainstreaming, and those who had power were indifferent or supportive within clear limits.

6. Conclusion

Gender mainstreaming in Taiwan was initiated by women's movement activists who successfully persuaded the government to adopt the agenda. The parliament was not involved until recently, when some activists became MPs and staff members. They attempted to copy their experience in working with the government on gender mainstreaming to the parliament, and their success was limited. The challenges critical actors faced that aimed to mainstream gender in the parliament showed gender mainstreaming as a state strategy to promote gender equality has not been a shared goal among political elites.

The parliament's GEC has made the parliament a more gender-friendly workplace, but it had no power over issues concerning MPs' rights or responsibilities. The childcare center was established and has had an inclusive policy of admitting children for anyone who works at parliament. But the sexual harassment prevention mechanism was strengthened mainly for civil servants who worked in parliament. Issues such as online voting, online participation in parliamentary meetings, or parental leave for MPs have not been discussed in the GEC since it has no influence over these issues. These issues are obviously important if the parliament is going to be a gender-friendly or family-friendly workplace, but there is no sign of when and how, or if ever, these issues will be discussed in the parliament.

Enacting laws that reduce gender discrimination or promote gender equality, as the Taiwanese parliament has done over the decades, is certainly positive. But that is not equivalent to gender mainstreaming in the legislative process. Gender sensitivity in the legislative process requires consistent institutional efforts, such as utilizing gender mainstreaming tools to ensure all laws, not only gender-related laws, are gender-friendly. No institution, formal or informal, in the Taiwanese parliament is making such efforts. Compared to the

government's gender policy machineries, gender sensitivity training, gender statistics, and gender impact assessment, the parliament did not use or underutilized these tools.

To what extent has the executive branch's conventional dominance over the decision-making process resulted in other constitutional branches' indifference toward gender mainstreaming? This is a question worth exploring, but it is beyond the scope of this article. One thing is clear: Unless all constitutional branches practice it, gender mainstreaming, as a state strategy to promote or ensure gender equality, still has a long way to go.

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Conflict of Interests

The author had prior acquaintance with all the interviewees before the interviews. Two of the interviewees were fellow directors of the board of a women's organization in which the author has participated.

Data Availability

Data regarding the organization and regulations of Taiwan's parliament is available at: <https://www.ly.gov.tw/Home/Index.aspx>

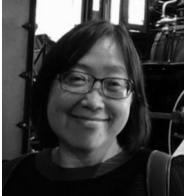
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