

## **Policy Note**

# Women and Political Power in the South Caucasus: Recent Developments in Georgia

ISET Policy Institute

Author: Davit Keshelava

Tbilisi, 2023

## Executive Summary

The underrepresentation of women in politics still persists globally, with women holding only 26.4% of parliamentary seats and 21% of ministerial positions worldwide. The South Caucasus region equally lacks female leadership; where the Power domain retains the lowest score within the Gender Equality Index. Despite electing few women into parliament, the countries of the South Caucasus have shown some improvement over the years. At present, Georgia leads in women's representation in both ministerial positions and in the National Bank, while Armenia and Azerbaijan lag behind.

The Georgian population moreover recognizes the importance of female participation in politics, despite the low levels of representation – where multiple surveys indicate that a significant proportion of respondents believe the proportion of female parliamentarians is too low, and the majority agree that increasing this representation would have a positive impact on the country. Notably, demographic factors such as gender, age, and education do influence these views.

The Georgian parliament is made up of 150 members, nominated through a mixed electoral system. In 2020, the parliament approved a mandatory gender quota, requiring parties to nominate at least one candidate of the opposite sex for every four candidates on their party lists. The majoritarian electoral system however does not impose quotas, leading to fewer women majoritarian candidates. Although there are still few women in leadership positions within parliament, women's participation in the political life of the country is nevertheless prominent.

In the 2021 local Georgian elections, a new law required political parties to have at least one candidate of a different gender for every three candidates on their electoral lists. Although the quota system has increased the number of women elected to local councils, there remains a significant gender imbalance in majoritarian races and as mayoral candidates – women still only account for a small proportion of mayoral and constituency candidates. However, women were actively involved in the elections as observers and media representatives.

Despite women comprising 54% of voters in Georgia, gender-related issues are rarely discussed in election campaigns, moreover voters tend to prioritize party leaders over party programs. Thus far, the female MPs to have been elected actively participate in the legislative process, with 26 women MPs in parliament and 4 chairing committees. The Gender Council has also been involved in various political activities, yet it remains challenging to measure the impact of these activities on policymaking.

The limited participation of women in Georgian politics may be due to both societal and supply-side factors. For example, women often view politics as a “dirty” business,

and negative campaigning can result in a lack of motivation to participate. Traditional family dynamics also restrict their participation due to the burden of family responsibilities. While unequal access to financial resources and a lack of transparency during the selection of candidates further hinders women's political progress. Consequently, although societal attitudes towards women's participation are improving, decision-making processes within parties are typically still dominated by men.

# Women and political power in Georgia according to the ISET-PI South Caucasus Gender Equality Index

Women's participation in politics is a crucial aspect of achieving gender equality and promoting democracy. However, despite progress in recent years, women are still underrepresented in political positions throughout all levels of government. **According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)**, as of December 2022, women only hold 26.4% of parliamentary seats globally (26.5% in the lower chamber and unicameral, and 25.9% in the upper chamber). Yet this number varies significantly by region – with Nordic countries having the highest female representation in parliament at 45.5% and countries in North Africa maintaining the lowest at 16.4%.<sup>1</sup> **In terms of executive positions, the World Economic Forum's 2022 Global Gender Gap Report** found that only 21% of ministerial positions are held by women worldwide. In addition, the percentage of women serving as a head of state or head of government amounts to only 14%. Those working in local governmental legislative bodies reached 34%, while the proportion of women occupying judiciary positions was notably higher at 42%.<sup>2</sup> These statistics thus underscore the persistent barriers that women face in entering and advancing in the political sphere.

The **South Caucasus Gender Equality Index (SCGEI)** from the International School of Economics (ISET) also demonstrates that there is a lack of representation of women in leadership positions within the South Caucasus.<sup>3</sup> The Power domain in ISET's Gender Equality Index consists of political and economic subdomains, and four key indicators: (1) women and men in ministerial positions; (2) women and men in parliament; (3) women in managerial position; and (4) women and men on the board of the Central Bank. It is notable that, on average, the Power domain has the lowest score among all domains for the countries of the South Caucasus (see Figure 1).<sup>4</sup> Despite Georgia's score in the Power domain being markedly higher than that of Armenia and Azerbaijan, it remains significantly behind the benchmark for advanced economies.

---

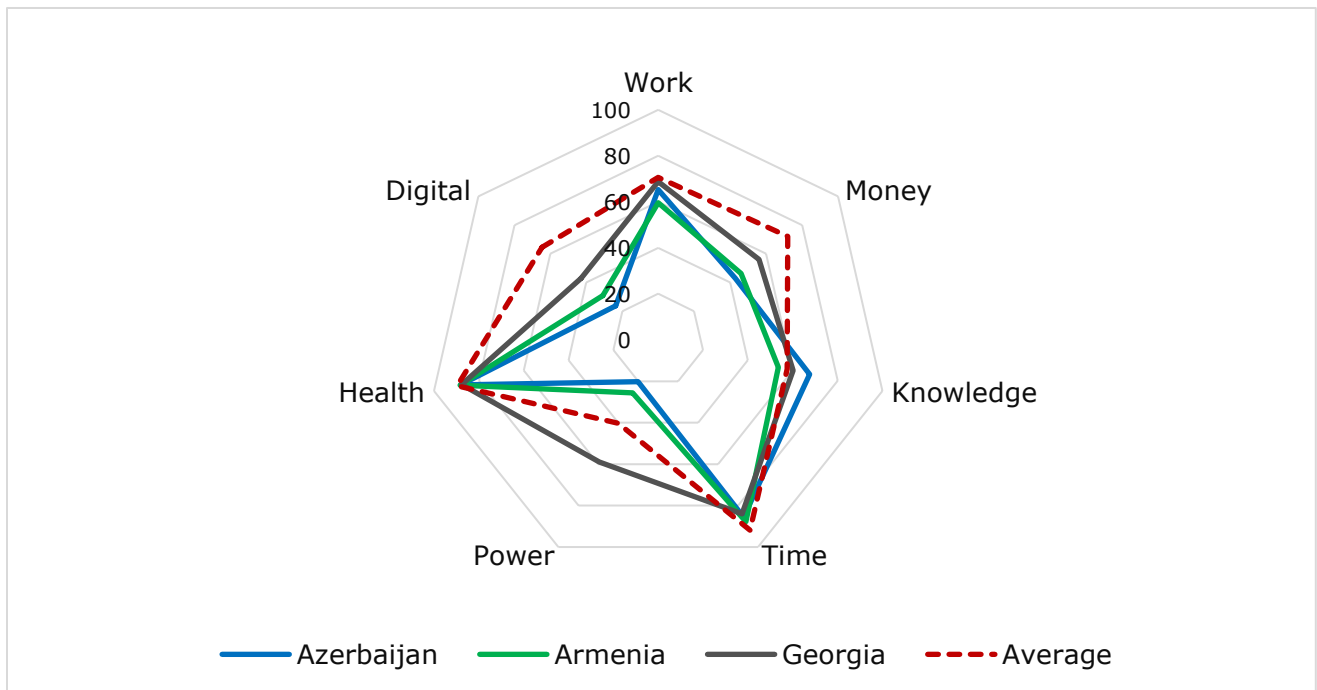
<sup>1</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). *Global and Regional Averages of Women in National Parliaments*. Retrieved from: <https://data.ipu.org>.

<sup>2</sup> Un Women. *Progress on The Sustainable Development Goals the Gender Snapshot 2022*. Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org>.

<sup>3</sup> ISET's Gender Equality Index (GEI) consists of six core domains: Work, Money, Knowledge, Time, Power, and Health (Digital is an additional domain whose score so far is not included in calculating the Index). The index value varies from 1 to 100 – the higher the value, the better is the country positioned in terms of gender equality.

<sup>4</sup> The South Caucasus comprises Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia.

**Figure 1: The ISET South Caucasus Gender Equality Index (SCGEI)**



Source: International School of Economics (ISET)

Considering the key indicators representing the Power domain, all three South Caucasus countries have a particularly low percentage of women in parliament (Hungary is the only benchmark country<sup>5</sup> with a lower score than Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan). However, these relatively low percentages do still represent a remarkable improvement from previous election cycles.

In contrast, Georgia leads in terms of the percentage of women in ministerial positions, outscoring all other Eastern European countries in the sample, whereas Armenia and Azerbaijan have the lowest female representation in such positions.

Moreover, following recent changes, Georgia currently has some of the most female board representation in the National Bank. Contrarily, the representation of women on the board of the Central Bank of the Republic of Armenia is fairly low (12.5%) and there are presently no female representatives on the board of the Central Bank of the Republic of Azerbaijan (see Figure 2).

<sup>5</sup> Benchmark countries are those used as a comparator set for the South Caucasus Gender Equality Index. These benchmark countries include Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia.

**Figure 2: Key Indicators in the Power Domain Representing Women’s Participation in Politics (2020)**



Source: International School of Economics (ISET)

## Exploring Women’s Political Representation in Georgia: An Analysis of Trends

Historically, women in local self-governments, ministries, and in the national parliament have always been underrepresented in Georgia. Nevertheless, the proportion of women in parliament has been experiencing a significant upward trajectory since 2012 – reaching a historic peak in 2020 after the implementation of mandatory gender quotas (see Figure 3). This measure, however, is still lagging behind the global average.

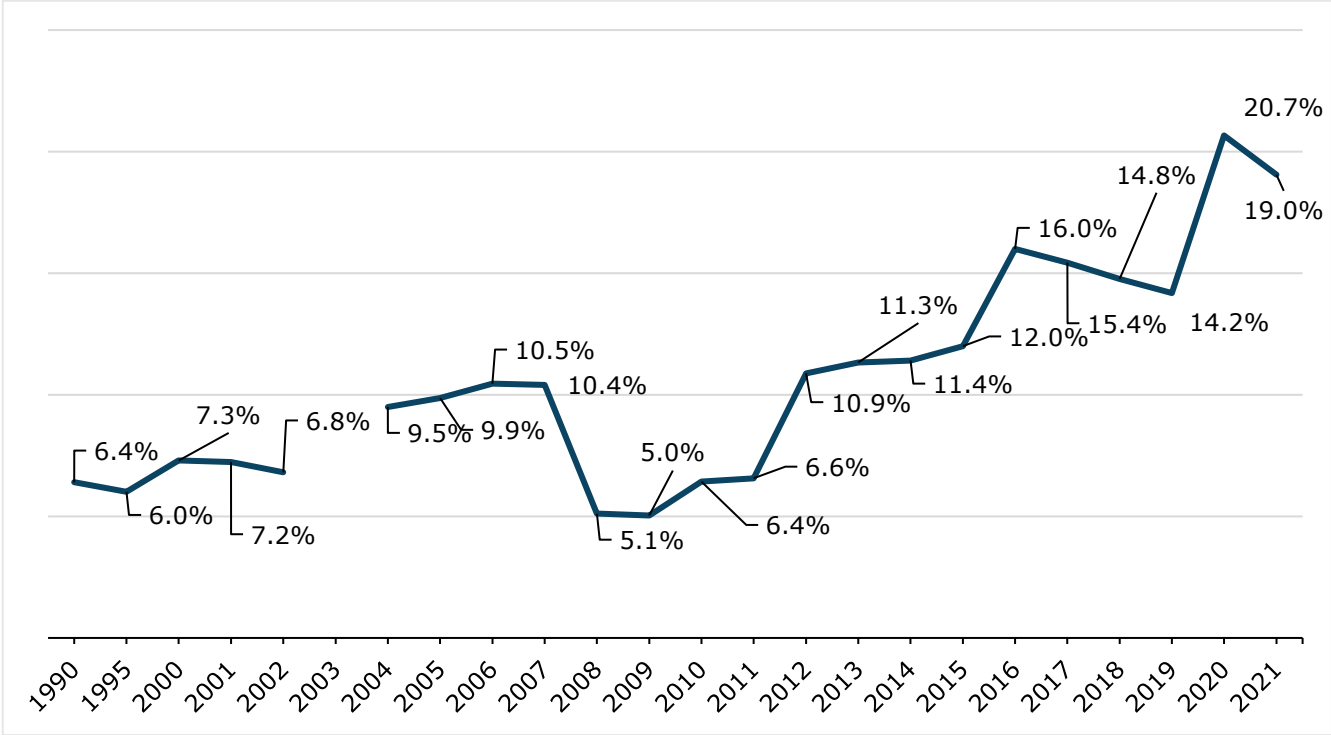
On the other hand, despite the notable enhancement of female representation among majoritarian parliament members since 2012,<sup>6</sup> there has been a marked decrease following the most recent parliamentary election. In 2020, there was only a single female majoritarian representative in parliament (see Figure 4); who subsequently resigned her seat to participate in local elections and was ultimately elected as mayor of one of the five self-governing cities. For a broader overview of female representation, Figure 5 illustrates the role of women in various executive, legislative, and judicial positions. Notably, the only areas where female participation exceeds 50% are within administrative staff and as judges in Georgian common law courts.

Despite these substantial levels of representation, it is apparent that women are still significantly underrepresented in local level positions, such as within local legislature

<sup>6</sup> In the Georgian system, 30 out of 150 the national parliamentary seats are reserved for majoritarian candidates, for whom people vote directly during parliamentary elections.

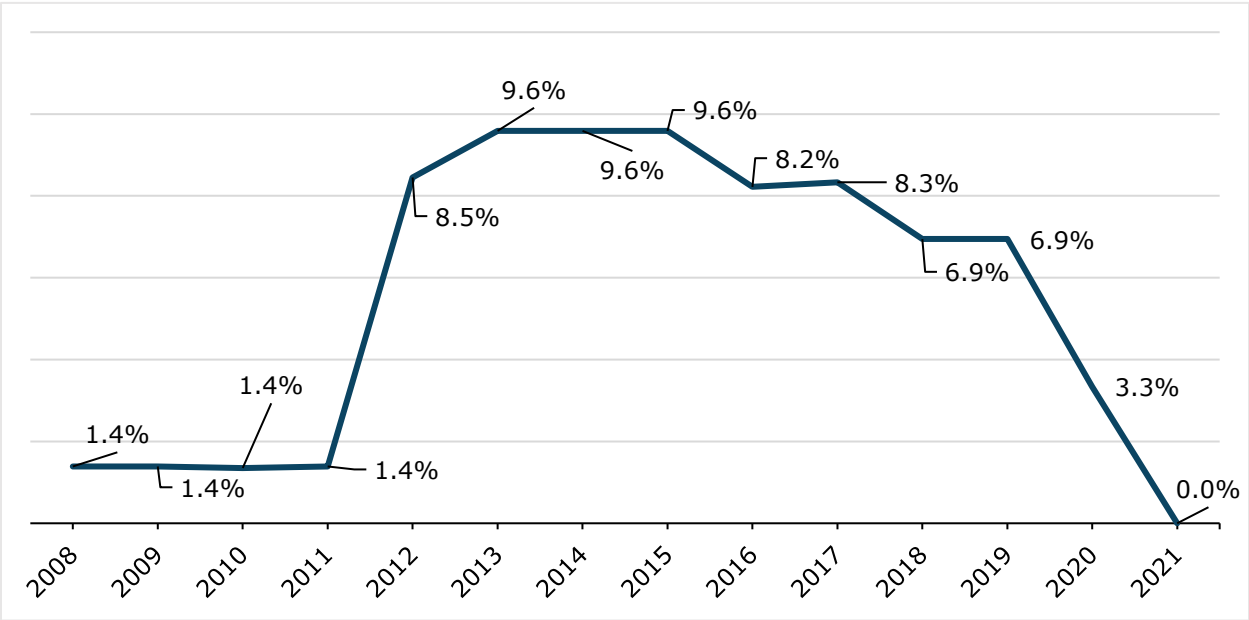
(13.5%), the supreme court of the autonomous Republic of Adjara (9.5%), and in positions of local authorities as mayors and governors (at only 4.7%).

**Figure 3: Percentage of Female Parliament Members**



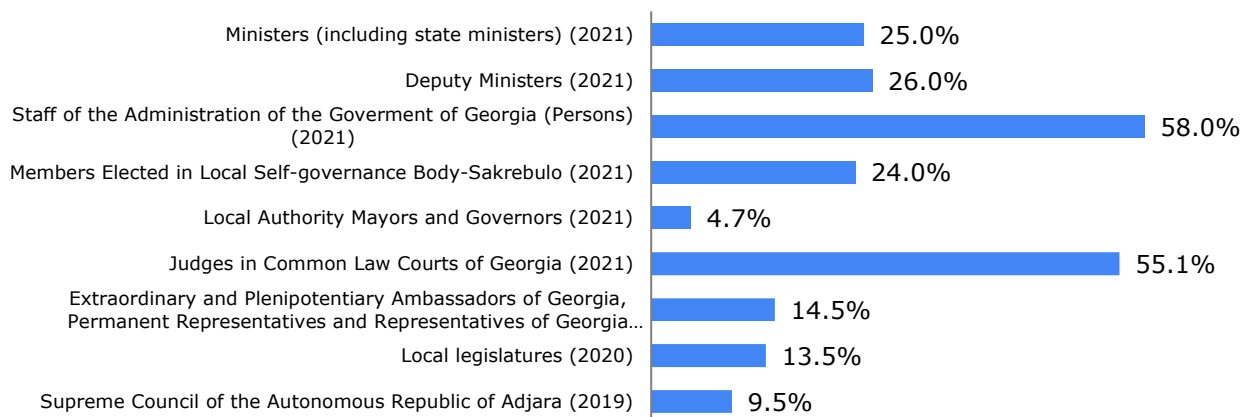
Source: Geostat

**Figure 4: Percentage of Female Majoritarian Parliament Members**



Source: Geostat

**Figure 5: Percentage of Women in Different Executive, Legislative, and Judiciary Positions**



Source: Geostat; Administration of the Government of Georgia 2020; Adjara Supreme Council 2019

## Perception of Women’s Political Participation in Georgia

Despite the relatively low level of female representation in Georgian politics, the local population recognizes the significance of their participation. According to the Future of Georgia Survey Report (2021),<sup>7</sup> a significant proportion of respondents believed that female representation in parliament was inadequate. Specifically, 46% of respondents stated that the number of female parliamentarians (20.7%)<sup>8</sup> was too low. A smaller proportion of respondents, 36%, believed representation was appropriate, while only 6% felt it was too high. The survey additionally revealed that social and demographic factors affected these perceptions – with women under the age of 35 and those with higher education being more likely to view the representation of women in parliament as inadequate. Furthermore, the majority of respondents, 54%, believed that increasing female representation in parliament would have a positive impact on the country, with only 9% suggesting it would have a negative effect. Such positive sentiments were particularly prevalent among women and individuals with higher education.

These attitudes were also confirmed by another survey, *A Survey on Youth Civic and Political Engagement and Participation in Peacebuilding*, conducted in 2021, which indicated that 43% of the young population agreed (either strongly agreed or agreed) that there should be more women in politics.<sup>9</sup> In a further survey, *Public Attitudes in*

<sup>7</sup> Caucasus Research Resource Centers Georgia. (2021). *Future of Georgia Survey Report*.

<sup>8</sup> At the time the survey was conducted in 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Caucasus Research Resource Centers Georgia. (2021). *Survey on Youth Civic and Political Engagement and Participation in Peacebuilding*.



Georgia,<sup>10</sup> conducted in 2021, 49% of respondents stated that they considered the optimal proportion of women and men in parliament to be equal representation.

## **Analysis of the Recent Parliamentary and Local Elections in Georgia**

### **Analysis of the Recent Parliamentary Election**

The Georgian parliament, a singular legislative body, includes 150 members who are chosen by way of a mixed electoral system. Of these members, 120 are selected via a proportional representation system, in which parties are allotted seats according to the number of votes received. The remaining 30 seats are filled through a plurality vote in individual constituencies, where the candidate with the largest number of votes is elected. Each parliament thereafter serves a four-year term.

In Georgia, there has been significant effort to implement gender quotas in elections. For instance, in 2011, legislation for a voluntary quota system was passed; under which an additional 10% of state funding was provided for political parties that submitted electoral lists including at least 20% of female candidates. However, in the 2012 elections only two parties met this requirement, neither of which secured any seats. This led to further discussions regarding the implementation of mandatory quotas for parliamentary membership and party lists.

Moreover, in 2015, the Task Force on Women’s Political Participation, a non-partisan advocacy platform, proposed implementation of a “zebra” quota system, which would have required every second candidate on party lists to be a woman, with the additional financial incentive of 30% state funding for parties that comply. This proposal was however not accepted by parliament nor was it presented for a vote (Dvornichenko, 2022).

Additionally, that same year, two members of parliament submitted an alternative legislative initiative that would require one out of every three candidates in party lists to be from the least represented gender. This initiative was discussed in a plenary session of parliament, although no vote was even taken.

In 2017, another initiative suggested replacing any elected member that relinquished their mandate with a successful candidate of the same gender. This concept received the support of 37,000 citizens, yet it was voted down in 2018 (Dvornichenko, 2022).

By July 2020, the parliament of Georgia had approved a mandatory gender quota, requiring political parties to nominate at least one candidate of the opposite sex for

---

<sup>10</sup> Caucasus Research Resource Centers Georgia. (2021). *Public attitudes in Georgia*.

every four candidates on their party lists. On 9 February, the Georgian parliament, in its third and final reading with 88 votes in favor and 3 against, also approved amendments to the Election Code regarding gender quotas. These amendments, passed under a fast-track procedure, extend the gender quotas in proportional party lists until 2032. Moreover, for parliamentary elections scheduled before 2028, every fourth person on proportional party lists must be a woman, while in subsequent elections women must be included in every third position on party lists. Additionally, the previous phrasing specifying “a person of another sex” has since been altered to “a woman”. Parties are now also obligated to provide additional funding to support their party’s women’s organization, although no enforcement mechanism has yet been established<sup>11</sup> (Dvornichenko, 2022;<sup>12</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), 2020).

The latest parliamentary elections in Georgia occurred on 31 October 2020 (Round 1), with the final round of voting concluding on 21 November 2020. At the time, there were 6,882 candidates nominated under the proportional election system, of which 44.3% were women. However, the percentage of elected female candidates via the proportional election system was slightly lower than the mandatory quota of 25%, because two political parties secured fewer than four seats in parliament (Citizens received two and the Labour Party one) – the quota requires at least one woman out of every four candidates in the list. Therefore, none of their elected candidates were women (after the election, one political party with four representatives replaced a female candidate with a male). From the 29 political parties that participated in the election, several (such as European Georgia, Democratic Movement-United Georgia, Party for Justice, Strategy “Aghmashenebeli”, and Alliance of Patriots) did include at least one woman in the top three positions of their party lists. While the political parties with the largest representation in parliament, Georgian Dream and the United National Movement, both met the minimum requirements for female representation in their party lists, however, women were predominantly placed in lower positions on the list. It is also notable therefore that female representation in parliament actually decreased in 2021 (Georgian Young Lawyers’ Association (GYLA), 2022b).

The majoritarian electoral system, on the contrary, does not impose any such quotas, hence several prominent political parties did not attach much significance to nominating women as majoritarian candidates. For instance, Georgian Dream (the ruling political party) nominated only a single woman as a majority candidate; where Lelo nominated 8 women, European Georgia - 5, Alliance of Patriots - 4, and United National Movement - 3 women. In total, 107 women ran as majority candidates (comprising less than 22 percent of all such candidates). None of whom secured a mandate in the first round of voting and only four women proceeded to the second round, while only one candidate, representing the ruling party, was elected (she later

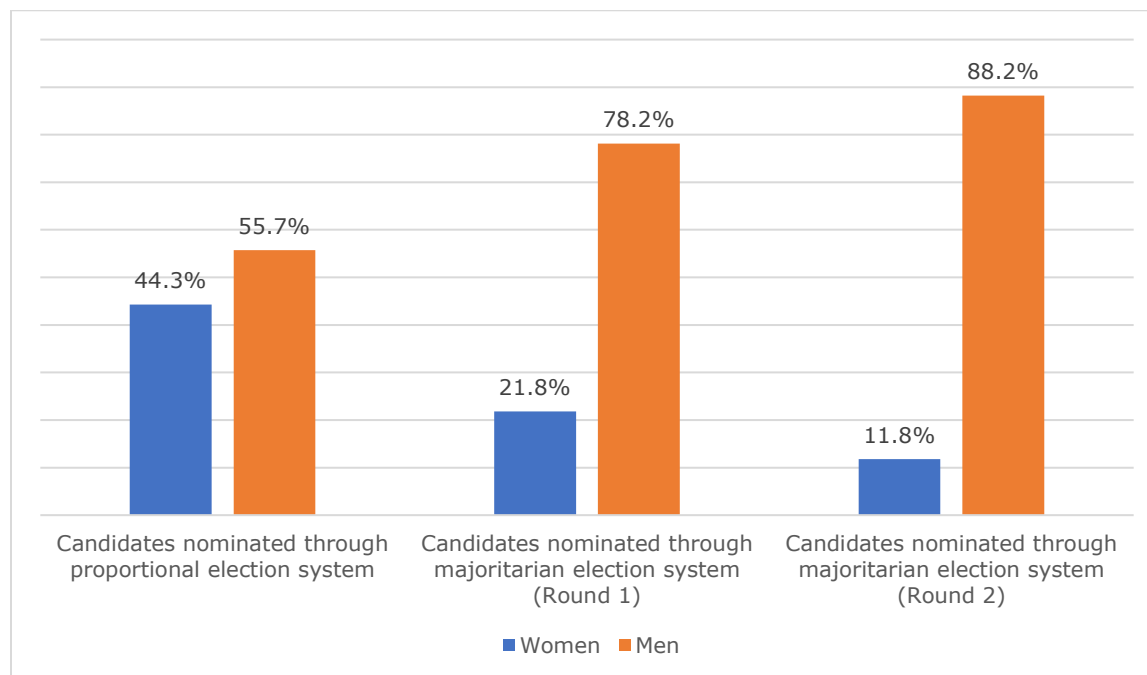
---

<sup>11</sup> Civil Georgia. (2023). *Parliament Approves Amendments on Gender Quotas*. Retrieved from: <https://civil.ge>.

<sup>12</sup> Dvornichenko, D. (2022). *Breaking Barriers to Women’s Participation in Politics in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine*. GMFpress. Retrieved from: <https://www.gmfus.org>.

left parliament to participate in a local election. Hence, there are currently no women elected as majoritarian candidates in Georgian parliament).<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 6: Candidates Nominated Through the Proportional and Majoritarian Election Systems, Rounds I and II of the 2020 Parliamentary Election**



Source: [genderstatistics.cec.gov.ge](https://genderstatistics.cec.gov.ge)

Despite this lack of representation, women are quite active in the political life of the country. Women not only served as candidates, but also made substantial contributions as party activists and coordinators. Additionally, their presence was notable in the administration of the elections. Markedly, female participation in district and precinct election commissions was greater than that of men, comprising approximately 66% of all members. The chairperson of the Central Election Commission (CEC) was also a woman; however, overall representation of women in the commission remained at only 25%. According to the CEC, more than 56% of accredited election observers were women (NDI, 2020).

## Analysis of the Recent Local Election

The local elections of October 2021 marked the inaugural application of gender quotas at this level, following the introduction of the quotas in June of that year. As per the new law, political parties are legally obligated to present at least one candidate of a different gender for every three candidates indicated on their respective electoral lists. This represents a shift from the previous quota of “one-in-two” candidates, which had notionally been in effect for a number of years, but had

<sup>13</sup> This data was retrieved from <https://genderstatistics.cec.gov.ge>.

never been implemented due to the absence of local elections during the period (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, International Election Observation Mission Georgia, 2021).<sup>14</sup>

In the event of the resignation of a female member of a local council, a regulation was established in 2017 to guarantee that the member would be replaced by another woman. The Constitutional Court moreover upheld the validity of this regulation in 2021, stating that it serves to ensure the “efficient operation of the mandatory quota system.” The ruling thus reinforces the importance of the quota system in ensuring gender representation on local councils.

During the elections on 2 October 2021, 42.5% of the 20,623 candidates registered in the local level proportional system were women (8,766 female candidates). Although this number was significantly lower for majoritarian candidates, where only 17.6% of the 2,771 majoritarian candidates were women (488 female candidates). From the 199 candidates to become mayors in 59 self-governing communities, only 9.1% were women (with the extremely low representation of just 18 candidates). The percentage of female mayoral candidates in Georgia’s five self-governing cities<sup>15</sup> reached slightly higher, at 17.5% (7 female representatives out of 40 candidates). Tbilisi maintained slightly higher female representation than in the regions. In the capital, 46.6% of the 1,728 candidates nominated through the initial proportional election system were women; in the majoritarian election system this reached 24.6% (34 out of 138) of candidates nominated, and female representation amounted to 18.8% (3 out of 16) for mayoral candidates nominated in Tbilisi City. The representation was even lower during the second round of elections – 8.3% of candidates nominated through the majoritarian election system, 20% of mayoral candidates nominated for the five self-governing cities (two candidates out of ten, for Rustavi and Kutaisi), and 0% of mayoral candidates nominated for the 15 self-governing communities (GYLA, 2022b).

At the local level, the quota system has had a significant positive impact on the number of women elected. In the 2021 local elections, women secured 31.4% of the seats awarded through electoral lists, a substantial increase from the 13% won in the 2017 elections. However, this progress is not reflected in the number of women elected into constituency seats. In 2021, out of the 664 members of the Sakrebulo elected through the majoritarian system, only 50 were women (7.5% of the total candidates elected). Similarly, the number of elected female mayors remains low – with only 3 of 64 being women, compared to just a single mayor out of 64 in the 2017 elections. In addition, within the 59 self-governing communities, only two women were elected. The root of this problem appears at the stage of candidate selection, with women only accounting for a small portion of mayoral candidates and

---

<sup>14</sup> Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. (2021). *International Election Observation Mission Georgia – Local Elections, 2 October 2021. Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe.*

<sup>15</sup> Tbilisi, Rustavi, Kutaisi, Batumi, and Poti.

candidates in constituency races in the 2021 local elections (GYLA, 2022a;<sup>16</sup> GYLA, 2022b; NDI, 2021a; UNDP, 2022).<sup>17</sup>

Beyond candidacy, women were also actively involved in the municipal elections as observers and media representatives. During the first round of local elections, 53.1% of representatives from local observer organizations (16,617 of 31,311 observers) and 56.7% of representatives from international organizations (580 of 1,024 observers) were women. The percentage of female representatives from the press and mass media amounted to 43.6% (GYLA, 2022b).

## Post-Election Activities for Elected Candidates

Although women constitute 54% of Georgian voters, gender-related issues are rarely incorporated into campaign discussions (NDI, 2020). Even if they are a part of the election campaign, voters prioritize political party leaders rather than party programs. According to one ISFED (2021) survey on election-related processes, 31% of respondents claim that what a party promises is more important, in contrast to the 48% who suggest that party leaders are more significant.<sup>18</sup>

Despite low representation in parliament, elected female candidates actively participate in the legislative process. Transparency International Georgia (2022a) highlights that,<sup>19</sup> from 11 December 2020 – 31 December 2021, there were 27 women MPs in parliament.<sup>20</sup> Four of whom were chairpersons<sup>20</sup>: Furthermore, among the opposition representatives, two women chaired a faction of the United National Movement (United Opposition “Strength in Unity”) and a political group (Group of Reformers). In addition, among those 15 members of parliament to have initiated 50 or more draft laws (with a total of 1,327 initiatives) four were women (initiating 283 draft laws). By number of MP’s questions, there are also six women within the list of the top ten contributors (they asked 803 questions in total).

---

<sup>16</sup> GYLA. (2022). [Monitoring report of pre-election environment, election day, post-election period and by-elections](#).

<sup>17</sup> National Democratic Institute. (2021a). *Limited Long-Term Election Assessment 2021 Municipal Elections in Georgia Election Assessment Report September 1 - November 5, 2021*.

<sup>18</sup> ISFED. (2021). [Survey on election-related processes](#).

<sup>19</sup> Transparency International Georgia. (2022a). [Report on the Performance of the Parliament of the Tenth Convocation](#).

<sup>20</sup> As of February 2023, the Georgian parliament has only 26 female members after one candidate, mentioned previously, resigned. This constitutes 18.6% of the total number of members of parliament, which is 140, as some elected politicians had boycotted the elections and left parliament as a form of protest.

<sup>20</sup> As of February 2023, there are four women serving as chairpersons (as well as the chairperson of the Gender Council) (Agrarian Issues Committee; Committee of EU Integration; Culture Committee; and Environment Protection and Natural Resources Committee), and eight serving as deputy chairpersons (Committee of EU Integration; Culture Committee; Defense and Security Committee; Education and Science Committee (x2); Environment Protection and Natural Resources Committee; Human Rights and Social Issues Committee; and Sectoral Economy and Economic Policy Committee). Retrieved from: <https://parliament.ge>.

Furthermore, the Gender Equality Council (a permanent council established by and reporting to the Georgian Parliament) was actively involved in the political process. According to Transparency International Georgia (2022b),<sup>21</sup> the following activities were implemented by the Council:

- 11 sessions and 242 working meetings;
- 102 involvements in forums and conferences;
- 6 appeals of citizens to the Council;
- 14 statements and 2 concepts;
- 4 legislative initiatives and 1 legislative proposal;
- 2 governmental reports;
- 4 thematic inquiry groups.

In spite of the active participation of women in parliament, it is still difficult to measure the full impact of these activities on the policymaking process.

## **Why are women underrepresented in Georgian politics?**

The disparity between the participation of men and women in Georgian politics may relate to differing levels of interest and to the respective willingness to enter the electoral arena (**Supply Side Factors**). The factors that primarily influence female representation in Georgian politics include women's attitudes towards political campaigns and the political environment, as well as the prevalence of traditional family dynamics and societal gender roles, specifically:

- Women perceive politics to be a **"dirty" business**, and the prevalence of **negative campaigning** makes them concerned over the impact on their children and family (Serpe, 2012). According to a report on women's participation in public and political life and economic activities (2022),<sup>22</sup> negative election campaigns can lead to a lack of motivation for women to participate in politics, and they can also result in a lack of support from their family members. Furthermore, the results of qualitative research indicate that politicians frequently face criticism and are subject to offensive language. This has resulted in politics being regarded as a harsh, unsuitable profession for women (ACT, 2013). It is moreover not unusual for Georgian political discourse to focus on private life and personalities of female politicians, as a means to damage their public image (Jajanidze et al., 2021). For instance, the Caucasus Resource Research Center (CRRC) demonstrated a concerning pattern from their study of parliamentary elections. They examined the comments on the Facebook pages of 491 majoritarian candidates between 31 August and 21 November 2020 and **found that women received 40 percent of comments**

---

<sup>21</sup> Transparency International Georgia. (2022b). [Performance Evaluation of the Gender Equality Council](#).

<sup>22</sup> Fund "Sokhumi" (2022). [Women's Participation in Public and Political Life and Economic Activities](#).

**categorized as abusive, even though they constituted only 22 percent of the profiles examined.** These abusive remarks often demanded that women conform to traditional gender roles (being homemakers and caretakers) or suggested that their success was due to personal or sexual relationships with influential men (CRRC 2020, NDI, 2021a).

- According to an ACT study on **women’s self-perception, many women share common beliefs and stereotypes about their gender.** The participants also recognized the importance, within business and politics, of having high self-esteem and confidence in one’s abilities. Overcoming barriers was often attributed to a woman’s assertive nature and diligence. The study additionally found that women in Georgia tend to be satisfied with their achievements, even if their aspirations are not fully realized (ACT, 2013). **In addition, a separate study indicated that Georgian women in politics tend to be modest about promotion and feel they need to work harder than men to attain leadership positions** (GYLA, 2017; Jajanidze et al., 2021).
- Traditional family dynamics, which place the burden of **family responsibilities** on women, limit participation in politics. The Time Use Survey in Georgia (2020-2021)<sup>23</sup> identified that a significant portion of the population, 66%, engages in unpaid domestic work, with a notable disparity between genders – where 88.3% of women and only 39.6% of men undertake such tasks (rural women have the highest participation at 90.3%, which thus hinders their participation at the local level). On average, the population of Georgia spends 2.1 hours per day on unpaid domestic services for the household and family members, with a notable gender gap. Men spend 0.7 hours daily on these activities in all areas of residence, whereas women spend five times more in rural areas (3.6 hours) and 4.7 times more in urban areas (3.2 hours).
- **The unequal access to financial resources** impedes women’s participation in politics, thereby hindering progress and their ability to attain leadership positions (Women’s Participation in Public and Political Life and Economic Activities, 2022).

The lack of female representation in Georgian politics can also be attributed to societal factors, such as the mismatch between social expectations of women and those expectations of political candidates (**Demand Side Factors**).

- According to a UNDP study, 60% of **respondents expressed support for increased political participation by women**, a 10% rise from 2013. This change was primarily driven by a shift in beliefs about women in politics – particularly among Georgian women. In 2020, 72% of women surveyed believed that female engagement in politics would be beneficial for the country, an increase from 56% in 2013. However, there has been less of a change

---

<sup>23</sup> UN Women and Geostat (2022). [Time Use Survey in Georgia \(2020-2021\)](#).

among men on this issue, with 45% of men in 2020 and 43% of men in 2013 expressing similar views.

- The process of **selecting political candidates** varies among parties, but it is often characterized by a lack of transparency, uneven competition, and unclear criteria, thus making it difficult for women to participate on an equal footing. These obstacles are also rooted in broader decision-making processes within parties that are typically dominated by men (NDI, 2020). Moreover, promotion mechanisms within Georgian political parties often do not prioritize skills or experience, and, as a result, women are infrequently selected for electable positions on party lists (NDI, 2021a). A data analysis additionally suggests that party procedures are controlled from Tbilisi, are highly centralized, and possess an elitist character (Urchukhishvili, 2017). One research report notes that such centralization has resulted in men in the regions attempting to strengthen their privileges by conforming to party norms and relying on male connections, while disregarding women in the regions (Urchukhishvili, 2017). Resultingly, most citizens, based on feedback from focus group discussions, have never voted for a female candidate simply because there has never been a woman running in their district (NDI, 2021a).

Another factor to consider is the obstacles that women encounter after being elected, namely:

- **The lack of representation and visibility:** Even when women are elected to political office, they may not be given the same level of representation or visibility as men. This can make it more difficult for them to have their voices heard and their ideas taken seriously within policymaking.
- **The lack of institutional support:** Governmental institutions and structures may not be designed to support women in politics. For example, the lack of family-friendly policies, limited access to childcare, and inflexible work schedules make it difficult for women with caregiving responsibilities to participate fully in policymaking.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The implementation of gender quotas in party lists during the 2020 parliamentary elections and in the 2021 local election led to a slight increase in the number of women in Georgian parliament. However, the effect of this measure was not as significant as expected. In particular, female representation remains extremely low in the majoritarian system (with few nominated or elected candidates) and within local municipalities, which were not affected by the introduction of the gender quota. Despite low participation in politics (at both the national and local level), the women who are elected tend to be significantly involved in legislative processes, although it is difficult to measure their full impact on policymaking.



Low levels of female participation are potentially explicable due to both demand and supply side factors, which include the differing attitudes of women and men regarding negative election campaigns; the heavy burden of family responsibilities on women; unequal access to financial resources; the mismatch between social expectations for women and those for political candidates; and the lack of a transparent process for selecting political candidates.

Within the local context, a combination of several approaches are recommended to improve the participation of women in Georgian political life:

- Implementing policies aimed at increasing **female labor market participation**.
- **Maintaining and expanding gender quotas:** Adopting quotas for women's representation in political parties and elected bodies can help ensure that women are represented at all levels of government.
- The effectiveness of gender quotas in elections is closely tied to the type of **electoral system**. Gender quotas tend to be more effective in proportional system elections, in which there are laws in place to ensure a gender balance in the candidature. However, implementing quotas in majoritarian elections is far more problematic. Countries that solely use a proportional electoral system tend to have around twice as many women in their legislature compared to countries that only operate under a majoritarian electoral system.
- **Affirmative action:** Implementing affirmative action policies during candidate selection, and in the hiring and promotion of political staff, can help offer equal opportunities for women.
- **Policies addressing the burden of unpaid care work** and changing traditional gender roles.
- **Childcare and family-friendly policies:** Providing access to affordable childcare and flexible work arrangements can help remove some of the barriers that women with caregiving responsibilities face in entering politics.
- **Training and mentorship:** Offering training and mentorship programs (as well as internal and external networking) for women can help build the skills and networks required for success in politics. Although such initiatives are often dependent on the support of international donors and are not deeply integrated in the system, they are still crucial in promoting the empowerment of women.
- **Challenging stereotypes:** Questioning stereotypical behavior and changing societal attitudes regarding women's capabilities and their interest in politics can help create a more inclusive political culture.

- **Financial support:** Providing funding for women to participate in politics, for example with campaign financing, helps build a more inclusive political sphere.
- In order to **enhance the participation and advancement of women in leadership roles**, political parties must take measures to ensure transparency and fairness throughout their internal candidate selection procedures. This may involve promoting women to prominent positions within groups of three or four, and providing support for elected women as they take on leadership positions. Additionally, parties that receive additional funding for surpassing quota requirements should utilize these resources to promote gender equality and empower women within their organizations (NDI, 2020).
- In order to enhance the participation of women and to promote them into leadership roles, **political parties must acknowledge the obstacles that exist within their own organization and explore ways to alter internal practices and behaviors**, for instance those relating to working hours or decision-making processes (NDI, 2020).
- To promote women in politics, it would be helpful to **highlight the success stories of female leaders**, particularly if the emphasis shifts away from their ability to balance family and work towards their professional skills and experience. This can be achieved while also motivating young men and women to participate in advocacy efforts that prioritize the integration of gender equality measures in public policymaking.
- Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan could increase women's participation in politics through **regional cooperation by implementing joint initiatives** that focus on raising awareness about the importance of gender equality in politics; by providing training and mentorship programs for women interested in running for office; and by sharing best practices and experiences when endorsing the political participation of women. Additionally, the creation of a regional platform for networking and exchange among female politicians could help increase their visibility and their influence in politics.

## References

- ACT. (2013). *Public Perceptions on Gender Equality in Politics and Business*. Tbilisi: UNDP Georgia.
- Campa, P. & Serafinelli, M. (2019). Politico-Economic Regimes and Attitudes: Female Workers under State-Socialism. *Review of Economic and Statistics*, 101(2), pp. 233-248.

Caucasus Research Resource Centers Georgia. (2020) [Violence against women in politics on Facebook](#).

Caucasus Research Resource Centers Georgia. (2021a). *Future of Georgia Survey Report*.

Caucasus Research Resource Centers Georgia. (2021b). *Public Attitudes in Georgia*.

Caucasus Research Resource Centers Georgia. (2021c). *Survey on Youth Civic and Political Engagement and Participation in Peacebuilding*.

Childs, S. & Kittilson, M. (2016). Feminizing political parties: Women's party member organizations within European parliamentary parties. *Party Politics*, 22(5):598-608.

Civil Georgia. (2023). *Parliament Approves Amendments on Gender Quotas*. Retrieved from: <https://civil.ge>.

Dvornichenko, D. (2022). *Breaking Barriers to Women's Participation in Politics in Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine*. GMFpress. Retrieved from: <https://www.gmfus.org>.

Esteve-Volart, B. & Bagues, M. (2015). Politicians' Luck of the Draw: Evidence from the Spanish Christmas Lottery. *Journal of Political Economy*, 124(5), pp. 1269-1294.

Folke, O. & Rickne, J. (2020). All the Single Ladies: Job Promotions and the Durability of Marriage. *American Economic Journal: Applied Economics*, 12(1), pp. 260-287.

Fox, R. & Lawless, J. (2004). Entering the Arena? Gender and the Decision to Run for Office. *American Journal of Political Science*, 48(2), pp. 264-280.

Fund "Sokhumi". (2022). *Women's Participation in Public and Political Life and Economic Activities*. Retrieved from: <http://www.fsokhumi.ge>.

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association. (2017). *Women in Georgian Politics*. Retrieved from: <https://gyla.ge>.

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association. (2022a). *Monitoring report of pre-election environment, election day, post-election period and by-elections*.

Georgian Young Lawyers' Association. (2022b). *2021 Local Self-government Election Observation Mission*. Retrieved from: <https://www.gyla.ge>.

Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2021). *Global and Regional Averages of Women in National Parliaments*. Retrieved from: <https://data.ipu.org>.

ISFED. (2021). *Survey on election-related processes*.

Jajanidze, G., Ghibradze, M., Kobakhidze, R., Tkemaladze, T., & Shengelia, V. (2021). *Georgian Women and Politics*. European Georgia Institute (EGI).

OSCE ODIHR. (2014). *Handbook on Promoting [Women's Participation in Political Parties](#)*.

Preece, J. & Stoddard, O. (2015). Why women don't run: Experimental evidence on gender differences in political competition aversion. *Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization*, 117, pp. 296-308.

Serpe, L. (2012). Focus Group Findings on Perceptions of Women in Georgian Politics - An Assessment of Perceptions of Women as Political Candidates and Elected Officials. *International Foundation for Electoral Systems*.

National Democratic Institute. (2013). *Increasing Women's Political Participation through Effective Training Programs*.

National Democratic Institute. (2014). *Women's Participation in Politics*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ndi.org>.

National Democratic Institute. (2020). *Report on the 2020 parliamentary elections*. Retrieved from: <https://www.ndi.org>.

National Democratic Institute. (2021a). *Limited Long-Term Election Assessment 2021 Municipal Elections in Georgia Election Assessment Report September 1 - November 5*.

National Democratic Institute. (2021b). *Combatting Violence Against Women in Georgian Politics*.

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. (2021). *International Election Observation Mission Georgia – Local Elections, 2 October 2021. Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*.

Transparency International Georgia. (2022a). *Report on the Performance of the Parliament of the Tenth Convocation*. Retrieved from: <https://transparency.ge>.

Transparency International Georgia. (2022b). *Performance Evaluation of the Gender Equality Council*.

United Nations. (2020). *Gender Social Norms Index (GSNI)*.

Un Women. (2017). *National Study on Violence Against Women*.

Un Women. (2022). *Progress on The Sustainable Development Goals the Gender Snapshot 2022*. Retrieved from: <https://www.unwomen.org>.

UN Women and Geostat. (2022). Time Use Survey in Georgia (2020-2021). Retrieved from: <https://www.geostat.ge>.

UNDP. (2022). *Electoral Gender Quotas Promote Equality in Politics, Reveal Gaps in Legislation and Party Rules*. Retrieved from: <https://www.undp.org>.

Urchukhishvili, G. (2017). *Women in the Parties: Deconstructing Myths*. UNDP.

World Economic Forum. (2019). *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*. ISBN-13: 978-2-940631-03-2.