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WOMEN IN POLITICS

Special Editor: Karolina Ó Beacháin Stefańczak

- | | |
|---|----|
| ■ Georgian Politics: Gender Imbalance and Women's (Under)Representation
Karolina Ó Beacháin Stefańczak, Dublin | 2 |
| ■ Representation, Reform and Resistance:
Broadening Our Understanding of Women in Politics in Azerbaijan
Sinéad Walsh, Dublin | 6 |
| ■ Women's Political Participation in Armenia: Institutional and Cultural Factors
Gohar Shahnazaryan, Yerevan | 9 |
| ■ DOCUMENTATION
The Global Gender Gap Index for the South Caucasus Countries.
Political Empowerment 2007–2014 | 13 |
| ■ OPINION POLL
Public Opinion on Women in Politics | 16 |
| <hr/> | |
| ■ CHRONICLE
26 February – 28 March 2015 | 18 |

Georgian Politics: Gender Imbalance and Women's (Under)Representation¹

Karolina Ó Beacháin Stefańczak, Dublin

Abstract

The imbalance of representation of men and women in Georgian politics diminishes the problems affecting women in society, making them less prominent and more difficult for the authorities to address. This article examines the political representation of women in independent Georgia in the context of political and electoral systems and the broader socio-economic environment of the state. It outlines the roles and positions women hold in political parties and provides a synopsis of the gender outcomes of parliamentary elections since 1991. The political participation of women in Georgia is analysed in conjunction with 'traditional values', the social perception of gender roles, and the influence of the Orthodox Church and its opposition to the ideas of gender equality.

Introduction—Political Representation of Women in Post-Soviet Georgia

Women in Georgia comprise 59% of voters, but their political representation oscillates at just 10%. Presidential elections in Georgia were contested exclusively by male candidates until 2004. There was one female candidate in the 2008 and three in the 2013 contests. With one exception, the candidates achieved less than 0.2% of the votes. The only female contestant who attracted a significant share of the electorate was Nino Burjanadze, whose support exceeded 10% in 2013. Burjanadze is the only woman who has held the two highest positions in Georgia. She was the Speaker of Parliament for over 6 years (2001–2008) and twice, for periods of two months, the acting President of the state (2003/2004 and 2007/2008).

Georgian parliaments since independence have had small proportions of women MPs, varying across the 22 years between 5.6% and 12%. With the 2008 elections, the share of female MPs elected to parliament was reduced to 6% and Georgia became the lowest ranking country among OSCE member states for the proportion of women in parliament. Following this election, the party of government, the United National Movement, had eight women MPs while one other female MP was elected from the list of the Christian Democratic Movement. The number of female legislators doubled from 6% to 12% (from 9 to 18 MPs) as a result of the October 2012 elections, and, for the first time in independent Georgia, the proportion rose above 10%.

The low representation of women can be explained, to some extent, by the negative legacy of Soviet rule on contemporary gender relations, on-going political instability and the complex relationship between the electoral and party systems. The electoral systems and the lack

of gender quotas have had an impact on the legislative recruitment of women internationally. In post-communist countries, however, there is relatively little difference between the share of seats held by women under the 'closed list' proportional (PR) and single mandate majoritarian systems. Unlike the experience in established democracies, where women tend to do better in PR systems, in the former Soviet states PR systems do not lead to significant increases in the number of women in parliament and, in some cases, women do better in majoritarian contests than they do on the party lists. In spite of Georgia's use of a single constituency list for at least half of its parliamentary seats since 1995, the percentage of women deputies has been very low (see Table 1).

Table 1: Women in Georgian Parliamentary Elections—an Overview

Year	Total number of seats	Women MPs	% of women MPs
1990	250	18	7.2
1992	222	14	6.3
1995	250	16	6.4
1999	235	17	7.2
2004	235	22	9.4
2008	150	9	6
2012	150	18	12

These figures could be interpreted as a slow incremental improvement for women until the 2008 election. The 2008 election is an anomaly as just prior to this contest the size of the parliament was cut by just over a third, resulting in a more competitive election than its predecessor, perhaps with the effect of squeezing women out. Looking in detail at the results of the 2012 parliamentary elections, women in the winning coalition performed marginally better in the majoritarian contests

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than they did on the list system. These results have to be contextualised by the volatility of political and party systems, armed conflicts, non-democratic elections and civil uprisings. Nonetheless the percentage of women elected to the Georgian parliament since 1990 seems to reaffirm that, in the post-Soviet sphere, there is no clear relationship between the level of democracy, the electoral system and the level of women's political representation.

Political and Electoral System

Georgia had a strong presidential system in place for all the post-1992 elections, until the transitional 2012 legislative elections and 2013 presidential contest moved it to a parliamentary system. The same voting system, with some variations, has been used for all parliamentary elections since the 1990s. Since 2012 the parliament is elected through a mixed system, with 73 MPs representing single-mandate constituencies and 77 MPs selected by party list ballot.

In the Georgian system, political parties are required to receive at least 5% of the valid votes to be included in the allocation of PR seats. This threshold had the effect of encouraging the development of 'blocs' of parties with combined lists. This may have had an adverse impact on the placement of women in prominent positions on the party lists, as it adds an additional element of negotiation between a number of male-dominated party leaderships. The majoritarian contests employ a two round system—to win in the first round a candidate must receive at least 30%, failing this a second ballot is held between the two candidates who received the highest support in the first round. The voting system after the 'Rose Revolution' has not encouraged independents and it was only in 2012 that they have been allowed to stand. Independent candidates are excluded from contesting the proportional part of elections and are confined to standing in single mandate districts only. They must demonstrate the support of at least 1% of voters registered in the district in which they intend to stand (this requirement does not apply to incumbent MPs) and pay a deposit of 5,000 GEL, the equivalent of seven months average salary in Georgia, which is reimbursed only to those candidates who receive at least 10% of the vote. While this provision sets a high barrier for independent candidates, this amendment potentially opened the electoral competition to women who were active in local communities but were outside political parties. Nonetheless, in 2012, due to the highly competitive and combative campaign environment, civil society female independent candidates were not encouraged to run.

Internationally, the significant increase in women's parliamentary representation from a global average of 12% in 1996 to 22% in 2014 has been attributed pri-

marily to two factors—the spread of democracy and the adoption of 'gender quotas'. Georgia does not have legal mandatory measures to secure more balanced gender representation. A 'soft' gender quota was introduced for the 2012 parliamentary elections in the form of financial incentives (a 10% increase in state funding) for political parties that fulfil the criteria: 20% gender quota evenly distributed throughout the party list.

The 2016 parliamentary election will be held under the amended Law on Political Unions of Citizens that includes a provision of increased supplementary public funding of 30% to parties that include three women for every 10 candidates on the lists.

Political Parties

The voting system in Georgia makes political parties and electoral coalitions the real gatekeepers to parliaments and therefore to real power. Their leaderships are almost exclusively male. Georgian parties are characterised by low levels of internal democracy and an absence of institutionalised mechanisms, which means that decisions are taken informally, through processes that are shaped by a male focused party culture.

The party system is volatile and instable. At the time of the 2012 election, the average age of the significant political parties contesting the election was 8.6 years; the party of government had existed for 11 years and the main challenger had been formed only the previous year. The post-Soviet Georgian state had existed for 22 years and no significant party dated from the beginning of independence, the oldest being the very small Republican and Labour Parties.

Georgian Dream, the coalition that won the 2012 elections, is a young formation, led by a party established in April 2012, emerging from a movement of the same name that had been launched in December 2011 by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili. Its interim leader was a woman, Manana Kobakhidze. The party identifies itself as social democratic. It is led by a political council, which in May 2013 consisted of 21 members, five of whom were women. That was a much higher share than their parliamentary representation. The proportion of women was impressive but has been reduced since from 24% to 16.6%. In February 2015 the 12-member political council includes two female members: Manana Kobakhidze and Eka Beselia. Georgian Dream is the main party within the five-party coalition. The oldest of the coalition parties is the small, but influential Republican Party of Georgia. Founded in 1978 as a dissident movement, its current leader, elected in November 2013, is a woman, Khatuna Samnidze. The other three coalition members are the National Forum, established in December 2006, the Conservative Party of Geor-

gia, founded in 2001 and Industry Will Save Georgia, founded in April 1999.

The main opposition party, United National Movement (UNM), was founded in 2001 by Mikheil Saakashvili and enjoyed a parliamentary majority between 2004 and 2012. The UNM is a centre-right formation affiliated to the European People's Party (EPP). The formal and broader informal leadership of the party is all-male.

The main political parties in Georgia do not have official and transparent candidate recruitment procedures; the processes of selecting prospective majoritarian MPs and composing the lists is both resource driven and informal, and hence is disadvantageous for women. Parties do not have internal gender quotas and lack other voluntary measures to secure more balanced candidate representation. In preparation for the 2016 parliamentary elections, some of the main Georgian parties are currently working with international organizations and NGOs to introduce new mechanisms to help them achieve the 30% women's representation on their lists.

Latest Elections

The Georgian parliamentary elections of 2012 were contested by fourteen political parties, two election blocs (comprising a further eight parties: six making up the Georgian Dream coalition and two being part of a Christian Democratic Union) and two independent candidates.

In the months prior to the 2012 elections, Georgian public opinion was extremely polarised between two key contestants, Bidzina Ivanishvili and the Georgian Dream coalition opposing President Mikheil Saakashvili and the then ruling party (UNM). It is important to note that as these were parliamentary elections, neither Ivanishvili or Saakashvili ran for office. The manifestoes and programmes of the parties were eclipsed by the public curiosity aroused by the prospect of a showdown between the two dominant male leaders. Issues of gender equality did not feature in the campaign.

In this election, a significantly larger proportion of women candidates contested when compared to the 12% of women deputies elected to the parliament—of the 2,757 candidates, 28.4 % (783) were women. This is atypical internationally, as usually the percentage of women elected approximates the proportion of women candidates. This discrepancy can be explained by the large number of candidates on the party lists, including the insignificant parties that did not put forward majoritarian candidates. A total of 444 candidates contested the 73 majoritarian seats compared to the 2,313 that contested the 77 proportional seats—on average 6 candidates contested each majoritarian constituency

compared to the average of 30 candidates for every proportional seat. Table 2 shows the proportion of women candidates on the party lists for the four significant parties/party blocs. These four electoral subjects made up only 30% (685) of all candidates on party lists, an indication of the large number of minor parties that contested this election. Women made up nearly 20% of the candidates for these four parties and coalitions, but only 13.5% for the two election subjects that divided the election between them, compared to 25% for the unsuccessful parties that did not pass the 5% threshold and therefore were not allocated seats. Of the candidates for the majoritarian seats, 13.30% (59) were women, of whom seven were elected, that is 9.5% of majoritarian MPs compared to the 14.3% of women in the proportional seats.

Table 2: Percentage of Women Candidates on Party Lists

Name of Party (Bloc)	Candidates Total	Number of Women	% Women	Met gender quota?	% National Poll
Georgian Dream	200	33	16.5%	N	54.97%
United National Movement	155	17	11.0%	N	40.34%
Christian Democratic Union	163	47	28.8%	Y	2.04%
Labour Party of Georgia	167	36	21.5%	N	1.24%

New regulations introduced by the Georgian Parliament in 2012 to promote more balanced gender representation were motivated by the very low proportion of women elected in 2008, which damaged Georgia's credibility internationally. They were generally ineffective; of the four significant electoral blocs three did not fulfil the criteria. Both UNM and Georgian Dream had substantial resources at their disposal and did not respond to the financial incentives to increase the parliamentary representation of women. Only the Christian Democratic Union Bloc, a coalition of CDM, a party with very conservative views on women's roles in society and a minor party with virtually no public support, met the gender criteria and qualified for additional subsidies. It seems likely they fulfilled these conditions primarily for the financial benefits, not due to the commitments to women's political advancement. The Labour Party's list included over 20% of women, but it did not meet the ranking conditions.

In spite of the failure of the financial incentive, the 2012 election significantly increased the number of women in parliament: from eight in 2008 (10.6%) to 11 (14.3%) in 2012 elected through the proportional

system and from one (1.3%) to seven (9.5%) elected through the majoritarian system.

In the previous term of Parliament dominated by UNM there was only one female majoritarian MP (1.33% of total) and in the 2012 election UNM continued the pattern they had adopted in the previous election by running only three female candidates for majoritarian seats. However three UNM women incumbents, who had entered parliament in 2008 through the party list, retained their seats, with one, Marika Verulashvili, re-elected as majoritarian MP for the Kvareli district (Khatuna Gogorishvili and Chiora Taktakishvili were re-elected as party list MPs) indicating that she had the support of the party and also that the electorate are willing to vote for women. In contrast Georgian Dream fielded female candidates in winnable majoritarian seats, such as Tbilisi, where UNM support was lower and also in Ivanishvili's home district of Sachkhere. They also chose female candidates who were well-established politicians and activists with good name recognition and reputations, including Tea Tsulukiani, Tinatin Khidasheli and Eka Beselia, who were well prepared and resourced to contest the elections. As a result Georgian Dream had the same number of women in majoritarian and proportional seats. For UNM the percentage of women on the proportional ballot was, at 15.1%, much higher than the proportion of women occupying UNM majoritarian seats.

Conclusions

Though communist ideology promoted the principle of gender equality, Soviet women were considerably under-represented in the influential circles of political power.

About the Author

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Further Readings

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While official quotas secured the high levels of female representation in Soviet political institutions, women were kept out of the top positions within the Communist party and thus denied real political influence. Women comprised approximately one-third of the deputies in the Supreme Soviet, but the maximum female representation in the Central Committee of the Communist Party was never beyond 5%.

Democratic transformations in the region brought hope of a positive change for women. However, the transition from the Soviet republic to independent states had a negative impact on women's public involvement and influence. It brought an end to the formal structures that had supported women's political engagement while at the same time the reassertion of 'traditional values' with the social perception of gender roles and the growing influence of the Orthodox Church mitigated ideas of gender equality that would have supported calls for women's political participation. Female representation in new legislatures dropped to less than 10% across the former USSR and, although the record has improved over the last two decades, the average percentage of female MPs remains low in comparison to the EU average.

The underlying trend of improvement in the number of women engaged in politics, which amongst other things could be linked to Georgia's higher level of international engagement, its links to the EU, and its perception of itself as a European state should result in better representation of issues affecting Georgian women. The case of Georgia shows, that it is not just institutions that are important. Party and electoral politics also matters, in pushing gender issues to the forefront of wider political debates.

Representation, Reform and Resistance: Broadening Our Understanding of Women in Politics in Azerbaijan

Sinéad Walsh, Dublin

Abstract

Azerbaijan is the leading country in the South Caucasus in terms of women's representation in parliament. However, it has the lowest number of women in government, with just one woman holding a rank equivalent to cabinet minister. Despite efforts to increase women's participation at the municipal and national levels, political parties and decision-making structures remain dominated by men. Women's substantive political engagement occurs mainly through the State Committee on Family, Women and Children's Affairs and civil society activism.

Introduction: Defining Politics

The presidential system in Azerbaijan was strengthened by referendums held in 2002 and 2009. The current head of state, President Ilham Aliyev, assumed office in 2003, and was re-elected for a third term in 2013. The president has the power to appoint and dismiss the cabinet, including the prime minister, who is head of government. Some legislative power resides in the 125 member National Assembly, or Milli Meclis, which is dominated by the New Azerbaijan Party. However, the distribution of power is closely linked to presidential patronage and membership of political, economic and regional elites.

Women are visible at various levels within this political system, and theoretically, no doors are barred to them. For example, the First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva is the president of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, a UNESCO and ISESCO Goodwill Ambassador, and a member of parliament. In 2013, she was appointed deputy chair of the New Azerbaijan Party, sparking rumours that she could be poised to replace her husband as president. The president's daughters, Leyla and Arzu Aliyeva, are well known figures, and the first lady's sister, Nargiz Pashayeva, is the rector of the Baku branch of Moscow State University.

Although the first family is often cited as an example of women with political power, very few decision-making positions are in fact occupied by women. The upper echelons of politics are dominated by men, with just a handful of women being appointed to leadership roles. This article shows that women's representation increases the further one gets from the centre of power. However, women's advancement is still hindered by male dominance within the political parties. Given the intransigence of the political system, civil society provides an important alternative locus for women's engagement with the state.

Where Are the Women?

Politics in Azerbaijan is a male-dominated field. In October 2013, following his re-election as president for a third term, President Ilham Aliyev appointed a 42-member

cabinet. It included the prime minister, five deputy prime ministers, twenty ministers of state, ten chairpersons of State Committees, and six other offices. Only one of these 42 positions is held by a woman: Hijran Huseynova, who has been the chairperson of the State Committee on Family, Women and Children's Affairs (SCFWCA) since 2006. This situation compares negatively with Armenia, where women hold two out of eighteen ministerial positions, and Georgia, where three out of nineteen ministries are led by women.¹

A review carried out by the SCFWCA to mark the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 draws attention to the under-representation of women in senior decision-making positions across all government departments. Currently, only three women hold deputy ministerial positions: Sevinj Hasanova (Economic Development), Sevda Mammadaliyeva (Culture and Tourism), and Nigar Aliyeva (Health). Women constitute a majority of workers in certain ministries, such as Health, Education and Social and Labour Protection, and are greatly under-represented in others, including National Security, Foreign Affairs and Justice.

By way of contrast, women appear to be making slow but steady gains in the parliament of Azerbaijan. This progress comes in spite of the absence of institutional mechanisms to improve women's representation. In 1992, the first full year of independence from the Soviet Union, women's share of seats in the Milli Meclis stood at just 6 percent. At Table 1 shows, this number rose to 12 percent in the 1995 parliamentary elections, but dropped to 10 percent in 2000. It rose to 12 percent again in 2005, and up to 16 percent in the most recent elections in 2010, when women won 20 seats out of 125 (one of these is now vacant, as Gular Ahmadova resigned her seat in 2012 after a vote-buying scandal).

¹ According to data found on the websites of both governments in February 2015

Table 1: Parliamentary Elections in Azerbaijan: an Overview

Year	Total number of seats	Women MPs	% of women MPs
1995	124	15	12.1
2000	124	13	10.48
2005	125	15	12
2010	125	20	16

Prominent female MPs include First Lady Mehrivan Aliyeva, and Bahar Muradova, who is deputy chairperson of the Milli Meclis since 2005, deputy executive secretary of the New Azerbaijan Party, and head of the delegation of Azerbaijan to the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE. Others include Rabbiyat Aslanova, head of the Human Rights Committee (the only woman to head a parliamentary committee); Govhar Bakhshaliyeva, head of the Delegation of Azerbaijan to the Parliamentary Union of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation; and Malahat Ibrahimgizi, chair of the Vote Counting Commission.

While women are a tiny minority within the executive branch of government, they are gaining ground in the legislature and are growing more visible in the field of international cooperation. There is still vast room for improvement: only eight out of 79 inter-parliamentary working groups are headed by women. Additionally, while Azerbaijan remains ahead of Georgia and Armenia with respect to women's representation in parliament, this does not say much about their influence over decision-making power. Rather, it appears that Baku is interested in promoting the image of gender-friendliness. It also does this by hosting high-profile events on women in politics, such as an international conference on women's role in cross-cultural dialogue in 2008, and the Women's Wing of the International Conference on Asian Political Parties in 2013.

Political Parties and Elections

There are over forty political parties registered in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Only one of them, the Liberal Party, is headed by a woman: former Secretary of State, Lala Shovket. Shovket is the only woman to have run for president, contesting the 2003 presidential elections on behalf of the National Unity Movement. She came in third out of eight candidates, with 3.62 percent of the vote (the top two candidates received 76.84 percent and 13.97 percent respectively). However, the election was marked by several irregularities and failed to meet OSCE standards. Shovket has boycotted all other presidential elections and resigned her seat in parliament in protest against corruption.

In response to an OSCE/ODIHR interim report on the 2013 presidential elections, criticising the lack of female nominees, the Central Election Commission of Azerbaijan notes that women's decision not to exercise their right to run for office is "inexplicable". This claim ignores a variety of structural factors, such as the extent to which the predominantly male leadership of political parties act as gatekeepers to nominations, or how women typically have less access to the organisational and financial resources required to mount a campaign. These issues are consistently highlighted in expert publications such as the 2007 UNDP report on Gender Attitudes in Azerbaijan.

Turning towards parliament, it becomes more difficult to explain away the under-representation of women. There are 125 members of the Milli Meclis, elected from single seat constituencies under the first past the post voting system. In the most recent parliamentary elections, according to the Central Election Commission, there were 688 names on the final ballot, 94 of whom were women. Women constituted 13.7 percent of candidates, but 16 percent of those elected. This small but significant discrepancy shows that women stand as good a chance as men, if not better, of being elected. However, given that elections in Azerbaijan have been pronounced neither fair nor free, women's representation may have more to do with party selection procedures than the will of the electorate.

A closer look at some of the parties demonstrates the extent to which politics is a male-dominated field. In the New Azerbaijan Party, women constitute over 40 percent of party members, but on the executive board they occupy just three seats out of twenty. In the 2010 elections, the party ran nineteen women as candidates, out of a total of 125. Nor do women fare better with the opposition parties. For example, while the Musavat Party has internal quotas guaranteeing women 25 percent representation in elected party structures, there were just five female candidates in the Musavat-Popular Front opposition bloc in 2010, out of a total of 91. At present, there is no cross-party Women's Caucus.

According to the SCFWCA, the New Azerbaijan Party is currently discussing the possibility of a 40 percent quota for female candidates in the 2015 parliamentary elections. This would certainly change the face, if not the substance, of politics in Azerbaijan. The results of the 2009 municipal elections, in which women's representation shot up from 4 percent to 26.5 percent, show how easy it is to engineer political gains for women. Leading up to the 2014 municipal elections, the New Azerbaijan Party continued to promote women's and youth participation, building on work previously undertaken by women's NGOs and international organisa-

tions. Women's representation in the municipalities subsequently reached 35 per cent.

Women's Civil Society Activism: Reform or Resistance?

Party membership is not the only way that women engage in politics in Azerbaijan. Civil society is often seen as an alternative form of democratic activism, and may be just as effective in terms of promoting women's rights. There are approximately 200 women's civil society organisations in the country, though very few of these are active. Women's NGOs seeking to influence the political process have developed an important relationship with the State Committee on Family, Women and Children's Affairs, which was set up in 1998 and expanded in 2006. This cooperation facilitated the development of gender equality legislation in 2006, and the law on domestic violence which was passed in 2010.

Since 2011, the SCFWCA has worked with Counterpart International and USAID to implement a programme on enhancing women's leadership. In 2012, a group of women, including several MPs, drew up a list of recommendations for government, advocating the adoption of temporary quotas to increase women's representation in government structures and state agencies. However, these recommendations did not elicit an immediate response from government, raising questions about the effectiveness of the current strategy and the power of the SCFWCA to influence decision-making. In addition, it is unclear to what extent these demands were driven by international donors.

Another area which has seen cooperation between civil society, parliamentarians and the SCFWCA is Women, Peace and Security. In 2002, under the auspices of the United Nations Development Fund for Women, Coalition 1325 was formed in order to advocate for the promotion of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in the context of the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. The Coalition has recently become more active in monitoring the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and is advocating for a National Action Plan that would strengthen women's role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

International commitments such as UNSCR 1325 and the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) have proved to be important mechanisms for tracking the advancement of women in politics. In February 2015, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women reviewed Azerbaijan's implementation of the Convention. Although it commended several positive achievements, it also called attention to legislative developments in 2014

restricting the activities of NGOs, including women's organisations.²

Women's civil society activism also takes the form of resistance to authoritarian trends. This is true of some women's organisations, and of other civil society organisations that are led by women. For example, Leyla Yunus held the position of deputy minister of defence in 1992–93, before founding the Institute of Peace and Democracy and becoming a vocal critic of Ilham Aliyev. She is currently imprisoned on charges of treason, and has been declared a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International. A number of the country's most well-known human rights defenders are women, such as Novella Jafarova, Saadat Bananyarli, Saida Gocamanli and Arzu Abdullayeva.

Women in the media are having a big influence over the next generation of political activists, including Khadija Ismayil, a journalist with Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty who is currently behind bars. Many women are active in less visible ways through youth movements and women's and/or feminist initiatives. These span the political spectrum, from being pro-government, to oppositionist, to ostensibly neutral. They operate at the local, national and international levels. Women's political activism also encompasses religion, as in the case of the Women's Council of the (banned) Islamic Party of Azerbaijan.³

Women are demonstrably active in civil society and exercise their right to political participation through their encounters with state institutions, such as the SCFWCA. In some cases, women's activism is geared towards dialogue and cooperation, while in others it takes the form of more radical activism. Women organise under diverse frameworks, including women's rights, peace and security, democracy, religious and civil liberties. Understanding how these women interact with the state and where they meet with reform and resistance will add tremendously to our understanding of both women and politics in Azerbaijan.

Conclusion

Azerbaijan takes pride in its historic legacy as the first Muslim country to extend the vote to women, and is taking steps to increase women's political participation. Nevertheless, women remain under-represented in politics, particularly in the executive branch and areas of decision-making. The case of the 2009 municipal elections shows how easily women can enter politics when adequate resources are made available to them—with

2 <<http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=15583&LangID=E>>

3 <<http://www.eurasianet.org/node/67595>>

or without a formal quota. Given the flawed system of democracy in Azerbaijan, further research is needed to understand why certain women are able to advance in politics, while many more are not.

Women's low level of participation may also be related to general disillusionment with the political system on the part of many women, including a large part of the educated and urban classes. Some of these women

call for regime change, others criticise certain policies, and a third group seeks to cooperate on areas of shared interest, primarily through the institution of the State Committee on Family, Women and Children's Affairs. A better understanding of how women in civil society relate to political institutions may provide an alternative means of measuring female participation and inclusion of women's perspectives in policy-making.

About the Author

Sinéad Walsh is a Government of Ireland Postgraduate Research Scholar at Trinity College Dublin (2012–2015). Her PhD thesis focuses on gender, women's organisations, civil society peacebuilding and United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in Armenia and Azerbaijan. She conducted extensive fieldwork in the region in 2012–2014, and participated in a number of cross-border initiatives.

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Women's Political Participation in Armenia: Institutional and Cultural Factors

Gohar Shahnazaryan, Yerevan

Abstract

Women have been poorly represented in Armenian politics for the last several decades. Currently, there are 14 women out of 131 members in Armenia's National Parliament. The percentage of women ministers and deputy ministers has never risen above 11% during the past 5 years. Women currently hold two cabinet posts, serving in the ministries that deal with culture and the diaspora. There are no women governors. Additionally, for the past decade, there were no female mayors or deputy mayors in any urban community in Armenia. There is a gender quota system in place for political parties, requiring that in campaign lists every fifth person starting from the second position should be a woman. Nevertheless, there is a widely practiced phenomenon of self-withdrawal among women candidates in Armenia, which is one of the barriers for women to be represented in all levels of decision-making. The practice of self-withdrawal is also an obstacle for implementing the quota system since it prevents the quotas from actually functioning. Among various obstacles preventing women's political participation in Armenia are: gender stereotypes, gender roles, women's lack of economic independence and social capital, low self-confidence among women, and the overall political culture.

Introduction

Women have little representation in Armenia's political life. Despite some slow progress, since Armenia received its independence in 1991, women have held few seats in the National Parliament, with the current level at 11%.

In addition, according to the 2014 Gender Gap Index, Armenia was in 123rd place out of 142 countries in the world in terms of the political empowerment of women. Armenia's current position actually marks a decline from 106th place in 2009. Currently,

only 14 of the 131 members of Armenia's parliament are women.

Table 1: Parliamentary Elections in Armenia: an Overview

Year	Total number of seats	Women MPs	% of women MPs
1995	190	12	6%
1999	131	4	3%
2003	131	7	5%
2007	131	12	9%
2011	131	12	9%
2014	131	14	11%

Political and Electoral System

During the past few years, the Armenian government has adopted several new federal laws, revised old ones, and enacted local polices on gender equality. Additionally, the Armenian government has supported several international initiatives to promote women's rights and advance their standing in society. Among these are the National Action to Improve the Status of Women, the National Action Plan to Combat Gender Based Violence, the Gender Mainstreaming Concept and the Law on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women.

As a result of reforms in 2007, the minimum share of women in lists of political parties grew from 5% to 15%¹. In 2011, this number increased to 20% thanks to a new gender quota system. According to Article 108 of Armenia's Electoral Code, "The number of persons of each sex shall not exceed 80% of any integer group of five candidates starting from the second number of the electoral list (2–6, 7–11, 12–16 and so on up to the end of the list) of a political party or alliance of political parties and of each party included in an alliance for the National Assembly election under the proportional electoral system."

According to the Gender Policy Concept Paper of the Republic of Armenia (2011–2015)², measures will be taken to enhance the representation of women in the RA National Assembly from 15% to 30%, in political and discretionary positions of the executive branch to 25%, in the highest and chief positions of civil service to 30%, and in local self-government bodies to 25%³. According to the same Concept Paper, the Armenian

government will also undertake some measures to bring national legislation into compliance with international standards, and make some amendments to the Electoral Code to set a 30% gender quota for political parties, in conjunction with the Council of Europe recommendations to increase the quota to 40%.

Currently, there are no quotas for any other leadership positions. This is one of the reasons for the low representation of women at different levels of political leadership. According to the survey *Gender Dimension of Civic and Political Participation in Armenia*, 57% of the respondents have positive attitudes toward the idea of gender quotas, despite the fact that a majority of society continues not to accept the idea and potential reality of women serving as president or prime minister. Yet, the overall Armenian population agrees that representation of women at different levels of political leadership will bring positive changes in society⁴. In particular, there is a widespread opinion that greater numbers of women in politics will bring more social justice, hold male politicians more accountable, and that their activities will be more transparent, decrease corruption, and make politics an ethical and moral profession.

Political Parties

The proportion of women who represent their party in the National Assembly is highest among MPs from the opposition *Heritage* party (20%). Fewer women are represented by the biggest oppositional party *Prosperous Armenia* (5%). But, despite the fact that there are so few women in the *Prosperous Armenia* party, on March 5, 2015, Nairuhi Zohrabyan, a woman, became the leader of the *Prosperous Armenia* party. For the first time in Armenia a woman is leading the largest opposition party.

Parties don't have any specific mechanisms and polices for gender mainstreaming, and women's advancement. In general, women in political parties occupy secondary positions, and do not participate in setting the party agenda or other decision-making processes. To illustrate this point, no party has a quota system to ensure that women serve in management positions. In addition, the leadership of the majority of parties does not consider gender policy to be necessary.

Women are not treated seriously and equally in parties because they are typically included just to meet the required quotas⁵. This situation creates an atmosphere in which political leaders are not willing to invest any resources in women, to help them develop new skills and advance their political careers. There is also a ten-

1 <http://transition.usaid.gov/our_work/crosscutting_programs/wid/pubs/Armenia_Gender_Assessment_2010.pdf>

2 The Concept paper should be implemented by the end of 2015

3 Excerpt from the Protocol of the RA Government Session (11.02.2010).

4 <<http://www.osce.org/yerevan/81699?download=true>>

5 Peculiarities of Women's Political Participation in Armenia (a sociological survey). British Council, Armenia, 2014

gency to withdraw women from the list of candidates after the election so that they do not actually serve in the parliament.

It is important to mention that female representatives of political parties themselves often reject the concept of gender equality. Thus, according to a survey conducted by the British Council in Armenia among female politicians, almost all respondents, especially those older than 45, took the position that despite their belief in equality, a woman in the political party should nonetheless be “less intervening” and “equal”, even if she occupies a hierarchically higher position in relation to men.

Male politicians do not need to prove their validity as political and public figures. Female politicians, however, need to undergo a long process of proving their right to a prominent spot in public life. Apart from that, female politicians think that society is more demanding of them, and is more critical of their shortcomings. According to women politicians, society holds the position that a female politician has no right to prioritize professional activities over family-related duties. For that reason, society has a much more positive attitude toward female politicians who have families and children, and present themselves as “mother” and “wife” figures.

In general, women are left out of the formation of party agendas and decision-making processes. In order to intervene and participate on these levels, women have to “behave like men” and perform according to rules which are “not acceptable” for women. Among such typical male characteristics are leadership, ambitions, persistence, rudeness, competitiveness, and so forth, which are traditionally defined as male qualities in Armenian society.

The Latest Elections

According to official statistics and various surveys, men and women participate in the elections as voters almost equally. However, there are fewer women among the candidates, with their numbers ranging from 7% to 20%.

The low number of women involved in Armenian politics results from the widely practiced phenomenon of self-withdrawal, which is one of the barriers preventing women from being represented in all levels of governance. In the parliamentary elections of 2012, 102 candidates self-withdrew during the post-election period. Twenty-six (26) of them were women. The self-withdrawal of male candidates were linked to their high positions in governmental bodies, while only 30% of women had the same reason. In 70% of the cases, the reason for stepping down was unknown, as those women did not want to comment on their actions. It may only be assumed that the political parties they were part of had influenced their respective decisions. Most of those

women represented the political parties which held the largest number of mandates in the parliament.

This practice of self-withdrawal is itself a big obstacle towards the realization of a quota system because it neutralizes the positive impact of the quotas. The number of women candidates running under the majoritarian system is also low due to the fact that these women act independently from political parties. The majority of women who were not elected often had good chances to be elected in their districts.

Women also self-withdraw in local elections. For example, in 2014, during local government elections, 7 women nominated their candidacy, but just before the elections, 2 of them announced that they would respectfully withdraw themselves.

In the elections for local self-government on March 15, 2015, women were nominated as mayoral candidates in only two communities out of 26⁶.

Women in Government

Overall, women have little representation among the country’s political leadership. However, there are many more women involved as employees of different ministries and state institutions. In some cases, there are more women staff members in state institutions than men. For example, there are 1,003 women and 893 men working in the Yerevan municipality. However, there has not been a single woman mayor or deputy mayor since Armenia became independent. Nor are there women among the heads of the municipal districts. There is also extensive gender segregation among staff members of different ministries in favour of women. There are twice as many women as men among staff members of the Ministry of Culture, Education and Science, Labour and Social Affairs, and Diaspora.

The percentage of female ministers and deputy ministers has never risen above 11% for the past 5 years. There are currently two female ministers in Armenia: the Minister of Culture, and the Minister of Diaspora. There are only three women among Armenia’s ambassadors to other countries. There is no woman governor in Armenia’s regions (marz), and only two deputy governors (in Aragatcotn and Armavir). For the past decade, there no women mayors or deputy mayors. Out of 586 council members in urban communities, there are only 30 women. There are more women among the leaders of rural self-government bodies. Currently, out of 866 rural community leaders, just 19 are women. Of 5,241 council members in rural committees, only 10% are women.

During the past 5 years, the percentage of women in legislatures has been extremely low (between 9%–11%).

6 <<http://womensnet.am/en/local-elections/>>

There are relatively more female lawyers in the judicial bodies at the national level, but male lawyers are twice as numerous. In 2013, the percentage of women judges was 24%.

Out of 9 members of the Constitutional Court, there is only one woman. There are no women among the members of Armenia's Central Bank Council. Women are also underrepresented in the scientific councils of state and non-state universities. The percentage of women in the scientific councils is 35%. Women comprise only 10% of all the highest posts of Armenia's civil service (see Tables 2 and 3 on p. 13).

Conclusion

Women in Armenia lack both institutional and cultural resources, and are at severe cultural, social and economic disadvantages when it comes to developing a political career. Gender socialization processes, including attitudes toward women's leadership and overall gender roles, limit women's opportunities and choices to be involved in political life. For example, 63% of the population agree that men make better political leaders than women do. Furthermore, 60% agree that, on the whole, men make better business executives than women do⁷. On this point, Armenia's political institutions, electoral system, and the level of party competition all contribute to create obstacles for women's political participation. The low number of women in politics is mainly determined

by the absence of a "woman-friendly atmosphere" during elections, as well as on the decision-making level. In addition, elections are associated with threatening people, giving bribes, and resolving issues in a "boy's clubs" style. Women can't and don't want to play these "games" and automatically becoming excluded.

The lack of economic independence is yet another contributing cause for the low political representation of women in Armenia. Women can't afford to finance election campaigns, and can't pay the electoral deposit required to run.

There is also a lack of social capital, and "useful" connections among women-political candidates, which makes it more difficult for women to achieve high political status.

Other factors include a huge element of risk in Armenian politics, and it takes a lot of courage for a woman to enter into the political field. There are a number of stereotypes about female leaders in general, and a tendency to appeal to cultural and national rhetoric whenever women leaders are trying to become more active and visible. Common attitudes often include such ideas as "it is not acceptable to behave like that for an Armenian woman," "Armenian women should stay at home and take care of their children," or "Women-leaders are those who don't have any personal life and/or good husbands."

Finally, women lack self-confidence and often repress their political ambitions and motivation.

About the Author

Gohar Shahnazaryan has a PhD in Sociology from Yerevan State University (YSU). She is the Director of the Center for Gender and Leadership Studies at YSU and an Associate Professor at the Department of Applied Sociology. Gohar also is a co-founder of local NGO Women's Resource Center.

Further Reading

- Ghazaryan G. *The problems of political rights realisation by women in Republic of Armenia*. 2013, <<http://www.shahkhatun.am/index.php?lang=arm&category=4&id=1042>>
- *Women's Political Participation in the 2012 Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Armenia*. Armenian Association of Women with University Education, OSCE, 2012
- <<http://womennet.am/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/119a.pdf>>

Table 2: Number of Women in Local Government

Year	Marzpets (Head of Regions)	City Mayors	Village Mayors	%
2002	0	0	16	2%
2003	0	0	17	2%
2004	0	0	17	2%
2005	0	0	21	2%
2006	0	0	23	3%
2007	0	0	23	3%
2008	0	0	23	3%
2009	0	0	24	3%
2010	0	0	24	3%
2011	0	0	22	2%
2012	0	0	20	2%

Source: National Statistical Service RA, 2003–2012

Table 3: Ministers and Deputy Ministers

Year	Women Ministers and Deputy ministers	%
2002	8	8%
2003	7	7%
2004	7	7%
2005	5	5%
2006	6	6%
2007	5	5%
2008	7	7%
2009	7	7%
2010	10	10%
2011	10	10%
2012	11	11%

Source: National Statistical Service RA, 2003–2012

DOCUMENTATION

The Global Gender Gap Index for the South Caucasus Countries. Political Empowerment 2007–2014

According to its self description the Global Gender Gap Index benchmarks national gender gaps on economic, political, education and health criteria, and provides country rankings that allow effective comparisons across regions and income groups. The rankings are designed to create greater awareness among a global audience of the challenges posed by gender gaps and the opportunities created by reducing them.

The methodology and quantitative analysis behind the rankings are intended to serve as a basis for designing effective measures for reducing gender gaps. The Global Gender Gap ranks countries on a 0–1-point scale. Zero is the worst score (inequality) and one the best (equality).

Continued overleaf

The Global Gender Gap Index is prepared on an annual basis by the World Economic Forum since 2006. At present it covers 142 countries. Since 2007 all three countries of the South Caucasus are included in the index. The index rankings refer to the previous respective year, i.e. the index values for 2007 assess the situation as of 2006.

Katharina Fischer

Figure 1: Political Empowerment, Global Rank 2007–14

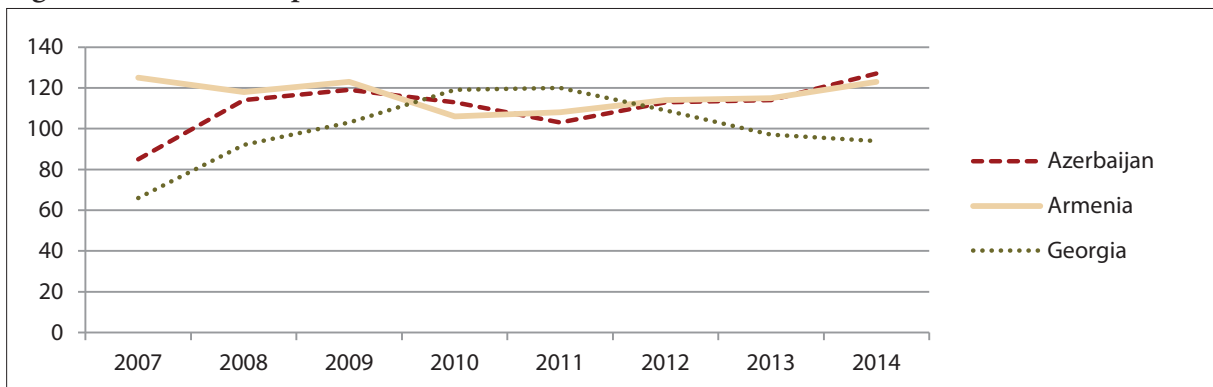


Figure 2: Women in Parliament, Global Rank 2007–14

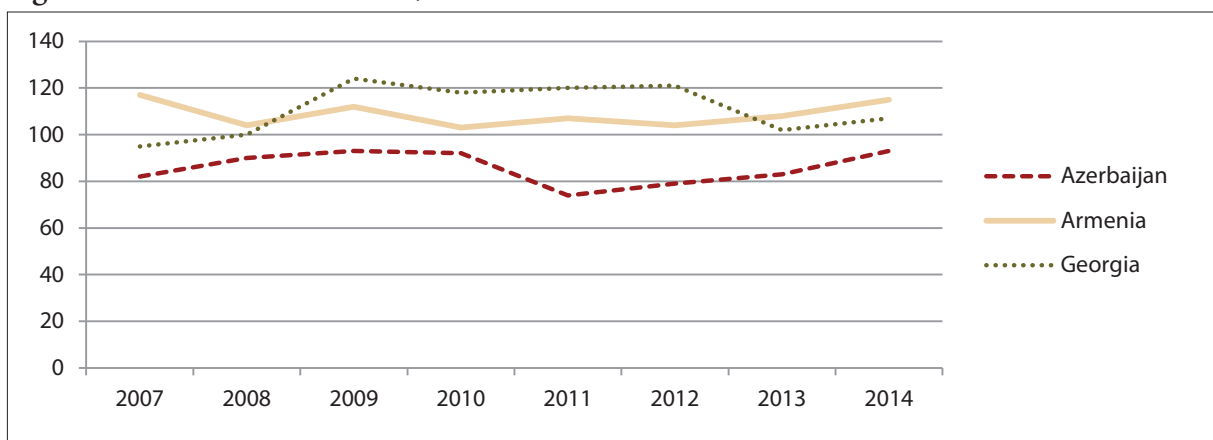


Figure 3: Women in Ministerial Position, Global Rank 2007–14

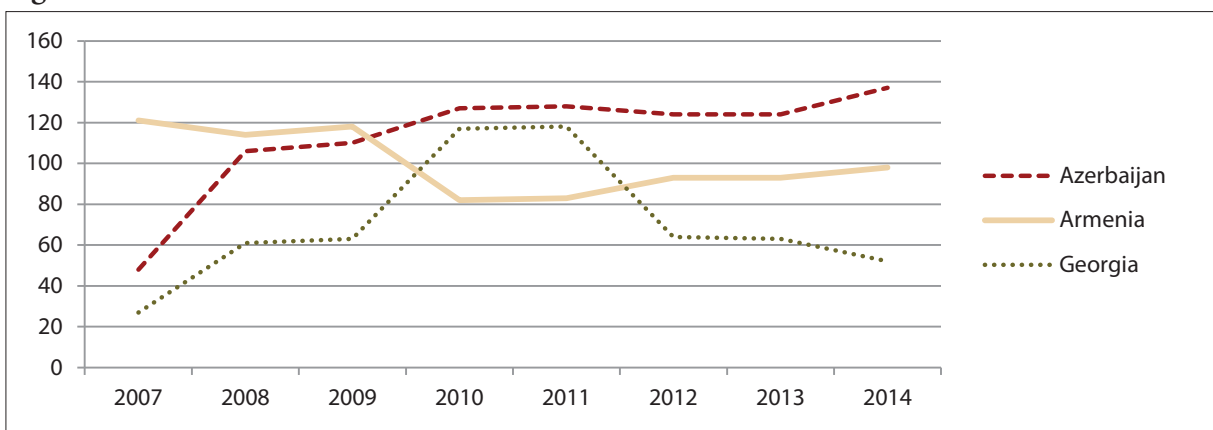


Table 1: Political Empowerment 2006–2014 (Global Rank and Index Value)

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	
Azerbaijan										
Gender Gap Index Overall rank score	-	59	61	89	100	91	99	99	94	0.6753
Political Empowerment	-	85	114	119	113	103	113	114	127	0.064
Women in parliament	-	82	90	93	92	74	79	83	93	0.18
Women in ministerial position	-	48	106	110	127	128	124	124	137	0.03
Years with female head of state	-	42	40	41	44	52	58	60	64	0.00
Armenia										
Gender Gap Index Overall rank score	-	71	78	90	84	84	92	94	103	0.6622
Political Empowerment	-	125	118	123	106	108	114	115	123	0.068
Women in parliament	-	117	104	112	103	107	104	108	115	0.12
Women in ministerial position	-	121	114	118	82	83	93	93	98	0.13
Years with female head of state	-	42	40	41	44	52	58	60	64	0.00
Georgia										
Gender Gap Index Overall rank score	54	67	82	83	88	86	85	86	85	0.6855
Political Empowerment	59	66	92	103	119	120	109	97	94	0.111
Women in parliament	86	95	100	124	118	120	121	102	107	0.14
Women in ministerial position	27	27	61	63	117	118	64	63	52	0.27
Years with female head of state	36	37	35	37	38	46	49	50	55	0.01

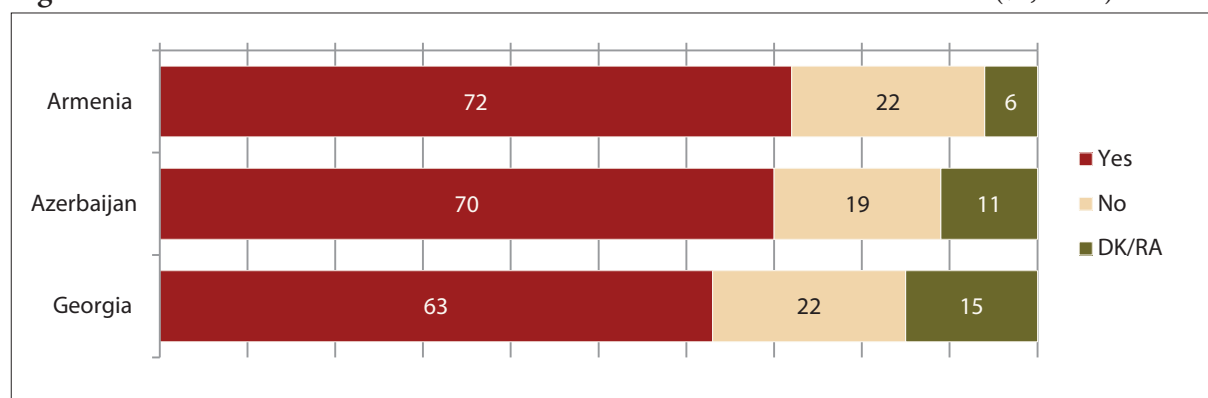
Source: <<http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/rankings/>>

OPINION POLL

Public Opinion on Women in Politics

All data in this section provided by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers, <<http://www.crrccenters.org/>>

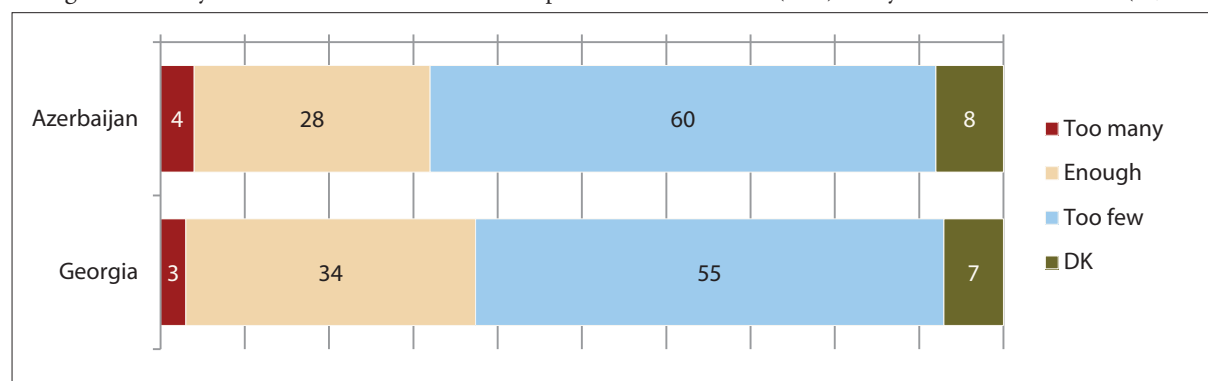
Figure 1: Would You Vote for a Women Candidate in Presidential Elections? (% , 2011)



Source: *Caucasus Barometer 2011*

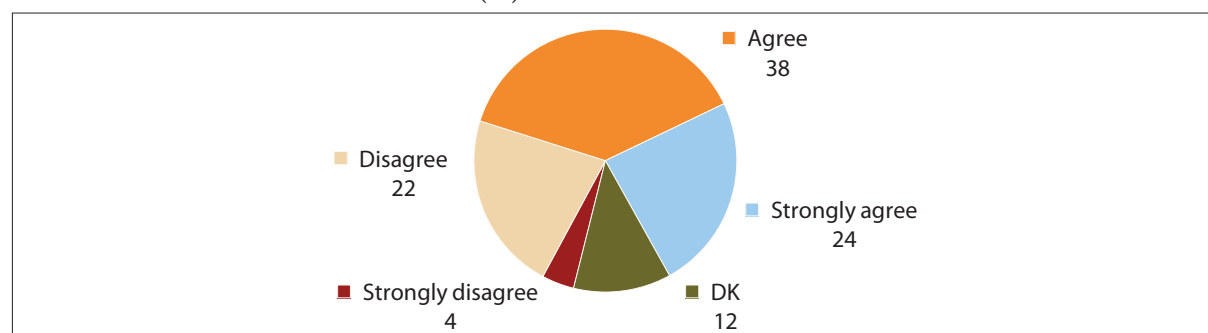
Figure 2: Number of Women in Parliament

Azerbaijan: Currently there are 19 women members of parliament out of 125 (15%). Do you think there are ... (% , 2012)
 Georgia: Currently there are 17 female members of parliament out of 150 (11%). Do you think there are ... (% , 2014)



Sources: Azerbaijan: *Social Capital, Media and Gender Survey in Azerbaijan, 2012*; Georgia: Source: *NDI/CRRC. Results of public opinion poll on women's political*

Figure 3: Azerbaijan: On the Whole, Do You Agree or Disagree That Men Make Better Political Leaders Than Women do? (%)



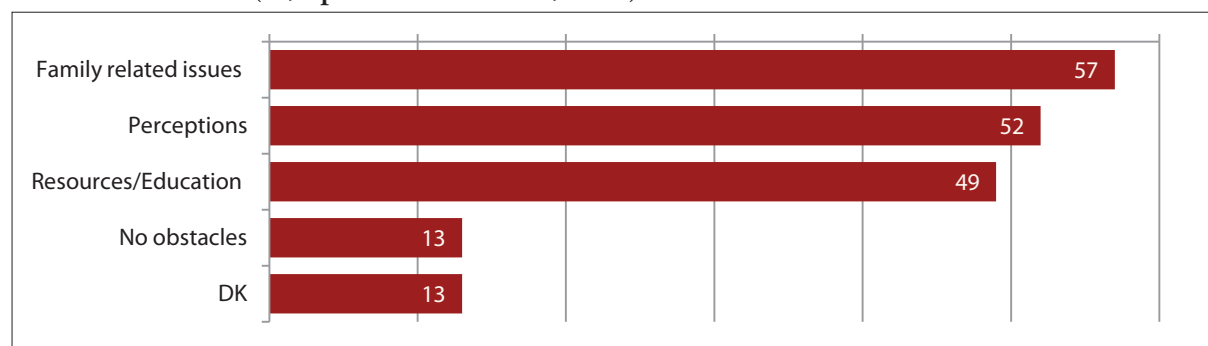
Source: *Social Capital, Media and Gender Survey in Azerbaijan, 2012*

Table 1: Georgia: Who will do a Better Job in the Following Positions? (% , 2014)

	Man	Woman	Both equally
President	53	5	40
Prime Minister	47	4	47
Minister	41	6	51
Deputy Minister	24	15	58
Speaker of the Parliament	38	5	55
Member of parliament	18	5	74
Political party leader	38	3	56
Mayor	50	5	43
Chair of local self-government council	37	5	55
Judge	26	16	56
Prosecutor	41	9	47
Company director	35	7	56

Note: Answers “do not know” and “neither” have not been included. They amount to no more than 3% in all cases.

Source: NDI/CRRC. Results of public opinion poll on women's political participation in Georgia (October 2014)

Figure 4: Georgia: In Your Opinion, What Are the Biggest Obstacles for Women to Engage in Politics? (% , up to three answers, 2014)

Source: NDI/CRRC. Results of public opinion poll on women's political participation in Georgia (October 2014)

Table 2: Georgia: To What Extent Do You Support or Oppose the Following Steps? (2014)

	Strongly support	Somewhat support	Somewhat oppose	Strongly oppose	DK
Political parties giving equal opportunities to men and women within the party structure	70	17	4	1	7
Parliament adopting a mandatory quota to increase women's representation	43	25	10	4	17
Parliament adopting a voluntary quota to increase women's representation	41	28	9	3	19

Source: NDI/CRRC. Results of public opinion poll on women's political participation in Georgia (October 2014)

CHRONICLE

26 February – 28 March 2015

26 February 2015	Georgian Prime Minister's special representative for relations with Russia, Zurab Abashidze, and Russian deputy foreign minister, Grigory Karasin, meet in Prague to discuss humanitarian and trade issues as part of bilateral talks between the two countries launched in 2012
26 February 2015	Former Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili blames the Central Bank over the depreciation of the national currency lari
27 February 2015	Romanian Prime Minister Victor Ponta tells his Georgian counterpart Irakli Garibashvili at a meeting in Bucharest that Romania is a strong supporter of Georgia's EU and NATO integration
2 March 2015	Georgian Foreign Minister Tamar Beruchashvili calls on Russia "to stop its aggressive policies against sovereign states" at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva
4 March 2015	Former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and adviser to Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko calls on the United States to provide Ukraine with weapons at a US Senate foreign relations committee hearing
5 March 2015	Founder of the opposition Prosperous Armenia Party (BHK) Gagik Tsarukian announces his decision to leave his post and quit "active politics" at the party's congress
5 March 2015	Top officials in Tbilisi's mayoral office resign amid a corruption scandal
6 March 2015	Georgian parliamentary chairman David Usupashvili says that Georgian-Russian relations are changing from "bad" to worse because of the situation in Ukraine
6 March 2015	Georgian energy minister Kakha Kaladze meets with Abkhaz officials to discuss rehabilitation works of the Enguri hydro power plant
7 March 2015	A court in Baku extends the pre-trial detention of Azerbaijani journalist Khadija Ismayilova by two months
10 March 2015	Georgian Economy Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili and Chinese Commerce Minister Gao Hucheng agree to launch a study on a possible bilateral free trade agreement between the two countries
10 March 2015	President Giorgi Margvelashvili convenes a special parliamentary session to discuss the stabilization of the national currency lari
10 March 2015	Opposition leader Nino Burjanadze accuses the United States of "insulting Georgia's sovereignty" for inviting former president Mikheil Saakashvili, who is wanted by Tbilisi, to testify before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee
11 March 2015	Azerbaijani security authorities arrest four men alleged to recruit Azerbaijani nationals to fight in Syria
11 March 2015	Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov says that Russia is ready for talks on the restoration of a Russian-Georgian railway link via Abkhazia, but Tbilisi and Sukhumi need to agree on the terms
11 March 2015	Inmates of a prison in West Georgia are reportedly on hunger strike to protest the postponement of their trials
12 March 2015	The Kremlin says that Russian President Vladimir Putin has talked with his Armenian counterpart, Serzh Sarkisian, on the phone to discuss Armenia's integration within the Eurasian Economic Union (EES)
14 March 2015	Armenian President Serzh Sarkisian says that he supports constitutional reforms to switch to a parliamentary system in Armenia
15 March 2015	Hundreds of people take part in a protest in Baku to express concern over the devaluation of the manat, the Azerbaijani currency
16 March 2015	Former Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili launches a TV talk show to counter TV channel Rustavi 2 which he accuses of serving the opposition
16 March 2015	President Giorgi Margvelashvili says that he supports introducing mandatory quotas to increase the number of women in Parliament in forthcoming elections
17 March 2015	Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and Georgian President Giorgi Margvelashvili attend a ceremony to mark the launch of the construction of the Trans-Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) in Kars, Turkey
17 March 2015	A NATO survey team visits Georgia to develop proposals over a planned joint evaluation and training center

18 March 2015	Russian President Vladimir Putin and de facto leader of South Ossetia, Leonid Tibilov, sign an “alliance and integration treaty” in the Kremlin which gives Russia the responsibility to ensure the security of the breakaway region
19 March 2015	The US State Department welcomes a decision by the Azerbaijani authorities to release activists from jail, but says that many others still remain in prison
19 March 2015	De facto leader of South Ossetia, Leonid Tibilov, says that the region wants to join Russia, but will not take this step in the near future as there are “many concerns” about this idea
21 March 2015	Tens of thousands of people demand that the government step down during a march in Tbilisi
23 March 2015	The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry says that a contract soldier with the Nagorno Karabakh forces has defected to the Azerbaijani side
23 March 2015	Opposition leader Irakli Alasania says that his Free Democrats party will not back the United National Movement party in a no-confidence vote against the government
26 March 2015	Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili criticizes media outlets and journalists for misrepresenting the situation in Georgia as “chaos”
28 March 2015	Deputy head of the Russian Duma's Committee for CIS Affairs, Oleg Lebedev, meets with Armenian lawmakers in Yerevan and says that a Russian soldier, who is accused of killing seven members of an Armenian family, will be tried by a Russian military court in Armenia

Compiled by Lili Di Pippo

For the full chronicle since 2009 see <www.laender-analysen.de/cad>

ABOUT THE CAUCASUS ANALYTICAL DIGEST

Editors: Denis Dafflon, Lili Di Puppo, Iris Kempe, Natia Mestvirishvili, Matthias Neumann, Robert Orttung, Jeronim Perović, Heiko Pleines

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