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# GREAT EXPECTATIONS: GENDER AND POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN GEORGIA

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### Abstract

Gender equality is one of the main priorities of any democratic society. The developed world has long agreed that the participation of women in politics is a key condition for democratic development of the country. No country can ensure fair and equal-opportunity policy without the participation of women. It will take decades for women to naturally secure equal political participation. Therefore, in order to speed progress and to address inequalities, in 2020, after much resistance and disagreements, the statutory gender quota was adopted by the Georgian Parliament.

The purpose of this study is to examine the current situation regarding women's participation in Georgian political life, to identify factors that have led to the implementation of the statutory gender quota, to assess the efficiency of the state policies to increase women's representation in political institutions and also to assess how incentive mechanisms devised in previous years have increased women's representation in Georgian political life. The aim of the paper is to identify the main reasons that hinder women's political involvement in Georgia. In the long term, it is necessary to maintain and increase the current gender quota to ensure equal representation.

### Key words

women's political participation in Georgia, women's participation in politics, women in Georgian Parliament, women MPs, gender quota.

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## 1. Introduction

Gender equality is closely linked to sustainable development and is a prerequisite for realization of all human rights. Gender equality in political participation remains one of the essential components of gender equality. The active participation of women

in politics at all levels of decision-making and integration of their experience into the political process contributes to equality, peace and sustainable development, which can be considered a support of democracy. Achieving gender equality in the political sphere is one of the central issues of gender equality. The low involvement of women in political

life is equally characteristic of both experienced and new democracies.

Although women represent 53 per cent of the population in Georgia (National Statistics Office of Georgia, 2020), their low representation in decision-making remains a problem for the country. In the early 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union when Georgia declared independence, the absence of women in Georgian politics was not remarkable for a country in post-Soviet transition. At the time, “women’s issues” were not high on the political agenda of the State, since the prime objective of the Georgian Government was to achieve national independence.

Over time, the issue of women’s empowerment and political representation gradually became a part of the political agenda. Despite the implementation of various support measures at the state level, including the implementation of the mandatory gender quota, women today still have not attained a so-called “critical mass”, needed to affect the political agenda. The low representation of women is particularly evident in local government. Consequently, identifying the root cause of the underrepresentation of women in politics is crucial for developing effective policies, aimed at eliminating gender inequality.

We are interested in studying women’s political participation in Georgia and seek to identify the effectiveness and efficiency of a new electoral system and a binding mechanism for increasing women’s representation – the so-called “gender quota” as a measure to increase women’s political representation. We also seek to analyse when and how the gender quota was adopted and whether this gives us reason for optimism about the increasing numbers of women actively involved in politics. One of the main objectives of our article is to identify the factors hindering the participation of women in politics and to devise effective political mechanisms to rectify gender disparities based on an understanding of the root causes of women’s underrepresentation in politics.

The article is based on the qualitative content analysis method, which allowed us to examine and analyse both international and Georgian legislation (including policy documents, such as the Elections Code of Georgia, the Political Associations Act, lists of political parties, electoral programmes, etc.), as well as studies conducted by international organizations in Georgia. Four semi-structured interviews with gender researchers were conducted during the study.

The study’s theoretical framework is based on the Drude Dahlerup’s “Critical Mass” theory (Dahlerup,

1988), according to which certain measures must be taken to provide effective participation of women and to mainstream women’s issues and views into the political arena. To promote women’s political participation in future, quantitative representation of women needed to reach a “critical mass”, is generally considered to be about 30 per cent.

Inequality between men and women in the public sector remains a major challenge not only in developing but in developed democracies as well. Despite the fact that in transitional countries, including Georgia, gender balance was declared a State policy priority, political parties sometimes contribute to gender stereotyping and to maintaining the status quo. Although a gender quota system was introduced in many countries of the world, including Georgia, women continue to be largely under-represented in decision-making positions as they have a long way to go to reach the critical mass in decision-making bodies.

## 2. Arguments in favour of women’s participation in politics

Feminist researchers have studied the growing theories of political representation and believe that the issue of women’s representation has not been systematically discussed in the current literature on mainstream politics (Carroll, 1984). Therefore, they discovered some weaknesses and shortcomings in established concepts of political representation.

Today’s feminist researchers have provided a number of interesting arguments, supporting the necessity of involving more women in politics (IPU Parline, 2021). The first and most important argument – is an argument of justice. If a system allows and encourages participatory democracy in the country, then naturally this system must represent the interests of the people and meet the population’s needs. This requires, first and foremost, the participation of women in decision-making. The symbolic representation is also an essential component of confidence building, necessary for successful relationships between the authorities and the citizens.

The notion that greater participation of women in politics will change the political sphere is rather controversial. However, empirical studies show that in countries where the degree of women’s political involvement is significantly higher, there is a change in the policy style, a discourse which is related to the factor of high participation of women (Durest-Lahti, Kelly, 1995). The more closely the government represents the whole society, the more stable public policy is. This means that it is important not only to

integrate women into politics but to ensure their effective representation as well. Anne Phillips calls the argument for the need for women's representation "transformative argument", because she believes that increasing women's representation changes and transforms politics (Phillips, 1995). She claims that women politicians behave more democratically and pay more attention to political equality and justice than men, and they always know how government policies affect female citizens.

This is also supported by the fact that mixed-gender Government and Parliament are able to address more problems, which, of course, are not exclusively women's. Certainly, women politicians do not only work on issues that are important to women, and male politicians do not always exclude these issues, but studies have shown that female non-feminists are more focused on developing policies that affect women than male non-feminists (Carroll, 1984). Of course, women's political participation and their leadership role is not the only essential factor for peace and prosperity in general, but their participation, undoubtedly, is a critical factor.

### 3. Historical overview of women's political activity

If we assess the status of women's rights since the Middle Ages, we will see that Georgia has been ahead of many European countries in this regard. Shota Rustaveli's 12th-century poem "The Knight in the Panther's Skin", which is considered to be the apex of Georgian literature, brought the idea of equality of women and men to the forefront (Rustaveli, 1966). Undoubtedly, it is worth mentioning that Queen Tamar, crowned in the 13th century, was the first reigning queen in Europe. An important indicator of women's legal status is that according to Georgian historical and legal sources of the 17th century, the law granted women the right to divorce on the grounds of incompatibility of character, infidelity, male impotence, etc., while in some European countries divorce was prohibited (Metreveli, 2003). Nonetheless, women in Georgia did not actively participate in public and political life. This was mostly the prerogative of women of the upper class, while ordinary women were traditionally relegated to the roles of housekeeping, raising children, etc.

The participation of women in public life increased during the 19th century, when women started to engage in public debates on a variety of issues affecting them. The women's movement which began in Europe in the late 19th century resonated with women in Georgia as well. Feminist ideas of

that period were mostly available to well-educated Georgian women in Western Europe who have returned to their homeland and considered emancipation and empowerment of Georgian women the main purpose of their struggle. Since the beginning of the 20th century, women's activity significantly increased. Initially, the women's movement focused on securing rights to education and property, but later it shifted the focus to securing political rights.

In the first Democratic Republic of Georgia (1918–1921), women had the right to vote in elections as well as to run for office. During the parliamentary elections in 1919, women actually used their right to vote and among the 130 elected members of the legislative assembly, five were women. Although the number of elected women remained low, at that time such a situation was quite progressive (IPU Parline, 2021).

In 1921, Soviet Russia invaded Georgia and annexed Georgian territories through violence. After that, the issue of gender equality, called "the disease, imported from the West" by the Soviet government, was completely taken off the political agenda (Buckley, 1985).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the restoration of the state independence of the Georgian Republic, the issue of gender equality gradually became a part of political agenda. Lika Nadaraya, one of the leaders of the first generation of Georgian feminists, considers steps, taken in the post-Soviet period to promote gender equality to be an "awakening of feminism". "At that time the main task of recently created women's movement was to overcome the denial of the existence of discrimination and to expose the unequal status of women in society" – said a first-generation Georgian feminist (Interview with Lika Nadaraya, July 20, 2020).

In the early 1990s, the lack of women in Georgian politics was a common occurrence, as the country was "just beginning to rise" and "nobody had time" for women's issues. Over time, despite a variety of supportive measures, until 2020 positive change was still not possible. During the 2012–2016 term of the Georgian Parliament, the number of seats held by women was 18 out of 150 (12%), while in the 2016–2020 parliament, the number of women holding seats rose to 24 (16%). Today, after the introduction of a legal gender quota in 2020, 25 per cent of parliamentarians are women (Darbaidze, 2018). The problem of women's representation in the regions and self-governing units (for example, in urban councils) is particularly acute.

Today, according the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Index, Georgia is placed 95 for women's political participation of the 153 countries

surveyed (WEF, 2020). Although this figure is slightly higher than the average for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, it still lags far behind the world average (0.154). Georgia has the lowest percentage of women in parliament among the countries of the South Caucasus (Georgia – 14.2%, Armenia – 23.5%, Azerbaijan – 17.4%) (IPU Parline, 2021).

## 4. Factors impeding women's political participation

### 4.1. Gender roles and stereotypes

Research on women's participation in politics usually exposes longer-term and interrelated factors impeding women's political participation. The Electoral Knowledge Network divides the factors into four categories (Electoral Knowledge Network, 2020). The first category focuses on obstacles which women are facing as candidates, members of political parties and activists. The second category includes obstacles faced by women as voters. The third category presents obstacles faced by women working in elected administration. The fourth category includes obstacles faced by women representing the civil society (for example, electoral observers, mediators, human rights and civil society activists).

Our study identified three major barriers that women face in terms of involvement in politics: structural, institutional and cultural obstacles (Electoral Knowledge Network, 2020). Structural barriers are usually described by the level of socio-economic development of the society itself and the share of women involved in professional life. It is a well-known fact that there is a direct link between the social and economic status of women in the society and their participation in the political institutions and in the elected offices. Women continue to have a disproportionate responsibility for unpaid work in the household that makes a concurrent political career practically impossible.

This division of obstacles highlights major problems that we encounter over and over in more than one category. In Georgia, these problems are the traditional gender roles, gender stereotypes, discriminatory treatment and norms, lack of political experience, lack of information and education, lesser access to financial resources, pressure on political parties and organization, unfavourable electoral system.

It is important to identify and discuss obstacles to women's participation in political life in Georgia. Global Gender Gaps in political participation rates in Georgia can be explained by differing interests and a desire to participate in politics. A number of factors

may be responsible for the low level of women's political participation in Georgia: women's attitudes towards election campaigns and political environment, family traditions, the perception of gender roles in Georgian society. According to a survey conducted by the United Nations Development Program in Georgia, the majority of women consider politics to be a "dirty" business (UNDP and UNFPA Georgia, 2020). Women are also concerned that an electoral campaign will negatively affect their children and families. According to the traditional distribution of family duties, the heavy burden of family responsibilities mainly falls on women, and this prevents them from participating equally in political life.

In Georgia, women have a disproportionate responsibility for unpaid work in the household compared to men, while women working full time are doubly burdened by family duties and work responsibilities. According to one recent poll, conducted by the United Nations Population Fund in Georgia, 80% of the respondents consider such domestic activities as cleaning, cooking and laundry to be women's responsibility (UNFPA Division..., 2020). 49% of the respondents said that caring for a child in the family is a woman's responsibility, while 43% said that these activities should be distributed in the family between women and men.

Public expectations of political candidates are less compatible with their gender expectations. This is especially true for Georgia, where traditional attitudes concerning the role of women significantly differ from public attitudes towards how leaders are supposed to behave. This attitude has changed overtime. According to a survey conducted in 2020 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP and UNFPA Georgia, 2020), 60% of the respondents supported women's participation in politics. This figure was 10% higher than the one recorded in 2013 (50%). The driver for change is a change of public attitudes towards the participation of women in politics, especially among Georgian women. In 2020, 72% of women believed that the mainstreaming of women in politics would be beneficial to the country, compared with 56% in 2013 (UNDP and UNFPA Georgia, 2020). In the case of men, the percentage distribution of respondents remained largely unchanged (45% in 2020 and 43% in 2013). At the same time, 37% of female respondents and 62% of male respondents agreed with the statement that men make better political leaders than women, while in 2013 the figures were 56% and 69%, respectively. Moreover, by 2020, 42% of women and 63% of men considered politics to be a man's business. In 2013, such a view was shared by 56% of women and 77% of men. This change shows that over the past

seven years the perceptions and attitudes of Georgians towards the social integration of women has considerably improved.

These data show that in Georgia the problem of public attitude and public behaviour towards the idea of having female leaders is far more acute than in developed democracies. The studies show that a stereotypical view of women as weak and having difficulty in making decisions is deeply ingrained in the society. The focus group on women's weaknesses mentioned women's sensitivity and simplicity (UNDP, 2020). These qualities are related to humanity, warmth and nurturing; therefore, the participants considered these qualities to be positive characteristics of female nature as well as an integral part of it. However, in their opinion, such qualities are unfit for political space, as it is considered that politicians should be less emotional and more resistant.

The contemporary Georgian political culture is characterized by traditional attitudes towards women's leadership capacity. These attitudes towards gender equality are crucial for analysing elected women officials. According to tradition, the role of a mother and a housekeeper remains a priority for women. Patriarchal values maintain the gender-based segregation. Women's responsibilities as mothers and wives along with household and family care work make it difficult for them to participate in public life. Apparently, overcoming these obstacles will lead to significant changes in regards to women's participation in political life.

#### **4.2. The impact of the electoral system on the political representation of women in elected bodies**

A change in the electoral system is an important incentive for the mainstreaming of women in politics (Norris, 2000). Traditionally, more women are elected by proportional representation rather than by majoritarian representation at both the national and local levels. The proportional representation system allows voters to vote for parties or, in some cases, for individual candidates. The seats are distributed in proportion to the votes. Such a system encourages parties to improve their attractiveness by including women candidates in the lists.

One of the main institutional obstacles to women's participation in politics is the electoral system. Experience shows that in electoral systems of proportional representation, i.e. when candidates are elected by party-list, women's chances to enter Parliament are far better than in majoritarian electoral systems (Norris, 2000). This issue is very much bound up with anti-women attitudes in politics. In majoritarian electoral systems the party would nominate

one candidate per district. In gender-segregated societies, to which Georgia also belongs, as indicated by the UNECE survey 2013, voters will more likely choose male candidates. If parties lack the political will to involve women in politics, majoritarian electoral systems make it possible to manipulate them. There are some connections between the electoral system and women's representation in elected bodies (Norris, 2000). On average, women occupy 20% of all seats in elected bodies by proportional representation in comparison with 9% of seats by majoritarian representation.

In Georgia there is a clear systemic relationship between the current electoral system and women's representation. It has been proven that in representative bodies larger numbers of women are elected by proportional representation than by majoritarian representation. In local governments the situation is worse (Norris, 2000). The Georgian local government elections held in 2017 confirmed that majoritarian elections had not contributed to increasing women's participation, since the number of women elected by majoritarian representation (8%) was significantly lower than of those elected by proportional representation (19.59%). Today, in 20 out of 60 municipalities in Georgia, the number of women elected by majoritarian representation is equal to zero. However, the local elections also showed that it is a lack of women-candidates rather than a lack of electoral support that is the central issue. If parties nominate women candidates, voters support them. For example, a woman was elected a mayor in self-governing unit Ninotsminda (Georgian..., 2017).

Electoral reform in Georgia and transition to a fully proportional electoral system from 2024 will be a positive way forward in increasing women's political representation. However, one female candidate of the parliamentary political party "Girchi – More Freedom" has already set a precedent by resigning from Parliament in favour of a male candidate. A few months ago, the fourth candidate on the list, Salome Mujiri, a woman MP, should resign from the parliamentary mandate. This indicates a lack of political will to eliminate gender disparities in Georgian political parties.

#### **5. The importance and necessity of a critical mass of women**

The introduction of gender quotas is a common and widespread practice aimed at helping women enter the political arena. The Platform for Action, adopted by the UN World Conference in 1995 in Beijing, articulated the foundation of its legitimacy. The

Beijing Platform for Action examined discriminatory attitudes and practices and unequal power relations between women and men within the family, which, in turn, results in a low level of representation of women at all levels of policymaking (United Nations, 1995). Whereas previously lack of resources and lack of women's interest in a political career were at the centre of discourse, after the adoption of the Beijing Platform for Action, emphasis has shifted to institutional and cultural problems leading to the exclusion of women from political space. Women's political participation involves attaining a "critical mass" of women in the highest legislative and executive bodies. The 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action along with the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women considers presence of 30–35% of women in Parliament to be a necessary condition, and the Council of Ministers of the Council of Europe recommends that women participate in political life and decision-making. It is noted that the representation of women in policy-making positions should not be less than 40% (Directorate..., 2003). In addition, the emphasis has shifted from individual women to institutions, designed to identify and address any barriers that prevents women's participation in political life. It should be noted that the objective to achieve "a large number of women in politics" changed to "gender parity" and "equal distribution of power at all levels of decision-making". The Beijing Platform for Action stresses the importance of establishing a critical mass (20–30%) of women in elected bodies, with the final objective to achieve full gender equality (Celis et al., 2008). While the Beijing Platform for Action does not contain controversial term "quota", this document calls on governments to take effective steps to achieve specific goals, through affirmative action in electoral systems, if necessary, and by encouraging political parties to include women as much as men. While the Platform's recommendations are articulated with great caution, the Beijing Platform aims to achieve gender equality in political sphere and encourages governments to make institutional changes that will ensure equal political representation of women and men.

Gender quotas are a quick way to achieve quantitative gender equality in representative bodies. The experience of Scandinavian countries is often cited as an argument by the supporters of gender quotas. It is worth noting, however, that the introduction of gender quotas in Scandinavia was preceded by a policy for women's empowerment and an introduction of voluntary quotas by political parties, which allowed women to make up 20–30 per cent of the representatives in the legislature even

before the introduction of gender quotas. Consequently, the experience of Scandinavian countries is a step-by-step process rather than an example of fast achievement of equal representation (Dahlerup, 1988). Therefore, the Scandinavian example is not of much relevance to assess the challenges which can be faced when introducing gender quotas in an expeditious manner.

## 6. Mechanisms to increase women's representation

Thanks to considerable efforts by various international and local non-governmental organizations, in 2011 an amendment was made to the Law of Georgia "On Political Unions of Citizens", according to which electoral stakeholders receive a supplement of 10 per cent, if in their party lists at least 20 per cent of candidates out of every 10 candidates are women (Darbaidze, 2018). Later, this section was amended to stipulate that while complying with this requirement, electoral stakeholders will receive 30% of supplementary payments. The Act entered into force right after the proclamation of the final results of the local elections in 2014. Nevertheless, this mechanism had not worked, and smaller parties which were not elected to parliament took advantage of the opportunity and received additional funding. Seven electoral stakeholders, registered to participate in the parliamentary elections of 2016, claimed a 30 per cent gender disparity, whereas only 4 of them passed the electoral thresholds. The ruling political party "Georgian Dream" and the main opposition party "United National Movement" failed to comply with the requirements of the amendment. This prompts the conclusion that this amendment did not work for Georgian political parties, and therefore the necessity of introducing gender quotas remained at the forefront of the political agenda (Election Administration of Georgia, 2016). The discussion on quotas in the Parliament of Georgia started in 2003 when only 67 deputies took part in the voting procedure and, as a consequence, the initiative failed. However, the importance of the problem is underscored by the fact that in 2015 two initiatives on gender quotas were introduced to the Georgian Parliament.

Nana Keenishvili, member of the ruling party "Georgian Dream", was one of the initiators of the draft, but her legislative initiative was immediately rejected by the public and, therefore, was not discussed at the parliamentary level. As for the second initiative, the sponsor of the bill was a local women's non-governmental organization that had

participated in the work group Task Force on women's political participation. The above legislative initiative envisaged 50% quota in the proportional representation system, i.e. a maximum of 38 women out of total 150 MPs in Georgian parliament, which equalled to a total of 25% of the MPs. Unfortunately, this legislative initiative failed, but despite the negative attitude of members of the legislative body towards the gender quota, in September 2017, the Task Force elaborated the legislative proposal on women's political participation, a coalition of local and international organizations that advocate for gender equality and women's political participation submitted to the Parliament with 37 000 signatures, envisaged the introduction of the so called "zipper" system, where male and female candidates would appear alternately on party lists of candidates for the parliamentary and municipal elections (Kani..., 1997). The bill provided some amendments to the Electoral Code of Georgia and the Political Associations Act. Parties and voting blocs were required to draw up electoral lists in accordance with the principle of gender equality. If an elected member resigned from the post for any reason, a vacant seat would be filled by the next candidate of the same gender. Unfortunately, this legislative initiative, submitted for the third time, failed in the Georgian Parliament.

The 4th and 5th periodic reports of the recommendations of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women prepared for Georgia states that the State should adopt measures to achieve a substantive gender equality, including gender quotas. This obligation also stems from Article 349 of the Association Agreement, to which Georgia acceded in 2014 (Committee..., 2014).

It is doubtless that the incentive norm developed for the parties during the recent years in order to encourage them to increase women representation in their party lists in return for the financial bonus did not work in Georgia and eventually, the Georgian government, fulfilling their international commitments, was obliged to vote in favour of a bill on gender quota. In July 2020, according to a set of amendments to the Elections Code of Georgia, Georgian Parliament adopted a mandatory gender quota, aimed at achieving a gradual increase in the number of women in Parliament. This amendment required political entities to nominate at least one of four candidates to the Central Electoral Commission at the 2028 parliamentary election. The said rule will apply to the parliamentary polls through October 2024 elections and following snap polls until October 2028 elections. Starting from October 2028 polls until October 2032 elections, however, the party lists

should include at least every third person of a different gender (Election Administration of Georgia, 2020).

The last parliamentary election in Georgia was held on 31 October 2020, and a second round of voting took place on 21 November 2020. The introduction of the gender quota on candidate lists was one of the most important changes during the elections, requiring at least each fourth candidate on party lists to be a woman. This requirement did not apply to candidates in single-mandate majority electorates (30 majority seats out of 150). There were 44.3% (3,049) of women out of 6,882 candidates in the proportional party lists and only 21.75% (107 out of 492 candidates) of women among candidates elected by the majority vote (Election Administration of Georgia, 2020). The total number of 30 women (20%) parliamentarians, while higher than in previous elections (16% without gender quota), still falls short of the mandated target of 25 per cent.

It should be noted that 29 women parliamentarians were elected by the proportional representation and one – by the majoritarian representation. The election results show that in almost all leading parties the number of women in the party lists exactly complied with minimum gender quota. 44.3% of the candidates on the party lists were women, while women's representation in the parliament was 24.2%. This testifies to the fact that women candidates are related to lower ranks on the parties' lists (where chances of being elected into parliament are lower). This shows once again that men continue to dominate Georgian politics.

Statistics on political representation of women show that Georgia is at a disadvantage in comparison not only to developed countries but to other developing democracies as well. Despite the introduction of gender quota, the level of women's political representation in Georgia is still lower than the world average. It should also be noted that the 25 per cent target for women on the party lists, which was reached as a result of the quota, still does not meet the standard established by the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action (30%). Although this time Georgian parties were able to comply with gender quota, it is possible that this legal regulation will be called into question in future, because political parties (such as "Girchi – More Freedom", "Georgian Labour Party", "European Georgia" and "Alliance of Patriots of Georgia"), represented currently in the Georgian Parliament, are strongly against the introduction of gender quotas. Also of note is that the political party "Girchi – More Freedom" challenged the measure in Georgia's Constitutional Court, but the court rejected the claim (Gadatskvetileba, 2020). On 11 August

2021, the parliamentary party “European Georgia” appealed the decision by Georgia’s Constitutional Court and although the Court affirmed the binding nature of gender quota, “European Georgia” still considers gender quotas discriminatory and claims that it may place women in an unequal position in the upcoming election (Evropuli..., 2021).

Georgian experts have acknowledged that the formation of political parties in Georgia, their stage of development and inner-party policies are today one of the main obstacles to the participation of women in Georgian political life. The coordinator of a gender equality network in Georgia believes that “Not one of, but the biggest obstacle is the political parties themselves” (Interview with the coordinator of a gender equality network, August 10, 2020). She believes that today no political party in Georgia has a proper political agenda and has not established its own ideology. An underdeveloped political party is the biggest problem for women’s political participation, as it is the party that is the most important mechanism that facilitates women’s involvement in politics. Men are still dominant in the political arena; therefore, gender stereotypes in society, traditional gender roles, double burden of women along with male-dominated composition of the executive bodies are major obstacles to women’s political participation.

## 7. Conclusion

Overcoming structural, institutional and cultural barriers to women’s participation in political life will bring about significant changes. As regards public policies and mechanisms for gender equality, these, while still important, are limited to certain measures and thus remain perfunctory and do not have such a practical impact as a coherent and long-term strategy could have.

The introduction of a gender quota system in 2020 slightly increased the percentage of women in the Parliament, but still this mechanism has not yet produced the desired results. Members of a working group Task Force, who initiated the introduction of the gender quota, believe that without it women would not be able to enter the Georgian Parliament in such numbers. But in the long term, restrictive gender quota should be maintained and most importantly, increased to address the problem. Furthermore, the authorities and other public and private bodies are encouraged to contribute to the participation of women in the labour market and to women’s economic empowerment, which, in turn,

will help to overcome cultural stereotypes in the society.

This study revealed a number of issues which need to be resolved to draw the right lessons. First of all, the importance of a critical mass of women in the legislative branch needs to be stressed. It became clearer that to reach a critical mass of women and to ensure the effective representation of women, it is necessary to significantly increase the number of women in electoral institutions to allow them to lobby for the interests of women and to resolve women’s issues. This problem can be solved, more or less, by applying a gender quota mechanism. Developments have proved that both the ruling and the opposition party lack the political will to empower women and promote their voice in the government. This is confirmed by the fact that the Georgian Parliament rejected the gender quota initiative for the third time, despite the fact that NGOs were able to gather sufficient number of signatures twice. In the end, the adoption of the gender quota was largely related to the obligations assumed by Georgia under the Association Agreement with the European Union and to pressure from international organizations.

Introduction of a gender quota in Georgia and, in particular, its incremental nature is a positive development. The example of developed democracies, however, proves that the use of gender quotas in political parties is equally important for quotas legitimacy. Political parties, therefore, should recognize the necessity of women’s participation in politics and establish their own voluntary quotas, benefit from the stimulating norms offered by the state, make inter-party politics and the process of developing the lists more transparent, open and democratic, adequately access the work of women members of political parties and contribute to the development of their professional skills.

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