Peculiarities of Women's Political Careers in Armenia

Analytical Report on the Research Findings

November 2025

Acknowledgements

Content

Abbreviations

CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CoE	Council of Europe
CRRC	Caucasus Research Resource Centre Armenia
EPD	European Partnership for Democracy
IRI	International Republican Institute
IPU	Interparliamentary Union
NDI	National Democratic Institute
ODIHR	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OxYGen	OxYGen Foundation for the Protection of Youth and Women's Rights
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WFD	Westminster Foundation for Democracy
NA	National Assembly
RA	Republic of Armenia
CSO/NGO	Civil Society Organisation / Non-Governmental Organisation

Executive Summary

Relevance of the topic and the state of women's political participation in Armenia

In recent years, Armenia has made significant progress in the field of gender equality, especially in terms of legislative reforms and implementation of international obligations. Armenia has signed a number of international documents and joint processes related to gender equality, which have served as a basis for the development of the national legislation and gender policy strategy. The "Strategy and Action Plan for the Implementation of the Gender Policy of the Republic of Armenia for 2025–2028,"[1] adopted in 2025, defines six priorities aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for women and men. The first priority focuses on overcoming gender-based discrimination in the governance system and promoting the advancement of women.

Women's political participation rates in Armenia have increased significantly in recent years, particularly as a result of the 38.3 per cent representation of women in the National Assembly,[2] which is due to the introduction of a gender quota and a simple proportional electoral system. However, numerical progress has not yet led to full involvement of women in leadership and decision-making: women are not represented in the positions of Vice-Presidents of the National Assembly, do not lead any of the factions, and head only two of the 12 standing committees (16.8 per cent).[3] This disproportion indicates a lack of opportunities for advancement within parties and confirms the observations of international studies that quotas are not sufficient to ensure full gender equality.

The limitations on women's advancement within political parties, their low representation in the leadership of the parliament, as well as their continued underrepresentation in decision-making positions within the executive and judicial branches, are evidence of systemic obstacles. Although some progress has been achieved in the appointment of women to ministerial positions, and from December 2024, four out of 12 ministers in the Armenian Government are women (33 per cent),[4] women have never held the highest positions in the country, and their presence at regional and local self-government bodies remains low. Women are not represented in the positions of regional governors and lead only four or 5.6 per cent of 71 communities in Armenia.[5] The introduction of gender quotas in the local self-government system in 2020 contributed to an increase in the number of women in Councils of Elders, reaching 29 per cent by 2025;[6] however, the effectiveness of the quota has been limited by cases of withdrawals and refusals to accept mandates, which are addressed by recent amendments to the Electoral Code of the RA.[7]

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1 Strategy and Action Plan for the Implementation of the Gender Policy of the Republic of Armenia for 2025–2028 https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/206364

2 Official website of the National Assembly of the RA, as of August 1, 2025 http://parliament.am/

3 Official website of the National Assembly of the RA, as of August 1, 2025 http://parliament.am/

4 Official website of the Government of Republic of Armenia, as of August 1, 2025 https://www.gov.am/am/

5 Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of the RA, As of October 30, 2025 https://www.mtad.am/

6 Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of the RA https://www.mtad.am/

7 On making amendments and additions to the Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia (Article 76). Adopted on 05.12.2024 http://www.parliament.am/legislation.php?sel=show&ID=9566&lang=arm

Women's political progress depends not only on improvements to electoral systems but also on the adoption of gender-sensitive policies by political parties and a shift in public perceptions. Progress is often held back by institutional, cultural, and informal barriers. Political parties frequently lack the structures needed to support women's advancement, while existing networks of patronage often favour male candidates.

This situation underlines the need for an in-depth study of women's opportunities for political careers, taking into account their motivations for entering politics, their personal experiences, and the systemic barriers they encounter.

Research methodology

The **research aims** to explore how women involved in the National Assembly and in local self-government bodies perceive the factors that support or hinder their political advancement, as well as their views on future career prospects.

A **qualitative approach** was used, combining content analysis of academic literature and open sources with in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion with experts. Information was drawn from both national and international materials, including relevant legal documents, statistical data, analyses of party programmes, and content monitoring of media and social networks

The **main research tool** consisted of forty in-depth interviews: fifteen with women Members of Parliament and twenty-five with women active in local self-government. Participants were selected on the basis of several criteria, including party affiliation, age, leadership position, political experience, membership of a national minority, disability status and level of civic activism.

The **sample of MPs** included representatives of political forces present in the National Assembly, covering both government and opposition factions, as well as various standing committees. Twenty-seven per cent of participants were non-partisan. In terms of age, forty-seven per cent were under forty. The sample also included female heads of standing committees, as well as representatives of national minorities and women with disabilities.

The local self-government sample included twenty-five female members of the Council of Elders, selected according to regional distribution, party affiliation, age group and leadership position. Cooperation with civil society organisations was also considered. The sample involved women councillors and community leaders from fourteen communities in seven of Armenia's ten regions, as well as members of the Yerevan Council of Elders. It also included women serving as community heads, deputy heads and faction leaders. Of the twenty-five women, seventeen were members of political parties representing twelve political forces, while eight were non-partisan. In terms of age, fifty-two per cent were under forty-four, thirty-two per cent were between forty-five and fifty-nine, and sixteen per cent were over sixty.

An essential part of the methodology was the **focus group discussion with experts**, designed to validate the findings and assess their practical relevance. Ten specialists took part, including researchers and expert journalists, who reflected on the obstacles to women's political careers, public perceptions, expressions of solidarity and ways of promoting progress. The results of the focus group confirmed the study's relevance and its consistency with previous research and professional experience.

Research findings

1. Motivations for women's political careers

Within the scope of this study, the motivations expressed by the surveyed women are multi-layered, ranging from ideological and personal to professional and public. Their decisions to enter politics are shaped both by rational considerations, such as the wish to participate in decision-making, and by emotional motives, including patriotism, a sense of protest, or the desire to bring about change.

These motivations are closely linked to the pathways through which women enter politics. Common routes include transitions from civic activism, professional backgrounds such as teaching, journalism, healthcare, business and other sectors, the youth wings of political parties, and posts within local self-government. Women in local self-government structures often have extensive experience in education or community service, and their recognition within their communities plays an important role in their nomination, serving as a valuable resource for political parties. While most women active in local government describe their motivation as a form of service to the community, aimed at improving everyday life and addressing specific local issues, women serving in the National Assembly tend to frame their motivation in terms of improving the country's overall situation and advancing broader values.

Political engagement is frequently triggered by specific events, including the 2018 revolution, the 2020 war, the post-war crisis and displacement. The introduction of gender quotas and the shift to a proportional electoral system have also been important in increasing the number of women included on party lists.

Support from family members, political leaders or the wider environment, as well as family traditions of political involvement, has played a significant role in women's decisions to enter politics. In the case of some MPs, party leaders have actively encouraged the transition from local governance to the National Assembly, which has become a decisive factor in career advancement.

When asked about their ideological positions, many women do not rely on classical political terminology such as right-wing, left-wing, centrist, liberal or conservative. Instead, they tend to describe their views through their personal values, often highlighting democracy, patriotism, social justice and stability.

The concept of gender equality is largely absent from both party programmes and women's responses, apart from rare cases where it is associated with socialist or human rights-based values.

Although ideology is not always the main reason for joining a particular party, it frequently becomes the reason for leaving one or resigning from a mandate. In any case, the question of how political ideologies operate within the Armenian context requires further in-depth research.

2. Leadership skills, self-perception and strategy

The women surveyed emphasised a number of personal qualities and skills they view as essential for political advancement. These include determination and a sense of purpose, principled behaviour, honesty, a strong sense of responsibility, social awareness, patience and resilience, as well as organisational and communication skills. Although often labelled as "soft" skills, they are, in fact, fundamental to sustained and inclusive engagement in political life.

International and local studies show that women frequently outperform men in many areas of leadership, particularly in initiative, adaptability, honesty and communication. Their progress is therefore not usually limited by a lack of ability, but by a lack of opportunities.

The women surveyed tend to shape their political identity through cooperation and shared values rather than competition. They describe themselves as principled, team-oriented, strategic thinkers who are attentive to public concerns. According to their own accounts, their strategic approach is grounded in listening to the public, making evidence-based decisions, engaging communities and cultivating trust.

This aligns with findings from both local and international research, which suggest that women's leadership styles often differ from traditional hierarchical models, offering instead a more inclusive, value-driven and community-focused form of politics.

3. Perceptions of success in politics

The women surveyed do not equate political success solely with official promotion. For them, true success is achieved when a woman politician can influence the political agenda, uphold her principles, and effect meaningful change in society. A successful woman, in their view, is one who earns public trust, leads on the basis of values, and contributes to social reform—whether by addressing community issues, protecting women's rights, or enhancing the education system.

Education, professional experience, trusted networks, and mentorship are all seen as important enablers of success. However, the respondents emphasise that achievement is not purely the result of individual effort; it also depends on teamwork, mutual support, and solidarity among women.

Solidarity in politics is regarded as a strategic resource. Although often informal, there are numerous examples—particularly at the local self-government level—where women form supportive networks, share experiences, and initiate collective actions. Solidarity is valued not only as a political tool but also as a cultural principle that challenges competitive

and hierarchical models. Women make solidarity practical in different ways, including mentoring, legislative cooperation, and the creation of community networks.

The research also explored how women perceive exemplary female politicians and the role models they admire. Respondents cited not only internationally recognised figures but also colleagues and other public personalities, suggesting that role modelling is strongly shaped by personal experience, environment, and cultural context.

According to the respondents, exemplary women politicians act with honesty, consistency, and a firm commitment to the public good. They combine professional competence with dedication to society, navigating systemic obstacles while maintaining their principles. The notion of exemplary leadership is closely tied to women's understanding of political success, highlighting the importance of public influence, value-driven leadership, and active social engagement.

4. Factors facilitating and hindering women's political advancement

The study indicates that women in Armenia enter politics within a complex environment, where achieving success requires not only professional skills but also resilience in overcoming cultural stereotypes and biases, the double burden of family responsibilities, and systemic barriers.

According to respondents, factors that support women's advancement include education, professional development, supportive networks, media visibility, international programmes, civic engagement, and gender quotas. However, obstacles such as financial constraints, the closed nature of party systems, double workloads, and targeted harassment on social media continue to limit women's full participation and progress.

Women gain valuable political experience through addressing community issues, engaging with the public, and developing new skills. Yet they often have to prove their competence twice and face "double standards" and discriminatory attitudes rooted in stereotypes.

Gender stereotypes are viewed as structural barriers that affect women's confidence and political participation. Women are frequently targeted on the basis of their gender, appearance, or marital status. Surveyed female politicians' responses to stereotypes vary: some actively challenge them, others acknowledge their existence, while a few even reproduce public stereotypes. Women operate in an environment dominated by masculine norms, which restrict their opportunities for self-expression.

Family can function as both a source of support and a constraint. A supportive family fosters empowerment, while a restrictive one limits choices. After entering politics, women often face the additional challenge of their families being targeted, leading to conflicts and further limitations on their activities.

Respondents view **gender quotas** as an important and effective mechanism for ensuring women's political participation. Despite certain negative consequences, quotas are seen as a necessary step towards gender equality

and the full inclusion of women in politics. They have also fostered greater solidarity among women and promoted agendas focused on women's rights.

Overall, women possess considerable potential; however, overcoming the obstacles that impede its realisation requires systemic support at educational, financial, cultural, and political levels.

5. Public relations as a key guarantee of political activity

The research examines how relationships with voters, civil society, the media, and technology affect the advancement of women politicians in Armenia.

Respondents describe their engagement with voters as highly active, combining face-to-face meetings with communication via personal and official social media pages. Direct contact is particularly important in smaller communities, whereas in larger communities digital platforms play a greater role. While direct contact carries a strong emotional responsibility, it is often constrained by time pressures resulting from women's double workload, issues of public trust, and, especially in rural areas, limited financial resources and infrastructure.

Cooperation with civil society is regarded as valuable, particularly by women with experience in human rights. Through these partnerships, many respondents have developed legislative initiatives to protect women's rights, and several have participated in leadership programmes for women.

Relations with the media are more complex. Some women actively cultivate media relationships, while others are cautious due to biased coverage and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Many prefer to share information via their own social media channels, allowing them to retain control over content.

Technology is recognised as a driver of progress, but it also presents challenges, including sexism, hate speech, and the targeting of women and their family members. Engagement on social media can therefore be both an opportunity and a risk, depending on its use and on the user's awareness of cybersecurity measures.

For women to be able to fulfil their full potential, an environment of trust, media literacy, and protective mechanisms to ensure safe and effective participation in the digital sphere are required.

6. The role of political parties in women's advancement

The research examines women's roles within political parties, their influence on decision-making, and their perceptions of equal opportunities for advancement. Despite the growing participation of women in political parties, their representation in leadership positions remains low. Findings indicate that legal incentive mechanisms—linking women's representation in territorial and governing party bodies to eligibility for state-targeted funding—have not yet achieved the desired impact.

Most of the women surveyed are party members. Some hold leadership or decision-making positions within parties or parliamentary factions,

while others participate primarily by expressing opinions, which are not always heard or considered influential in decision-making processes. Some respondents value the democratic culture within their parties or factions, whereas others note that decisions are largely determined by the party leadership.

Women often exert influence through their personal qualities, such as constructiveness, collegiality, and the ability to listen. They tend to adopt a collaborative approach, which can serve as both an advantage and a limitation in political struggle.

Non-partisan women report that not belonging to a party restricts their influence, although it can sometimes allow greater freedom of expression. Their impact on factional decisions is variable, depending on the specific context and political culture of the faction.

Party culture is frequently perceived as patriarchal, with women viewed more as supporters than as decision-makers. Some non-partisan women attribute their lack of affiliation to this closed and hierarchical culture.

The research also highlights that internal gender quotas within parties, particularly in the ruling party, can help expand women's representation. These mechanisms are seen as meaningful steps towards implementing national gender equality policies.

Respondents propose a range of concrete measures to strengthen women's political participation, including mentoring and capacity-building programmes, transparent promotion mechanisms, the development of gender strategies, and equal access to resources. They emphasise the need for genuine participation, founded on value-driven leadership and an inclusive political culture, rather than symbolic representation.

7. Vision for future careers

The study also explores the surveyed women's perceptions of their future political careers, revealing a range of perspectives closely linked to their motivations for entering politics.

Many women do not see politics as a career in the traditional sense, but rather as a value-driven choice and a form of public service. Guided by a sense of social responsibility, they aim to address societal issues, and their future political engagement is therefore tied to solving these problems.

Others express uncertainty, influenced by the political climate, family circumstances, or their party's position. Women in this group often find it difficult to navigate political life, particularly if their initial entry into politics was shaped by external factors.

Women active at the community level tend to focus on resolving local issues without seeking promotion or representation at the national level. For them, political activity is most meaningful when it is directly connected to their communities.

Some women associate their future with specific sectors, such as education, social policy, or women's rights. They view politics as a means of implementing reforms in these areas, although they do not necessarily aim to hold executive positions to achieve these goals.

Women who regard politics as part of their personal identity are prepared to remain engaged regardless of position. They emphasise maintaining their political voice and their public role.

At the same time, some women categorically reject the idea of continuing their political careers, disillusioned by the political environment, hate speech, and distortions in political processes. A few feel they have already fulfilled their objectives or believe it is time to make space for younger generations.

Overall, women's visions of their political futures are diverse, ranging from sustained ideological engagement and continued activity in public life to disappointment and withdrawal from politics.

Conclusions and recommendations

The findings of the study allow the following conclusions to be drawn:

- The women surveyed enter politics not for personal gain, but out of a commitment to public service, ideological convictions, and a sense of community responsibility. However, the issue of gender equality is rarely reflected in their motivations.

- The leadership model described by the women is based on collaboration, values, and social sensitivity, contrasting with competitive and hierarchical approaches.

- Respondents associate success with public impact, principled conduct, and contributions to social change, emphasising the importance of solidarity and teamwork.

- Despite their considerable potential, women's advancement is constrained by systemic barriers, stereotypes, and the demands of family responsibilities, highlighting the need for multidimensional and systemic support.

- Effective engagement with voters, civil society, the media, and technology is a key precondition for political success, though the risks inherent in the digital environment require protective mechanisms.

- Political parties often operate within closed and patriarchal cultures, limiting women's real participation and opportunities for progression. Nevertheless, internal quotas and gender-sensitive strategies can help ensure more equal opportunities.

The recommendations developed from this research are addressed to all relevant stakeholders, including women politicians, political parties, the National Assembly and the Government of the Republic of Armenia, civil society organisations, the media, and international organisations implementing women's empowerment programmes in Armenia. They aim to address the challenges identified in the study and propose actions to support women's political advancement across the following areas:

- **Institutional and legislative support:** To promote women's political advancement, it is essential to continuously monitor trends in women's participation during upcoming local and parliamentary elections. Based on these outcomes, the effectiveness of gender quotas and state funding mechanisms for political parties should be evaluated. Internal policies and procedures within parties should be improved to ensure greater transparency and gender sensitivity. Increasing the accountability of political parties and the National Assembly is crucial for fostering women's political advancement and achieving the goals set out in the national gender equality strategy. Legislative and institutional measures must create equal opportunities for both women and men to progress in national and local politics.

- **Capacity-building and educational programmes:** To strengthen women's political leadership, specialised training courses should be introduced to enhance skills in political communication, negotiation, media engagement, time management, and stress management. Programmes should also focus on developing digital competencies, raising awareness of cybersecurity, expanding mentoring networks, sustaining international programmes, and establishing an information platform to support networking, collaboration, and women's political advancement.

- **Public support and women's solidarity:** Promoting women's political participation requires creating platforms for solidarity and cooperation, fostering positive public perceptions of women politicians in the media, and implementing campaigns against stereotypes that hinder women's progress. Measures should also improve work–family balance through legislative and institutional reforms and ensure the visibility of women's political activism through systematic monitoring of their activities.

- **Engaging men as allies:** Women's political advancement benefits from the active involvement of male colleagues as allies in promoting gender equality and justice. A collaborative and inclusive political culture can be fostered by supporting joint initiatives between women and men, including legislative projects, public campaigns for human rights and public interests, women-led actions, and participation in various events and programmes.

Relevance of the topic

In recent years, Armenia has made significant progress in increasing women's representation in the National Assembly and local self-government bodies, particularly due to the introduction of gender quotas in parliamentary and local elections. However, despite these achievements, women remain significantly underrepresented in senior leadership positions and decision-making, in the territorial administration system, and in party leadership. This discrepancy between women's representation in elected bodies and their real influence on political decisions is also confirmed globally. Research by major international organisations such as the OSCE[8] and the UN,[9] confirms that quotas alone are insufficient to ensure gender equality in governance.

Nevertheless, Armenia's legal framework provides a solid foundation for promoting gender equality. The country has acceded to a number of key international instruments and legal documents designed to advance gender equality and protect women's rights.

First of all, in 1993, Armenia ratified the fundamental international instrument for the protection of women's rights, the UN Convention on the **"Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women"**,[10] along with the **Optional Protocol**.[11] In addition, Armenia has also committed to implementing the provisions of the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**,[12] which were adopted in 1995 as a global strategy for women's empowerment and ensuring gender equality. Within the framework of the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**,[13] Armenia is actively involved in the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, particularly Goal 5 on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls. Armenia has also undertaken a number of commitments aimed at ensuring gender equality within the framework of **Council of Europe documents**[14] and the **OSCE**.[15]

The combination of the above-mentioned documents and processes forms the international legal and political framework based on which Armenia develops and implements its national legislation. Thus, in 2013, Armenia adopted the **Law "On Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men"**,[16] which confirms the principle of gender equality across all spheres of public life, the legal protection of women and men from gender-based discrimination and the provision of equal opportunities. In 2017, the **Law "On**

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8 Gender-responsive Governance, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, 2024 https://www.osce.org/odihr/575958
9 Gender Equality in Public Administration, UNDP; University of Pittsburgh, 2021 https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3931368?v=pdf
10 UN Convention on the "Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/60505
11 The Optional Protocol of UN Convention on the "Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women" https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/31426
12 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/01/beijing-declaration
13 Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals in Armenia https://armenia.un.org/hy/sdgs
14 Gender Equality https://www.coe.int/en/web/genderequality
15 Gender Equality https://www.osce.org/gender-equality
16 Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men" https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/83841

Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence" was adopted,[17] establishing mechanisms for protection against gender-based violence and ensuring institutional accountability.

In 2025, the Government of the Republic of Armenia also adopted the **"Strategy and Action Plan for the Implementation of Gender Policy in the Republic of Armenia for 2025-2028"**.[18] The strategy outlines six priorities aimed at creating a favourable and enabling environment for the realisation of the rights and opportunities of women and men in the relevant fields, in line with the international commitments undertaken by Armenia. The first of the priorities focuses on overcoming gender discrimination in all areas of governance and at the decision-making level, improving the national mechanism for the advancement of women, ensuring and expanding opportunities for equal and full participation of women and men. Within the framework of the priority, a number of goals have been defined, aimed at reviewing and improving national mechanisms aimed at women's advancement in the political and governance sectors, promoting women's representation and participation in governance and decision-making positions, including both elected and appointed leadership roles, in the legislative, executive, judicial, and local self-government systems.

The obstacles faced by women in Armenia are not only institutional but also deeply embedded in informal norms and political culture. While parties may formally commit to gender equality, they often lack internal mechanisms to support women's advancement. Informal networks and patronage systems tend to favour male candidates, and women frequently encounter resistance when seeking re-election or attempting to progress within party structures. Numerous studies have documented these patterns, emphasising the need to transform political institutions and cultures to create genuine pathways for women's political careers.

To propose meaningful changes within Armenia's governance system, more detailed data on the specifics of women's political careers is needed. Numerical indicators offer a general overview of women's political participation but fail to capture their actual experiences, motivations, and aspirations. This research seeks to address that gap by focusing on the particularities of women's political careers in Armenia.

The research also holds strategic significance, offering an opportunity to inform party programmes, candidate selection processes, and voter engagement mechanisms ahead of the 2026 parliamentary and local elections.

Ensuring gender equality in governance requires not only increasing women's numerical representation but also transforming political systems, cultures, and institutions. In this context, the present study, which highlights the particularities of women's political careers in Armenia, can directly contribute to protecting women's interests and supporting institutional reforms.

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17 The title of the Law "On Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence and Restoration of Family Solidarity" adopted in 2017 was revised by amendments 12.04.24 HO-169-N https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/194267
18 Strategy and Action Plan for the Implementation of Gender Policy in the Republic of Armenia for 2025-2028 https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/206364

Assessment of the situation of women's political participation in Armenia

One of the primary indicators of women's political participation is their representation in elected bodies at both national and local levels. These indicators reflect not only the extent of women's influence over the exercise of electoral rights and the shaping of political institutions, but also the broader level of democratic development in the country. Equally important are indicators of women's participation in senior positions within the executive and judicial branches, which help assess their influence in decision-making. However, in a parliamentary system, women's representation in the legislative body, the National Assembly, provides the clearest measure of their opportunities for political advancement.

With its 38.3 per cent **female representation in the legislative branch**, Armenia currently ranks 37th among 181 countries in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's ranking.[19] For comparison, the average female representation in unicameral parliaments around the world is 27.1 per cent.[20] Moreover, while the global figure has only increased by 4.1 percentage points (23 per cent to 27.1 per cent)[21] over the past eight years, in Armenia, during the same period (after the transition to a parliamentary system of government),[22] the indicator has increased by 20.3 percentage points (18 per cent to 38.3 per cent).[23] This significant progress was made possible by the gender quota enshrined in the Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia, according to which the number of representatives of each gender on party lists should not exceed 70 per cent.[24] The use of a simple proportional electoral system has also played a role. Unlike the previous mixed proportional electoral system with territorial (rating-based) lists, it guarantees that all candidates, including women, in the proportional electoral lists of the winning political force, enter the National Assembly. As a result, the political forces represented in the current National Assembly convocation ensure a higher representation of women, 38.3 per cent, than they had included in their electoral lists for the 2021 elections (up to 35 per cent).[25] However, this high representation of women in parliament has not yet translated into the fulfilment of expectations associated with achieving a **"critical mass"** of women, and this is a challenge that continues to relate to the formation of women's leadership.

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19 As of August 1, 2025: IPU Parline data https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/?date_year=2025&date_month=10

20 IPU Parline data https://data.ipu.org/women-averages/?date_year=2025&date_month=10

21 Women in Parliament 1995-2025. IPU https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2025-03/women-in-parliament-1995-2025

22 The first parliamentary elections after the transition to a parliamentary system of government in Armenia were held in 2017, the 6th convocation of the National Assembly.

23 Women's Political Participation in Armenia: Policy Brief, 2022, OxYGen, Yerevan 2022 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Policy-Brief_to-Support_Women-_Political_Participation_Eng.pdf

24 Electoral Code of the RA, Article 83, paragraphs 4 and 10 https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=109081

25 Women's Political Participation in Armenia: Policy Brief, 2022, OxYGen, Yerevan 2022 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Policy-Brief_to-Support_Women-_Political_Participation_Eng.pdf

As shown by previous research on women's political participation in Armenia,[26] the simple proportional electoral system, on the one hand, significantly enhances women's opportunities to be elected, removing electoral barriers related to limited resources and unequal competition with male candidates. On the other hand, it does little to enhance women's recognition among voters, increase their visibility during elections, or develop their leadership skills. Consequently, the responsibility for women's political advancement shifts largely to the parties and to the activities of the women once elected. In essence, the growth of women's political careers today is primarily determined by two factors: their opportunities for advancement within parties and the quality of their performance in elected positions.

The low level of women's participation in parliamentary leadership reflects the lack of opportunities for their advancement within parties. As of August 2025,[27] despite the 38.3 per cent representation of women in parliament, women are not represented in the position of vice-president, do not lead any of the factions, and only two of the 12 standing committees (16.8 per cent) are chaired by women.[28] Women have never held the position of the president of the National Assembly. In parallel with the global rise in women's representation in parliaments, their presence in parliamentary leadership positions has also been growing. As of March 2025,[29] women made up 23.8 per cent of presidents, 32.6 per cent of vice-presidents, and 27 per cent of chairs of standing committees.[30]

From the perspective of women's political progress, an important factor is the significant rejuvenation of the parliament in recent years, indicating a generational change in the political field. The average age of the Members of Parliament in the National Assembly of Armenia is 41.7 years.[31] According to data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union,[32] the Armenian Parliament ranks third among the ten countries with the youngest parliaments (average age under 45 years). The number of young people, including women, in the Armenian Parliament under the age of 40 is quite high, it is 56 per cent. For comparison, only 18.6 per cent of Members of Parliament globally are in this age group.[33] The entry of a large number of young women into politics can itself play a stimulating role in overcoming stereotypes about women's political participation and their advancement in the field.

The **number of women in political positions in the executive branch** has only recently become comparable to their representation level in the National Assembly. Since December 2024, four out of 12 ministers in the Government

26 Women's Political Participation in Armenia. OxYGen , Yerevan 2021 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Women-PP_ENG.pdf
27 Official website of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia http://parliament.am/
28 As of August 1, 2025, women chair the Standing Committee on Labour and Social Affairs and the Standing Committee on Financial-Credit and Budgetary Affairs of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia
29 Women in Politics: 2025 https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2025-03/women-in-politics-2025
30 Women in Politics: 2025 IPU-UN Women https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infographics/2025-03/women-in-politics-2025
31 IPU Parline data https://data.ipu.org/parliament/AM/AM-LC01/data-on-youth/
32 IPU Parline data https://www.ipu.org/impact/youth-participation
33 IPU Parline data https://data.ipu.org/age-brackets-aggregate/

of Armenia are women (33 per cent),[34] which is higher than the global average of 22.9 per cent,[35] and the highest figure for Armenian cabinets of ministers since 1990. Women head the Ministries of Education, Science, Culture and Sports, Health, Justice and Internal Affairs, with the first woman appointed to the position of Minister of Internal Affairs only in 2024. The representation of women in the positions of deputy ministers[36] is 15 per cent, with five out of 12 ministries having no women deputy ministers.[37]

From the perspective of overcoming stereotypes, the appointments of women to positions traditionally regarded as male domains, such as the positions of Prosecutor General, Head of the Foreign Intelligence Service, and Head of the Penitentiary Service, are particularly important. At the same time, women have never held the positions of President of the Republic of Armenia, Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia, Deputy Prime Minister, or Secretary of the National Security Council.

In the territorial administration system, there are no women in the positions of regional governors, and only four women holding the position of deputy regional governor.[38]

In the judicial system, women are underrepresented in the positions of court presidents (18 per cent). There are no women among the presidents of the presidents of courts of appeal and specialised courts, the President of the Court of Cassation is a woman.[39] One out of nine judges in the Constitutional Court is a woman, 11 per cent. Three out of nine members of the Supreme Judicial Council are women, 33 per cent, and gender representation among the members of the Supreme Judicial Council is regulated by the Judicial Code of the Republic of Armenia.[40]

Although the positions of Prosecutor General, Minister of Justice, and Human Rights Defender are held by women, the issue of women's advancement in the judicial and legal sectors and their representation in leadership positions remains on the agenda.

A significant increase in **women's representation in the local self-government system** was observed only after 2021, when the proportional electoral system was introduced in local self-government elections in communities with more than 4,000 voters, and a gender quota was applied accordingly.[41] As a result,

34 Official website of the Government of Republic of Armenia https://www.gov.am/
35 Women in Politics: 2025 IPU-UN Women https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/infograph-ics/2025-03/women-in-politics-2025
36 According to the Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Public Service", a person holding the political position of deputy minister acts under the authority delegated by the minister and is not vested with the power to make independent political decisions on their own responsibility.
37 Official website of the Government of Republic of Armenia https://gov.am/
38 Women and Men in Armenia, Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia 2024 https://armstat.am/am/?nid=82&id=2700
39 Women and Men in Armenia, Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, 2024
Official website of the judiciary of the Republic of Armenia https://court.am/hy
40 Articles 76.3 and 109.5 of the Judicial Code of the Republic of Armenia https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/119531
41 Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia, Article 104.1. Electoral system https://www.arlis.am/Docu-mentView.aspx?DocID=172405

significant progress was recorded in the representation of women in the councils of elders, from 11 per cent to 29 per cent.[42] In communities formed under the majoritarian electoral system, where a gender quota does not apply, women's representation in councils of elders is 17 per cent.[43]

Despite the progress achieved through the application of gender quotas, women's representation in local self-government is below the global average of 35.5 per cent.[44] Moreover, the effectiveness of the quota in local self-government elections is lower than the results recorded in the elections to the National Assembly and the Yerevan Council of Elders. Thus, in about one-third of the 71 community Councils of Elders, women's representation is significantly below the quota threshold. The women's representation in the Councils of Elders of Armenia also varies across regions, reaching a maximum of 35 per cent in Shirak and a minimum of 14 per cent in Aragatsotn.[45]

Studies[46] have revealed a number of issues related to the implementation of quotas in local self-government elections. In particular, in different communities, more than 30 cases were recorded in which almost all women included on the electoral lists of certain political forces either withdrew their candidacies or renounced their mandates, as a result of which councils of elders or individual factions were formed without female representatives. In all these cases, a certain guarantee of maintaining the quota established by Article 141.8 of the Electoral Code was violated. According to this provision, *"…where as a result of mandate refusal, the number of representatives of any sex in the given faction falls below and results in less than 25 per cent, it shall be given to the next candidate of less represented sex in the electoral list of that political party, if any"*.[47]

In 2024, following recommendations from civil society organisations, paragraphs 6 and 8 of Article 141 of the Electoral Code of Armenia were supplemented by the following provision: "Where there is no other candidate in the electoral list, the mandate shall remain vacant".[48] It is expected that this amendment will help overcome the harmful practice of "formal involvement"[49] of women on electoral lists in the upcoming local self-government elections in 2026.

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42 Women's Political Participation in Armenia: Policy Brief, 2022, OxYGen, Yerevan 2022 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Policy-Brief_to-Support_Women-_Political_Participation_Eng.pdf
43 In the same source
44 Facts and figures: Women's leadership and political participation https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-womens-leadership-and-political-participation
45 Women and Men in Armenia, Statistical Committee of the RA, 2024 https://armstat.am/am/?nid=82&id=2700
46 Women's Political Participation in Armenia: Policy Brief, 2022 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Policy-Brief_to-Support_Women-_Political_Participation_Eng.pdf
47 Electoral Code of the RA, Article 83, paragraphs 4 and 10 https://www.arlis.am/DocumentView.aspx?DocID=109081
48 On making amendments and additions to the Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia (Article 76). Adopted on 05.12.2024 http://www.parliament.am/legislation.php?sel=show&ID=9566&lang=arm
49 The phenomenon of women's "formal involvement" on electoral lists was highlighted in the final report of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission on the 2018 parliamentary elections https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/armenia/413567

In the **local self-government system, women's representation in the position of community head** is not regulated by a quota, and under the proportional electoral system, their representation largely depends on the electoral lists submitted by political forces, which in rarely headed by women. Women's nominations for the position of community head in the case of majoritarian representation are also infrequent. As a result, as of October 30 2025, women lead four out of 71 communities in Armenia, or 5.6 per cent.[50] Women are also underrepresented in the appointed positions of administrative leaders of settlements or districts that are part of enlarged communities (5.1 per cent).[51]

The assessment of achievements, shortcomings and obstacles related to women's political participation in Armenia reveals their political progress, the lack of opportunities to ensure their representation in elected and appointed high-level positions. At the same time, the assessment of the situation confirms the necessity of studying women's political career opportunities, moreover considering the issue in the context of women politicians' own perceptions, in particular, in the context of their motivations, experiences, enabling factors, relations with the public and the press, their advancement in the party, and as well as stereotypical and other contextual factors.

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50 Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of the Republic of Armenia https://www.mtad.am
51 Women and Men in Armenia, Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia 2024 https://armstat.am/am/?nid=82&id=2700

Research Methodology

Purpose of the research

To explore the perceptions of women in the legislative branch and local self-government bodies (LSGs) regarding their political achievements, the factors that facilitate or hinder their progress, and their views on future career opportunities in politics.

Methods and research tools

The research included qualitative methods, using the following tools:

- Collection and content analysis of professional literature on the topic, including both local and international studies and relevant documents.
- Collection and analysis of information from open sources concerning the activities of women politicians during the research period.
- In-depth interviews with women holding elected positions in the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia and in local self-government bodies.
- A focus group discussion with experts to validate the findings, assess their applicability, and address any problematic information arising from the interviews.

Description of research methods and sample

1. Collection and content analysis of professional literature

Served as the basis for justifying the relevance of the research topic, assessing the state of women's political participation, developing the interview questionnaire, and analysing the interviews collected within the framework of the research.

Within the study, the following sources of information regarding women's political participation were used:

- International and national legal documents;
- Results of local and international studies, sociological surveys, and analytical reports on women's participation in elections over the past ten years (since Armenia's transition to a parliamentary system of governance);
- International and national statistical data (for comparative purposes);
- Studies analysing the gender sensitivity of Armenian political parties' programmes and procedures;
- Results of media and social media monitoring concerning women's image, their participation in elections in Armenia, manifestations of hate speech, and gender-based disinformation.

2. Study of information from open sources

Served as a basis for forming the research sample, developing the questionnaire, and analysing the collected interviews.

In particular, during the research period (June-September 2025), the following materials were studied:

- *Biographies of women Members of Parliament available on the official website of the National Assembly;*
- *Information about women members of the Council of Elders presented on the official website of the communities;*
- *Media coverage related to the activities of women MPs, women members of the Council of Elders, and women community leaders;*
- *Facebook posts published by women politicians;*
- *Official news disseminated by political parties;*
- *Interviews with women politicians published in the media;*
- *The experience of women MPs in collaborating with programs dedicated to women's leadership over the past eight years;*
- *Data from international and national specialised websites on women's political participation (Inter-Parliamentary Union, UN Women, Parliament monitoring,[52] WomenNet.am);*
- *Information from other sources, including information about women councillors cooperating with the 'EQUAL – EU 4 Women's Empowerment in Armenia" programme (hereafter 'EQUAL" programme).[53]*

3. In-depth interviews with women holding elected positions in the National Assembly and local self-government bodies

Served as the main tool for achieving the objectives of the research.

Interview questionnaire: The interviews were conducted using a pre-designed questionnaire.

Research sample: **40 interviews** were conducted within the framework of the research: 15 interviews with women Members of the National Assembly and 25 interviews with women who were members of the council of elders or community leaders. All interviews were conducted on the principle of anonymity.

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52 The programme and website were closed in 2023.

53 The "EQUAL – EU 4 Women's Empowerment in Armenia" programme is implemented during 2022–2025 by the following partner organisations: OxYGen Foundation, European Partnership for Democracy NGO, Netherlands Helsinki Committee NGO, Women's Support Centre NGO, WINNET Goris Development Foundation in cooperation with Winnet Sweden NGO https://oxygen.org.am/en/ongoing_projects_eng/equal-eu-4-women-empowerment-in-armenia/

Constraints of the research sample: At the initial stage of the study, six women Members of Parliament and a woman member of a Council of Elders refused to participate in the interviews. After that, the sample was supplemented with other women politicians. The member of the Council of Elders refused to be interviewed due to being appointed as a school principal and leaving the council. The reasons given by MPs for refusing participation included heavy workloads, a biased attitude toward the topic of the interview, and failure to contact them after reviewing the questionnaire. Within the context of this research, these factors can be characterised as limited access to women MPs, due to a lack of interest in women's issues or other non-visible circumstances.

Description of the sample of Members of Parliament of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia

Out of the 41 women Members of Parliament currently represented in the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, 15 were included in the research sample.

Composition of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia[54]
107 Members of Parliament, of whom 41 are women (38.3%)

"Civil Contract" Faction
It includes 69 Members of Parliament, of whom 27 are women (39%)

"Armenia" Faction
It includes 28 Members of Parliament, of whom 12 are women (43%)

"With Honour" Faction
It includes six Members of Parliament, of whom two are women (33%)

Members of Parliament not included in any faction
Four Members of Parliament, no women

The sample of women Members of the National Assembly was formed based on several criteria, including party affiliation, parliamentary faction, standing committee membership, age, political experience, leadership position within the elected body, and involvement in a standing committee of the NA. Additional factors were also taken into account, such as representation of national minorities, presence of disability, and level of activity in public relations.

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54 Official website of the National Assembly of the RA, as of August 1, 2025 http://www.parliament.am/

Party affiliation

Of the 15 women Members of Parliament included in the sample:

- 11 (73 per cent) are party members: "Civil Contract" (seven), "Armenian Revolutionary Federation" (three), "Reborn Armenia" (one);
- Four (27 per cent) are non-partisan.

Faction, government/opposition

The sample includes women Members of Parliament representing the two largest factions from both the government and the opposition:

- Seven women MPs from the "Civil Contract" faction;
- Eight women MPs from the "Armenia" faction.

Focus of parliamentary activity

Women are not represented in two of the twelve standing committees of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia.

These are the Standing Committee on Economic Affairs and the Standing Committee on Territorial Administration, Local Self-Government, Agriculture and Environment Protection.

The women Members of Parliament included in the sample work in eight of the 12 standing committees of the National Assembly:

- Two in the Committee on Labour and Social Affairs;
- Three in the Committee on Health Care;
- Two in the Committee on European Integration;
- Three in the Committee on Science, Education, Culture, Diaspora, Youth and Sport;
- One in the Committee on Regional and Eurasian Integration;
- Two in the Committee on Foreign Relations;
- One in the Committee on Defence and Security;
- One in the Committee on Human Rights Protection and Public Affairs.

Leadership position in the National Assembly

Women in the leadership of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia.[55]

- Are not represented in the positions of President or Vice-President,
- Do not lead any of the factions,
- Women chair only two of the 12 standing committees,
four women hold the position of deputy chair within standing committees.

Of the 15 women Members of Parliament included in the interview sample, four have held leadership positions:

- One serves as a chair of a standing committee;
- Three serve as deputy chairs of standing committees;
- One is a former vice-president of the National Assembly.

Age composition

The average age of the Members of the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia is 41.7 years.

56 per cent of Members of Parliament fall within the age group of under 40. Of the 41 women Members of Parliament, 27 or 66 per cent, are under the age of 40.

Of the 15 women Members of Parliament included in the sample:

- Seven or 47 per cent are under 40 years old;
- Five or 33 per cent are between 40 and 50 years old;
- Three or 20 per cent are aged 50 and above.

Persons with disabilities

The research sample includes one woman with a disability.

Representatives of National Minorities

The sample includes two women representing national minorities, one of whom entered parliament through the national minorities' quota.

Parliamentary experience

Of the 15 women Members of Parliament in the sample, seven have served in two or more convocations of the National Assembly of the RA.

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55 Official website of the National Assembly of the RA, as of August 1, 2025 http://parliament.am/

Activity in public relations

Of the 15 women MPs included in the sample, eight have participated in the National Assembly-Civil Society Organisations (NA-CSO) cooperation platform[56] and other related initiatives, and have introduced legislative initiatives related to women's rights and interests.

Description of the sample of women in local self-government bodies

The research sample included 25 women out of 415 women members of the Councils of Elders represented within Armenia's local self-government system.

Representation of Women in the Councils of Elders: Yerevan and regions

- The indicators of women's representation in Councils of Elders in Armenia are disproportionate by region, reaching a maximum of 35 per cent in Shirak and a minimum of 14 per cent in the Aragatsotn region.

- The overall indicator of women's representation in Councils of Elders, 29 per cent, is significantly lower than the 38.5 per cent recorded in the newly elected Yerevan Council of Elders.[57]

The main criteria for selecting women members of Councils of Elders and community leaders for the sample were: regional distribution, party affiliation, political experience, age, leadership position within the elected body, and representation of national minorities. An additional factor was their cooperation with the "EQUAL" programme.[58]

Regions and communities

The sample included women councillors and community leaders from seven of 11 regions of the republic: Syunik, Vayots Dzor, Lori, Tavush, Shirak, Armavir and Ararat,[59] as well as from the capital, Yerevan.

Out of 71 communities in the republic, the sample included women councillors and community leaders from 14 communities (20 per cent): Goris (Syunik region), Gyumri, Ashotsk, Akhuryan (Shirak region), Vanadzor, Spitak, Pambak (Lori region), Berd, Ijevan, Dilijan (Tavush region), Jermuk (Vayots Dzor region), Armavir (Armavir community), Verin Dvin (Ararat region) and Yerevan communities.

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56 Cooperation for Equality. NA-CSO cooperation platform https://havasar-infohub.am/hamagorcak-cutyun/
57   Women and Men in Armenia, Statistical Committee of the RA, 2024
58 The "EQUAL – EU 4 Women's Empowerment in Armenia" programme is implemented during 2022–2025 by the following partner organisations: OxYGen Foundation, European Partnership for Democracy NGO, Netherlands Helsinki Committee NGO, Women's Support Centre NGO, WINNET Goris Development Foundation in cooperation with Winnet Sweden NGO.
https://oxygen.org.am/en/ongoing_projects_eng/equal-eu-4-women-empowerment-in-armenia/
59 The selection of regions was partly influenced by the fact that the present research was conducted within the framework of the "EQUAL" programme, which has been implemented in those same regions.

Position held in the Councils of Elders

The sample includes two of the three women holding the position of community leader in the republic, one of the eight women holding the position of deputy community leader, and two women holding the position of faction leader.

Party affiliation

The 52 political forces represented in the Republic's Councils of Elders have ensured the following levels of women's representation within their factions.[60]

- 28 political forces have more than 30 per cent female representation,
- 11 have between 25 per cent and 30 per cent women,
- 13 have less than 25 per cent, including cases with no women represented.

Of the 52 political forces represented in the Republic's Councils of Elders, the women included in the sample represent 12 parties and alliances.

Of the 25 women in the sample:

- 17 are party members, representing twelve political forces: "Civil Contract" party, "Country to Live" party, "My Powerful Community" party, "Bright Armenia" party, "Homeland" party, "National Progress" party, "Zoravor Community" party, "Republic" party, "Prosperous Armenia" party, "Reborn Armenia" party, "Citizen's Decision" party, "Arush Arushanyan" alliance.
- Eight are non-partisan.

Age composition

56 per cent of members of the Councils of Elders across the Republic are under the age of 44, and 50 per cent are women.[61]

Among the women included in this research:

- 52 per cent are under 44 years old,
- 32 per cent are between 45 and 59,
- 16 per cent are aged 60 and above.

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60 Women in Local Self-Governments: "EQUAL" newsletter https://oxygen.org.am/texekagir/page60455911.html
61 Women and Men in Armenia, Statistical Committee of the RA, 2024.

4. Focus group discussion with experts

The purpose of the focus group was to validate the findings of the study and their applicability.

The focus group discussion with experts is an integral part of the research methodology. It was conducted during the initial stage of summarising the study results, to validate the findings and their applicability and to discuss problematic information gathered through the interviews.

In particular:

- Whether the research findings covered all essential aspects of the phenomenon under study,
- Whether the results could be generalised to other contexts, timeframes, or groups of people.

The focus group brought together seven experts with experience in researching women's political and economic participation, and three journalist-experts experienced in the monitoring of women's political participation.

The questions discussed in the focus group can be divided into two main groups:

General questions about the research

- To what extent do the findings correspond with your own experience?
- Which questions or findings may require clarification, and what could be added?

Questions related to key issues

What problems do you identify concerning women's political careers? What obstacles and challenges do they face, in your view?

- What is your opinion on women's solidarity? Are there manifestations of it in the political sphere?
- Have public perceptions and trust toward women politicians changed in recent years?
- How would you assess the relationship between women politicians and civil society or the media?
- In your opinion, what steps could be taken to promote women's political advancement?

The focus group discussion confirmed the relevance and significance of the research, as well as the comparability of its findings with previous research and the experts' personal observations.

Part 1. Motivations for women's political careers

The diversity of motivations for pursuing political careers is categorised in professional literature in various ways, including by the goals of political behaviour, value orientations, underlying factors, degree of awareness, and the nature of activity, among others.

As research conducted in Armenia indicates,[62] the motives for entering politics can be divided into two large groups:

Public motivations

- The desire to contribute to the country and society, to help address existing problems, and to improve the socio-economic and moral-psychological conditions (altruistic motives).

Personal motivations

- The desire for self-affirmation: overcoming competition and challenges, attaining higher social status, and achieving the associated psychological satisfaction.
- The desire for self-expression: the wish to apply one's experience, abilities, professional knowledge, and skills.
- Personal, self-interested aspirations: the pursuit of personal gain, protection of business interests, improvement of material well-being, enhancement of social standing, or the benefits associated with status.

In reality, public and personal motives are often combined and largely determined by the individual's system of values. It is another matter that not all motives are sincerely voiced during individual interviews, especially motives for personal gain, securing one's own business, improving material well-being or enjoying status privileges are often left unspoken. It is nevertheless noteworthy that both international and local studies[63] confirm certain differences between the motives of women and men seeking political careers. Women more often mention public motivations (ideology, striving for justice, civic duty, and social welfare), whereas in the case of men, personal motives prevail (increasing status, power, self-affirmation). These differences are also characteristic of broader public perceptions, influenced by the stereotype that men are expected to have authority and make decisions, and therefore that men's striving for power is considered normative.

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62 "Participation for Change", "Caucasus" Centre for Social Research, results of the research conducted within the framework of Oxfam's programme "Women's Voice and Participation in the 2012 Parliamentary Elections of the RA", Yerevan, 2012 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Women-Electoral-behaviour_Research-_ENG.pdf

63 Women political leaders: the impact of gender on democracy, WFD 2021 https://www.wfd.org/what-we-do/resources/women-political-leaders-impact-gender-democracy Peculiarities of Women's Electoral Behaviour, OxYGen, 2019 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Women-Electoral-behaviour_Research-_ENG.pdf

Within the framework of this study, questions regarding women politicians' motivations sought to identify:

- The primary personal and public motivations of respondents for entering politics;
- The factors or sources of support that encouraged their engagement;
- The role of ideology in their political involvement.

1.1. Public and personal motivations for women's engagement in politics

The interviews show that the motivations of the women politicians surveyed are shaped by both personal and public factors. Their reasons often combine practical goals with emotional influences. On one hand, respondents are clear about what they hope to achieve; they see politics as a way to grow personally, express themselves, and make a social impact. Some also have a desire for leadership, which helps advance their political careers. On the other hand, factors such as sense of protest, patriotism, or the inspiration of a charismatic leader, also play a role. Overall, their responses are mainly guided by a commitment to the public interest, including civic duty and a desire for justice.

From civic activism to politics

Most of the women surveyed entered politics to pursue the ideals they believe in, such as democracy, justice, freedom, and equal rights. These motivations are especially common among women who transitioned from civic activism and the NGO sector into politics. Research indicates that the number of such women has been increasing, particularly on the electoral lists of the last two parliamentary elections.[64]

In this context, the introduction of gender quotas has played a decisive role. As parties are required to ensure at least 30 per cent female representation among their candidates, they increasingly regard women with a background in civic activism and advocacy as valuable additions to their electoral lists. For civic activists, participation in politics is a means of increasing their influence over decision-making processes, making this a widely observed motivation.

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64 Snap Parliamentary Elections – 2018: Peculiarities of Women's Electoral Behaviour, OxYGen, 2019

> *"I entered politics through public activity, particularly initiatives aimed at increasing women's participation in decision-making processes."*
>
> *"My motivation was to bring change in my field, to initiate those changes myself, and to be part of their realisation."*
>
> *"For me, politics was an opportunity to do what I had always believed was necessary."*
>
> *"Before entering institutional politics, I had always been involved in, or had initiated, civic movements."*
>
> *"At first, I was mainly active in public movements, raising various issues that were gradually resolved. Over time, people in my community began to see me as someone who could solve problems and started turning to me."*
>
> *"Since childhood, I was raised with values such as Armenia's independence, identity, and national and state principles."*
>
> *"My motivation was love for my homeland."*
>
> *"My motivation was the desire to do something good for society."*

From journalism to politics

The motivations behind the transition from civic activism to politics are also common among women working in journalism. Through their professional engagement with a wide range of public issues, many choose to contribute more directly to addressing these problems by increasing their influence and status. Their deep understanding of political processes also makes them a valuable resource for political parties.

> *"I worked in television for many years, focusing on highlighting community issues. Over time, it became natural to move from journalism into politics, as I had the energy, experience, and skills to contribute to the development of my community."*
>
> *"I initially worked in media, including television and radio, primarily on entertainment programmes, before gradually moving into political journalism and producing political content. In 2019, I was offered a position in the National Assembly, entering a highly political environment. The transition happened naturally and gradually rather than being the result of a conscious decision, with each step leading me closer to politics."*

From education and municipal services to the Council of Elders

The motivations of women who entered politics by standing as candidates in local self-government elections have distinct characteristics. Most describe their involvement in councils of elders as a form of service to their community, focused on improving community life and addressing specific local issues.

> *"I have worked in the public sector for 20 years and have been active in civic matters since school. During this time, I have engaged with authorities on various issues, programmes, and sometimes with oppositional views or criticisms. My community, including the city, its problems, and development opportunities, has always been a focus of my attention."*

"Motivated by my love for my city, I decided to become a councillor to take direct responsibility for addressing local issues, rather than relying on others and waiting for solutions."

One of the most common pathways in local self-government is the "from pedagogy to the Council of Elders" scenario, where motivation often stems from teachers' public recognition within their communities. Following the transition to a proportional electoral system, political parties have increasingly drawn on this resource to ensure female representation on their electoral lists. Research on electoral lists also highlights another typical pathway in local government elections: the "from municipal employee to the Council of Elders" scenario.

"Having worked as a teacher for many years, I realised that my opinion was respected across different social groups, and I recognised that I had the potential to make a meaningful contribution in the field."

"While working in the municipality as a specialist in the education, culture, and sports department, I noticed that many social issues affecting women, children, and culture were never discussed in council meetings, as the council was composed entirely of male representatives. This motivated me to participate directly in the decision-making process."

1.2. Circumstances of entering politics and sources of support

In many cases, factors described as motivations also reflect the circumstances that prompted women to stand in local government or parliamentary elections. For instance, the 2018 Revolution served as a motivating factor for representatives of the ruling party. For many others, the 2020 war, the post-war situation, and displacement played a decisive role, increasing women's civic engagement and participation in volunteer, humanitarian, and local recovery initiatives, which in turn facilitated broader political involvement. The transition to a proportional electoral system and the introduction of gender quotas are also cited as important incentives.

"My primary motivation for becoming actively involved in politics was the war. The losses we suffered, the devastated state of Artsakh, and my concern that the danger could eventually reach Syunik, my home region, compelled me to act. My aim was to have some influence and help prevent these losses from becoming irreversible."

"The first factor was the change in the electoral system, which made women's involvement more desirable and valued. Women recognised that the state acknowledged the importance of their knowledge, skills, and abilities, and I decided to seize that opportunity."

Among women involved in local self-government, respondents more frequently mention the influence of people around them or party leaders, whose encouragement or invitation prompted them to enter politics. There are also cases where women followed the political traditions of their families.

"The motivation did not come from me personally. People who knew me and had seen my work at school believed I could contribute to the community and recognised my potential."

"I did not initially understand politics or what my party colleagues wanted, but as a well-known businesswoman, I was gradually drawn into political involvement. Recognition often brings such opportunities."

"I was offered the third position on the party list as someone experienced in the social sphere and familiar with the community. At first, I felt my professional duties were incompatible with being a council member. However, when the first person on our list was imprisoned, I felt it became a matter of honour, and I chose to stand by them."

"Initially, I had no particular motivation. I was approached by someone I knew and joined their team. My involvement was not driven by personal political preferences but rather by circumstance."

"Constant encouragement from friends, relatives, and acquaintances— urging me to run, get elected, and work for change—served as a motivating factor."

"The suggestion came from acquaintances, and I accepted it. People around me—colleagues, the rector, my family, and especially my husband—encouraged me. Had he opposed it, I would not have pursued the opportunity."

"My entry into politics was shaped by the events of 27 October and, earlier, by the influence of Vazgen Sargsyan. My mother, who had herself been involved in politics in the 1990s, inspired and encouraged me in every possible way."

The personality of leaders has played a significant role for those Members of Parliament who have progressed from local government to the legislative body. This is a common scenario, as in the absence of clear mechanisms within political parties to support women's advancement, the leader's influence often becomes the decisive factor in their career progression.

"A significant influence in my political career was the party leader, who invited me to enter national politics and stand in the parliamentary elections. Prior to that, I had never imagined myself in high-level politics."

"I initially served as a member of the Council of Elders, and later received an offer to continue my work in the National Assembly. I have now served two convocations as a Member of Parliament."

From the perspective of women's political career advancement, an interesting pathway is the progression from membership in a party's youth wing to becoming a Member of Parliament or a member of the Council of Elders. In such cases, particular circumstances or changes in the political environment often act as a catalyst for further career development.

"In my case, it was less a matter of personal motivation and more about circumstances. I was already involved in the party's youth wing and engaged in politics indirectly, though not as a formal member. The decision to join the party and participate actively in political processes came after 2018, driven by the situation in the country and the realisation that change had to happen immediately."

"I have been active since childhood. Initially, I was involved in the youth wing of another party, later participating in the Revolution and joining the ruling party. My motivation was concern for my city and the desire to make a difference."

In summary, the motivations of the women surveyed in this research are largely shaped by the pathways through which they entered politics. The most common scenarios include transitions from civic activism, professional backgrounds (such as education, journalism, healthcare, business, and other fields), party youth wings, and municipal administration roles into political office. Specific circumstances can also be decisive, including crises, the influence of people around them, the role of party leaders, and the dynastic involvement of family members in political processes, among other factors.

1.3. Ideological foundations for entering politics

The analysis of the interviews highlights the same issues regarding the ideological foundations of political parties that have been identified in previous studies. Overall, Armenia's party system remains in a developmental stage, with a limited and unclear spectrum of political ideologies. According to expert assessments, one of the main reasons for the inactivity of many of the 119 registered parties in Armenia is their weak ideological basis. At the same time, there is an ongoing debate in the political arena between two opposing views: one that considers political ideologies outdated and artificial, suggesting the need to move beyond "isms," and another that argues a healthy party system and meaningful political competition are impossible without clear ideological foundations.

Studies of party programmes indicate that they generally incorporate liberal, social-democratic, conservative, and nationalist ideas. For example, research examining the ideological foundations of the nine most active political parties in Armenia[65] shows that their programmes largely reflect centre-left, social-democratic principles. Unlike their pan-European counterparts, however, these principles are often accompanied by nationalist and moderately conservative rhetoric. Research also highlights an interesting observation: in some cases, the ideology identified through a review of a party's programme differs both from the ideology the party officially claims to uphold and from the ideology that society attributes to it.[66]

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65 Political Ideologies of Armenian Political Parties According to their Programs. Research Outcomes, Yerevan, 2020 https://political.am/storage/uploads/files/eng_print.pdf
66 In the same source.

These observations about Armenia's political landscape are also confirmed by the present research. Several women respondents noted that Armenia's political system does not follow the classical model seen in many other countries, and that political parties often pursue directions that do not align with their stated ideological foundations.

Within the framework of the research, the question of ideology had two purposes. First, to what extent did the ideological foundations outlined in party programmes motivate women to become involved in politics? Second, were these women sufficiently informed about their parties' ideologies?

The responses obtained from the interviews correspond with other research on political ideology in Armenia, including the results of the "Political Compass" test, which indicate that the majority of young women are centre-left on the socio-economic dimension and moderately liberal on the socio-cultural dimension.

The analysis of the interviews shows that women who are members of parties with a clear ideological foundation tend to have a more in-depth understanding of their party's ideology. In these cases, their responses reflect not only the party's ideological orientation but also their personal attitudes towards the values underlying that ideology.

Not all of the women surveyed use classical political terminology (such as right, left, centrist, liberal, or conservative); many prefer to describe ideas that reflect their own value system, emphasising democracy, patriotism, social justice, and stability of the country.

> *"For me, the only ideology is patriotism."*
>
> *"For me, patriotism is more important than political ideologies."*
>
> *"For me, there is one ideology, and that is to have a powerful, strong, economically stable homeland."*
>
> *"I am a supporter of democracy and have a vision to make the community a prosperous, social community."*

This tendency is particularly noticeable among non-partisan women and those who are members of newly established, community-based parties formed immediately after the transition to the proportional electoral system for local self-government elections. Research indicates that 42 of the 119 state-registered parties in Armenia were established or registered after 2018, with a significant number founded ahead of the 2021 parliamentary and local self-government elections.[67] It is therefore understandable that these newly formed parties may not yet have had the opportunity to clarify their ideological positions.

In many cases, the key issue is how closely a party's ideology aligns with the goals and ideas expressed by the women themselves. This is particularly evident among women who were elected via a party's electoral list but are not formal members of that party.

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67 Issues of Ensuring Gender Equality and Women's Advancement in Armenian Political Parties, situation assessment report. UNDP, 2024

> *"My views have always been patriotic, national, and conservative. I do not accept liberalism, which I see as a perversion from Europe, and I will only follow a leader whose political views align with my own."*
>
> *"If a head of state or party leader holds a particular idea, I do not feel obliged to approve it. What matters to me is the idea itself, not the person or the party."*
>
> *"I consider myself both pro-state and patriotic, but I maintain my own perspectives and may not fully agree with anyone. I do not follow anything blindly; in terms of ideology, I adopt positions that are clear to me."*
>
> *"I do not adhere to any particular ideology. I do not follow anyone and make my own decisions."*
>
> *"I cannot give a very clear answer, but I can indicate the ideas within the party that appealed to me, such as environmental or social components."*
>
> *"I generally support conservative politics, although I hold more liberal views on certain issues. On national matters, however, I am firmly conservative."*

In the context of ideology, none of the women surveyed referred to the idea of gender equality. In other words, this concept is not only absent from party programmes, which is supported by research,[68] but is also largely missing from the parties' value systems. Only a few respondents mentioned equality and equal opportunities, and even then, only in relation to socialist or human-rights ideologies.

> *"On human-rights and related issues, I am strongly left-leaning, almost feminist, but on other matters, I support free-market policies and moderate right-leaning positions. Consequently, my ideological stance manifests differently depending on the context."*

The interviews indicate that the majority of women who are party members are aware of their obligation to uphold and share the ideology of their respective parties. Moreover, they are prepared to dedicate their efforts to promoting and implementing party ideas, even in cases where their original motivation for joining the party was not ideologically driven.

It is noteworthy that the commonly cited view of moving beyond "isms" is presented as a liberal approach to ideology. Nevertheless, according to the respondents, it remains very important to be guided by ideas. Their answers generally reflected the principles espoused by their parties, although these often require further clarification or the development of a more coherent ideological framework.

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68 Analysis of Armenian Political Party Platforms from Gender Equality Perspective. OxYGen, 2022 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/ANALYSIS-OF-ARMENIA-POLITICAL-PAR-TY-PLATFORMS_June2022.pdf

"Since our party and we ourselves have an ideology beyond 'isms," I am more inclined towards liberalism in regulations, as I believe social relations are evolving so rapidly that they should not be constrained by rigid ideological frameworks."

"We often discuss the obsolescence of ideas and the notion that 'isms" no longer matter, but I believe it remains important to be guided by ideology."

"I think that, in addition to representing a particular party and naturally sharing its values, we must maintain a personal value system aligned with the party's core principles and act as carriers of those values."

Although the respondents' answers do not allow a definitive conclusion that ideology is the decisive factor in joining a particular party or being included on its electoral list, experts note that disagreement with a party's ideology is most often cited by women as the main reason for leaving the party or resigning from their mandate. In any case, the question of how political ideologies are applied in Armenia requires further in-depth study.

Part 2. Leadership skills and characteristics

In examining the factors that facilitate or hinder women's political careers, it is important to understand the personal characteristics and skills that are essential for their advancement.

Within this framework, respondents were asked two key questions:

- What personal characteristics and skills are important for women to advance in politics?
- How would you describe yourself as a politician in terms of your skills, strategies, and approaches?

2.1. Skills and personal qualities

In their responses, the women surveyed highlighted a range of characteristics, skills, and personal qualities that they consider essential for progress in politics, based on their experience.

Determination and purposefulness: Many respondents emphasised that women must be persistent, have clear goals, and not give up in the face of challenges.

> *"If you do not believe in your own abilities, the political field will quickly consume you. You need to be determined and unafraid of failure."*
>
> *"If a woman lacks a clear goal, politics will lose her. You need to believe that you can effect change."*

Communication skills and confidence: The ability to speak publicly, negotiate, listen, and persuade is vital. Confidence in one's own abilities also seen as a key factor for progress.

> *"Women often have good ideas but hesitate to voice them. Confidence in one's own voice is crucial."*
>
> *"It is impossible to advance in politics without strong communication skills."*
>
> *"One needs to be able to listen, understand, and unite others."*
>
> *"Women often work well in teams and are capable of building trust."*

Although these are often labelled as "soft" skills, the interviews show they are essential for ensuring sustainable and inclusive political processes.

High sense of responsibility and honesty: Success in politics is strongly linked to moral values, honesty, and commitment to the public good.

> *"Politics should be based on honesty. A woman who is honest with her voters will always have support."*

Organisational and analytical skills: The ability to coordinate teams, analyse situations, and make strategic decisions is highly valued.

> *"A woman who can analyse situations and quickly orient herself has an advantage in politics."*

Sensitivity to social issues: Women frequently demonstrate a deep understanding of community needs, which drives their political engagement.

> *"Women are often more attuned to community concerns, which makes them effective politicians."*
>
> *"They often feel these concerns more deeply, bringing them closer to the people."*

Although sometimes overlooked in politics, these skills are particularly valuable in developing social policies and building public trust. Interestingly, women in Councils of Elders, in agreement with Members of Parliament, stress that success in politics requires not only knowledge and experience but also psychological resilience.

Patience and resilience

> *"Politics is not an easy path. Patience and resilience are very important, especially when facing unequal treatment."*

Overall, the women surveyed identified mainly those skills that characterise effective leadership. Research from the Harvard Business Review indicates that women outperform men in 17 out of 19 leadership skills, particularly in initiative, flexibility, self-development, achieving results, and integrity.[69] Men scored higher only in strategic thinking and technical/professional experience.

These findings align with a survey by the International Republican Institute (IRI) and Breavis company on women's political participation in Armenia,[70] which found that women outperform or match men in seven out of ten traits commonly attributed to politicians, including empathy, listening and communication skills, honesty and incorruptibility, purposefulness, education, and moral values. Men, however, tend to excel in leadership experience and power. Experts note that women's progress is often hindered not by a lack of abilities but by a lack of opportunities.

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69 Harvard Business Review research: Women Score Higher Than Men in Most Leadership Skills, June 25, 2019 https://hbr.org/2019/06/research-women-score-higher-than-men-in-most-leadership-skills
70 Public Opinion Survey on Women's Issues: Residents of Armenia, IRI / Breavis 2021 https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/iri.org/womens_political_participation_breavis_iri_results_presentation_final_07.01.2021.pdf

2.2. Self-characterisation as a political figure

The women surveyed describe themselves as principled, value-based leaders, team players, and politicians with strategic thinking and sensitivity to public issues.

> *"I am guided by principles, not interests. This helps me maintain trust."*
>
> *"My strength is teamwork. I can unite different groups around a common goal."*
>
> *"I am a politician who listens first, speaks afterwards. This is my approach: respect towards people."*
>
> *"I highly value principledness, consistency and being a team member."*

Judging by their responses, it can be stated that women build their political identity not on a competitive, but on a cooperative and value-based foundation.

Strategy and approaches

Women often state that their strategy is based on listening to the public, making evidence-based decisions, a community approach, and long-term impact.

> *"I listen to people first, only then propose solutions. That is my strategy."*
>
> *"My approach is based on community engagement. Without people, politics is empty."*
>
> *"My working style is based on trust. If people do not trust you, no strategy will succeed."*

The women surveyed therefore construct their political strategy using a bottom-up approach, prioritising public participation and the cultivation of trust. They describe themselves as collaborative, principled, and attuned to public concerns, building their strategy on engagement and credibility rather than power. This suggests that women's model of political leadership differs from traditional hierarchical approaches, favouring a more inclusive and value-based form of politics—a perspective supported by several international studies.[71]

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71 Gender and evaluations of leadership behaviors: A meta-analytic review of 50 years of research. The Leadership Quarterly https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1048984324000511

Part 3. Perception of success in politics

The following questions sought to explore the respondents' perceptions of success in politics, as well as the role models of successful women politicians:

- What constitutes success for women politicians, and what factors contribute to it?
- Are there any women politicians you consider exemplary? If so, why? The responses offer valuable insight into how women define political success, the values they associate with it, and the exemplary figures they look up to, based on their own experiences and observations.

3.1. Defining success for women politicians

Success as public trust and influence: the women surveyed frequently associate political success with earning public trust, exerting influence, and advancing the public interest.

> *"Success is when people trust you, value your opinion, and see tangible results."*
>
> *"The success of a woman politician is measured not by the position she holds, but by the degree to which she has influenced the political agenda."*
>
> *"For me, success means having one's voice heard and being able to influence decisions, even without holding an official position."*
>
> *"Success is not about being in the National Assembly; it is about being recognised as a fair and consistent political actor."*
>
> *"Politics should be viewed as the art of finding solutions; therefore, success comes not only from critique but also from proposing practical solutions and ways to implement them."*

The women surveyed frequently emphasised the importance of informal influence, highlighting community involvement, contributions to shaping the political agenda, and the cultivation of public trust as key markers of political success.

Success as value-based leadership: Many women perceive success as staying true to their values while actively driving social change.

For me, success means being able to change people's attitudes towards gender equality.

> *"A woman is successful when she brings her values into politics while remaining true to her identity."*

Many also emphasise that success entails remaining true to one's values and acting with integrity, regardless of external pressures.

> *"A woman is successful when she upholds her principles, even if it means leaving the system."*
>
> *"I consider my success to be maintaining my integrity, even when it has cost me my position."*
>
> *"The success of any politician lies in the value of their word."*

Consequently, value-based leadership is seen as a key measure of success, particularly for women, who are regarded as a driving force for change in politics.

Success as social impact and community change: Some women link success to tangible social outcomes, such as addressing community issues, advancing women's rights, and implementing educational reforms.

> *"I consider my success to be the creation of a women's support network within the community."*
>
> *"I feel successful when I see that, thanks to my initiative, girls in the village have begun participating in community meetings."*

In this context, success is perceived at the community level as tangible change, rather than merely as "bottom-up" influence.

Among the factors contributing to success, women highlight the importance of education, professional experience, trusted networks, and public recognition. Notably, the respondents often emphasise that success is achieved not solely through individual effort, but also through mutual support among women.

> *"Education, experience, and team support are the factors that have enabled me to succeed."*
>
> *"Without a trusted network, progress is very difficult; success does not come from individual effort alone."*
>
> *"My education has given me the confidence to speak on equal terms with others."*
>
> *"Having mentors is crucial; I have succeeded because experienced women supported me."*
>
> *"I have never viewed other women as competitors; we are all walking the same path."*

3.2. Perceptions of women's solidarity in politics

Respondents also highlighted mutual support among women when discussing their perceptions of "women's solidarity." Some referred to the well-known remark by former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albrigh,[72] that there is a special place in hell for women who do not help other women.

Although women's solidarity in politics—expressed through mutual support, mentorship, and collective action—has not been fully documented in Armenia, several studies and analyses of political processes provide evidence of its manifestations. For instance, research on "Public Perceptions of Women's Political Participation in Communities" by the OxYGen Foundation[73] documents that women's groups, particularly at the local self-government level, often act as mutual support networks, sharing experiences, mentoring one another, and engaging collectively in political initiatives: women elected to local self-government bodies frequently form informal groups to support each other, exchange experiences, and jointly raise community concerns.

Similarly, an article in the *Yerevan State University Journal of International Relations* notes that women's political activism in Armenia is often accompanied by cultural solidarity, shaped through the shared struggle against common challenges and gender-based barriers: women's political engagement is seen not only as a path to personal advancement, but also as a joint effort to establish gender equality.[74]

Participants in this study perceive solidarity in politics as mutual support, the exchange of experience, a willingness to promote one another, and unity around shared values. In their view, women's solidarity is a key factor in achieving collective success.

> *"Women's solidarity means supporting one another rather than competing, particularly in challenging circumstances."*
>
> *"Solidarity occurs when women politicians do not obstruct each other, but actively assist one another in advancing."*
>
> *"When effectively practiced, women's solidarity should serve as a crucial tool for enhancing women's political participation."*

It is noteworthy that women perceive solidarity not merely as a political tool, but also as a cultural value that challenges competitive and hierarchical models.

> *"We are all on the same path; without solidarity, many would be left behind."*
>
> *"Solidarity also means refraining from judgment or belittlement, and instead offering understanding and empowerment."*

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72 Madeleine Albright (Keynote speech at Celebrating Inspiration luncheon with the WNBA's All-Decade Team, 2006)

73 Research on "Public Perceptions of Women's Political Participation in Communities" by the OxYGen, 2021 https://havasar-infohub.am/hamaynqner/

74 "Women in Politics: Stereotypes and Modernity" (YSU Scientific Journal) www.Journals.ysu.am

The women surveyed suggest various formats to make solidarity work in politics.

Formats of solidarity	Supporting examples
Support networks	*"Women's networks can serve as platforms where experienced women support newcomers."*
Mentoring and experience sharing	*"I have received great support from women who had already walked this path. It gave me strength."* *"Throughout my career, I have felt invaluable support from female colleagues, rooted in the very idea of women's solidarity. I, in turn, have helped and encouraged women who joined the National Assembly after me. Politics is one of the few spheres where women's solidarity is clearly visible."*
Joint initiatives and legislative cooperation	*"We have worked together with several women MPs to improve gender-related legislation."* *"Joint initiatives provide not only strength but also demonstrates that women are capable of acting together."*
Formation of women's groups at the territorial and community levels	*"Women's groups in communities can become a driving force for change."* *"At the local government level, women need to unite to protect and advance one another."*

The interviews show that women's solidarity in politics is not only desirable, but also essential for overcoming obstacles caused by gender stereotypes. Women operate in an environment where they often face stereotypes, closed institutional systems, and media targeting. In this context, solidarity is viewed as a strategic resource for strengthening social connections, building psychological resilience, advancing the gender agenda, and establishing women's political influence.

According to experts who participated in the focus group for this research, examples of women's solidarity in the Armenian political arena remain limited. Women do not always demonstrate a united stance when female colleagues are targeted based on gender, and their positions are often shaped by party affiliation. As a result, instances of sexism in politics frequently go unaddressed.

Although some surveyed women expressed scepticism about the possibility of solidarity in highly politicised contexts, the majority remained optimistic. Notably, successful examples of solidarity are primarily cited by women from regional communities. For instance, in one community, women councillors from both opposition and ruling factions united to support the candidate who received the highest number of votes. A key factor in this collaboration was that these women were already respected professionals in their communities and had established connections prior to joining the Council of Elders. In other

words, women's professional and leadership experience, as experts, political figures, or community leaders, increases the likelihood of cooperation and a unified stance on issues, irrespective of party affiliation.

> *"I believe the reason for our unity was that all of us, before becoming members of the Council of Elders, were already accomplished people in our respective fields, and we had interacted with one another before working together in the Council of Elders. Moreover, unlike men, I think women never take the issue to hostility; they approach conflict issues in a much more constructive way."*

In general, women stress the importance of translating the idea of solidarity into practice, highlighting that it should not remain merely a stated value, but should be actively demonstrated through networks, mentoring, collaboration, and political mobilisation.

3.3. Role models of women politicians

A number of international studies have examined which women politicians are most frequently cited as exemplary leaders.[75] Such studies not only provide evidence on how role models are perceived by the public, but also reveal the characteristics based on which women are recognised as successful politicians.

In Armenia, as part of the baseline study on gender norms and stereotypes in the Eastern Partnership countries,[76] one-third of respondents reported that they did not have a female role model during adolescence. Those who did most frequently mentioned family members, school teachers, and famous public figures, while women politicians were cited less often.

Within the framework of this research, the women surveyed mentioned both internationally recognised politicians, such as Margaret Thatcher, Angela Merkel, and Golda Meir, and their own female colleagues. For these respondents, exemplary women are those who act with honesty, principledness, consistency, and a focus on the public interest.

75 Inspiring the Future: The Influence of Historical and Contemporary Role Models on Women's Leadership Paths (Al Naqbi, 2023)
Theorizing compassionate leadership from the case of Jacinda Ardern: Legitimacy, paradox and resource conservation ResearchGate, 2021
Before Prime Minister: Margaret Thatcher, Angela Merkel, and Gendered Party Leadership Contests. Politics & Gender Cambridge University Press: 2015
76 Baseline study on gender norms and stereotypes in the countries of the Eastern Partnership, UN Women/UNFPA, 2022 https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/03/baseline-study-on-gender-norms-and-stereotypes-in-the-countries-of-the-eastern-partnership

Exemplarity as value-based and moral leadership	*"X.X. is an example for me because she has never deviated from her values, regardless of political pressures."*
	"Y.Y. is an example for me because she is capable of combining professional depth with a public approach."
Exemplarity as a Symbol of Struggle and Resilience	*"I admire women who have walked a difficult path but never gave up. That is true role modelling."*
	"Exemplary women politicians are those who have managed to overcome systemic obstacles while remaining true to their principles."

The analysis shows that perceptions of exemplary women politicians are closely linked to the respondents' understanding of political success. For the women surveyed, political success is not primarily about attaining power but about exercising public influence, demonstrating value-based leadership, and contributing to social change. Exemplary figures are recognised not only for the positions they hold but for their professional competence, public dedication, resilience, honesty, and commitment to societal progress.

Overall, in Armenia, women's political success is perceived as a combination of public trust, value-based leadership, and social engagement, with exemplary figures embodying these qualities through both their achievements and their ethical conduct.

Part 4. Factors facilitating and hindering women's political advancement

The interviews reveal that women in politics operate in an environment where achieving success often requires not only professional skills but also resilience to overcome cultural stereotypes, family responsibilities, and institutional barriers.

The respondents shared their perspectives on the factors that facilitate or hinder women's political advancement, as well as their own experiences navigating these challenges, by addressing the following questions:

- What factors or conditions facilitate or hinder women's political advancement?
- What experiences have you gained in politics, including both positive and negative aspects?

4.1. Perceptions of enabling and hindering factors

Interviews with women politicians highlight a number of systemic and environmental factors that can either facilitate or hinder women's political advancement.

Enabling factors

Education and professional development: Higher education, particularly in the fields of public administration, law, and social sciences, is considered an important prerequisite.

> *"My political journey began when I started studying public policy. Education opened doors for me."*
>
> *"My education in law provided me with the tools to defend my position."*

Networks and mentorship: For women, having a supportive environment and networks within parties, civil society, and international organisations is crucial. Mentorship and guidance can significantly contribute to progress.

> *"If you don't have a supportive network, it is very difficult to move forward. I have been greatly helped by women who have already walked this path."*

Media visibility and public recognition: Women can increase their visibility, present their viewpoints, and build public trust through the media.

> *"The media can be a platform where a woman expresses her position and builds trust."*
>
> *"When people know you as an honest and hardworking person, they are more willing to trust your political decisions."*

International programs and experience: Participation in international educational, political, or experience exchange programs is considered a strong incentive.

> *"Participation in international programs helped me see that women everywhere struggle with similar problems."*

Participation in civic initiatives: Experience in human rights advocacy and cooperation with civil society organisations contributes to the development of legislative initiatives aimed at protecting human rights.

> *"Being active in civil society helped me understand the mechanisms of politics."*

Gender quotas: The introduction of gender quotas has already contributed to increased female representation in parliament and local self-government bodies. Quotas are seen as effective tools for promoting women's political advancement, but alone they are insufficient to ensure further progress or to overcome gender-based stereotypes.[77]

> *"I am afraid that without quotas, very few women will appear on the electoral lists of different political parties."*
>
> *"From the perspective of ensuring a certain degree of equality in participation, I view quotas positively. However, I do not consider them sufficient and see many negative aspects as well."*

Achieving success requires both the development of skills and the creation of an enabling environment that promotes women's full participation at educational, financial, networking, and cultural levels.

Factors hindering women's political advancement

In the interviews, women also discussed in detail the factors that may **hinder their political advancement**.

Limited financial resources: Political activity often requires financial investments, which can restrict women's participation, particularly in regional communities where the majoritarian electoral system is still applies. Under a proportional electoral system, this factor is less influencial.

> *"Political participation often requires financial costs, which limit opportunities for many women."*
>
> *"Financial resources may not be so important under today's proportional system, but within a majoritarian system, financial independence is essential to allow women the opportunity to stand as candidates."*

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77 Policy Brief – Promoting Women's Political Participation (OxYGen Foundation, UNDP) https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Policy-Brief_to-Support_Women-_Political_Participation_Eng.pdf

Social stereotypes and cultural barriers: Women face societal stereotypes regarding leadership, decision-making, and public roles.

> *"In our society, there is still a perception that women should stay in the family rather than engage in politics."*

Burden of family responsibilities: Political activism often clashes with family responsibilities, particularly in the absence of a supportive environment.

> *"Political activism often clashes with family responsibilities. Without support, it is very difficult to balance both."*

Closed party structures: The closed nature of decision-making within parties can hinder both the entry and advancement of women. Even those already involved are often excluded from influential positions, regardless of experience or capabilities.

> *"Decisions within parties are often made in closed, narrow circles where women are underrepresented."*
>
> *"Decisions within parties are often made without women's participation. This must be changed."*

Hate speech: Women highlighted the serious challenge posed by hate speech, particularly in relation to interactions with media and digital technologies.

The factors mentioned by women generally align with barriers identified in other research and with public perceptions. For instance, the International Republican Institute (IRI) and Breavis survey,[78] found that the most common (50–80 per cent) reasons hindering women's political participation include cultural norms discouraging activism, lack of party support, limited financial resources, targeting through hate speech on social media and in the press, and women's responsibility for childcare and household chores.[79]

4.2. Women's personal experience in politics

The respondents shared both positive and negative aspects of their political experience, which closely reflect their perceptions of facilitating and hindering factors.

Positive experience

The women surveyed associated their positive experience in politics with public engagement, influence on decision-making, community change, and personal growth.

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78 Public Opinion Survey on Women's Issues: Residents of Armenia, IRI / Breavis 2021 https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/iri.org/womens_political_participation_breavis_iri_results_presentation_final_07.01.2021.pdf
79 The survey was conducted nationwide, covering 511 respondents, 46 per cent of whom were men and 52 per cent were women.

> *"I realised that through my participation, it was possible to change the community's attitude towards women."*

> *"Politics has taught me that if you are persistent, you can achieve even what once seemed impossible."*

> *"It is an indescribable feeling when you see your proposal become law."*

Judging by the responses, women view politics as a platform for self-affirmation and public influence, enabling real change and promoting social justice. This aligns with their motivations for entering politics and their perceptions of success and women's solidarity.

> *"Politics allowed me to make heard the issues that had been ignored for years."*

The positive experience of women involved in public policy is also highly appreciated by society. Other studies on women's activities in local self-government bodies indicate that, according to public opinion, women's involvement in local self-government bodies contributes to solving community problems and improving the socio-economic situation. For example, according to the research on **"Public Perception of Women's Political Participation in Communities"**[80] 78 per cent of respondents who personally know women members of their community Council of Elders want those women to continue serving in office, and while in communities led by women, 84 per cent of respondents want her to remain as head of their community.

Research indicates that women in politics acquire new skills in communication, negotiation, and strategic planning, which contribute to their self-assertion and professional growth. This is also confirmed in the responses of the women surveyed within the framework of this research.

> *"The experience of shaping public discourse and developing political agendas is important for me."*

> *"The combination of skills gained is exceptional. In a short time, you have to develop public speaking abilities and be ready for any situation, considering the unpredictability of events. This teaches flexibility, quick decision-making, and invaluable communication skills that no university could replace."*

> *"It was important for me to start speaking on behalf of 'us' rather than 'I.'"*

> *"The main experience of my 15 years in politics is that I have remained faithful to my principles; my word has often played a decisive role."*

> *"I have improved my skills in shaping political speech, conveying messages, understanding people's problems more accurately, and organising contacts effectively."*

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80 Public Perception of Women's Political Participation in Communities. Research, OxYGen Foundation, 2021 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Public-perception-research.pdf

International studies highlight the positive impact of women's political participation:

Public influence and political agenda-setting: According to a joint assessment by the United Nations Development Programme and UN Women,[81] women's political participation contributes to the advancement of agendas that are often neglected, such as social protection, education, healthcare and gender equality. *"Women's participation in politics not only deepens democracy, but also ensures diversity in decision-making."*

Promoting peace and diplomacy: According to a number of studies that have examined the impact of women's political leadership on global issues,[82] women leaders tend to choose peaceful negotiations and diplomatic solutions, reducing the likelihood of conflict: *"Women in politics often act as peacemakers, promoting stability and dialogue."*

Public trust and new leadership models: within the BBC's 100 Women initiative,[83] many women politicians have been identified as leaders who enjoy public trust and are guided by values rather than power, which once again confirms the validity of the results of the present research.

Negative experience

The women surveyed mainly associate their negative experiences with gender-based discrimination, closed party systems, media and social networks targeting, and psychological pressure.

> *"The media targeted me not because of my ideas, but because of my appearance and family status."*
>
> *"I am very afraid of the press, and I always avoid it. You might say something, perhaps not formulate your thoughts correctly, and they can twist it and misrepresent it."*
>
> *"The most important challenge women politicians must overcome is hate speech in the public sphere. There is so much hate speech against women politicians in the public sphere, especially on social networks, that it truly becomes a serious test."*

The expert discussions of this research prove that women politicians often become targets of not only professional but also personal attacks, many of which are gender-based.[84] The fact that the hate speech in the Armenian-language media landscape has reached an alarming level, especially in terms of targeting women, public and political figures, is also confirmed by the results of media monitoring.[85] UN Women assessments show women face threats, personal attacks, and sexual insults, especially online.

81 Reflections lessons from evaluations: boosting women's political participation. UNDP 2025 https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-02/women_political_participation.pdf
82 The Evolving Roles of Women in National Politics: A Literature Review. Impact of Women's Political Leadership on Global Issues. 2023 https://www.dpublication.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/27-iss6-2546.pdf
83 BBC 100 Women https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01k4f07
84 The issue is analysed in greater detail in the "Impact of Gender Stereotypes" and "Role of Technology" sections of the present research
85 Online Hate Speech Targeting Women in Armenia, "All for Equal Rights" Foundation, 2024 https://www.allrights.am/language/en/online-hate-speech-targeting-women-in-armenia-2/

The answers of the respondents within this research put forward biased attitudes towards women politicians.

> *"In the political field, women often have to prove their worth twice over, simply because they are women."*
>
> *"I am often not listened to until I prove that I know what I am talking about."*
>
> *"The most significant experience for me is interacting with men on a completely different level, where you appear to be equal, yet in reality, you are not, even if your official position is higher than that of the man standing next to you."*

The research data from the "Public Perception of Women's Political Participation in Armenian Communities"[86] confirm that at the local self-government level, women officials often face a culture of "men-only decision-making" and are not perceived as equal partners.

Global studies also document biased and discriminatory attitudes towards women politicians due to gender-based stereotypes, which consider the influence of "social norms and stereotypes" as a key factor underlying women's negative experiences in politics, emphasising that overcoming such stereotypes is a fundamental precondition for women's political empowerment.

According to a **2020 survey by the United Nations Development Programme**, nearly half of the world's population still believes that men are better suited to politics than women: *"Women in politics face deeply entrenched stereotypes that constrain their progress".*[87]

A number of international analyses identify stereotypes as structural barriers that affect women's self-confidence, access to resources and political participation. For example, **the study "Women in Politics: Barriers to Participation and Strategies for Inclusion"**[88] shows that the marginalisation of women in politics occurs through both cultural and institutional barriers. It notes that although many women are present in the political system, they often lack real influence, being placed in symbolic or secondary roles without decision-making authority. In this sense, the underrepresentation of women in positions of power is one of the primary manifestations of their negative experiences in politics.

86 Public Perceptions of Women's Political Participation in Communities, OxYGen, 2021 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Public-perception-research.pdf

87 Tackling social norms: a game changer for gender inequalities. UNDP (2020) https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2025-02/women_political_participation.pdf

88 Women in Politics: Barriers to Participation and Strategies for Inclusion, International Journal of Social Science Research, 2024 https://www.ijssr.com/wp-content/uploads/journal/published_paper/volume-1/issue-2/IJSSR25217.pdf

Another reflection of women's negative experiences is the very limited representation of women in Armenia's governance system at the levels of parliamentary leadership, community heads, and senior state positions. This perception is also evident in the responses of the women surveyed in this study. For example:

> "In Yerevan, we have never had a female mayor or head of any of the city's administrative districts. There has only been one female deputy mayor, and even then, only for a very short period."

Overall, the analysis of the surveyed women's responses reveals that while they have gained diverse experiences in politics, they simultaneously face systemic barriers and cultural stereotypes. Their positive experiences are mainly associated with public engagement, social change, and value-based leadership, whereas the negative experiences are primarily linked to gender discrimination and media targeting.

4.3. The impact of gender stereotypes

The role of social stereotypes and cultural barriers is key in influencing women's political activity and advancement, as confirmed by local and international studies.

Stereotypes in public perceptions

Research conducted in Armenia shows that stereotypes regarding women's "family" and "public" roles continue to hinder their political progress. A particularly widespread perception is that politics is a "men's domain" and that women should prioritise family responsibilities.[89]

According to the baseline study on stereotypes in the countries of the Eastern Partnership,[90] more than half of men surveyed in Armenia believe that men make better political leaders. Among women respondents, 44 per cent agree with this statement, while 47 per cent believe there is no difference between male and female political leaders. These results indicate that patriarchal attitudes remain a barrier to women's advancement to leadership positions and limit opportunities for further political careers.

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) study "Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women parliamentarians",[91] 82 per cent of women MPs surveyed have experienced some form of psychological violence, and 20 per cent have been subjected to sexual harassment. Women parliamentarians report encountering misogyny and sexism in the workplace on a daily basis. Repeated surveys across multiple regions over several years not only confirmed these findings but also revealed other forms of sexism and violence against women, including threats of death, rape or assault,

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89 Women in Politics: Stereotypes and Modernity (YSU Scientific edition) www.Journals.ysu.am
90 Baseline study on gender norms and stereotypes in the countries of the Eastern Partnership, UN Women/UNFPA, 2022 https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/03/baseline-study-on-gender-norms-and-stereotypes-in-the-countries-of-the-eastern-partnership
91 Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians, IPU 2016 https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parlia-mentarians

sexist insults on social media, comments on appearance, and even instances of sexual and physical violence.[92]

Research in Armenia indicates that 14 per cent of hate speech targeting women engaged in public life consists of insults based on appearance, 12 per cent involves calls for violence, and 20 per cent involves swearing, of which 11 per cent is sexual in nature.[93]

Within the framework of this research, women politicians reported that stereotypes manifest as psychological pressure, discriminatory attitudes, sexist insults and hate speech, online threats, gender bias, double standards, and other forms of discrimination based on stereotypical assumptions.

Attitudes of women politicians towards stereotypes

The attitudes of the women politicians surveyed towards stereotypes and gender-based discrimination can be conditionally divided into three groups:

The majority of respondants, fully aware that patriarchal stereotypes hinder their work, actively oppose discriminatory attitudes. They provide numerous examples from personal experience and describe successful strategies for overcoming stereotypes. They also report encountering discrimination based not only on gender but also on age, disability, or ethnic identity.

"Stereotypes are unacceptable to me, and through my own example, I try to show young women that these barriers can be broken."

"There are stereotypes in our society concerning not only women's participation in politics but also in other fields, mainly regarding women's success. In recent years, such barriers have been overcome thanks to women who, as locomotives, pave the way."

"Naturally, I have encountered stereotypes, continue to face them, and will certainly do so in the future. For years, I have been trying to prove that I can do even more than many of my male colleagues. Only over time could I prove that my words were put into action."

Stereotypes and prejudice are often more pronounced in the regions than in the capital.

"Stereotypes create a lot of internal barriers for women. They constantly doubt their abilities and worry about what others think. It greatly hinders women and harms the community, which loses many capable individuals."

"I have never been targeted for my skills or abilities, but rather for being a woman. That is the most painful aspect of being involved in politics. However, one must rise above such comments and not allow them to break or distract you."

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92 Addressing Violence against Women in Parliaments https://www.osce.org/odihr/532187
93 Online hate speech targeting women in Armenia, 2024 https://www.allrights.am/language/en/online-hate-speech-targeting-women-in-armenia-2/

> *"The situation is more severe in the regions than in Yerevan. Even today, a woman can be told directly, 'It was not your business,' or 'You should have married and had children instead of doing this.'"*

> *"Stereotypes have a significant impact. Even if nothing is said openly, there is an assumption that if a woman enters politics, she must be someone's mistress or has agreed to it for money. Only a very small proportion of people believe that you have an ideological struggle to fight for."*

Some respondents acknowledge the existence of stereotypes and discrimination but note that they have not personally experienced it. Nonetheless, they are ready to confront it.

> *"Honestly, I have not personally experienced stereotypes or gender inequality. However, I have a negative attitude towards gender discrimination: one should not be criticised for being a woman."*

> *"I have not encountered gender discrimination in my career, but that does not mean it does not exist."*

> *"Personally, I have not faced it, but gender-based discrimination against women in politics does occur frequently, particularly in rural areas, where women's entry into politics is sometimes questioned on moral grounds."*

A smaller group of participants indicated that stereotypical approaches are shared even by women already involved in politics, noting that women sometimes target other women.

> *"In any case, a man, especially an Armenian man, is a strength. The final decision always belongs to a man. Men must prevail."*

> *"Women have already been brought forward to such an extent that men feel lost. I do not consider this right because there are situations that only a man can handle."*

> *"Our Armenian nation is accustomed to the fact that power should be in a man's hands. And when women gain power, they become more commanding."*

Double standards

Respondents often emphasise that women operate in a political environment dominated by male norms, where women are frequently expected to demonstrate "femininity" rather than behaviour typical of a politician. For example, one male MP told a female MP in the National Assembly: *"My upbringing does not allow me to ignore the fact that you are a woman. Therefore, try to use this podium with the grace and tenderness that befits a woman"*.[94]

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94 Manifestations of Sexism in Public Sphere and Speech, OxYGen, 2020 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/%D5%81%D5%A5%D5%BC%D5%B6%D5%A1%D6%80%D5%AF.pdf

Women experience "double standards" in terms of speech and behaviour.

> *"Literally the same thing that a woman and a man can say: the woman will be targeted, while the man will not even attract attention. I say this from personal experience."*
>
> *"When I visit regions and say, "I will raise your issue," the reaction is sceptical. The reaction is different when a male MP says the same thing."*
>
> *"Even minor mistakes can be fatal for women, triggering waves of hate speech on social media, while similar errors by men are easily forgiven."*
>
> *"Our society is much more demanding of women. The collective shortcoming of ten men is forgiven, but one woman's mistake leads to collective labelling."*

Women are often expected to demonstrate strength and assertive opinions while simultaneously conforming to stereotypes of femininity, limiting their ability to express themselves freely. Gendered communication styles, shaped by stereotypes, create expectations that women behave "like women" while men act "like men." For instance, a study by the University of Cambridge in the UK on stereotypes in political speech[95] shows that even public perceptions of women's language styles (such as "soft voice" and "non-assertive tone") can affect women's political participation.

> *"Sometimes it feels as though my gender prevents me from being perceived as a politician."*
>
> *"Women often try to imitate men's behaviour, speak using their vocabulary, and make masculine jokes. That environment constantly pushes you to become more masculine."*

Changes over time

Another study from the University of Cambridge[96] shows that gender models of political style change over time, and the stereotypical pressure placed on women by society weakens. Observing parliamentary debates in the UK over 25 years, researchers noted that perceptions that women use more emotional and empathetic arguments, while men use analytical and aggressive language, have shifted. Women now adopt stylistic features traditionally associated with masculine communication.

Although no similar studies exist in Armenia, experts in this research observed changes in the speeches of women MPs in the National Assembly, noting greater confidence, stronger argumentation, and more assertive judgments.[97] These shifts may be related to both the situation in the country and the generational change that has taken place within the political sphere. A different question, however, is to what extent women politicians' attempts to imitate the "masculine style" are accepted or "forgiven" by voters, and, in general, to what extent public pressure on women to conform to stereotypes has weakened in Armenia.

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95 Shaw S. Barriers to Women's Participation in Politics. In: Women, Language and Politics. Cambridge University Press, 2020
96 British Journal of Political Science No Longer Conforming to Stereotypes? Gender, Political Style and Parliamentary Debate in the UK, 2022
97 From the focus group discussion with experts

The women politicians surveyed express cautious optimism about the weakening of stereotypes. Most believe that changes are obvious, yet the influence of stereotypes remains strong.

> *"Regardless of how much people's attitudes have changed, when it comes to women's leadership, I still clearly feel a discriminatory attitude towards women in particular."*
>
> *"Stereotypes still exist. They have not been completely overcome. Overcoming them requires systematic work in education, culture, and society. We still have much work to do, but the ice has begun to melt."*

According to the baseline research on stereotypes conducted in the countries of the Eastern Partnership,[98] 67 per cent of women and 55 per cent of men in Armenia believe progress has been made towards gender equality. However, 45 per cent of women and 56 per cent of men stated they would not like to see more women in politics. Among young people aged 18–35, 53 per cent held similar biases. This suggests that, despite the growth of women's political participation through quotas, women are still not widely seen as role models, and gender stereotypes remain strong in public perception.

4.4. The role of family in women's political advancement

This research examined the role of family in women's political careers in two dimensions:

- What role does the family play in shaping women's political careers?
- What challenges arise when combining family responsibilities with political activity, and what opportunities do you see to overcome them?

All respondents agreed that family plays a decisive role at every stage of a woman's political career, from the decision to enter politics to assuming responsible positions. Two scenarios were noted:

- The family can support and encourage a woman's advancement;
- The family can hinder or even prohibit a woman's political participation.

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98 Baseline study on gender norms and stereotypes in the countries of the Eastern Partnership, UN Women/UNFPA, 2022 https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/03/baseline-study-on-gender-norms-and-stereotypes-in-the-countries-of-the-eastern-partnership

The supportive role of the family

Women in both the National Assembly and the Council of Elders highlighted the importance of family support throughout their political careers.

> *"I am fortunate to be able to say that my family, my parents, my husband, and my husband's family have not only avoided holding me back, but also supported me in every possible way, so that I could realise my full potential in the political field and promote the ideas I believe in."*

> *"If the family is against it, a woman cannot function as a political figure, let alone succeed. In my case, the support of my children, their understanding of what I do and why, and their encouragement have only pushed me forward. Having support at home is very important."*

> *"I have four children and one grandchild, I am very busy, and my family helps and supports me in any matter. My children help with technical matters, my husband with transportation. The atmosphere in my family is very positive."*

Family support is considered essential not only for practical reasons such as childcare but also for psychological support.

> *"Our society is such that we cannot ignore the role of the family in a woman's self-realisation in any field. If a woman does not receive the necessary support within her family, she will either not dare to enter that field or will stop halfway. From my own experience, I can say that without my family's support, I can hardly imagine how I would have overcome the difficulties that exist along the path of politics."*

> *"A family can either make a woman a housewife, leaving her in the kitchen, or give her wings and lead her to career growth. It is very important to have a like-minded husband in the family, not in terms of political views, but one who recognises that you are a person with your own ideas and perspectives, that you have the freedom of your own work, and who does not limit it in any way. This is very important for a woman."*

In the responses of women living in the regions, it is particularly emphasised that entering politics is often a joint decision with male family members:

> *"When I received the offer, I thought to myself, 'No, my husband will be against it.' But when I came home and told him, he said, 'No problem at all.' That pleasantly surprised me. The same was true with my father. My children were still young at the time, so we didn't particularly take their opinion into account, but later I could feel that they were proud of me."*

> *"My decision was not unanimously accepted in my family. At first, my sons were against it, and my husband asked, 'Are you sure you want to take on such great responsibility? Even if it is necessary for the team, your decision is important.' I told him, 'If I know that you are with me, then I am ready.'"*

Family-imposed restrictions

Some families restrict women's political activity, which respondents described as a form of psychological violence rooted in stereotypes.

> *"We constantly talk about violence against women, but we do not consider psychological violence, which is widespread, in the form of prohibitions and constraints on personal choice. This is unacceptable for me."*
>
> *"In my case, balancing family and politics is a real challenge. I am not married. I had a partner, and we were in a relationship, but he said, 'If you go into politics, we will not get married.' I chose politics."*

Research shows that the practice of imposing restrictions on women is widespread in Armenia, not only when it comes to entering politics, but also when assessing the labour market in general. According to the **baseline study on gender norms and stereotypes in the countries of the Eastern Partnership**,[99] that 23 per cent of men would not allow a woman in their family to work outside the home. According to the survey "On Public Perceptions of Women's Political Participation in Communities",[100] 73.4 per cent of respondents identified family prohibition as one of the reasons for women not running for office.

The views of the women politicians surveyed for this study suggest that, beyond the challenge of balancing work and family responsibilities present in any other employment opportunities, the restrictions on entering politics are linked to additional factors viewed as a challenge from the family perspective. Restrictions are linked to irregular work schedules and high public visibility and risks of targeting or threats to the woman and her family.

> *"Many men do not like their wives being in politics. They prefer them to have a fixed work schedule: to go to work and return home at a set time."*
>
> *"I still hear from men in my circle that they would not want their wife or sister to be involved in politics, because they would not be able to withstand that public shaming."*
>
> *"Family members also express concerns in terms of safety. For instance, after the elections, during the widespread resignation from mandates, acquaintances often hinted to my mother that it would be better if I did not take the mandate. She was afraid that they would try to intimidate me, not bribe."*

Families at the centre of targeting

Respondents emphasised the need to protect families from the challenges women face after entering politics. Most women noted that the greatest challenge was not so much being personally targeted, but rather having family members targeted.

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99 Baseline study on gender norms and stereotypes in the countries of the Eastern Partnership, UN Women/UNFPA, 2022 https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/03/baseline-study-on-gender-norms-and-stereotypes-in-the-countries-of-the-eastern-partnership
100 "Public Perception of Women's Political Participation in Communities. Research, OxYGen Foundation, 2021 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Public-perception-research.pdf

> *"I think the main challenge for a woman is to keep her family away from public discussions, because they may have accepted your decision, but they still bear the public consequences of it."*

According to the research "Online Hate Speech Targeting Women in Armenia" in addition to targeting women engaged in public activities, targeting their families is also widespread: calls for violence and insults directed at children and parents, as well as reproaches and public shaming of fathers, husbands, and brothers for "failing to control the woman's behaviour or public image."[101]

According to the observations of women politicians surveyed within the framework of this research, such targeting of families can have serious consequences, as insults or swearing directed at a woman in public life may push her family members, particularly her husband or brother, to demand retribution against those who made or published the offending remarks.

> *"I know many cases where real conflicts have occurred, and men went and found the insulter. After such incidents, women either leave their political activities altogether or begin to limit themselves to "safe" political agendas, so as not to bring any trouble upon the men in their families."*

The analysis of the respondents' answers regarding targeting of families states that not only must a woman entering politics be prepared to face all the negative consequences of being a public figure, but also her family members.

> *"The family must be prepared to bear all the difficulties that a woman in politics goes through, from various public pressures to hate speech. Families equally share all the successes, achievements, failures, good and bad emotions with us, sometimes even more than we do."*

This does not mean, however, that targeting the family, or any behaviour crossing moral boundaries and all red lines, can be acceptable to the public or within the political sphere. The analysis of the interviews indicates that the factor of targeting the family plays a decisive role in a woman's decision on whether to continue her political career.

Balancing family and political career

Household responsibilities and childcare are frequently cited as obstacles to women's political participation. According to the **results of the International Republican Institute (IRI) and Breavis company survey,**[102] **80 per cent of both women and men surveyed share this view.**

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101 Online hate speech targeting women in Armenia, 2024 https://www.allrights.am/language/en/online-hate-speech-targeting-women-in-armenia-2/

102 Public Opinion Survey on Women's Issues: Residents of Armenia, IRI / Breavis, 2021 https://www.iri.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/iri.org/womens_political_participation_breavis_iri_results_presentation_final_07.01.2021.pdf

> *"Unlike men, women experience pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare responsibilities. This is not only about politics but applies to any form of employment. And if there is no family support, it becomes extremely difficult for a woman to make a career."*

Women note that balancing family and politics is possible, especially with family support, although challenges remain for young mothers.

Most of the respondents see the solution in receiving family support and ensuring equal distribution of family responsibilities, while others view it within a broader context as a matter of state policy aimed at supporting families. None of the respondents cited family responsibilities as a reason to abandon politics.

> *"I have been fortunate in this regard because my husband and children fully support me."*
>
> *"Everyone knows that weekends are my family days, and we do not hold faction meetings on those days. This was also my condition, because it is important for me to have at least two days entirely devoted to my family.*
>
> *"My husband has always told me, 'I will stand by you at any moment,' because this job has no fixed schedule, it is daily work, sometimes even late at night."*
>
> *"My decision was made easier by the fact that my children were already grown up. I did not face the difficulties that women with young children experience, devoting 70-80 per cent of their time to them."*
>
> *"The strongest families are those where the spouses are also very good friends. In such cases, family responsibilities are shared; there are no women's or men's responsibilities, only family responsibilities."*

Some respondents advise young women to prioritise childcare before politics, though this is exceptional; most advocate creating opportunities for women to combine family life with political careers. This thesis, however, remains exceptional, as the majority of respondents, including women with young children, advocate for creating opportunities that allow women to combine family life with a political career. Many of the respondents, especially young women, are against the idea that a woman should be forced to choose between family and politics. In their opinion, any such choice should be a matter of freedom, not forced, which is possible only if both women and men are provided with equal opportunities.

> *"Whether a woman or a man should be free enough to decide what they choose. Perhaps a woman finds happiness in baking or in raising a child, and that happiness has the right to exist. Equal opportunities must be created, and I will be free to choose."*

According to respondents, not all women and men want to engage in politics; however, this desire often does not even arise among women, as the lack of opportunities creates barriers that seem insurmountable.

4.5. Perceptions of the effectiveness of gender quotas

The respondents discussed gender quotas as a mechanism for promoting women's political participation, reflecting both their positive and negative effects. They responded to the following questions:

- How do you assess the introduction of gender quotas? What positive or negative impact do you observe as a result of their implementation?
- What other political tools or mechanisms could be effective in promoting women's advancement in politics?

Both the general public and the women politicians surveyed recognise the main achievement of the gender quota enshrined in the Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia[103] as the significant increase in women's representation in the National Assembly and local self-government bodies. This achievement is particularly appreciated by respondents who participated in promoting the idea of quotas. The quota is also seen as an incentive for political parties to ensure women's participation in politics.

"In my opinion, the quota has been and remains one of the most important tools, because our society has not yet matured enough for women's representation to occur naturally."

"Without quotas, men would continue to move forward together on party lists through friendships and connections and would never consider the involvement of women."

"For me, the quota is very important, and, in my opinion, it should be at a 50/50 ratio. I also do not agree with the view that it merely serves to ensure numerical representation."

Respondents also emphasised that quotas contribute to women's advancement, providing opportunities for self-expression and gradually changing public perceptions of women's roles in politics.

"Even if women initially enter politics as a result of quotas, they can develop, establish themselves as political figures, become more active, and work on their professional growth. It is also due to the quota that the attitude towards women entering politics has changed to some extent."

"Even if women's presence in politics through quotas may at first seem artificial, over time, many of these women grow professionally. In other words, even an initially artificial presence becomes real."

It is important to note that the majority of respondents understand quotas as a temporary measure, recognising the need for additional supportive mechanisms to consolidate progress. However, when asked to name such mechanisms, most respondents struggled to suggest alternatives, stating that at present no tool appears more effective than quotas.

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103 Electoral Code of the RA, Articles 83.4, 100.2, 100.3, 130.2, 141.6, 141.8 https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/201330

> *"I don't know of any other political tool that can currently replace the quota. It is a temporary measure that should be abandoned only when it has fulfilled its purpose- when it has succeeded in bringing about equal gender representation."*

Regarding the negative consequences of quotas, women pointed to the practice of including "random" women on party lists, particularly in smaller parties and at the regional level. They also noted cases of "formal" inclusion in local self-government bodies, where women listed due to quota requirements subsequently refuse their mandates or withdraw.

> *"Although quotas are the right tool to ensure women's participation, sometimes women appear on the electoral lists who have no genuine interest in politics. In some cases, just to fill the required quota, parties simply recruit people who have never considered engaging in political activity."*

> *"Before elections, in the rush of preparations, small parties include women whose presence itself calls into question the idea of women's political participation. This is a relevant and problematic issue."*

While most respondents identified these negative consequences, they did not propose concrete remedies, believing that such issues would resolve over time. Some, however, suggested solutions, particularly within party structures, emphasising the need for parties to actively support women's advancement, conduct motivational work at the local level, and expand leadership development and educational programmes for women. In all cases, respondents did not see these shortcomings as a reason to abandon the quota system. They expressed confidence that without quotas, women's representation would decrease significantly.

> *"Even if at some point quotas result in purely technical representation, simply to meet numerical requirements, eventually the numbers translate into quality. We are already witnessing these changes."*

> *"I do not see any alternative to quotas; there should be complementary measures, programmes and events that encourage women's participation and ensure the effectiveness of the quota system."*

As a positive achievement, respondents mention the relatively new mechanism for applying quotas, a practice adopted from international experience, namely the establishment of internal gender quotas within the party, which are aimed at ensuring the representation of women in the party's leadership and territorial bodies. While they assessed these internal quotas positively, they noted that introducing them has been challenging, as male members' attitudes play a crucial role.

> *"Are there many men who would promote women at the expense of their own participation? My answer is no. Do you know how the number of women in our leadership increased? The structure simply expanded. Otherwise, I think there would be no consensus."*

Experts positively evaluate the initiatives to introduce internal quotas, believing that they will contribute to women's political careers within parties.[104]

Despite the achievements of gender quotas, debates over whether quotas are "for or against" women, or whether being elected through a quota is "shameful," persist in some political circles. Yet surveys over the past ten years consistently show that Armenian society generally supports quotas to ensure adequate representation of women in the National Assembly and local self-governments. Public opinion is even more progressive than political actors regarding quota size, with most favouring up to 50 per cent[105] and supporting their application in the executive branch.[106] Given this, one might assume the appropriateness of quotas is no longer contested. However, analysis of the respondents' answers shows that even the opinions of women politicians who directly benefit from the quotas are not definite on this issue.

> *"What is the quota? It is a very good thing, but it is a violation of men's rights. Women have been promoted so much that men being pushed aside."*

However, most respondents found it worrying the fact that women who entered politics through quotas oppose the idea of applying quotas, considering it a form of discrimination against men, forgetting that quotas were introduced as a tool to combat discrimination against women.

> *"Some people say that quotas create unfair competitive conditions, but this is simply unacceptable, given the centuries-old culture in which men restricted our opportunities for participation."*

Positions against quotas mirror arguments voiced in global debates. The issue identified in this research is that such views are expressed by women who themselves benefited from quotas. Experts attribute this to subconscious stereotypes, perceived negative consequences of quotas, or limited awareness of factors that promote or hinder women's advancement[107] These perceptions may also stem from the use of the term "positive discrimination", now largely replaced in official documents by "temporary special measures" as defined in the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.[108]

Experts note that gaps in awareness and stereotypical thinking are being addressed through educational programmes and training courses aimed at developing women's leadership. The issue can also be viewed in terms of women's solidarity: the Armenian experience shows that quotas once served as a unifying idea, allowing women in the National Assembly and women's rights organisations to act with a common purpose. Recognising this is important for ensuring continued advancement and promoting the agenda of women's rights protection.

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104 From the focus group discussion with experts

105 Public Perception of Women's Political Participation in Communities". Research, OxYGen Foundation, 2021 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Public-perception-research.pdf

106 Men and gender equality in Armenia. Report on sociological survey findings, UNFPA, 2016 https://menengage.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/MEN-AND-GENDER-EQUALITY_Final.pdf

107 From the focus group discussion with experts

108 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), article 4, temporary special measures https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/60505

Part 5. Public relations as a key guarantee of political activity

Connections between women in legislative or local self-government bodies and their voters, and their relations with civil society and the media, are crucial in determining the success of their political careers. Within the framework of this research, these aspects are examined from three main perspectives:

- The accessibility of women politicians to voters and their preferred forms of communication;
- The nature of their relations with civil society;
- The challenges they face in building relationships with the media.

5.1. Relations with voters

All respondents emphasise that maintaining relations with voters is essential, describing it as a fundamental part of their work and a responsibility. They recognise that active engagement allows them to communicate public concerns, express citizens' views, increase their visibility, and improve their chances of re-election.

Respondents generally rate their accessibility highly, noting that they are available to their voters and explaining how they prefer to remain in contact.

"I am open and available to citizens in any space and platform, including social networks and other platforms. I am always available. There are always messages in my Messenger, and none of them go unanswered. I also communicate with people during regional visits."

"In essence, I am always in active contact with voters: on the street, in the car, in transport, and at the university with students. In other words, my contact with the public is constant and a top priority. I prefer personal communication and direct discussion of the issues to online exchanges or formal correspondence."

"I think every party member should prove themselves through their actions, not by promising what they will do, but by doing it so voters can see. That is why, when people contact me, whether through calls, letters, requests, applications, or in-person meetings, I listen to everyone and try to find solutions to their problems. If there are no solutions, at least I can explain why this problem cannot be resolved, definitely within the boundaries of the law. I never act against it."

At the local self-government level, communication with voters has its own particularities, heavily influenced by the size of the community. Smaller communities favour personal interaction, whereas larger ones rely more on social networks. Not using social media is considered a disadvantage. In large communities, beyond reception hours, additional initiatives are implemented, such as weekly newspapers or press-conference-style meetings.

> *"Everyone in my community knows me. I don't need to introduce myself. I can easily talk to citizens on the street or in shops and take any opportunity to present my ideas, maintaining direct and personal communication with people."*

> *"Meetings with voters are regular, once or twice a month. We listen to everyone. If problems arise, we try to solve them or guide them. I think that this form of cooperation is very appropriate and effective. These are informal, ongoing relationships that are maintained constantly."*

> *"I use all possible platforms and all environments, doing my best to use them effectively. These are also means of increasing public communication and visibility."*

> *"Constant communication with citizens is one of the most important things for me. I would say that 80 per cent of my work is listening to people, identifying their problems, and finding solutions. In large communities, it's a bit difficult, but it is still important to keep in touch and listen to people. We have reception hours on Friday, but even on other days, no citizen who comes to the municipality ever leaves without being heard."*

> *"In small communities, it is much easier to work with people. I know all the residents personally, and I know the problems of each individual. Even when we need to implement a programme in those communities, we go on site, discuss it together, and decide which programme is more suitable for the given family."*

> *"We hold receptions with citizens, and social media now offers extensive opportunities to communicate and maintain contact. People often write to me, and I don't leave any message unanswered."*

Communication with voters also carries an emotional aspect. On the one hand, respondents note that direct communication gives them positive emotions; on the other, they also experience difficulties, particularly when promises made to citizens are not fulfilled by their political force.

> *"Interestingly, I receive more information and positive emotions from face-to-face interactions in person or in street contacts than through online communication. That is why I prefer in-person communications. We also have meetings when necessary. In my nine-year career, I do not remember a case where a citizen approached me and their problem was not resolved."*

Women politicians also mention several objective challenges in communicating with voters, including:

- Lack of infrastructure and resources for organising meetings in the regions;
- Double workload of women, and limited time as a result;
- The factor of trust towards women.

Difficulties in organising meetings in the regions

In enlarged communities, problems with roads, transport, and limited financial resources restrict opportunities for councillors to organise meetings in remote areas. These constraints also make it difficult for residents to attend meetings held in the regional centre. While Members of Parliament have adequate financial support for organising visits, reimbursements provided to members of the Council of Elders are insufficient. Furthermore, limited awareness among voters about their rights and procedures makes personal communication especially important.

Double workload

In addition to limited resources, both women MPs and women councillors face additional obstacles in organising their work with voters, such as problems of double workload and time constraints, as well as the lack of supporting administrative staff. These factors affect the women's level of activity, the assessment of their work within their parties, and complicates career advancement.

The factor of trust

Distrust towards women politicians is rooted in stereotypes, although experts note that trust largely depends on the individual and on public trust in political institutions in general.[109]

"For me, it is very important that any form of communication, whether with civil society, the Fourth Estate (the press), or the public, be based on trust. I give great importance to maintaining the atmosphere of trust that has been built around me. If you have managed to gain the trust of a particular group, you must treat it with the utmost responsibility, trying to maintain it, because it is easy to create that environment, but it is even easier to lose it. One wrong step, one wrong word, one wrong position can take it away. Therefore, the guiding principle should be thoughtful and sincere communication, which, I believe, is always appreciated."

According to the 2024 Caucasus Barometer conducted by Caucasus Research Resource Centres (CRRC),[110] trust in political institutions in Armenia is very low. Trust in political parties does not exceed ten per cent; trust in the National Assembly stands at 17 per cent; trust in local self-government bodies is higher, at 31 per cent. Experts emphasise that this general climate of distrust makes it difficult for political representatives, including women, to engage effectively with voters. At the same time, international research shows that women politicians are often perceived as more honest, less corrupt, more socially responsible, and more inclined towards dialogue and consensus.[111]

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109 From the focus group discussion with experts
110 Caucasus Barometer 2024 Armenia https://caucasusbarometer.org/am/cb2024am/codebook/
111 Data from Pew Research Centre and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)
Women politicians more likely to reply to people who reach out in need, study shows. Research brief https://theconversation.com/women-politicians-more-likely-to-reply-to-people-who-reach-out-in-need-study-shows-147395
Who is Afraid of More Women in Politics, and Why? An Analysis of Public Opinion in 28 European Countries https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/1554477X.2023.2256612?needAccess=true

Research on public perception conducted in Armenia,[112] shows that voters highly value the work of women in local Councils of Elders. Although there are no specific surveys about women MPs, studies linked to gender quotas point to a positive attitude towards ensuring women's proper representation in parliament.[113]

Yet high expectations placed on women make them more vulnerable to mistakes. Experts note that if increased representation does not meet expectations, the idea of women's political participation itself may be undermined. Unlike men, whose shortcomings are seen as individual, criticism directed at women frequently becomes generalised, affecting all women and complicating the entry of others into politics.

5.2. Cooperation with civil society

All women MPs and women involved in the Councils of Elders emphasise the importance of connections with civil society. Women with experience in human rights advocacy are more open to cooperation, noting that they continue to maintain previous connections.

> *"The connection with civil society has also been maintained from the past, as I myself worked in the NGO sector for many years. I use every available tool: all social media platforms, in-person meetings, and receptions for citizens, etc."*
>
> *"The connection with civil society comes from my previous work. I have not developed new tools for this purpose since my earlier connections have been maintained."*
>
> *"I can create dialogue platforms with civil society around topics of my interest, to ensure our effective cooperation."*
>
> *"During these years, I cannot recall a case when I have simply rejected an offer from an NGO, because I attach great importance to the development of civil society in Armenia, which is one of the safeguards of democracy. I always try to be responsive and cooperative whenever they approach or raise an issue."*

Several women MPs have successfully cooperated with women's rights organisations, resulting in specific legislative proposals on labour rights, violence against women and children, hate speech, and sexism. In 2019, the NA-CSO Cooperation Platform was established around the promotion of equal rights for women and men.[114] As a result of the discussions held within this framework, about two dozen proposals were transformed into

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112 Public Perception of Women's Political Participation in Communities. Research, OxYGen Foundation https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Public-perception-research.pdf
113 Men and gender equality in Armenia. Report on sociological survey findings, UNFPA https://menen-gage.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/MEN-AND-GENDER-EQUALITY_Final.pdf
114 The platform was established within the framework of the UNDP program "Modern Parliament for a Modern Armenia," implemented jointly by UNDP, the National Assembly of the Republic of Armenia, the OxYGen Foundation, and the International Centre for Human Development, with the support of the United Kingdom's "Good Governance Fund" and the Government of Sweden https://havasar-infohub.am/hamagorcakcutyun/

legislative initiatives and adopted.[115] The initiatives concerned the Labour Code and Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia, the Law "On Political Parties", the prevention and protection of violence against women, issues of women's reproductive health and benefits, the Law "On Audiovisual Media", hate speech, and sexism, etc.

The cooperation around this agenda continued during the current convocation of the National Assembly. In particular, during the discussions on amendments to the Law "On Prevention of Domestic Violence and Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence" in 2024[116] the women Members of Parliament who were the authors of the bill, having become the targets of public speculation, collaborated with NGOs working on the issue and succeeded in substantiating and advancing their proposals. Women were also at the forefront during the ratification of the Lanzarote Convention by the National Assembly, which also became the target of speculation.

In the context of cooperation with civil society, the participation of several women Members of Parliament and women councillors in major programmes implemented in Armenia in recent years can be observed. These include UNDP's "Women in Politics" (2018–2025),[117] Promoting Women's Participation in Peace and Security Processes" (2022–2025),[118] the "Katarine" School of Women's Political Leadership (2019–2025),[119] and "EQUAL – EU 4 Women's Empowerment in Armenia" (2022–2025).[120]

It is worth noting that, among the 25 women included in the sample of this research, 11 local councillors had previous experience of cooperation with the "EQUAL" programme.

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115 https://havasar-infohub.am/hamagorcakcutyun/page21172130.html
116 https://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx?aid=150320
117 It has been implemented from 2018 to 2025 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), in cooperation with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure of the Republic of Armenia and the OxYGen Foundation, with the support of the Government of the United Kingdom's "Good Governance Fund"
118 The programme is implemented through a grant from the Institute for War and Peace Reporting (IWPR), with the support of the United Kingdom's Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO)
119 The programme has been implemented since 2019 by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) with funding from the U.S. Department of State
120 The project is implemented by OxYGen Foundation, European Partnership for Democracy (EPD) NGO, Netherlands Helsinki Committee NGO, Women's Support Centre NGO, and WINNET Goris Development Foundation in cooperation with Winnet Sweden NGO

5.3. Challenges in building relationships with the media

Respondents' views on the media are mixed. While they recognise the media's role in shaping public opinion, many also mention challenges or negative experiences.

> *"The media is the tool through which public perceptions are shaped, so I try to establish the best possible relations with all representatives. In fact, it is part of my responsibility; I am in charge of the party's public relations office and working with representatives of the media is also my professional duty. I am always open to the media and journalists; I rarely refuse. Besides, I walk a lot, I live in the city centre, and journalists approach me very often."*
>
> *"For me, it is a matter of principle to be open and accessible to all individuals or media outlets concerned with Yerevan's problems, who have something to say or questions to raise. In that sense, I never approach selectively whether or not to speak to a particular media outlet based on its political orientation. It is also very important for me to make the professional information I possess available to all residents of Yerevan."*

The responses fall into two broad categories: those who communicate freely with the media and those who avoid engagement due to past negative experiences.

Women politicians who communicate freely with the media

> *"I am also very open in my interactions with the media and always answer questions. Sometimes I myself initiate meetings with media representatives, for example, when it concerns the legislative amendments that I have proposed, and so on. I rarely refuse any media."*
>
> *"I have no problems with the media. Whenever I need to say something, I can easily arrange it."*
>
> *"I am always available for media representatives, even if I do not wish or cannot give an interview, I still respond and explain why not."*

Those who have had negative experiences with the media

> *"To be honest, I don't communicate much with the media because I am quite disappointed in it. Our media still has a lot to learn, a lot of room to grow and participate in training. I might say 'pear,' and it writes 'apple.' That's why I avoid dealing with the media; maybe that is bad, I have nothing to say, but I prefer to communicate only with the media outlets that are adequate."*

Research conducted in Armenia shows that the main problems with the media concern the visibility of women politicians and presenting a non-stereotypical image. Although media coverage of female public and political figures has increased in parallel with the increase of women's representation in government, it is not proportional and continues to remain significantly lower than that of male politicians.

This problem becomes particularly evident during elections. According to reports from the OSCE/ODIHR observation missions,[121] during the three parliamentary elections held between 2007 and 2021, the visibility of women candidates in the Armenian media did not exceed ten per cent, even though during the same period, the representation of women candidates in elections increased from 22.6 per cent to 37 per cent due to the introduction of gender quotas.

Similar patterns were observed in the 2021 local elections. According to monitoring data,[122] the media coverage of women candidates amounted to only four per cent, while women made up an average of 34 per cent on the electoral lists of political forces.

Monitoring also reveals numerous cases of gender stereotyping, biased attitudes, and gender-based misinformation in the Armenian mass media.[123]

Women politicians compensate for the lack of visibility in traditional media through increased activity on social media. They note that in their interactions with the public, they prefer to rely not on traditional media support, but on social networks. In that case, at least they can ensure unbiased content.

5.4. The role of technology in women's political activity

In Armenia, women have no problem accessing digital platforms: 81.9 per cent of women and 77.9 per cent of men use the Internet, which is higher than the global average of 65 per cent for women and 70 per cent for men.[124] The role of technology in politics is best characterised by the findings of media consumption research conducted in Armenia. Thus, according to the research on Freedom of Expression and Media Consumption in Armenia (2024)[125] digital platforms, particularly social networks, blogs, video blogs and podcasts, are the main/primary source of social and political news for 62 per cent of respondents, and Television ranks second, as the primary source for 45 per cent of respondents.

Within the framework of this research, questions concerning the role of technology in women's political careers made it possible to examine the issue in several dimensions:

- To what extent do women politicians use modern technologies, including social media, in their professional activities, and which social media platforms do they prefer?

121 Elections in Armenia https://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/armenia
122 Elections 2021: Women Candidates' Coverage on TVs and Online Media: Analysis of Monitoring Results https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final_Report_Coverage-of-female-candidates_Elections-2021_ENG.pdf
123 Discrimination and violence on TV and Online Media: How gender-sensitive is the Armenian media? 2019 and 2021. Analysis of Monitoring Results, OxYGen, Journalists for the Future NGO, 2021 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Media-Monitoring-Report_Final.pdf
Gender Disinformation in the Armenian Media https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/FINAL-Media-report-Eng-1.pdf
124 ITU Facts and Figures 2024 https://www.itu.int/hub/publication/D-IND-ICT_MDD-2024-4/
125 Research on Freedom of Expression and Media Consumption in Armenia, Internews, 2024 https://internews.org/resource/freedom-of-expression-and-media-consumption-in-armenia/

- What differences exist between users of social networks as a tool in terms of age and place of residence?
- What difficulties and challenges do they face on digital platforms, and how do they assess the role of technology in ensuring women's political advancement?

Advantages of digital platforms

The majority of women surveyed actively use the capacities of technology, social media, and artificial intelligence tools in their political activities to maintain contact with voters, reach a wider audience, conduct campaigns, build evidence-based speeches, and build support. The technology for them serves as a guarantee of their personal progress and of competitiveness, and a means of keeping pace with the times.

Overall, women politicians highlight two main opportunities among the advantages of social media and digital platforms:

- Social media and digital platforms allow for faster and more direct contact with voters;
- Social networks help to bypass the limitations of traditional media, which often display bias against women.

"I am entirely in favour of keeping up with the times and remaining competitive. My team and I make full use of all opportunities provided by modern technologies, from social networks to various digital tools. I also believe that they greatly affect the publicization of the qualities of a personal brand. It is essential for me not to stand still but to move forward, to try new formats, fresh approaches and come up with new messages."

"I began actively using social media during the pre-election period. It was important for me that my political views and speeches were also available to Assyrians around the world, and the fastest and most effective way to maintain a connection with them is through social networks. It worked very well."

"Today, anyone can make themselves known through social media without waiting for a convenient opportunity to appear on television or radio once or twice a year. This gives a huge advantage. Naturally, I actively publish my political work on my social media pages, receive different kinds of feedback, and even when I receive negative feedback, of course, if it comes from real users and not from fake accounts, I never delete it."

Among social networks, respondents first mention Facebook, followed by other platforms: Instagram, TikTok, X (formerly Twitter), and Telegram.

> "I use all social media platforms, but with a more targeted, differentiated approach. For example, I post more youth-oriented content on TikTok, and I post more professional material on Facebook."

> "I mainly use Facebook, X, Telegram. When I first started to use TikTok, there was a perception that TikTok was not appropriate. Two years later, everyone joined TikTok without exception. Everyone. Now it is considered appropriate. On TikTok, I mainly post informative videos and not personal ones. But sometimes I read comments like, 'So, you are an MP, aren't you? What has an MP to do on TikTok?' without understanding that it is an additional tool to ensure communication."

The issue of personal and official pages on social media

Views differ on whether personal and political content should be kept separate. Some maintain strictly political pages, others combine personal and political content, and some manage two pages.

> "My personal page has become my political page. Just as my life is not divided into political and personal parts, the same is true for my social pages."

> "Before entering politics, I was not active on social media; I hadn't even posted a photo for years and never shared my personal life on social platforms. But I realised that being a public figure, a politician now requires direct communication with society, so I manage a political page on Facebook. Although I am one of the most active deputies in that regard, I think I should be more active."

> "I have both a personal page and an official page on Facebook, but the content is almost the same. I don't know how useful it is to maintain two pages."

> "I have an official page on Facebook, but I don't use it often. I prefer my personal one. I think a separate political page is boring for people; it can provide a slight diversion from politics, showing, for example, what else a politician does beyond their official duties. After all, a politician is an ordinary person too. Occasionally, I like to post something nice, for example, if I have taken a nice photo, and I post it so people can see that photo shooting is one of my hobbies."

Distinguishing between personal opinion and political position is often difficult, and some respondents mention problems arising from how their online activity is interpreted.There have been many instances where this has caused problems within political forces.

> "I am proficient with technology and use AI a lot nowadays, but I use social media exclusively for personal purposes. I share political thoughts and express my opinion. There was even an occasion when I posted some political thoughts, and some people in the municipality said I shouldn't have written such a thought. I replied, 'That is my page and my personal opinion. I have the right to express it.' The conversation ended there."

Characteristics of using technologies

Age-specific differences are evident in the use of technologies for political activity. Younger respondents emphasise social media as the primary and most effective tool, whereas older and more experienced politicians, even while recognising the necessity and importance of new technologies, still consider social networks a supplementary means. They continue to view in-person communication with voters as the main and most effective approach.

"On the one hand, it gives you the opportunity to communicate with many people, but on the other hand, you are completely detached from real interaction. It would have been much better if the Internet didn't exist, and you could go out and learn about people's problems in person, because pictures and videos are one thing, but reality is another. I prefer face-to-face communication, which, unfortunately, becomes less and less common."

"Online communication is widespread nowadays, but for me, direct interaction is more important."

Caution towards social media is observed among both women MPs and councillors, with those in regional areas being notably more cautious.

"I present myself more as an individual than a political person on social platforms."

"I have social media accounts, but I never post anything. I do not even congratulate my relatives or family members on their birthdays with a post. I only share photos."

The scepticism of political figures in the regions is supported by several factors. First, access to technology in remote settlements remains lower than in regional centres or the capital, making in-person interaction indispensable. Second, discussions in digital environments are more easily manipulated, and third, it is essential to be familiar with basic cybersecurity rules when using technology.

"The main advantage of social networks is that they give you an opportunity to reach a wide audience and make your work as a politician much more visible. However, on the other hand, there are a number of risks, one of them being that any discourse in the digital environment is much easier to shift into the field of manipulation."

"They are very important for problem-solving and lobbying, as well as for finding quick solutions in various challenging situations. They help raise issues publicly and reach a large number of people at once. Another matter, however, is the need to be aware of the basic security rules when using digital technologies."

Research highlights concerns about media literacy. Despite high Internet usage in Armenia, only 31 per cent of respondents are able to distinguish facts from opinions and identify manipulative content, while only 18 per cent can recognise dubious information or verify facts.[126]

Sexism, aggression and hate speech on digital platforms

The primary reason for women politicians' caution towards technology, both among MPs and local self-government members, is the prevalence of sexism and aggressive behaviour online. The respondents' concerns are confirmed by a number of studies, according to which women politicians are most exposed to online attacks and gender-based targeting. One of the most widespread forms of online violence, both globally,[127] and in Armenia, is hate speech; moreover, in the Armenian-language media landscape, it has a clearly expressed political (20.5 per cent) and gender orientation (42.6 per cent).[128]

Women politicians are frequently targeted not for their policies but for personal characteristics, with politically motivated criticism often crossing boundaries and focusing on individuals' private lives. Respondents express concern about the hostile level of discourse, attacks on family members—especially children—and the lack of clear mechanisms, or knowledge of existing mechanisms, to protect themselves from online bullying.

"I used to be active on Facebook, posting updates about my work and sharing my views. The reason why I left it is very personal. In order to avoid my family and children being targeted, I simply froze my account. Of course, I now have a page, but it was created and is managed by my assistant. She mainly posts my speeches and statements, but, of course, it's not me."

"Recently, I was watching a programme showing which women politicians were supposedly someone's mistress... with photos. I cannot understand how such a thing is even possible. This is a disgrace, unacceptable, and a violation of rights enshrined in the Constitution. This is how you can easily find yourself at the centre of a shameful scandal with no way out. In general, social networks can have disastrous consequences with this kind of influence. Very few women are able to use filters to protect themselves from such attacks; many do not even know how."

"Personally, it is a great psychological pressure for me, especially when their accusations are groundless. It would be different if they had evidence or facts to publish it, but to play with a person's name without proof? That is why we are often very cautious when expressing opinions. We do not want to be insulted or family members to be targeted."

126 Research on Freedom of Expression and Media Consumption in Armenia, Internews, 2024
https://internews.org/resource/freedom-of-expression-and-media-consumption-in-armenia/
127 Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women, The Economist Intelligence Unit
https://onlineviolencewomen.eiu.com/
128 Online Hate Speech Targeting Women in Armenia, 2024 https://www.allrights.am/language/en/on-line-hate-speech-targeting-women-in-armenia-2/

"I highly value the role of social networks in terms of communication. It is an opportunity to convey a message to the public. However, I do not accept under any circumstances the recent tendency among politicians and public figures to use swear words or spread hate speech. People engaged in politics should conduct ideological battles, not use street-level discourse. I think that politicians should be held accountable for using inappropriate public language."

"If a woman can use digital tools, she can share her work activities with an incredibly wide audience. In this sense, it is a very important and empowering tool. Yet, on the other hand, it can play a cruel trick, and a single post on a social network can become fatal. The culture of making comments in Armenia is terrible. If you read the comments, you could decide to quit politics at any moment."

Despite these risks, most women surveyed consider the opportunities afforded by technology to outweigh the dangers.

"The advantage is that you get the opportunity to announce your existence to the world without intermediaries. But on the other hand, the more people know you, the more you are discussed and targeted. Still, I am convinced that if you are engaged in politics and no one discusses you, then you are a dead politician."

"So, is this an opportunity or a threat? Both depend on you. I try to focus on opportunities while also understanding the risks."

In conclusion, respondents' attitudes towards social media and digital tools can play a decisive role in determining not only the level of their activity but also the feasibility of continuing their political careers. Some are so discouraged by the threats online that they hesitate to make decisions about their future in politics, while others, fully aware of the risks, are determined to confront these challenges and continue their political work.

Part 6. The role of political parties in women's advancement

Within the framework of this research, the discussion of the topic focuses on the respondent women's perceptions of their role in the political parties, their perceptions of party policy and internal culture, as well as measures they propose to ensure equal opportunities within parties.

The participants of the research responded to the following questions:

- What role do you have in the party? What influence do you have on decision-making?

- In your opinion, what should a party's policies and culture be to promote women's involvement and advancement?

- What measures can be taken within parties to ensure equal opportunities?

Women's influence within political parties

When measured by representation in the governing bodies of Armenian parties, women's influence is significantly lower than their overall participation in the parties.[129] The low level of women's representation in the governing bodies of parties served as the basis for enshrining a provision in the Law "On Political Parties",[130] aimed at women's presence in leadership. This provision links women's representation in party leadership to targeted state funding.[131] According to research and expert assessments this provision has not yet produced the expected results, and in most parties receiving state funding, the women's representation in the leadership positions remains below 40 per cent.[132][133]

In this study, 28 women (70 per cent of respondents) are party members, with 17 holding specific positions within the party or in elected bodies. Specifically:

- Nine women are involved in leadership structures at various levels, ranging from local councils to the highest governing body. Their official roles are mainly as members of councils, boards, or leadership bodies, with only rare cases of women heading territorial party structures.

129 Women's Political Leadership in Armenia. Manual for political parties, UNDP, 2021
130 Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Political Parties" https://www.irtek.am/views/act.aspx-?aid=87850#
131 According to Article 26, Part 7 of the Law of the Republic of Armenia "On Political Parties", state-targeted funding is allocated to a party based on the percentage of the underrepresented gender in the party's permanently operating governing body during the reporting year. Specifically, half of the funding for at least 40 per cent, a quarter of the funding is between 20 and 40 per cent, and no funding is provided if it is less than 20 per cent
132 Issues of Ensuring Gender Equality and Women's Advancement in Armenian Political Parties", situation assessment report. UNDP, 2024
133 From focus group discussions with experts

- Eight women hold positions that allow them influence in decision-making, including roles in elected bodies, as community heads or deputy heads, leaders of party factions in Councils of Elders, and chairs or deputy chairs of standing committees in the National Assembly.

The remaining respondents who are party members emphasise that although they do not hold official positions, but they actively participate. Most of them note that their influence on decision-making is determined by the expression of their opinions, rather than by their position. Others notesthat their opinion is not always heard.

> *"My opinion is heard, discussed, and taken into account."*
>
> *"I would like to be listened to and understood in the faction."*

Some women value a democratic culture within their party, where opinions are discussed and decisions made collectively, while others note that leadership or the majority often determines outcomes, rendering their influence ambiguous.

> *"We don't make decisions without group discussion, decision-making is not a one-person process."*
>
> *"Even if no one has asked my opinion, and if I think I have something to say, I can freely approach the board members, the staff or even the party leader. How much influence that has depends on various circumstances."*

Many women associate their influence in the party with their personal qualities: constructiveness, friendliness, and the ability to listen. These qualities are often seen as key factors of success in a party environment.

> *"I am very constructive, very friendly (...) I never make anyone's life difficult."*
>
> *"I do not create problems (...) I ensure maximum peace."*

Women often adopt a collaborative approach to exert influence, which can be both a strength and a limitation during political struggles.

Non-partisan women, reflecting on their influence within factions, note that not being party members limits their decision-making power. In some cases, they view this as an advantage, allowing them to freely express their opinions. However, the influence of non-partisans on faction decisions cannot be described unambiguously.

> *"Since I am not a party member, my influence and role are not significant."*
>
> *"I am not, and have never been, affiliated with any party (...) however, decisions are made on democratic principles."*
>
> *"I am non-partisan, but our faction is among the most liberal. Any decision is made as a result of active discussion among the MPs, so I must mention the role and decisive influence of each of the MPs on decision-making process."*

Perceptions of the role of political parties in women's advancement

Respondents emphasised that political parties should foster an inclusive, transparent, and equality-based culture.

> *"The women's role within the political party is often limited to organizational work, rather than strategic decision-making."*
>
> *"A party should not only include women on the lists, but also trust them at the decision-making level."*
>
> *"If there is no clear position on gender equality within the party, then women's involvement remains formal."*
>
> *"The party culture should encourage women's initiative, rather than restrict their role."*

Women contrasted their expectations with reality, describing party culture as often "patriarchal," where women are expected to be "supporters" rather than "decision-makers." They emphasise the need for real participation, not symbolic presence.

Interestingly, non-partisan women cited patriarchal party culture as a reason for remaining outside party structures.

> *"I am non-partisan precisely because, unfortunately, political parties in our country are built around a single individual and he is usually a man, and others initially accept that they have no chance of becoming, for example, the party leader. For me, it is important that there is internal competition and the opportunity for advancement in the party."*

Measures within political parties to ensure equal opportunities

As interviews show, the role of parties in women's political advancement is decisive. Women often face closed party systems in which decisions are made without their participation. Even when women are included in party lists, their role is limited to a formal presence without real influence. Women are not sufficiently represented in the party leadership bodies.

In the context of these problems, particular attention should be paid to the practice of "internal quotas" established within the ruling party, which is aimed at expanding the number of women in the party's leadership and territorial bodies. According to the women surveyed, although the adoption of quotas was rather challenging, they have already yielded results by significantly expanding women's representation within the party's executive board.

> *"With great difficulty, we managed to establish internal quotas within our party. I know that in previous attempts, the proposal to adopt quotas has been rejected by the party, and it was only possible to adopt it by increasing the number of board members. I think that all parties need internal mechanisms that promote women's advancement."*

Experts note that voluntary internal quotas, especially by the ruling party, can set a precedent for other parties and reflect a party's commitment to implementing state gender policy.[134] In particular, it is a step towards achieving one of the objectives set out in the 2025–2028 Strategy for the Implementation of Gender Policy in the Republic of Armenia, specifically the development and application of gender-sensitive policies and practices by political parties.[135]

Respondents stressed that quotas alone are insufficient. Party policies and culture must ensure women's real involvement rather than mere formal presence. Recommended measures include encouraging women's initiative, providing mentoring and training, developing and implementing a gender strategy, and ensuring equal access to resources and decision-making.

The analysis of the interviews reveals that the women surveyed have a clear understanding of what steps are needed to create a new political culture based on inclusiveness, equality, and value-based leadership. In this regard, a high level of awareness is demonstrated by women who have participated in women's leadership programs or have been involved in human rights advocacy before entering politics.

In particular, the women respondents suggest a range of practical steps to promote women's advancement within parties, such as providing **support and training.**

> *"Parties should introduce mentoring programs for women, especially for young members."*
>
> *"Women's training within parties should be continuous, not just before elections."*

The importance of **transparent promotion mechanisms** as well as the **existence of a gender strategy** is also emphasized.

> *"The procedure for electing leaders within the party must be clearly defined. If there is no transparency, women are left out."*
>
> *"Equal opportunities mean not only inclusion in candidate lists, but also equal use of resources."*
>
> *"The party should have a gender strategy, not just make statements."*
>
> *"The issue of gender equality should be on the party's agenda, not only raised during elections."*

The problems and solutions identified by the women surveyed regarding the role of parties in ensuring women's political advancement are consistent with expert assessments and are confirmed by the findings of research conducted on this topic in Armenia in recent years.

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134 From the focus group discussion with experts

135 Strategy and Action Plan for the Implementation of Gender Policy in the Republic of Armenia for 2025-2028 https://www.arlis.am/hy/acts/206364

Research on women's leadership within political parties indicates,[136] that the party environment can be both an enabling and a constraining factor. "Women's Political Participation in Armenia: Policy Brief," presenting the issues of women's involvement during the 2021 snap parliamentary and local self-government elections, states that *"the nomination of female candidates by parties is often conditioned not by internal equality policies, but by the requirements of the Electoral Code"*. It also notes that *'the main obstacles to women's progress within parties include exclusion from the decision-making process, unequal access to resources, and the absence of mentoring mechanisms"*,[137] once again confirming that women's involvement in political parties may be merely a legal requirement, and real participation still requires time.

Another study[138] similarly observes that *"party culture remains male-dominated, expecting women to take organisational rather than strategic roles,"* and that *"women are often included in party lists without any real political influence or the opportunity to influence decision-making."* These claims also highlight the "patriarchal" nature of party culture and some constraints on women's roles.

International studies, likewise, confirm that political parties play a decisive role in women's political advancement, especially in terms of how willing they are to implement inclusive policies, ensure equal access to resources, and remove systemic barriers. For example, according to the **UN Women** analysis,[139] parties are often a "gateway" for women to enter politics; however, this phenomenon has both positive and negative aspects. *"Parties decide who is nominated, in what positions, and with what resources. If there is no culture of equality, women are excluded from influential positions."*

International IDEA's research "Gender Equality in Political Parties",[140] which examines the internal procedures of parties regarding gender equality, states that *"parties that have a gender strategy, mentoring programmes, and transparent promotion mechanisms are more likely to contribute to women's advancement."* The research also notes that women's advancement within parties requires not only structural changes, but also a reassessment of values.

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136 Women's Political Leadership in Armenia. Manual for political parties, UNDP, 2021
137 Women's Political Participation in Armenia: Policy Brief, OxYGen Foundation, 2022 https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/Policy-Brief_to_Support_Women-_Political_Participation_Eng.pdf
138 Women's representation and participation in political parties and political initiatives in Armenia: Gender analysis / Women's Resource Centre NGO, 2016 https://armunicat.nla.am/cgi-bin/koha/opac-detail.pl?biblionumber=1324252
139 Corporate thematic evaluation of UN Women's support to women's political participation: Insights from the field. UN Women, 2024 https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/05/corporate-thematic-evaluation-of-un-womens-support-to-womens-political-participation-insights-from-the-field
140 IDEA International – Gender Equality in Political Parties https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/gender-equality-political-parties

The European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE),[141] through its analysis of political party practices in EU member states, has found that women's participation is higher in parties that have a gender equality committee, women's political schools, and internal monitoring mechanisms. *"Women's advancement within parties is possible only when gender equality is viewed as an institutional commitment, rather than a public relations tool."*

Based on the findings of the above-mentioned research, including the issues identified within the framework of this research, the analysis of the key factors describing the role of parties in women's political advancement can be summarised in the table below:

Factor	Armenia[142]	International experience[143]
Application of quotas	Legislatively mandated, but often formal, with no real impact.	Quotas are viewed as an initial step, a temporary measure, but not sufficient in the absence of an internal party culture.
Party culture	Male-dominated, hierarchical, women are expected to take organisational, non-strategic roles.	Parties built on the principle of equality promote women's leadership and initiative.
Support and capacity building	Often absent or implemented only before elections.	Support programmes are considered an essential tool for development.
Access to Resources	Women often lack equal access to financial, media and networking resources.	Access to resources is considered a prerequisite for success.
Gender Strategy	Often absent or formal, implementation mechanisms lacking.	Gender strategy must be institutionalised and effectively implemented.
Participation in decision-making	Women are frequently excluded from the party's decision-making level.	Women's participation in decision-making is seen as an indicator of democracy.

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141 European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) – Gender Equality in Political Decision-Making, 2022
https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/publications/gender-equality-political-decision-making
142 'Ibid'.
143 'Ibid'.

Part 7. Vision for future career

The women surveyed tried to describe their plans concerning their future political career by responding to the following question:

- Do you intend to continue your political career? If yes, in what direction do you see it developing?

The respondents' answers can be grouped according to key factors influencing their decisions about continuing political engagement. These factors are closely related to their motivations for entering politics.

Politics as an ideological choice, not a career

Many women view politics not as a career but as a struggle for values or a form of public service. This reinforces the idea that women entered politics not for personal gain, but for public purpose.

"I have never even thought about politics as a career. At this stage, yes, of course, I will continue to fight, but not for the sake of a career, but because I know that there are so many serious problems in our country, and if I can influence even part of them, then I must remain in politics. The day I realise I can no longer bring about a change will be the day I leave."

"I have come a long way, and leaving politics would be like parting with my identity, because for me this is an ideological choice, not a career. I may not be a member of the leadership body and so on, but my ideological influence is now for life."

This position highlights that women in politics are often guided by a sense of social responsibility rather than personal ambition.

Uncertainty, reservations and conditional approaches

A considerable number of women link their future political engagement to external factors such as the political situation, family circumstances, or the position of their party. This demonstrates a degree of uncertainty and caution.

"I don't know how the party will value me, but I see myself only and exclusively in my current team."

"Honestly, I don't have the answer to that question yet. I am very much an artistic person... I see myself more in art than in politics."

"I am not sure, it depends on the state of the country, I don't know. It depends on developments. At the moment, I don't know."

17.8 per cent of respondents expressed uncertainty about their future plans and their active role in politics. This may be due to the difficulties women face in expressing themselves in politics, as well as the ongoing search for preferred fields. Those women who entered politics due to circumstances or at the encouragement of others and have no clear ideological basis find it difficult to define their future directions.

Preference for territorial and community involvement

Women involved at the community level often note that their political activity is determined by local issues and personal connection to the community. They often do not strive for high positions or representation at the national level, but focus on local influence, viewing community engagement as the most effective and meaningful form of political participation.

"I love community work. I want to continue being useful to the community."

"I cannot imagine my life without my school and my pupils... my choice will not be in favour of politics."

This approach is also typical of women who prefer to continue their professional work, leaving politics.

The role of women in politics as an instrument of change

Some women associate their political involvement with specific sectors, such as education, social policy, or women's rights. They see politics as a tool to drive change in these areas.

"I will mainly focus on the role of women in education, I will move forward with that idea."

"I see myself in the social sector. I have a clearer vision there than in other areas."

"In the future, I see my political activity directed at training young specialists in politics. For me, it is a very serious political activity to prepare future politicians in political schools."

This suggests that women perceive politics as a means to implement sectoral reforms, particularly in areas traditionally associated with women.

Confidence, struggle and affirmation of identity

Some women see their future in politics as an integral part of their identity. They emphasise the continuity of their struggle and the importance of political speech.

"I am already beginning to find it difficult to imagine myself without politics... my kind of people is needed."

"I am determined to continue my struggle."

This indicates that women can develop a stable political identity that goes beyond the boundaries of holding office and takes on a public role.

A complete rejection of political engagement

Some women have firmly decided not to continue in politics. Reasons include deep disappointment with the political environment, the sense that they have achieved their goals, or the perception of a new generational role for themselves.

> *"I can say with great confidence and sincerity, without hesitation, that I will no longer continue my political activities. I had three main goals for being in politics, and for the most part, they have been achieved."*
>
> *"In fact, I am so deeply disappointed that I have almost made a final decision that I will no longer run for office. I am disappointed that, unfortunately, many issues are resolved through street-level behaviour."*
>
> *"Political activity is much broader for me than being a Member of Parliament. I have always valued young people's entry into politics, and there must come a time when we, mature and established individuals, make room for the younger generation of politicians."*

Even experienced women face difficult choices due to the political environment, online harassment, and threats to their families. They balance discomfort with political processes against responsibility for the country's uncertain situation.

International studies find similar trends as the ones outlined within the framework of this research. For example, the study "Representation and the Challenges in Women's Political Careers",[144] which examines women's future political plans and career aspirations in the European Union, analyses these in the context of career stages, personal motivation and ambition, as well as opportunities:

- **Career stages:** pre-institutional, institutional, and post-institutional stages, where decisions at each stage shape future aspirations.

- **Personal motivation and aspirations:** drive career decisions and influence pursuit of future positions.

- **Perception of opportunities:** women are constrained by party selection mechanisms, societal stereotypes, and institutional norms, affecting future advancement.

Interestingly, the research also examines the situation **"after politics"**, noting that women face difficulties in obtaining high-paid positions, which in turn limits them from planning for a future career. It proposes a theoretical framework to help political decision-makers understand when and how women's career aspirations are hindered, and what reforms are needed to overcome these obstacles.

Another study,[145] based on **surveys of women MPs in various countries**, looks at the starting point and further progression of women's political careers. It highlights that women often show less ambition for high positions than men, which is explained by several obstacles identified by the respondents. These include financial difficulties, the lack of inclusiveness and transparency of parties which are considered "gateways" to enter politics, as well as pressure

144 Gendered EUropean careers? Representation and the challenges in women's political careers Elena Frech Institute for Political Science, Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg, Bamberg, Germany, 2021 https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/14651165241300281
145 WOMEN'S POLITICAL CAREERS 2022, By Sofia Collignon, Queen Mary University of London and Minna, Cowper-Coles, King's College London, Global Institute for Women Political Leaders AISBL

due to stereotypical public perceptions, media attention and online violence, and other factors that affect not only women's current participation, but also future political aspirations.

The women surveyed indicated that their political involvement was conditioned by several prerequisites:

- **Aspiration for social influence**: politics is viewed as "the fastest and most effective way to bring about change."
- **Family support:** more than 80 per cent indicated that their family members or spouses encouraged them to run for office.
- **Education and professional experience:** the majority of the respondents have higher education degrees and have occupied leadership positions, which contributed to shaping future political aspirations.

A research report published by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD)[146] outlines the main drivers that shape women's aspirations for political careers:

- **Family involvement and support:** family members engaged in politics often inspired women to enter the field themselves. This not only drove them towards political engagement but also helped them understand its mechanisms.
- **Political issues and personal experiences:** many women indicated that concern about specific issues or their own activism led them to become political leaders.
- **Sense of public service:** the desire to "make the world a better place" was mentioned as a key driving force in nearly 50 per cent of interviews.

The report provides a detailed account of how women prepare for political leadership in order to realise their aspirations, also addressing the obstacles that may limit their political ambitions.

By recognising the comparability of the findings of this research with the approaches of international research, it can be concluded that women's perceptions of their political future are multi-layered, reflecting both ideological approaches and practical reservations. The responses of women participating in this research indicate that women often perceive politics not as a classic career, but as a form of public service, a struggle for values, and social responsibility. This is confirmed by their positions, which emphasise not the pursuit of office, but the opportunity to influence through public reforms.

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146 Westminster Foundation for Democracy: Women's political careers: Where do leaders come from? Rebecca Gordon, Shannon O'Connell, Sophia Fernandes, Keerti Rajagopalan & Rosie Frost, London, March 2021

Conclusions and recommendations

The research findings allow us to draw the following conclusions:

- The women surveyed report that they enter politics not for personal gain, but out of a sense of public service, ideological commitment, and responsibility to their communities. Gender equality, while relevant, is only a minor factor in their motivation.

- Their approach to leadership emphasises cooperation, values, and public responsiveness, in contrast to competitive or hierarchical models.

- Success, as understood by the respondents, is measured by public impact, principled decision-making, and influence on social change, highlighting the importance of solidarity and teamwork.

- Despite their considerable potential, women's political advancement remains constrained by systemic barriers, entrenched stereotypes, and the demands of family responsibilities, signalling the need for comprehensive and sustained support.

- Effective communication with voters, civil society, the media, and through digital technologies is a key factor in women's political success. At the same time, the risks inherent in the digital environment necessitate protective measures.

- Political parties often operate within closed and patriarchal structures, limiting women's meaningful participation and advancement. Nonetheless, equality of opportunity can be promoted through internal quotas and gender-sensitive strategies.

- Respondents' expectations regarding their political futures vary widely—from continued engagement to disappointment and withdrawal—reflecting decisions shaped by environment, circumstances, values, and opportunities.

Based on these findings, a set of recommendations has been developed to support the advancement of women's political careers. These are addressed to all stakeholders, including women politicians, political parties, the National Assembly and Government of the Republic of Armenia, civil society organisations, the media, and international organisations implementing women's empowerment programmes in Armenia.

The recommendations aim to tackle the challenges identified in the research and to foster women's political advancement across the following areas:

1. Institutional and legislative support

- Monitor women's participation in the upcoming parliamentary and local self-government elections to identify trends in women's political progress and potential challenges.

- Assess women's participation in the upcoming local self-government elections from the perspective of the effectiveness of additional guarantees for maintaining the gender quota introduced in the

Electoral Code of the Republic of Armenia to address previously recorded violations.

- Monitor the effectiveness of the state targeted funding mechanism envisaged by the Law "On Political Parties" in ensuring women's representation in the leadership of political parties.

- Support the development of strategies aimed at enhancing women's participation and advancement, introduce mechanisms to promote transparency and gender sensitivity in internal procedures, and expand the precedent of applying the internal quota system within political parties.

- Increase the accountability of all parties involved in the country's governance for ensuring women's political advancement by encouraging their participation in programmes and events aimed at implementing state gender policy, particularly, in achieving the objective addressed to parties in the "Strategy and Action Plan for the Implementation of Gender Policy in the Republic of Armenia for 2025-2028".[147]

- Foster the consolidation of women PMs represented in the National Assembly around the agenda of ensuring women's advancement and, by adopting the international best practices of the parliamentary governance system, establish a parliamentary committee on ensuring equal rights and opportunities for women and men.

- Review the reimbursement system proposed in the bill "On Amendments to the Law on Local Self-Government"[148] for covering the necessary expenses of members of the Council of Elders, ensuring a fairer and transparent approach to increase the involvement and efficiency of the Council of Elders.

2. Capacity-building and educational programs

- Introduce specialised training within women's empowerment and leadership programmes, with international support, to strengthen skills in political communication, negotiation, media relations, time management, and stress management.

- Develop national and local initiatives to enhance women politicians' digital skills, including social media use, campaign strategy, cybersecurity, and technology.

- Expand mentoring networks at local and national levels to facilitate collaboration between experienced politicians and newcomers.

- Ensure the sustainability and continuity of international programmes aimed at broadening women's political participation in Armenia.

- Promote the creation of an online information and analysis platform to support women in politics in developing their careers and networks.

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147 Strategy and Action Plan for the Implementation of Gender Policy in the Republic of Armenia for 2025-2028, First priority: "Development and implementation of gender-sensitive policies and practices by political parties"

148 Bill "On Amendments to the Law of the Republic of Armenia on Local Self-Government" https://www.e-draft.am/projects/9105/about

3. Public support and women's solidarity

- Foster women's solidarity by creating platforms for collaboration among women politicians and civil society actors committed to women's empowerment.

- Encourage positive media coverage of women in politics, and promote non-stereotypical representations of women politicians through cooperation with journalists.

- Implement public campaigns to challenge stereotypes, promote gender equality, eliminate sexism and hate speech, and strengthen the family as a supportive environment for women's leadership.

- Take initiatives to expand childcare infrastructure and support work–family balance, removing barriers to women's political and professional careers.

- Monitor activity levels of women and men in Parliament and local councils, such as speeches, legislative initiatives, and inquiries, to enhance the visibility of women's political engagement and challenge stereotypes.

4. Engaging men as allies

- Encourage male politicians, public figures, professionals, and celebrities to act as allies in supporting gender equality and the advancement of women's leadership.

- Introduce joint political schools for women and men, incorporating gender-sensitivity training within programmes designed to develop political skills and leadership.

- Engage male Members of Parliament in combating hate speech, participating in women-led initiatives and public campaigns, and ensure their involvement in a range of events and programmes that promote public interests and human rights.

- Promote greater utilisation of women's professional expertise within the National Assembly, including through the collaborative development of legislative initiatives by female and male MPs across various areas.