

# FROGEE POLICY BRIEF 3

## Insights from Georgia

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Women in politics: why are they under-represented?

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Political empowerment: Georgia's weakest link towards gender equality progress?

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# Abstract

## Women in politics: why are they under-represented?

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Women are generally under-represented in political offices worldwide, and their under-representation becomes larger in more senior positions. In this brief I review some recent academic literature in economics and political science on the likely causes of women's under-representation. Broadly speaking, the literature has divided such causes into "supply-side" and "demand-side" factors: the former include women's potentially lower willingness to run for political office, whereas the latter include voters' and party leaders' prejudices against women in politics. Understanding the underlying causes of women's under-representation in political institutions is crucial in order to design the most effective policies to address the existing gender gaps. In concluding I summarize some of the policies that have been proposed or used to empower women in politics and review the evidence on their effectiveness when available.

## Political empowerment: Georgia's weakest link towards gender equality progress?

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In this brief we review the most recent evidence on women's representation in Georgian politics, including the data from the 2020 Parliamentary elections. We find that introducing gender quotas in 2020 party lists have resulted in a slight improvement of the share of women in the Parliament. However, this measure still fell short of its expected effect. We argue that both "supply-side" and "demand-side" factors driving women's under-representation in the Georgian politics need to be addressed in order for these shares to change in a meaningful way. The recommended policy interventions to help solve the problem in the long run range from maintaining and expanding binding gender quotas for political party candidates, supporting women's participation on the labor market to tackling cultural stereotypes in the society and financing leadership training programs for women.



## Women in politics: why are they under-represented?

Women are generally under-represented in political offices worldwide, and their under-representation becomes larger in more senior positions. Of the four dimensions considered in the World Economic Forum's Gender Equality Index (namely, Economic Opportunity and Participation, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival and Political Empowerment), the dimension called Political Empowerment, which measures the extent to which women are represented in political office, records the poorest performance, with only 25% of an hypothetical 100% gap having been closed to date.

Importantly, although there is large variation across countries, gender inequality in political empowerment is documented in every region worldwide, including in those countries that are most socially and economically advanced. Sweden, for instance, while having a good record of women's representation in most institutions (women currently represent 47.5% of the Parliament members, 54.5% of the ministers, and about 43% of the municipal councillors), has never had a woman as Prime minister, and only one third of its mayors are female. Countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia have only closed 15% of an hypothetical 100% gender gap in political empowerment, according to the World Economic Forum, by far their worst performance among the four sub-indexes that compose the overall Gender Equality Index.

Given the persistent under-representation of women in political institutions, where important decisions that shape societies are taken, economists and political scientists, among others, are increasingly interested in understanding the causes of the gender gap in political

representation. In this brief I summarize some of the recent academic literature on this question, and I review some policies that may help closing the gender gaps in political representation.

*Table 1. World Economic Forum Gender Equality Index. Regional Performance in 2020, by Sub-index*

	Overall	Econ. Participation and Opportunity	Educational Attainment	Health and Survival	Political Empowerment
Western Europe	0.767	0.693	0.993	0.972	0.409
North America	0.729	0.756	1.000	0.975	0.184
Latin America and the Caribbean	0.721	0.642	0.996	0.979	0.269
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	0.715	0.732	0.998	0.979	0.150
East Asia and the Pacific	0.685	0.663	0.976	0.943	0.159
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.680	0.666	0.872	0.972	0.211
South Asia	0.661	0.365	0.943	0.947	0.387
Middle East and North Africa	0.611	0.425	0.950	0.969	0.102
Global	0.685	0.582	0.957	0.958	0.241

*Note:* The Global Gender Equality Index tracks countries' progress towards reaching gender equality in educational and health attainment as well as in economic and political life. The overall score is an unweighted average of these four sub-dimensions. A score of 1 corresponds to perfect equality; by contrast, the closer to 0 the score, the larger the gender gap in the respective dimension. The regional average for Eastern Europe and Central Asia is calculated based on the individual scores of the 26 countries as listed in Figure 2. This Table is the authors' own rendering of data taken from the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2020 (WEF, 2019 p.22).

## Why are women under-represented in political office?

Broadly speaking, three main reasons are most often explored, namely women's unwillingness to



become politicians, voters' bias, and parties' bias. Below I provide an overview of some of the work that has addressed each of these three factors.

### Gender gaps in political ambition

Large-scale surveys have documented that women who, based on their professional and economic credentials, are potential political candidates, report lower ambition to occupy executive offices than comparable men (Fox and Lawless, 2004). The main reasons for the gender gap in ambition appear to be that (a) women are less encouraged to run for office than men and (b) women are less likely to believe that they are qualified for office than men.

Women's tendency to shy away from competition (Niederle and Vesterlund, 2007) may also play a role, since the political selection process is likely perceived as highly competitive. As Preece and Stoddard (2015) find by using two experiments, priming individuals to consider the competitive nature of politics lowers women's interest in running for political office, whereas it has no effect on the interest of men.

Women's willingness to advance in their political career can also be influenced by family and relational considerations. Recent work from Folke and Rickne (2020) shows that in Sweden female politicians who are promoted to mayor (i.e. the highest office in municipal politics) experience a significant increase in the likelihood of divorcing their partner, whereas this is not the case for men. If women face higher costs for their career achievements, as the evidence in Folke and Rickne (2020) suggests, they may be discouraged from pursuing such objectives.

While there is evidence that women may on average be less willing to advance to top positions than men, it is not clear how quantitatively relevant this factor is to account for the lack of

women in power. The introduction of gender quotas in candidate lists in different countries worldwide can be informative in this sense. If women's under-representation in electoral lists is mostly due to the lack of qualified female politicians, some electoral lists (in most cases representing specific political parties) may not be able to run due to the introduction of a quota, and the average "quality" of lists, measured by some relevant (to voters) characteristics of their members, would decrease. The literature finds no evidence of either of these two responses to quotas (see Baltrunaite et al., 2014, Besley et al., 2017, Bagues and Campa, 2020). On the contrary, in Italy (Baltrunaite et al., 2014) and Sweden (Besley et al., 2017) quotas appear to have improved the "quality" of the elected politicians.

### Voters' bias

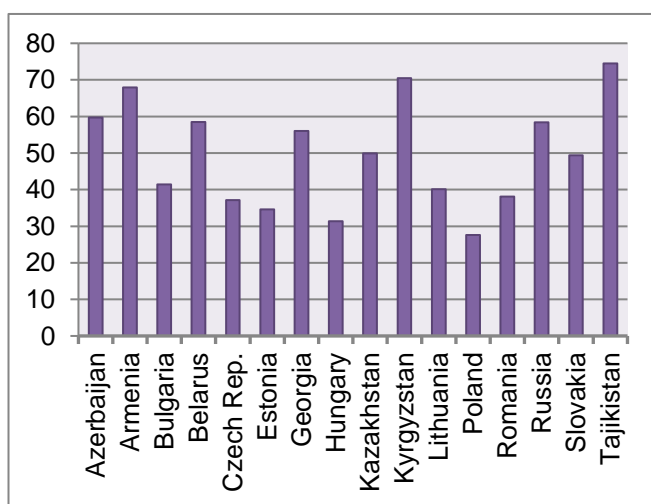
Krook (2018) observes that the existing work in political science regarding the importance of voters' bias in explaining women's underrepresentation in politics leads to ambivalent conclusions. Results in the most recent economics literature confirm this assessment. Barbanchon and Sauvagnat (2019) compare votes received by the same female candidate in French parliamentary elections across different polling stations within an electoral district and find that votes for women are lower in municipalities with more traditional gender-role attitudes. They interpret this pattern as evidence of voters' discrimination and conclude that voters' bias matters quantitatively in explaining women's under-representation among politicians. Conversely, Bagues and Campa (2020) find no evidence of voters bias against women, based on voters' reaction to the introduction of a gender quota for electoral lists in Spain. Specifically, they study how the quota impacts the electoral performance of lists that were more affected by the quota - i.e. that were forced to increase their share of female candidates by a larger extent, due to



their lower level of feminization pre-quota. They do not find evidence that such lists have worsened their relative electoral performance due to the quota. Put differently, there is no evidence that voters lower their electoral support of a list when its share of female candidates increases for exogenous reasons.

Survey data on voters' attitudes can also help in gauging the extent to which voters discriminate against women. Based on data from the latest wave of the World Value Survey (WVS, 2017-2020), in Western Europe typically less than 20% of survey respondents express agreement with the statement "Men make better political leaders than women do" (e.g. 5% in Sweden, 9% in Denmark and Germany, 12% in Finland and France, 19% in Italy; only in Greece the share of agreement is higher than 20%, at 26%). As shown in Figure 1, these percentages are substantially higher in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.).

Figure 1. Share of survey respondents who report to "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" with the statement "Men make better political leaders than women do".



Notes: Data are based on the latest wave of the World Value Survey, 2017-2020. The countries selected were either part of the former Soviet Union or under direct Soviet influence before 1990.

It bears noting, however, that answers to the WVS are not always informative about the extent to which voters' bias prevails in a country. Where the percentage of respondents who think that men

make better political leaders than women is close to or above 50%, as e.g. in Armenia, Georgia or Russia, voters' bias is likely to be an important factor. However, in countries with lower levels of agreement, such as for instance Poland, drawing conclusions is harder, since the WVS does not measure the share of respondents who think that *women make better political leaders than men do*.

### Parties' bias

Party leaders, who often are key players in the selection of politicians, may prefer to promote male rather than female candidates. If they are aware of voters' bias against women, preferring male candidates is consistent with a votes-maximizing strategy. However, party leaders may also act as gate-keepers and hold women back even in absence of voters' bias. Esteve-Volart and Bagues (2012) find evidence of an agency problem between voters and parties by looking at Spanish elections. While parties tend to nominate women in worse positions on the ballot, there is no evidence that women attract fewer votes than men; moreover, when the competition is stiffer, women's position on the ballot improves. These two facts lead the authors to conclude that the disadvantage women face can likely be attributed to parties' rather than voters' bias.

When considering all these factors, it is also important to note that the systematic under-representation of women in political institutions is likely self-reinforcing, due to gendered group dynamics. In the laboratory, women in male-majority teams appear significantly less likely to put their name forward as team-leaders than women in female-majority teams; they anticipate, correctly, lower support from team members (see Born et al., 2019). Female mayors in Italy are significantly more likely to be removed by their municipal councils than their comparable male colleagues; importantly, this is especially true



when the share of male councillors is particularly large (Gagliarducci and Paserman, 2011). These studies suggest that, since the political arena has been historically male-dominated, gendered group dynamics can create vicious cycles of women's under-representation.

## Which policies can be used to increase women's representation in political institutions?

Different policies can be considered to address the various factors accounting for women's under-representation in politics. In an attempt to address the "supply side" aspect of women's under-representation, various non-profit organizations have offered training programs aimed at providing women with knowledge, skills and networks to build political careers (see, for instance, NDI 2013). While reviewing the existing literature on these programs is beyond the scope of this brief, to the best of my knowledge there is little to no research-based evidence on the quantitative impact of training on women's advancements in politics. Non-profit organizations, political parties and researchers may fruitfully collaborate to implement and systematically test training programs.

Gender quotas are the most commonly used policy intervention, especially those regulating the composition of candidate lists, and they have been extensively studied; overall the literature suggests that quotas are more or less effective in empowering women depending on their design and the context where they are used (see Campa and Hauser, 2020 for a more comprehensive review of the economics literature on gender quotas and related policy implications). Given the nuances in the functioning of quotas, countries or regions that consider their adoption should consult with experts who know the ins and outs of

such policies and combine their expertise with local knowledge of the relevant context.

The structure and distribution of power within parties is likely crucial for improving women's political representation. Some scholars have devoted attention to the role of women's organizations within parties. Theoretically such organizations should favour the creation of networks and offer mentorship services, which are likely crucial to climb the career ladder in politics. In Sweden, a coalition of women from both the right and the left is credited for having pressed the Social Democrats' into adopting their internal zipper quota by threatening to form a feminist party (see Besley et al., 2017). Women's wings within political parties could play a similar role. Kantola (2018) notes that women's organizations seem to be currently deemed as outdated, at least in European parties; Childis and Kittilson (2016), on the other hand, find that their presence does not seem to harm women's promotion to executive roles within parties, a concern that has been associated with the existence of such organizations. In countries with public funding of political parties, specific funds could be directed to women's organizations within parties.

Folke and Rickne (2020) also note that, since women in top jobs appear to face more relational and family constraints than men, policies that improve the distribution of economic roles within couples could help address the under-representation of women in positions of political power; their observation underlines the crucial role of gender-role attitudes in affecting women's empowerment in any area of society. How can these attitudes change? An increasing amount of research is being devoted to answer this question. Campa and Serafinelli (2019), for instance, show that a politico-economic regime that puts emphasis on women's inclusion in the labor



market can change some of these attitudes. More research from different contexts and on specific policies will hopefully provide more guidance for policy makers on this important aspect, but the message from the existing research is that gender-role attitudes can be changed, and therefore policy-makers should devote attention to interventions that can influence the formation of such attitudes.

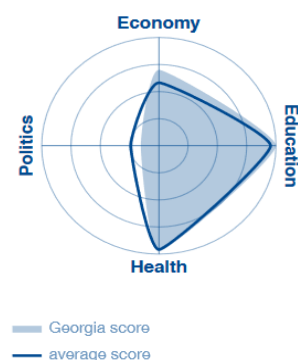
In many Western democracies the rate of progress in women's access to top political positions has proven especially slow. This history of Western democracies and the existence of the self-reinforcing mechanisms described above can serve as a lesson for countries in transitions, where new political organizations and institutions are emerging. In absence of specific policies that address women's under-representation at lower levels very early on, it would likely take a very long time before gender gaps are closed at higher levels of the political hierarchy.

In concluding, I observe that constant monitoring of the gender gaps in political institutions is important, even in presence of clear upward trends, since progress is rarely linear and therefore needs continuous nurturing.

## Political empowerment: Georgia's weakest link towards gender equality progress?

According to the World Economic Forum's Gender Equality Index, Georgia ranks 95th among 153 countries in terms of women's political empowerment (with a score of 0.154 out of 1). Although Georgia's score slightly exceeds the average for Eastern Europe and Central Asia, it notably lags behind the global average of 0.241.

Figure 1. Sub-components of the World Economic Forum's Gender Equality Index

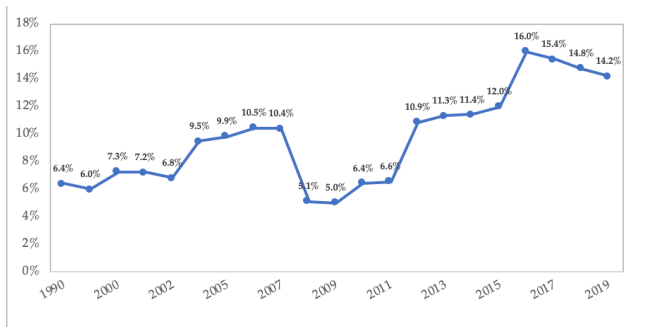


Source: WEF, 2020.

Political empowerment is the country's weak spot among the sub-components of the Gender Equality Index (Figure 1). Among the Former Soviet Union and neighboring countries, until recently Georgia had the lowest percentage of women in the lower or single house of the National Parliament (14.2% vs. 23.5% in Armenia and 17.4% in Azerbaijan; Inter-Parliamentary Union 2020). However, this relatively low percentage still represents a remarkable improvement from just 6.4% of women in the Parliament in 1990 (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Percentage of Women among the Parliament members in Georgia since 1990



Source: Geostat

### What changed in the recent Parliamentary elections?

The most recent Parliamentary elections in Georgia took place on October 31, 2020, with runoffs completed on November 21, 2020. One of the most important changes in this election was the introduction of a gender-based quota for party lists. The quota required that at least every fourth candidate on a party list be a woman. No gender quotas were required for majoritarian candidates from single-mandate constituencies (30 out of 150 seats). Among the 6882 candidates on proportional-party lists, 44.3% (3049) were women, while the proportion among the majoritarian candidates was only 21.75% (107 out of 492).

Overall, 30 women were elected to the Parliament (20%). While this number is an improvement from the 16% in the previous election (with no gender quotas in place), it still fell short of the target 25% implied by the quota. Notably, 29 women parliamentarians were elected through party lists, and only one was elected as a majoritarian candidate. The results of the elections (Table 1 below) strongly suggest that the top of almost all party lists included women only to the extent that the gender quota required. Given that 44.3% of party list candidates were women, the 24.2% resulting share of party-list elected women in the

Parliament suggests that women were more likely to be placed at the bottom of the party lists (i.e. where the chances of ultimately getting elected to the Parliament are lower). This once again indicates that the political sphere is still very much male-dominated in Georgia.

Table 1. Share of women in the total number of mandates in the new Parliament

	# of Women	# of Mandates	% of Women
Georgian Dream	15	61	24.6%
United National Movement	8	35	22.9%
European Georgia	1	5	20%
Lelo	1	4	25%
Strategy Agmashenebeli	2	4	50%
Alliance of Patriots	1	4	25%
Girchi	1	4	25%
Citizens	0	2	0%
Labor party	0	1	0%
<b>Total on party lists</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>24.2%</b>
<b>Majoritarian mandates</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>3.3%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>20%</b>

Source: Election Administration of Georgia (CESKO), authors' calculation.

Note: The numbers reflect the official results as reported by the Election Administration of Georgia on 31.10.2020 and on 21.11.2020. As of 09.02.2021 electoral results continue to be questioned by several political parties and thus the numbers may not reflect the final gender composition of the current Parliament.

### Women in other positions of power in Georgia

The situation with women representation in local self-governance bodies outside Tbilisi is worse than at the national level. Though mild positive dynamics have been observed over recent years, based on the data from the latest 2017 local elections, the average share of women in local councils is only 13.5% (notably, in Tbilisi this number is higher, at 20%).

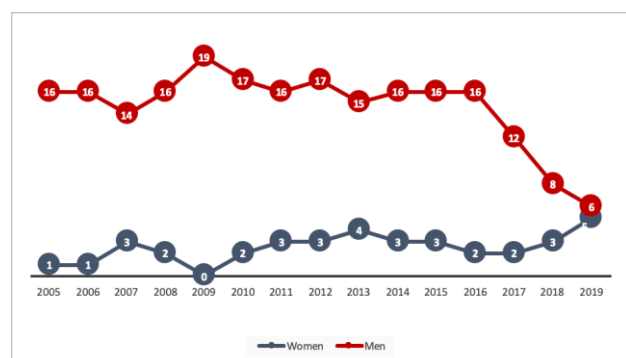
Historically, women at the ministries have also been under-represented in Georgia: in 2005-2009,





around 8% of government ministers were women (Figure 3). Starting from 2009, the number of female ministers increased: as of 2019, approximately half of government ministers are women (45%). What is interesting, this increase accompanied a general restructuring of the Georgian government and a major reduction of the number of ministries (from 18 in 2016 to 11 in 2019). Meanwhile, the gap between women and men holding the positions of deputy ministers remains somewhat wider. Between 2005 and 2017, around 19% of deputy ministers were women. In 2018-2019 this proportion increased, but only to 30%.

Figure 3. Women among government ministers, 2005-2019



Unlike the ministries, women have been well-represented in Common Law Courts and on the High Council of Justice (HCJ). The latter is a very powerful political body, even though its members are not elected through popular vote. Currently 7 out of 15 judges on the HCJ are women.

### Why are women under-represented in Georgian politics?

The gap between male and female participation in Georgian politics may be driven by the different level of interest in and willingness to enter the electoral arena. In Georgia, the most important factors which affect the “supply” of women in politics are women’s attitudes towards

campaigning and the political environment and the prevalence of traditional family dynamics/gender roles in the society. This is supported by the evidence from focus groups with women living in different parts of Georgia (Serpe, 2012). According to the findings, most women perceive politics to be a ‘dirty’ business, and the prevalence of negative campaigning makes women worry about the impact on their children and family. Traditional family dynamics, which place the burden of family responsibilities on women, are another key impediment. Women in Georgia carry a disproportional share of domestic care work relative to men, while women who work full time are doubly burdened by family and work responsibilities. According to the recent UNFPA (2020) survey, housework activities like cleaning, cooking or washing were regarded women’s duties by around 80% of respondents in Georgia. Around 49% said that childcare tasks were undertaken by women in their families, while 43% claimed that these tasks were shared by men and women within family.

The underrepresentation of women in Georgian politics can also be influenced by “demand-side” factors, namely the fact that candidacy expectations and the gender expectations in the society are incongruent. This is particularly true for Georgia, where traditional perceptions of how women should behave often differ from the public perception of how leaders should behave. These attitudes, however, have been changing over time. According to a UNDP study (2020), 60% of respondents in 2020 supported the greater engagement of women in politics. This is 10 percentage points more than in 2013 (50%). This change was driven by a shift in beliefs about women in politics observed especially among Georgian women. In 2020, 72% of women believed that women’s engagement in politics would



benefit the country, up from 56% in 2013. Among men these numbers have not changed much in the seven year period (45% in 2020 and 43% in 2013). Meanwhile, in 2020 37% of women and 62% of men agreed with the statement that men make better political leaders, when these numbers were 56% and 69% in 2013. Moreover, in 2020 42% of women and 63% of men believed that politics is a man's domain. In 2013, 56% of women and 77% of men shared the same belief. These changes suggest that in 7 years Georgians' perceptions and attitudes shifted towards supporting a higher involvement of women in public life.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the Georgian context, a combination of several different approaches may be recommended to improve the participation of women in political life. In particular, maintaining and expanding gender quotas for party-nominated candidates can serve as an important first step towards greater representation of women in politics. A binding 25% quota in the recent Parliamentary elections was at least partially successful, and could in the future contribute to greater acceptance of women in politics. Given that in local self-governing bodies women are underrepresented to an even higher extent, the quotas will likely help improve the gender bias at the local level.

Since the international evidence suggests that enhanced women participation in the labor force is likely to correlate with greater female representation in politics (Milazzo and Goldstein, 2019), policies aimed at increasing female labour market participation could positively influence the share of women in political offices in Georgia. Such examples can be found in the United States or Nordic countries, where high levels of female representation in the parliament were explained in

part by “women's entrance into the labour market in large numbers in the 1960s” (Dahlerup, 2005; Iversen and Rosenbluth, 2008).

The historically shaped gender stereotypes which perpetuate an unequal distribution of unpaid household work in Georgian families (Urchukhishvili, 2017) are among the key obstacles to greater representation of females in politics. Thus, policies addressing the unpaid care work burden and changing traditional gender roles are equally important. For example, providing access to good quality, affordable childcare and elderly care services would go a long way towards reducing the unpaid care burden on women. At the same time, encouraging paternity leave take-up would promote greater involvement of men in childcare and help address gender stereotypes.

Last but not least, to enhance female political participation, the government could prioritize women-tailored capacity-building trainings. A lack of information concerning how to run political campaigns frequently nurtures women's reluctance towards their future influential political activity (OSCE ODIHR, 2014). In this regard, the government programs could finance female-tailored peer-to-peer trainings, ideally delivered by already empowered role models. These training programs can be introduced on different levels: from secondary schools or education programs for adults to recruitment and outreach campaigns organized by political parties. Certainly, all the interventions mentioned above will not solve the problem overnight, but in the long run may contribute to a much higher presence of women in the Georgian political landscape.



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