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Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Shahnazaryan, G. (2015). Women's Political Participation in Armenia: Institutional and Cultural Factors. *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, 71, 9-17. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-90527-8>

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

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

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

About the Author

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

Further Reading

- Yuliya Gureyeva, "Policy Attitudes Towards Women in Azerbaijan: Is Equality Part of the Agenda?" *Caucasus Analytical Digest* No. 21, 30 November 2010
- Leila Aliyeva, "Women's Participation in Political Life," in *Political Party Regulation in Azerbaijan*, Centre for National and International Studies, Baku: January 2012
- *20th Anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action: National Report for the Republic of Azerbaijan*, State Committee of Family, Women and Children's Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Baku: 2014

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

Gohar Shahnazaryan, Yerevan

Abstract

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

Introduction

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

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

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

Table 1: Parliamentary Elections in Armenia: an Overview

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

Political and Electoral System

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

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

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

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

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

Political Parties

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Latest Elections

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

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

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

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

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

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

Women in Government

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

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

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

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

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

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

About the Author

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

Further Reading

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

Table 2: Number of Women in Local Government

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

Source: National Statistical Service RA, 2003–2012

Table 3: Ministers and Deputy Ministers

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

Source: National Statistical Service RA, 2003–2012

DOCUMENTATION

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

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

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

Continued overleaf

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

Katharina Fischer

Figure 1: Political Empowerment, Global Rank 2007–14

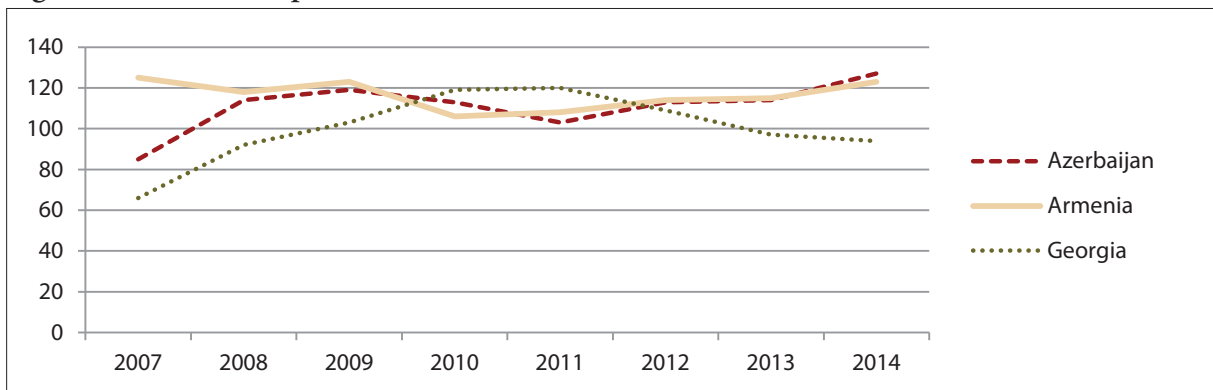


Figure 2: Women in Parliament, Global Rank 2007–14

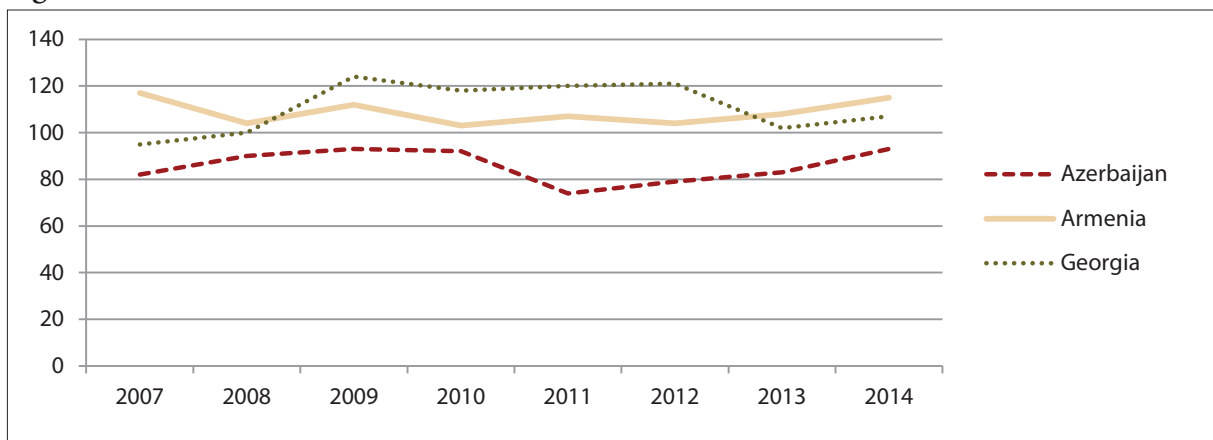


Figure 3: Women in Ministerial Position, Global Rank 2007–14

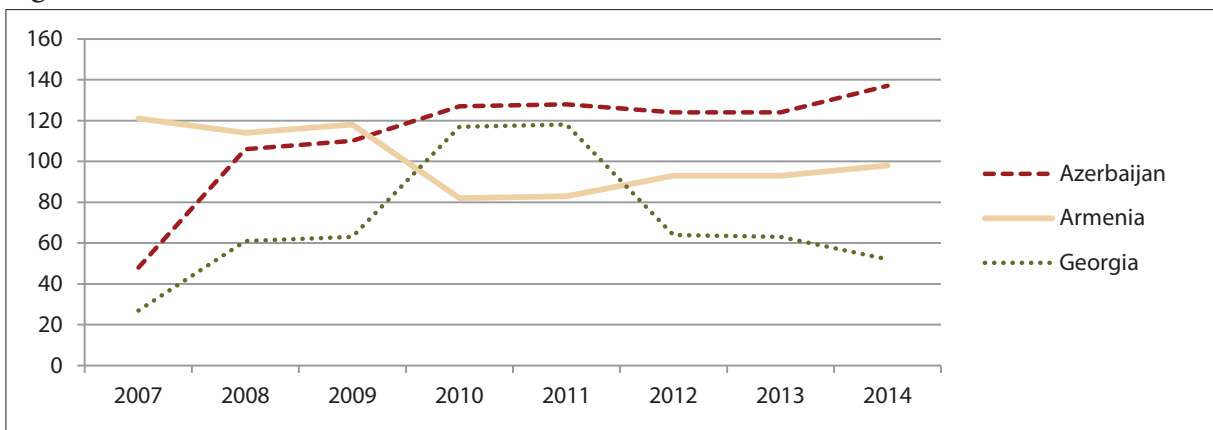


Table 1: Political Empowerment 2006–2014 (Global Rank and Index Value)

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

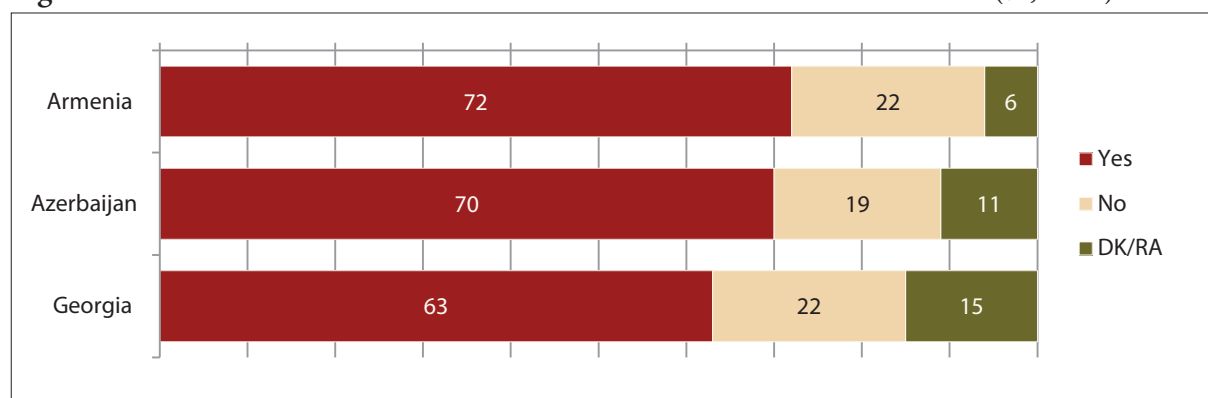
Source: <<http://reports.weforum.org/global-gender-gap-report-2014/rankings/>>

OPINION POLL

Public Opinion on Women in Politics

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

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

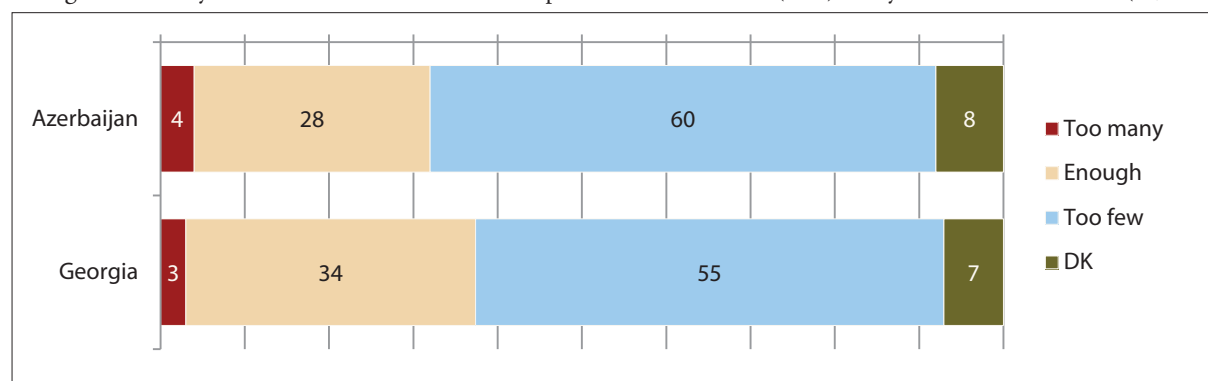


Source: *Caucasus Barometer 2011*

Figure 2: Number of Women in Parliament

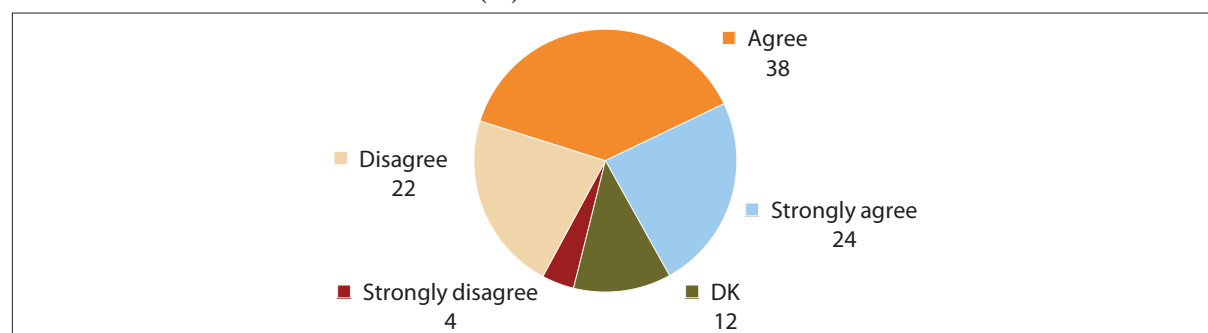
Azerbaijan: Currently there are 19 women members of parliament out of 125 (15%). Do you think there are ... (% , 2012)

Georgia: Currently there are 17 female members of parliament out of 150 (11%). Do you think there are ... (% , 2014)



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

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



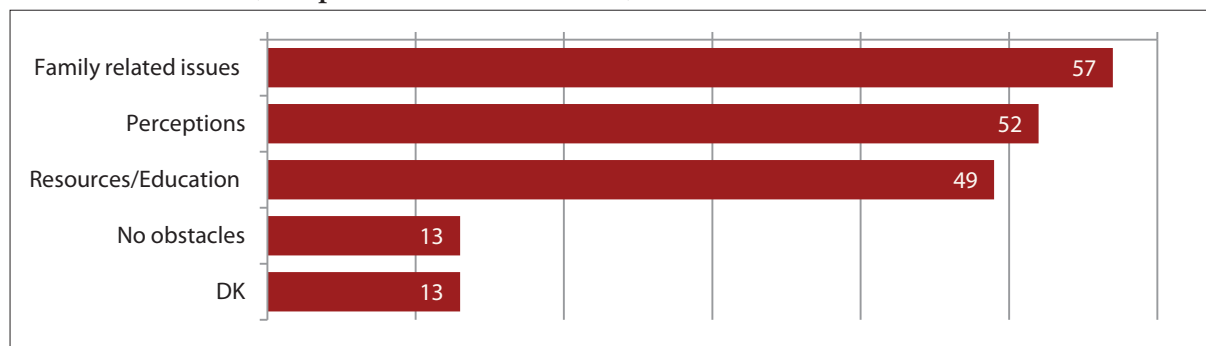
Source: *Social Capital, Media and Gender Survey in Azerbaijan, 2012*

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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