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Violence against women in politics in the Kyrgyz Republic: Results of study

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I. THE CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

1.1. Purpose and method of the study

The purpose of this study is to identify the different forms of violence perpetrated against women in elected public office, running for office or politically active in the public sphere, and to make recommendations to reduce this phenomenon.

The study was conducted using **quantitative (questionnaire survey) and qualitative (desk study, in-depth interviews, case studies, social network analysis) research methods**. All of that helps to see general trends (quantitative analysis) as well as announce women's experiences (qualitative analysis).

The desk study was used to review the policy framework reflected in the decisions taken and legislation governing electoral processes and responses to instances of hate language in the media and social media.

Social network analysis. A qualitative analysis of the patterns of violent behavior to which women politicians are subjected. The analysis includes the social media accounts of 10 selected female candidates and female politicians not running for office, whose specific examples of online violence were identified in the study, as well as the accounts of selected media outlets (radio news stations, television stations and the press) commenting on the campaign. All reports and comments from the last two weeks (November, 12-27) of the campaign for the 2021 parliamentary elections were read, using a pre-prepared form. In all, the study has analyzed at least 10 social media accounts.

The sample survey was conducted through an in-depth interview with a basic set of questions for women candidates in parliamentary, presidential and local elections, as well as for elected MPs at national and local level. A total of 12 interviews were conducted (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of female respondents by status and elected body, persons

<i>Elected body</i>	<i>Number of female respondents</i>	
	<i>MPs</i>	<i>candidates</i>
Supreme Council	2	2
City Councils	2	2
Village Councils	2	2
<i>Total</i>	6	6

The interviews provided more insight into personal experiences and the impact of violence against women in politics.

The online questionnaire in the Google Form for candidates and MPs of local councils was implemented in a snowball method with data collection from partner organizations at local level, through a specially designed online questionnaire and instructions on how to complete it for regional experts. The survey was conducted in the Osh and Chui Regions, in the areas with the largest populations. A total of 124 questionnaires were collected (104 women and 20 men were interviewed) (Table 2).

Table 2. Sampling and distribution of female and male respondents by area, persons

<i>Region</i>	<i>Number of voters, persons</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Number of questionnaires</i>	
			<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
Bishkek, Chüy Region	428,599	22.13	55	5
	609,774	31.48		6
Osh, Osh Region	898,569	46.39	49	9
Total	1,936,942	100.00	104	20

The Google Form consists of 96 questions comprising the following blocks:

1. Respondent's personal data
2. Experience as a MP, membership in a political party
3. Issues concerning violence
 - Issues concerning physical violence
 - Issues concerning psychological violence
 - Issues concerning economic violence
 - Interruption to MP/candidate
 - Sexual harassment
 - Media violence
 - Causes and consequences of violence

Personal (questionnaire) data from respondent are needed to analyze how certain factors influence women's opportunities to participate in political processes: age, marital status, presence and age of children, level of education, ethnicity, and disability.

The questions on violence seek to identify different forms of violence and will identify factors that demonstrate how, how often, by whom, under what conditions, etc., violent behavior against women occurs, both in the electoral process and as a MP.

It is envisaged that the study will not only help to identify the main forms of violence against women in their political activities, but also to develop recommendations to minimize violent manifestations so that women are not afraid to be active in life, to build and develop leadership skills, and to contribute to the economic and social well-being of the whole country, their communities and their families when they enter government and governance.

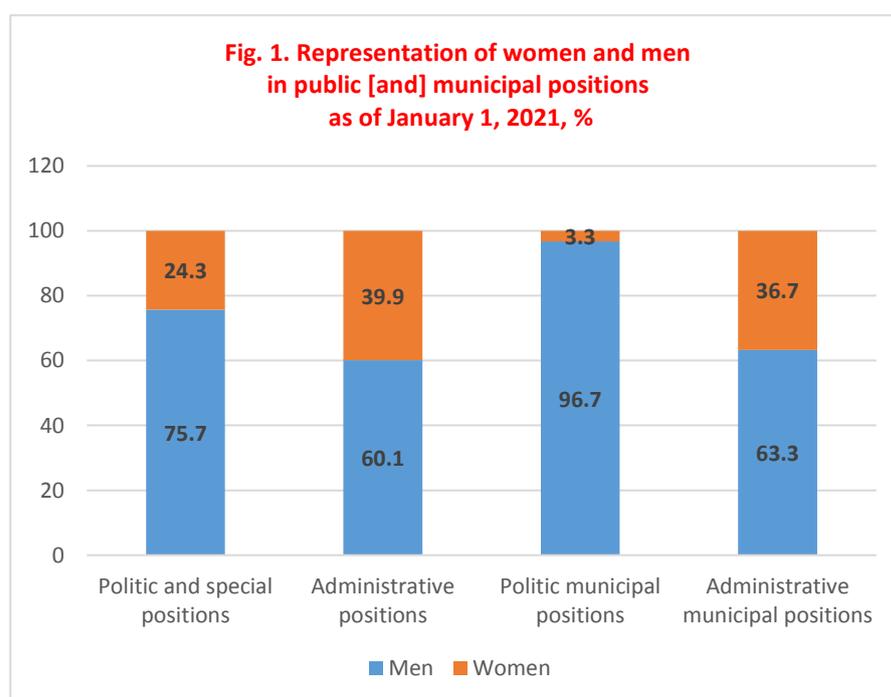
1.2. Ground zero: current situation of women in politics in Kyrgyzstan

Representation of women in public and municipal positions

Women's participation in politics remains very low in Kyrgyzstan despite all the legal requirements for gender representation. This above all points to unequal opportunities for men and women to engage in it, both nationally and locally.

An imbalance in the representation of women and men can be observed in all branches of government and in all areas of decision-making. It is most evident at the political positions level,¹ where the percentage of women was only 24.3% as at January 1, 2021. At the administrative positions level, the percentage of women is higher, at 39.9%² (fig. 1).

There is an even greater imbalance at the local level. As of January 1, 2021, only 3.3% of women held political municipal positions, and 36.7% held administrative municipal positions (fig. 1). In general, the percentage of women in local government remained extremely low until



April 2021, with each successive election resulting in a decrease in the number of women elected. Women's representation in local councils decreased from 19% in 2016 to 11% in 2018, with a quota of 30%³.

On April 11, 2021, elections to local councils were held for the first time under the 2019 legislative amendments, and the results show a 37% share of women elected in 2021.⁴

The highest proportion of women in political municipal positions is in Naryn Region (6.2%), the lowest in Bishkek and Osh (0% each). Women hold the most administrative municipal positions in Chui Region (61.0%) and the least in Batken Region (20.6%)⁵.

¹ The list of political state and special state positions, as well as political municipal positions is defined in the Register of the state and municipal positions of the Kyrgyz Republic, approved by Presidential Decree UP No. 17 of January 31, 2017.

² Women and men of the Kyrgyz Republic: 2016-2020. P. 69.

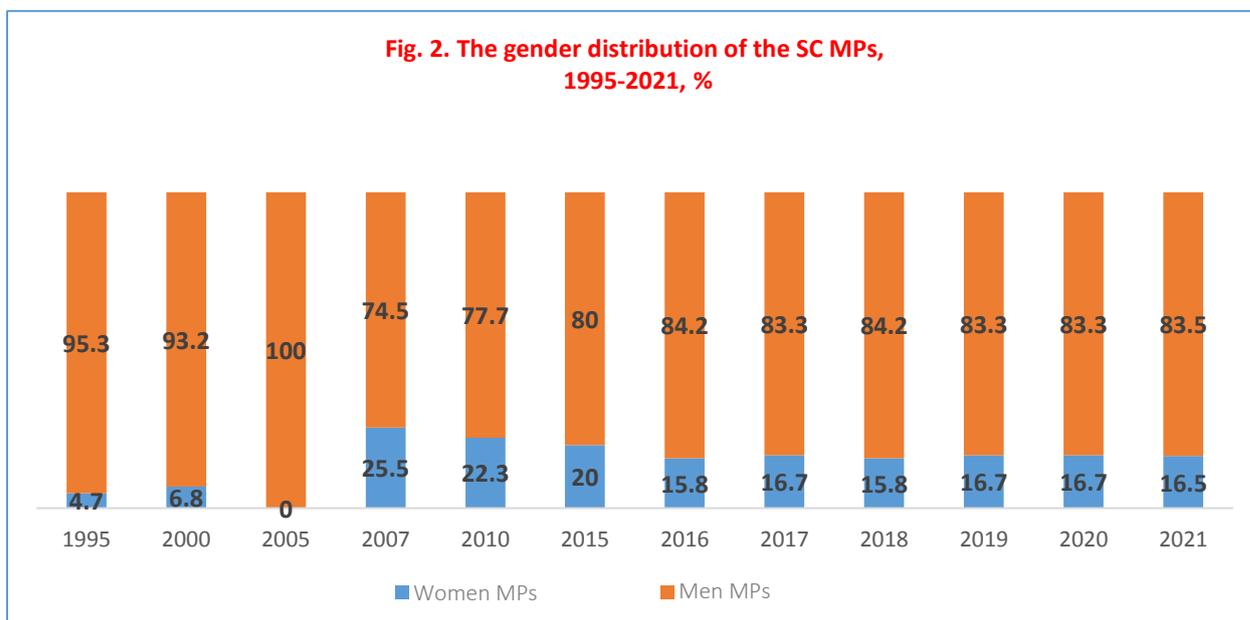
³ National Voluntary Review of the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in the Kyrgyz Republic (KR). P. 59.

⁴ Women and men of the Kyrgyz Republic: 2016-2020. P. 68.

⁵ Women and men of the Kyrgyz Republic: 2016-2020. - P. 75.

Women MPs of the Kyrgyz Republic Supreme Council (KR SC)

The highest representative body, the Supreme Council (SC, or Jogorku Kenesh), has always been characterized by a clear predominance of male MPs, and in some periods (2005 elections) there were no women MPs at all (fig. 2).



To overcome this situation, legislative requirements (special measures) were established to ensure women's representation in a number of state bodies, including the SC, which resulted in an increase in the proportion of women MPs, but the required minimum of 30% representation has still not been achieved (Table 3).

Table 3. Percentage of women MPs of the KR SC, by election year, persons, %

Election years	Total number of the KR SC MPs	Including women	
		Persons	%
Prior to the introduction of special measures			
1995	105	5	4.7
2000	105	7	6.8
2005	75	0	0
After the introduction of special measures			
2007	90	23	25.5
2010	120	28	23.3
2015	120	25	20.5
2021	90	19	21.1

Regarding the structure of the SC factions, there was also a gender imbalance in favour of men on the eve of the 2021 elections. For example, as of December 1, 2021, there were six factions in the 6th Convocation of the Supreme Council. It is the only faction that has come close to the target (27.3%) for female representation. There were no women in the Bir Bol faction (Table 4).

Table 4. Representation of women in the factions of the 6th Convocation of the Kyrgyz Republic Supreme Council, persons¹³

Item No.	Faction	Number of women MPs		Total number of MPs in the faction
		Persons	%	Persons
1.	Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan	11	29.7	37
2.	Respublika–Ata Zhurt	4	15.4	26
3.	Kyrgyzstan	1	5.5	18
4.	Önügüü–Progress	1	7.7	13
5.	Bir Bol	0	0	12
6.	Ata-Meken Socialist Party	3	27.3	11
Total:		20	17.1	117

Number and percentage of women in the Cabinet of Ministers, ministries and agencies

Data on the number and percentage of women in the Cabinet of Ministers show a gender imbalance. Thus, as of December 1, 2021, out of 21 members of the Cabinet of Ministers, only one is a woman, Minister of Natural Resources, Ecology and Technical Supervision, which represents 4.8%.

The composition of deputy ministers is also characterized by gender gap. In almost all ministries it is men. The exceptions are the Ministry of Digital Development, where 1 of the 4 ministers is a woman, the Ministry of Education and Science, where 2 of the 3 deputies are women, and the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Migration, where also 2 of the 3 deputies are women. In all other ministries and the State Committee for National Security, the deputy positions are held by men. Thus, only 9.1 % of the 55 Deputy Cabinet Ministers are women.⁶

As for the presidential plenipotentiaries in the regions, all seven of them are men.

There is also a clear preponderance of men in other state bodies. Thus, at the beginning of 2021, it was most significant in the following bodies:

- State Customs (84.3%),
- Office of the Procurator-General (79.8%),
- Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Reclamation (over 76.4%),
- Ministry of Transport and Communications (72.9%),
- Chamber of Accounts (over 72%), and other bodies.

Alongside this, the number of women prevails in the bodies listed below:

- National Statistics Committee (73%),
- Ministry of Labour and Social Development (72%),
- State Intellectual Property and Innovation Service (over 71%),
- Ministry of Health (67%),
- State Registration Service (69%),
- Ministry of Education and Science (over 57%).⁷

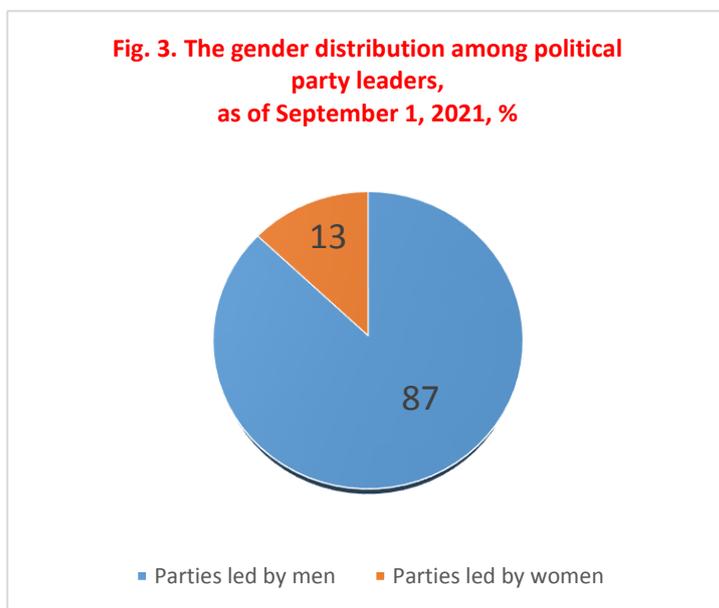
⁶ <https://www.gov.kg/ru/gov/s/2>

⁷ <http://stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/7d7c4d59-2b8f-44e0-86be-adee6e8c5e28.pdf> P. 73-74

Number and percentage of women leaders of political parties

As of September 1, 2021, 294 political parties were registered in Kyrgyzstan, of which only 39 were headed by women (13%) (fig. 3).

Seventy-five political parties expressed a desire to participate in the 2021 parliamentary elections, two of which were rejected (Erkin Kyrgyzstan, Ene Jurogu-Meken).



Only 21 political parties made it to election day on November 28, 2021, and of those, only two political parties' lists are headed by women: the Zhashasyn Kyrgyzstan (Toktayum Umetalieva) and the Aruuzat, Party of People's Dignity (Almakan Bekova). It is noteworthy that voters themselves are contradictory towards "women's" parties, expressing both views in favour and against them. The fact that women do not get into parliament also shows that women themselves (i.e. almost half of the electorate) do not vote for women.

"A few persons from the parties will not pass. Since men don't let them just prove themselves. A women-only party should be created. A party of like-minded individuals. My observations and experiences allow me to draw some conclusions."

"Women-only parties have been established for a long time and have been contesting elections, but they never get through!"

(from a Facebook post comments)

Gender composition of the CEC and TEC

The Central Commission on Elections and Referenda of the Kyrgyz Republic (hereinafter, the CEC) is the authorized state body responsible for the preparation and conduct of elections and referenda in the Kyrgyz Republic and leads the system of election commissions.

The CEC consists of 12 people, of whom 4 (33.3%) are women. The CEC is chaired by a woman, Nurjan Shaildabekova, and her two deputies are men.⁸

In order to maintain this level of women's representation, it is key that the CEC is one of the state bodies for which the President and Parliament must adhere to the principle of 'no more than 70% of persons of the same gender' when nominating candidates. This principle underpins the entire system of temporary special measures adopted in the country.

For the elections to be held on November 28, 2021, there were **36** District Electoral Commissions with a total of 490 members. The gender distribution of the District Electoral Commissions is balanced: **252 men (51.4%)** and **224 women (45.7%)**.

The composition of the **54** Territorial Electoral Commissions (TECs) is also broadly gender-balanced: out of 650 TEC members, **304** are women, representing **46.7%**; the position of TEC chairperson is occupied by **22 women (40.7%)** and **32 men (59.3%)**.

There were **30,508** district electoral commission members, the majority of whom were women, in **2,435** district electoral commissions: 21,179 women (69.4%) and 9,329 men (30.6%).

1.3. Profile of respondents

Female respondents

The target groups for the quantitative analysis were women candidates who had participated in parliamentary, presidential and local elections, as well as elected MPs to the Supreme Council, city and village councils.

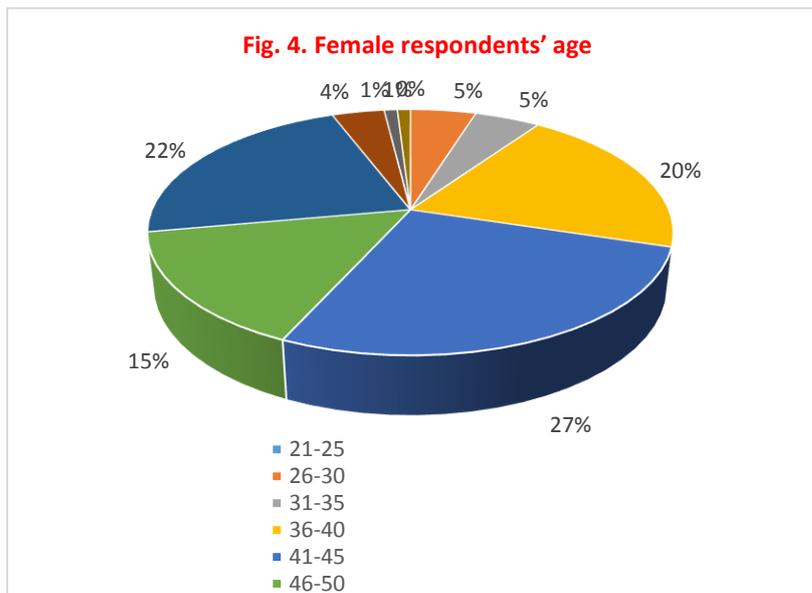
The study covered Bishkek as well as two regions in the south and north respectively, Osh and Chui.

The President shall, within the scope of its powers, appoint and submit nominees to each public body, taking into account a gender representation of not more than 70% of persons of the same gender.

The Supreme Council, within the limits of its competence, with a representation of not more than 70% of persons of the same gender, elects the members of the Central Commission on Elections and Referenda

(Articles 23 and 24 of the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women)

⁸as of December 2021 https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/CIKBSHK/Sostav_CIKBSHKnyn_kuramy/

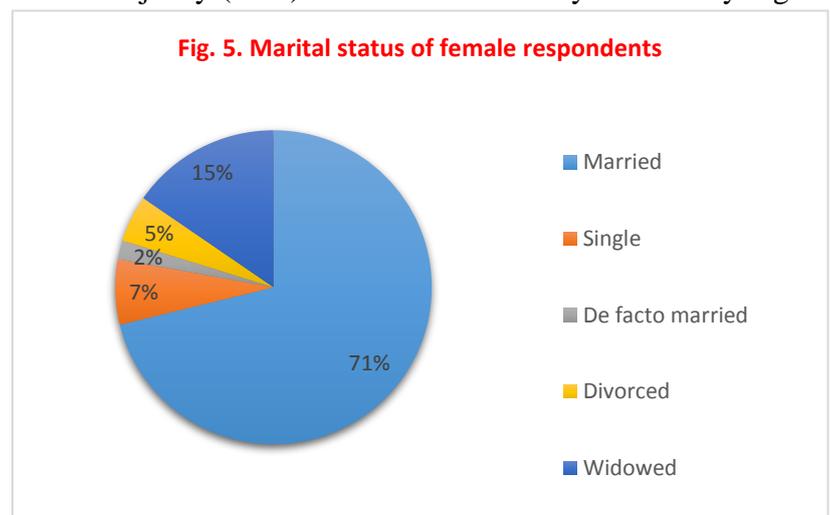


(fig. 4).

As already mentioned (Table 2), female respondents are residents of Bishkek and Chüy Region (55 women) and Osh and Osh Region (49 women).

The majority of female respondents (27%) are between the ages of 41 and 45. Approximately equal numbers of female respondents (22 and 20 per cent respectively) were in the age groups 51-60 and 36-40. The least number of female respondents (1%) are in the age group of women over 71

Married women accounted for the majority (71%) of the women surveyed. A fairly high proportion of women (15%) are widows. Women in de facto marital relationships accounted for the smallest number (2%) of female respondents (fig. 5).



Almost two thirds (64%) of the women surveyed have children under the age of 18. The largest number of women (48) have one child. One of the female respondents interviewed was a mother of 6 and 7 minor children.

It is noteworthy that women's political activity is significantly influenced by their environment - husband, parents, children, relatives, acquaintances. Both quantitative and qualitative research showed this.

“At first my husband was strongly against my nomination as MP, at the time he was still in labour migration in Russia, and my husband's family, including my husband's parents, helped me explain it to him, and he eventually agreed. However, at first he was very skeptical about my legislative activity, it mentally knocked me out, for example asking a lot of questions if someone called or went to meetings or work meetings, not allowing me to travel to Bishkek for professional development seminars, opposed my business trips, however I have 2 adult children who helped me to persuade my husband or explain my situation, now everything is fine, he supports me and does not restrict me.”

“The existing MPs were not solving the problems, and I already had the authority. My entourage (neighbors, relatives and friends) started suggesting that I should become a

MP. My husband's opinion was decisive, otherwise I wouldn't have gone. He is stern, oriental, but supportive because there is respect. He believed, he gave consent"

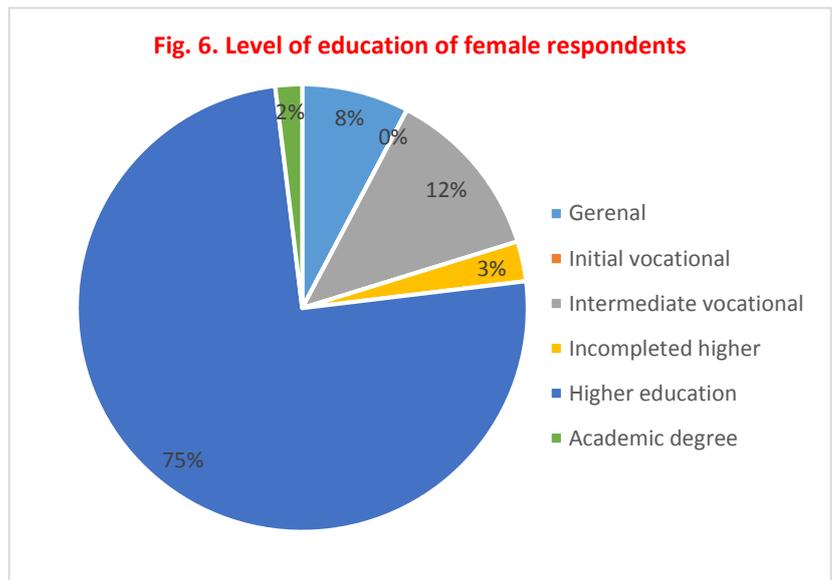
"I received a phone call inviting me to come to a party convention... They also said it was possible to join the list of those running for SC. My husband and I talked about it. He supported me. The fact that I became a candidate is a credit to my husband. He is a former government official, he understands that we have to act, and the more reformers there are, the more likely it is that something will change. We were encouraged. I consulted my mother and she was supportive."

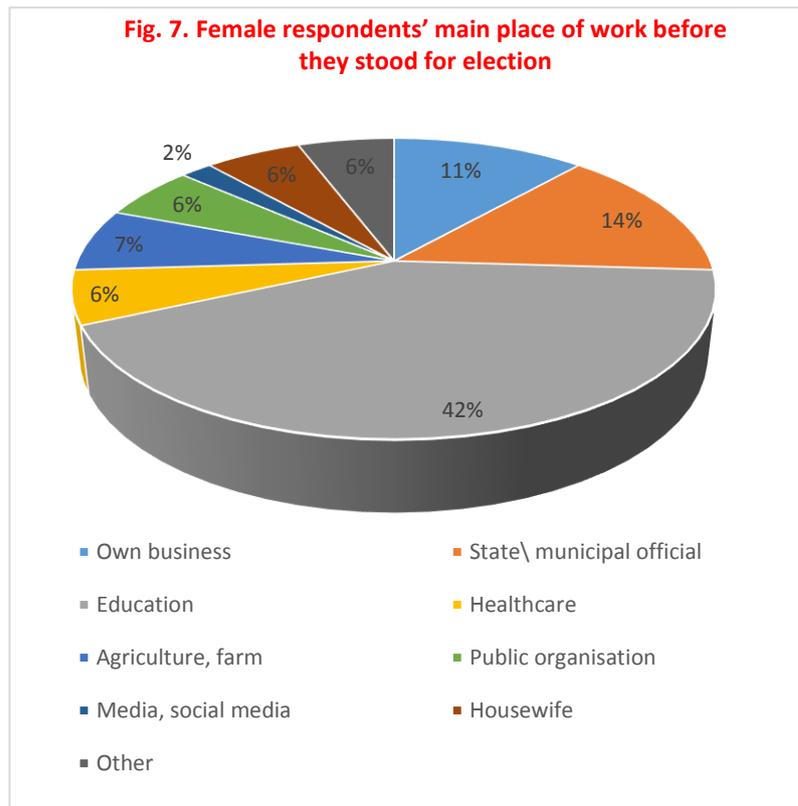
(from interview with women MPs and female candidates)

The questionnaire asked women whether they identified themselves as members of ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities. A negative response was given by 76%. 21% of women identified themselves as a minority. The remaining women left the question unanswered.

6% of the women interviewed have a disability.

The vast majority (75%) of female respondents are women with higher education. 12% have a secondary vocational education. Female respondents with a degree/certificate and incomplete higher education are the least likely (2 and 3%, respectively) (fig. 6). This further reflects that having a professional education increases a woman's chances of economic independence, strengthens her self-confidence and credibility both in her own eyes and in the eyes of others.





An interesting question for the interpretation of the survey results is the question of which job was the women's main job before they participated in the elections. Thus, the majority (42%) came from education to politics. Three times less (14%) were from the state and municipal services, 11% of the women were from their own businesses, and 7% were from agriculture. Equal numbers of women (6% each) come from health care, non-governmental organisations, housewives and other sectors (social workers, accountants, cashiers, petrol station attendants, etc.). Fewer of the respondents (2%) worked in media and social media (fig. 7).

Among the women who took part in the survey, the vast majority (92%) were female members of local councils. The least - 1% - of the Supreme Council, and the remaining 7% are not MPs. Most of the local council MPs interviewed have been in that position for less than one year - that is, elected in April 2021 in accordance with amendments to the legislation on local council elections.

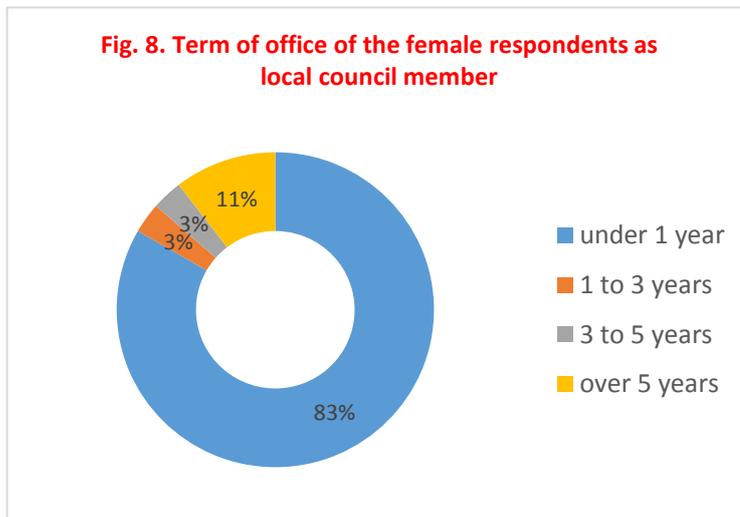
For 82% of women MPs (80 people) in local councils, this is their first election (fig. 8). Apparently, this was made possible by the adoption of special measures. For those female respondents who are not in office for the first time, in most cases (59%) it is their second election. The remaining 41% are elected a third time.

Among female respondents, only 8% had attempted to run for the Supreme

The Local Councils Elections Act of the Kyrgyz Republic of July 14, 2011 provides that, for the election of MPs to the village councils, no fewer than 30% of the mandates of MPs to the village councils shall be reserved for women (Article 59-1 (1)). In the case of a premature termination of the powers of a woman MP who received a mandate on the basis of reserved mandates, the mandate is transferred to the next female candidate who received the highest number of votes in the respective electoral district (Article 52 (1-2)). Prior to the elections in April 2021, women's representation in local government at the local level remained extremely low, with each successive election resulting in a decrease in the number of elected women in local councils. Women's representation in local councils decreased from 19% in 2016 to 3,5% in 2020, with a quota of 30%. Overall, at the local level, the percentage of women among the heads of village districts has not reached 5% since 1995. The situation changed dramatically after local elections were held on April 11, 2021, using a mechanism of reservation of seats for women in village councils.

Council. In most cases it was a one-off attempt.

One of the female respondents is a member of the Supreme Council, it is her second term in office.



In the questionnaire, the participants were also asked about their party affiliation. A quarter (25%) of them are members of a political party, and 29% of them have changed their party affiliation for various reasons.

Male respondents

As already noted (Table 2), the survey was conducted not only among women, but also among men, 11 of whom were residents of Bishkek and Chüy Region and 9 of Osh and Osh Region.

Almost half of the respondents (45%) were young men aged 31-35, 20% were aged 36-40 and 10% each were men aged 21-25 and 41-45.

All of the men surveyed are married, 80% of them have children under the age of 18. Thus, young age and the presence of minor children do not prevent men from carrying out their political activities.

Only 5% of respondents consider themselves representatives of national, religious, ethnic minorities.

None of the male respondents had a disability.

Almost all respondents (90%) have higher education.

In terms of professional experience, most of the men interviewed (30%) had run their own business before taking part in the elections, and were engaged in agriculture (20%). Just under 15% were employed in state and municipal services. The same proportions of male respondents (10% each) come from the education and health sectors. Representatives of the media, social media, NGOs and other spheres were few in number - 5% each.

Among the men surveyed, 80% serve as MPs on local councils, with most of them (11 out of 16 who answered this question) having been MPs for less than a year. Everyone else is not a member of any representative body at the time of the survey.

This is the first election for the majority (69%). This is the second election for those respondents for whom election to the local council is not the first. None of the respondents had attempted to become a MP of the Supreme Council.

Regarding the party affiliation of the men surveyed, the majority of them (65%) are not members of a party. Among male party members, 15% had already changed their party affiliation.

II. INTERNATIONAL LEGAL AND POLICY INITIATIVES TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

2.1. Violence against women politicians in terms of international law

“Democracy without women’s participation is a contradiction.”

(Melanne Verweir, Former Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Gender)

Violence against women pervades virtually all spheres of our lives: it occurs in the family, in access to natural and economic resources, in labour relations, in health care, etc. The area of politics, the area of decision-making, where women do not have equal opportunities with men, is also not free from violence. This trend, as the available research shows, is characteristic of different countries with different government.

Violence in political activity begins to manifest itself both at the stage of the electoral process - participation in elections - and when women perform their functions as members of a representative body or as members of an executive body. Women politicians face violence at different levels of government, both national and local. At both stages and levels of the political process, women’s political activism is accompanied by some form of violent behaviour which, however, cannot always be easily identified as gender-based violence. However, it always has an impact on women’s willingness and readiness to participate in political processes.

At the heart of gender-based violence are patriarchal attitudes that underpin the traditional way of life in society, deeply entrenched gender stereotypes based on the notions that “women belong in the kitchen”, “politics is not women’s business”, etc. These attitudes towards women’s political leadership are a manifestation of historical inequalities that lead to discrimination and create obstacles to the advancement of women in society.

Sexism, misogyny, sexual harassment, hate language: these and other phenomena have to be faced by women trying to assert themselves in politics. All this is exacerbated against a background of growing religious influence and increasing poverty, further hindering women’s political activism. And for those women who have managed to overcome obstacles to entry into the political process, they also have to deal with additional violence aimed at undermining their professionalism and reputation. However, women themselves may not always be able to identify the actions directed against them as violence.

Sexism and violence against women politicians are not just particularities affecting the lives of individual women. They have macro implications, namely that they encroach on democratic foundations, prevent women from exercising their right to participate fully and

“If we are excluding half of our population from actively participating in decision-making and having a voice, we are compromising our democracies and ignoring skills and talent.”

(Katarzyna Gardapkhadze, Former First Deputy Director of the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR))

equally with men in political life and to express their opinions, limit women's right to vote and to be elected to public and municipal office, ultimately undermining the representativeness and legitimacy of the electoral institutions themselves. Further, sexism and violence against women in parliaments and local representative bodies, as well as in the executive, limit their access to decision-making positions and undermine their ability to fulfil their official duties.

The participation of women as half of the world's population in decision-making processes has repeatedly been the focus of political conferences, both global and regional, resulting in declarations, resolutions, reports were considered, etc. For example, at the Third OSCE Gender Equality Review Conference, political will to promote women and address violence against women in politics, along with proactive support from male allies, was identified as an area for further action.⁹

The political participation of women and gender equality on the agenda of various high-level events and the mandate of international organisations are based on international law, with the UN Charter as its preamble affirming the equal rights of men and women. Based on the UN Charter, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights¹⁰ establish the principle of equality and non-discrimination on the basis of gender.

The principle of equal rights and opportunities for women and men in political life has been "unpacked" in more detail in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women¹¹.

The UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women¹² is the kind of international treaty which, under Article 7, imposes obligations on states parties, including Kyrgyzstan, to take all necessary measures to prevent gender discrimination, in particular:

- to incorporate the principle of equality between men and women in its Constitution and other relevant legislation and ensure, through law and other appropriate means, the practical implementation of this principle;
- to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, in all fields and in particular in the political sphere, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, in order to guarantee them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men;
- to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, ensure to women the right on equal terms with men:

Generally recognized principles and norms of international law, as well as international treaties entered into force in accordance with the legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic, are an integral part of the legal system of the Kyrgyz Republic.

(Article 6 (3) of the KR Constitution)

⁹ <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/f/0/488671.pdf> P. 23

¹⁰ The Kyrgyz Republic acceded to by Resolution No. 1406-XII of January 12, 1994.

¹¹ The Kyrgyz Republic acceded to by Decisions Z No. 321-1 of January 25, 1996 of the Legislative Assembly of the Kyrgyz Republic Supreme Council and P No. 258-1 of March 6, 1996 of the Assembly of People's Representatives of the Kyrgyz Republic Supreme Council.

¹² The Kyrgyz Republic acceded to by Decisions Z No. 320-1 of January 25, 1996 of the Legislative Assembly of the Supreme Council and P No. 257-1 of March 6, 1996 of the Assembly of People's Representatives of the Supreme Council.

- a) to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be elected to all publicly elected bodies;
- b) to participate in the government policy formulation and implementation and hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;
- c) to participate in the activities of non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

The UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women issued **General Recommendation No. 35** in 2017, which states that “Harmful practices and crimes against women human rights defenders, politicians, activists or journalists are also forms of gender-based violence against women affected by such cultural, ideological and political factors,” and the gender-based violence “manifests itself on a continuum of multiple, interrelated and recurring forms, in a range of settings, from private to public, including technology-mediated settings and in the contemporary globalized world it transcends national boundaries.”¹³

Concerned at the low level of women’s participation in political and public life in Kyrgyzstan, particularly in administrative posts, in particular in municipal government, the diplomatic service and rural local self-government, the lack of appropriate temporary special measures, inadequate capacity-building measures and insufficient funding for electoral campaigns for women who might run for elected office, which impede equal participation of women in political life, *the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women*, in its **Concluding observations on the fourth periodic report of Kyrgyzstan**¹⁴, recommended a number of measures to address the root causes of weak implementation of the existing temporary special measures and introduce in its legislation provisions to encourage the use of temporary special measures in both the public and private sectors.

Further, *in the Concluding observations on the fifth periodic report of Kyrgyzstan*,¹⁵ the Committee remains concerned about the lack of understanding in the State party of the non-discriminatory nature of temporary special measures, their limited use in most areas of the Convention in which women are underrepresented or disadvantaged, and their limited impact on achieving substantive equality between women and men.

The Committee notes with concern:

- (a) The low representation of women in the Zhogorku Kenesh (15 per cent) and in local councils, and the introduction of the mixed electoral system, which will lower the quota for women candidates from 30 to 18 per cent;
- (b) Gender-based violence and hate speech against women candidates during elections and political rallies;
- (c) Restrictions on the activities of women human rights defenders and their lack of protection from reprisals.

The Committee recommends that the Kyrgyz Republic:

- (a) Review its the electoral legislation to reach parity of women and men in political life and to that effect take targeted measures, including temporary special measures, such as increased quotas, to strengthen the representation of women at all levels of government, in the

¹³ General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CEDAW/C/GC/35&Lang=en

¹⁴ Adopted by the Committee at its sixtieth session (February 16 to March 6, 2015).

¹⁵ Adopted by the Committee at its eightieth session (October 18 to November 12, 2021).

Zhogorku Kenesh and in local councils, in the judiciary and in academia, in particular at decision-making levels;

(b) Require political parties to include an equal number of women and men candidates on their electoral lists, with the women's and men's names appearing on alternating rows (the zipper system);

(c) Provide capacity-building to women politicians and candidates on political campaigning, leadership and negotiation skills, and raise awareness, in concert with the media, among politicians, the media, religious and community leaders and the general public, on the importance of the full, independent and democratic participation of women on an equal basis with men in political and public life to guarantee the implementation of the Convention;

(d) Take effective measures to protect women candidates from gender-based violence and hate speech, including online, during elections;

(e) Remove any restrictions on the activities of women human rights defenders and create an enabling environment to promote their participation in political and public life, including by ensuring their protection from gender-based violence and reprisals.

Another global instrument, *the Convention on the Political Rights of Women*¹⁶ establishes:

- Women shall be entitled to vote in all elections on equal terms with men, without any discrimination (Art. I);
- Women shall be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination (Art. II);
- Women shall be entitled to hold public office and to exercise all public functions, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination (Art. III).

The *Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence*¹⁷ is the most important convention, but adopted at the European rather than the global level (*Istanbul Convention*).¹⁸ “Recognizing that violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women.” According to Article 3 of the Convention, “violence against women” is understood as a violation of human rights and a form of discrimination against women and shall mean all acts of gender-based violence that result in, or are likely to result in, physical, sexual, psychological or economic harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”

It should be noted that the Convention applies to all forms of violence against women.

Violence against women has also been the focus of attention of the UN General Assembly, which has adopted several resolutions on the issue. So for instance,

- Resolution 66/130 (2011) called on States “to investigate allegations of violence, assault or harassment of women elected officials and candidates for political office, create an environment of zero tolerance for such offences and, to ensure accountability, take all appropriate steps to prosecute those responsible”;
- According to Resolution 73/148 (2018) the General Assembly deeply concerned about violence against women and girls in all its different forms, including sexual harassment, in the public and private spheres. It “encourages national legislative authorities and political parties, as

¹⁶ The Kyrgyz Republic acceded to by Decisions Z No. 321-1 of January 25, 1996 of the Legislative Assembly of the Kyrgyz Republic Supreme Council and P No. 258-1 of March 6, 1996 of the Assembly of People's Representatives of the Kyrgyz Republic Supreme Council.

¹⁷ Adopted on May 11, 2011.

¹⁸ Kyrgyzstan is not a party to the Istanbul Convention

appropriate, to adopt codes of conduct and reporting mechanisms, or revise existing ones, stating zero tolerance by these legislative authorities and political parties for sexual harassment, intimidation and any other form of violence against women in politics.”

The *Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action*¹⁹ has an enormous conceptual importance when addressing violence against women in politics. It sets out women’s participation in decision-making bodies and decision-making as a strategic objective (Goal G). The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action notes that achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning. Equality in political decision-making performs a leverage function without which it is highly unlikely that a real integration of the equality dimension in government policy-making is feasible. Without the active participation of women and the incorporation of women’s perspective at all levels of decision-making, the goals of equality, development and peace cannot be achieved.

Ensuring gender equality and empowerment of all women and girls is one of the seventeen *Sustainable Development Goals* (Goal 5) to which Kyrgyzstan, along with other countries around the world, is committed. The objectives of Goal 5, *inter alia*, are to:

- Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life (Target 5.5);
- adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels (Target 5.C).

*UN Security Council Resolution 1325*²⁰ urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels.

The foundations for gender equality in political participation are also laid in the Convention on Standards of Democratic Election, Voting Rights and Freedoms in the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States²¹, reflected in the Guidelines on Elections²² and etc.

2.2. Global and regional policy initiatives

In addition to international legally binding instruments, surveys, reports, communications and other publications from various international (global and regional) institutions, both formal and informal, have focused on violence against women in politics. They highlight the role of gender equality in politics and democracy and propose measures to put an end to violence against women in political decision-making.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union is an international organization serving to coordinate the activities of the parliaments of the world. It is one of the oldest international parliamentary

At the regional level, for example, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe are actively involved. In 2018, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), in cooperation with the Inter-Parliamentary Union, conducted a study on “Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe”. The

¹⁹ Adopted at the Fourth World Conference on Women September 4 - 15, 1995

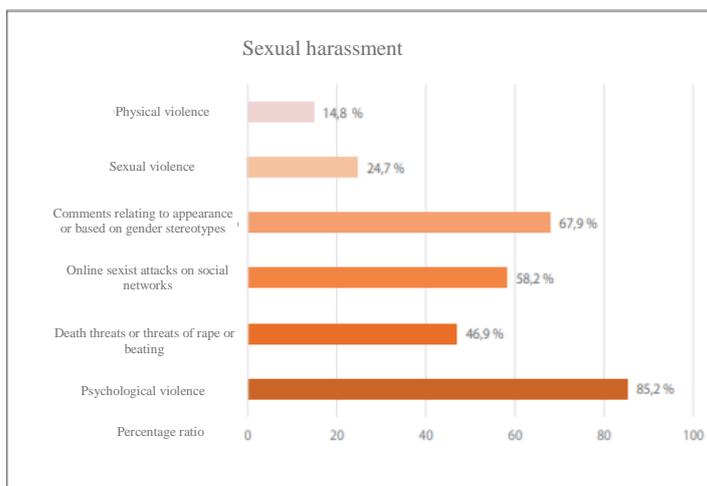
²⁰ Adopted by UN the Security Council, on October 31, 2000

²¹ The Kyrgyz Republic acceded by Law No. 185 of August 1, 2003.

²² Adopted by the Venice Commission at its 51st plenary session (Venice, July 5-6, 2002).

aim of the study was to gather primary information on instances of unacceptable behavior and acts of violence against women parliamentarians, aimed at limiting their ability to fulfil their mandate and protect the interests of their electors in complete freedom and safety. A questionnaire was developed that included questions on unacceptable behavior and violence experienced by women politicians. The results of the study produced recommendations for parliaments and parliamentarians on how to prevent and address such acts and behavior.

The study “Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe” notes that “gender-based violence affects women in all spheres of life. Politics is no exception...sexism, harassment and violence...and often dismissed as the price women have to pay for being in politics”, and in this context “At the same time, players in the political arena should strengthen their policies, legislation and other measures aimed at putting an end to sexism and violence against women in politics.”²³



Acts of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe.
Source: A Study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and PACE “Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe”.

The said study showed that 85.2 per cent of respondents had experienced psychological violence, of whom 46.9 per cent reported having received death threats or threats of rape or beatings, 58.2 per cent of those interviewed had experience of abusive, sexual or violent content and behavior on social networks and 24.7 per cent having been sexually harassed during their term of office.²⁴

The findings of the study have led to a number of initiatives by PACE and other Council of Europe bodies, including

- PACE - Recommendation 2152 (2019) and Resolution 2274 (2019) *Promoting parliaments free of sexism and sexual harassment* promoting better information on this issue and drawing attention to commitments to protect women’s rights - including the right to live free from violence - and containing concrete recommendations for remedial action;
- PACE Recommendation 2157 (2019) and Resolution 2290 (2019) “Towards an ambitious Council of Europe agenda for gender equality”, calling on member states and national parliaments to reaffirm their commitment to gender equality policies, to adopt the Council of Europe’s proposed non-sexist language and to take steps to rigorously ensure equal political representation of women;
- Recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to the member States of the Council of Europe on preventing and combating sexism (2019), which notes that gender equality is central to the protection of human rights, functioning democracy,

Ms Liliane Maury Pasquier, Former President of the PACE, launched the #NotInMyParliament initiative to raise awareness of the extent of sexism and sexual harassment against women parliamentarians and to fight to put an end to sexism in the parliamentary environment.

²³ <https://assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/EGA/WomenFFViolence/BrochureParliamentSexism-RU.pdf>

²⁴ <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>

good governance, respect for the rule of law and the general welfare, while sexism is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, leading to discrimination and preventing the full advancement of women in society.

- Amend *the Code of Conduct for Members of the PACE* to include an explicit prohibition of sexism, sexual harassment, sexual violence and sexual abuse, as well as a commitment to follow the Council of Europe’s requirements for respecting human dignity;
- Revise *the PACE Election Observation Core Principles* to ensure that violence, sexism and sexual harassment against women are taken into account in election observation;
 - *OSCE Ministerial Council Decision (2018)* on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women, which recognizes that “women engaged in professional activities with public exposure... are more likely to be exposed to specific forms of violence or abuse, threats, and harassment, in relation to their work. It also “encourage all relevant actors, including those involved in the political process, to contribute to preventing and combating all forms of violence against women, including those engaged in professional activities with public exposure and/or in the interest of society”;
 - The 2021 *Report* by the OSCE PA Special Representative on Gender Issues, Hedy Fry, *on violence against women journalists and politicians*²⁵ focuses on the impact of such violence and its implications on women victims, as well as democracy as a whole. It calls on the OSCE PA and Member States to step up efforts to support and protect these women, and considers measures that parliaments can take to address this growing crisis.
 - *Development of a toolkit on combating violence against women in politics*, currently being carried out by the OSCE Democratic Governance and Gender Equality Division. It focuses on measures that can be taken by women politicians, parliaments, political parties and civil society.

These and other examples demonstrate the global community’s concern about the phenomenon of violence as an obstacle to equality.

Indeed, in 2021, this topic was identified as a priority for meetings of the UN Commission on the Status of Women. In its *Agreed Conclusions*, the Commission emphasized that “the promotion of women’s full and equal participation and leadership in public life and the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls are interrelated.” The Commission expressed concern that violence against women in politics and public life is prevalent throughout the world, preventing women from realizing their equal right to participate in all spheres of public life.

III. THE PHENOMENON OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS HAS BEEN THE FOCUS OF RESEARCH: BRIEF EXCURSION

3.1. International experience of research on violence against women politicians

It should be noted that not only in Kyrgyzstan but also in the world so far there is little research of this kind. One of them is *Violence against Women in Politics*, published most recently in 2020. It defines the phenomenon and offers a framework for identifying the forms

²⁵ <https://www.oscepa.org/en/documents/special-representatives/gender-issues/report-17/4247-2021-report-by-the-special-representative-on-gender-issues-violence-against-women-journalists-and-politicians-a-growing-crisis/file>

that violence takes around the world.²⁶ According to the author, violence against women in politics is not simply a gendered extension of existing definitions of political violence privileging physical aggressions against political rivals. Rather, violence against women in politics is a distinct phenomenon involving a broad range of harms to attack and undermine women as political actors.

These tactics take five forms. Four of these types are widely recognized in international conventions on violence against women: physical, psychological, sexual and economic.

Physical violence encompasses a wide range of bodily harms involving unwanted contact and confinement. This can include killing, beating, slapping, kidnapping or arbitrary arrest. According to a global survey by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), 25.5% of women parliamentarians surveyed had experienced some form of physical violence in connection with their political activities.²⁷

Psychological violence, unlike physical violence, inflicts trauma on individuals' mental state or emotional well-being. It seeks to disempower targets by insulting, ridiculing, or frightening them. Such actions may include death threats, rape threats, intimidation, threats against family members, verbal abuse, rumor campaigns, surveillance or blackmail. Most studies show that psychological violence, including online harassment and abuse, is the most common form of violence against women in politics. As already noted, a study of European parliaments shows that 85.2 per cent of female MPs who took part in the study said that they had suffered psychological violence, including 58.2 per cent who had been the target of online sexist attacks on social networks.²⁸

Sexual violence includes sexual acts and attempted sexual acts of coercion as well as unwanted sexual comments or advances. It can include rape, attempted rape, groping, sexual jokes and requests for sexual favours. Given the high level of cultural stigma, women are often hesitant to talk about their experiences of sexual violence. Nevertheless, 21.8% of women parliamentarians worldwide said they had experienced sexual harassment and even assault in the course of their work in parliament.²⁹

Economic violence involves denying, limiting or controlling women's access to financial resources, using economic hardship as a means of control. Forms of economic violence include vandalism, property destruction, theft or withdrawal of financial support. According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, economic violence is the second most common form of violence identified by women parliamentarians worldwide, affecting almost a third (32.7%) of respondents.³⁰

Some research also identifies a fifth category of violence, *semiotic violence*, which mobilizes sexist and degrading words and images to injure, discipline and subjugate women.³¹ Examples abound, from digitally altered images depicting women in sexually graphic and degrading ways, to fake sex videos released during elections, to fake videos depicting women in false and misleading images. While semiotic violence has characterized the portrayal of women

²⁶ Mona Lena Krook. 2020. *Violence against Women in Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press. For a short summary of the chapters, see <https://www.vawpolitics.org/book>.

²⁷ <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>

²⁸ <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>

²⁹ <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>

³⁰ <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>

³¹ Mona Lena Krook. 2020. *Violence against Women in Politics*. New York: Oxford University Press.

in public life throughout history, it has been given new life with the rise of gender disinformation campaigns around the world.

Another attempt to study violence against women politicians, *Violence against women politicians in Serbia: women in politics at the tripoint of gender, power and political culture*,³² focused on analyzing the phenomenon of violence against women politicians in this Eastern European country. It focused on analyzing both media content and personal perceptions of violence by women themselves who held political office at different levels of the legislature: national, regional and local.³³ The aim of the research was to gain insight into the most important patterns and characteristics of violence against women in politics, the characteristics of the perpetrators of violence, the methods they use, and the causes and impact of violence on political activism and other aspects of women's lives. The research was conducted on two fronts - one focusing on women's personal experiences of violence during their political activity and on perceptions of the situation and possible solutions to protect women politicians from violence, and the other focusing on an analysis of media content on the topic of violence against women politicians.³⁴

According to findings of the study, women politicians are exposed to various forms of violence, which can be grouped into three categories:

Structural violence:

- segregation of duties and labour exploitation of women in parties;
- unequal distribution of posts within political parties and barriers to women's promotion to higher posts in the party or to government office;
- trading in the mandates of women;
- marginalization and removal of women from parties.

Cultural violence:

- The use of gender stereotypes, sexism, misogyny in direct interpersonal violence against women.;
- Spreading the culture of sexism and misogyny, reproduction of violent, political discourse in the media.

Direct violence:

- Psychological violence;
- Sexual harassment;
- Physical violence;
- Stalking;
- Digital violence.

In addition to exploring all these forms of violence, the authors have also focused on analyzing the context - the environment in Serbia, which they characterize as pronounced gender inequalities both in public life and in private, family relations, which are present in work and employment, education, political and social participation, material status and income, in the

³² Marija Babović, Smiljana Milinkov, Marija Srdić, Biljana Stepanov. Violence against women politicians in Serbia: women in politics at the tripoint of gender, power and political culture Belgrade, 2021.

³³ The research was supported by the OSCE Mission to Serbia and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

³⁴ Marija Babović, Smiljana Milinkov, Marija Srdić, Biljana Stepanov. Violence against women politicians in Serbia: women in politics at the tripoint of gender, power and political culture Belgrade, 2021. P. 4

unequal distribution of unpaid domestic work and family care work.³⁵ Admittedly, the same is true in Kyrgyzstan, a country with deeply entrenched partisan attitudes, which is a significant obstacle to equality and well-being.

3.2. Exploring violence against women in Kyrgyzstan

Violence against women has been the subject of research in Kyrgyzstan on a number of occasions, but it is more about sexual and physical violence, as well as domestic violence as a specific type of violence that includes different forms of violent manifestations. Attempts to identify their nature, the causes of their occurrence, the extent of their spread, the economic harm that violence causes, to describe victimological characteristics, to develop mechanisms for counteraction, etc. have been made in individual publications.

For example, the study *Gender as Perceived by Society* focused on the study of gender in five areas: women's political participation; women's economic empowerment; violence against women in the form of bride stealing and underage marriage; women's religious radicalization; and women's participation in labour migration.³⁶

The section on women's political participation, *inter alia*, presented the results of a survey on women's and men's participation and access to politics, awareness of special measures to strengthen women's political participation, the extent to which women are active, and public attitudes towards these issues. Thus, it was shown that the majority of women and men agree that women contribute greatly to the country's policy-making (73% and 64%, respectively), and also believe that equal representation of women and men in government indicates a high level of development in the country (69% and 63%). Notably, more than half of women (54%) and less than half of men (41%) believe that life in the country would improve if there were more women among the decision-makers.

The study also tried to find out what are the obstacles to greater women's participation in politics. Its results showed that one of the main obstacles was the lack of support from a spouse or family, as well as women's lack of experience and knowledge (46%) and community support (42%).³⁷

As the analysis of the data presented in the publication in question shows, women politicians do not support women themselves. They are quite critical, and even harsher than men, about the work of women parliamentarians. The authors of the study suggested that "this may be due to a lack of understanding of the importance of women's presence in the supreme legislative body on the one hand, and the lack of communication between women parliamentarians and the female electorate on the other. At the same time, this paradox may be due to the fact that many women see political activity as incompatible with women's family responsibilities. At the same time, the population knows the women MPs rather poorly and has little information about their work. The main qualities that a politician, irrespective of gender, should have are education, intelligence, concern for the needs of ordinary people, honesty and integrity. Thus, for the most part, the population does not have special, specific requirements for women politicians."³⁸

³⁵ Ibid. P. 6

³⁶ <http://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/04b5b8ac-3016-46ed-a7ec-750398c1aeb4.pdf>

³⁷ <http://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/04b5b8ac-3016-46ed-a7ec-750398c1aeb4.pdf> P. 149

³⁸ <http://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/04b5b8ac-3016-46ed-a7ec-750398c1aeb4.pdf> P. 165-166

In the publication *Gender as Perceived by Society*, issues relating to violence against women were statistically measured only in the context of abduction for the purpose of marriage and child marriage.

Another attempt to study women's political participation was the Gender Ranking of Political Parties in Kyrgyzstan.³⁹ The development of the gender ranking was based on four key dimensions: the level of democracy and openness of parties, the level of gender sensitivity of parties' documents and activities, the gender 'portrait' of parties in the media, and public perception of parties' promotion of gender issues.

As another example of research on selected aspects of violence against women in politics carried out in Kyrgyzstan, gender monitoring reports on elections can be cited:

- Gender monitoring report on the elections to the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic held on November 28, 2021;⁴⁰
- Final report on the observation of the organization and conduct of the early presidential election in the Kyrgyz Republic: gender monitoring results from January 10, 2021;⁴¹
- Gender monitoring report on the elections to the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic held on October 4, 2020;⁴²
- Gender monitoring of the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic (April 2017 to February 2018)⁴³, etc.

They reflect, in varying degrees of detail, the different forms of violence against women in politics.

It should also be noted that certain aspects of women's political participation and analysis of forms of violence against women are included in alternative reports to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women,⁴⁴ reflected in the Monitoring of Sustainable Development Goals indicators in the Kyrgyz Republic,⁴⁵ the Voluntary National Review of the Sustainable Development Goals in the Kyrgyz Republic,⁴⁶ the National Review of the Kyrgyz Republic in the framework of the Beijing Declaration and the Beijing Platform for Action. Progress and Challenges. (Beijing+25),⁴⁷ described in case studies such as the "Case Study on Combating Gender Inequality in Political Participation in Kyrgyzstan",⁴⁸ Report on the Study on the Incidence of Sexual Harassment of Women and Girls in Labour and Employment Relations⁴⁹, etc.

³⁹ https://www.kg.undp.org/content/kyrgyzstan/ru/home/library/womens_empowerment/gender-ratings.html

⁴⁰ https://awli.kg/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/gendermonitoringik_2021.pdf

⁴¹ <https://awli.kg/publikaczii-datkaajm/otchet-po-rezultatam-gendernogo-monitoringa-vyborov-prezidenta-2021/>

⁴² <https://awli.kg/publikaczii-datkaajm/otchet-po-rezultatam-gendernogo-monitoringa-vyborov-deputatov-zhogorku-kenesha-2020/>

⁴³ <https://awli.kg/publikaczii-datkaajm/gendernyj-monitoring-deyatelnosti-zhogorku-ke%d2%a3esha-kyrgyzskoj-respubliki/>

⁴⁴ For example, Alternative Report to the Fifth Periodic Report of the Kyrgyz Republic to the CEDAW committee, prepared by the NGO board

⁴⁵ <http://stat.kg/ru/publications/monitoring-pokazatelej-celej-ustojchivogo-razvitiya-v-kyrgyzskoj-respublike/>

⁴⁶ https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/26372VNR_2020_Kyrgyzstan_Report_Russian.pdf

⁴⁷ https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/Gender/Kgz_Beijing_25_Review_Rus_Final.pdf

⁴⁸ https://www.kg.undp.org/content/kyrgyzstan/ru/home/library/womens_empowerment/-case-study-on-combating-gender-inequality-in-political-particip.html

⁴⁹ https://kawj.kg/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/%D0%9A%D0%90%D0%96%D0%A1_%D0%BF%D1%83%D0%B1%D0%BB%D0%B8%D0%BA%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F_%D1%85%D0%B0%D1%80%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%81%D0%BC%D0%B5%D0%BD%D1%82.pdf

Despite numerous examples, it is worth noting that there has not yet been a full-scale study of violence against women in politics that examines the forms of violence, its perpetrators, causes and other aspects. This study is thus a first attempt at a comprehensive analysis of the subject.

IV. NATIONAL LEGAL CONTEXT

4.1. Legal Framework for Gender Equality in Women's Political Participation

The legal context for women's participation in political processes, including electoral processes, is determined by the national legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic, with the Constitution (the Basic Law) at the center. Since Kyrgyzstan gained sovereignty, constitutional reforms have taken place on a number of occasions, resulting in different forms of elected state bodies and the resulting distribution of powers between them.

The last constitutional reform to take place in the Kyrgyz Republic was the 2021 reform, when the new Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic was adopted by referendum on April 11. The law on its adoption was signed by the President on May 5, 2021.

The current *Constitution* reflects the approach of the value of gender equality and establishes:

- equality of rights, freedoms and opportunities for men and women (Article 24 (3));
- no one shall be subject to any type of discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, language, disability, ethnicity, religion, age, political or other opinion, education, origin, property or other status, as well as other circumstances (Article 24 (1));
- Special measures established by law and aimed at ensuring equal opportunities for different social groups, in accordance with international obligations, do not constitute discrimination (Article 24 (1));
- prohibition of propaganda of national, racial, religious hatred, gender and other social superiority, calling for discrimination, hostility or violence. (Article 32 (4));
- equal rights and opportunities for entry into the civil and municipal service and for promotion in the manner prescribed by law (Article 37 (3));
- the right of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic to elect and be elected to state and local government bodies, as well as to participate in a referendum (Article 37(1));
- the right of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic to participate in the management of public and state affairs, either directly or through their representatives (Article 37 (2));
- local council MPs are elected by citizens residing in the respective administrative and territorial entity in accordance with the procedure established by law with equal opportunities (Article 113 § 1).

Law of the Kyrgyz Republic of 4 August 2008 on State Guarantees for Equal Rights and Possibilities for Men and Women establishes the state guarantees on provision of the equal rights and opportunities to persons of different floor in political, social, economic, cultural and other areas of activity of the person; it is designed to protect men and women from discrimination on the basis of floor; it is directed to approval of the progressive democratic relations between men and women. In particular, it stipulates:

- gender equality in public administration by ensuring gender representation of persons in all branches of government through legal, organizational and other mechanisms (Art. 9);

- Equal rights and equal opportunities to enter the civil and municipal service, to be promoted and to continue to work in government, the obligation of the heads of state and local government bodies to ensure equal access for people of different genders to the civil and municipal service (Art. 10);

- a quota system, which means that the staffing of state and local government officials should not be dominated by officials of the same gender. The quota system should be provided for in other regulatory legal acts and should require that the same gender in these bodies should not exceed 70% of their staff (Art. 10);

- Prohibiting same-gender tenders and requiring heads of state and local government bodies to develop gender-sensitive career development policies for employees. Furthermore, if two candidates of different genders have competed for a vacant public or municipal service post, the candidate of that gender who is less represented in the body in question shall be accepted on equal terms (Art. 10).

Special measures as well as guarantees of equal electoral rights are defined for the following state bodies and their representatives: MPs of the Supreme Council, Central Commission for Elections and Referendums, MPs of city councils, auditors of the Chamber of Accounts, judges of the Supreme Court, Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court, Deputy Ombudsmen (Akyikatchy) of the Kyrgyz Republic.

4.2. Legal framework for electoral legislation

The legal basis for electoral legislation, in particular elections to the Supreme Council (parliament) and local councils, and presidential elections, is also laid down in the Constitution.

Thus, the Supreme Council, the highest representative body, consists of 90 deputies and is elected for a term of 5 years. The procedure for electing deputies to the Supreme Council is determined by constitutional law (Article 76 §§ 1 and 2). Such a law is the *Constitutional Law On the Election of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and Deputies of the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic of July 2, 2011*

Significant changes to the said Constitutional Law, which changed the system of parliamentary elections, were made in 2021.⁵⁰

Currently, Elections to the Supreme Council are held under a mixed system:

- The 54 deputies to the Supreme Council are elected under the proportional system in a single constituency covering the entire country. The right to nominate candidates belongs to the political parties;

- The 36 deputies to the Supreme Council are elected under a majoritarian system in single-mandate constituencies formed by the CEC. The right to nominate candidates belongs to the political parties and citizens by self-nomination.

Kyrgyz electoral legislation provides for *special measures to ensure women's representation among political party candidates*. Thus, the Constitutional Law On the Election of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and Deputies of the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic stipulates that *when determining the list of candidates, a political party must consider*

⁵⁰ On August 26, 2021, the Constitutional Law on Amendments to the Constitutional Law on the Election of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and Deputies of the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic was adopted

representation: no more than 70% of candidates of the same gender, and the difference in the order of priority in the lists of women and men nominated by political parties must not exceed three positions (Article 60 (3)).

This provision was initially included in the Law when it was adopted in 2011,⁵¹ but loopholes remained, which contributed to the fact that women candidates included in the list formation stage, and later women MPs who received parliamentary mandates, gave up their mandate for various reasons and mandates were passed on to the next male candidate on the party list. Thus, women were legally disappeared of decision-making processes.

Through the tremendous efforts of civil society organizations, together with development partners, we succeeded in having the Constitutional Law No. 96 of June 5, 2017 **On Amendments to the Constitutional Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on the Election of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and Deputies of the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic** to include the norm that *in case of early termination of a MP, his mandate is transferred to the next registered candidate:*

- of female candidates - in the case of the termination of a female deputy's term of office;
- of male candidates - in the case of the termination of a male deputy's term of office;

If there are no persons of the respective gender on the list of candidates, the mandate of the deputy shall be given to the next candidate on the list (Article 65 (4-1)).

Thus, at parliamentary level, special measures to maintain at least 30% gender representation have been strengthened.

The next step contributing to maintaining women's representation in Parliament was the adoption of Constitutional Law No. 103 of August 26, 2021 **on Amendments to the Constitutional Law on the Election of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic and Deputies of the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic**, which established the following:

In the distribution of mandates received by a political party, initially at least 30 per cent of the total number of mandates received by a political party shall be distributed among the female candidates who received the highest number of votes. In the event that female candidates on a political party's candidate list do not receive votes, the remaining mandates in the women's quota are distributed in line with the order of placement of female candidates on the political party list established when the list was registered with the CEC. 70% of the total number of mandates is then distributed among the candidates whose ordinal number received the highest number of votes relative to the other candidates. The positions of candidates on a political party's candidate list move in descending order according to the number of votes each candidate receives (Article 64 (4)).

However, despite all efforts, in the history of Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary system, a 30% representation of women in the SC has never been achieved. The highest proportion (25.5%) was in October 2007, when 23 women MPs (25.5%) were elected to Parliament. And there have been years (2005) when parliament was all-male.

⁵¹ These quotas first appeared in the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic On the new revision of the Kyrgyz Republic Code of October 23, 2007

The legal basis for the election of deputies to local councils is Law No. 98 of 14 July 2011 About Elections of Deputies of Local Keneshes, which defines the electoral rights of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic and their guarantees and regulates relations connected with the preparation and conduct of elections of deputies to local councils.

Since its adoption, the Law has stipulated that when forming list of candidates for city councils, political parties must take into account the representation of no more than 70% of persons of the same gender, and the difference in the order of priority in the lists of women and men nominated by a political party must not exceed two positions (Article 49 (7)).

The same law stipulates that if a candidate refuses to continue participating in the election, the candidate has the right to withdraw from the election and the political party has the right to withdraw the list of candidates and refuse to participate in the election or remove the candidate(s) from the list by submitting a corresponding written application to the relevant territorial electoral commission. In this case, a candidate of the same gender as the excluded candidate is included in the list of candidates (Article 54).

However, despite this, there has been a decline in women's participation in local government. Each election led to a decrease in the number of elected women in village councils. Women's representation in local councils decreased from 19% in 2016 to 11% in 2018, with a quota of 30%⁵². The decline in the proportion of women in local councils has been a cause for concern on the part of civil society. This was because the diversity of needs related to women's daily lives, which is most evident at the local level, remained unexpressed in the political agenda of local government; and because the necessary human resource capacity for women's political participation at the national level was not being developed⁵³.

In order to ensure real equality of opportunities for women and men to participate in local councils elections, the efforts of women in the non-governmental sector, in cooperation with development partners, adopted in August 2019 the Law on Amendments to the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on the Election of Local Kenesh Deputies, which established additional mechanisms for the representation of women at the local representative body level:

- in the case of early termination of the mandate of a MP elected under the proportional system, his/her mandate is transferred to the next registered female candidate in the case of termination of the mandate of a female MP of parliament. In the case of a premature termination of the powers of a woman MP who received a mandate on the basis of reserved mandates, the mandate is transferred to the next female candidate who received the highest number of votes in the respective electoral district (Article 52 (1-1)).
- in determining the results of the election of village councils MPs, mandates are initially distributed among female candidates. Those women candidates who obtain the highest number of votes compared to other women candidates are recognized as elected, i.e. there is a mandatory reservation of at least 30% of mandates of deputies to the village council for women (Article 62 (2)).

Already a month after these amendments were introduced, early elections for village council deputies were held in September 2019 in the rural district of Saruu, Jeti-Ögüz district, Issyk-Kul Region, and nine women were elected as MPs.⁵⁴

A year and a half later, on April 11, 2021, elections to local councils were held for the first time throughout the country, according to the 2019 amendments to the electoral legislation.

⁵² National Voluntary Review of the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in the Kyrgyz Republic - P. 59.

⁵³ National Voluntary Review of the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in the Kyrgyz Republic - P. 61.

⁵⁴ https://24.kg/vlast/130506_vyiboryi_vsaruu_kak_jenschinyi_sela_uterli_nos_mujchinam/

Although in some polling stations the elections were declared invalid⁵⁵ and new elections were called⁵⁶, the proportion of women elected to local councils was 38%. This result can safely be considered a huge success in achieving gender equality.

4.3. Violence against women in terms of national legislation

National legislation in the Kyrgyz Republic neither at constitutional, code or law level contains a concept of “gender-based violence”, i.e. violence committed on the basis of gender, nor a specific concept of “violence against women” which is common to the entire legal system. Only one by-law, the Regulation on the Procedure of Interaction of State Authorities and Local Self-Governments, as well as Other Organizations and Citizens to Reduce the Risk of Violence against Women and Children in Emergency and Crisis Situations, approved by Government of the Kyrgyz Republic Resolution No. 418 of August 22, 2019, refers to gender-based violence which is defined as “any act of gender-based violence that causes or is likely to cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering, as well as threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”, which in principle is similar to the definition given in the international document, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993). Of course, this resolution applies in a narrowly specific sense, as it defines the procedure for interaction between state and local government bodies of the Kyrgyz Republic, as well as other state and non-governmental organizations and citizens to prevent, suppress and respond to gender-based violence in emergency and crisis situations.

Although there is no single definition of gender-based violence in national legislation, it should be recognized that its specific forms (namely prevention, suppression and assistance to victims) are regulated by different branches of legislation - criminal, criminal procedure, family, labour, contravention legislation, legislation on protection and defense against domestic violence, etc.

For example, domestic violence, as violence which primarily⁵⁷ affects women, may be classified as both a crime and an offence under national legislation, punishable under the Criminal Code or the Contravention Code respectively. In addition, the perpetrator of domestic violence may be subject to measures provided for in a special law, the Protection and Defence Against Domestic Violence Law.

Thus, under Article 177 of the Criminal Code, domestic violence is any intentional act by one family member against another family member or a person of equivalent status which violates the constitutional and other rights and freedoms of the victim, or causes physical or mental suffering, or harm to the physical or mental development, resulting in less severe harm to health⁵⁸.

The Contravention Code in Article 70 defines domestic violence as “the intentional use or threat of physical, psychological or economic violence, as well as neglect committed by a family member/a person of equivalent status to another family member/a person of equivalent status.” Thus, the qualification of domestic violence in each case depends on the occurrence or non-occurrence of less severe harm to health consequences.

⁵⁵ For example, Osh City Council, Tokmok City Council

⁵⁶ <https://shailoo.gov.kg/media/askar/2021/05/28/2021.pdf>

⁵⁷ Over 95% in 2020

⁵⁸ Emphasis added

As noted, a specific legal act is the Law on Protection and Defence Against Domestic Violence, according to cl. 10) of Article 1 which defines domestic violence as “the intentional use or threat of physical, psychological or economic violence, as well as neglect committed by a family member/a person of equivalent status to another family member/a person of equivalent status.” The Law provides for four forms of domestic violence (physical, economic and psychological violence and neglect).

Psychological violence is a threat to commit physical, sexual, economic violence, as well as deliberate humiliation of honor and dignity, coercion to commit offences or acts endangering life or leading to mental, physical health problems, and limitation of the right of adults to communicate.

Physical violence is the direct or indirect intentional physical impact of one family member/a person of equivalent status on another family member/a person of equivalent status, deprivation of the exercise of vital functions, deprivation or restriction of freedom of movement, housing, food, clothing, forcing to hard physical labour, and avoidance of care and caring responsibilities.

Economic violence is the intentional failure by one family member/a person of equivalent status to support another family member/a person of equivalent status, as well as the intentional deprivation or restriction of the right to receive or dispose of property or income intended by law, and/or the use of funds and property by the proxy to the detriment of the grantor.

Neglect is the deliberate failure to take care of family members and persons of equivalent status.

Sexual violence is not a separate form of domestic violence as it is a criminal offence and, depending on its objective, can be classified as rape, sexual assault, coercion to perform sexual acts, sexual acts with a person under the age of 16 and indecent assault. These forms of sexual violence are punishable under the Criminal Code, regardless of whether it is committed by a family member or another person.

Other forms of violence against women are a group of offences in the criminal law, grouped under the heading “Crimes against the form of the family and the interests of children”. The vast majority of their victims are women and girls. These may include kidnapping a person for the purpose of marriage, forcing a person into a de facto marital relationship, forcing a person to marry, violating the law on marriageable age in religious ceremonies, bigamy or polygamy.

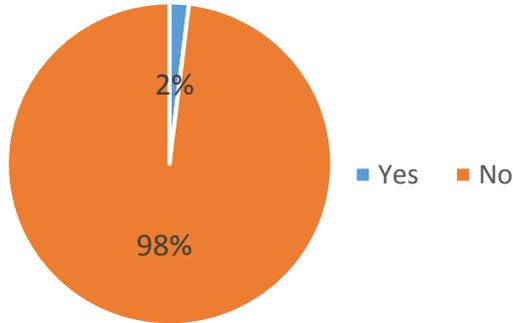
Obviously, involvement in prostitution, trafficking in human beings, illegal abortions, etc. can also constitute forms of violence against women.

V. FORMS AND TYPES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN POLITICIANS IN KYRGYZSTAN

5.1. Physical violence

An analysis of the women’s questionnaires showed that only 2 women (2%) who participated in the survey had experienced physical violence against parliamentary candidates and current MPs, indicating a low prevalence of this form of violent behavior (fig. 9). The male respondents noted that none of them had experienced physical violence.

Fig. 9. Have you been in a situation where you as an MP/candidate were physically abused? (women’s answers)



One of the women who experienced physical violence indicated that the violence occurred frequently, while another indicated that it was a one-off occurrence. However, they responded that these acts were carried out by both men and women equally, taking place at public events (meetings with voters, meetings, etc.), at their place of work, and at the local territorial election commission. Physical violence was tolerated from strangers as well as from work colleagues. The women victims did not raise the issue of bringing the perpetrator to justice.

“We were campaigning by 2-3 people at a time, handing out materials...One voter threw a notepad and pens at us. The woman did it deliberately...”

(from interview with female candidate for deputy)

Regarding the question of whether female respondents were aware of cases of physical violence or threats of physical violence against other women politicians in connection with their involvement in election campaigns, political activities as a deputy, 12% of those surveyed answered in the affirmative. However, all the men interviewed were unaware of such cases.

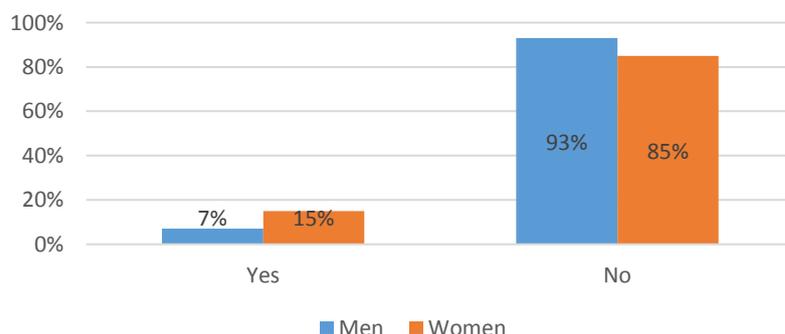
One participant in an in-depth interview described the physical violence of a woman running for president, on whose campaign staff she worked.

“During the presidential election, when I was in the headquarters of a presidential candidate, we were interviewing people, it was not our electorate. Then we ran into a group of older women from the village, they were aggressive, they shouted that a woman’s place is at home.... They started grabbing us with their hands, started kicking us out, shouting that “politics is not woman’s business, you have to deal with your family”. We had to run away from there....”

(from interview with female candidate for deputy)

5.2. Psychological violence

Fig. 10. Have you personally received offensive, sexist remarks? (% , women’s and men’s answers)



Psychological violence is usually aimed at weakening self-confidence, diminishing authority in the eyes of society.

The most frequent forms of psychological violence experienced by the women interviewed were intimidation,

humiliation, verbal abuse, threats, blackmail and public discrediting. For example, offensive, sexist remarks⁵⁹ were experienced by 15% of female respondents and 7% of male respondents (fig. 10). The respondents noted that “these remarks took the form of both “a slight hint that I am a woman and that politics is not women’s business” and direct insults”. It should be noted that these actions occurred not only on the part of men, but equally on the part of women (this was indicated by male and female respondents). Most of these actions against women were taken by political opponents, but also by acquaintances. To a lesser extent, women’s relatives. These actions took place more often in face-to-face meetings.

“During election campaigns I have repeatedly encountered cases where opponents have tried to discredit me by calling me a foreign agent due to the fact that I represent civil society and I am one of the active right defenders in southern Kyrgyzstan... They try to dissuade the electorate from voting for me on the grounds that I am an NGO member and therefore “promote Western values and the LGBT community”.

(from interview with female candidate for deputy)

“He⁶⁰ immediately disliked me because I was No. 12 on the party list and he was No. 98. He started obstructing my work in every way possible in order to get me to withdraw my candidacy, he started to turn his fellow party members against me, including by spreading untrue rumours about me. He studied my curriculum vitae and pointed out that I was unmarried and therefore probably got a place at the top of the list for a reason.”

(from interview with female candidate for deputy)

“My opponents had the support of the head of the village administration (ayil okmot), who, using his official position, campaigned for them, as well as spreading false information about me and urging them not to vote for me. So I think it was an uneven fight... it was easier for my opponents to campaign with the support of the head.”

(from interview with female candidate for deputy)

Those who insulted female and male candidates did not incur any responsibility for different reasons - approximately the same number of respondents indicated that they had not contacted law enforcement agencies or had done so but had been directly or indirectly denied protection. The man who responded affirmatively to a question about receiving the offensive remarks did not contact law enforcement agencies.

Men (all 100% of respondents) are not aware of cases of psychological violence, sexist remarks, insults against women politicians related to their participation in the election campaign, political activity as a deputy, judging by their answers.

Harassment, i.e. repetitive and unwanted behavior, such as unwanted attention, communication or contact, which caused fear as a form of psychological violence, was rarely experienced by the women and men interviewed (6% and 10% respectively). Men and women cited harassment by political opponents and people they knew, while women also cited

⁵⁹ Sexism is prejudice, discrimination against a person on the basis of sex or gender identity. At the heart of sexism is the belief that one sex is superior to the other.

⁶⁰ Party fellow, male parliamentary candidate

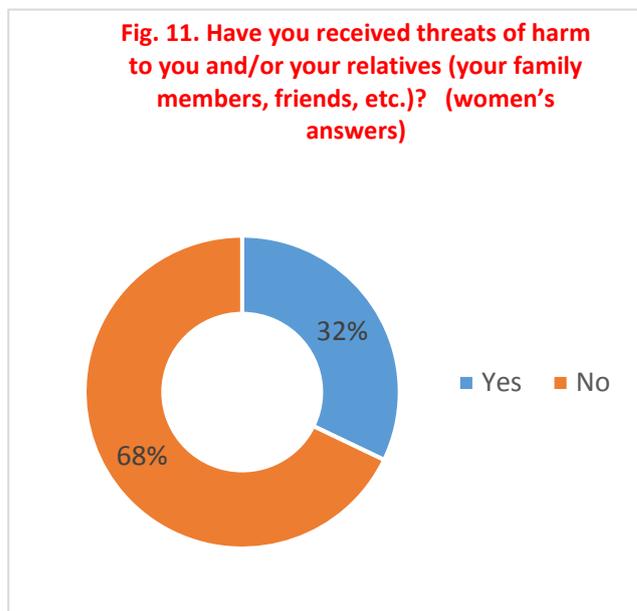
harassment by strangers. The harassment was carried out on the street, in meetings, as well as via messengers, social media, telephone and email.

“The male opponents in one car prevented me from campaigning. From morning till night they chased me.”

(an explanation in the questionnaire of one of the female candidates)

The perpetrators were not prosecuted as none of the respondents contacted law enforcement agencies. However, one of the two men interviewed who responded positively to the question about harassment noted that he had received a personal apology from the harasser.

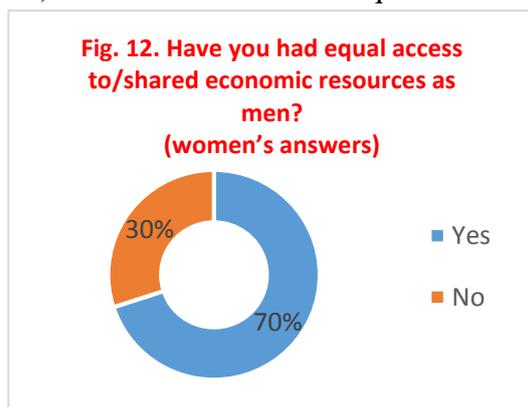
In almost a third of cases (32%) women have experienced threats as a form of psychological violence (fig. 11), and almost a fifth of respondents (19%) are aware of cases of psychological violence, sexist remarks, insults against other women politicians. These actions took place both via means of communication (messengers, social networks, telephone, email) and face-to-face contact (in the workplace, during meetings with party fellows, at public events (meetings with voters, meetings, in the street, etc.). As with other forms of violence, the perpetrators were not prosecuted because the victims were denied protection directly or indirectly by law enforcement agencies.



happened several times from people he knew on the street. The respondent did not contact law enforcement agencies.

5.3. Economic violence

Almost a third of the women interviewed (30%) had experienced economic violence (fig. 12). Women did not have equal access to/shared economic resources as men.



More often than not, economic violence had logically taken place on the “male-only” or “more male” side. This was also confirmed by the participants in the in-depth interviews. As in other forms of violence, no one was held responsible. Obviously, this is not only because women have not raised the issue, but also because the law does not treat these actions as illegal. Regarding the awareness of respondents regarding cases of economic violence (unequal access or distribution of resources, etc.), in relation to other women politicians

related to their involvement in election campaigns, political activity as a MP, such awareness was shown by only 15% of women responding to this question.

Male respondents believed in 15% of cases that the form of economic violence in question was against women.

To a large extent, women's economic constraints are due to their unequal access to economic resources in general. Campaigning and promotion (meetings with voters, printed and video campaign materials) are known to require a significant investment that only a small number of women can afford.

“Every candidate, including women, invested money for campaign expenses. I didn't have as much money as the other candidates, so there were limits to getting campaign funds from the party headquarters in 2016. So there were fewer banners, booklets about me. I spent a lot of time meeting voters, could not separately gather many voters in one place due to lack of funds, so had to work with small groups and it took a lot of time. Couldn't get a promotional video for TV or an audio message for the radio made...”

“A small example - women sometimes don't even have money for transport to campaign, men have both cars and money for petrol...”

“Women spend their money and parties fund men more...”

“During the Supreme Council elections, men spent more on campaigning, so they have more money...”

“In both cases of my participation in the KR SC elections, there was no demand from the party leaders to contribute financially to the party, but there were grievances from male party members who wanted women to contribute financially on an equal basis with men. However, there have been cases of restricted access to the party's resources, for example in 2010, due to a conflict with the chief of staff, he hindered my work by using his official position, reduced the number of banners with my image by three times, and gave orders to post them not in the region (Osh), where my main electorate lived, but in Bishkek, where no one knows me. They also did not give me a car for meetings, justifying it by saying that I did not contribute money to the cash pool, so I had to organize trips and meetings with voters at my own expense.”

(from interview with female candidate)

Another form of violence against women is trying to silence them and deliberately prevent them from speaking, which was experienced by 12% of women who responded to this question. Of the 12 women who responded affirmatively to this question, those who did so showed that these actions were “more by men” (4 persons) or “only by men” (3 persons) as well as by both men and women in equal measure (3 persons). This was more true of political opponents (5 persons). As in previous cases, no one was prosecuted (11 persons) and in one case, a woman's appeal went unheeded.

When asked whether you were aware of cases where other women politicians had faced obstacles in carrying out their activities (they had been deliberately prevented from speaking or had been silenced (interrupted, mute, etc.), 14% of the women who answered this question

replied positively. None of the men interviewed had experienced such incidents against themselves.

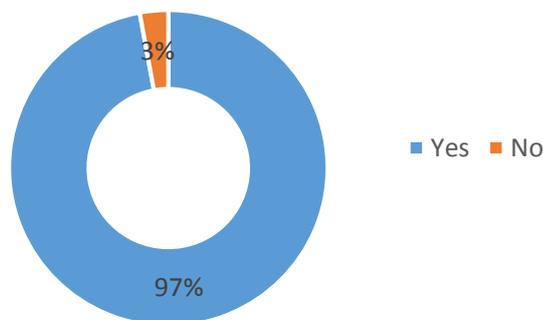
“I face obstacles because of my political views, because I adhere to the idea of democracy and advocate a fair distribution of village resources, and I do not collude with other deputies or officials for my own benefit, but instead advocate for public interests, I am often in the minority and my hands become empty and I increasingly think of giving up my mandate because I see no point in fighting.”

(from interview with woman MP)

5.4. Sexual violence and harassment

The women in the study were not asked whether they had personally experienced sexual harassment. As the questionnaire allows for the identification of the female respondent's identity, the inclusion of this question could have affected the sincerity of responses for various reasons (such as the intimate nature of the question itself, fear of disseminating the information received, cultural, ethnic, religious particularities, etc.). The women were therefore only asked about their awareness of such cases of sexual harassment involving “other” women. Obviously, in answering this question, the women could also reflect their own personal experiences.

Fig. 13. Are you aware of cases of sexual harassment of women politicians (harassment as a woman) in the form of unwanted sexual advances or demands, letters and messages of a sexual nature? (women's answers)



The results of the analysis of the answers to the question of whether female respondents are aware of sexual harassment of female politicians (harassment as a woman) in the form of unwanted advances or demands of a sexual nature, letters and messages of a sexual nature are impressive - 97(!)% replied affirmatively (fig. 13). Thus, we can conclude that this phenomenon is extremely widespread.

The women who responded to this question say that they are aware of repeated episodes of harassment. Also among the answers to the question of who were the perpetrators of these actions, the female respondents indicated the option “on the part of the party fellows”. However, when asked if they were aware of cases where women politicians had been subjected to sexual harassment and refused to reciprocate, the women replied in the negative. When asked about responsibility as a consequence of harassment, female respondents answered “no” or “I don't know”. Given the high latency of cases of sexual harassment and the extremely scarce judicial practice on this issue, as well as imperfect legislation (no special law prohibiting harassment),⁶¹ it can be assumed with a high degree of certainty that perpetrators are not held responsible for sexual harassment.

⁶¹ Only the Law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women prohibits sexual harassment

As for the men interviewed, only 1 responded positively to the question of whether he was aware of sexual harassment of female politicians in the form of unwanted advances or demands of a sexual nature, letters and messages of a sexual nature, while explaining that he had no further information.

Participants in the in-depth interviews shared this type of information in more detail and pointed out instances of harassment, while acknowledging that women themselves may not always be able to identify these acts.

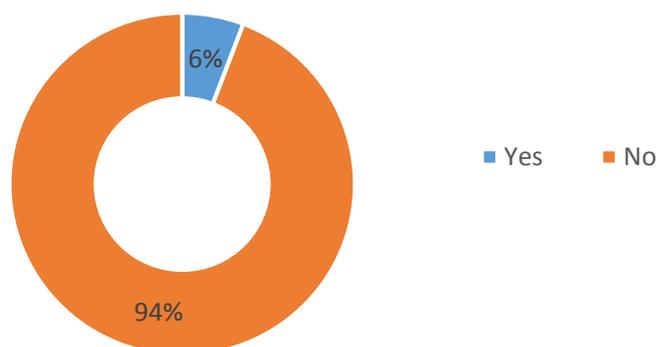
“Often harassment of women, including women politicians, is very common (violation of personal boundaries, light petting when talking, obscene jokes and innuendo, discussing body shape and clothes, etc.). The issue is that we, women, ourselves do not define these cases as harassment, i.e. we are not used to protecting our personal boundaries and putting a stop to such cases.

(from interview with female candidate)

5.5. Media violence

The vast majority of women surveyed (94%) indicated that their offensive or sexual images or comments about them as a woman politician were not disseminated in the media and social media (fig. 14). In 6% of the women who answered positively to this question, half of them indicated that these acts had taken place more than once (3 out of 6). These actions occurred in a

Fig. 14. Have offensive or sexual images or comments about you as a woman politician ever been disseminated in the media and social media? (% , women’s answers)



third of the cases on social media. As in other cases, the persons who disseminated the offensive or sexual images or comments were not held responsible.

Participants in in-depth interviews admitted the fact of obscene comments about themselves, noting that these were obscene comments on social media photos.

“Someone wrote to me in the comments that I’m

going into politics because my husband doesn’t satisfy me.”

(from interview with female candidate)

The respondents noted that on several occasions they had encountered cases of information being disseminated in the media that did not correspond to reality. The majority of women pointed out that this was a repeated situation, noting that these were posts on social media.

“The head of the village administration was against my becoming a deputy of our the village council, so with his help another woman registered as a candidate and with his help she merged with the other two male candidates. They campaigned together through

messengers and WhatsApp groups among the villagers and spread various untrue rumours about me, claiming that I pursue personal interests and try to sneak corruption schemes, etc.”

“This is the first time I have encountered fake accounts, it was the situation that upset me the most, but my entourage has been very supportive. Illiterate people fell for it, I had to spend time making excuses. Acquaintances offered to take revenge on my opponent and do black PR, but I refused. I will rely on my friends, entourage and authority. There have been a lot of calls for support as well. I’m guessing roughly who (the man) might have been.”

(from interview with women MPs)

Of the 104 women interviewed, 12 showed awareness of offensive or sexist images or comments about other women politicians (MPs, candidates) in the media and social media, spreading information that is not true.

In terms of men’s answers, only one pointed to fake images about him and 4 noted that media/social networks had published information about them that was untrue, with 3 out of 4 indicating that this had happened more than once. The perpetrators were not held responsible.

It should be noted that the respondents did not specify on whose side (women or men) the violence in the media was. This could probably be due to the inability to reliably identify who is hiding under different nicknames. However, content analysis helped to reveal the back side, demonstrating whether it was women or men who expressed support. For example, calls for women’s solidarity are predominantly made by women, who are aware of the benefits that can accrue to all of society from women’s participation in politics.

“Countries where women are in leadership positions are really developing!!!”

“...it’s time for women to show their confidence in their power and politically correct decision-making and to show men that their credibility in preserving and uplifting the country is falling!”

“Go for the women, the more the better. Only a woman would understand us.”

“I wish that our president, mayor, governor and head of the village administration would all be women. The men have completely ruined the country...”

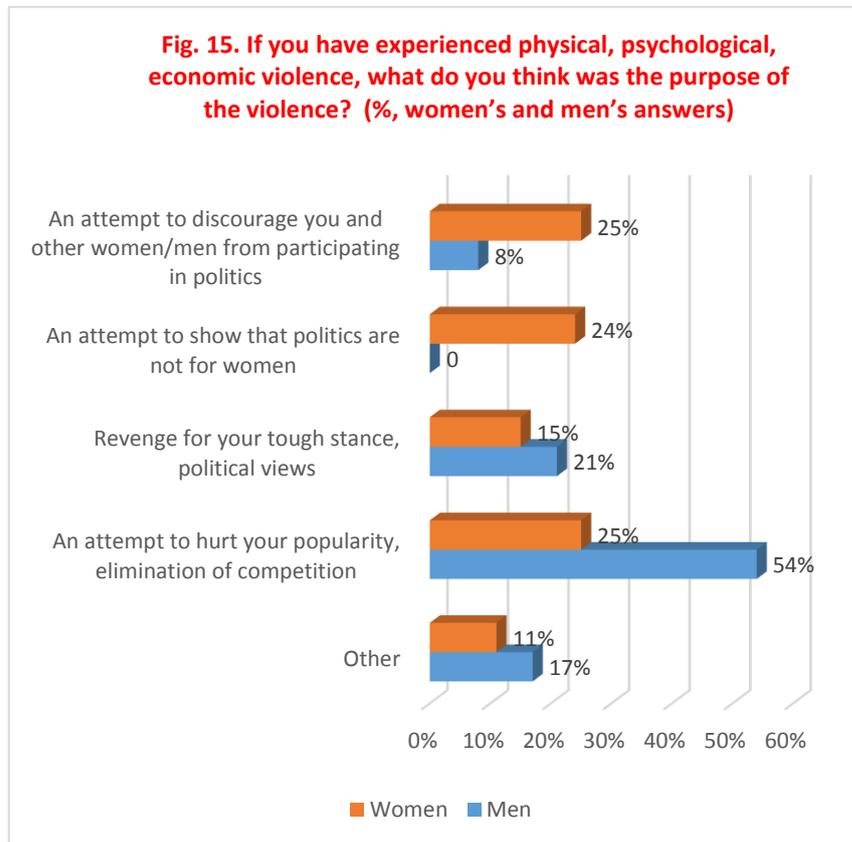
“There is no longer any confidence or strength to watch all this, what men politicians are doing...!”

“Male politicians as leaders are ‘worn out’, all in intrigue, political capture and false patriotism! It’s time for women to be brave, or men will tear the country apart!”

(from a Facebook post comments)

VI. CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN POLITICIANS IN KYRGYZSTAN

The questionnaire asked respondents about the reasons of violence against women politicians and its consequences.



When asked what, in their opinion, was the reason for physical, psychological and economic violence, male respondents identified as the main reason an attempt to reduce their popularity as an MP, to eliminate competition (54%). Further causes given were revenge for their adherence to principles, political views (21%) and an attempt to discourage them and other men from participating in politics (8%). The “other” reason, but without specifying it, was cited by 17% of respondents.

The two main reasons given by the women interviewed were to discourage them and

other women from participating in politics and to try to reduce their popularity as an MP by eliminating the competition (25% each). Almost the same percentage (24%) suggested the reason for violence against women is to show that politics is not women’s business as a reason for violence against them.⁶² This was also confirmed by the participants in the in-depth interviews. Next in descending order were revenge for their adherence to principles (15%) and “other” causes (11%) (fig. 15).

“Women read the party’s platforms. Such an educated approach irritates men even more. During a meeting with voters, male candidates answer questions according to their own opinion, without respecting the party’s platform. If you correct their answer, you will immediately become their opponent. Then they start spreading such silly rumours about you. Therefore, a woman candidate during an election campaign should always be alert, within the party you will need to form your own support group.”

(an explanation in the questionnaire of one of the female candidates)

Another question respondents answered was about the influence of factors such as their gender, age and ethnicity on the causes of violence. It is noteworthy that a fairly high proportion

⁶² men have not been asked this question

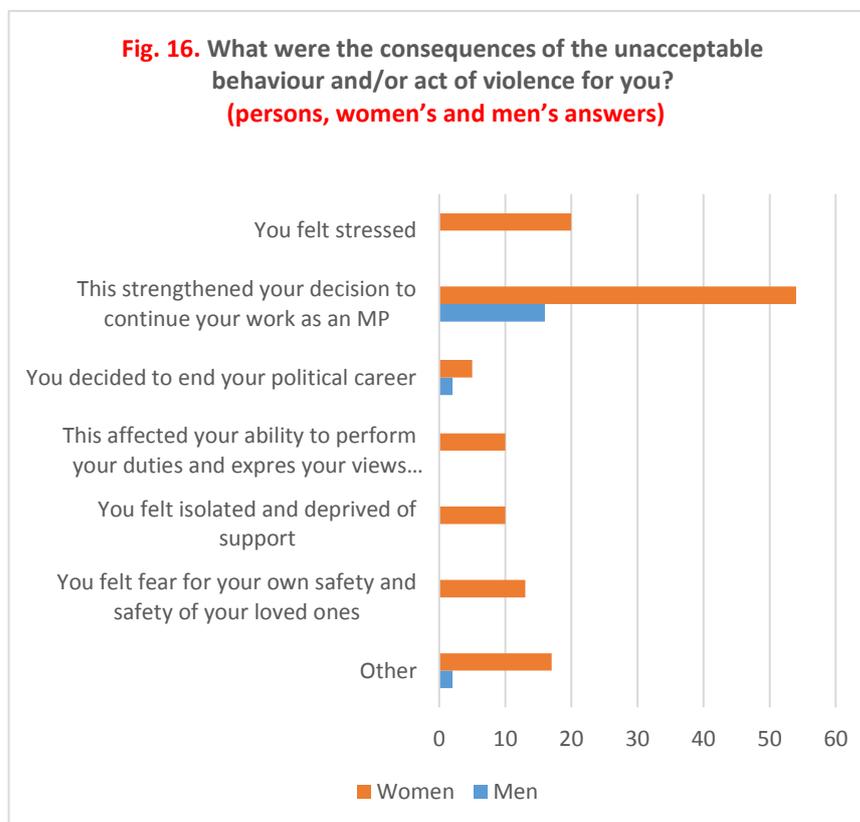
of female respondents cited gender (15%) and age (9%) as such factors, while men did not cite these factors at all. This was also confirmed by the participants in the in-depth interviews, citing both young and old age as an influencing/discriminatory factor.

“I worked for many years in the village administration, know all my fellow villagers personally and am also familiar with all the problems, so I decided to run for deputy, but during the election campaign I was criticised by young candidates (both men and women) because of my retirement age, very often my opponents said behind my back that I had no business running for deputy, I should give way to the young. On the contrary, in my retirement I have a lot of free time which I would like to devote to the development of our village and solving socially important problems, I believe that my experience would be useful in the parliamentary body, but unfortunately I have faced discrimination because of my age (ageism).”

“If a woman is young, then they say she is inexperienced; if she is mature, then they say she is too old. This bias does not apply to men.”

(from interview with female candidates)

With regard to the consequences of unacceptable and/or violent behavior towards candidates/MPs, the following can be noted. Thus, the majority of respondents (both women and men) indicated a strengthened determination to continue as a candidate/MP (fig. 16). The women also noted that they went through something stressful, felt fear for their safety and the safety of their loved ones, felt isolated and without any support, and this affected their ability to discharge the mandate and express their views freely. The same answers are cited by the participants in the in-depth interviews. The men, however, did not give such answers in the Google questionnaire,



but only indicated a strengthening of their resolve to remain politically active. This is probably due to the stereotypical notion that men should not admit to being weak or fearful.

“During the electoral campaign, my opponents spread all sorts of untrue information about me and tried to discredit me as a candidate, this did not affect the outcome of the election - I got the most votes among women, but I was stressed about it, and such actions by my opponents distracted me

from my main goal, I became despondent and mentally low-spirited.”

(from interview with one of female candidate)

CONCLUSIONS

In general, the national legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic on gender equality in terms of political participation is progressive and includes constitutional guarantees of equal rights, freedoms and opportunities for men and women (Article 24 of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic), a number of special measures in electoral legislation, which are designed to ensure mandatory minimum representation of women in Parliament, city and local councils, as well as in certain state bodies (the CEC, the Chamber of Accounts, the Judicial Council).

It is also positive that the system of special measures is constantly being improved to meet the challenges that arise in their application. An example of this is the inclusion of a requirement for an initial distribution of at least 30 per cent of mandates to women candidates in parties admitted to the distribution of mandates. However, the return to single-mandate constituencies elections under the majoritarian system is a serious backlash from a gender perspective, as the majoritarian electoral system itself is unfriendly to women. The results of the last parliamentary elections in single-mandate constituencies (November 28, 2021) confirmed this negative trend - not a single woman was able to win a mandate⁶³. This is the second time in Kyrgyzstan's recent history (the first was in 2005) that majoritarian elections have resulted in parliamentary mandates being given only to men.

Yet women in politics in Kyrgyzstan are a minority, an imbalance in the representation of women and men can be observed in all branches of government and in all areas of decision-making. It is most pronounced at the level of political positions: women accounted for only 24.3% of political public offices and only 3.3% of political municipal offices as of January 1, 2021. In the history of the independent parliament, female representation has never exceeded 25%, is now only 21%, and is the lowest among Central Asian countries⁶⁴. Thus, Kyrgyzstan has not yet succeeded in achieving the minimum 30% representation of women in parliament recommended by the UN Social and Economic Council. There are dozens of times fewer women among political party leaders, government members and election candidates in Kyrgyzstan.

Up until now in Kyrgyzstan, despite numerous examples, it is worth noting that there has not yet been a full-scale study of violence against women in politics that examines the forms of violence, its perpetrators, causes and other aspects.

National legislation in the Kyrgyz Republic neither at constitutional, code or law level contains a concept of "gender-based violence", i.e. violence committed on the basis of gender, nor a specific concept of "violence against women" which is common to the entire legal system. Although there is no single definition of gender-based violence in national legislation, it should be recognized that its specific forms (namely prevention, suppression and assistance to victims) are regulated by different branches of legislation - criminal, criminal procedure, family, labour, contravention legislation, legislation on protection and defence against domestic violence, etc. However, not all cases of violence against women and in all spheres are fully defined in legislation and there are problems both in terms of definitions and legal mechanisms to protect and guard against this negative phenomenon.

This study has found that those women who have ventured into politics face additional challenges, barriers which include violence against women politicians.

⁶³ With the exception of two single-mandate constituencies in Bishkek (Birinchi May and Sverdlov District), where the election was declared invalid and a repeat election was scheduled for February 27, 2022).

⁶⁴ In Uzbekistan, the proportion of women in parliament is 32.7%; in Kazakhstan, 27.1%; in Tajikistan, 25.8%; and in Turkmenistan, 25%.

This study found that women politicians in Kyrgyzstan face all forms of violence. In terms of the prevalence of a particular form of violence (from more to less), they can be listed in the following order:

- (1) sexual harassment of women politicians (harassment as a woman) in the form of unwanted sexual advances or demands, letters and messages of a sexual nature;
- (2) psychological violence, threats as a form of psychological violence, sexist remarks, insults, intimidation, humiliation, verbal abuse, threats, blackmail and public discredit;
- (3) the dissemination of offensive or sexual images or comments about women politicians on social media;
- (4) economic violence manifested in unequal access/sharing of economic resources with men, facts of economic restrictions on women where no such restrictions apply to men;
- (5) obstruction of women's political activities (they have been deliberately prevented from speaking or have been silenced (interrupted, microphone switched off, etc.);
- (6) harassment, i.e. repetitive and unwanted behavior, such as unwanted attention, communication or contact, which caused fear;
- (7) the dissemination of offensive or sexual images or comments about women politicians on media;
- (8) physical violence or threats thereof.

The study found an extremely high prevalence of cases sexual harassment of women politicians (harassment as a woman) in the form of unwanted sexual advances or demands, letters and messages of a sexual nature: 97(!)% of female respondents reported being aware of such cases and that the harassment had been repeated. These actions took place on the part of the party fellows. Given the high latency of cases of sexual harassment and the extremely scarce judicial practice on this issue, as well as imperfect legislation (no special law prohibiting harassment), it can be assumed with a high degree of certainty that perpetrators are not held responsible for sexual harassment.

In almost a third of cases (32%) women have experienced threats as a form of psychological violence, and almost a fifth of respondents (19%) are aware of cases of psychological violence, sexist remarks, insults against other women politicians. These actions took place both via means of communication (messengers, social networks, telephone, email) and face-to-face contact (in the workplace, during meetings with party fellows, at public events (meetings with voters, meetings, in the street, etc.). As with other forms of violence, the perpetrators were not prosecuted because the victims were denied protection directly or indirectly by law enforcement agencies.

The most frequent forms of psychological violence directly experienced by the women interviewed were intimidation, humiliation, verbal abuse, threats, blackmail and public discrediting. For example, offensive, sexist remarks were experienced by 15% of female respondents and 7% of male respondents. It should be noted that these actions occurred not only on the part of men, but equally on the part of women (this was indicated by male and female respondents). Most of these actions against women were taken by political opponents, but also by acquaintances. To a lesser extent, women's relatives. These actions took place more often in face-to-face meetings. Those who insulted female candidates did not incur any responsibility for different reasons - approximately the same number of respondents indicated that they had not contacted law enforcement agencies or had done so but had been directly or indirectly denied protection.

Almost a third of the women interviewed (30%) had experienced economic violence. Women did not have equal access to/share economic resources as men. More often than not, economic violence had logically taken place on the “male-only” or “more male” side. As in other forms of violence, no one was held responsible. Obviously, this is not only because women have not raised the issue, but also because the law does not treat these actions as illegal. To a large extent, women’s economic constraints are due to their unequal access to economic resources in general. Campaigning and promotion (meetings with voters, printed and video campaign materials) require a significant investment that only a small number of women can afford.

Another form of violence against women in politics is trying to silence them and deliberately prevent them from speaking, which was experienced by 12% of women who responded to this question. Most often such actions occurred more or only on the part of men, more frequently by political opponents. As in previous cases, no one was prosecuted and in one case, a woman’s appeal went unheeded. When asked whether you were aware of cases where other women politicians had faced obstacles in carrying out their activities (they had been deliberately prevented from speaking or had been silenced (interrupted, mute, etc.)), 14% of the women who answered this question replied positively. None of the men interviewed had experienced such incidents against themselves.

Harassment, i.e. repetitive and unwanted behavior, such as unwanted attention, communication or contact, which caused fear as a form of psychological violence, was rarely experienced by the women and men interviewed (6% and 10% respectively). Men and women cited harassment by political opponents and people they knew, while women also cited harassment by strangers. The harassment was carried out on the street, in meetings, as well as via messengers, social media, telephone and email. The perpetrators were not prosecuted as none of the respondents contacted law enforcement agencies.

Regarding media violence, it was found that media that are legally regulated and have an established practice of ethical reporting rarely allow offensive or sexual images or comments about women politicians: only 6% of respondents experienced (but repeatedly) such incidents. However, these actions occurred in a third of the cases on social media. As in other cases, the persons who disseminated the offensive or sexual images or comments were not held responsible.

Regarding the question of whether female respondents were aware of cases of physical violence or threats of physical violence against other women politicians in connection with their involvement in election campaigns, political activities as a deputy, 12% of those surveyed answered in the affirmative. Only 2 women (2%) who participated in the survey had experienced physical violence against parliamentary candidates and current MPs, indicating a low prevalence of this form of violent behavior. The male respondents noted that none of them had experienced physical violence.

Overall, the study found that perpetrators are rarely or almost never held accountable for violence against women politicians (regardless of the form of violence), often victims’ appeals go unheeded and the lack of confidence in receiving the necessary protection from the relevant authorities, in turn, leads women to abandon attempts to file complaints, applications or appeals.

The most common reason for violence against women politicians, according to women, is an attempt to discourage them and other women from participating in politics and to reduce their popularity as an MP, eliminating competition (25% each). Almost the same percentage (24%) suggested the reason for violence against women is to show that politics is not women’s business as a reason for violence against them. This was also confirmed by the participants in the in-depth

interviews. Next in descending order were revenge for their adherence to principles (15%) and “other” causes (11%).

Regarding the question about the influence of factors such as gender, age and ethnicity on the causes of violence, it is noteworthy that a fairly high proportion of female respondents cited gender (15%) and age (9%) as such factors, while men did not cite these factors at all. This was also confirmed by the participants in the in-depth interviews, citing both young and old age as an influencing/discriminatory factor.

With regard to the consequences and impact of unacceptable and/or violent behavior towards candidates/MPs, the following can be noted. Thus, the majority of respondents (both women and men) indicated a strengthened determination to continue as a candidate/MP. The women also noted that they went through something stressful, felt fear for their safety and the safety of their loved ones, felt isolated and without any support, and this affected their ability to discharge the mandate and express their views freely. The same answers are cited by the participants in the in-depth interviews. The men did not give such answers, but only indicated a strengthening of their resolve to remain politically active. This is probably due to the stereotypical notion that men should not admit to being weak or fearful.

Thus, we can state that violence against women politicians in Kyrgyzstan is a widespread phenomenon, manifested in all forms (to a greater or lesser extent), aimed at limiting or even excluding women’s political activity, questioning the right and value of women’s participation in politics, with these phenomena being mostly hidden, victims not adequately protected, and perpetrators (often party fellows) avoiding responsibility, mechanisms to prevent, respond to, protect and safeguard against violence are not regulated in law, legislation and practice. However, many women who have faced violent manifestations against themselves as politicians rarely give up political activism and are instead strengthened in their determination to continue their political activities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

At the level of legislation:

- Incorporate the concepts of gender-based violence and violence against women into national legislation (in a comprehensive anti-discrimination law and by-laws) and define legal framework for prevention, coordinated response to violence and accountability for perpetrators, comprehensive protection for victims of violence in politics against all forms of violence;

To law enforcement agencies:

- Take measures to change the current practice where appeals by women politicians regarding various forms of violence against them either go unheeded or do not result in the prosecution of perpetrators;
- Carry out preventive work to prevent all forms of violence in politics, especially with regard to the most common forms of violence against women politicians;

To political parties:

- Develop intra-party democracy measures and introduce mechanisms to prevent and protect against violence, harassment and other violent behavior, establishing special

bodies to deal with cases of violence against and/or by party members, with a primary focus on protecting the interests and safety of those affected by violence;

- To foster a culture of non-violence, unacceptable harassment and belittling of women politicians;
- Ensure women's participation in party decision-making on all issues, including access to economic resources, opportunities;
- Implement permanent measures to change existing negative gender attitudes towards women's political leadership;
- To encourage and facilitate the establishment of various associations of women party members and to ensure that the 'voice of women' is taken into account in party decision-making;

To the media, social media:

- Introduce standards of gender-sensitive journalism in their work, avoid belittling, insulting women politicians, using gender bias and stereotypes, justifying the exclusion of women from politics and attracting violence against women leaders in their publications and materials;
- Increase the visibility of gender-based violence in politics, especially latent forms of violence, and raise public and governmental awareness of this negative phenomenon;
- Conduct awareness-raising campaigns among politicians, community leaders, journalists and the general public on the importance of women's participation in decision-making to ensure a greater awareness of the fact that the full, equal, free and democratic participation of women on an equal basis with men in political and public life is a condition for democratic development;
- Implement permanent measures to change existing negative gender attitudes towards women's political leadership, special media outreach programmes to increase gender sensitivity;

To NGO and international organizations:

- Actively promote initiatives by political parties, state bodies seeking to introduce mechanisms to safeguard and protect against gender-based violence and violence against women in politics;
- Increase women leaders' awareness of different forms of political violence, protection measures against violence and active opposition to the phenomenon;
- Continue research on gender-based violence and violence against women in politics to identify specific factors, conditions conducive to violence and successful mechanisms and practices to prevent and address gender-based violence in the political sphere.