

## Women Voters in the Agenda of Georgian Political Parties

Shota Kakabadze<sup>1</sup>

### Executive Summary

As recent elections and ongoing political events have demonstrated, political polarisation and one-party rule remain hindering factors in the country's democratization process. The diversity of the political spectrum and the establishment of a resilient multi-party-political system, in which parties respond to voters' demands, is a deterrent in overcoming the status quo and the building of an inclusive democratic process. In these regards, running an election campaign tailored to specific segments of the voters, and their interests and needs, is of particular importance.

This policy brief examines how much the agendas of the main political parties in Georgia reflect the interests and needs of the various segments of voters and the extent to which they are able to respond to voters' interests. More specifically, this paper looks at the extent to which these political entities are able to reflect in their agendas the needs of women voters, who represent more than half of the voter pool. To conclude, the policy brief offers recommendations to relevant actors to ensure a more effective response to the challenges and to contribute to strengthening inclusive democracy in Georgia.

**Key Words:** Women voters, Political Parties, Pre-election Campaign, Inclusive Democracy.

<sup>1</sup> Policy Analyst at the Georgian Institute of Politics

## Introduction

The last election, held in October 2021, once again demonstrated the difficult political situation in Georgia. One-party rule at every level of governance, political polarisation and a “monopolised” political space (ზურაბაშვილი 2021, 2) remain hindering factors to further democratization of the country. Winning over the hearts of so-called undecided voters, who represent 39% of the electorate according to 2022 December polls (Caucasus Barometer 2022), is essential for overcoming the status quo and contributing to the inclusive democratic processes. Involving this segment of voters more actively in the political processes and bringing them closer to the political parties will help to diversify the political spectrum and the establishment of a resilient multi-party-political system.

In order to increase the number of potential voters it is important to identify a specific segment of the electorate and formulate an election campaign or strategy tailored to their needs. A strategy of working with women voters - an important segment of the electorate - is noteworthy in this regard. There are issues and challenges relevant for this part of the population, yet they make up a very small part of the political parties’ platforms. This does not help to bring voters and party agendas closer to each other.

The 2023 data shows the disparities in society: the average wage for men is about 711 GEL more than that for women (Business Formula 2023); and as shown by the data almost 71% of those receiving pensions are women (Business Media Georgia 2023) thus they make up an important segment of the electorate. Regardless of the reasons the lower wages for women and their longer life expectancy indicates that voters are not homogeneous. Therefore, the election campaigns of political parties and their strategies or programs should be tailored to women’s issues. This would not only help political parties mobilise more voters but could help overcome the differences between Georgian voters and political parties (ხერცოძე 2016).

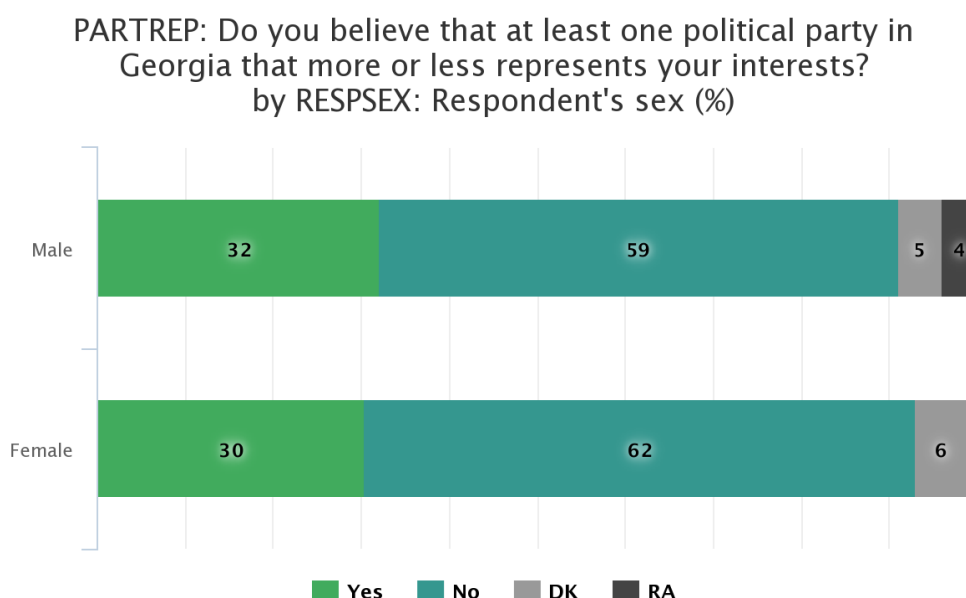
Using the experiences of the 2020 Parliamentary and 2021 local-government election campaigns and programs, this policy brief aims at analysing the extent to which the political parties are able to reach out to this specific segment of voters; it asks to what extent political parties reflect important issues for women voters and their relevance. More specifically, the work analyses the election programs and campaigns of the five political parties that participated in both the 2020 Parliamentary and 2021 local-government elections (Georgian Dream, United National Movement, Lelo, Strategy the Builder, European Georgia) and to what degree their election agendas reflected the interests and priorities of women voters.

In the conclusion and recommendations, the work also suggests the main strategies the political parties should employ to increase and diversify their voter pool by focusing on women voters.

## Ideological features of Georgian Political Parties

Despite their multiplicity, the mainstream political parties in Georgia are mostly uniform in their **ideological views**. The 2020 Parliamentary election analysis demonstrates that the main political party platforms in Georgia are mostly **centrist** on the left-of the conservative economic spectrum, strictly right-wing political actors being uncommon. The centrist parties change their ideological views/positions easily, depending on the political situation. On issues related to healthcare or social welfare, they take a more leftist stance (პაპავა და თევდორაძე 2020). This uniformity in the political spectrum makes it harder for voters to identify with any one of the parties (Diagram 1).

*Diagram 1: by sex - Do you believe at least one party represents your interests in Georgia?*



NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, December 2022  
Retrieved from <http://caucasusbarometer.org/>

*Source: NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, December 2022.  
Available at <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nd2022ge/codebook/>*

The 2022 December data demonstrates that, regardless of gender, an absolute majority of those surveyed **do not see any one of the parties representing their interests**. It is also noteworthy that Georgia is characterised by **elite affective polarisation**, which implies that discussions among the political actors are emotional not substantive. This on its part hinders the growth of voter engagement, as people are not able to identify with any one of the parties (სამხარაძე 2022, 3). The share of the population that is characterized by more or less emotional polarisation is just a third (სილაგაძე 2023). This points to the fact that undecided voters represent a large but underutilised resource for small political parties.

Therefore, **political parties should analyse the demands and needs of these “estranged” voters**, which requires a segmented approach to the electorate. More specifically, in order for the political parties to attract the “estranged” electorate, it is important to run political campaigns that are inclusive and reflect the interests of various voter groups.

## Interests and needs of women voters in Georgia

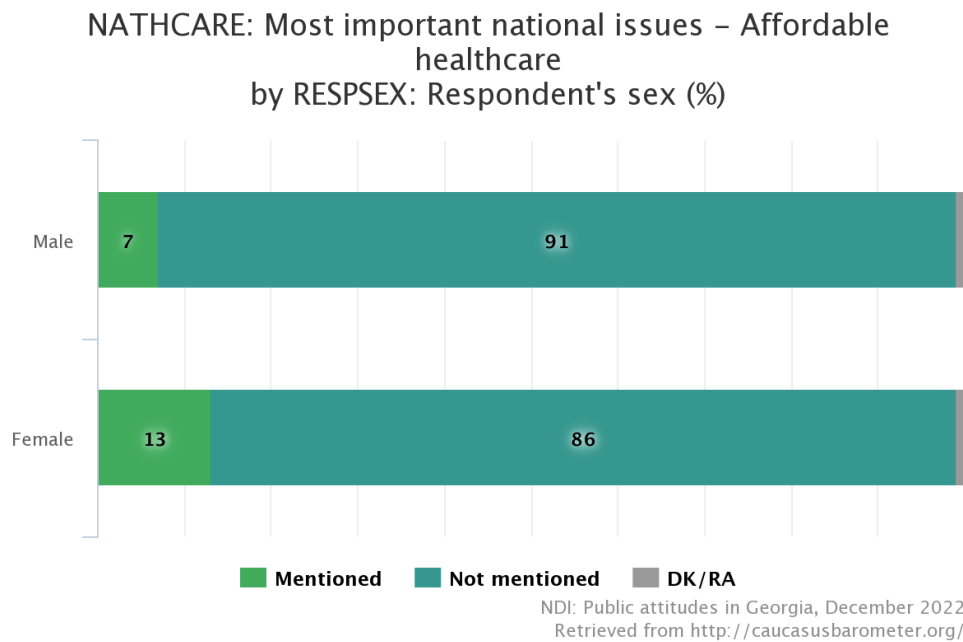
The universal census of 2014 demonstrated that women represent around 52% (1,940 940) of the entire population (3,713 804) (საქსტატი 2014). According to 2020 Central Elections Commission data, prior to the Parliamentary elections, women voters were in majority in the 30-60 and 61+ age groups (51,9% and 61,34% respectively), while among the 18-29 age group their share was 48,17% (CESKO 2020). Research indicates that in terms of voter participation, men voters are more active, particularly in areas with ethnic minorities. Across the country, the average difference between activity levels among men and women was around 5-6% (ბაგრატი 2020, 7-8). This points to the fact that there is significant potential and space to increase votes for parties with the right strategies. The existing political polarisation leaves the **issues of women voters out of political agendas**.

To measure the extent to which political party pre-election agendas reflect women voters' priorities and needs, it is important to determine the interests of this segment of the electorate. As in the 2017 analysis of elections in the UK, this policy brief focuses on three topics and on how they are reflected in party strategies and programmes. These topics are: **policies that are priority for women, political matters that have direct impact on women and policies that are directed towards eradicating gender inequality** (Annesley and Gains 2017). This paper will examine the topics in these areas that are of most interest for women in Georgia and the extent to which they are reflected/considered in party election promises and programmes.

### Priority policy supported by Georgian women voters

The December 2022 opinion polls indicated that **opinions of female and male respondents differ, mainly on social issues**. The research demonstrates that for women voters, issues focusing on family values and the future of children play a more important role in political communication than ideology (ბაგრატი 2020, 17-22). The 2022 opinion poll shows, for instance, that 6% more women than men named affordable healthcare among the most important issues. (Diagram 2).

**Diagram 2:** by sex -The most important national issue - affordable healthcare



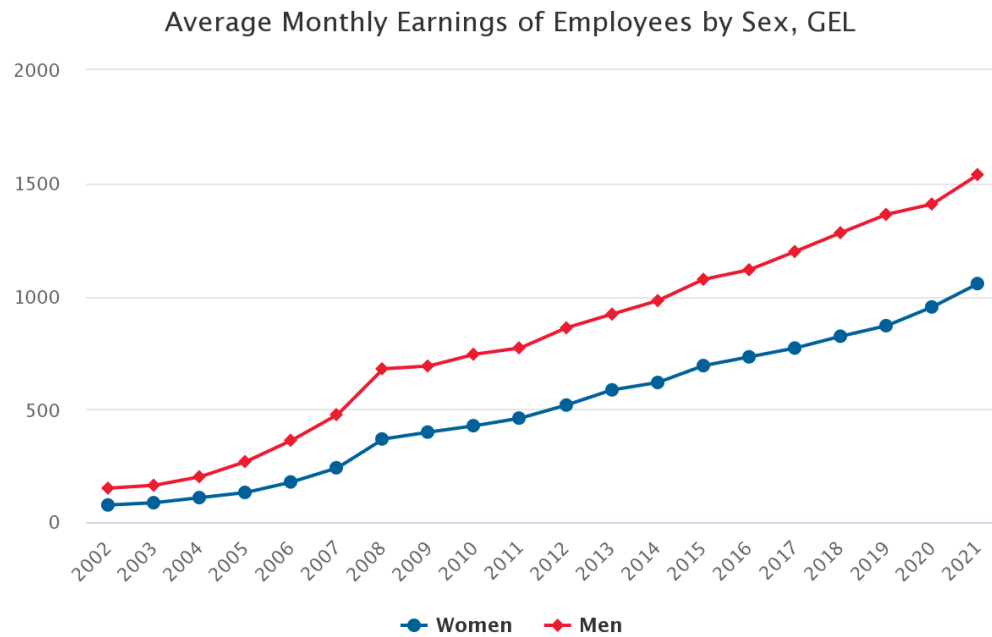
*Source:* NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, December 2022.  
Available at: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nd2022ge/codebook/>

According to the National Democratic Institute (NDI) data, 15% of women named education as the most important issue for the country, while for men this figure almost halved, at 8%. (Caucasus Barometer 2022). One reason behind this difference may be the fact that, in general, internal family matters related to raising children, education, hospital visits, etc. are women's responsibilities (ბაგრატიონი 2020). Therefore, it is mostly this segment of the population that deals with such issues daily - these challenges are priorities for them.

#### Political issues that have a direct impact on women

There are political issues that directly impact women voters and for that reason are outside the focus of male politicians. For instance, gender inequality remains an important challenge in Georgia in numerous areas. A good illustration of this is the gap between average salaries. According to the National Statistics Center, during the last two decades the gap between the average monthly pay of women and men employees is steadily increasing (Diagram 3), which is an important issue and should not be ignored by political parties.

**Diagram 3:** Average salary of employees by sex.

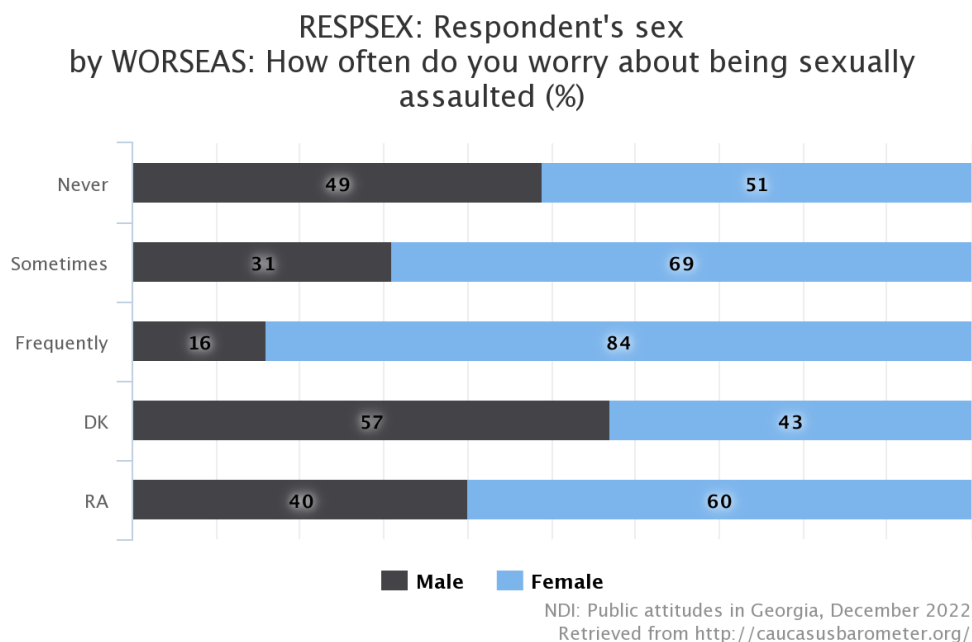


**Source:** Geostat.

Available at: <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/39/khelfasebi>

Another important issue that has a direct negative impact on women voters is sexual harassment and the increased risks of gender-based homicide. The 2022 NDI polls indicated that among those who sometimes fear sexual attacks, 69% are women, and the number is 84% for those who frequently have that feeling - 84% (Diagram 4).

**Diagram 4:** by sex - How often do you worry about the threat of sexual attack.



*Source: NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, December 2022.*  
Available at: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nd2022ge/codebook/>

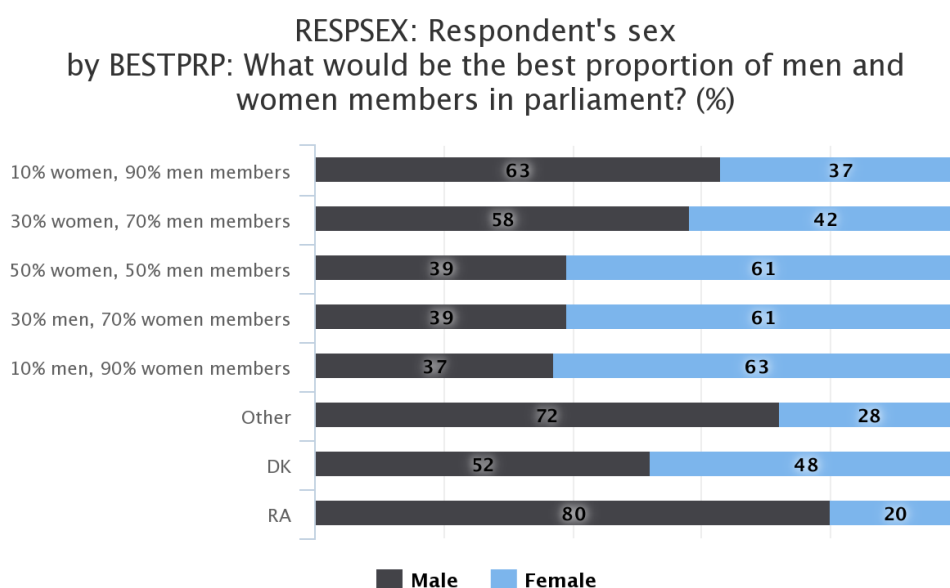
Purely gender-based homicide or homicide attempts are no less pressing issues.<sup>2</sup> This demonstrates the challenges that are important for women voters at elections and requires the attention of political parties.

#### Policies that are directed at eradicating gender inequality

The latest research also demonstrates that **increasing representation** in the legislative branch is important for women voters. For instance, according to the December 2022 NDI polls, men make up less than half (39%) of those who think the share of women and men Members of the Parliament (MPs) should be equal. (Diagram 5).

<sup>2</sup> For instance in 2018-2022, 56 people were killed or there were attempts to kill them, just because they were women (თარხნაშვილი 2022).

**Diagram 5:** by sex - What would be the best proportion of men and women members in the Parliament?



NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, December 2022  
Retrieved from <http://caucasusbarometer.org/>

**Source:** NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, December 2022.  
Available at: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nd2022ge/codebook/>

This data points to the fact that women voters demand that the status quo should be changed to increase their representation, which is an important message for the parties.

To be fair, some measures have already been taken in this regards. For instance, gender quotas were introduced in 2020, requiring political parties to include women in their lists as every fourth member (after 2028 elections - every third). Yet, it is noteworthy that while in the 2016 Parliament women MPs made up quarter of MPs (24.3%) (სოციალური სამართლანობის ცენტრი, 2020), in the 2020 Parliament, women MPs represent only 19% (taking in the boycotted opposition list and 30 majoritarian MPs).

All this points to the challenges that women face and demonstrate why it is hard for them to advocate their interests or agendas in Georgian politics. For their part, political parties, and particularly the so-called “middle” parties should be interested in working on this segment to get their votes. The demand among women voters for increased representation in the legislative branch creates a space that enables political parties to win more voters and attract the so-called “undecided”-voter share of the electorate.



## Topics interesting to women voters in political parties' platforms

The 2020 and 2021 election programme analysis of the political parties demonstrates that most of the parties do not have a separate chapter for challenges to women voters, and that their strategies and programmes on how these issues need to be addressed are very general and often superficial.

It should also be noted that the 2021 local elections were held in a more tense environment than the Parliamentary elections. On the one hand, the opposition viewed it as a referendum, which further destabilised the political agenda and made the political party platforms or promises focusing on social and economic issues look irrelevant/secondary (კვაშილავა 2021).

For instance, the issue of encouraging and strengthening women's political participation is generally noted in 2020 programs, stating that they encourage "women's participation not only in party activities or decision-making process", but they also support "the engagement of more women in the country's political process" (partiebi.ge 2020). It is also noteworthy that European Georgia is against gender quotas (იკითხე პოლიტიკა 2020). The pre-election platform of Lelo was a lot more specific in this regard and included plans, such as appointing women to at least 40% of the state/high-level positions or introducing gender-balanced HR policies in the civil service (partiebi.ge 2020). Yet, no specific support from women voters was evident among Lelo voters, which may be explained by the fact that there was no pre-election campaign specifically targeting them.

The election program of the ruling party is also general in this regard. More specifically, its program notes "the support of women's participation on the job market for gender equality through legislative initiatives and other programs" (ქართული ოცნება - დემოკრატიული საქართველო 2020, 20). As for the Strategy Builder, there is no separate chapter focusing on gender equality, women's empowerment, or political participation. However, these issues were being actively discussed when meeting with the voters (იკითხე პოლიტიკა 2020).

The handling of the issue of gender inequality in **average compensation among employees** is very vague and not properly reflected in most of the party platforms. The election platform of Lelo envisaged legal mechanisms to eradicate gender discrimination in compensation and the employment process (partiebi.ge 2020); however, it is uncertain if the party managed to make the issue relevant. In the case of Strategy Builder, this topic is fragmented - the program noted the salary gap and the need to improve working conditions in sectors that employ women yet did not deal directly with gender inequality. (იკითხე პოლიტიკა 2020). Nor is wage inequality mentioned separately in the 2020 election programs of the United National Movement or European Georgian which clearly would not arouse interest in these parties among women voters. The ruling party's program very generally touches upon this topic, stating that "to ensure gender equality on a job market, women's participation will be supported through legislative initiative and other programs" (ქართული ოცნება დემოკრატიული საქართველო 2020, 28).

**Gender-based violence** is partly mentioned in political party agendas for 2020 parliamentary and 2021 local governance elections. Yet, it is very general. The European Georgia program does not acknowledge challenges facing women and there are no specific initiatives identified to address them (იკითხე პოლიტიკა 2020). There is a general discussion on violence against women and implementation of effective mechanisms to fight crimes motivated by discrimination-based intolerance (ქართული ოცნება დემოკრატიული საქართველო 2020, 20). Similarly, to the Georgian Dream, United National Movement program has a general mention of strengthening “preventive mechanisms for the violence against women” and empowering women at the decision-making levels (ერთიანი ნაციონალური მოძრაობა - ძალა ერთობაშია 2020, 25). Lelo’s platform highlighted preventive policies on violence against women (იკითხე პოლიტიკა 2020). However, in general, party political platforms lack specific measures and action plans.

To conclude, the analysis of the five main political parties’ election platforms demonstrates that campaigns and platforms only superficially or partially reflect women voters’ interests. Even though this segment of the population makes up a significant share of the electorate, global issues such as polarisation and European integration define the agendas of the political entities. These issues overshadow the topics identified in the beginning of the research: policies that are priority for women, political matters that have a direct impact on women and policies that are directed towards eradicating gender inequality.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

As noted, the latest research demonstrates that for the major part of Georgia’s population, none of the political parties stand close to their views. Considering that women voters represent more than half of the electorate, a pre-election campaign tailored to this specific segment would create opportunities for political parties to increase their voter pool. Provided there is an appropriate political strategy and constant engagement with women voters, they [political parties] may reduce the level of estrangement between this segment of the voters and the parties and take specific steps towards closing the gap.

However, the research conducted as a part of this policy paper demonstrates that even though political parties acknowledge the importance of women’s empowerment, and some of the entities even dedicate a separate chapter to this topic, measures taken in these regards are too general and lack specifics. This may influence how attractive one party or another is for women voters, and if they are able to reach this particular segment of the electorate. In response to the existing challenges, this policy brief offers recommendations to the political parties and the representatives of NGOs, academia, and the media.

### Recommendations for Georgian political parties

- **Parties** should actively use focus groups, interviews, surveys, and similar research to study the specific voter segments and their needs.
- Women in political parties must **constantly communicate their needs to the public** using various inter-party mechanisms.
- Establish and strengthen political platforms and forums that ensure **women voters' engagement in the work on party agendas**.
- **Political parties** should demonstrate in detail in their party platforms action plans to resolve the issues important for women.
- While running election campaigns, **political parties** must consider the main messages relevant for women voters, regardless of any other issue of broader significance.

#### *Recommendations for media outlets, NGOs and academia*

- **Media outlets** should plan special shows focused on women voters' needs and discussions around this topic.
- **NGOs and academia** should facilitate communication between women voters and political parties and **establish permanent dialogue formats**.
- **Media outlets, NGOs and academia** should organise meetings and discussions where political party representatives answer questions from women voters and talk about their needs.
- In cooperation with international organizations, support **research and publication of work focused on women voters**.
- Elaborate a **strategic plan** to bring forward women voters' issues through wide engagement with the public and list specific steps to be taken.

## References

- ბაგრატი, თამარ. 2020. ქალი ამომრჩევლის ელექტორალური ქცევის ირაციონალური და რაციონალური ასპექტები. EECMD. Available at: <https://eecmd.org/ka/publication/ქალი-ამომრჩევლის-ელექტორ/> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- ერთიანი ნაციონალური მოძრაობა – გაერთიანებული ოპოზიცია „ძალა ერთობაშია“. 2020. საარჩევნო პროგრამა. Available at: <https://droa.ge/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/5-საარჩევნო-ბლოკი-„ერთიანი-ნაციონალური-მოძრაობა-გაერთიანებული-ოპოზიცია-„ძალა-ერთობაშია.pdf> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- ზურაბაშვილი, თეონა. 2022. პოლიტიკური პოლარიზაცია - მოჯადოებული წრე თუ ხელიდან გაშვებული შესაძლებლობა პატარა პარტიებისთვის? პოლიტიკის მემორანდუმი #50, საქართველოს პოლიტიკის ინსტიტუტი. Available at: <https://gip.ge/ka/publication-post/political-polarization-a-vicious-circle-or-a-missed-opportunity-for-small-political-parties/> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- თარხნიშვილი, ნინო. 2022. ახალი წელი ქალების გარეშე - ფემიციდი 2022 წელს. რადიო თავისუფლება. Available at: <https://www.radiotavisupleba.ge/a/ახალი-წელი-ქალების-გარეშე-ფემიციდი-2022-წელს/32195641.html> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- იკითხე პოლიტიკა. 2020. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung. Available at: <https://feminism-boell.org/ka/person/ikitxe-politika> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- კვაშილავა, ბაკურ. 2021. თბილისის მერობის კანდიდატების წინასაარჩევნო პროგრამების მიმოხილვა 2021 წლის ადგილობრივი თვითმმართველობის არჩევნებისათვის. EECMD. Available at: <https://eecmd.org/ka/publication/> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- პაპავა, გიორგი. თევდორაძე, ლევანი. 2020. მარჯვნივ თუ მარცხნივ: როგორია პარტიების ეკონომიკური ხედვა? - საარჩევნო კომპასი-საქართველო. Business Media Georgia. Available at: <https://bm.ge/ka/article/marjvniv-tu-marcxniv-rogoria-partiebis-ekonomikuri-xedva---saarchevno-kompasi-saqartvelo/67154> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- სამხარაძე, ნინო. 2023. ქალთა პოლიტიკური გაძლიერება და საქართველოს დემოკრატიზაცია: რატომ არის მნიშვნელოვანი პარლამენტის ინკლუზიურობა?“ პოლიტიკის ნარკვევი #47, საქართველოს პოლიტიკის ინსტიტუტი. Available at: <https://gip.ge/ka/publication-post/qalta-politikuri-gadzliereba/> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- საქსტატი. 2014. მოსახლეობა და დემოგრაფია. Available at: <https://www.geostat.ge/ka/modules/categories/316/mosakhleoba-da-demografia> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- სილაგაძე, გივი. 2023. პარტიულობა და ემოციური პოლარიზაცია საქართველოში. კავკასიის კვლევითი რესურსების ცენტრი, საქართველო. Available at: [https://crrc.ge/uploads/tinyMCE/documents/Projects/GEOPartisanship%20and%20Affective%20Polarization\\_NED.pdf](https://crrc.ge/uploads/tinyMCE/documents/Projects/GEOPartisanship%20and%20Affective%20Polarization_NED.pdf) Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- სოციალური სამართლიანობის ცენტრი. 2020. EMC გენდერულ კვოტაზე და მის მნიშვნელობაზე. Available at: <https://socialjustice.org.ge/ka/products/emc-genderul-kvotaze-da-mis-mnishvnelobaze> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- ქართული ოცნება - დემოკრატიული საქართველო. 2020. საარჩევნო პროგრამა. Available at: <https://gd.ge/uploads/programs/b5045f9c70101fae8.pdf> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- ხურციძე, თიკო. 2016. გადაუწყვეტელი ამომრჩევლის ფენომენი და ქართული არჩევნები. საქართველოს პოლიტიკის ინსტიტუტი. Available at: <https://gip.ge/ka/გადაუწყვეტელი-ამომრჩევლ/> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;

- Annesley, Claire. Gains, Francesca. 2017. General election 2017 – Is gender still on the agenda? How parties appeal to women voters. The University of Manchester. Available at: <https://blog.policy.manchester.ac.uk/posts/2017/05/general-election-2017-is-gender-still-on-the-agenda-how-parties-appeal-to-women-voters/> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- Business Formula. 2023. საქართველოში კაცების სამუშაო ხელფასი ქალებისას 711 ლარით აღემატება. Available at: <https://businessformula.ge/News/13073> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- Business Media Georgia. 2023. საქართველოში ასაკით პენსიონერთა 71% ქალია. Available at: <https://bm.ge/ka/article/saqartveloshi-asakit-pensionerta-71-qalia/126694> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- Caucasus Barometer. 2022. NDI: Public attitudes in Georgia, December 2022. Available at: <https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/nd2022ge/NATEDU-by-RESPSEX/> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- CESKO. 2020. ამომრჩეველთა სტატისტიკა ასაკის მიხედვით. Available at: <https://cesko.ge/ge/amomrchevlebi/amomrchevelta-siashi-asakobrivi-statistika-> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;
- Partiebi.ge. 2020. შეადარეთ პოლიტიკური პროგრამები თემატურად. Available at: <https://partiebi.ge/2020/geo/home> Last seen: 28 April, 2023;



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

**Embassy of Switzerland in Georgia**



საქართველოს პოლიტიკის ინსტიტუტი  
GEORGIAN INSTITUTE OF POLITICS

Georgian Institute of Politics (GIP) is a Tbilisi-based non-profit, non-partisan, research and analysis organization. GIP works to strengthen the organizational backbone of democratic institutions and promote good governance and development through policy research and advocacy in Georgia.

This publication has been produced from the resources provided by the “Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (SFDFA)”. The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (SFDFA) and the Georgian Institute of Politics.

## HOW TO QUOTE THIS DOCUMENT:

**Shota Kakabadze**, *“Women Voters in the Agenda of Georgian Political Parties”*, Policy Brief No.48, Georgian Institute of Politics, May 2023.

© Georgian Institute of Politics, 2023

13 Aleksandr Pushkin St, 0107 Tbilisi, Georgia

Tel: +995 599 99 02 12

Email: [info@gip.ge](mailto:info@gip.ge)

For more information, please visit

[www.gip.ge](http://www.gip.ge)