



# NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AND LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS-2021: PECULIARITIES OF WOMEN'S ELECTORAL BEHAVIOUR



**RESEARCH REPORT**





This publication was produced in the framework of the “Early Elections - 2021 - Domestic Observations and Citizens Empowerment by Civil Society” project implemented by OxyGen Foundation, Helsinki Citizens’ Assembly – Vanadzor, Union of Informed Citizens and Yerevan School of Political Studies. The Project is funded by the European Union.

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the author/partner and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	4
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> .....	5
<b>RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b> .....	7
<b>Chapter 1. Gender Peculiarities of Voters’ Participation: NA Elections</b> .....	10
<b>Chapter 2. Gender Peculiaritiess of Voters’ Participation: LSG elections</b> .....	18
<b>Chapter 3. Peculiarities of Women Voters’ Electoral Behaviour and Preferences</b> ....	23
<b>“Family Voting”</b> .....	23
<b>Voter Motivation and Participation under Proportional Electoral System</b> .....	24
<b>Voter Orientation according to Pre-Election Programs</b> .....	25
<b>The Most Important Issues of the Elections Agenda: Difference of Women and Men’s Perceptions</b> .....	26
<b>Political Preferences of Women Voters</b> .....	31
<b>Voters’ Informational Preferences and Participation in the Campaign</b> .....	34
<b>CHAPTER 4. WOMEN VOTERS’ EXPECTATIONS OF FEMALE CANDIDATES AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS THEM</b> .....	37
<b>CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> .....	44

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEC	Central Electoral Commission
CSO	Civil Society Organization
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
IEOM	International Election Observation Mission
EC	Electoral Code
LSG	Local Self-Government
NA	National Assembly
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODIHR	Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
FGD	Focus Group Discussion

## INTRODUCTION

Studies of political behaviour in different countries demonstrate that the way citizens connect to democratic processes has a number of gender peculiarities, and gender differences in electoral behaviour and participation level are manifest even in democratic countries.

At the same time, gender gap in voting behaviour recorded in different countries can often reach proportions essentially affecting election results. For example, in many countries, women are inclined to sympathize with and support parties with left-leaning ideologies more than men are. Research also reveals that consolidated positions develop around specific issues of concern to women (issue voting) in those countries that have traditions of strong women's movements.

In Armenia, political forces have never expressed consolidated positions on women's interests and rights and, hence, female voters have not developed common political preferences. Nevertheless, in Armenia, there are certain differences in women and men's attitude towards the priorities of the political agenda, as well as in terms of indicators of their participation in national and local elections.

Even though men and women participate in voting almost equally, women are yet more passive than men in terms of, for example, their interest in politics and participation in discussions.

In this respect, it is important to realize that inequalities in political engagement or factors impeding equality prejudice such democratic processes as discussions, representativeness and legitimacy. It is obvious that a combination of several interconnected factors, such as resources, economy, socialization, and political context, can cause differences in women and men's political participation and electoral behaviour. On the other hand, study of peculiarities related to the impact of these very factors can help produce equal and sustainable results.

In earlier research on electoral and political behaviour, gender was often viewed only as one of the factors in a statistical model. Today, scholars pay more attention to gender peculiarities of political behaviour and this approach should be continuous to allow revealing regularities in women and men's electoral behaviour and ensuring inclusive electoral processes.

This research was carried out within the framework of the project "Elections4All-2021 – Domestic Observations and Citizens Empowerment by Civil Society," aiming to contribute to improving the Armenian democratic process by fostering CSO coordinated oversight and monitoring for inclusive, gender-sensitive, transparent, free, and fair elections in 2021 both at local and national levels.

The research was conducted after snap parliamentary elections of 2021 in Armenia, as well as during the entire process of local self-government elections in the

Republic of Armenia in the autumn of 2021 and it reveals electoral behaviour peculiarities of women and men characteristic of the political situation and the observed time period, as well as depicts the dynamics of electoral behaviour as compared to the elections held in 2018.

The research includes such subjects as:

- Gender peculiarities of voters' participation in the 2021 Republic of Armenia National Assembly elections,
- Gender peculiarities of voters' participation in the 2021 local self-government elections,
- Peculiarities of electoral behaviour and preferences of women voters, and
- Expectations of women voters from female candidates and their attitude towards them.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Assessment Objectives

The research “National Assembly and Local Self-Government Elections -2021: Peculiarities of Women’s Electoral Behaviour” pursues three main objectives:

- To study gender peculiarities of voters’ participation in the 2021 National Assembly and local self-government elections,
- To identify and study peculiarities of women voters’ electoral behaviour and preferences,
- To develop recommendations for ensuring gender equality in electoral processes and overcoming identified problems.

### Information Collection Methods and Tools

Four main methods were used to collect information on topics of this research:

#### **Analysis of Documents, which include**

- The RA Electoral Code
- Documents related to organization of electoral processes
- Programs and lists of political parties and party alliances
- International documents related to electoral processes, women and gender equality
- International and other countries’ research relevant for the issue

#### **In-Depth and Expert Interviews**

With participants of the electoral processes and experts on human rights and gender equality

#### **Study of research on the 2021 NA and LSG elections by other organizations and of databases**

- Data of the RA Central Electoral Commission,
- Data of the RA Statistical Committee,
- Final report by “Witness” (“Akanates”) Observation Mission of the National Assembly Snap Parliamentary Elections of June 20, 2021,
- Pre-election and post-election surveys of the NA elections 2021 by MPG LLC, GALLUP International Association in Armenia
- Female Candidates’ Coverage on TV and Online Media during the 2021 Elections: Analysis of Monitoring Results by OxYGen,
- Final report by the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission on the RA Early Parliamentary Elections of June 20, 2021,
- “Caucasus Barometer 2019 Armenia”.

## Focus Group Discussions

Within the framework of the project six focus group discussions were organized

- With voter residents of Yerevan and marzes (provinces),
- Women voters,
- CSO representatives,
- Journalists,
- Experts.

*Sixty-seven people participated in FGDs. Both Yerevan/marz and women/men were represented among discussion participants. Participating were young and senior age representatives, as well as persons with disability.*

**Discussions were held as follows:**

- The 2021 NA elections/post-election discussion
- The 2021 LSG elections/pre-election and post-election discussions

Special questionnaires were developed for focus group discussions, the discussions were documented (taken down in shorthand), and the results were analyzed and used for presentation of the research results.

### **The Main Thesis of the Research**

**Electoral behaviour** is one of the most important forms of political participation and is an indicator of democracy development in society. In political science, electoral behaviour assumes actions (or inaction) of all actors in political processes, which they manifest in upholding or changing the political system as a result of elections. In a narrow sense, electoral behaviour is viewed as voting behaviour, including voters' motivation and mechanisms and reasons for the formation of their electoral preferences.<sup>1</sup>

Peculiarities of citizens' electoral behaviour are largely dependent on the political culture of a given society, the level of development of political parties, applied electoral system, influence of socio-economic and cultural factors, religious affiliation, as well as the age and gender of participants in electoral processes.

The subject matter of this research is women's electoral behaviour, which they manifest during the exercise of their active electoral right. That is to say, electoral behaviour has been viewed not only in terms of women's participation in voting, but as

---

<sup>1</sup> Gender and Political Behaviour <http://oxfordre.com/politics/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228637-e-71>



an attitude towards the electoral processes, including pre-electoral campaigns, their electoral preferences as well as expectations from female candidates.

The RA legislation, which secures the equal right of the RA citizens, women and men, to participating in electoral processes<sup>2</sup>, international documents, which regulate the field and are ratified by Armenia, as well as the RA Government's decision N 1334 -L "On Endorsing the Strategy and Action Plan for Implementation of Gender Policies in the Republic of Armenia for 2019-2023" also served as a basis for the research.

### **Presentation of Research Results**

The research results are summarized in the following four main parts of the report:

**Chapter 1.** Gender Peculiarities of Voters' Participation: NA Elections,

**Chapter 2.** Gender Peculiarities of Voters' Participation: LSG Elections,

**Chapter 3.** Peculiarities of Women Voters' Electoral Behaviour and Preferences,

**Chapter 4.** Expectations of women voters from female candidates and their attitude towards them.

The report also contains a section on **Conclusions and Recommendations**.

### **Information Presentation Principles and Process**

In order to reveal gender differences in voters' participation in the 2021 parliamentary and LSG elections (Chapters 1 and 2), the CEC-provided statistics and data of the sociological surveys carried out during the period of the elections were examined. Qualitative assessments on peculiarities of women voters' participation were provided based on the results of focus group discussions held within the framework of the research.

Women and men's participation in the elections was assessed via two main indicators:

- ✓ **Voters' participation according to gender**, i.e. the proportion of women and men that participated in voting as compared to the total number of electors of the given gender.
- ✓ **The proportion of electors participating in voting according to gender**, i.e. the proportion of women and men in the total number of electors that voted.

In order to reveal women voters' preferences and peculiarities of their electoral behaviour (Chapter 3), compared were the results of sociological surveys on electoral processes in Armenia and viewpoints expressed during the focus group discussions conducted within the framework of this research.

---

<sup>2</sup> The RA Constitution, the RA Electoral Code, the RA Law "On Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Women and Men."

## RESEARCH RESULTS

### Chapter 1. Gender Peculiarities of Voters' Participation: NA Elections

Evaluating voters' participation in the voting of the 2021 snap elections, it is possible to notice that voters' participation (49.3%) in 2021 is higher than participation in the 2018 elections (48.6%). However, the participation indicator for both 2018 and 2021 is much lower than the 60% voters' participation recorded in the 2017 regular elections, which, according to opinions of experts<sup>3</sup>, can be explained by a great number of undecided electors.

**Table 1**  
Participation in parliamentary elections according to the CEC protocols

	2017	2018	2021
The total number of voters according to the lists	2588466	2593140	2595512
The number of electors who voted	1575786	1261105	1281997
Participation percentage	60.9%	48.6%	49.3%

Source: CEC data

Looking at the proportion of women and men that voted as compared to the total number of electors of a given gender, it is possible to understand what the participation by gender was like. The percentage of men who participated in the 2021 voting was 47.2% as compared to the total number of male voters, and the percentage of women who voted made up 50.8% as compared to the total number of female voters, which attests to a more active participation of women.

In the 2018 elections, this indicator of women's participation was lower (47%), and in case of men, it was 51.5%, i.e. in the 2021 elections, women's participation increased by 3.8 percentage points, and men's participation decreased by 4.3 percentage points.

**Table 2.**  
Indicators of women and men's participation in the 2018 and 2021 parliamentary elections (*The proportion of voting women and men in the number of voters of each sex, in %*)

Participation indicator	2018	2021	
Female voters' participation	47%	50.8%	↗ 3.8
Male voters' participation	51.5 %	47.2%	↘ 4.3

Source: CEC data

<sup>3</sup> Based on a focus group discussion.

Comparing the responses to the pre-election sociological survey<sup>4</sup> question “Are you going to participate in the parliamentary elections to be held on June 20, 2021?” and factual indicators of participation recorded in the 2021 elections, one can state that:

- The difference between voters’ intentions and their factual participation is insignificant, making up respectively 51.1% and 49.7%.
- There is almost no difference between women and men’s intentions – respectively 51.5% and 50.7%, although women were a little bit more interested in election participation.

It is noteworthy that in the 2021 elections, the percentage of voters expressing unequivocal intention to participate in the elections is significantly lower than indicators recorded by all pre-election surveys conducted by Caucasus Barometer<sup>5</sup>, according to which, no less than 70-80% of respondents expressed their intention to participate in the elections.

It is also noteworthy that according to the results of the surveys conducted by GALLUP International Association in Armenia on the intention to participate in the 2018 elections<sup>6</sup>, 71% of respondents were definitely going to vote. However, the factual participation in the 2018 elections was lower by more than 20 percentage points. At the same time, the difference between women and men’s intentions about participation revealed by the survey results was confirmed by indicators recorded during the elections.

**Table 3**  
**Comparison of pre-election survey and election results on women and men's participation in the 2018 and 2021 parliamentary elections**

	Survey results		Election results	
	Unequivocal intention to participate in elections		Factual indicator of participation in elections	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>2018</b>	69.4	72.5%	47%	51.5%
<b>2021</b>	51.5%	50.7%	50,8%	47,2%

Yet another indicator demonstrates women’s more active participation in the 2021 elections – the proportion of women and men among those who voted.

According to the CEC data, more than half of electors in Armenia are women and in this respect, there is almost no change in voter lists as compared to the previous elections. The difference does not exceed 6.5 percentage points. During the 2021 elections, 53.13% of citizens included in the voter lists were women and 46.87% were

<sup>4</sup> MPG LLC, GALLUP International Association in Armenia, 2021 <https://gallup.am/product/pass-paaaaaaass-pre-election-survey-4nd-wave/> 07.06.2021-10.06.2021

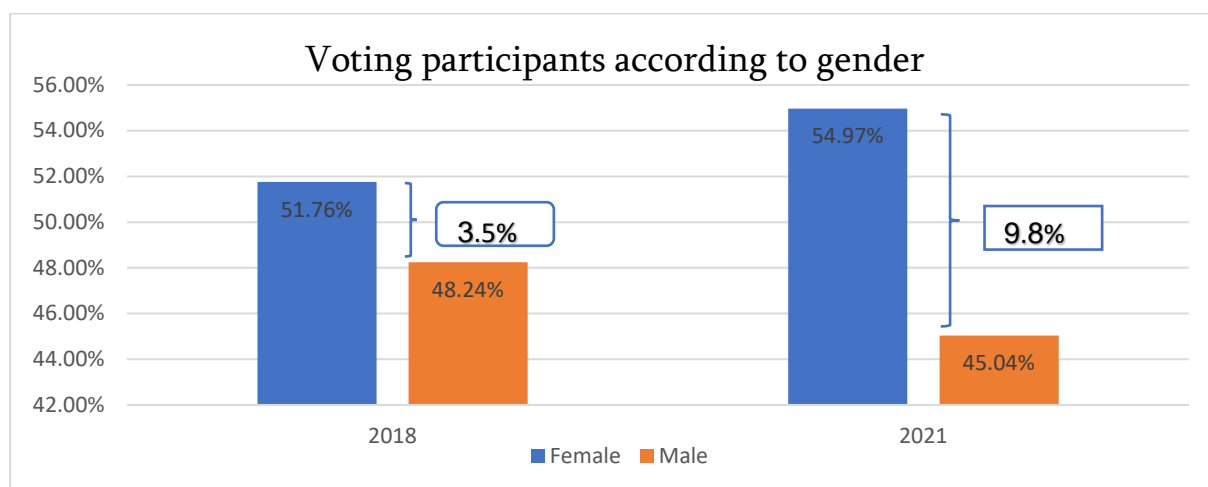
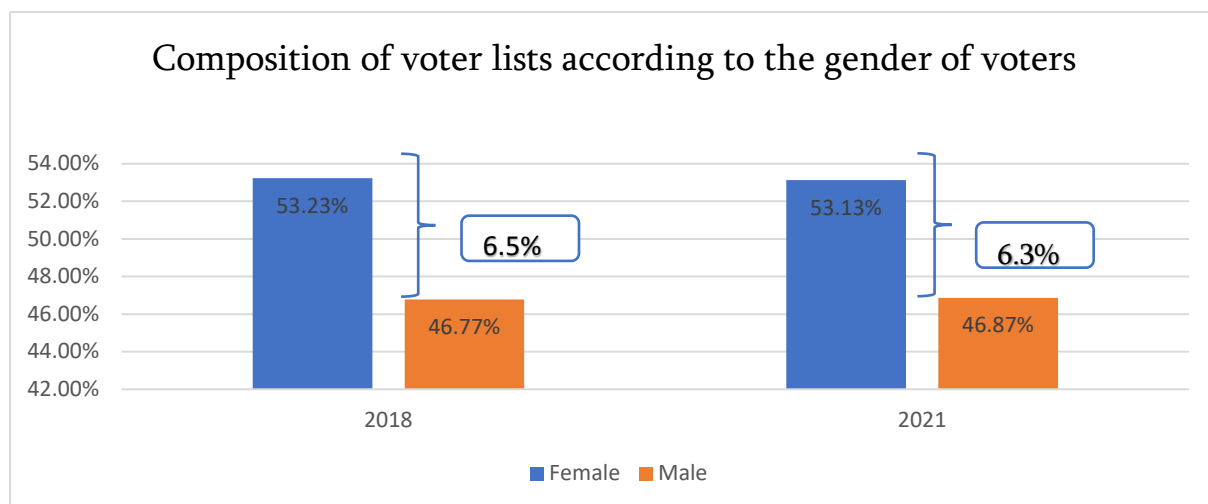
<sup>5</sup> <https://caucasusbarometer.org/am/cb-am/VOTPRCP/>

<sup>6</sup> MPG LLC, GALLUP International Association in Armenia, 2018. <https://gallup.am/product/ellection-express-2018-wave-2-final-station/>

men. In 2018, the proportion of voters was almost the same: women made up 53.23% and men 46.77%.

Looking at the proportion of the voting participants based on gender, one can state that in the 2021 elections, the difference between women and men’s participation increased in women’s favor.

**Chart 1.**  
**Women and men’s proportion in voter lists and among participants in voting: 2018 and 2021 parliamentary elections<sup>7</sup> (in % as compared to the total number of electors and those who voted)**



In the 2021 elections, voting participants included 45.04% of men and 54.97% of women, and in the 2018 elections, men made up 48.24% of the voting participants and women 51.76%. If the gender-based difference in the proportion of electors who participated in the 2021 elections made up 9.8% in favor of women and thus exceeded gender difference of 6.5 percentage points existing in voter lists between the total

<sup>7</sup> Data obtained from the RA Central Election Commission. <https://res.elections.am/images/doc/Statistics2018.pdf>  
<https://res.elections.am/images/doc/Statistics2021.pdf>

Note: The presented data do not include the data of the supplementary lists compiled on the voting day.

number of voters, in the previous, 2018, elections, this difference was much smaller making up 3.5 percentage points.

According to the opinions voiced during the focus group discussions, women's activism in the 2021 parliamentary elections was noticeable both as voters and as candidates.

*"... Women are more active now, participation is higher as compared to the past..."*<sup>8</sup>

According to the focus group participants, the decline in men's participation and increase in women voters in the 2021 snap elections are conditioned by the following factors:

- ✓ In the opinion of experts, taking into consideration that the 2021 elections were organized in June, when men migrating for jobs are absent from the country, it is possible to assume that this factor might have changed the proportion of voters in favor of women. However, this thesis is not confirmed by looking at the participation in the 2021 and 2018 elections from the perspective of Yerevan-marz division, according to which, the gender proportion of voters changed on the expense of Yerevan electors, and it remained unchanged in the marzes (provinces).
- ✓ The emotional background of the elections conditioned by the losses due to the war played an important role.

*"... These elections were much more cruel in the emotional sense since first, they were held after the war, during which the public experienced very serious psychological trauma, including women, be it because of their husbands going to the war front or because of losing their sons and so on. Hence, the emotional background was intense in these elections."*<sup>9</sup>

In the opinion of participants in focus groups of experts<sup>10</sup>, due to the war losses and the impact of the post-war situation, male electors were more disappointed, which could have affected the indicator of their participation in the elections. The opinions about the impact of the tense emotional background of the elections on women are not unequivocal. On the one hand, this background could have been a serious impediment and could have caused passivity, as in case of men.

*"...I believe that this time women were more passive than during the 2018 elections. ...I cannot speak about the political preferences of women voters because I believe that nevertheless there was a higher wave of disappointment among women since they are after all mothers and as such cannot remain unaffected."*<sup>11</sup>

On the other hand, the factor of this very emotional background could have triggered the participation of women electors taking into consideration the fact, confirmed by international and domestic experience, that in crisis conditions, women's activism increases rather than decreases.

---

<sup>8</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>9</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>10</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>11</sup> From a focus group discussion

*“The worries and concerns about their children, their husbands and not only about theirs, but in general about our soldiers, our homeland, the problem of our country’s defense impart a kind of great strength and make us more active in the political field.”<sup>12</sup>*

In the opinion of experts, the increase in women voters’ activism could have been affected by the processes of appreciation of women’s role initiated after 2018.

*“One of the achievements of 2018 was the [new] perception about women’s role, that I am a decision-maker and my voice is important.”<sup>13</sup>*

*By my observations, since 2018, women’s participation in not only elections, but, in general, in political and public processes has been substantially different from our previous experience because the factual increase in women’s role was very striking, especially, that of young women, who managed to substantially change the atmosphere of these processes. And their activism, their role was very big and it seems to me that it was inspiring for women themselves.”<sup>14</sup>*

This thesis, however, does not explain the indicators of activism of women voters in 2021 as compared to the 2017 parliamentary elections and their passivity in the 2018 snap elections.<sup>15</sup>

Yet another viewpoint of the same focus group participants is connected with the use of administrative resource in electoral processes, the use of which in the pre-election period is noted in the 2021 report by “Witness” observation mission.<sup>16</sup> This factor in the form of participation coercion also could have affected the behaviour of women voters by increasing their participation in the electoral processes, including on the voting day, taking into consideration that the majority of employees in the areas of public administration, healthcare, and education are women (65%).<sup>17</sup>

In any case, a clear-cut assessment of the impact of factors affecting voters’ participation could have been done based on more extensive sociological surveys, which, however, during the 2021 electoral processes were limited in their number and did not pursue the aim of clarifying the noted issues.

The difference in the level of activism of female and male voters becomes more obvious through comparison of the indicators of their participation in Yerevan and marzes (provinces).

Thus, according to the CEC data, 65% of electors that participated in the 2021 parliamentary elections voted in the marzes and 35% in Yerevan.

In Yerevan, 56.8% of the voting participants are women and 43.2% are men, and in the marzes respectively 50.8% and 49.2%. That is to say, in Yerevan, the

---

<sup>12</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>13</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>14</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>15</sup> According to the CEC data, the proportion of voting women and men made up 54.8% and 45.3% in the 2017 parliamentary elections and respectively 48.24% and 51.76% in 2018.

<sup>16</sup> Final report on the National Assembly Snap Elections of June 20, 2021 by “Witness” observation mission [https://res.elections.am/images/doc/report\\_akanates20.06.21.pdf](https://res.elections.am/images/doc/report_akanates20.06.21.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> According to the data of the Statistical Committee [https://www.armstat.am/file/article/gender\\_2021.pdf](https://www.armstat.am/file/article/gender_2021.pdf)

proportion of women electors among those who voted was higher, with the difference with men reaching 14 percentage points.

In the 2018 elections, the same tendency was observed. In Yerevan, women voters participated more actively than in the marzes, however, the difference compared to men made up 9 percentage points. The proportion of women and men in the marzes was the same in the 2018 and 2021 elections.

**Table 4.**  
**The proportion of women and men that voted in the 2018 and 2021 parliamentary elections in Yerevan and the marzes, %**

	Yerevan, NA		Marzes, NA	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>2018</b>	54.7%	45.3%	50.3%	49.7%
<b>2021</b>	56,8%	43,2%	50,8%	49,2%

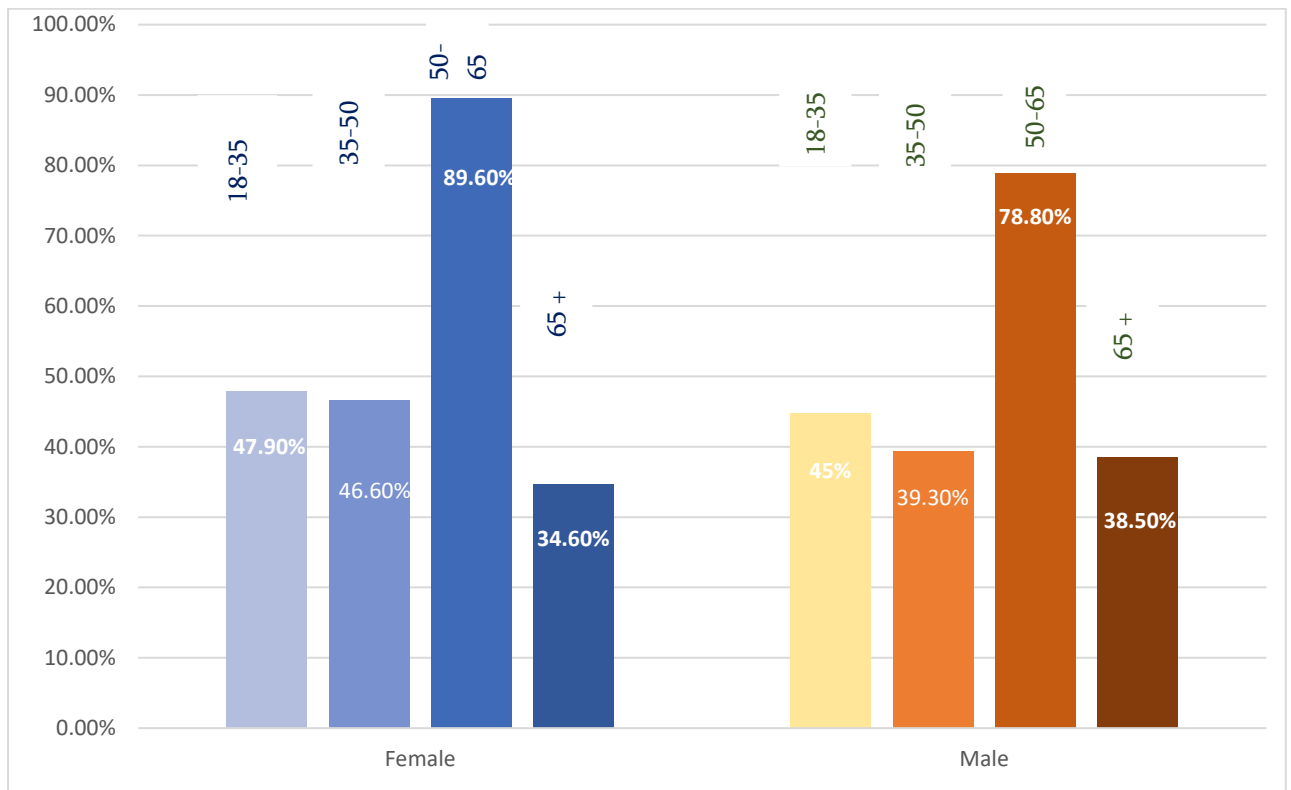
*Source: CEC data*

In order to reveal voters' participation in terms of age groups, two indicators were considered for both women and men within the framework of this research:

- ✓ Election participant women's proportion in each age group as compared to the total number of women electors in that age group (the same for men).
- ✓ The distribution of voting electors of each gender according to age groups.

Looking at the proportion of women and men who voted as compared to the total number of electors in their age group, one can see that both female and male electors in the age group of 50-65 participated in the voting more actively. Moreover, the civic activism of women in that age group in terms of their participation in elections stood at approximately 90% and that of men made up 79%, with the difference being 11 percentage points.

**Chart 2.**  
**The participation indicator of women and men according to age groups (as compared to electors of each gender in a given age group)**



Source: CEC data

The second group striking by activism of voters is that of 18-35 year olds. The participation of women in that group made up 47.9% and of men 44.8%, with the difference as compared to other age groups being insignificant – approximately 3 percentage points. It is noteworthy that the activism of young voters is half less as compared to voters in the 50-65 age group and points to the necessity of boosting the civic activism of young people.

In the 35-50 age group, women were again more active than men were, with the difference making up 7.3 percentage points, more than in case of the 18-35 age group. As far as the age group 65+ is concerned, men were more active than women were, although, taking into account the factor of women's longer life span, the percentage of women in this age group is higher than that of men both in the population and among electors.

Comparing the distribution of voting electors of each gender according to age groups for the 2018 and 2021 parliamentary elections, one can state that the greatest change is noticeable in the 18-35 age group.



**Table 5.**  
**The distribution of women and men voting in the 2018 and 2021 elections according to age groups (as compared to the percentage of those of each gender that participated in the voting)**

	2018		2021	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>18-35</b>	26.6%:	31.2%,	25.3%	28%
<b>35-50</b>	25.8%	25.6%	26.9%	27.3%
<b>50-65</b>	31.5 %	28.7%	29.3%	27.4%
<b>65+</b>	16%	14.6%	18.5%	17.4%
	100%	100%	100%	100%

Among voting women, the 18-35 age group made up 25.3% in 2021, and 26.6% in 2018, i.e. the change was insignificant. The proportion of men of this same age group among men voting in the 2018 elections was 31.2%, which decreased by 3 percentage points to 28% in 2021. It should be noted that it is primarily men of this age group that participated in the 44-day war and suffered losses.

A look at the age proportion of female and male electors that participated in the LSG elections in 2021 confirms the regularities and patterns revealed for parliamentary elections.

**Table 6.**  
**The distribution of voting female and male electors according to age groups for the 2021 parliamentary and LSG elections (as compared to the percentage of those of each gender that participated in the voting)**

	LSG elections		Parliamentary elections	
	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>18-35</b>	24.6%	29,2%	25.27%	28%
<b>35-50</b>	28.4%	28.3%	26.9%	27.3%
50-65	30.7%	28.0%	29.3%	27.4
65+	16.3%	14.5%	18.45%	17.5%
Total	100%	100%	100%	!00%

Source: CEC data

Among the factors conditioning the participation differences of women and men in different age groups, focus group participants have noted men's labor migration, the workload of young women taking care of young children, and a higher proportion of women among the elderly.

*"In certain age groups, women participate more. This seems to be conditioned by the fact that men in those age groups are migrating for jobs."<sup>18</sup>*

*"Young women with young children have serious time availability problems to participate in any event, including going to the polling station on the voting day. I have often noticed that in young families with young children only one of the spouses, usually men, participate in the voting... Older women do not have such problems: children are old enough, the household workload is not so big, they do not have to ask for permission from mother-in-laws or father-*

<sup>18</sup> From a focus group discussion

*in-laws to leave home like young daughter-in-laws have to do and, in essence, nothing interferes with their active participation.*<sup>19</sup>

## **Chapter 2. Gender Peculiarities of Voters' Participation: LSG elections**

The peculiarity of the 2021 LSG elections<sup>20</sup> is the fact that 45 out of 52 communities participating in these elections were consolidated communities, where elections were held through proportional system of representation for the first time (with the exception of Gyumri and Vanadzor, where proportional electoral system was first applied in 2016).

According to the CEC data, voters' participation in the LSG elections was lower (41.6%) than in the parliamentary elections (49.3%).

**Table 7.**  
Participation in the 2021 LSG elections according to the CEC protocols

	<b>October 17</b>	<b>November 14</b>	<b>December 5</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Total number of voters</b>	166753	80798	1112396	1359947
<b>Number of voting participants</b>	55410	38295	472528	565186
<b>Participation percentage</b>	33.2%	47.4%	42.5%	41.6%

*Source: CEC data*

This tendency of lower participation has been typical of all local-level elections held up to date as compared to national-level parliamentary and presidential elections, which are perceived as more important elections by voters. As for indicators of women and men's participation, they demonstrate that women voters' participation in the LSG elections was lower than that of men.

Two indicators were considered to assess women's participation in the LSG elections:

- ✓ The percentage of women participating in the elections as compared to the total number of women electors.
- ✓ The proportion of electors participating in the voting according to their gender.

Calculating the percentage of women who voted as compared to the total number of women electors, one can see that based on this indicator, only 37.8% of women electors participated in the voting. The percentage of voting men makes up 45.9% of the total number of male electors, exceeding women's participation by 8 percentage points. In the parliamentary elections, the picture was different: women voters were more active than men were. Fifty point eight percent of the total number

<sup>19</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>20</sup> The elections were held on October 17, November 14, and December 5.

of women voters and 47.2% of the total number of male voters participated in the voting, i.e. women were more active than men by 3.6 percentage points.

**Table 8.**

**Indicators of women and men’s participation in the 2021 LSG and parliamentary elections (*The proportion of voting women and men in the number of electors of each gender, %*)**

<b>Participation indicators</b>	<b>LSG elections</b>	<b>Parliamentary elections</b>
Women’s participation	37.8%	50.8%
Men’s participation	45.9 %	47.2%
Difference, %	8%	3.6%

The regularity of women’s lower participation in local elections has also been revealed by studies conducted in European countries, according to which, in the national elections either there has been recorded almost no difference between women and men’s participation, or women have shown more active participation.

However, this trend does not concern local elections, during which indicators of women’s participation are lower than those of men<sup>21</sup>. International experts primarily cite the fact that women electors usually do not attach importance to second-level elections as a reason for this situation.

In Armenia, the perception of the importance of local elections is largely dependent on the development level of the LSG system, which since 2016 has been in the processes of community consolidation reforms, which can affect both voters’ perceptions and their level of participation in elections. As for the 2021 LSG elections, there are also other factors causing voters’ passivity. They include transition to the proportional electoral system and as a consequence of that the difficulty with voters’ political orientation and the emotional background due to the war consequences, which was characteristic of the 2021 snap parliamentary elections as well.

*“...I have been working as a specialist of technical devices during elections, already for almost five years during six elections; I participated under all political forces, and these last elections were very passive in terms of voters’ participation, both the National Assembly snap elections and the LSG elections.”<sup>22</sup>*

A look at the proportion of women and men among the electors participating in the LSG elections demonstrates that it significantly differs from the proportion recorded during the parliamentary elections.

In 2021, the proportion of women and men among the LSG elections participants differs by 3.4 percentage points in favor of men’s participation, in contrast to the participants in the 2021 parliamentary elections, where women’s participation is higher by 9.8 percentage points.

<sup>21</sup> Serafini, M., (2021) “Gender Gap in Electoral Behavior”, Essex Student Journal 12(1).

<https://publications.essex.ac.uk/esj/article/id/82/>

<sup>22</sup> From a focus group discussion

**Table 9.**  
**The proportion of women and men participating in the voting during the 2021 parliamentary and LSG elections**

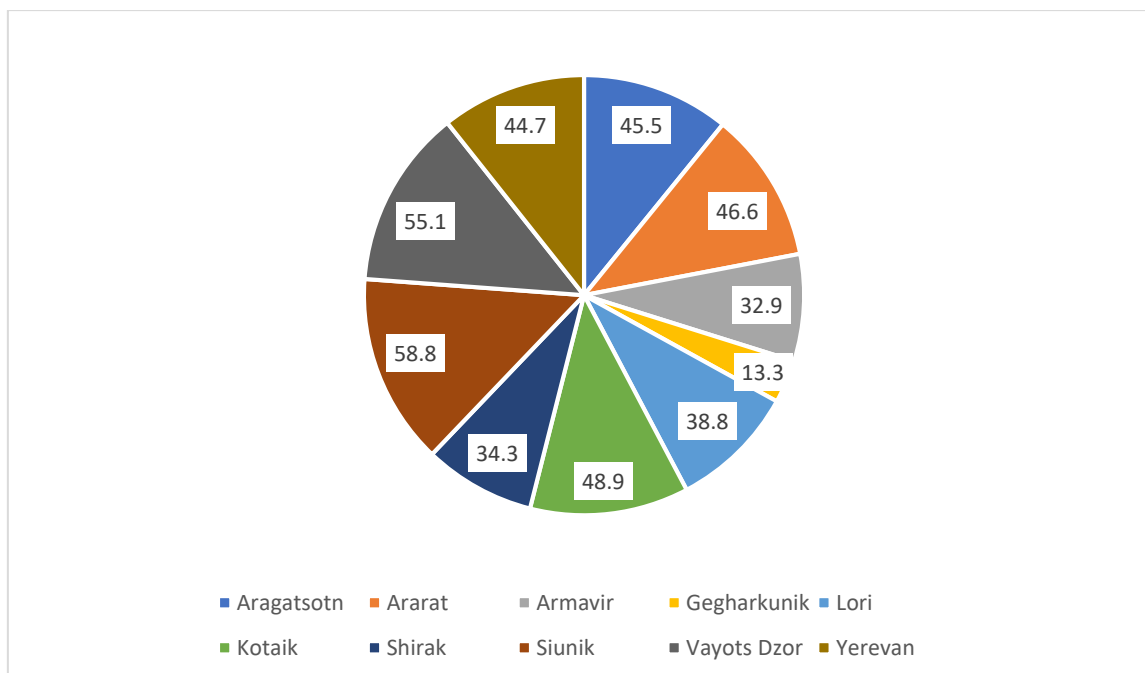
	Parliamentary elections		LSG elections	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
<b>The total number of those who voted</b>	1267128		565186	
<b>The total number of those who voted, according to gender</b>	696571	570557	273009	292177
<b>Those who voted, according to gender percentage</b>	54.97%	45.04%	48.3%	51.7%
<b>The difference between women and men's participation</b>	>9.9		<3.4	

*Source: CEC data*

According to the CEC data, the indicators of voters' participation in the 2021 LSG elections greatly differ from marz to marz and from community to community. In particular, the lowest participation was noted in Armavir (32.9%), Shirak (34.3%), Lori (38.9%), and the highest participation was recorded in Siunik (58.8%) and Vayots Dzor (55.09%). The last two borderline marzes were affected by the war consequences the most in terms of provision of shelter for those displaced from Artsakh and serious border delimitation and security problems. Therefore, voters attached more importance to elections connecting their results with the solution of issues of concern to them. According to the CEC data, the voters in these marzes showed significantly higher participation than the average in the parliamentary elections as well.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup><https://res.elections.am/images/doc/masnak20.06.21pv.pdf>

**Chart 3**  
**The percentage of voting participants during the 2021 LSG elections, according to marzes**



Source: CEC data

As for women’s participation, the proportion of women and men among those who voted was different at different stages of the LSG elections, which can be conditioned by the actual proportion of female and male voters in the given marz.

**Table 10.**  
**The proportion of women and men participating in the 2021 LSG elections**

	October 17		November 14		December 5		Total for all three stages	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
Participation in numbers	29145	26225	19577	18662	224287	247290	273009	292177
The total number of those who voted	55370		38239		471577		565186	
As compared to the total number of those who voted	52,6%	47,4%	51,2%	48,8%	47,6%	52,4%	48,3%	51,7%
Difference between women and men’s participation	>5.2%		>2.4%		< 4.8%		<3.4%	

Source: CEC data

However, no clear-cut regularity was noticed between general participation indicators and the proportion of women among those who voted in this or that marz. The general indicators of voters’ high participation do not necessarily mean that women participated in the voting more actively in the given marz or community.

In particular, although in Siunik and Vayots Dzor marzes with voters' higher participation the percentage of women among those who voted was higher than the average indicator for the LSG elections, it hardly differed from the men's proportion.

In Shirak and Lori marzes with lower participation indicators, the difference between the proportion of women and men makes up 4-6 percentage points in favor of women's participation.

Just the opposite is in Armavir marz with the lowest voter participation (32.9%), where women's participation was lower by 12 percentage points than that of men.

**Table 11.**  
The gender proportion of voting participants according to marzes and major urban communities, percentage

Marzes	Siunik		Vayots Dzor		Armavir		Shirak		Lori	
	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M
As compared to the total number of those who voted %	50.4	49.6	48,9	51,1	44,1	55,9	52,4	48,6	53,1	46,9
Major urban communities	Kapan, Goris		Yeghegnadzor		Armavir		Gyumri		Vanadzor	
As compared to the total number of those who voted %	51	49	48,5	51,5	44.3	55.7	54,6	45,4	54,8	45,2

Source: CEC data

A regularity is noticed also in major urban communities, where women's proportion among those who voted is significantly higher than that of men. In particular, in Gyumri and Vanadzor, where LSG elections were held through proportional electoral system for the second time, the proportion of women among voting participants is higher by 9-10 percentage points than that of men, i.e. it is the same as the difference between women and men's proportion recorded during the parliamentary elections.

In those consolidated communities, where LSG elections were held through proportional electoral system for the first time, the percentage of women among voting participants is much lower than that in Gyumri and Vanadzor, i.e. women demonstrated apparently lower participation in those communities. This circumstance was commented upon during the focus group discussions, within the context of change in the electoral system for LSG elections and community consolidation. *"Women's passivity in small communities during the LSG elections is also caused by community consolidation."*<sup>24</sup>

<sup>24</sup>From a focus group discussion

## Chapter 3. Peculiarities of Women Voters' Electoral Behaviour and Preferences

With the aim of revealing the peculiarities of women voters' preferences and electoral behaviour, compared were the results of sociological surveys on electoral processes in Armenia and viewpoints expressed during the focus group discussions conducted within the framework of this research.

During the research, revealed were also a number of peculiarities of women's electoral behaviour and preferences, which are presented as follows.

### “Family Voting”

Cases of the directed voting by women electors are considered serious limitation of women's electoral behaviour impeding the free exercise of women's will and the opportunities of making a conscious choice. The cases of the so-called “family voting” are confirmed by domestic observers as well. In particular, according to the report by “Witness” (“Akanates”) observation mission, “1-3 cases of family voting were recorded in the 23.67% of the observed polling stations, 4-10 cases in the 33% of them and 11 or more cases in the 67% of them.”

*“... The family voting problem was very noticeable during the elections of this year because there were more cases of staying in closed spaces due to COVID and sharing opinions with each other and viewing the family's (husband's) opinion as much more dominant and influencing women's opinion formation.”<sup>25</sup>*

*“...I even know cases when servicemen husbands wrote, called to tell to vote for this or that person, and not to vote for another one.”<sup>26</sup>*

When describing women's electoral behaviour, focus group participants see a difference between employed and unemployed women, noting that working women participate in elections more actively and make more conscious choices.

*“If you work, you are one way or another involved in all areas. And when you stay at home, I do not know for sure, but these women's psychology is a little bit different, they are a little bit dependent on their husbands.”<sup>27</sup>*

Singled out is also the electoral behaviour of rural women. Focus group participants note that the influence of husbands on their families is much stronger in rural areas and they often instruct their families who to vote for.

*“...Rural women rely more on the family men and make their choices based on these everyday conversations.”<sup>28</sup>*

---

<sup>25</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>26</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>27</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>28</sup> From a focus group discussion

*“... Women, especially many of the rural women do not even try to participate in elections and go to vote only in cases when their husbands or brothers participate in elections and clearly know who to vote for.”<sup>29</sup>*

*“... There was even decreased interest in the last LSG elections, and as for behaviour, one should take into account, when evaluating behaviour, women’s interest in political processes, which is generally very low in the marzes and the family’s opinion significantly affects electoral behaviour, the family guidance has a significant and weighty influence since women cannot orient themselves in political processes.”<sup>30</sup>*

## **Voter Motivation and Participation under Proportional Electoral System**

Evaluating the impact of the transition to the proportional electoral system for LSG elections on the motivation and participation of voters, including women voters, experts pointed out the following factors during focus group discussions:

- With the transition to the proportional electoral system, old mechanisms for participation in LSG elections, when the main motivation to vote was “the obligation” to support friend and relative candidates did not work, however, new mechanisms, which attach importance to supporting this, or that political force and its ideology, have not been formed yet.
- Nevertheless, in the 2021 LSG elections, voters followed this principle to some extent, which, in the opinion of focus group participants, *“we have not yet get rid of, be it within parties or other areas.”<sup>31</sup>* In the parliamentary elections too, voters were guided by personalities.

*“LSG elections are yet far from being called party or political events, they are very personalized and seem to be in resistance to the proportional electoral system.”<sup>32</sup>*

*“In Armenia, both national and community elections were and continue to remain a choice of a personality and individual. Irrespective of the circumstance whether in the past the candidate was self-nominated or nominated by some party, voters, in reality, continue to elect a personality and not a party.”<sup>33</sup>*

Taking into consideration the difference between women and men in terms of social connections, although women, according to expert estimates, are more free from voting in accordance with the nepotism principle, they, in those communities, where LSG proportional electoral system elections were held for the first time, could have had more difficulties making a choice between political parties, which could have caused their low participation indicators in small communities.<sup>34</sup>

*“In LSG elections, women are in a certain sense more free in making choices since they do not have these social connections and a broad circle of friends... Women are often outside such circles and do not have to elect someone because he is known to be a “good fellow” or*

---

<sup>29</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>30</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>31</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>32</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>33</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>34</sup> From a focus group discussion



*some authority. And if they are not obliged to vote for someone by their husbands, brothers or fathers, they have bigger chances to make a political choice. So, it turns out that women are freer as voters than men, who are constrained when they are approached by some male friend and told that his friend has been nominated, so please support him.”<sup>35</sup>*

On the other hand, according to assessments by focus group participants, wider involvement of women candidates in party lists can motivate women to go to vote “to support women who are their acquaintances,” i.e., on the one hand, they can have the same motivation as men.

*“...Now that they know that women are involved, being a woman voter, she herself can go help her girl-friend to become at least a council member; this way they begin to participate in elections.”<sup>36</sup>*

On the other hand, this can become an incentive for women to get interested in politics and participation of other women.

*“...I have noticed that they have started to be interested in those women, who are included in the first group of ten in the party candidate lists.”<sup>37</sup>*

Participants in focus groups with voters have confirmed that only the form of elections has changed, however, their content and the principle and motivation for participation in voting have remained the same.

*“...It’s true that now we elect a party in small communities, but we vote for specific persons because we all know almost everyone, we elect personalities from parties and not party themselves; we elect in a way that depends on who has joined that party.”*

*“In the past since [the electoral system] was majoritarian, they went to vote for relatives, friends nominated by them; now, with party lists, a strange situation has developed for people. People can root for some party, but be against those included in the lists.”<sup>38</sup>*

## **Voter Orientation according to Pre-Election Programs**

Although focus group participants expressed hope that the proportional electoral system will create bases for more conscious, principled, program-guided election, this optimism is not yet substantiated in terms of party programs. The political forces that participated in the LSG elections did not present pre-election programs, thus depriving voters of the opportunity to make a more conscious decision. In the opinion of experts, almost the same situation existed for the parliamentary elections, during which the political struggle was not program-based, although during surveys, voters noted that they prioritized programs to make a choice.

*“...If we talk about the last parliamentary elections, they were crisis-driven, not regular elections not requiring programs... There is another circumstance, other criteria, which guide*

---

<sup>35</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>36</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>37</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>38</sup> From a focus group discussion

people and even if they came up with another program, those who had to vote for that force, would vote for it.”<sup>39</sup>

“In reality, our parties, in my opinion, do not yet have fully developed programs that are politically different from others to allow people to orient themselves in their choices, for example, leaning more to the left or to the right.”<sup>40</sup>

“First of all, there needs to be a program, which you would like to read or not to read. When there is no program, there is no attitude. Next, it is a conventional approach to be guided maximum by lists.”<sup>41</sup>

“Up to date, we have a leader election, and not that of political parties or even to a lesser extent programs put forward by them because in reality in the political field people change their positions so often and move from one party to another making it impossible to understand which direction and ideology they represent. A kind of chaotic situation evolves not allowing orienting yourself.”<sup>42</sup>

“My opinion, though probably subjective, is that the greater part of people were hardly aware of the programs and even candidates included in the lists were not aware of the programs of their parties because people elected persons or did not elect because of the persons involved.”<sup>43</sup>

## **The Most Important Issues of the Elections Agenda: Difference of Women and Men’s Perceptions**

Differences between women and men’s electoral behaviour become known at the level of preferences, expressing their socio-political values and perceptions of priorities for the country’s or their community development. Although in international practice gender gap in voting behaviour can play a decisive role in terms of its impact on the elections results, Armenia’s experience demonstrates that there are differences in preferences between female and male voters with respect to these issues, however, they either do not reach significant proportions, or do not leave a significant impact on the elections results.

The agenda of the 2021 snap parliamentary elections was dictated by heavy war losses and extremely tense political situation due to that. It greatly differed from all previous elections and affected the results of the pre-election surveys.

---

<sup>39</sup> From a focus group discussion

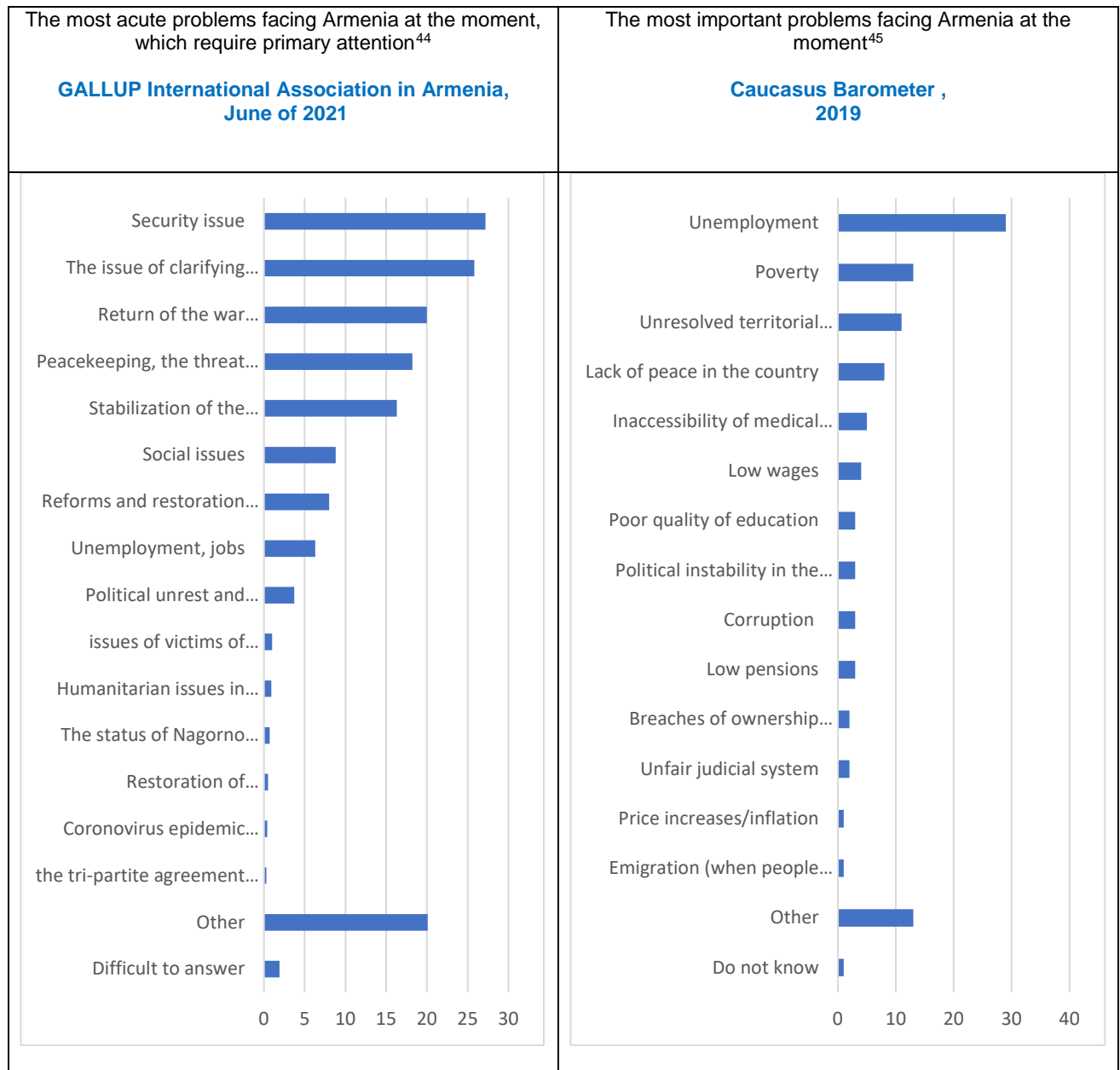
<sup>40</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>41</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>42</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>43</sup> From a focus group discussion

**Chart 4.**  
**2019 and 2021 (pre- and post-war period) Difference of issues of concern to voters**

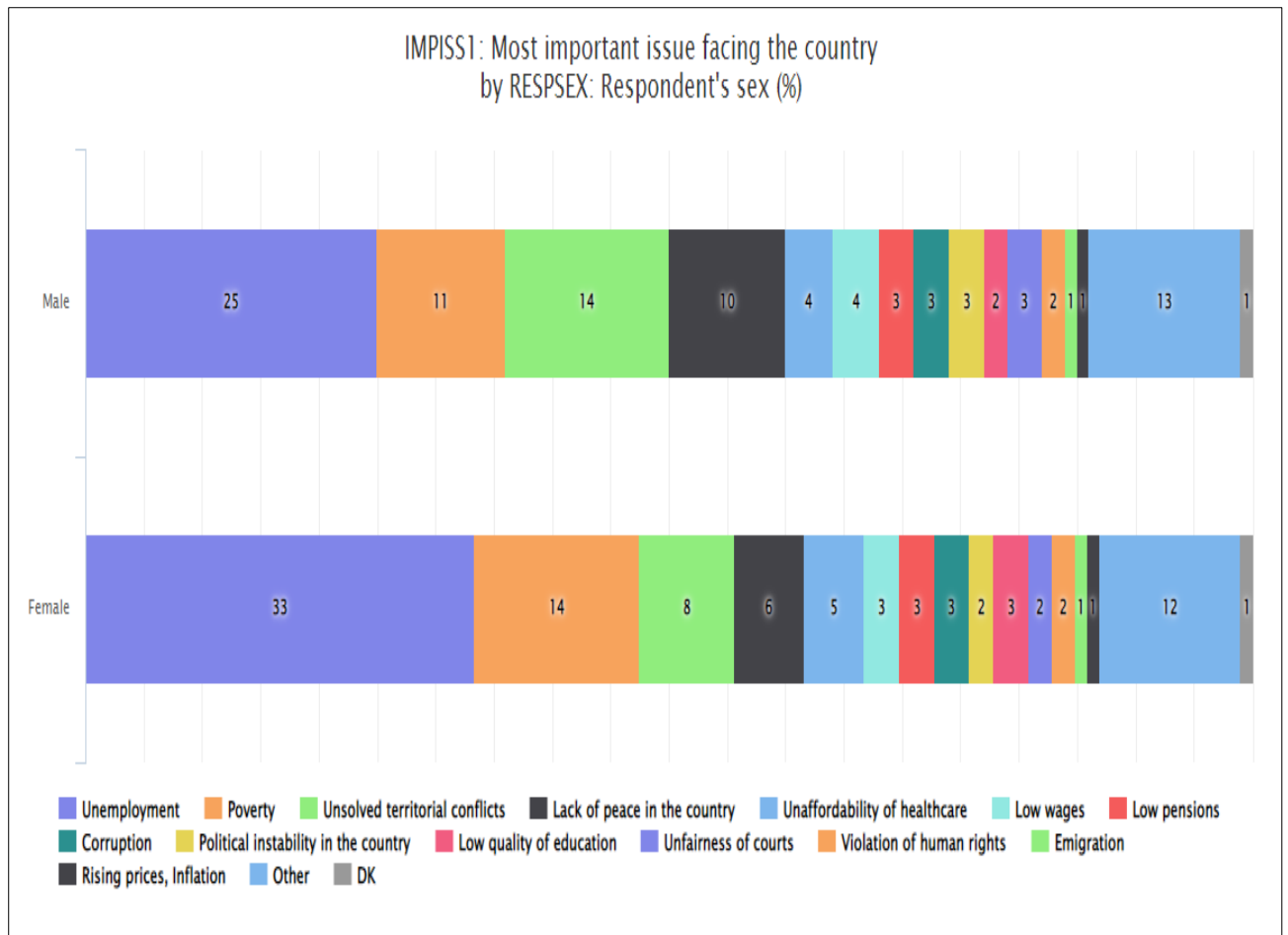


In 2019, the difference between women and men’s priorities are quite noticeable. For example, it makes up 8 percentage points for the issue of unemployment, 3 percentage points for poverty, and 4 percentage points for the unresolved conflict.

<sup>44</sup>MPG LLC, GALLUP International Association in Armenia, June 2021 <https://gallup.am/product/pre-election-survey-3nd-wave-idiotka-en/>

<sup>45</sup> Caucasus Barometer 2019 Armenia

**Chart 5.**  
**The most important problems facing Armenia in the perceptions of women and men, 2019**



During the 2021 parliamentary elections, the issue of security and related delimitation problems overshadowed the unemployment issue removing it to the background. Although concerns about the socio-economic situation are mentioned immediately after security problems, they are worded as stabilization of the economy. The differences of women and men’s responses do not exceed 1-2 percentage points for almost all questions, with the exception of the first two questions, which both relate to the same security issue, but are differently-worded.

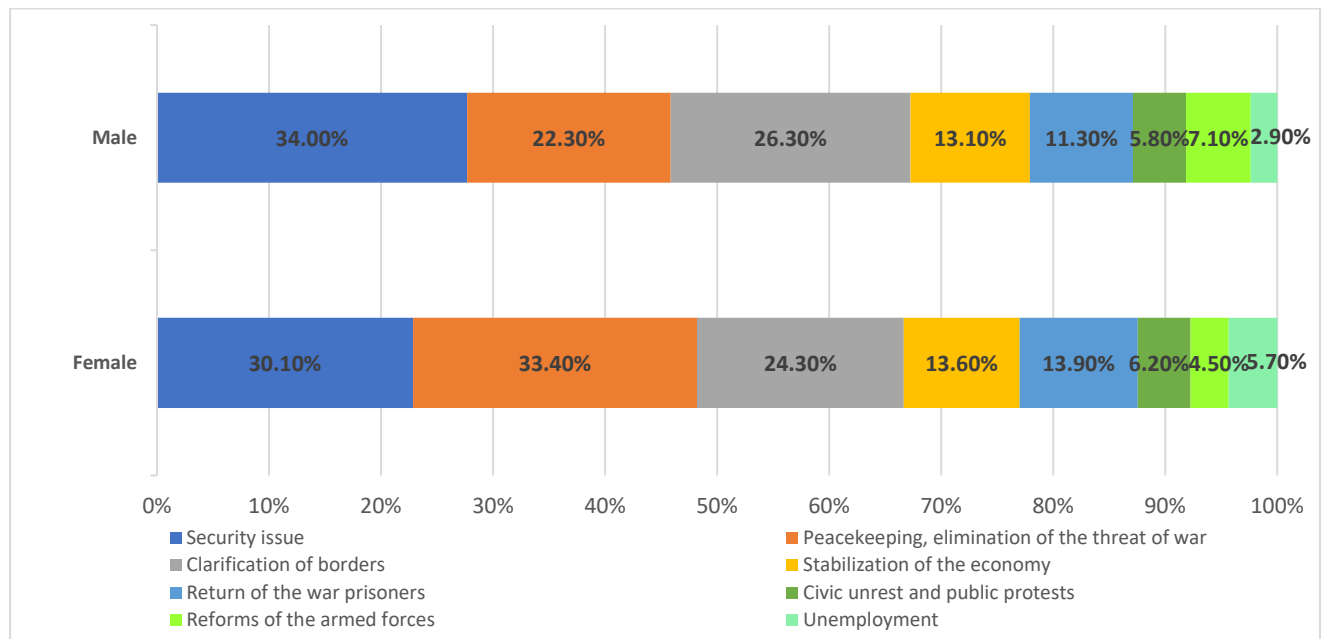
Women prefer to formulate their concern as an issue of establishment of peace and elimination of the threat of war, with a difference of 11 percentage points as compared to men. Men give preference to the formulation “security issue,” with a difference of 4 percentage points as compared to women. This difference in the noted women and men’s responses demonstrates that the rhetoric of political forces can be critical for women and that they are inclined to give their preference to those political forces, which voice their promises of ensuring security within the context of establishment of peace.

**Table 12.**  
**What are the most acute problems facing Armenia at the moment, which require primary attention? May, 2021<sup>46</sup>**

<b>Prioritized Issues</b>	<b>YES%</b>
Security issue	31.9%
Peacekeeping, the threat of war	28.1%
The issue of clarifying borders	25.2%
Stabilization of the economy	13.3%
Return of the war prisoners	12.7%
Political unrest and Public protests	6.0%
Reforms and restoration of the army and armed forces	5.7%
Unemployment	4.4%
Internal political situation	3.2%
Change of government	2.5%
Humanitarian issues in the area of military conflict	1.7%
Restoration of infrastructure in the area of military conflict	1.5%
The status of Nagorno Karabakh	1.5%
Social status, poverty	1.5%
Difficult to answer	1.4%
Coronavirus epidemic and its consequences for the country	1.3%
Other	11.8%

<sup>46</sup> MPG LLC, GALLUP International Association in Armenia, May 2021 <https://gallup.am/product/minus-30-pre-election-survey-2nd-wave/> Certain differences in the order of priorities notable in the responses of the surveys conducted by the organization in May and June of 2021 can be attributed to rapid changes in the public mood in the tense political situation. However, security provision remains unchanged as a common priority.

**Chart 6.**  
**What are the most acute problems facing Armenia at the moment, which require primary attention in women and men's perception?**  
**May, 2021<sup>47</sup>**



The peculiarities of the agenda of the 2021 parliamentary elections were also emphasized by focus group participants. They unequivocally noted security issue as a priority, which, according to their assessments, had overshadowed all the other issues.

Within this context, issues related to women rights were completely removed from the agenda and programs of the political forces.

*“In these June elections, in general, both the rhetoric and presentation of problems was extremely masculinized...the entire public discourse seemed to me to be extremized, I do not remember such patriarchal, masculinized elections held in the past. In many cases, it was like a “fight of men.”<sup>48</sup>*

*“By my observation, the difference between the parliamentary elections of 2018 and 2021 was that in 2018 there was no militarized context. The context determined largely by the 2020 war has become much more profoundly militarized.”<sup>49</sup>*

Taking into consideration the general context of the 2021 parliamentary elections, NGOs dealing with women issues did not show activism in promoting “Women’s Agenda” among voters and political forces, although during the preceding elections, steps were taken in that direction. The “Women’s Agenda”<sup>50</sup> was developed

<sup>47</sup> MPG LLC, GALLUP International Association in Armenia, May 2021 <https://gallup.am/product/minus-30-pre-election-survey-2nd-wave/> Certain differences in the order of priorities notable in the responses of the surveys conducted by the organization in May and June of 2021 can be attributed to rapid changes in the public mood in the tense political situation. However, security provision remains unchanged as a common priority.

<sup>48</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>49</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>50</sup> “Women’s Agenda for Development” in the lead-up to the RA Snap Parliamentary Elections <https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/4.pdf>

and pre-election debates<sup>51</sup> were organized around it with voters and representatives of political forces running in the elections. According to expert observations, “this time, it seemed to be not the time to raise such issues.”

*“... These last elections notwithstanding, women, in general, are more attentive to points that relate to social issues, women issues or rather family issues, educational issues. We have clearly noticed it, however, during the past two elections; this did not play a role, no role at all.”<sup>52</sup>*

*“The only topic touched upon about women was mothers of the victims, parents of the war prisoners, but I did not hear separate women issues voiced.”<sup>53</sup>*

*“During the recent elections, security issue was a priority, but even in that context, with populist approaches voiced are only “mothers of heroes,” and not “parents who have lost their children.” The romanticization of the war leads to a situation when women are deprived of their true concerns and issues and are ascribed national preservation roles: giving birth to soldiers and other roles, among which the right to be concerned about regular employment, social, health, educational and other real issues is lost.”<sup>54</sup>*

The agenda and moods recorded during the parliamentary elections were to some extent maintained during the LSG elections as well. Security provision and issues related to delimitation of borders were in the foreground, especially during elections in the borderline communities.

Overall, as demonstrated by focus group discussions with voters, the agenda of the LSG elections developed around issues of community significance, many of which are directly related to women’s interests, be it infrastructure development, water supply, or inter-community transport.

### **Political Preferences of Women Voters**

Some understanding of women and men’s political preferences are provided by pre-election surveys, which, in contrast to the experience of the preceding elections, were limited in number during the 2021 early elections.

The difficulties of voters to make a political choice were conditioned by at least three circumstances, which equally relate to both parliamentary and LSG elections:

- Both for LSG and parliamentary elections, a big number of parties were nominated, many of which were newly-formed. According to the CEC data, for the 2021 LSG elections, 167 parties and party alliances were nominated in 45 communities. The number of parties nominated for the snap parliamentary elections was also unprecedented – voters, in a very short period of time,<sup>55</sup> had to make their choice from among the lists of 25 political forces;
- Second circumstance is the factor of the underdevelopment of the parties and the absence of clearly defined ideological basis for many of them. According

<sup>51</sup> <http://womennet.am/women-agenda-debate-1/>

<sup>52</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>53</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>54</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>55</sup> During the snap parliamentary elections, the election campaign lasted only 11 days.

to the data of the RA State Register, as of 2021, 113 parties were registered in Armenia, 28 of which were created in 2021, i.e. in the period immediately preceding the elections.

- The third circumstance is the factor of lack of trust in parties, which is confirmed by sociological surveys, according to which, the lack of trust was higher among men.<sup>56</sup>

Looking at the results of the pre-election surveys related to voter political preferences, one can state that the differences between women and men's preferences are very insignificant and do not exceed 1.7%.

**Table 13.**

**Which party or alliance will you vote for?**<sup>57</sup>

**Research period: June 14, 2021 - June 16, 2021**

Which party or alliance will you vote for?	% of female respondents	% of male respondents	Difference between the male and female respondents, %
“Prosperous Armenia” Party	5,2	5,6	-0,4
“Civil Contract” Party	25,2	25,2	0
“Bright Armenia” Party	5,1	5,2	-0,1
“Armenian National Congress” Party	1,9	1,7	-0,2
“Republic” Party	3,4	1,7	1,7
“5165 National Conservative Movement” Party	1	0,9	0,1
National-Democratic Pole/ “Daredevils of Sassoun” Party	0,2	1,4	-1,2
“Fair Armenia” Party	0,2	1,2	-1
“Sovereign Armenia” Party	0,3	0,3	0
“Armenia” Alliance	28,5	28,9	-0,4
“Armenian Homeland” Party	0,3	1,4	-1,1
“Our Home is Armenia” Party	0,8	1,5	-0,7
“Shirinyan-Babadjanyan” Alliance	2,7	2,9	-0,2
“I Have the Honor” Alliance	11,2	10,3	0,9

<sup>56</sup> Caucasus Barometer Armenia 2019 , <https://caucasusbarometer.org/am/cb2019am/TRUPPS-by-RESPSEX/>

<sup>57</sup> MPG LLC, GALLUP International Association in Armenia, June 2021 <https://gallup.am/product/bets-are-made-pre-election-survey-5nd-wave/>



Other	0.8	1.4	-0,6
None	2.5	2.9	-0,4
Difficult to answer	4,2	0,4	3,8
Refuse to answer	6,3	3,9	2,4

Source: GALLUP International Association in Armenia», 2021

Overall, in case of the greater part of the indicators, absolute values are very small, which does not allow revealing clear-cut regularities in terms of the differences between women and men's political preferences. One can only state that there are no differences between women and men's positions among the electors of the main contestants – "Civil Contract" Party and "Armenia" Alliance. Meanwhile, for example, according to the data of the 2018 surveys, women voters in favor of "My Step" Alliance exceeded men by 4 percentage points.

As compared to the previous elections, trends are maintained especially in case of the "Republic" Party, which women voters sympathize with two times more than men. In 2018, this party ran in the elections within the composition of the "We" Alliance and the percentage of women in favor of it also exceeded two times the percentage of men.<sup>58</sup>

Approximately 1.2% difference exists between men and women sympathizing with the "National-Democratic Pole" Party<sup>59</sup>. During the previous elections, the same difference was manifest with respect to the "Daredevils of Sassoun" Party<sup>60</sup>, which is a founder of this political force. The fact that the number of male sympathizers with this force is larger corresponds to the regularity confirmed through international research that women do not sympathize with political forces that hold extreme positions.

In case of the remaining political forces, the differences between women and men's preferences are less than one percentage point, which does not allow drawing clear-cut conclusions.

The greatest difference between women and men is manifest among those respondents, who refused to talk about their political preferences or expressed their positions by responding "Difficult to answer." In case of such positions, the number of women exceeds that of men by about 2.4-4 percentage points. Almost equal number of women and men expressed the position of voting for "None," giving no preference to any political force.

<sup>58</sup> According to the data provided by the organization «MPG LLC, GALLUP International Association in Armenia», 2018

<sup>59</sup> Was established in 2020 by representatives of the "Daredevils of Sassoun" Party and other political actors.

<sup>60</sup> According to the data provided by the organization «MPG LLC, GALLUP International Association in Armenia», 2018

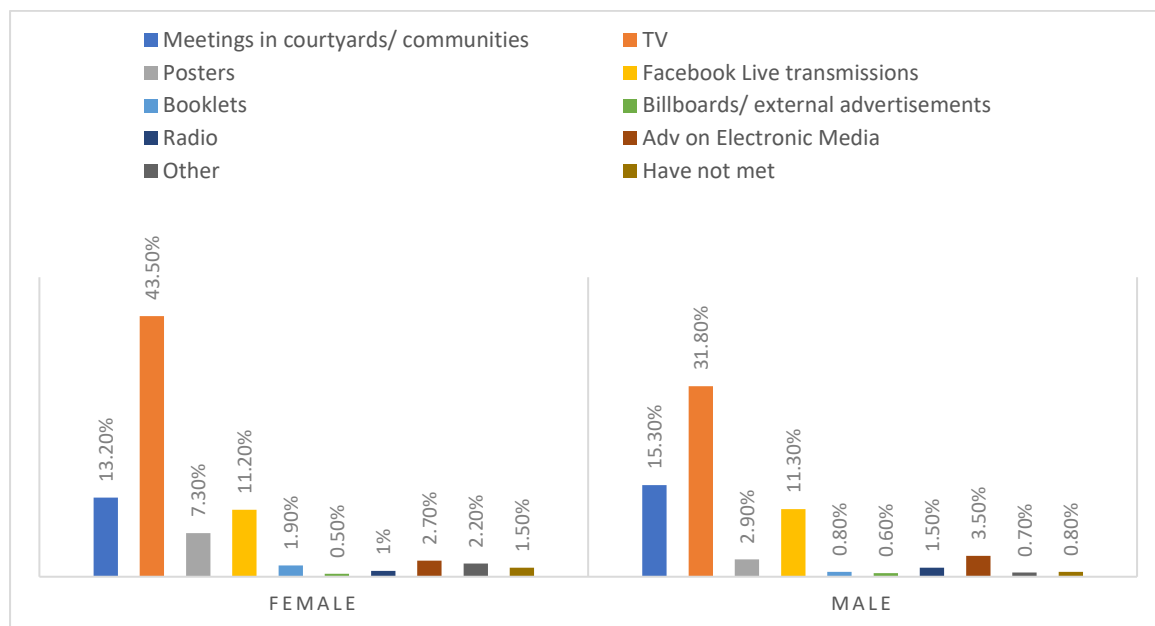
## Voters' Informational Preferences and Participation in the Campaign

In accordance with the terms established by law on extraordinary parliamentary elections, the pre-election campaign of the 2021 parliamentary elections lasted for 12 days, which is much shorter than 35-40 days defined for regular elections.

Certain conclusions can be drawn about the differences of women and men's informational preferences during the campaign based on the data of pre-election surveys and the results of focus group discussions.

**Chart 7.**

**How do you get informed about the campaign?<sup>61</sup>**



The surveys demonstrate that the most widely used informational sources by both women and men were TV and Facebook. Moreover, if women and men make almost equal use of social networks, there are more women in terms of receiving information from TV. This is also confirmed by focus group discussions.

*“... Women voters, in contradistinction to men, rely more on the picture portrayed by media. I believe that it is so because women follow the media more and especially TV, they spend more time at home.”<sup>62</sup>*

*“...So far as I spoke with women in the pre-election period, their perceptions are formed based on the ready models presented on TV.”<sup>63</sup>*

<sup>61</sup> MPG LLC, GALLUP International Association in Armenia, June 2021 <https://gallup.am/product/bets-are-made-pre-election-survey-5nd-wave/>

<sup>62</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>63</sup> From a focus group discussion

According to the surveys, men participate in pre-election meetings more. This is also confirmed by focus group discussions.

*“...Judging from the meetings held on our street with voters, I can say that I hardly saw any women there. There were primarily men there, primarily in the evening hours and it was a very unpleasant situation for me. Whenever I passed by, only some boys, men were standing. I thought why there were no women...It seems to me that this masculinized environment and situation pushed women away.”<sup>64</sup>*

*“The only difference that there is between women and men is, I believe, in terms of participation in electoral processes...I mean those men that gather in areas adjacent to the polling stations with supporters of the political force or figure that they like...In this respect, women are more passive, they do not come together in the streets and talk...”<sup>65</sup>*

According to the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission assessments,<sup>66</sup> “the campaign was characterized by a high degree of polarization and was often confrontational. High levels of harsh, intolerant, inflammatory and discriminatory rhetoric in the period leading up to election day tainted the debate.”

According to the assessments by “Witness” (“Akanates”) domestic observation mission,<sup>67</sup> “during the campaign, the hate speech reached extremely dangerous volumes, raising concerns about the potential risks for civil strife. 60% of the residents of over 150 communities visited by the observers of “Akanates” reported that the rival parties carried out their propaganda on the ground mainly by spreading hostility and hatred.”

Based on the observations of focus group experts, the fact that the pre-election period was characterized by extremely aggressive rhetoric could not but affect the electoral behaviour of women. The society was divided even in virtual domain, where hate manifestations towards the sides were unprecedented. Women avoided public discussions, instead participating in opinion exchange in narrower and more reliable circles. Often it was a very narrow virtual space, where they felt safer.

*“...In reality, women participated actively in the pre-election discussions, however, those were not public discussions, but a narrower circle, often Facebook chats, etc.”<sup>68</sup>*

The number of voters, including women, who did not follow the campaign at all, was not small. This is explained by the general apathy of the post-war period and the aggressive context of the pre-election situation.

---

<sup>64</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>65</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>66</sup> OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission final report on the RA National Assembly early parliamentary elections of June 20, 2021 <https://res.elections.am/images/doc/OCSE20.06.21.pdf>

<sup>67</sup> “Akanates” observation mission final report on the RA National Assembly snap elections of June 20, 2021

<sup>68</sup> From a focus group discussion

*“... The emotional state of those people, who are not interested in the news, especially staying away from political news, not wanting to look at, follow, know any political force at all, and can be characterized as a profound disappointment and indifference. They say that nothing depends on us and everyone keeps to themselves...”<sup>69</sup>*

The mood of the parliamentary elections also affected the process of the LSG elections campaign, which proceeded more actively than usual, although mass media observations attest<sup>70</sup> that from the perspective of coverage it was not noticeable on national TV channels and online news outlets.

It is noteworthy that according to voter assessments, at the local level, people’s awareness has overall increased and a new phenomenon is observed: in villages, women have begun to participate in campaigns.

*“In the past, when you went to some community and asked who your council members were, villagers would not know it for sure because there, in the community, they would only go and make a decision and that’s it. Now, there are stormy campaigns due to community consolidation. Before, and I am 36 years old, I had never seen women going to campaigns for election of council members. Now, people go to meetings and see who the candidates for community council are.”<sup>71</sup>*

---

<sup>69</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>70</sup> Coverage of Female Candidates on TV and News Websites in the 2021 Elections: An Analysis of Monitoring Results [https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final\\_Report\\_Coverage-of-female-candidates\\_Elections-2021\\_ARM.pdf](https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final_Report_Coverage-of-female-candidates_Elections-2021_ARM.pdf)

<sup>71</sup> From a focus group discussion

## Chapter 4. Women voters' expectations of female candidates and attitude towards them

Voters' expectations connected with women's participation, as well as recognizability of female candidates and their visibility in elections play a great role in women voters' behaviour and formation of their attitude towards female candidates.

### Voters' Expectations of Female Candidates' Participation

All research conducted in Armenia on women's political participation points to the public demand for expanding women's representation among authorities. Focus group discussions conducted within the framework of this research have confirmed that voters have a positive attitude towards visible increase in the number of female candidates. Moreover, they have certain expectations from representation of women in the Parliament and local authorities. It is a different issue that not all had clear understanding of those legislative regulations that make possible changes in the expected direction. In particular, ordinary electors had vague understanding of "the gender quota" and of the law that enshrines it.

*"...I believe that a law was being developed to provide that women be included in each third position in party lists."<sup>72</sup>*

*"...It seems that this time the Government has put forth a demand or recommendation that each third municipal council member should be a woman."<sup>73</sup>*

*"It is a state requirement. I believe our constitution stipulates that."<sup>74</sup>*

*"As far as know, in these LSG elections, each third person, or one in each group of three should be a woman and that's why, there were more women in the elections, more women candidates."<sup>75</sup>*

*"...It is not only an issue of internal activism, but also of external demands because in order to be called a democratic country some certain external requirements should be met, that there be certain ratio of women and men or be equal [distribution] in the parliament as well."<sup>76</sup>*

It is noteworthy that voters explained increase in the number of female candidates not by requirements of the law, but by activism showed by women.

*"This year women began to be more self-confident and that provided a great opportunity."<sup>77</sup>*

*"Women began to appreciate themselves and aspire to participating in our country's governance. In addition, the general concern about the fate of the country, which exists, compels not to remain indifferent, be useful by deeds, if not by weapons; this tendency is overall noticeable."<sup>78</sup>*

---

<sup>72</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>73</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>74</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>75</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>76</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>77</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>78</sup> From a focus group discussion

Overall, opinions of voters about increase in women's representation in the National Assembly are divided. Part of them are optimistic, positively evaluating increase in the number of women in the Parliament.

*"Thanks to women's participation, they have begun to respect women more, also somewhat reckon with women. I believe that in the Armenian society, the most difficult thing is to break stereotypes and vanguards in breaking them are those women, who try, to some extent, to represent the people's interests in the National Assembly."*<sup>79</sup>

*"Women approach issues differently from men, it is my opinion that women's presence in the Parliament will probably bring about some changes."*<sup>80</sup>

The other part of voters believes that the quota "ensures quantity and not quality," and expresses certain disappointment with women elected to the NA. Voters in the marzes (provinces) are especially inclined to compare female deputies of the National Assembly with women represented in LSG bodies, who, in their opinion, are more responsible to the public.

*"I am trying not to listen to speeches of the National Assembly deputies, especially to those by female deputies; I do not accept their posture, I do not know whether they understand the meaning and content of their presence there...I do not want to say other things, but I do not see the compassion that exists in women members of LSG councils in the National Assembly."*<sup>81</sup>

In the opinion of experts, although indicators of women's representation in the National Assembly have evidently improved, it is time to be concerned about the content as well, which women elected thanks to the quota bring to the NA with themselves.

*"This time the situation with women's representation has improved because thanks to the quota more women were included in the lists. However, what content did these women bring; did they raise any issue associated with women's rights or interests? This question remains unanswered."*<sup>82</sup>

NGO activists, who have made a major contribution to introducing the quota and, in their words, have struggled for it for years, express certain disappointment with the fact that women, who made it to the Parliament thanks to the quota, are becoming "party minions" and do not meet the expectations that they had of expansion of women's participation.

*"...The problem is even not that they do not promote women's agenda; expectations were connected with bringing new values to the political field, changing the atmosphere, formulating a clear-cut position so that women do not become men's assistants...In this respect, I am perhaps too tough, but, I believe that we have that right since they are from our rank and file and made it to the Parliament thanks to our efforts; hence, they are obliged to reckon with us...Otherwise, they should withdraw and say that we cannot defend those values, we give up the mandates and leave."*<sup>83</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>80</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>81</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>82</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>83</sup> From a focus group discussion

*“Women, who were environmental activists in the past, have not raised any question about those problems at the National Assembly even once. We ask them, ‘why do you not speak?’ And they respond that their team has decided so. However, I have not sent you there to talk only about you team. I have sent you there to speak about issues of concern to your electorate.”<sup>84</sup>*

Although focus group participants confess that because of big expectations they are tougher on female deputies than on male deputies, assessments of experts and voter perceptions associated with women coincide in terms of still unrealized expectations.

They see the reasons in the principles of compilation of party lists. In the opinion of voters, parties, in order to meet the requirement of including certain number of women, do not take into consideration candidates’ merits and qualities. On the one hand, this view confirms the practice of women’s so-called “formal nominations,” about which OSCE/ODIHR observers noted in their final report on the 2018 parliamentary elections.<sup>85</sup> On the other hand, a question arises whether, in case of including men in the lists, parties take into account candidates’ merits or they have a general problem of absence of criteria. Both experts and voters are of the opinion that there exist problems with party cadre policy not only with respect to women. Simply, these problems become more visible in case of women, taking into account voters’ fastidiousness towards them and especially so during LSG elections, where all know all...

*“A problem arises related to the issue as to what principles guide party nominations of women. Since communities are small, all know each other and see that those women, who are simply included to be present, are elected, but those women, who, in reality, could do greater work representing their communities, are left out.”<sup>86</sup>*

*“Lists are replenished by people that are closer to parties, and not based on the principle of candidates’ competence; for the time being, it is so.”<sup>87</sup>*

*“I believe that parties are guided by some interests when compiling their lists because many prepared women and girls may be left out or may hold last positions and not pass to municipal councils.”<sup>88</sup>*

*“Compilation of similar lists seems truly shameful to me. With absolutely no experience and no understanding, many random people gathered so that a certain number was included in a list for it to be registered. And now, following the work, I can see a profound tragedy we are facing, when local self-government bodies include people that do not know what it is about and why they are there.”<sup>89</sup>*

---

<sup>84</sup>From a focus group discussion

<sup>85</sup> The RA National Assembly Early Elections of December 9, 2018, ODIHR Election Observation Mission, final report [https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/b/413564\\_0.pdf](https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/9/b/413564_0.pdf)

<sup>86</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>87</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>88</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>89</sup> From a focus group discussion

In the opinion of journalists, in the LSG elections, parties, having difficulties with engaging quality cadre, were guided by two circumstances in case of women: candidate's recognizability and her manageability.

*"When compiling their lists, I believe that political teams approached the issue of women's involvement with a very clear-cut logic. First, they tried to engage those women, who had certain influence in the community and hence able to bring along certain electorate with them. These are quite specific professions: an outpatient clinic employee, director of an educational or cultural institution, i.e. they relied on women who have certain weight in the community. Secondly, to engage such women that will not cause "much headache" when working as municipal councilors."*<sup>90</sup>

Noted is also the opposite problem, when prepared, capable women with a successful experience of working as municipal councilors refuse to be nominated through the list of any party because of, in their words, inability to make their choice from the diversity of parties. Secondly, they see a danger of their reputation built up over the years being discredited if nominated through the list of this or that party. Such factors as underdevelopment of parties, their lack of clear-cut ideology and program and, as a consequence of that, lack of public trust in parties play a role in both cases.

*"Women largely avoid being featured in party lists. For the recent LSG elections, in our community, there was a serious problem with finding female candidates for inclusion in party lists..."*<sup>91</sup>

*"Having followed activities of experienced women in the area of local self-government over the years, I can say that many of them were not included in the lists although their experience was very necessary for the community."*<sup>92</sup>

### **Problems with Recognizability and Visibility of Female Candidates**

According to the assessments of focus group participants, even in the conditions of a significant increase in the number of women candidates, they continue to have problems with both recognizability and visibility during the pre-election campaign, which causes their low competitiveness in voter perceptions.

The problem with recognizability is especially acute in consolidated communities during LSG elections. For that reason, men play a decisive role in party lists.

*"Men are recognizable due to a number of factors. The overwhelming majority of men featured in the first places in the lists are, as a rule, high-ranking officials. Social connections also play a big role. They are much stronger and wider for men than for women. Of no little importance are business connections, conditioned by different relationships."*<sup>93</sup>

*"If in the past we had communities, where women had authority and where they had worked and electors saw and appreciated their work and were ready to elect and reelect those women,*

<sup>90</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>91</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>92</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>93</sup> From a focus group discussion



*now with consolidation of more than ten villages these same women can hardly have much recognizability in other villages, and this complicates the situation.*<sup>94</sup>

As for the visibility problem, in the opinion of voters, women candidates interact with their electors more and campaign more actively during majoritarian elections and in case of application of open territorial lists. Although simple proportional system of representation gives better chances to female candidates to be elected, they remain in the shadow in case of closed party lists as the campaign is led by the first persons on the list.

*“In 2018, we had closed national and territorial or rating lists and in case of territorial lists competition was quite intense; women had to be more active. At that time, we had two deputies from Shirak marz and both of them had campaigned actively. One of them participated also in the 2021 elections, however, her campaign was much more passive, she was on a party list. I believe that when campaigning while on party lists, candidates are, so to say, campaigning “without showing effort and lazily.”*<sup>95</sup>

Monitoring results of female candidates’ coverage on TV and online media in the 2021 elections<sup>96</sup> demonstrate that the significantly increased participation of women in both parliamentary and LSG elections thanks to the introduction of the gender quota did not lead to the enhancement of their visibility in mass media.

*Although in the 2021 RA NA elections women candidates made up 37% in the lists of political forces, and in the LSG elections, 34%, their visibility was just 9% during the NA pre-election campaign, and much less, 4%, during the local elections campaign.*

*According to the mass media monitoring results*<sup>97</sup>

The same monitoring effort revealed that not only journalists in articles authored by them, but also political forces during their pre-election campaign did not give proper attention and time to women candidates. Women were little featured in video clips broadcast within the framework of the pre-election campaign of political forces running for election to the NA, as well as in the video recordings of their pre-election meetings. The data of the final report by OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission also point to the low visibility of women candidates during the campaign.

*“Women MP candidates did not speak in 471 out of 500 video recordings of the observed pre-election meetings.*

*-Female candidates appeared as speakers only in 5.8% of the observed pre-election meetings.*

*-Time allotted to statements by female candidates made up 1.5 hours or just 11% against more than 30 hours or 88.9% for male candidates.”*<sup>98</sup>

---

<sup>94</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>95</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>96</sup> Coverage of Female Candidates on TV and Online Media in the 2021 Elections: Analysis of Monitoring Results  
[https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final\\_Report\\_Coverage-of-female-candidates\\_Elections-2021\\_ARM.pdf](https://oxygen.org.am/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Final_Report_Coverage-of-female-candidates_Elections-2021_ARM.pdf)

<sup>97</sup> Ibidem

<sup>98</sup> Ibidem

*“Only 24 out of 153 observed speakers during rallies were women (16 per cent), and 51 out of 73 observed campaign events (70 per cent) featured no female speaker.”<sup>99</sup>*

In the opinion of participants in the focus group discussions held within the framework of this research, active participation of women candidates in the campaign was impeded by tense atmosphere and hate speech. In their report, the OSCE/ODIHR observers have noted a high level of intolerance, offensive and discriminatory rhetoric especially during the NA pre-election period.<sup>100</sup>

*“Almost all women featured in the third place in the lists remained very much in the shadow during the elections and it seemed to be intentional because they did not want to assume responsibility or to be targeted or they were intentionally kept in the shadow by men so that they were not targeted. I believe that in this case, the post-war situation had a lion’s share because before that we had seen certain progress in terms of women’s participation in the campaign, even at one polling station two women were engaged in quite a hot struggle, but the post-war situation was completely different.”<sup>101</sup>*

*“In these elections, women featured little and it was conditioned by the cautiousness of women candidates, they were less prepared and had more concerns about how their speech would be perceived, about how to present themselves in order not to be targeted.”<sup>102</sup>*

### Voters’ Attitude to Women Candidates

Although the classical question, “Are you ready to vote for a female candidate?” is not so topical in case of simple proportional representation system, when electors vote for closed lists, it can clearly describe respondent’s attitude towards women candidates. The differences in the approaches to this issue revealed by focus group discussions allow dividing voters into three groups.

The first group includes those voters, who unequivocally accept and attach importance to nomination of female candidates and their entry into the political field, pinning certain hopes on the elected women. They express readiness to elect female candidates, are convinced that in society there have been positive shifts with respect to this issue, and *“...now it is not shameful for anyone, whose wife might become a municipal councilor” or “be nominated for the position of the mayor.”*

*“When during the previous elections one of the women passed the threshold, and she was a much respected woman, the mentality of people changed, this woman changed the stereotypes. She demonstrated that a woman could be highly developed, smart and simultaneously deal with community issues, which set a good example for many and, why not, also instilled courage in others.”<sup>103</sup>*

The second group includes those female voters, who have doubts about women candidates, falter and show mistrust in them, at the same time noting that there are worthy candidates among women. Many note that they will elect a woman if they are

---

<sup>99</sup> The RA NA Early Elections of 2021, ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report <https://res.elections.am/images/doc/OCSE20.06.21.pdf>

<sup>100</sup> Ibidem

<sup>101</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>102</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>103</sup> From a focus group discussion

convinced that a woman's word "can be weighty for different community representatives and employees." These voters raise the problem of lack of female leaders.

*"We have not yet reached the stage when we could follow women leaders...Perhaps, there is a problem with leaders, there is no female leader that can be followed and be elected, and maybe women themselves do not trust women..."<sup>104</sup>*

The third group includes those women voters, who unequivocally advantage men. Neither the age, nor education of the candidate, nor her experience matters since they are of the opinion that "the "right thing is that men rule in the community." They can see women in the composition of the community council since, in their opinion, it is not part of the authorities, and however, they want to see men in the position of the community head. They rule out women's holding leadership positions, explaining their reasoning by the double workload of the woman in the family, her household concerns and her duties in the family.

*"In order to engage in politics, the woman should neglect her family, and it is somewhat unbecoming for the Armenian woman. And even if a woman engage in politics, the right thing for her is that the family come first and then politics."<sup>105</sup>*

In the opinion of journalists, because of the post-war situation, during the 2021 elections, not only many issues were removed to the background, but also those personal qualities were attached importance to, which are necessary for addressing security issues and taking decisive steps, and those are qualities characteristic of men in the perceptions of society.

*"It should be taken into consideration that the elections took place in a post-war, semi-military country. The war always has men's face, during a war, problem solvers are men and this circumstance disadvantaged women. Simply no attention was paid to female candidates because they thought "let's elect this man" that can solve military and political problems, be strong enough not to bring the country to the brink of a war, i.e. they expected to see strong will, great resoluteness, i.e. qualities that are attributed to men by stereotypic perceptions...It is possible that in different conditions, if there were no this post-war situation, we had a completely different picture in these LSG elections in terms of women's participation."<sup>106</sup>*

At the same time, it is obvious that before the war under more peaceful conditions, the attitude towards women candidates was all the same always skeptical. In the opinion of participants in a focus group discussion with journalists, women voters were more demanding with respect to female candidates.

*"What is women's attitude towards female candidates? It seems to me that it is skeptical. They believe that in comparison with men, women are not good leaders."<sup>107</sup>*

*"Women are stricter towards female candidates and if, for example, in case of men, candidate's appearance cannot be decisive; women can target female candidate's*

---

<sup>104</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>105</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>106</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>107</sup> From a focus group discussion

*appearance, speech, posture; it is strange, but it is a fact. Also, in case of female candidates, the main concern is whose wife she is.*<sup>108</sup>

When talking about their attitude to female candidates, voters single out young women and girls, emphasizing that they are more active, self-confident and courageous and, thus, contribute to overcoming gender stereotypes. On the other hand, they also speak about lack of experience and responsibility among youth entering the realm of politics. In any case, the role of young people is appreciated both in the parliamentary and local elections.

*“It seems that in society more prominence is given to youth. I do not want to say whether it is good or bad; perhaps, among youth, lack of experience is big, but, in any case, youth are given prominence...”*<sup>109</sup>

*“If in the past in the marzes, women were not perceived as political leaders, now, it seems, there are no more stereotypes. The new generation is braver; we probably think a little bit differently and always give in to men.”*<sup>110</sup>

In essence, the generation change in Armenia’s political field begun after 2018, including among women, continued also in the 2021 elections, which was undoubtedly visible to voters as well, who gave prominence to young women’s participation in their commentaries.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The research data demonstrate that classical gender differences in terms of electors’ participation that are confirmed by international practice are also visible in Armenia, both in national and local elections. In addition, certain peculiarities are noticeable in behaviour of women voters in terms of motivation, electoral preferences, and expectations.

In Armenia, the number of women voters is higher than that of men. At the same time, certain differences exist in indicators of their participation as well. In particular, in the 2021 parliamentary elections, female electors participated in voting more actively than male electors did, with the difference between the proportion of women and men among the voting participants reaching almost 10 percentage points, and women were more active in the capital city than they were in the marzes (provinces). The revealed difference is consistent with a regularity recorded in European countries, according to which, in national elections, either there is almost no difference between participation of women and men, or women participate more actively.

A number of factors were pointed out in the focus group discussions as possible reasons for women voters’ more active behaviour.

---

<sup>108</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>109</sup> From a focus group discussion

<sup>110</sup> From a focus group discussion

Significant differences in terms of voter participation were recorded in different age groups. In particular, voters in the 50-65 age group were the most active participants in voting (participation being more than 90%). Moreover, in this age group, women's activism was higher than that of men, with the difference being 11 percentage points. As for other age groups, the difference between the level of activism of women and men was not so significant.

The next age group that was striking by electors' activism was the age group of 18-35 year olds (participation being 48%). However, it is noteworthy that the activism of young voters is almost two times less as compared to the activism of those in the 50-65 age group, which points to the necessity of increasing the civic activism of young people.

The comparison of the 2018 and 2021 parliamentary elections shows that the biggest change in terms of participation was manifest in the age group of 18-35 year olds. In particular, in 2021, young men's participation was lower than in 2018, which can be explained also by the fact that it is primarily men of this age group that participated in the 44-day war and suffered losses.

Along with low participation of voters in the LSG elections, women voters demonstrated more passive behaviour than men voters did: women's participation was lower than that of men by 8 percentage points at the time when in the NA elections, the activism of women voters was, on the contrary, higher than that of men by 4 percentage points. The revealed difference corresponds to the regularity recorded in other countries, according to which, indicators of women's participation in local elections are, as a rule, lower as compared to those of men, and the main reason for this, according to international experts, is that women voters usually do not attach importance to second-level elections.

In Armenia, the perceptions of the importance of local elections are largely dependent on the level of development of the LSG system and processes of community consolidation started in 2016. The uncertainty resulting from this could not but affect both voter expectations and their participation in the elections.

Another factor that plays an important role is the transition to the proportional electoral system and, as a consequence of that, voter difficulties with political orientation, which are more pronounced in case of women voters due to their lower interest in political events and developments.

A look at the voter political preferences based on the results of pre-election surveys demonstrates that differences between women and men's preferences with respect to political forces are very insignificant and do not exceed 1.7%. The focus group discussions show that voters had difficulties due to the great number of political forces nominated for both LSG and parliamentary elections, the underdevelopment of parties, the absence of ideological basis among many of them and lack of trust in parties.

Even in those cases, when women participate in voting more actively, the politics is perceived as a one-dimensional system (dominating men), because of which women believe that their political preferences are not so important. This is confirmed

by the existence of the “family voting” phenomenon, which is more pronounced in the marzes and is based on women’s mistrust in their own viewpoints and their conviction in the ability of men to make the “right” choices.

In their assessments of the impact of the transition to the proportional electoral system in the LSG elections on the motivation and participation of electors, including women voters, the focus group participants have stressed that only the form of elections has changed and the content and principle of and motives for participation in voting have remained the same. In essence, though partly, old mechanisms of participation worked in the elections, when the main motivation for voting was either nepotism, an “obligation” to support in-laws, friends, and relatives, or election of personalities, and new mechanisms that attach importance to supporting this or that political force and its ideology or program have not been formed yet.

It is proven by international practice that an unequal distribution of economic and social resources between men and women does not affect their electoral behaviour since there are almost no expenses related to participation in voting. Instead, gender differences in voter motivation can be conditioned by the difference between needs and interests of women and men. However, as revealed by research, the pre-election programs of Armenia’s political forces, as a rule, do not contain provisions aimed at defending the interests or rights of the female electorate, i.e. the possibility of motivating women voters through programs is hardly used. The 2021 elections were not an exception in this respect: in the post-war situation and in the context of ensuring security of the country, issues related to women’s rights were completely left out of the agenda and programs of the political forces.

As demonstrated by pre-election surveys, in the 2021 parliamentary elections, security provision and related delimitation issues overshadowed issues of unemployment and poverty, which had been a number one priority before, removing them to the background. Moreover, women and men, being almost equally concerned with security issue, prefer different formulations of this problem. Women prefer to express their concerns about security issue as one of peacekeeping and elimination of the threat of war, with the difference making up 11 percentage points as compared to men. Men give preference to the wordings “security provision” and “clarification of borders,” with the difference being 4 percentage points in comparison with women. The noted differences show that the rhetoric of political forces can be essential for women and they are inclined to give their preference to those political forces that voice their promises about ensuring security in the context of establishment of peace.

Because of the post-war situation, during the 2021 elections, not only many issues were removed to the background, but also importance was attached to those personality qualities that are necessary for solving security issues, taking decisive steps, and these qualities, in the perceptions of society, are characteristic of men more than of women. Experts have characterized the public discourse of the 2021 elections as extremely masculinized.

Certain differences are noticeable in the informational preferences of women and men. Surveys demonstrate that for both women and men, the most prevalent information sources are TV and Facebook. Moreover, if women and men make almost

equal use of social networks, women exceed men in terms of receiving information from TV. Men participate in pre-election meetings more than women do. This is also confirmed by focus group discussions.

The fact that the pre-election period was characterized by extremely aggressive rhetoric could not but affect women's electoral behaviour. Women avoided public discussions, instead participating in opinion exchange in narrower and more reliable circles. The society was divided even in the virtual domain, where manifestations of hatred towards sides were unprecedented. The aggressive context of the elections also affected the visibility of female candidates, which, according to voter assessments and monitoring results, was very low.

The focus group discussions held within the framework of this research confirmed that voters have a positive attitude towards the visible increase in the number of female candidates. Moreover, they have certain expectations from women's representation in the Parliament and local authorities. It is a different thing that, according to expert assessments and in voter perceptions, these expectations have not come true yet. At the same time, focus group participants confess that because of big expectations they are making more demands on female candidates and deputies than on male ones.

When describing their attitude towards female candidates, voters positively evaluate the generation change in Armenia's political field, especially emphasizing the activism and courage of young women and girls; however, they express concern about lack of experience and sense of responsibility among many of them.

***The above noted conclusions point to the necessity of taking a number of steps in the direction of expanding activism of women voters and developing their capacities to make a conscious choice, including the following:***

- To expand the scope of awareness raising programs for voters, ensuring equal involvement of women and men in these programs,
- To organize special training courses for young female voters with the purpose of developing their motivation to put their choices on the ideological basis,
- To include work with women voters in programs aimed at protection of women's political and civic rights with a view to enhancing their awareness and developing their skills for gender sensitivity and making conscious choices,
- To expand the practice of collecting, spreading and analyzing sex-disaggregated data on all participants in electoral processes,
- To secure the requirement of collecting and publicizing sex-disaggregated data on electoral processes among the CEC functions defined in the Electoral Code,
- To extend the practice of presenting the results of pre-election sociological surveys based on gender and age,
- To ensure the continuity of studies on women's electoral behaviour, to conduct special sociological surveys on women and men's motivation, preferences, peculiarities of their participation in elections, including also questions aiming to reveal the motives of electors not participating in elections,
- To organize special training courses to enhance gender sensitivity of journalists covering electoral processes,

- To include questions related to the upholding of the principle of gender equality in media monitoring conducted during elections,
- To incorporate into the programs of women's leadership schools special training courses aimed at developing skills for organization and conduct of pre-election campaigns and increasing the visibility and recognizability of female candidates,
- To ensure the gender sensitivity of the pre-election programs of political forces and to include provisions defending women's interests and rights with a view to developing discourse on women issues in the political agenda and, thus, attracting the attention of women voters.

\*\*\*





**YEREVAN 2022**