



REPRESENTATION
AND PARTICIPATION
OF WOMEN IN THE
POLITICAL PARTIES
AND POLITICAL
INITIATIVES IN ARMENIA:
GENDER ANALYSES



2016

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**Representation and participation of women in the
political parties and political initiatives in Armenia:
gender analyses**

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In the book the issue of women's representation in the political parties and political initiatives is discussed, as well as challenges that women encounter in the politics in Armenia. The research is conducted by Women's Resource Center NGO, and is devoted to the understanding of gender issues within political parties and political initiatives and factors hindering promotion of women in the political institutions. The research analyses is extracted from in-depth interviews conducted among representatives of political parties and initiatives. A case study of short-lived all-female political party in post-Soviet Armenia "Shamiram" is included.

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INTRODUCTION

The participation of women in political parties and political initiatives is a theme of interest throughout the world. It is of high value especially from the perspective of equal rights and opportunities between men and women and is conditioned by the necessity of transformation of belligerent culture internationally. It is believed that the participation of women in decision making allows contributing to the development and deepening of peace culture, as well as the strengthening of social justice.

Armenia is not isolated from global discourse. Nevertheless, it does not stand out with the high levels of participation of women in politics and other spheres of public life, quite the contrary, Armenia is among the states with entrenched patriarchal values and culture, valiant masculine identity and authoritarian political regime that almost fully denies active political participation to women. Being part of quite a peculiar geopolitical region, caught in the middle of civilizational clashes, Armenia continuously finds itself influenced by the power struggle of superpowers. Given this perspective, gender issues carry the impact of both external and internal frictions caused by cultural specificities, as well as the juxtaposition of their composite effects.

Being influenced by the West, Armenia has successfully introduced legal reforms, adopting a number of international and regional conventions, which create a conducive environment for the equality of rights and opportunities for both men and women. Concurrently, the implementation of the provisions of adopted legal documents is not full-fledged, which leads to a reality when women feel demotivated to participate in politics and other domains of public life.

According to World Economic Forum's 2015 Global Gender Gap Report results among rated 145 countries Armenia has taken the 125th place in terms of political participation. Currently, there are thirteen MPs in the Armenian Parliament, three ministers in the executive branch, no governors or mayors with only eighteen heads of community. These results clearly depict the alarmingly low rates of political empowerment in the country.

Numerous local and international reports on the political participation of women in Armenia have repeatedly highlighted those obstacles and challenges that create impediments for political engagement. The root causes are to be found in local culture through gender stereotypes and rigidly defined gender roles, most particularly in the political culture extant with corruption, the domination of non-formal relations, woven into unjust and at times illegal methods of operation, as well as social psychological state of affairs among women, leading to unjustified levels of low self-esteem.

The studies conducted in the country have also reflected upon the electoral system, making gender sensitive observations, such as the application of gender quota, the picture of withdrawal following elections, etc.

Within this diversity of research participation of women in the political parties has been somehow overlooked. Nevertheless, on numerous occasions within the studies there have been recurrent recourse to the international academic discourse on the importance of engagement of women in party politics and initiatives, on one hand, being positively correlated to overall political participation of the latter, as well as, on the other hand, having negative consequences in terms of creating additional obstacles along the way.

Driven by the understanding of the importance of comprehensive research on the matters of political engagement and participation of women, as well as being motivated by the desire to fill in the existing thematic gaps, the research team of the Women's Resource Center NGO has targeted the participation and engagement of women in parties and political initiatives.

Taking stock of the results of research related to the highlighted theme, as well as providing a background review, the current study aimed at identifying the gender aspect of internal initiative/party politics, pinpointing opportunities for the advancement of women within these structures, as well as enumerating factors that influence the process. Being intertwined with local and international relevant studies, the current research endeavor has come up with a number of hypotheses, which had served as the foundation for definition of an appropriate methodology and relevant research tools.

The book has adopted the following logic. First part reflects upon relevant theories adopting a feminist lenses. It is then followed by the presentation of historic analysis of post-soviet countries including Armenia within the context of women's political participation, which in itself is a result of content analysis of other relevant documents.

Second part encapsulates the results of the research. The lion share of the research studies the current affairs of Armenian political parties and initiatives, trying to reveal gender dynamics. The analyses are based on the data extracted from in-depth interviews conducted among men and women engaged in party politics that have unearthed quite interesting findings, frequently reinforcing the findings from other studies.

Determined to enrich the current study with interesting realities and facts, the team has also conducted a case study, targeting the short-lived all-female political party "Shamiram". Although, the above-mentioned party is no longer operational, it presents an interesting precedent in the history of the Republic of Armenia, as a solely female party with a pathway that captures the obstacles faced both by politically active women and by the entire party as a political entity. This rare case also holds a high utility function in terms of the current study, as in attempting to juxtapose it with the current reality it would be possible to make projections concerning the faith of an all-female party if that becomes a discussed possible option.

The content of the research is a humble, but valuable contribution to the enrichment of scientific understanding of gender studies in Armenia. The unveiling of noteworthy finding and novel perspectives can serve future studies of researchers interested in post-soviet and post-communist countries.

**DEVELOPMENT
OF
FEMINIST
CRITIQUE
OF POLITICAL
SCIENCE
AS A
SEPARATE
DISCIPLINE**

CHAPTER I

Up until the 60s of the last century, feminism was not present in political theory. It was rather a part of liberal theory. But with the development of radical feminism, mainstream political theory was forced to review its approach to gender issues and the role of women in politics. According to the well-known political scientist and researcher Virginia Sapiro, the famous question “What about the women?” has been finally raised in political theory and in political behavior.¹ In political behavior, the question led to a close examination of the gendered aspects of political action and a search for the mechanism of women’s representation in the political leadership.² In political theory, on the other hand, the question about women’s representation meant “asking what the canonical political philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx said or didn’t say about women”.³

Feminist critics of political theory or *feminist political theory*, which emerged in the 1970s and 80s of the past century, study how gender roles and relationships are incorporated in social and political institutions on the one hand, and how political institutions influence the distribution of gender roles in society, on the other. Feminist political theory interacts with both political theory and various branches of feminism (liberal, radical, socialist, postmodern). Feminist political theory combines knowledge from political science, philosophy, sociology, psychology, gender studies, and anthropology. Feminist critics of political theory either reevaluate the concepts of classical political theories by evaluating data from gender surveys against these theories, or through the reconstruction of classical theories from a feminist standpoint. As Sapiro pointed out in her research, women’s studies discovered flaws and gaps in mainstream political theories and concepts.⁴ According to Sapiro “research on women uncovers critical problems in democratic theory and research which are of direct relevance to the problem of representation”.⁵ Another important point is that feminist critique of political science introduced a new language of research and discourse in general.

1. **Phillips**, Anne 1998. *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford University Press.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

Feminist theorists challenged the understanding and perception of justice and morality, the nature of political identity, as well as tackling the issue of who has the power to produce political knowledge.⁶ In particular, feminist critics of political theory argue that concepts of justice should be equally applied to private domains of social life as it is to the public domain and civil society.⁷

Similarly, feminist critique of political theory stresses that the power of men over women tend to exclude women from politics “because women do not dispose of public power, belong to political elites or hold influential positions in government institutions”.⁸

At the same time, feminist critique of political theory does not only revise or criticize existing mainstream concepts of political theory, but it suggests its own approach. Given the assumption that in political science men have been viewed as public and therefore political actors, and women as private, and thus nonpolitical actors, the discipline itself has not considered gender as a question, until “the numbers of women in the discipline increased, and events external to the discipline caused a reexamination of the assumption that women are not political”.⁹

In particular, a new theory of morality based on feminist ethics of care was developed as a result of feminist critique of political theory.¹⁰

Erica Tucker distinguishes the following main methodological bases of feminist political theory:¹¹

1. Concern with power relations, including gendered, racial, class-based and cultural relations within different social institutions.
2. Critique of the history of political philosophy and its norms and theories.

6. Ritter, Gretchen, Mellow, Nicole 2000. The State of Gender Studies in Political Science. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 571, N 1.

7. Ibid.

8. Squires, Judith 2000. *Gender in Political Theory*. Polity Press.

9. Tolleson-Rinehart, Sue, Carrol, Susan J 2006. Far from Ideal. The Gender Politics of Political Science. *American Political Science Review*, vol, 100, N 4.

10. Ibid.

11. Tucker, Erica 2014. Feminist Political Theory. *The Encyclopedia of Political Thought* (published online on 15 SEP 2014).

3. Rejection of essentialism and the notion that social categories are unchangeable.

4. Focus on experience or critical understanding of individual experience of the subject.

Even though feminist critique of political theory as an official discipline only came into being in the 1960s, some attempts of the critical analysis of early liberal feminists has been found from the late 17th century. One of the first critics of the idea that rationality was a characteristic of men alone was Mary Astell (1666-1731), who is also known as the first feminist of the West.¹² According to Astell, men and women have same abilities and rationality, and therefore they should have equal access to education.

It is worth mentioning that advocates for women’s political rights in the late 18th century also included men. For example, French philosopher Condorcet argued that women should have equal education and political rights as men, and exclusion of women from politics based on the fact that they have menstrual cycles or carry pregnancies is nonsense. Similar ideas were expressed by German writer and intellectual Theodor Von Hippel who argued that educated men should become advocates for women’s liberation and political rights¹³.

Among the most well-known and influential critics of traditional political theory are Hannah Arendt, Nancy Hartsock, Nancy J. Hirschmann and Carol Gilligan.

Arendt presented new ways of approaching such concepts as democratic decision making, identity politics, and political judgment.¹⁴ Standpoint theory developed by Hartsock argues that possession of unequal power will always produce different knowledge for men as for women.¹⁵

According to Hirschmann, liberalism does not take into account the feminist perspective.¹⁶ Her main argument is that liberal political

12. Bryson, Valerie 2003. *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction*. Palgrave Macmillan.

13. Ibid.

14. Ritter, Gretchen, Mellow, Nicole 2000. The State of Gender Studies in Political Science. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 571, N 1.

15. Ibid.

16. Hirschmann, Nancy.J. 1989. Freedom, Recognition, and Obligation: A Feminist Approach to Political Theory. *American Political Science Review*, vol. 83, Issue 04.

thought presents *self* predominantly through the prism of male identity.¹⁷ Hirschmann also argues that men are more attracted to liberalism, because it reflects their viewpoint and somehow excludes female standpoint. The cornerstone of Hirschmann's concept is that there is certain correlation between the concept of the *self* developed in liberalism and the construction of male identity.

Social psychologist Carol Gilligan widely criticized theories of morality developed in psychology which tried to "prove" that women are less moral than men are. In her own research, Gilligan found that women and men have a different sense of morality: women's morality is associated with an *ethic of care* versus men's morality which is mainly associated with an *ethic of justice*.¹⁸

Gender roles, ideology and political engagement became the subject of interest along with the development of feminist critiques of social and political sciences. According to feminist sociologists all institutions are gendered, and likewise feminist political scientists argue that "no aspect of politics can be understood without an understanding of the ways that gender influences underlying assumptions and dynamics".¹⁹ According to sociologist Joan Acker, gender is an inevitable part of processes, practices, images, ideologies, and distribution of power within them.²⁰ Political science has always been a reflection of the overall political culture and has dominated in societal attitudes and perceptions of the roles of men and women. As Sue Tolleson-Rinehart and Susan Carol state, "political science has located its most central concepts, particularly power and the state, in the public, and, like society generally, has aligned what it means to be a man or woman with public and private".²¹

Although, as discussed above, feminist critique of political theory can be traced back to 17th century, there are very few feminist writings in mainstream political theory. Issues such as patriarchal power, male-

17. **Sinopoly**, Richard, C, **Hirschmann**, Nancy, J. 1991. Feminism and Liberal Theory. *American Political Science Review*, vol. 85. Issue 01.

18. **Ritter**, Gretchen, **Mellow**, Nicole 2000. The State of Gender Studies in Political Science. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 571, N 1.

19. **Tolleson-Rinehart**, Sue, **Carrol**, Susan J 2006. Far from Ideal. The Gender Politics of Political Science. *American Political Science Review*, vol, 100, N 4.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

dominated leadership, and legitimate government were discussed in the political theory. It should be mentioned that political theorists have discussed the issues of power and government for more than two thousand years, but mainly in the context of the rich and the poor, masters and slaves, government and citizens, elites and masses, and have never really touched upon the issue of power between men and women.²² In fact, feminist theory challenged the public-private binary that has been part of power relations for centuries. Feminist theory deconstructs how power is presented in the concepts of sex, sexuality, sexual identity, gender roles, gender stereotypes, gender symbolism and many other concepts of gender theory.²³

As Carol Pateman argues, political theory never really acknowledged gender based power as political power and did not take feminist theories seriously which challenge the legitimacy of patriarchal government. Moreover, according to Pateman, women, womanhood and women's bodies represent everything that is associated with private life versus public life, therefore women cannot develop political morality unlike men who possess all necessary capacities required for citizenship. This dichotomy between the private and the public is central to feminist movement.²⁴ According to Pateman "although some feminists treat the dichotomy as a universal, trans-historical and trans-cultural feature of human existence, feminist criticism is primarily directed at the separation and opposition between the public and private spheres in liberal theory and practice".²⁵

In order to establish a democratic society, the whole concept of masculinity and femininity should be deconstructed. As Pateman says, identities of men and women now "stand opposed, part of the multi-faceted expression of the patriarchal dichotomy between reason and desire".²⁶ But according to her, the most important and challenging question of political theory still remains about how to equally incorporate masculine and feminine identities into political life, and overcome the

22. **Pateman**, Carol 1989. *The Disorder of Women*. Stanford University Press.

23. **Hawkesworth**, Mary 2010. *From Constitutive Outside to the Political of Extinction: Critical Race Theory, Feminist Theory, and Political Theory*. *Political Research Quarterly*, 63 (3).

24. **Pateman**, Carol 1989. *The Disorder of Women*. Stanford University Press.

25. Ibid.

26. **Pateman**, Carol 1989. *The Disorder of Women*. Stanford University Press.

existing duality and opposition between sexes in political life.

Starting from Aristotle, political philosophy in general has always focused on the public whilst excluding the private realm, which was dominated by women. However, the private world itself has always been a product of patriarchy and, in the households, women still play a secondary and submissive role. As later feminist movements revealed, the private life has also always been dominated by unequal power division, control and violence against women. Feminist critique of political theory stresses that the private in the patriarchal system will always be structured by *political* inequalities.²⁷ "In the public, from which women were excluded, men set the terms of their public and private power. Women were forcibly and legally excluded from participating in public. They could not vote, matriculate into most institutions of higher education, or serve in military institutions. Women were excluded from any kind of political participation even as laws they had no hand in crafting or voting upon cemented their inequality in matters of voting, divorce, property ownership and labor".²⁸

Pateman also widely criticizes the theory of social contract, seeing it as a theory of an exclusive fraternal agreement and masculine order. The main categories in social contract theory, such as "individual", "the public", "civil society", are categories developed from the patriarchal understanding of civil society and social contract. Pateman therefore argues that as long as social contract is a patriarchal act, it excludes women from that process, and therefore does not allow women to be part of civil society. As Pateman writes, "one problem about the social contract is the question of exactly who makes the agreement.... Women have no part in it; as natural subjects they lack the requisite capacities and abilities. The "individuals" of the stories are men."²⁹

It is obvious that the question of feminism and political theory is very much interconnected with the processes in the development of civil society. As Pateman states, "in the story of the creating of civil society through an original agreement, women are brought into the new social order as inhabitants of a private sphere that is part of civil society and yet

27. **Tucker**, Ericka 2014. *Feminist Political Theory. The Encyclopedia of Political Thought* (published online on 15 SEP 2014).

28. *Ibid.*

29. **Pateman**, Carol 1989. *The Disorder of Women*. Stanford University Press.

is separated from the public world of freedom, equality, rights, contract, interests and citizenship. Women, that is to say, are incorporated into the civil order differently from men."³⁰ This perception and association of women with private and men with public comes from more fundamental attitudes derived from classic social contract theories that only men are born free and equal. As Pateman mentions, contract theories constructed sexual difference as a political difference, the difference between men's natural freedom and women's natural subjection. In other words, for a long time the social contract was masculine and non-inclusive by its nature, and only with the rise in feminist critiques did it become possible to rewrite the social contract theory to make it more inclusive and equal.

In her book *Gender in Political Theory*, Judith Squires argues that bringing gender perspective into political theory does not just mean engendering concepts that have been gender-neutral for a long time, but also revealing the highly gendered nature of mainstream political theory.³¹ Squires raises a very important question saying that politics have been "not only notoriously resistant to the incorporation of women, their interests and perspectives", but also unwilling to define the activities of women as political. According to Squires, feminist review and critiques of political theory not only opened up new horizons for theorizing women's identity, but also deconstructed male subjectivity and identity in politics. The author distinguishes three approaches to describe relations between gender and politics: *inclusion*, *reversal* and *displacement*. Basic presupposition beyond the approach of 'inclusion' is that women are excluded from politics and therefore certain measures should be undertaken to include them in politics. This position is often shared by liberal feminists. Those advocating for a strategy of 'reversal' argue that the term 'political' should become more open for women's perspectives and views. This position is mainly shared by radical feminists. Finally, the 'displacement' approach seeks to "destabilize the apparent opposition between the strategies of inclusion and reversal".³²

In her critique of liberalism and early political theory, Pateman also argues that with the development of the concept of rationality and

30. **Pateman**, Carol 1989. *The Disorder of Women*. Stanford University Press.

31. **Squires**, Judith 2000. *Gender in Political Theory*. Polity Press.

32. *Ibid.*

rational human beings, women started to be perceived as a source of disorder: "Women are a source of disorder because their being, or their nature, is such that it necessarily leads them to exert a disruptive influence in social and political life. Women have a disorder at their very centers- in their morality- which can bring about the destruction of the state. Moreover, the threat posed by women is exacerbated because of the place, or social sphere, for which they are fitted by their natures- the family."³³

Susan Bourque and Jean Grossholtz distinguish four categories of distortion of the participation of women in politics.³⁴ The first category includes the misrepresentation of female political characteristics, attitudes, and behavior in the literature. The second category deals with the assumption of male dominance, with presuppositions that men should occupy dominant political roles and control political decisions. The third category, somehow related to the second one, refers to the socially-accepted characteristics of masculinity, such as aggressiveness, competitiveness and assertiveness as norms of political behavior. As Bourque and Grossholtz mention, "rational political behavior is defined by the male pattern, it is by definition the expression of male values, and irrationality is by definition the expression of female values". Finally, the fourth category of distortion refers to the assumptions that underrepresentation of women in political life plays essential role in "normal" functioning of society.³⁵

For the purpose of our research it is important to talk briefly about the subfield of political theory, *American politics*. This subfield of political theory is studying such topics as gender and voting behavior, social policy and gender, candidate selection processes and policy choices of legislator. Starting from 1960s, this subfield has been primarily focused on styles, behaviors, and capacities of men and women in the politics.³⁶ The main questions that feminist-oriented scholars in the area of American politics are asking is: how, when and why men and women differ in their political attitudes and behavior.

33. **Pateman**, Carol 1989. *The Disorder of Women*. Stanford University Press.

34. **Phillips**, Anne 1998. *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford University Press.

35. Ibid

36. **Ritter**, Gretchen, **Mellow**, Nicole 2000. *The State of Gender Studies in Political Science. The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 571, N 1.

One of the contemporary theories in gender studies, *Developmental theory*, also has its own explanations about gender gaps in politics. The core concept of developmental theory is an assumption that the division of gender roles in contemporary society does not create favorable conditions for women to enter politics.³⁷ Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris distinguish three main points in the developmental theories that can explain gendered differences in the political behavior and attitudes of men and women: 1) differences between societies in general based on their level of political and economic development; 2) differences within societies based on generational cohorts, and 3) differences between societies based on structural and cultural factors.³⁸ Unlike other authors, Inglehart and Norris argue that the shift in the representation of women in politics is determined by the rise of post-materialist values and the development of the feminist movement and accordingly feminist identity and consciousness.³⁹

Despite the large amount of work done by feminist critics and gender analysts, political theory still remains a very patriarchal and conservative discipline. In their article *The State of Gender Studies in Political Science*, Gretchen Ritter and Nicole Mellow state that "although high-quality work is being done on gender in political science, it has had only a modest impact on the field as a whole. Part of the reason may lie in resistance to gender as a valid subject for analysis."⁴⁰

G. Ritter and N. Mellow distinguish two main reasons for poor impact of gender studies in political theories: 1) resistance to gender as a valid subject for analyses, and 2) structure of political theory and its divisions of different subfields that quite often ignore the work of each other.⁴¹

A shift in women's representation in political science as a discipline happened from the 1960s to the 1980s. "The number of doctorates awarded to women in 1967-1968 alone reversed the decline begun in

37. **Inglehart**, Ronald, **Norris**, **Pippa** 2000. The developmental theory of the gender gap: women's and men's voting behavior in global perspective. *International Political Science Review*, vol. 21, N 4.

38. Ibid.

39. Ibid.

40. **Ritter**, Gretchen, **Mellow**, Nicole 2000. *The State of Gender Studies in Political Science. The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 571, N 1.

41. Ibid.

the 1950s and brought political science's proportion of women with PhDs closer to that of other fields".⁴² Research and scholarship in women and politics brought attention to women's political careers and "corrected the distorted picture of women depicted in the earlier political science literature".⁴³

The issue of women and politics is closely interrelated with the whole concept of women's social and political representation. The main questions here are: what does "representation of women" mean? What does it mean to be represented? Under what circumstances are women's interests represented?⁴⁴

As Sapiro mentions, throughout the whole history, the biggest objection to women's participation at all levels of political life was the fact that the man is the head of the household, therefore he also should be granted the right to represent his family interests publicly.⁴⁵ Sapiro argues that, in order to be able to represent women's interests, it is first of all important to understand under which women become represented in certain political system. This answer requires new studies of core questions of politics, "informed by a recognition that gender differentiation and stratification profoundly structure human life". In this aspect, four main factors become essential.⁴⁶

- *Political economy*, including economic needs, effects of international politics, federalism and international organizations. Another factor influencing the representation of women's needs in public policy is intergroup tension. According to Sapiro, the policies that affect women must be considered in the context of conflicting political demands and problems.

- *Ideology*, meaning dominant political system and values. In her comparative analyses of various ideologies, Sapiro shows that in fact there is little difference among liberal, social democratic and Marxist systems. Another dimension of ideology that plays an essential role in

42. Tolleson-Rinehart, Sue, Carrol, Susan J 2006. Far from Ideal. The Gender Politics of Political Science. *American Political Science Review*, vol, 100, N 4.

43. Ibid.

44. Phillips, Anne 1998. *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford University Press.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid.

women's political representation is religiosity/secularism and the degree of religious fundamentalism of a given country.

- *Feminist movements and interest organizations*. Sapiro distinguishes eight strategies or techniques that women's organizations around the world are using in order to gain influence and legitimacy in patriarchal systems. The **first** techniques are so-called conventional pressure techniques, such as legal action, lobbying, electoral participation, interactions with officials and press. The **second** group of techniques includes nonconventional pressure techniques, such as protests, demonstrations, public actions, etc. A **third** strategy is consciousness-raising. Establishment of alternative institutions (providing women legal, psychological, social, health and other help) constitutes a **fourth** strategy. A **fifth** strategy is separatism or the establishment of groups and institutions whose goal is to provide self-contained services which will be opposed to male-dominated institutions or non-feminist ideology. Sapiro called the **sixth** strategy, caucus- groups of women within various occupational, educational or political organizations and institutions. A **seventh** well-known strategy among women's organization technique is coalition building with similar organizations with shared goals and values. And finally the **last** strategy is an engagement with international organizations. Besides analyses of women's organizations' strategies, Sapiro suggests studying the response of government groups in order to understand the whole issue of women's political representations. The most common response is not an acceptance or rejection though, but more often, symbolic manipulation and tendency to depoliticize the issue. According to Sapiro, "every time someone questions the impact of a new policy affecting women's status on 'the basic unit of society, the family', public-private distinction is being questioned".⁴⁷

- *Women as representatives*. The major two questions that Sapiro raises when talking about women as representatives are: 1) whether women make a difference once they are elected, and 2) whether an increase in the number of women in positions of power are the key to representing women. Based on years of research, Sapiro distinguishes the following areas that affect and will continue to affect women's political representation. These areas are: 1) women in politics making

47. Phillips, Anne 1998. *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford University Press.

some difference in government responsiveness to women's interests, 2) the presence of women in politics contributing to an equal distribution of power, participation, and decision-making, 3) the increasing number of women in politics influencing power symbolic changes in politics in general, giving space to other under-represented groups of population.⁴⁸

Continuing the discussion on women's political representation, Anne Phillips suggests two main arguments as to why women should be equally represented. The first argument is an argument of justice. In her article *Democracy and Representation* Phillips states that "...it is patently and grotesquely unfair for men to monopolize representation. If there were no obstacles operating to keep certain groups of people out of political life, then we would expect positions of political influence to be randomly distributed between both sexes and across all the ethnic groups that make up the society."⁴⁹ The second argument raised by Phillips is about the representation of women's interests. The argument is based on the basic concepts of political realism, for example that the interests of all groups in society should have equal opportunities of representation.

48. Phillips, Anne 1998. *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford University Press.

49. Ibid.

**SOME
EXPLANATIONS
OF WOMEN'S
LOW
REPRESENTATION
IN FORMAL
POLITICS**

CHAPTER II

In the literature on women and politics, a lot of different factors are distinguished that either help women in or prevent them from pursuing political careers. Often these factors have different names, but the meaning and explanation remain the same. They all include information on institutional, structural and socio-cultural variables. Below we will present selected concepts that explain women's participation or underrepresentation in the politics from **institutional**, **contextual** and **individual** levels.

Pamela Paxton and Sheri Kunovich distinguish the following factors: 1) supply-side factors, 2) demand-side factors, 3) cultural factors, and 4) international actors and institutional regulations.¹

Similarly, in the book *Women's Political Participation and Representation in Asia: Obstacles and Challenges* Kazuki Iwanaga suggests the concept of the *facilitator* that can help women in their advancement in the politics. Three types of facilitators have been proposed:

1. Institutional
2. Contextual
3. Individual

Since many distinguishing factors overlap in different theories, below we present the combination of factors from different theoretical concepts.

1. Supply-side approach argues that supply of women necessary for political activism and participation is determined by gender socialization, which very often limits women's opportunities and choices to be involved in the political life. As Paxton, Kunovich and Hughes mention in their article *Gender and Politics*, "across both developed and developing countries, men are consistently found to be more interested in politics and have more political knowledge than women.... At the same time, across all races, this gender gap disappears or is even reversed among children and teenagers". Besides this, women lack the necessary resources such as time and money to participate in politics. The supply-side approach also brings important factors such as type of

1. Paxton, Pamela, Kunovich, Sheri, Hughes, Melanie 2007. Gender in Politics. *The Annual Review of Sociology*. Fall (8).

employment to our attention. Data on the correlation between women's economic participation and political activism shows that certain types of work, which give women more opportunities, not only raise their financial and social status, develop social capital, but also provide women more opportunities to discuss and debate politics.² Similarly, women's involvement in civil society and non-governmental work opens up more opportunities for women's political activity.³

2. The demand-side approach stresses the issue of power and the so-called rules of the political game. The main question that the advocates of this approach are asking is whether women can attain political power and, if so, how.⁴ Demand for women in politics is dependent on a broad range of factors, such as democracy, the nature of electoral system, the presence of gender quotas, the structure of political parties and political leadership, and finally the voters' behavior.⁵ Even though all aforementioned factors are important for women's participation, there is no data showing which factor or combination of factors plays the most important role in the advancement of women in politics. Interestingly, data shows that democratic regimes are not always favorable to women. Moreover, women are even less represented in democratic systems and especially in the transitional periods from authoritarian to democratic regimes.⁶ As for electoral systems, there are more women elected in the countries that have both proportional representation and plurality-majority system.⁷ Gender quotas, including constitutional, electoral and political party quotas, is perhaps one of the most controversial factors used to promote women's political participation. Data of research on quota shows that gender quotas do not function in the same way in all countries across the globe. It very much depends on the whole process of quota adaption (adopted naturally or by the pressure of international community) and the nature of political leadership (male dominated or gender balanced). Nevertheless, there is evidence that gender quotas can have a positive impact on the level of women's representation in the

2. Paxton, Pamela, Kunovich, Sheri, Hughes, Melanie 2007. Gender in Politics. *The Annual Review of Sociology*. Fall (8).

3. Ibid.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid.

politics.⁸ In fact "quotas have been viewed as one of the most effective and expeditious affirmative action policies in increasing women's participation and representation in both elective and appointive positions in public office".⁹ More than 40 countries in the world introduced some sort of gender quotas.

The *quota system* was first introduced in politics in late 1970s. The quota system is a mechanism which allows the government, political parties and initiatives to address the gender gap through increasing the number of women in government and in political sphere in general. The quotas for women require that women must constitute a certain number or percentage of the members of a body. It can refer to candidate lists, the parliamentary assembly, committees or the government.¹⁰ There are several types of gender quotas presented below:

A *legal quota system*¹¹ can be laid down in the constitution, in electoral constitutions or in political party constitutions, which ensure unconditional implementation. Legal quotas force all parties and political bodies to nominate a certain number of female candidates.

A *voluntary party quota system*¹² can be used by political parties at will, via voluntary adoption, which has not yet mandated by legislation or constitution. In many countries this system is used a lot by center-left-leaning parties, while liberal and conservative parties are opposed to such systems. The aforementioned types of quotas can be labeled as candidate quotas.¹³

The *reserved seats or sex quota system*¹⁴ specifies a 'critical value', below which the government or other political body is considered to be gender imbalanced and requires re-elections. The example quotas

8. Iwanaga, Kazuki (ed) 2008. *Women's Political Participation and Representation in Asia: Obstacles and Challenges*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies.

9. Ibid.

10. Mark, Jones P 1998. Gender Quotas, Electoral Laws, and the Election of Women: Lessons from the Argentine Provinces. *Comparative Political Studies*, 31 (1).

11. Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers (2005); The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), Sweden, pp. 142-144 .

12. Ibid.

13. United Nations Children's Fund, The State of the World's Children 2004.

14. Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers (2005); The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), Sweden.

for such a system can be the provision of 20% female representation among legislators and 50% among politicians.

In some countries where women historically have been excluded from political life, a tendency to put quotas in place for women in politics have become in a way a kick-off or fast track for female representatives to quickly be included in political life of that country.

The scientists and scholars who are against the introduction of gender quota systems tend to outline mainly the following arguments:¹⁵ (a) based on the fact that, using quotas, women receive more preference, the quota system is seen as being against the principle of equal opportunity for all, (b) the quota system suggests a choice between social categories, like gender, whereas the political representation should be a choice between ideas and party platforms, (c) quotas assume that the voters vote for a politician based on the gender, whereas the choice should be done based on the qualifications of the politicians and the better-qualified candidates should be elected as a result, (d) women themselves are against quotas as they do not want to be elected on the basis that they are women, and (e) it is likely that if the quotas for women are widely used, demands for quotas for other minority groups will follow. Accordingly, such situation could result in politics of sheer group-interest representation.¹⁶

There is another group of advocates in support for gender quotas who suggest several **advantages**, such as:¹⁷ (a) quotas for women compensate for barriers which in fact prevent women from their access to political positions, (b) quotas ensure representation of several women in politics, thus minimizing the stress often experienced by the single 'token' women, (c) women have the right as citizens to equal representation, (d) political life is a necessary part of women's experience, (e) women's interests cannot be represented by men, and only a large amount of women can represent the diversity of women, (f) although women's political qualifications are underestimated and

15. Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers (2005); The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), Sweden.

16. Pande, Rohni, Ford, Deanna 2001. Gender Quotas and Female Leadership: A Review. *Harvard University*.

17. Women in Parliament: Beyond Numbers (2005); The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), Sweden.

minimized in a male-dominated political system, women are as qualified as men, (g) despite the idea that the quotas discriminate against individual men, in reality the quotas limit the tendency of political parties to nominate only men. Therefore, the voters are given an opportunity to vote for women candidates as well, and h) it is sometimes impossible to justify men's occupation of more than 80 percent of the parliamentary seats in the world.¹⁸

There have been a number of good practices in introducing and using gender quota systems in various countries, where the rates of women's political participation were shown to have significantly increased afterwards.

3.Contextual factors refer to the cultural, social and economic context in which women's participation takes place. Iwanaga distinguished three types of contextual facilitators: cultural, international, and socioeconomic. The idea is well-researched, that *cultural values* and traditions can be an obstacle for women's political participation, in particular attitudes toward women's leadership, division of gender roles, and expectations from men and women in a particular society. The perception of women as less strong and less competent leaders than men exists perhaps in every society. Even in those countries where women's participation in education and labor market made some significant progress during the past decades, women still face cultural obstacles when they try to obtain political leadership.

There are also findings which show the role of religion on women's political representation. Thus, it has been demonstrated that countries with large numbers of Protestants are more supportive of women's political leaders, than countries with large numbers of Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Muslims.¹⁹ This cultural approach is becoming more and more popular among researchers of gender and politics, because it can be a reliable predictor of women's representation in the politics.²⁰

18. Pande, Rohni, Ford, Deanna 2001. Gender Quotas and Female Leadership: A Review. *Harvard University*.

19. Ibid.

20. Inglehart, Ronald, Norris, Pippa 2000. The developmental theory of the gender gap: women's and men's voting behavior in global perspective. *International Political Science Review*, vol. 21, N 4.

The importance of cultural factors has been proved by the research conducted by Inglehart and Norris.²¹ A survey revealed that there is a strong correlation between attitudes toward women's leadership in society and the number of women in politics.²² Similarly, societies with egalitarian political cultures have more women in the parliament.²³

Iwanaga makes an interesting observation concerning the impact of cultural factors on the representation of women in politics. Iwanaga argues that, in the majority of societies, women are seen as symbols of innocence and moral superiority and often even viewed as more moral than men and therefore do not belong to the "dirty" world of politics.²⁴ At the same time, women are also perceived as much more emotional and sensitive, which also makes them less "suitable" for a "tough" political career. According to Iwanaga, these particular stereotypes have contributed to the marginalization of women in politics and the acceptance of politics as an inappropriate place for women. This supposed antithesis between women and politics has a powerful influence on people's attitudes and on women themselves in coming forward as candidates.²⁵ Iwanaga also discovered a correlation between religion and women's political leadership. For example, the analyses of the data from the World Values Survey (1995-2001) showed that Islam is an obstacle for women's political participation, and the participation of women in the political sphere is overall higher in Christian countries.²⁶ It was also proven that the proportion of elected women is lower in those societies where the dominant religion is hostile to the advancement of women and gender equality.²⁷

Among contextual factors, *socioeconomic* factors play a very important role. Different surveys have revealed a correlation between women's representation in politics and women's involvement and representation

21. Inglehart, Ronald, Norris, Pippa 2000. The developmental theory of the gender gap: women's and men's voting behavior in global perspective. *International Political Science Review*, vol. 21, N 4.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. *Women's Political Participation and Representation in Asia Obstacles and Challenges* Edited by Iwanaga, K. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies 2008.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

in the labor market. As Iwanaga mentions, women often have a lower socioeconomic status than men do, and therefore occupational backgrounds of women are frequently not as suitable for political careers as those of men. A comparative survey conducted by Reynolds in 180 countries shows that levels of women's socioeconomic development are positively correlated with the numbers of female parliamentarians.²⁸ At the same time, data on correlation between women's political representation and involvement in the labor market can be controversial when it comes to the comparison between developed and developing countries. In particular, it has been found that the same variables, such as electoral system, women's participation in the labor market, attitudes toward women's leadership in the society, etc., statistically have a significantly consistent effect on women's political representation in developing countries, whilst not having any effect in developed countries.²⁹

4. International actors and the commitment of local governments to international conventions and regulations also play an essential role in the promotion of women in politics. As comparative data of desk reviews on women's representation in politics shows, the countries that have international obligations and commitments and ratified international agreements have relatively more women in various political institutions.³⁰

5. Institutional facilitators refer to the political structure, type of political and electoral system, the nature of the legal system, the role of the state, and the level of party competition. Among other factors Iwanaga mentions incumbency, turnover and political campaign finance. Institutional facilitators are divided into *legal*, *electoral* and *political*. Legal facilitators refer to formal and legal eligibility for women's representation in politics. Electoral factors include types of electoral system and its rules. Surveys show that the electoral system in fact has an impact on the representation of women in politics. It has been proved that women are more likely to be elected in a proportional representation system than in single-member majoritarian systems. Quotas as a main tool of addressing political factors have been discussed earlier.

28. *Women's Political Participation and Representation in Asia Obstacles and Challenges* Edited by Iwanaga, K. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies 2008.

29. Ibid.

30. Squires, Judith 2000. *Gender in Political Theory*. Polity Press.

The Role of Gatekeepers

For the purpose of our survey, political parties and party leaders represent a particular interest of study. Surveys conducted in the past twenty to thirty years examining the impact of political parties on women's political advancement in their respective societies show that the characteristics of political parties matter for women.

Various research shows that perception of women among political elite almost everywhere in the world has been shaped by gender stereotypes, and that these stereotypes play an important role in this group's recruitment and promotion of candidates.³¹ Moreover, female candidates are quite often forced into "women's roles" and defined as women first, and not as politicians.³² Interestingly, at the same time, female candidates tend not to speak about "women's issues" and/or emphasize their "domestic" and private role as wives, mothers, etc., as shown by other surveys. In fact, too much emphasis on women's issues in a campaign might give an impression that the candidate "is too narrow in her concerns and will not adequately represent all the people".³³

Margaret Conway mentions that the role of gatekeepers in determining who can run for public office is crucial in the promotion of women in politics.³⁴ At the same time, she mentions that most of the research in this area ignores the prior selection phase of office seeking, which is believed to be one of the most important stages of election process.³⁵ As Conway mentions, "in that prior selection processes, many potential women candidates may be discouraged from even entering the primary election nominating contest. Although primary elections to nominate a political party's candidates for the general election mitigate the influence of political gatekeepers relative to the past, gatekeepers retain substantial influence over who can successfully complete in the nomination phase of an election."³⁶

31. **Phillips**, Anne 1998. *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford University Press.

32. *Ibid*.

33. *Ibid*.

34. **Conway**, Margaret 2001. Women and Political Participation. *Political Science and Politics*, vol/issue 02.

35. *Ibid*.

36. *Ibid*.

In his book *The Missing Majority: The Recruitment of Women as State Legislative Candidates*, David Niven argues that women are hardly present among the political elites, not because they lack the necessary knowledge and skills, or they do not have important social networks, but because political party leaders, the majority of whom are men, prefer candidates similar to themselves and alienate those who are not similar. Niven supports his argument with a survey conducted among women politicians and political party leaders. The results of one survey showed that the majority of interviewed women experienced some sort of bias in favor of men. Even political leaders agreed that there is a gender bias in the processes of recruitment. In particular, men political leaders tend to believe that male candidates have more chances to win in the election, than women.³⁷ Male party leaders also rated characteristics which are seen as masculine as more valuable. According to Niven, party leaders in general do not have enough information about the capacities of female candidates, due to which their thinking and behavior is extremely stereotypical and biased.³⁸

One particular hypothesis that Niven suggests is very useful for our research of the Armenian political institutions that will be tested in during our survey. This hypothesis is "leaders who are older, who have been in their position longer, and who wield a great deal of power in their party tend to be most likely to see women candidates as different from themselves and, hence, less appropriate for elected office. As these leaders retire or leave office and are replaced by younger, less singularly powerful party chairs, biases against women candidates will decrease".³⁹

Summarizing the findings of different surveys, P. Paxton, Sh. Kunovich and M. Hughes show that leftist parties are comparatively likely to promote women. Apart from that, representation of women in party leadership increases women's representation in the politics. It is more likely that "female party elites will try to support female candidates in elections by influencing list placement. Women in party leadership, or

37. **Niven**, David 2000. *The Missing Majority: The Recruitment of Women as State Legislative Candidates*. Praeger Publishers.

38. *Ibid*.

39. *Ibid*.

even in mid-level positions, can further influence women's numbers by pushing for party rules targeting certain percentages of women as candidates.... Besides, when parties are resistant to change, it is also more likely that women will go outside the party structure to form their own parties".⁴⁰

Notwithstanding the huge body of existing research, there are still gaps in our knowledge, this gap also acknowledged by the literature itself. Summarizing the literature review of future research priorities in the area of women in politics allowed us to identify the following areas:

1. Development of new theories for non-Western and less developed countries and regions.
2. Development of more precise measures of the causes and consequences of women's political participation.
3. Collecting longitudinal data on women's political participation, representation and impact.
4. Collecting subnational data on women's participation and representation and more extensive data on women in political parties.
5. Understanding of how women's political power and influence is affected by their actions in traditional and non-traditional political structures.
6. Understanding of how: 1) acts of individual women, 2) women's movements in the particular country, and 3) state gender machinery, promote women's participation in the politics.
7. Conducting cross-cultural surveys on women's political participation.

40. Phillips, Anne 1998. *Feminism and Politics*. Oxford University Press.

**WOMEN'S
POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION
IN
POST
COMMUNIST
COUNTRIES**

CHAPTER III

Historical Overview: Women's Political Participation during Communism

In history and literature, the communist political system is frequently referred to as a promoter of an ideology of gender equality. During this era, communist states adopted policies calling for equality between men and women and enforced mechanisms for the legislation of that ideology. Many women were engaged in social life and labor; many supportive institutions such as kindergartens and day-cares were established to ensure women's equality in terms of opportunities. At the same time reforms in political life were also implemented. Women were well-represented in the power-concentrated communist party, though only a few women were in leading positions. In 1970s the quota system was introduced into the majority of the communist states. The proportion of women in parliamentary candidate lists reached 30% in some countries. Therefore, the number of women in parliaments increased too. In 1980 Lithuania and Latvia had the most women representatives (36% and 35% respectively), while among Central and Eastern European countries Poland (23% in 1980), Bulgaria (22% in 1981) and Estonia (21% in 1985) had the lowest numbers of women representatives. Even Western European democracies with rich history of feminism were far from reaching such indicators.

Though these results could be seen as victory of the communist system, the positive changes were rather artificially constructed, which has become more obvious since the independence of the states and as a result of their first elections.

Magdolna Kosa-Kovacs¹ refers to the ideology of gender equality adopted by the communist model as "statist feminism", which forced women's emancipation by introducing gender-based quota system. This system was a rather artificial as the decision-making power remained male-dominated, while women's participation in parliaments was assured by quota system. Women's participation was obliged by the system. It was top-down obligation and had caused no cultural-

1. **Ko'sa'-Kova'cs**, Magdolna 2004. *The Situation of Women in the Countries of Post-Communism Transition*. Report, Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly.

behavioral changes. Therefore, after the collapse of communist system, women rarely appeared on the decision-making level.

Furthermore, though women were given opportunities to be more socially and politically engaged, they still suffered from double burden, as responsibilities in the household were not equally shared by family members. Therefore, after the states declared independence, women left the male-dominated spheres, particularly politics, focusing instead on family life. They no longer felt the motivation to compete in “dirty” politics where they were not valued as an equal to men candidates to high positions on decision-making level.

Dramatic Decline: Women’s Political Engagement in Post-Communist Countries

Communist top-down politics had not left any changes in political culture; therefore women were immediately excluded upon the collapse of the system. Furthermore, as the communist ideology did not tolerate feminism, post-communist countries were decades late from feminism being established as an ideology there.² Rather it was stigmatized as a Western value, destroying Soviet families. This negative perception of feminism is still a hot topic for many post-communist countries.

The new post-communist situation reflected on women both positively and negatively. New realities reinforced men’s domination in social-economic and political lives, contributing to masculine culture flourishing.³ The privileges entitled to women disappeared leaving them alone to face new realities. War in some countries engendered a new situation which increased the vulnerability of women to male violence.⁴

However, the new reality had its impact in the formation of women’s social movements. The post-communist countries were far behind

2. Sloat, Amanda 2005. Fixing an Old Divide: *The Political Participation of Women in an Enlarged Europe*.

3. Ko’sa’-Kova’cs, Magdolna 2004. *The Situation of Women in the Countries of Post-Communism Transition*. Report, Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly.

4. Nikolić-Ristanović, Vesna 2004. *Post-Communism: Women’s Lives in Transition* (special issue of Feminist Review N 76).

Western European ones in terms of feminist movements’ development. But new realities enforced women to reinterpret their status and realize the importance of struggle to reestablish their position in society.

After the dissolution of the communist system, women’s representation in politics significantly decreased. Due to new electoral systems and legislative changes, the proportion of women in parliaments dropped to around 10% in post-communist countries.⁵ In Hungary, the number of women elected declined to 7% in the first free elections, while in 1980, it was 30%, in Latvia 34.8% (1985) dropped to 5.5% (1990).⁶ The picture is primarily the same in all post-communist countries.

The removal of the quota system heavily influenced this decline. The number of women decreased along with political institutions regaining their power, and women were replaced by male counterparts.

Besides the lack of legislative mechanisms to ensure women’s representation in the political system, there were several other factors, mainly socio-cultural, preventing women from becoming engaged in politics.

During the communist era, politics was perceived as a “dirty game” and women were participants of that game only when required by the system. The new system merely fostered women’s decision to get out of that game. At the same time, political parties did not take any steps to engage women. They did not show any interest and political will to promote women in leadership.

Moreover, lack of solidarity among women was obvious, with no desire to help each other to achieve success. Women in leadership positions did not differ from their male counterparts in terms of becoming a part of male-dominated agenda.

There are also other factors for women’s low political mobilization. Some of them are the following:

- **Cultural-religious reasons:** the traditional role of women is

5. Ko’sa’-Kova’cs, Magdolna 2004. *The Situation of Women in the Countries of Post-Communism Transition*. Report, Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly.

6. Sloat, Amanda 2005. Fixing an Old Divide: *The Political Participation of Women in an Enlarged Europe*.

seen as in the home, fully devoted to education of next generation and following religious and cultural traditions. Women in politics are seen as exceptions or negatively perceived by the society, which tends to marginalize them.

- **Family responsibilities:** women are seen as having obligations towards family which should be prioritized at expense of interests and career. Since the entire burden of family lies on women's shoulders, they hardly find time for political career.

- **Harsh competition:** in a male-dominated structure, where women do not have sufficient support or social capital, they are more vulnerable in electoral competition and have fewer chances to win in harsh competition.

- **Weak feminist movement and civil society support:** in transitional societies, where social movements develop gradually, and women's movements are very far from being as strong as Western movements, women do not get support from the women's movement either. Solidarity among women is not on the agenda.

During recent decades, the tendency for more women to become involved in political structures is visible. Attitudes towards women in politics are changing and therefore more women are seen in politics. In the late 1990s and 2000s, there was a measurable change in the number of women in political structures. Women seek for male dominated position, such as Prime Minister (Bulgaria), Ministers of Foreign Affairs (Latvia) and Justice (Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania).⁷

These changes were conditioned by new political realities in the international arena.

The transformation of the political agenda in independent states positively impacted women's political engagement. In this regard, European Union (EU) enlargement policy significantly contributed to the promotion of gender equality policies in the majority of post-communist countries. The concept of gender equality prioritized by the EU in all spheres including politics was also highlighted in the EU enlargement

7. Sloat, Amanda 2005. Fixing an Old Divide: *The Political Participation of Women in an Enlarged Europe*.

policy. Therefore, all states seeking for membership in EU were obliged to follow those priorities.

As a first step, legislation was adopted according to international agreements to include non-discrimination articles dealing with equality issues.⁸ For instance, all the post-communist countries have ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)⁹ which is one of the grounding conventions dealing with women's issues. Further developments illustrated a positive tendency towards women's increased political participation.

The post-communist countries geographically bordering Western Europe have more women politicians due to close connections to Western political culture. For example, in Baltic States which are close to Scandinavian countries, women have started lobbying for intra-party quota system earlier than other post-communist countries.¹⁰

Western scholars single out several factors influencing women's involvement in politics. In particular, they mention that: 1) the number of women in higher education and involvement in the workforce positively correlates to women's participation in politics; 2) cultural features explain the degree to which women are involved in politics; 3) proportional representation electoral systems provide better conditions for women's political participation than other types of electoral systems.¹¹

Studies by John Ishiyama¹² and Richard Matland¹³ show that unlike western industrial democracies, where the above-mentioned factors characterize women's political participation, in post-communist societies the situation is different.

Despite the fact that number of women with higher education and engaged in the workforce is substantial in post-communist period, the

8. Sloat, Amanda 2005. Fixing an Old Divide: *The Political Participation of Women in an Enlarged Europe*.

9. Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979)

10. Matland, Richard E, Montgomery, Kathleen 2003. Women's Access to Political Power in Post-Communist Europe. Oxford Scholarship Online.

11. Ibid.

12. Ishiyama, John T. 2003. Women's Parties in Post-Communist Politics. *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*. Vol. 17 N 2.

13. Matland, Richard E, Montgomery, Kathleen 2003. Women's Access to Political Power in Post-Communist Europe. Oxford Scholarship Online.

number of women involved in politics is dramatically low. Still, "for women to be considered an attractive candidate, they need more education, more party service, or a very prominent position in the society... In short, to be considered a man's equal, women had to be more than a man's equal".¹⁴

In the countries of East-Central Europe (Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria) women with higher education are more interested in politics than women from the Baltic States and CIS countries.¹⁵

Furthermore, according to Matland¹⁶, while electoral systems have strong effects on the level of women's political participation in industrial societies, they do not effect women's participation in post-communist developing countries.

In contradiction to the popular argument that cultural features explain women's political participation, Ishiyama found out that in post-communist countries these two variables do not have significant correlation.¹⁷

Women and Political Parties in Post-Communist Countries

Communist political ideology promoted women's involvement in political parties as well. The number of working women as members of the only leading communist party was growing from year to year. These reforms could have had a positive impact on future political culture if they were not enforced by the regime without any consideration of cultural background. Therefore, it was not accidental that during democratic transition the number of women in newly established political parties as well as in political life in general declined sharply. However, the

14. Ibid.

15. **Ko'sa'-Kova'cs**, Magdolna 2004. *The Situation of Women in the Countries of Post-Communism Transition*. Report, Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly.

16. **Matland**, Richard E, **Montgomery**, Kathleen 2003. Women's Access to Political Power in Post-Communist Europe. Oxford Scholarship Online.

17. **Ishiyama, John T.** 2003. Women's Parties in Post-Communist Politics. *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*. Vol. 17 N 2.

new political environment created opportunities for women's parties to emerge.

Kitschelt,¹⁸ in describing parties in post-communist countries, distinguished between three ideal types: charismatic parties built around an individual leader based on loyalty towards him, clientelistic parties based around patronage rewarding loyal members, and programmatic parties based on an ideology of a well-functioning society.

In post-communist states, parties tend to adopt the clientelistic type where the leader is the main decision maker. Participation of women in the party depends on his will. In general, women are rarely part of such parties as they are not part to the inner cycle of leadership, therefore are not considered preferred candidate for the leadership. Such parties do not pay attention to advocacy campaigns around women's higher representation and are hardly influenced by them.

In contrary to clientelistic parties, programmatic parties, which are led by ideologies, are more concerned about women's engagement in parties. These parties tend to be close to Western type of parties and generously enjoy their support.

Women's Parties in Post-Communist Politics

Since the 1990s, women's parties have been formed in several post-communist countries. Some of them performed successfully at the early stage of their existence but could not sustain themselves further. The ideology of early stage women's parties was based on values of motherhood and family. They used to see their role in raising family and social security issues. Woman and her rights were rarely discussed by these parties.

For example, the *Women of Russia* political party was able to gain favorable public opinion because of their ideology based on the belief that mothers of Russia could save the country.¹⁹

18. **Kitschelt**, Herbert 1995. Formation of Party Cleavages in Post-Communist Democracies Theoretical Propositions. *Party Politics*. Vol. 1 N 4.

19. **Ishiyama, John T.** 2003. Women's Parties in Post-Communist Politics. *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*.

Western feminist ideology was by far unacceptable for them. A representative of Armenian women's political party *Shamiram* in an interview said: "Many called us "feminists", but we have always propagated an image of the strong man".²⁰

The majority of women's parties were grown out of communist-era institutions and organizations. They either had strong support in terms of other political parties led by men, or strong leaders among them with rich experience. Unfortunately, none of the women's parties was able to ensure stability of their activism through years.

Their instability is explainable by several factors. Those having support from political powers were unable to function independently after the "patron" parties lost their power. Those women's organizations which preferred working independently did not cooperate with other political parties, therefore were alone at competition and could not survive. Finally, the parties led by famous women lost their power either because those leaders left parties, or those women were no longer influential in society.

20. Elections of 1995.

**OBSTACLES
FOR
WOMEN'S
POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION
IN
ARMENIA**

CHAPTER VI

Women's Political Participation: Dynamics of Development

The question of women's rights in Armenia goes back as far as the 6th and 7th centuries when, according to the laws and regulations at the time, women and men had equal rights and opportunities with regards to property, divorce, and remarriage. A reference to gender equality can be found in Armenian national epos *Davit of Sasun*, in the quote "a lion is lion, whether male or female".

The ancient Greek philosopher Xenophon indicated that Armenian women had rights and privileges, including speaking freely with men in the streets and participating in community life. The whole concept of gender equality and women's rights has undergone significant transformations throughout Armenian history, taking into account the influence of the Babylonian, Hellenistic, and Byzantine Empires, as well as Roman, Parthian, Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Russian civilizations. As a result, Western and Eastern cultures appear not only in Armenian poetry, art, music, and architecture, but also in attitudes towards the role of women in Armenian society.

A huge step in the equality of men and women was the famous Book of Rules of Mkhitar Gosh written during the 12th century. According to this document, women had the same rights as men and gained opportunities to inherit and own property.

It seems that this equality discourse was relatively strong in Armenian society up until late Middle Ages. Vardan Hacuni in his book *Armenian Woman in History* wrote that Armenian women lost their rights and freedom because of the constant fear of assimilation of Armenians with other nations.¹

An interesting point to mention is that throughout the history of Middle Ages and later in the 19th and 20th centuries women had the support of men to promote their rights and get involved in political life. In the first Republic of Armenia (1918-1920) women were already received the

1. *Gender Studies* 2001. (ed. Hasratyan, Jemma). Association of Women with University Education (N2), Yerevan.

right to vote and be elected. As a result, three women were elected as parliamentarians.²

Along with the rise of women's movement worldwide, Armenian women also started to advocate for their rights at the end of 19th and the beginning of 20th century. The famous Armenian public figure, writer and philosopher of 18th century, Shahamir Shahamirian, states in the official document written in 1773: "Each human individual, whether Armenian or of another ethnicity, whether male or female, born in Armenia or moved to Armenia from other countries, will live in equality and will be free in all their occupations. No one will have the right to lord over another person, whereas their manual labor shall be remunerated according to any other work, as required by the Armenian Law".³ In the document prepared by Shahamirain, considered by some to be a draft of future Armenian Constitutions, it is also mentioned that "every man should respect and honor women", as well as that "women and girls do not need to cover their heads and faces in the public".⁴

Armenian women got the rights to vote and be elected in 1918. Even before this time, according to National Constitution adopted in 1863 by the Armenian community in Ottoman Empire, those women who were interested in the social and political life had an opportunity to participate in the meetings of National Parliament.⁵ Women also coordinated "culturally approved" issues in the Parliament, such as children's education, charity issues and coordination of hospitals. In fact, women's rights became one of the main arguments in the discourse of economic versus cultural modernity in the second half of the 19th century.⁶ Nationalist groups used the "women rights" issue in their rhetoric against the westernization of Armenian population. On the contrary, the progressive section of the Armenian population, especially in Ottoman Empire, raised the issue of women's political and economic empowerment as one of the main tools of national self-identification and development. Interestingly, unlike

2. Participation of women in public and political life in the Republic of Armenia 2013. *Yerevan School of Political Studies of the Council of Europe*, "Press Club Ararat".

3. **Aslanyan**, Svetlana. Women's Rights in Armenia. *Social Watch* (published online)

4. **Nikoghosyan**, Artur 2005. *Gender Studies*. Association of Women with University Education, Yerevan.

5. **Nikoghosyan**, Artur 2005. *Gender Studies*. Association of Women with University Education, Yerevan.

6. Ibid.

now, in the 19th century among supporters of women's rights were also well-known intellectual Armenian men, such as Grigor Artsruni, Mikael Nalbandyan, Matteos Mamuryan and others.⁷

For example, Petros Simonyan, the editor-in-chief of *Meghu* (Bee) magazine, which was published in Tiflis (modern Tbilisi) in the end of the 19th century, set aside a significant amount of space for women's issues in the magazine.⁸ Artsruni advocated for mixed schools for boys and girls.⁹ In the beginning of the 20th century, several magazines devoted to women's rights issues were also published in Western Armenia; among them famous *Tsaghik* (Flower), *Artemis* and *Hay Kin* (Armenian Woman) magazines.

In the beginning of the 19th century, two famous women writers, Srбуhi Vahanyan-Dyussap and Zabel Asatour, formed the draft of the *Declaration of Women's Rights*, in which they touched upon equality of men's and women's rights, the right to choose a profession, and women's participation in community life.¹⁰ Dyussap also claimed that a society where women are oppressed, their rights and dignity violated, is an immoral society.¹¹ In her novels Dyussap also wrote against forced marriages, claiming that a woman can be liberated only through paid work. From 1918 to 1920 women comprised 8% of the National Parliament of the First Republic and the first women ambassador in the world was appointed from Armenia to Japan, Ms. Diana Abgar.

At the end of the 19th century, there were Armenian women founded organizations, along with men, and joined political parties. Out of 630 Armenian organizations operating in Constantinople at the end of 19th century, about 60 were women's organizations.¹² It should be mentioned that even though the missions of these organizations were education, charity and poor and orphan relief. In the process they created a space

7. Ibid.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. **Kirakosyan**, Sevak, **Margaryan**, Nvard. *Moral Mistresses of The Kitchen: Eyewink Into the Past*. As You E-magazine.

11. *Gender Studies* 2001. (ed. Hasratyan, Jemma). Association of Women with University Education (N2), Yerevan.

12. *Gender Studies in Armenia* 2003. (ed. Hasratyan, Jemma). Association of Women with University Education (N2), Yerevan.

for women's civic and political activism. The two best known women's organizations were especially active: *School-Loving (Dprocaser) Ladies Association* and *Patriotic (Azganver) Armenian Women's Association*, both established in 1879.¹³

It is worth mentioning that the Armenian women's movement of the 19th century was influenced by the European women's movement,¹⁴ yet had very strong national, even nationalistic, discourse. In the 19th century, the Armenian community of Constantinople, inspired by European Enlightenment, developed a very strong mission to educate all Armenians, even in the very remote villages, through which enlightening and education they aimed to preserve national values.

Even though this tradition had the potential to develop into a national women's movement, this did not happen. Instead it was replaced by Soviet ideology of equality, which helped women achieve progress, but significantly diminished the ethnic and cultural discourses of the movement.

A challenging new stage began after the collapse of Soviet Union. The current women's movement is represented mostly by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individual activists. Despite some positive developments in the area of gender equality since 1990, including the adoption of international documents such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms Discrimination against Women in 1993, there are still numerous macro- and micro-level obstacles for the equal representation of women in all spheres of life, including political participation and decision making.

The Armenian legislative system is gender-sensitive. In fact, Armenia has ratified a series of agreements and conventions which refer to the establishment of gender equality. There are significant changes in the national legislation as well. In 2007, due to the amendments of the RA Electoral Code, a quota of 15% was introduced to ensure women's engagement in party electoral lists for a proportionate voting system. In 2011, this number increased to 20%. Moreover, the electoral list had to

13. **Nikoghosyan**, Artur 2005. *Gender Studies*. Women with University Education, Yerevan.
14. Most of the women who opened charity organizations or schools for girls got their education abroad, mainly in Paris.

be constituted the way that a woman candidate was present at least once in each five, starting from the second place.¹⁵ Nevertheless, basic targets of gender equality are yet to be achieved since the engagement of women in political, economic, and public spheres remains limited. Moreover, during the past few years, the political and economic participation of women in Armenia has decreased. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, in 2015 Armenia was ranked 105th out of 145 countries, falling by two places compared to 2014. In 2011, Armenia was ranked 84th. The overall change seems to be driven by Armenia's deteriorating ranks in economic and political participation of women.

In 2010, the RA government verified the Gender Policy Concept Paper, and then in 2011, the Gender Policy Strategic Action Plan for the years of 2011 to 2015. In 2013, the RA National Assembly adopted the law *On State Guarantees of Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities for Men and Women*.

Reconsidering the historical background, due to educational reforms in the late 1980s, 61% of specialists with higher or secondary specialized education and 51% of workers on the whole were women. Before the period of *perestroika* (reconstruction), the official representation of women in social-political life was ensured by the leaders of the Soviet Union, but women did not appear in higher positions of leadership. Starting from the last years of the Soviet Union, women lost most of their representation in the decision-making systems, which continued in to post independent Armenia.¹⁶

According to data represented in **Table 1**, women were more widely represented in the legislative governance only when the quota system was functioned. Thus, more women represented Armenian SSR Supreme Council in 1985 and RA National Assemblies of 2007 and 2012. During elections of all three, a gender-based quota system was in place¹⁷.

15. **Hasratyan**, Jemma, **Zakaryan**, Lilit, **Hovnatanyan**, Tamara, **Armaganova**, Gayane. *Women's Political Participation in Parliamentary Elections in 2012*. Association of Women with University Education, Yerevan.

16. **Ishkanian**, **Armenuhi** 2003. Gendered Transitions: The Impact of the Post-Soviet Transition on Women in Central Asia and the Caucasus. *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, vol 3, Issue 3.

17. **Hasratyan**, Jemma, **Zakaryan**, Lilit, **Hovnatanyan**, Tamara, **Armaganova**, Gayane. *Women's Political Participation in Parliamentary Elections in 2012*. Association of Women with University Education, Yerevan.

Table 1: Representation of Women in the Parliament

Convocation Year	Representation of Female Parliamentarians
1985 Armenian SSR Supreme Council	35.6%
1990 RA Supreme Council	3.5%
1995 RA National Assembly	6.3 %
1999 RA National Assembly	3.1 %
2003 RA National Assembly	5.3 %
2007 RA National Assembly	9.2 %
2012 RA National Assembly	10.7 %
As of 2016	9.9% ¹⁸

During the 20 years of independence, the number of women in legislative governance in Armenia increased only by 7%, a figure which was ensured by the gender quota. As experts predict "at this pace, at least 25 more years will be necessary to achieve the 20% quota".¹⁹

Currently, in the Armenian National Assembly, only 13 out of 131 parliamentarians are women, and this is in a situation where 20% quota system was put in place. Women are even less proactive in the framework of majoritarian system. The number of women, both candidates and elected, is decreasing from election to election. If in 1995 there were four women elected under majoritarian electoral system, in 2012 their number decreased to two (see Table 2).²⁰

18. Arpine Hovhannisyann, former parliamentarian, was appointed Minister of Justice.

19. **Hasratyan**, Jemma, **Zakaryan**, Lilit, **Hovnatanyan**, Tamara, **Armaghanova**, Gayane. *Women's Political Participation in Parliamentary Elections in 2012*. Association of Women with University Education, Yerevan.

20. Ibid.

Table 2: Elected Women under the Majoritarian System in 5 Assemblies of the Parliament

	1995	1999	2003	2007	2012
Number of women elected under majoritarian electoral system	4	2	1	-	2

Experts explain the decrease in the numbers through severe competition, "dark" and unfair technics, negative campaigning and partially by a decrease of number of majoritarian constituencies.²¹ It should be also mentioned that the lower number of women-candidates under a majoritarian system is due to the fact that those women act independent of political parties. The majority of those women, both elected and not, had high ranking in their election districts.

The low number of women in politics in Armenia is a consequence of a widely-practiced phenomenon of self-withdrawal, which is one of the barriers for women to be represented in all levels of governance.

Thus, in the parliamentary elections of 2012, 102 candidates self-withdrew in post-election period, 26 of them were women. Self-withdrawal of men candidates was linked to their high positions in governmental bodies, while only 30% of women had the same reason to apply the practice of withdrawal. For 70% of the cases, the reason behind their choice was unknown as those women did not like to comment on their actions. It can be only assumed that the political parties of which they were part had influenced their decision. Most of these women represent the political parties holding the highest number of mandates in the parliament.²²

The practice of self-withdrawal is an obstacle towards the realization of quota system as it neutralizes the functioning of the quota system.

21. Ibid.

22. **Hasratyan**, Jemma, **Zakaryan**, Lilit, **Hovnatanyan**, Tamara, **Armaghanova**, Gayane. *Women's Political Participation in Parliamentary Elections in 2012*. Association of Women with University Education, Yerevan.

Under Constitutional amendments adopted in 2015 through a referendum, the form of governance changed from presidential to parliamentary, and the proportional electoral system became preferable.

These proposals have only been partially accepted. In particular, the list will be in proportion of 25/75, instead of the previous 20/80 ratio. The seats are provided to the candidates according to the party's list. If, as a result, all mandates under the same category are taken by the candidates of the same sex, the last candidate yields the seat to the candidate of the unrepresented sex. According to the authors of the draft code, this mechanism should ensure women's representation in each fraction of the NA. The gender composition of the local authorities in Armenia has not undergone significant changes. Thus, in the 2000s in Armenia no women were elected as mayors in the cities or appointed as marzpets²³ of the 10 marzes in Armenia. The number of women elected as heads of the villages has also not changed significantly (2-3%). (see Table 3)

Table 3. Number of women in local government (National Statistical Service RA, 2003-2016)

Year	Marzpet	City Mayor	Head Village	%
2002	0	0	16	2%
2003	0	0	17	2%
2004	0	0	17	2%
2005	0	0	21	2%
2006	0	0	23	3%
2007	0	0	23	3%
2008	0	0	23	3%
2009	0	0	24	3%
2010	0	0	24	3%
2011	0	0	22	2%
2012	0	0	20	2%
2016	0	0	18	2%

23. Marzpet is the governor of the region (marz, regional unit).

The level of women among ministers and deputy ministers is low too. Over the years, their number has not significantly improved either. In the current cabinet of ministers there are only three women; the ministers of Culture, Diaspora and Justice. The minister of Justice, Ms Arpine Hovhannisyanyan, was appointed recently, in 2015. The appointment of Hovhannisyanyan was unprecedented and evoked wave of unpleasant reaction in social media targeting her both professionally and as a woman. Partially, the negativity was caused by the sphere of which she undertook responsibility. Justice has never been perceived as a "feminine" sphere.

As of 2016 the number of women ministers and deputy ministers is seven, which is lower compared to previous years.

Table 4: Ministers and Deputy Ministers (National Statistical Service RA, 2003-2016)

Year	Women Ministers and deputy ministers	%
2002	8	8%
2003	7	7%
2004	7	7%
2005	5	5%
2006	6	6%
2007	5	5%
2008	7	7%
2009	7	7%
2010	10	10%
2011	10	10%
2012	11	11%
2016	7	7%

A positive tendency has been noted in the judicial system regarding gender equality. The number of women here tend to increase. Before

2009, the number of women did not exceed 22, and from 2009 their number doubled, from 22 to 47. Recently the number has declined and only 24% of the judges are women. In the Constitutional Court, the first woman judge was appointed in 2010. Currently two out of nine judges in the Constitutional Court are women.

Table 5. Female members of RA Judicial System (National Statistical Service RA, 2002-2016)

Year	Women Judges	%
2001	21	21%
2002	18	18%
2003	21	21%
2004	20	20%
2005	19	19%
2006	21	21%
2007	22	22%
2008	21	21%
2009	46	21%
2010	45	22%
2011	46	37%
2012	47	39%
2016	47	24%

Public Perception of Women in Politics

Gender equality is an alarming issue in Armenia, as highlighted not only by feminists, but also through public opinion surveys. According to *Armenian Gender Barometer Survey* conducted by Yerevan State University Center for Gender and Leadership Studies in 2014,²⁴ 58% of the respondents agree with the statement that there is *inequality among*

24. *Armenian Gender Barometer Survey*. YSU Center for Gender and Leadership Studies, 2015.

men and women in Armenian society. The same survey shows that women's rights are violated in all spheres of life, including politics.

Public opinion on women's political participation is not unequivocal. However, men politicians tend to be more positively perceived by the society than women politicians.

According to research entitled *Gender Dimensions of Socio-Political Participation in Armenia*²⁵, 85% of the respondents believe that Armenian public opinion is positive about men's political careers, and 46% about women's political careers. In terms of equal perception of both, public opinion is unequivocally more positive about men's political careers (60%), than about women's political careers (11%).²⁶

In this case, gender stereotypes play an important role in formation of attitudes on women's political participation. In particular, according to World Value Survey (2010-2014)²⁷ 63.5% of the respondents agreed with the statement that men make better political leaders than women do. Moreover, more men (74%) agree with this statement than women do (53%).

Statement: On the whole, men make better political leaders than women do	Total	Sex	
		Male	Female
Agree strongly	22.7%	30.8%	15.1%
Agree	40.8%	43.5%	38.3%
Disagree	24.8%	13.2%	31.6%
Strongly disagree	9.1%	6.4%	11.5%
Difficult to answer	3.4%	3%	3.4%

25. **Hovhannisyan**, Hovhannes, **Zakaryan**, Lilit, **Osipov**, Vladimir 2011. *Gender Dimensions of Socio-Political Participation in Armenia*. UNFPA, OSCE, Yerevan.

26. Ibid.

27. World Value Survey Armenia (2010-2014).

According to the survey *Armenian Gender Barometer*, more than half of those surveyed agreed to the statement that men are better political leaders than women, and men are preferable to be elected.²⁸ Meanwhile, 68% of the respondents believe that gender equality in terms of rights equality between men and women is an essential characteristic of democracy.²⁹

The stereotype that women in politics have no personal life still exists. 48% of surveyed men and 39% of women agreed with this statement. It is noteworthy to mention that the attitudes towards women in business are more positive. In response to a similar statement, that something is wrong in the personal life of a woman engaged in business (private entrepreneurship) 60% of male respondents and 53% of female respondents disagreed.³⁰ The factors, including gender stereotypes, preventing women's political participation in Armenia will be discussed in greater detail below.

Factors Preventing Women's Political Participation in Armenia

The factors preventing women's political involvement were studied from two sides: perceptions of women politicians and societal perceptions of barriers on women's political involvement.

According to the results of the survey *Gender Dimensions of Socio-Political Participation in Armenia*³¹, women's non-participation in building a political career is linked to:

1. women's primary focus on family (45%),
2. women's low self-confidence (35%),
3. lack of public trust and confidence in women politicians (33%),
4. absence of mechanisms that would advance women (e.g. inadequate

28. *Armenian Gender Barometer Survey*. YSU Center for Gender and Leadership Studies, 2015

29. World Value Survey Armenia (2010-2014).

30. **Hovhannisyan, Hovhannes, Zakaryan, Lilit, Osipov, Vladimir** 2011. *Gender Dimensions of Socio-Political Participation in Armenia*. UNFPA, OSCE, Yerevan.

31. Ibid.

representation of women on political party lists in elections) (29%)³².

According to another piece of research,³³ women holding political positions mention the familial dependency/devotion as the main barrier towards political involvement. Responsibilities towards family are one of the main factors contributing to the general portrait of a woman in politics in Armenia.

Familial Responsibilities as an Obstacle for Women's Political Participation

Family is the number one priority in Armenian society. Therefore, women's decisions are greatly influenced by family members' opinions. In case her family is against a woman's promotion up the career ladder, a woman should sacrifice herself for her family. Hence, the woman's role in keeping the household and raising children is prioritised over her outdoor activism. Over 90% of people agree that woman's most important mission is to have a child. And almost everyone thinks that career should not be a woman's first priority, rather, family should always come first.³⁴

Studies on time management show that women in Armenia spend five times longer in the household and in unpaid work than men do.³⁵ According to societal perceptions, the primary role of a woman is to take care of the family and educate children.³⁶ Women deviating from this perception are not supported by society, but labels as an "uncaring" mother or an "inappropriate" wife. Women themselves feel guilt from their own family for spending less time at home and for less devotion to raising their children.

Practice shows that women successfully enrolled in politics are supported

32. Ibid.

33. **Ghazaryan, Gayane** 2013. *The Problems of Political Rights' Realization by Women in RA* (report of sociological survey).

34. *Armenian Gender Barometer Survey*. YSU Center for Gender and Leadership Studies, 2015.

35. **Duban, Elizabeth** 2010. *Gender Assessment: USAID/Armenia*.

36. **Hovhannisyan, Hovhannes, Zakaryan, Lilit, Osipov, Vladimir** 2011. *Gender Dimensions of Socio-Political Participation in Armenia*. UNFPA, OSCE, Yerevan.

by their families. Typically, women in politics talk about their husbands with gratitude, tend to stress the latter's role in their success. Supportive behaviour from the husband is perceived an act of generosity. In contrary, men in politics thank their own skills and professionalism in entering politics, and their wives' opinion is considered but is not vital in decision making.³⁷ Another group of successful women in politics are divorced or single women less constrained with familial responsibilities.³⁸

Gendered Constraints of Women's Political Participation

The stereotypical portrait of women in politics of Armenia is a woman of 40 years or over with higher education, employed in "feminine" spheres such as education or health, and supported by their family and close relatives. Their economic stability is not a primary criteria for them in contrary to men, whose economic status determines their involvement in the politics.³⁹ This image is drawn in accordance to gender stereotypes and prejudice trending in Armenian society. The average age of the women in politics is over 40 due to the fact that at this age, women are relatively free from familial concerns, and care of children.⁴⁰

Women are expected to be strong, just, and ready to take on difficulties and hardships. These characteristics are not perceived as "feminine", however a woman who has these characteristics is perceived as a successful and respected leader by the society. It is only in case of success that she is forgiven the deviance from "femininity".⁴¹ Patriarchal culture defines images of both women and politicians. These images do not match in such societies. Therefore, for a woman, engagement in politics is at the expense of "losing" femininity. The characteristics

37. **Mkhitaryan**, Armine, **Zakaryan**, Lilit 2006. *Gender Indicators of Armenian Local Government Institutions*. Eurasia Foundation, Yerevan.

38. **Ghazaryan**, Gayane 2013. *The Problems of Political Rights' Realization by Women in RA* (report of sociological survey).

39. **Mikaelyan**, Hrant 2011. *Women in Local Administration in Armenia*. Caucasus Institute, Yerevan.

40. Ibid.

41. **Ghazaryan**, Gayane 2013. *The Problems of Political Rights' Realization by Women in RA* (report of sociological survey).

through which a politician is framed are identical to those through which man is portrayed. Woman has to decide: either follow her passion, enter politics and be labelled as "atypical" or quit, maintaining her gender role as dictated by society. Therefore, women's low political representation is a consequence of social pressure on women through gender roles.

Gender stereotypes and prejudice are powerful predictors of women's low representation in politics. "Politics is not a proper occupation for women" or "women's emotionality prevents them from making correct decisions" are commonly produced statements, clearly illustrating the public perception of women in politics.⁴² The discrimination towards women in politics is rooted in gender stereotypes in frames of which children are socialized.

The two main agents of socialisation, family and school, instill various gender stereotypes into children from early childhood. These stereotypes reflect on children's whole lives.⁴³ According to *Armenian Gender Barometer* survey⁴⁴, the qualities prioritized through child development vary based on child gender. For a boy qualities such as being independent, self-confident, persistent, unselfish, and generous are priorities, while for a girl qualities such as obedience and self-expression valued more.

The results of another gender-themed survey⁴⁵ reaffirms the findings listed above; modesty, refined nature, femininity are the main qualities associated with women. These qualities do not guarantee success in decision making, governance or management.

Furthermore, the qualities associated with a good politician are used to portray a man politician rather than a woman: to name a few, high intellectual abilities (for a man 92%, for a woman 90%), sufficient experience in work at public administration bodies (75% and 72%

42. **Hovhannisyan**, Hovhannes., **Zakaryan**, Lilit, **Osipov**, Vladimir 2011. *Gender Dimensions of Socio-Political Participation in Armenia*. UNFPA, OSCE, Yerevan.

43. **Tsaturyan**, Ruzanna 2012. *Gender Roles in Armenian Elementary School Textbooks*. Institute of Archeology and Ethnography, Yerevan.

44. *Armenian Gender Barometer Survey*. YSU Center for Gender and Leadership Studies, 2015.

45. **Matosian**, Maro, **Kazhoyan**, Perchuhi, **Harutyunyan**, Gayane 2013. *Sociological Survey on Gender Attitudes and Stereotypes in Armenia*. Women's Support Center, Yerevan.

respectively), honesty and principled (78% and 77% respectively).⁴⁶

Through the socialisation of girls where importance is given to the values of modesty and femininity whilst ignoring the values of self-esteem, governance and decision making, a boundary is created for women from getting involved in processes of decision making and governance. Therefore, women's entrance into political life is prevented by huge obstacles. It takes more time and courage for a woman to go against public opinion and through gendered paths to get into politics. Men have much fewer steps to reach the same goal.

Gender-based discrimination does not tend to be a particular obstacle for women in entering politics, however it becomes an issue when they start to work in the system. The traditional roles of a man as the main breadwinner and controller at home and a woman as a guarantor of harmony at home and the main educator of children are reflected in politics.⁴⁷ In politics, the role of educator and "mother" is handed to women due to stereotypical perception of women in role of mother and raiser of children. Men's role is different: they should govern and make decisions for the society, including women. The functions are therefore transferred from family to politics.

Finally, the distrust towards women in ruling positions can be explained through the gender stereotypes as well. "When choosing ideal candidates based on qualification, people were 2.5 times more tend to choose a man with the same qualifications than a woman" states the survey.⁴⁸ Gender-based discrimination in society is one of the main indicators of women's low representation in politics. Distrust and stigmatisation of women in politics prevents more women from engaging with a "man's world".

Lack of Economic Independence

Unemployment rate in Armenia is 20% (2015)⁴⁹. The factors conditioning this rate vary from men to women. In all the age groups the main reason for unemployment among women (98%) is the prioritising of the care of family and children, while for men the reasons to not work are either disability status or privilege of getting social benefits.

It is worth noting that in most cases women decide for themselves to quit competing for highly paid jobs due to the widespread cultural stereotype that women should not earn more than men. Paradoxically enough, in 1990s women turned out to be more flexible in carrying out all kinds of jobs to sustain their families, while men were in "masculine crisis", rejecting work deemed "improper" to their status, even if the family needed urgent support.

The main source of family income is the money earned by a man. A woman is not restricted from work if it is a part time job, and does not prevent her from "feminine" responsibilities, including taking care of family, educate children, to name but a few.⁵⁰ According to the *Caucasus Barometer* (2015) 43% of women did not have any personal income during last month and 24% of men were in the same condition. 72% of women and 45% of men were unemployed at the moment the survey was conducted and 60% of women were not even interested in finding a job. In going against the norm, a woman faces harsh opposition from family members. In most cases, women prefer quit their goals to prevent any conflicts at home. Only a few courageous women successfully overcome the barrier, but often at the expense of losing their family or their marriage ending in divorce.⁵¹

Economic dependence engenders women's general dependence on men. The breadwinner is praised in the family. Decision-making becomes his privilege and significant responsibility in the family. Economically

46. **Hovhannisyan**, Hovhannes, **Zakaryan**, Lilit, **Osipov**, Vladimir 2011. *Gender Dimensions of Socio-Political Participation in Armenia*. UNFPA, OSCE, Yerevan.

47. **Duban**, Elizabeth 2010. *Gender Assessment: USAID/Armenia*.

48. **Hovhannisyan**, Hovhannes., **Zakaryan**, Lilit, **Osipov**, Vladimir 2011. *Gender Dimensions of Socio-Political Participation in Armenia*. UNFPA, OSCE, Yerevan.

49. RA National Statistical Survey, 2015.

50. **Mikaelyan**, Hrant 2011. *Women in Local Administration in Armenia*. Caucasus Institute, Yerevan.

51. **Ghazaryan**, Gayane 2013. *The Problems of Political Rights' Realization by Women in RA* (report of sociological survey).

dependent women are less mobile in society. It prevents them from engaging in politics.

For example, the lack of economic independence causes a barrier for a woman pushing forward her candidacy, as she will not be able to finance her campaign. The amount of money necessary for the electoral deposit and for pre-election campaign is huge.⁵² This barrier is not overcome by many male counterparts as well. Women, who do not have financial support, cannot afford to pay such huge amount of money, therefore she is left out from the competition. The culture of community support is moreover not popular in Armenia. Therefore, woman should be either backed by someone financially secured or should be promoted by a political party.

“Dirty” Politics: Political Culture in Armenia as a Barrier for Women’s Political Participation

According to Armenian Association of Women with University Education (2007), in the conditions of non-legitimate elections, women are twice as vulnerable in the political sphere. “Dirty” rules of the game frequently practiced in the political life of Armenia are not a part of women’s political culture. Women are perceived as just and unconditioned in decision-making through their nature, therefore they cannot be a part of that unfair game. In addition, women are seen as the “last hope” to clean up the politics. Still women are not equally treated, and are rather perceived as reserves, used only in emergency situations. Sometimes a woman is seen as an alternative to a bad governor-man based on her justness and readiness to avoid corruption risks and a high level of responsibility. To sum up, the woman is seen as a “saviour”.⁵³ For this reason, in non-legitimate elections, women’s chances for victory are twice as less compared to their men counterparts.

In small communities, there is no limitation placed on re-election. The governor is legally in power even if he runs for the same position for a

52. **Mkhitaryan**, Armine, **Zakaryan**, Lilit 2006. *Gender Indicators of Armenian Local Government Institutions*. Eurasia Foundation, Yerevan.

53. Ibid.

few times. Their candidacy is often supported by the community. Hence, holding a position becomes monopolistic. There is also a practice of “inheriting” the power from father to son.⁵⁴ In such conditions women are less capable of competing. If they do succeed their success is attributed to their families or kinship due to commonly spread opinion that one needs connections to advance.⁵⁵

The unjust political environment nullifies the impact of legislative reforms undertaken according to international obligations by the Armenian government. Though Armenian legislation is quite supportive towards women in terms of the promotion of gender equality and gender sensitive policy in political sphere, the enforcement of the laws still needs work to put the mechanisms set up by the law in place.

A valid example of poor enforcement of the law is the phenomenon of self-withdrawal widely exercised during the parliamentary elections in 2012. According to the amendment to the Electoral Code, a 20% gender quota was introduced enforcing the inclusion of 20% women in the party electoral list. After the elections, a big number of candidates who were handed mandates, the majority of whom were women, then declared self-withdrawal, leaving their mandates to their party colleagues who all turned out to be men. As a result, only 14 women were presented in the fifth convocation.⁵⁶

Lack of Social Capital

In Armenia, politics is often built around non-formal communication and networks. These networks are primarily “masculine” in nature, constructed by men for men. These networks create specific “masculine” spaces for political discussions: restaurants, baths, saunas, and the like, spiced by “masculine” jargon⁵⁷. Community problems often

54. **Mikaelyan**, Hrant 2011. *Women in Local Administration in Armenia*. Caucasus Institute, Yerevan.

55. **Mkhitaryan**, Armine, **Zakaryan**, Lilit 2006. *Gender Indicators of Armenian Local Government Institutions*. Eurasia Foundation, Yerevan.

56. **Hasratyan**, Jemma, **Zakaryan**, Lilit, **Hovnatanyan**, Tamara, **Armaghanova**, Gayane. *Women’s Political Participation in Parliamentary Elections in 2012*. Association of Women with University Education, Yerevan.

57. **Pittman**, Alexandra 2013. *Exploring Women’s Rights and Feminist Movement Building in Armenia: Learning from the Past and Strategizing for the Future*. Open Society Foundations- Armenia.

find solutions during such gatherings, therefore male candidates are favoured in communities. Non-formal ways of problem solving is still the most-used mechanism in communities. Women, in contrary, do not have such networks and culture. They cannot be a part of these “masculine” networks. Some women use the networks of their brothers, husbands or fathers to increase or create their own networks.

In small communities, women’s employment in educational and health spheres stands as a guarantee for expansion of social and political capital. In bigger communities the political or civil organisations undertake the function of promotion of women in politics.⁵⁸ In addition, women do not prioritize solidarity and support amongst themselves. Formation of political culture by women is not on the agenda either.

Woman’s success is not attributed to her personal features and abilities, but to a male relative’s power, capital and networks. If a husband or father or other male relative is at her side, helping her, she will probably succeed. She also needs support from her family and relatives.

As stated in the study of Hrant Mikaelyan, “From childhood, boys are socialized to make friends on the streets and make useful connections, and they naturally gather social capital throughout their lives, while women are discouraged from gaining skills in making and using connections.”⁵⁹ There is also a huge element of risk in Armenian politics and it takes a lot of courage for a woman to enter into the political field. Women are treated with prejudice, suppressing their desire and involvement in political life. The most common stereotypes are: “it is not acceptable to behave like that for an Armenian woman,” “Armenian women should stay at home and take care of their children,” “women-leaders are those who don’t have any personal life and/or good husbands”, etc. As a result of these obstacles, about 40% of women withdrew their candidacy during the last municipality and village council elections.⁶⁰

Psychological Barriers: The Problem of Low Self-esteem

Through socialisation, gender stereotypes repress women’s innovativeness and motivation to reach their goals. Women repress their desire to seek higher positions as it is not seen as “appropriate” for a woman. Gender stereotypes influence the formation of the self-esteem of a woman, therefore causing low self-esteem and distrust in her own abilities.⁶¹

The main agents of socialisation are frequently women; mothers at home and teachers, the majority of who are women, at school are the influential agents of socialisation both for men and women. Feminisation of socialisation hypothetically assumes changes in gender attitudes of future generations, but in practice the changes are not visible, because women duplicate the pattern of behaviour practiced in the society.

According to Armenian Association of Women with University Education (2007), prejudices such as “politics is not a women’s place” reduce women’s desire and self-esteem to get involved in politics. There is the fear of the loss of femininity among women who want to be a part of political life. These stereotypes make women doubly controlled, as they feel obligation to be a politician, but at the same time to remain in the frames of femininity. Profession choice is also based on gender stereotypes. Women tend to choose the professions which are considered “feminine”: pedagogy, health, cultural and social sciences. Women in politics often refuse the existence of gender discrimination in the society, but reproduce the patterns through their talks: “There is no discrimination, but something else. Women are not perceived seriously.”⁶² Women’s self-esteem is highly connected to men’s opinion. Their support encourages women, gives them wings to fly, while absence of support dramatically reduces their social and political activism. Disobedience frequently causes losses in personal life. Often, when,

58. **Mikaelyan**, Hrant 2011. *Women in Local Administration in Armenia*. Caucasus Institute, Yerevan.

59. *Ibid.*

60. *Ibid.*

61. **Hovhannisyan**, **Hovhannes**, **Zakaryan**, **Lilit**, **Osipov**, Vladimir 2011. *Gender Dimensions of Socio-Political Participation in Armenia*. UNFPA, OSCE, Yerevan.

62. *Women’s Political Participation in the 2007 Parliamentary Elections in the Republic of Armenia: Analytical Overview 2007*. Armenian Association of Women with University Education.

husband was against wife's decision to enter politics, divorce was unavoidable.⁶³

Through socialisation, women are taught to underestimate their capacities and pay little attention to the formulation of independent views and opinions. Therefore, throughout life they avoid participation in decision making and competitions for top positions. Women see themselves as dependent on men, and do not trust other women in the same sphere. This is the main reason for the lack of women solidarity and support in the society. These stereotypes force them to admit discrimination as a natural consequence.

In general, woman's participation in political life is linked to many losses. She is expected to overcome underestimation of herself, but also face gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms in the society, summed up with non-legitimate elections, corruption risks, and persistent resistance against women's political participation.

63. **Ghazaryan**, Gayane 2013. *The Problems of Political Rights' Realization by Women in RA* (report of sociological survey).

**THE
ENGAGEMENT
OF
WOMEN
IN
ARMENIAN
POLITICAL
ORGANIZATIONS:
OBSTACLES
AND
PERSPECTIVES**

CHAPTER V

5.1. Research Methodology and Justification

The participation of women in public life is contingent on various factors, starting from structural and institutional ones leading up to cultural and socio-psychological factors. The institutional design of the political organizations and groups, transparency and internal decision making cycles play a significant role in the process of advancement and/or impairment of women on their way to crafting their political careers.

As already discussed in the theoretical section of the research, the following are the key factors obstructing women from pursuing political life paths:

- Family responsibilities,
- Gender stereotypes and gender roles,
- Economic dependence of women,
- Adverse political culture,
- Lack of social capital among women,
- Low self-esteem.

Nevertheless, the main factor influencing advancement of women in politics remains the **institutional design of political organizations and initiatives**.

In Armenia, after the independence, the political participation of women remains quite low. On the other hand, their engagement in political and civic initiatives is tangible, since these are less institutionalized and rigid, have rather transparent modes of resource allocation and decision making.

The goal of the current study was to analyze those factors and opportunities that are conducive to the advancement of women in political organizations and initiatives.

Research objectives were as follows:

- Analyze the institutional design of Armenian political organizations and initiatives¹,
- Study the gender composition of Armenian political organizations and initiatives, including gender based approaches and procedures,
- Identify impediments and difficulties that Armenian women encounter when building their political profile,
- Compare opportunities available to women in political organizations and rather non-formal civic and political initiatives,
- Analyze the influence of cultural variables, such as perceptions, stereotypes pertaining to gender roles, as well as ideas about female leadership role models, on the participation of women in Armenian political life.

Applied Research Methods

In order to achieve the set objectives the following items have been considered:

1. Content analysis of data and studies pertaining to the political participation of women in Armenia, including attitudes towards the advancement of women. Particularly, the following theoretical approaches and concepts have been reviewed:

a) feminist political philosophy (A. Phillips, A. Pitman, J. Ritter, N. Melnow and others),

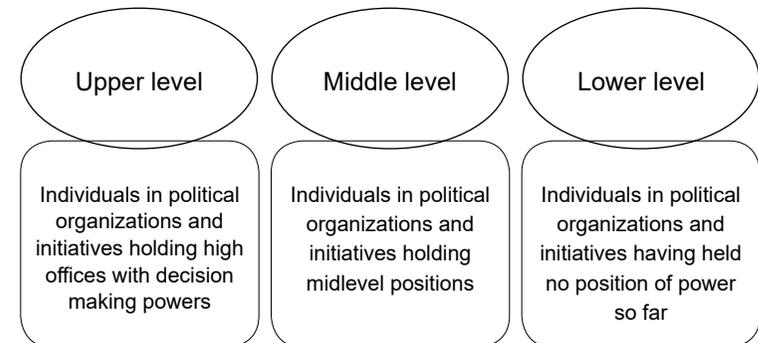
b) theories explaining low levels of engagement of women in politics (P. Paxton, S. Konowitz, M. Hughes, J. Mark, R. Pand, D. Ford and others),

¹ Within the scope of this research political initiatives are the ones that have less formalized and institutionalized political entities that include for example the "Pre-parliament" or "Civic Contract" that at the time of our research was not yet registered as a political party.

c) theories of political participation of women in post-soviet countries (M. Kosa-Kovacs, V. Nikolic-Ristanovic, R. Matland, K. Montgomery and others):

The difficulties and impediments to the political participation of women were also subjected to content analysis by studying previous research conducted by local researchers. Based on reviewed theories and already conducted previous research the key hypotheses have been put forward and the relevant methodology was developed. Upon the completion of the research and based on the results the theoretical part has undergone some revisions, thus, ensuring the synergetic analysis of both theoretical and research sections of the study.

2. In-depth interviews with male and female representatives of political organizations and initiatives at lower, middle and upper levels have been conducted.



At each of the levels, the in-depth interviews have been conducted with one representative of each sex. The research team has adopted the aforementioned approach in order to identify gender specifics at each level based on comparative analysis of the views of male and female representatives in political structures.

Used Questionnaires

Questionnaires have been developed for each group of interviewees, comprising the following main sections:

- General questions and personal information,
- Political career of the respondent,
- Participation in the decision making within the political organization or initiative,
- Social networks, social capital and relations with peers and leaders,
- Obstacles and discrimination experienced during the period of advancement,
- Political goals,
- Perceptions about gender roles and attitudes concerning gender equality,
- Attitudes concerning the leader and other decision makers,
- Attitudes pertaining to political activism.

Questionnaires developed for women also included additional questions on the experienced changes in terms of the gender roles and expectations that the family members held towards them, such as “how “femininity” is being applied in politics?”, “how the attitudes of people (relatives, friends, colleagues) changed towards women who had entered the political sphere?”, etc.

Questionnaires developed for leaders of political parties and initiatives also included questions concerning the process of their membership and advancement, some points that elucidate internal structural procedures and mechanisms that would ensure gender equality and prove the availability of gender policy within the entity.

Difficulties encountered during the research

During the field work no difficulties were encountered. The only technical problem, at times, was the hassle of reaching the representatives of political parties. In this stage, it became clear that political initiatives were more open and inviting, unlike the parties and most notably the ruling Republican Party (RPA). We assume that part of the problem comes with bureaucratization and formalization, which the initiatives have less than the parties. Apart from that, it was hard to find the Armenian National Congress (ANC), Heritage Party and political initiatives’ lower level members, as at the moment of interviews the recruitment levels were low given the passivity of the political environment.

Thus, the non-accessibility of interviewees had two key features:

1. The given party/initiative had no willingness to participate in the process of interview,
2. The given level of the given party/initiative had been left with open slots.

We had tried to find comprehensive solutions to above stated problems:

- We have sent official requests to the political parties/initiatives, detailing out the rationale of research and highlighting the importance of participation of party members,
- We have resorted to snowballing method, trying to ask the already interviewed individual to give contacts of others from any of the levels and have successfully contacted them,
- We have resorted to the informal mechanisms of asking acquaintances to put the team in contact with other members. Nevertheless, we failed to find six interviewees (most of them from the Republican Party of Armenia).

5.2. The Gender Profile of Political Parties and Initiatives

In order to compile the gender profile and structure of the political parties (PP) and political initiatives (PI) we studied the websites of those entities, as well as received additional information during the interviews.

The analysis of the websites revealed the following information: only the Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) and Armenian National Congress (ANC) had structural clear distribution and gender composition. For the other parties there was only the information on the names of structures and substructures without a clear indication of the number of members registered in each, whereas for political initiatives any such kind of information was not available.

Prosperous Armenia Party (PAP), Rule of Law Party (RLP), and Armenian Revolutionary Federation (ARF) websites only had the overall description of the structure broken down by substructures with no availability of numeric data. The structures of those parties are provided below:

Heritage Party, Civic Contract and Founding Parliament political initiatives did not have their data published.

Apart from official information, political figures were given a question on gender composition of the parties and initiatives. Once again, it was not possible to obtain specific data and statistics, nevertheless, some kind of a descriptive picture was reconstructed.

Henceforth, the political figures at the highest level of parties and initiatives provided the following picture of gender composition:

RPA 45 % f – 55 % m	ANC 30 % f – 70 % m	PAP No data was provided	RLP 45 % f – 55 % m
ARF 20 % f – 80 % m	Heritage 45 % f – 55 % m	Founding Parliament 20 % f – 80 % m	Civic Contract 20 % f – 80 % m

In the electoral party lists the gender balancing is mainly being accomplished in line with the legal provisions of the Electoral Code, where parties are required to ensure at least twenty percent representation of less represented gender (i. e. women). However, in case of ARF the number of women both in the party and particularly, in the party list has declined lately, and currently, there are no female representatives in decision making bodies. In case of the other parties, the minimum twenty percent is being sustained, in some cases, it is the initiative of the party itself to make sure that the composition of women reaches thirty-three percent (PAP, RLP).

The responsibility of **public relations** and the process of the **development of party platform** do not have gender sensitivity in any of the studied parties. The division within the platform is rather thematically determined and is driven by the level of specialization and available human capital. From the first side, there is no gender difference and/or discrimination, nor there has been previously. Gender differences are not recorded also in the **process of the campaign**, as both women and men are equally engaged in the process.

When referring to the **party secretariats**, in the case of PAP, RLP and Heritage Party, the majority is women, and when asked about it, the women found it quite normal. The main justification for women being the majority of secretariats was the argument that as a rule the latter are more diligent in keeping the records and doing the logistics that is descriptive of the functions of the secretariat and that explains why women are more trusted than men to lead that section. For men, it is more typical to be in leading positions, which is mainly being identified in the parties. In the secretariat of the ARF the roles are distributed based on the skills and specialization, not based on gender, thus, men and women are almost equally represented in it. In ANC Party and Civic Contract political initiative there is no secretariat as such, therefore, both men and women undertake the relevant functions and bear responsibility equally. When it comes to Founding Parliament political initiative, here in the secretariat the majority of individuals are men.

The **governance style** of both parties and political initiatives is collegial, problems and main issues are being discussed through general assemblies, seeking the consent of the majority of members.

In the two initiatives and RLP, RPA and Heritage Party the **party membership** is obtained upon the written request from the prospective member, instead no official selection or appointment procedure is available. In the rest of the parties, i. e. ANC, ARF and PAP the membership is open to any citizen of the country, who is eighteen years old and is granted upon the written request given if the political council or board provides a recommendation.

Speaking of a specially devised **Gender Policy**, as well as activities conducted for women or efforts to further their engagement in decision making, PAP, RLP, Heritage Party, RPA and ARF mentioned that they have special caucuses for women. These channels help women and girls to further their engagement and enlarge opportunities within the party through additional venues for self-realization. When it comes to ANC and the political initiatives, the interviewed representatives mentioned that there is no gender policy, as well as no caucus for women is provided.

It is worth mentioning that along with the emphasizing the absence of a gender policy, the interviewed party members of both genders mentioned that within their ranks gender based discrimination was not noticed. Meanwhile, when asked about **privileges granted to women** most of the interviewed as a rule understood the **special treatment on the days dedicated to celebrating women, not the political promotion or quotas ensuring bigger numbers of engagement**.

“...generally speaking we treat women appropriately, during the holidays we always organize activities, we try to please women and girls by buying gifts and encourage them for the work done.”

PP, male, mid-level

Overall, it can be concluded that the political parties and initiatives do not have any official gender policy and at the level of management no rules are being adopted to ensure gender parity.

5.3. Perceptions about Gender Roles and Gender Aspects of Leadership

Gender Equality and Perceptions about Gender Roles

It is worth mentioning that negative attitude and stereotypes around the definition of gender², which has developed due to the misinformation spread by the media and other outlets, has impacted also those questioned from the political parties and initiatives. Therefore, when speaking of gender equality and roles, the majority of respondents regardless of their sex, frequently tried to avoid using the word gender, instead, they preferred to use the concept of “equality between men and women”.

Nevertheless, they did not avoid touching upon the issue and presented their ideas concerning gender equality.

Later in the text we will further reflect on perceptions of gender roles among male and female members of political parties and initiatives.

When speaking of gender equality, men were divided into two groups; one group that was against it and another one that was for it. The ones that spoke in favor of equality were the majority and represented the mid and high levels of their respective organizations.

Men that were against gender equality were mostly from the lowest levels of their political parties and initiatives and consequentially were mostly quite young. They believed that gender equality was an artificially constructed idea in order to ensure the unnecessary domination of women, as in reality each had his/her clearly defined role and responsibilities. According to the opinion of the men of this particular group, the things that women can do, men cannot and vice

2. Right before an unexpected act of joining the Eurasian Custom Union, in 2013, a spread of a movement targeting the concept of gender, considered it something coming from Europe that was deliberately aiming at the corruption of the Armenian identity, core national values, such as the family and children.

versa. Meanwhile, they also were quite opposed to the stereotypical underestimation of abilities and skills of women.

Men speaking for gender equality, regarded it as a natural and acceptable condition, when there is equality before law for men and women in all spheres, such as education, labor, politics, family, etc. On the other hand, it was being viewed as a right, which is given to women to benefit from, if they want to be in business, politics or manage the household. The men of this group with their opinion showed that gender equality did not imply absolute prevalence of women over men. It was interesting that according to the opinion of men, there is gender equality in modern day Armenia, including in politics, instead it is the preference of women that turns out in low numbers when it comes to engagement in politics. Therefore, they did not see any necessity to employ any means in order to increase the number of women in those spheres, where men still dominate in Armenia, i. e. politics, business, decision making positions, etc. Thus, according to the men, who voiced their opinion in favor of gender equality, the scarce number of women in politics and high ranking positions is their choice, which means that they will have to be the ones ensuring higher levels of engagement.

Those men, who in general spoke for the political engagement of women, did not see the role that the political parties and initiatives had to play in ensuring the equal engagement in the process, instead explaining it by the fact of women's household responsibilities.

“...The level of engagement of women is being decided by themselves. The difficulty in case of women is their family role and that there are other issues. Instead the ones that are not married, are fully consumed by making sure they do. The main issue is to what extent they want to engage. It is not that they want, but are not allowed, instead it is just the way I described. One cannot force another person, that person has to desire it herself ...”

PI, male, mid-level

Men that were for gender equality, when speaking of gender roles and expectations, mentioned that naturally there are role differences, which are endowed by the nature from the very beginning, which in the end

create the fundamental differences between men and women (mostly they stressed the biological foundations for the difference of gender roles, such as heavy physical work in case of men or child bearing functions in case of women, etc.). This said, there were no clear cut assignments of other roles and other spheres, when stereotypically assigned roles for each of the sexes could not be assumed by the opposite one. Quite to the contrary, the representatives of this group believed that the decision of role assignment had to be done by a given individual.

The interviewed women, too, had two diverging opinions and approaches.

The women in the first group thought that gender equality was the *equality before law for men and women in all spheres of life*, thus, leading to the advancement solely based on the skills and abilities of a given individual. It was interesting to see that in this group there were women from lower levels of political initiatives, whereas in the case of political parties the women came from all levels of engagement.

The other group of women, which was comprised of mid and high level individuals from initiatives, as well as representatives from all levels of political parties, viewed gender equality as something artificially constructed and that men and women cannot assume equal roles or be equal in any society, any sphere or any period of time.

It is worth mentioning that unlike men, women in both groups did not have a majority camp and only with a marginal preference the propagators of gender equality prevailed in both groups. This aspect can hint to the fact that men being against gender equality, voiced preference for it as rather a lip service in order to avoid additional public pressure and labels of being against equality. Another justification can come to additionally support this conclusion, as in Armenian society no tangible and valuable steps are being taken in order to ensure gender equality in all spheres of life and particularly in politics.

Assuming that for political advancement the adoption of male roles and self-expression within the confines of male culture could serve as a prerequisite, women were asked an additional question: “If they had tried in their political career to copy men or contrary to that they had tried to accentuate their femininity in politics in order to become successful?” As a result it became clear that women politicians had

never tried to accentuate their femininity, but also they had not tried to copy male roles. Meanwhile, women mentioned that frequently both men and women have model behaviors, the copying of which should not be viewed as gender inequality that speak in favor of prevalence of masculinity or femininity.

Meantime, part of interviewed women stated that after entering politics the attitudes and perceptions of family and other people around them had changed. These women also believed that their gender roles did not change.

According to the women from the other group, people surrounding them have changed their attitudes and now take them more seriously, even if they do not show it overtly.

“...Just my role in the family has changed, it has become more stable, a bit more free. I did not have conflicts in the family, as we are of more a modern type and family members did not create obstacles. They definitely guide me, provide their advice, good or bad they share their views, but do not push in terms of the choice of profession or political issues.”

PI, female, mid-level

Nevertheless, women have not noticed any tangible shifts in their gender roles, as their everyday life had moved on in a mode of business as usual with a bigger share being given to the politics.

“...The attitude of family members has of course changed covertly, but they do not explicitly show it. Well, we are living in an Armenian reality. In this reality, men head the households, whereas women are the necks as we say. So whichever way we want the things to move we turn that way. But you will have to always accept that the man is the head. This is how we have been raised, girls are taught that from the early age. These are our national traditions and customs. If you think you are an Armenian, well, then that is your specific typology.”

PI, female, high level

“...For instance the fact of me being a party member had for a

while kept men away from me. I do not try to imply that I am infallible. Once or twice I have been reprimanded that I am tough, I somehow have a party toughness. I have tried to understand if I were such a person and how to change. But a woman..., an individual has to be happy, male or female does not matter. But somehow, since we, women are being asked out as a rule, we do that very rarely ourselves, we have to be smart in order to be chosen and go for the choice.”

PP, female, lower level

“Yes, they have become more respectful, and when presenting me they say that I am a public person, an activist. In this sense it has changed. I myself also changed in terms how I view public people.”

PP, female, lower level

Concerning self-esteem and self-portrayal changes after the engagement in politics, the situation is as follows. There were no tangible changes in terms of self-portrayal both among men and women. The only change that was noticed and applied to both sexes was the boosted esteem after a sequence of successes registered. Other key changes were not mentioned.

Referring to **self-esteem** the majority of women both from the parties and initiatives told that **after entering politics their self-esteem had been significantly boosted, they had become more self-confident, had become more self-reliant and had aspired for more. Unlike women, interviewed men in their majority did not observe any impact on their self-esteem and had seen no change whatsoever, since their “self-esteem is anyway quite high.”**

It is noteworthy that interviews with women highlight their continuous desire for self-perfection. Female respondents mentioned their desire to engage in educational initiatives in the future in order to enrich their knowledge base and improve their operations. However, that self-improvement is only viewed in the light of service to the motherland. There are number of studies about female self-esteem. They reveal that women more frequently underestimate themselves, thus, exhibiting

desire to aim at the maximum or reaching perfection unlike men, who are more courageous in taking steps even when they do not qualify. The low self-esteem among female participants becomes obvious in many instances, as well as in their speech-acts. "I don't know," "I am not sure if I have an answer," "perhaps," and similar other statements prevail in the responses of females. The responses of male respondents are more clear, succinct and determined.

Perceptions about Leadership

Leadership is the ability and capacity of an individual to manage other people or groups. In public life of any society the actions of the political elite are defined by the presence of political leadership. Leadership qualities can be exhibited from early childhood or later in the adult life. We tried to understand when leadership qualities exhibited themselves among the political party and initiative representatives that participated in the study, aiming at the identification of gender indicators in relation to the perception and attributes of leadership.

Attitudes pertaining to leadership are quite general and were congruent among both party and initiative representatives regardless of their gender. More specifically, perceptions concerning leadership did not reveal any gender specific indicators. Quite the contrary, both men and women mentioned a number of common qualities.

Henceforth, leadership qualities according to respondents can be classified into a number of following categories:



Types of Leadership

Based on the interviews with the members of political parties and initiatives we identified four possible types of leadership:

- 1. Primary leadership**, when the qualities become obvious from early childhood, i. e. in the kindergarten or school;
- 2. Secondary leadership**, when the person does not consider himself or herself a leader, but thinks that in adulthood he or she has exhibited certain charismatic qualities;
- 3. Situational leadership**, when those qualities are observed in certain situation or based upon specific social-political demand;
- 4. Attributed leadership**, when the person thinks that others will have to judge if he or she has leadership qualities.

Based on this, aggregating the approaches and perceptions of male respondents, one can identify the following types of leadership (grouped based on the availability of majority within the sample).

Secondary leadership

"...I have not noticed any leadership qualities in me."

PI, male, mid-level

"...Maybe my activation button was to be turned on later in life."

PP, male, high level

Primary Leadership

"...First, in the university, then in the army, later in my workplace."

PP, male, mid-level

"...Yes, I was in student council during university years."

PP, male, high level

Situational Leadership

"...Leadership reveals itself when quite frankly you excel at something, you have some narrow specific skills then you can claim the leadership."

PI, male, mid-level

Attributed Leadership

"...I don't think that an individual can identify for himself leadership qualities. It will have to come from the people around you."

PP, male, mid-level

"...My leadership is not to me to be assessed, instead it is to my friends, party members and others to decide if I have it or not."

PP, male, mid-level

Based on the opinions of female respondents one can assemble the following typology (again based on the majority opinion in the group):

Primary Leadership

"...Early on in the school I exhibited those qualities."

PP, female, mid-level

"...I have noticed leadership qualities when I was in the middle school, I noticed that my friends love listening to me, and do what I say, and they like communicating with me."

PP, female, high level

Secondary leadership

"...I have never assessed myself in terms of leadership qualities. Have never thought about leadership related things."

PP, female, mid-level

"...Quite frankly, when it comes to me talking about leadership is not that right. I do not share these views and get the concept of leadership."

PP, female, mid-level

Situational Leadership

"...At one point I thought that I do not want to be that active and have not assumed any that kind of role when in the university, I was rather laid back then."

PP, female, high level

"...When I hit the street and got acquainted with strangers, I realized that we are all interconnected."

PI, female, high level

It is noteworthy that, though rare, among men there were people that could not accept or deny their leadership qualities, leaving that to the others surrounding them to do so. While women were more in numbers and quite open in assigning primary leadership roles to themselves as compared with other women or men around them. This can be linked

5.4. Gender Profile of Political Participation and Political Activism

The Key Profile of a Politically Active Person

to fact that men in the Armenian reality are being assigned “leadership qualities” from a very early age, thus, always assigning this role even in those cases, when they do not exhibit them. As a result, those men, who have been assigned this role, but did not have the qualities, in reality resort to the other people around them to get the approval of the availability of these traits. Along the same lines, since women are not being assigned and expected to have leadership capacities, when grown up, they actually exhibit those qualities, if they really have them, unlike men, who have to carry out that role even in those cases, when they do not have the qualities.

The study once again confirmed that politically active women have personified images, i. e. their image is linked to very concrete individuals, what can be linked to the fact of them being represented in very scarce numbers in politics, leading to the image of a politically active women directly associated with real life active female politicians with clearly observed leadership qualities. Unlike women, in case of men it is very difficult to construct **one** image of political leader, which is explained by the fact of men being well represented in politics, thus, having a diversity of leadership qualities.

It is noteworthy that when comparing political parties and initiatives, we did not notice an inclination towards one type of leadership. Quite the contrary, one could identify at least two or three PP or PI representatives that had leadership qualities pertaining to one of the identified four groups. **Henceforth, differences in leadership qualities are identified in relation to the gender, but not the type of organization.**

The study results also confirmed that in case of women their family of birth and attitudes of parents played a bigger role in their future political engagement compared to men.

The study also aimed at the identification of gender sensitivity of descriptions of politically active person and gender differences of perceptions among representatives of political organizations.

When describing a political active person two groups were identified:

- a) Simple citizens that are politically active;
- b) Political figures.

An interesting nuance was noticed: when describing politically active people, men were more pragmatic, whereas women’s descriptions also had idealistic strokes.

The description of a politically active person

According to the opinions of women, the politically active person has to be honest, objective, realist, determined, persistent, educated and cultured. That person has to have faith, strength of will and clear ideas that would motivate him/her to move forward. That person has to be active, not passive, also has to be well informed about the politics and political life. That person has to be ready for struggle and is supposed to have good analytical and critical thinking skills in order to be able to discern false things and overcome them.

“...Has to have real strength of spirit, meaning he/she has to be unwavering, but merciful. That person has to be independent in order not to allow any other person to dominate him/her or lead. Has to take into account the voice of the people.”

PP, female, lower level

“...Politically active person has to be aware of the political system of the country, of its political parties, their ideologies, in order to

be able to make choices. Politically active person has to be aware of all ongoing processes and follow the actions of political leaders from all parties.”

PP, female, mid-level

“...The most important thing is the analytical thinking, which I hold in a high esteem, and is rarely found in our reality, since once they read a piece of information, they take it for granted and it is really hard to argue anything else with them.”

PP, female, high level

According to male respondents, politically active people had to be patriots, determined, literate, educated, honest, sincere and inquisitive. That person had to have moral standing, carry clear values, ideology and political views, as well as exhibit politically savvy systemic thinking. They also highlighted the importance of organizational skills and management competences along with the presence of grounded principles for all actions.

“...Politically active person is not indifferent. I just think that as such people should not be indifferent, they shall have to try to grasp the overall picture instead of narrowed individually driven outlooks.”

PI, male, mid-level

“...We all are politically active, but none of us is political activist. For a politically active person the most important aspect is the basic knowledge and the fact of being informed.”

PP, male, mid-level

“...Determination, understanding, honesty and so that they do not cherish ideas of solving personal issues and getting gains when engaged in politics, so that those that transgress principles are ostracized, as we saw recently. I naturally am ready to go till the very end.”

PP, male, mid-level

“...I am not sure, but I think that one has to have certain principles

and stay loyal to the adopted line. That person should be incorruptible, has to have a valiant spirit, has to remain upbeat and not get discouraged, since when a wave of disappointments passes among the ranks of common people, the activist has to multiple his/her efforts, as those disappointments occur along your way up.”

PP, male, lower level

When comparing the descriptions provided by men and women, certain commonalities arise, especially in relation to key indicators. Nevertheless, when asked if indicators of politically active men and women had any differences, the respondents thought that in modern life the differences gradually disappear. If a number of decades ago, political activism were linked to men, whereas women under the weight of stereotypes and social pressure exhibited a rather passive social stance, and it was really rare to see a politically active woman, now the society does not place a qualitative or quantitative differentiation between politically active men or women.

When describing politically active citizen another general descriptor was mentioned, that being politically active did not necessarily lead to engaging in politics or participating in activities while holding a flag or a banner, and that regardless of the sex of the person. One can be politically active in any sphere, such as arts, science, education, etc. Those artists that create politically charged art, scientists that engage in research of politically relevant subjects or translate such works, the educators that socialize their students into civic subjects with knowledge and analytical tools, all these people are also considered being politically active. It was mentioned also that politically active meant participating in elections, is able to raise his/her and community concerns in relevant institutions, thus, impacting the political parties' decision making processes.

“...I am not at all convinced that all politically active people should take banners and go in front of the Government building. I think that someone doing business when coming across an injustice, does not try to bribe his/her way out of the situation, instead I would expect that person to opt for court, where his/her interests

can be defended. That also is political, like when the person tries to defend his/her interests.”

PI, female, high level

“...An institution that raises the concerns of citizens, maybe number one, has to be sincere both to itself and the others, whose interests he/she wants to represent, the desire to work, which has to run in parallel, determination and the ability to be patient in any endeavor, since as a rule not well thought and hasty actions bring about unexpected consequences.”

PP, male, high level

It is interesting to note that there was no tangible difference in terms of gender and institutional affiliation. This view was held both by male and female respondents from political parties and initiatives.

According to the respondents (both male and female) it was unacceptable to place gender based differentiations or limitations when speaking of politically active people, and it was not only unacceptable, but also unreasonable, since being politically engaged part of the society was the right of both men and women and was being perceived as such.

The Description of a Political Figure as a Politically Engaged Person

When describing the political figure as being politically active person, there were no considerable differences noted based on the gender of the respondent. This can be explained by the possibility of majority of political figures in Armenia being men, and when saying political figure automatically imagining people of one specific gender, thus, attuning their provided descriptions around that image.

The main general indicator or descriptor was that the political figure had to be just, honest, unbending, but with a sense of pity. That person has to be incorruptible, be the owner of clear political objectives, positions, system of values and patriotic thinking. That very same person has to be determined and able to find constructive solutions around the issues of concern to the citizens.

“...The key is to having patriotic thinking, thus, when a person chooses to engage in politics, that person has to clearly

understand that he/she is going to undergo deprivations, his/her personal interests and gains are to be left aside, thinking about the welfare of the others.”

PI, female, high level

“...First of all the person engaged in politics has to have high morals, I don't care what they say about politicians, who really enters it, sometimes they say nonsensical stuff about this.”

PP, male, mid-level

“...Politically active person has to have political views above all, instead of waiting for someone else telling him/her what to do and stemming from those views has to initiate some actions, finding adherents.”

PP, male, high level

“...Well, first of all, politically active person has to be a realist, fully delving into the politics so that his/her activism gets noticed.”

PP, female, lower level

Some respondents also voiced a concern that in Armenia today a number of things badly impact the development of the image of politically active female figure:

- 1) The diversity of people who call themselves political analysts or are engaged in politics;
- 2) Media portrayal and non-correct political journalism.

All this formulates stereotypical descriptors and qualities describing political figures, which in its turn adds yet another impediment to the engagement of women in politics in large numbers. The above stated is also confirmed by the fact that respondents themselves mentioned (mostly men) that the low numbers of women actively engaged in politics negatively impacts their activity, turning the ones that are engaged into rather passive political figures, not being able to use all their potential for the further development of the political sphere and its improvement.

Reasons for Starting a Political Career and Joining a Political Institution

It is not surprising that, male and female members of political initiatives, when starting their political careers had no ambitions or sound reasons. More specifically, they had no deliberate intention to engage in politics. They have mostly mobilized around certain political issues and the desire to solve issues related to welfare state, which had led to self-identification with groups that had been active in these issues. And their decision was directly linked to the vision of the initiative, its programs and supporters.

“...Political career sounds a bit overrated, I consider myself an ordinary Armenian, citizen that has what to do and cannot seat on the couch, following the events unfolding in our country, while people like me are struggling and trying to change something.”

PI, male, lower level

Certainly, individuals with more experience and of an older age engaged in initiatives linked their political activism and career with the student years, the student uprisings of Soviet times and the fact of their being part of these things.

“...Entering politics happened very naturally. Why I say that, because I don't think anyone can just spontaneously become a political figure. Already during my student years I was engaged in public activities, but not the political ones.”

PI, female, high level

Younger representatives (both male and female) mentioned that their main political activism came about during 2007-2008 presidential elections and following events and it still goes on.

Speaking of representatives of political parties in terms of their careers, some key differences appear. Among certain political parties (RPA, PAP, RLP) women engaged there mentioned that their desire to join the given party was driven by the motivation to do something good or agreeing with the political ideology of the party.

“...I have heard a lot that the party supported many people, with visits to the kindergartens, boarding schools, gave away gifts, and made children happy. I like to be involved in such kind of things. That was the main reason why I joined the party. I had no political motivation.”

PP, female, lower level

In case of men joining the RPA, PAP, and RLP parties were mostly motivated by the closeness of the organization's political ideology, but there was also another motivation, which was to try and have a contribution to the change in the country and do something by joining the party, that was the way men thought.

In case of non-coalition parties (more specifically ANC) there were no significant differences between men and women in terms of their decision to join the party. The motivation of becoming a party member was driven by the opposition to the ruling party ideology and closeness to the ideology of a given party. The main drives were to change the existing political system, bring to the minimum the corruption risks and cases of bribery, create better living standards for the people, ensure freedom of speech and other conducive conditions. In order to reach all of the above, the respondents mentioned that the best strategy was to join the given party, spread its ideology, and thus, ensure the victory of that organization. As a result of all of these, only the male and female representatives of opposition parties saw the realization of their objectives and establishment of enabling environment for the others.

It was interesting that male and female representatives of ARF mentioned motivations of joining the party that were linked to the centennial heritage of the organization, its key contribution to the national liberation struggle and other ideological nuances that are only to be found in that particular party.

“...It is a serious organization with national ideology, which during the last 125 years had played a key role in the life of our people. It is striving for the preservation of national values, through its works and activities it has had an immense impact in very severe circumstances, be it external or internal, etc.”

PP, male, high level

It has to be mentioned that both males and females join the party also being driven by family heritage (they are not the first generation that has opted for the party) and this fact alone influences the younger generation in their decision to join the ranks.

“...My parents are party members up until now, and let me say that they have met through ARF, and I also already mentioned that from the very early age I have seen how they would go to the party meetings, as well as I have heard their ideological discussions.”

PP, female, lower level

When answering the question of why they have specifically chosen the party not any other organization in trying to reach their objectives, in case of all the party representatives of both genders, the answers were similar. Joining the party was seen as the only way of making sure that tangible and effective changes occur through their political activism. Among alternatives of being inside the party in terms of exhibiting activism, *civic movements and social activism* was mentioned.

Civic movements were seen as actions that generated short term results, which in certain cases through their targeting and core purpose transform into political movements, as those civic movements in reality are aimed at the betterment of the political system via turning into a struggle against injustices.

Activism in social spheres was estimated as something of an expert level engagement and exchange of opinions, which cannot generate tangible results, instead it can indirectly impact the opinions of decision makers, still not ensuring decisive role and result.

Advancement in Political Organizations

The study also aimed at finding out gender perspective of internal mobility mechanisms of political organizations. In case of women the advancement was interestingly initiated by governing bodies of political parties and initiatives, which means that as a rule women did not suggest their candidacies.

“...No, let me state why it was presented in a smooth way, the suggestion came from them (the governing body members), I had never told them to make me a member of the political council.”

PP, female, mid-level

In case of men the picture is completely different, as the majority has self-promoted their candidacies. Women, instead, told that their friends and other people around them played a significant role in a sense of encouraging them and giving the necessary boost for the self-esteem.

“...People that knew me, recommended me to enter the party. I went and asked for that. I won't give his name, he is quite a well know public figure. He told me not to get involved.”

PP, female, mid-level

“...My friends really helped me a lot, the ones in the party, as their support really means a lot to me, as sometimes when you feel down and loose the faith, thinking that you cannot do anything, while seated with them with a cup of coffee, they motivate you, tell you to remember where you started from.”

PP, female, mid-level

This means that women exhibit low levels of self-esteem and motivation, which leads to the absence of the willingness or decision for self-promotion. Moreover, even being promoted by the management team, women still need the support and motivation of their friends and other people around in order to lift their spirits up.

“...My friends morally supported me, they believed fully in me and my ideas, objectives, my strength, they believed that I could do that, because in reality it is very difficult to be alone.”

PP, female, mid-level

Although men are also frequently being promoted by management team, but unlike women the number of self-promoted men is much higher. Men use their social network for increasing the probability of reaching the desired end upon self-promotion.

“...Reaching this position was conditioned by the fact of having

sound understanding, good assessment, when your friends see that in this particular thing that guys is more knowledgeable or is more effective in terms of doing it, and naturally after seeing that, they trust you.”

PP, male, mid-level

It is noteworthy that speaking of gains and losses as a result of promotion and reaching high offices gender differences were present, too. Men more stated the gains, such as new friends, new experiences and knowledge, also mentioning the losses in terms of time and energy, women along with the same thoughts also highlighted another key problem. For married women it was a big problem to carry out their household duties along with their political responsibilities, which frequently led to conflicts and problematic situations. This is a result of the stereotypical view of politically active working women not being able to be good mothers, now negatively impacting the family life of those who are actually engaged in political life.

“...In our Armenian reality the grandmother is an icon to be worshiped, the mother is a saint, the women is a strategic enemy, and the daughter is the light of her father’s eyes. This is the Armenian equation. For men I don’t know of any equation.”

PP, female, high level

Certainly, women that have already reached an established position in the political life have already dealt with the conflicts and have a rather stable condition in terms of being able to overcome those difficulties, thus, being pushed into the background, where the male members of the family of the given woman have played a positive and encouraging role in motivating them and accepting their politically active lifestyle.

“...Not only my role in the family has changed, it has become more stable, more independent, more freed from them. I had not had conflicts in my family, because they are a bit more modern and do not create any obstacles. They even guide me, provide their advice, they share their views, but do not impose them, neither in the choice of profession nor in political matters.”

PP, female, mid-level

Interviewed women mentioned that they did not have family issues in relation to their political activity, quite the contrary, they had become more self-confident in making decisions in the family. However, many stated that it is an issue in Armenia, when family is being opposed to the political activism of a woman and is the real problem in many cases, when really smart women want to enter politics.

“...It is the result of the Armenian reality. We do not welcome women in politics in Armenia, our perceptions are not conducive.”

PP, male, mid-level

“...it is a pity that in Armenia there are many families that oppose women entering the politics. Our family luckily is not one of them, but seriously there are many like that, where women are deprived from political engagement.”

PP, female, mid-level

5.5. Social Networks within the Parties

There were no differences identified in making networks of friends inside the party and developing the social capital. The main thought was that within the structures the relations with peers were very friendly and positive. Some members from PPs and PIs, due to the limited time they had, found it hard to have outside contacts, whereas those that did not have such time limits, continued their internal party and initiative relations in their daily lives as well.

When speaking of conflicts with other PP and PI members, it was mentioned that most of them were of professional nature, which were being resolved through healthy debates.

“...No, there is nothing of serious type. It is natural that during the discussion of different issues there are diverging opinions, but that does not reach a level of a major conflict, not that I know of.”

PP, male, high level

According to PP and PI representatives that have participated in the study, interpersonal conflicts are rather rare, which as a rule do not negatively impact the functioning of the PI or PP.

The interpersonal conflicts as a rule are being solved outside PI or PP, but when it becomes impossible to resolve them, the parties to the conflict simply minimize their contacts within the PP or PI, so that it does not interfere with the normal operations of the organization.

“...Of course, there are conflicts. They get resolved through lengthy debates or within three minutes...Depending on the issue. It happens that people hold grudges against each other naturally, but it has nothing to do with our functioning, these are some kind of personal things. There are also ideological clashes, also very healthy competition.”

PP, male, mid-level

It is interesting that women did not mention about any serious conflict. There are debates, disagreements, other incompatibilities of working nature, which nevertheless, do not impact interpersonal relations. Issues of debate related nature occur both to men and women, but they do not grow into long terms unsolved problems. It is noteworthy that women are more tolerant when it comes to conflicts. The main disagreements between women politicians and their male or female peers are mostly of ideological nature and frequently come about due to the differences in political opinions.

Relations with PP and PI leaders also had quite friendly nature. The members of lower level stated that high level members were very polite regardless of the gender of the respondent, during the meeting they were stated to take into account their views and opinions.

“...The relations with leadership do not bear any difference in reality. The leading bodies and members realize that if they somehow adopt an unpopular decision, we can recall it back.”

PI, male, mid-level

“Civic Contract” political initiative members mentioned that their main approach is not to have one leader and provide leadership opportunities

and privileges to all that made it difficult for them to describe specificity or a difference in leader-peer and peer-peer relations.

“...Our leadership conscientiously works towards the creation of an environment for members that have opinions to be able to voice them, speak about it, be open, more particularly they strive to make sure that members are not limited by anything, as they realize that by giving opportunities to people one can engage them and make them part of the process.”

PI, female, high level

Introducing changes in relations were mostly similar based on the provided opinions. Most of them think that they do not need any changes in their relations, more specifically in the working relations. The relations are very positive and there is no need for fundamental changes both with those that are more of a peer type, also with those that hold quite friendly relations. Moreover, no interpersonal changes were mentioned, since the respondents told that when developing their relations with people they take into account the identities of the others and accept them the way they are or reject them.

“...I think there is no need to change anything in relationships, since there are people of various characters, as I had already mentioned, and they hold different world views or visions when approaching solutions of problems.”

PP, male, mid-level

Speaking of conflicts with leaders, all respondents mentioned that they do not have conflicts with them most of the times. This is conditioned by the fact that conflicts arise in cases of absence of consensus, common goal or agreement. But when people get around a common political unit, it is assumed that all have the same goal and aspirations, thus, there can be any ideological clashes with the leaders.

Speaking of unequal treatment within the political organizations, it was stated that they have not noticed any inequality as such be it by the gender, age or education or any other reason. Quite the contrary, female respondents mentioned that they notice a positive discrimination (or as they put it - positive inequality), such as when they voice opinions

or views everyone listens to them and pays attention. Certainly, this does not mean that they play a big role in decision making and have a leadership position, but they also have not noticed any gender based discrimination.

The tendency of not speaking of unequal treatment among female respondents could be explained by the possible fear among women that have gotten a quasi-equal opportunity in political participation (quasi, since the participation of women is ensured mostly through the application of quotas as a requirement or under public pressure) to lose the opportunity, if they voice their concerns and discrimination, which in reality do exist in political systems.

Two female respondents from ARF mentioned that there is no purposeful gender inequality and discrimination within the party, however, they thought that the inequality was a societal issue that reverberated with all spheres, including the party relations.

“...There is no deliberate unequal treatment, it is rather mirrored through the Armenian realities of inequality with all the consequences stemming from this. If you are too feminine they perceive you differently. If you are quite feminized you would have to struggle more in order for them to treat you as their equal. If you have rather masculine constructs when responding to them, the path towards the equality is a bit shortened.”

PP, female, mid-level

Although, the holders of such opinion do not see the fact, in reality **men and women have different ways of overcoming problems and difficulties on their way up within the ranks.**

“...In Armenia, all over the place, well not only in Armenia, it is not only a matter of male chauvinism, but lack of female solidarity. Women, I don't know, have this housewife complex, there is jealousy, lack of trust, meanness, and stereotypes. We have a lot of things that we need to revisit.”

PP, female, high level

The above stated opinion, though not voiced frequently in relation to

intraparty gender inequality, showed that women at times are forced to confront the discrimination of other women within the party. This is yet another impediment, which in patriarchal societies doubles the obvious and latent criticism against political activism of women by obvious criticism from women.

Finally, as a summary, it is worth mentioning that the picture of social relations within the parties and initiatives is overall positive and constructive both horizontally (peer to peer) and vertically (peer to superior). In certain cases, the relations are confined within the party, in other cases still, they spread to include everyday life.

5.6. Challenges and Impediments Faced by Men and Women during Political Participation and Decision Making

Involvement of women in decision making process is one of the key indicators of their political engagement. According to Virginia Sapiro, female engagement in politics contributes to equal distribution of power, participation and decision making. The involvement of women in decision making is not an end in itself, it contributes to balancing of power and equal distribution, thus, also the provision of diversity of opinions.

We have already reflected upon those key factors that impede the active involvement of women in decision making. Those are mostly external factors, which are of socioeconomic and cultural nature. Nevertheless, discussions and research around the issue has had less attention focused on PI/PP intra-organizational structural impact as an impediment to female political participation.

The study has also reflected upon the internal dynamics of political organization, revealing the role of women in internal decision making processes.

Within the study, the respondents viewed the participation in decision making from two perspectives, one within the party, the other, on a broader country wide scale.

The majority of respondents consider the participation of women in decision making on a country wide level as something out of reach, given that they are representatives of the current power structure. In this case, the decision making on a country wide scale, being viewed as the prerogative of power holding persons, at least requires dialogue with the ruling party, which the oppositionist respondents find unacceptable. The main goal of changing the regime, crowds out other “secondary” issues, such as gender related ones.

Political organizations included in research have group decision making processes within different frames of management, unlike the perception that is held within the Armenian public. Regardless of the frame of management, decisions are being made based on diverse opinions and majority vote. The participants excluded the possibility of a one man decision making in their political organizations. None of the respondents hinted or talked about injustices or disagreements in decision making processes. Moreover, none spoke of any intraparty impediments, including any gender based discrimination or segregation. All of the respondents both from PIs and PPs excluded the possibility of any gender discrimination, stating that men and women equally participate in decision making. Nevertheless, they still accept the fact that there are few women in supreme or governing bodies, not to mention the Presidia that all hold decision making powers by definition. It is worth to mention that only one party studied within this research is ruled by a female representative.

Earlier in the book we discussed the role of “gatekeepers” in terms of women participating in politics, which was not supported within this study based on the information collected from respondents. Moreover, they excluded the possibility of the leader of the organization making decision on his/her own, referring to the effectiveness of the mechanism of majority driven decision making.

“...Decisions are not made by one person, definitely, I am positive, though I have already told that before. There are a number of mechanisms for decision making depending on the issue at hand. The political council is being presented with the problem, we discuss it, then vote among other things. After that if there are other opinions, we make a decision to have a series of separate

discussions within local chapters.”

PP, male, high level

“...You know it was very open and based on clearly defined democratic principles, meaning that each and every one had a chance to share his/her views and as I thought it was one of the strong points of Pre-parliament. Those people, who were being viewed as the leaders, such as Jirayr Sefilian, Garegin Chuqaszyan did not in any way discriminate based on age or gender. All were equal and that was creating a very good environment, engaging both women, men also the youth.”

PI, female, lower level

Some of the respondents found the level of female participation in decision making processes of their respective political organizations quite satisfactory, referring to the officially set twenty percent gender quota, which is being upheld by their organization.

Even when realizing the problem very few political organizations have tried to address the scarcity of women and try and promote their engagement. However, one has to state that almost all organizations have women’s councils, as the respondents mentioned it, but had difficulty to clarify what is it that these structures really do. It can be assumed that these councils do not play an active role, since even the members of political organizations themselves find it hard to substantiate further their activities.

“...We have women’s council, but that is all I know, since I am being invited and engage in it as an invitee. They have their own governing body, I have my own work to do.”

PP, female, high level

The intraparty policy of promotion of engagement of women has activities evolving in two directions mainly.

Collaboration with non-governmental organizations that deal with women’s issues: NGOs have provided expert advice to political organizations on their way of trying to revisit and conceptualize the problem of low engagement of women, contributing to the development

of policy document on the promotion of women engagement. The similar support of European organizations is an asset worth mentioning, and it was aimed at formulation of understanding and capacity building of partisan women. However, none of the political organizations have adopted any directed measures.

The Role of Female Leader: A clear intraparty program on promotion of women's engagement has been introduced in the party that is headed by a female leader, who giving importance to the role of female politicians, supports the development of capacities among young leaders, promoting their participation in local and international study, as well as exchange programs along with the creation of similar opportunities within the party.

"Successful Women" as Prototypes

Numerous gender studies have raised the issue of stereotypical perception about women that are actively engaged in politics. Mostly negative image of women built on stereotypes can impede the promotion of politically active women, thus, playing a role in keeping their numbers down.

Unlike public perception, the image of female leaders serves as a prototype for women in PPs and PIs, especially for those, who are taking their first steps. In the reality of absence of gender sensitivity, the engagement of successful women provides a positive ground for the promotion of political engagement of women, partially filling the gap created by the absence of gender sensitivity.

"Successful" female peers are viewed as prototypes of female political leaders that can be emulated, allowing others to identify with them. The discourse on successful female politicians bears impact in those organizations, where on the top of the pyramid women successfully fulfil their roles and have reached a certain political position, such as for instance holding the MP mandate. These women in intraparty life do carry an important prototypical behavioral representation.

Problems of Gender Sensitivity Faced by Political Persons

The gender sensitivity of women themselves and the respectful political organizations is the most important guarantee of their political engagement. **The level of realization of gender issues by the individual and the political organization are directly correlated with the engagement of women in decision making and political life as such.** Although, none of the respondents had come across or realized gender inequality in internal politics, it is obvious that in political organizations there is an issue with gender gap. **Even if the overall number of women in political organizations is not small, nevertheless along the way up and in higher levels of the organizations their numbers gradually fall, even reaching zero point.** Only the fact of all the leaders except for one of the political organizations included in the study being of male gender speaks for itself. In this case, **it is possible that the problem is tied to the absence of gender sensitivity, such as the fact of political individuals not realizing or rejecting the underlying gender based causes of the situation at hand.**

The respondents explain the absence of gender issues in their respectful organizations through a number of justifications.

Gender Problems Seen as Artificial Issues

Among respondents a clear tendency of denying the existence of gender inequality was noticed. It revealed itself through 1) the rejection of the issue, i.e. "nothing like that exists" and 2) the conviction that there was a tendency of artificially making it an issue.

The rejection of gender issues in political organizations is an issue in itself, taking into account the scarcity of women at highest levels of hierarchy. **Not raising gender related issues might be explained by the fact of fragmented understanding of the problem at hand.** More particularly, frequently gender equality was being understood as a certain level of presence of women in political organizations and exclusion of

any possibilities of clear-cut impediments. Such limited understanding of gender equality narrows the comprehensive understanding of the problem, thus, obstructing the organization of activities aimed at the solution of the issue.

“...Sorry, but I can’t answer your question in anyway, as I have not seen that problem. Maybe I will try to further that same approach, not ever mentioning about women, because when you make it salient, it means there is some kind of a problem, so that you speak about it.”

PP, female, mid-level

On the other hand, **the rejection of gender inequality is viewed within the context of human rights**, i. e. from the very beginning considering both men and women as humans, overlooking their gender differences, thus, also excluding the option of adopting a special position toward any of the genders.

“...We always approach anything from “human” perspective. While defending the human rights, it turns out that automatically the rights of all genders are protected by default. We have not stressed women, the same way, as we have not done that for men either.”

PP, female, high level

Moreover, there are attempts to neutralize gender inequality by viewing positive discrimination as an act of inequality in itself:

“...Look, gender inequality in itself.... (we are now losing the focus), if you say that there has to be this many girls at least in the council, for example, or this or that for women, that also is an inequality. Who says that inequality is when they are not talked about or privileges... If you give privileges to women, it is an insult. Why it should not have been that way? If you purposefully stress the privilege of a woman in anything or it has to be this way for her, it is also a gender inequality. Who told you that their rights should be violated in order for that to be considered as a gender inequality?”

PI, male, lower level

Even when gender related issues are raised, they are viewed from the broader societal perspective, excluding the availability of the problem in their own PPs and PIs. Often gender inequality is being viewed within the overall context of problems without stressing the importance of a filtered identification of gender issues in terms of them being as separate items on the list. On the other hand, inequality is being considered as a natural thing, only stressing the need for acceptable range:

“...First the social role of women. That is the nature of the humankind. A woman has a greater role in the family than a man, it is just the history of the humankind. A woman gets day offs for giving birth to a baby, not the man...The nature itself has set the things this way. Being burdened by family naturally leaves less space for a woman to get involved in social life. But in all other things she easily engages. A man is considered to be created for tougher tasks, whereas a woman is more sensitive, that explains it all.”

PP, male, high level

Only very few among the respondents had highlighted the importance of raising gender issues, even more setting a political agenda, as well as discussing them within the broader context of the public politics.

Gender specificities appear also in the context of decision making, when the respondent had previously thoroughly viewed gender issues within his/her professional duties, had been more sensitive and able to record gender based inequalities. More specifically, the respondent from the women’s council of a political organization directly engaged in the identification of intraparty gender issues in order to reflect it in the internal agenda, mentioned:

“...It was also the ratio, let say of delegates. For example, we thought that it was an important issue, but when you give it a look, in our party the number of women is high, but during the general assemblies most of the delegates are men with very few women present. No one had paid attention to that, but it still was the reality. We started paying attention to it, at least trying to push for parity. Then we decided to create female support groups, so that they prepare women in the regions for local elections.”

PP, female, high level

Although the respondents of in depth interviews completely rejected the presence of gender inequality in their political organizations, apart from that not even viewing it as something relevant to the Armenia society, the detailed analysis of the respondent texts obviate gender issues clearly. The conflict between responses and language discourse can provide a number of explanations:

1) It is possible that gender sensitivity is low and the problem is not being seen from that angle, thus, excluding the clear identification of gender discrimination;

2) The intra-organizational solidarity does not allow the representatives to raise the availability of such concerns.

Gender issues identified as a result of context analysis need to be further discussed in order to develop clear understanding about those issues, bearing in mind the concrete concept.

The Powerful Language of a Male Leader

The respondents have on numerous occasions voiced the group nature of decision making in political organizations, executing through debate and voting, thus, giving opportunities to participants to raise concerns and propose topics for discussion. None of the respondents mentioned about coming across impediments in their respective PIs and PPs in terms of being overlooked or when voicing their opinions. Although decisions are being made collectively, frequently they spoke about the importance of so called final word of male leaders.

“...Well the meeting was being chaired by our beloved Mr. President, and then he says “[the name of the respondent] the rest of the meeting is going to be chaired by you, stand up and come here,” and I am seated in the hall and said back “Oh please Mr. President...” He shifted places, came down to the hall, sat and then I chaired the meeting. What I want to say is that there is no such issue of male vs. female, these kinds of issues are done with among our ranks.”

PP, female, high level

In another example, in an effort to show the impossibility of gender inequality in their political organization, a male respondent states a common gender stereotype:

“...I am going to choose a girl as my secretary, so that you stop asking this question. It does not matter at all if one is a woman, a man, a child, a disabled or an elderly. It does not matter.”

PP, male, mid-level

These kinds of statements during interviews show the presence of gender issues, justifying the argument that the absence of gender sensitivity limits the raising of those issues and impedes adoption of appropriate activities aimed at the promotion of engagement of women in politics.

Continuing the presentation of perceptions of respondents concerning engagement of women in politics, it is deemed necessary to discuss the problems faced by women in the political context, in all of those examining women as both subjects and objects of the same politics. Acknowledging the importance of political participation of women, along with their actual scarcity at the moment, the respondents stated that it was necessary to introduce women's issues in the PP and PI agendas. One of the respondents placed a big importance on the ongoing organization of activities aimed at the promotion of engagement of women, instead of the existing practices of hasty actions during the election campaigns, which were not effective. Although having had realized the importance of it, the respondent had not yet implemented any of the ideas shared in the interview.

On the other hand, a woman is viewed as an object of politics. In that case, she is perceived as the bearer of a certain problem. More particularly, the respondents mentioned the roles of motherhood in women's lives and the need for protection, as items qualified to be included in the political agenda. The promotion of political participation of women is among the identified problems.

Summing up the perceptions and views of respondents about the political engagement of women, it is once again important to highlight the problem that has served as a basis for this research exercise. **Why**

there are few women involved in intraparty decision making, as well as in the party leadership and representative (electoral) lists, if their numbers within the organization as stated are almost comparable with that of men and as they mention within their structure there is no form of any discrimination? It is assumed that either it is the fact of the absence of gender sensitivity that does not allow identifying intraparty gender inequalities by the stakeholders themselves or conditioned by the internal solidarity **the respondents were not sincere in their answers, avoiding to raise those real reasons that limit active engagement of women in political leadership and decision making.**

5.7. Gender Specificities of Political Goals

In the frames of multifaceted discussion of development of women's political engagement, it is important to discuss the ideas that the respondents from PIs and PPs have concerning their political future.

The study has included the objectives, specifically highlighting the political objectives of PP and PI representatives, detailing out the impediments to their realization and the role of PIs and PPs in all of that, thus, setting an objective to reveal gender specificities of setting those objectives along with their implementation.

The objectives of respondents are not always of political nature, moreover, some of them exclude entering politics in the future, emphasizing the need of individual investment and development in other spheres.

The perceptions of political objectives among respondents are not quite clear and frequently bear the mark of their political organization.

In general, the political objectives of respondents are abstract: there is a lack of clarity and certainty. Mostly the respondents synchronize their individual objectives with the ones of their respective organization. In this case again the objectives are not clear. As a rule it is formulated along the lines of "to improve something", "introduce changes to Armenia" and similar responses, as well as eradication of corruption, improvement of socioeconomic conditions and other vague goals, the frames of which are not tangible.

It is noteworthy, that the intra-structure discourse is as vague: all the representatives from political organizations have shared similar thoughts, giving out constructs that stem from party objectives and politics.

The clarity of political objectives is mainly observed among the respondents from high and mid-levels. Particularly, participating and winning in parliamentary elections of 2017 was one of them.

"...For the leader of any party in upcoming election the goal is that (and the number one upcoming election is the parliamentary one) [sites the name of their party] takes most of the seats."

PP, female, high level

Representatives from non-ruling parties see as their political goal the change of the ruling regime. Frequently, the change of regime by the opposition respondents is viewed as their personal, party and country wide objective. Non ruling party representatives reject other political objectives in a situation of such an urgent situation, when the problem is not solved.

Let's note that the variations in responses were recorded based on political ideologies, gender and affiliation with the party or initiative did not generate any differences.

Viewing the introduction of changes in the country as a political objective the political organization is being considered as a mere tools to enlarging the personal capacities of individuals on their way to large scale changes.

In the planning and formulating political objectives the external influence is highlighted. Particularly, respondents refer to the possibilities of realization of personal goals conditioned by the influence of others persons and organizations. In politics making advancements alone is seen as nonrealistic. In the party the internal powers, in the politics the backing of the political organization or a powerful leader is an important precondition for moving up the political ladder.

"...Generally in our party we have political processes, there is an internal conviction that youth has to be engaged in the governing body to the extent possible and in the recent body their numbers

were quite high. Perhaps even close to half of it were the youth about the age of 30 or my age. So we have that conviction that if I go and suggest my candidacy to the body, cause it is true that it does not change much, but in any case it gives some status or, don't know, some kind of a standing."

PP, male, mid-level

The role and the objectives of the party are highlighted, internalized, and as a result the objectives of the party and its members are noticed to be synchronized. To the question of "What political objectives do you have?" the respondents distance themselves from their own objectives, instead presenting the ones of the party as their own. On one hand, it speaks of the closeness and identification with the party, on the other hand, not seeing objectives outside their organization.

In the identification of personal and party objectives it is not an accident that the answers of respondents about the objectives carry the nuances of ideologies of political organizations. The respondents from non-ruling organizations in their statements mostly mention the need for regime change and revolution, whereas organizations with national ideologies highlight national issues in their objectives. For example, a PP representative from such a structure aims at the following:

"...In a couple of years I see myself studying abroad. I have already chosen the discipline, which is not only for my personal gain, but is going to serve my motherland. I have thought about Genocide studies."

PP, female, lower level

It is interesting that a number of women from higher levels of organizations mention that they see as an objective their reconfirmation in the position of an MP or considering becoming one, seeing it as the realization of the highest possible political career objective. Such views have been shared by women from political parties. One of them said:

"...So for example, if I become the president of the country, it won't be bad. That was a joke of course. I don't have any aspirations to be quite frank, I like the job of the MP anyway."

PP, female, high level

Meanwhile, the candidacy of any woman including the female respondent's, being elected as president is not being considered. Moreover, the image of a male leader is present and is recurrently being referred to it.

Becoming an MP in case of interviewed women is the highest possible aspiration, which has a prototype in a form of the example of other party female already serving as an MP or her own one. That aspiration is being voiced when women are asked about personal objectives.

Some of the respondents had a difficulty to formulate their personal political objectives, because they viewed their political engagement as something rather forced onto them than a willful act.

More particularly, respondents have mentioned being engaged in politics as a result of having no alternative choices. This can be explained by dire conditions of the country, when people are felt pressured to participate in politics in order to carve their own future in the country. Although, this kind of behavior is considered forced political participation, still in a traditional sense of it, that is a mode of participation, when the citizen not being indifferent to the matters regarding the future of the country, actively participates in decision making.

Is the Political Objective a Means for Career Development or Implementation of Reforms?

According to some of the respondents the political objective is to have political career advancements, which is only possible through the membership in the ruling party. In these circumstances, becoming a member of the ruling RPA is regarded as a "pass". That kind of objective, meantime, is seen as contradictory to the true service to motherland, as it is regarded within the context of the ruling regime, which is considered as an anti-state body in a need of being toppled down. Many of the representatives from the opposition parties have stated that.

“...Quite frankly, if I had political objectives I would have been a member of the Republican Party and most probably I would have been in the parliament by now.”

PP, male, lower level

Another perspective is about seeing the objectives as something from soviet heritage, again putting it in conflict with the service to the motherland, when it comes to the functions and objectives of the political organization. This type of the approach is of rather oppositionist stance, considering the political objectives within the context of regime change. And in this case again, the party objectives become personal ones for its members.

In conclusion, it is necessary to mention the abstract and impersonal nature of political objectives of the respondents. The absence of clarity in political objectives predicts the perplexity of defining actions and tactics aimed at implementing those objectives, thus, leading to the limitation of its feasibility. In such cases, the political future of the participants is vague.

**PARTY
WITHOUT
POLITICAL AMBITION:
“SHAMIRAM”
(Semiramis)
FEMALE
POLITICAL
PARTY
(A Case Study)**

“In Parliamentary elections of 1995 apart from “Shamiram” Party there were no other surprises in our country, I mean from the perspective of parliamentary elections.”

Michael Melkumyan, PAP, 2016

The Post-Soviet Armenia in its vortex of new challenges and opportunities had plotted a bigger role for the discussion of gender issues in the process of formulating women’s movement and promoting their engagement in politics. The new reality was dictating the importance of women, as subjects of politics and key players. Nevertheless, taking into account the stereotypical perception of women in the society and their excessively valued role in the family, as well as the household, such questions, as to what extent (a) the society was ready to accept a women’s party in politics and (b) the creation of such kind of a party was a conscious process, are valid enough to be raised. To what extent that “fragile creature” that was ready to enter the “pack” had even functioned? In order to answer these questions, this section of the book examines the functioning of the all-female political party “Shamiram” from gender perspective, as an organization created by women and dealing with women’s issues for the first time in the history of independent Armenia. The latter, though short lived, managed to leave its mark on the political life of the newly independent country.

The political party of “Shamiram” was a surprise in terms of it being an all-female party, the speed of establishment of the organization and the fact of it coming the second in the elections. However, it was questionable to what extent it was women-centered in its core, gender sensitive and after all, had it considered formulating a feminist agenda at all?

Within the frames of this research, “Shamiram” has been included as the only all-female political party ever created in Armenia, which has left its mark in the political life and political participation of women. Short-lived, still “Shamiram” party’s activity was an interesting precedent, which served as a reflection for public perceptions, the unpreparedness of political life to gender sensitivity, as well as it served as an important precedent for similar future initiatives.

“Shamiram” has been included in this research in the format of a case study, based on the analysis of information published in online media outlets and interviews with the party elite.

The complexity of the case study was in the scarcity of academic papers about the party, as well as in media publications. Often, the available publications had just a line about the party, as a structure that existed in that period that had passed the required percentage benchmark in parliamentary elections, taking seats in the parliament.

“Shamiram” was registered in 1995, right before the elections, engaging women from all walks of life and working in different spheres. The party successfully participated in 1995 elections and as a result of twenty percent of votes given to them took eight seats in the parliament, turning into an all-female faction. Currently, the party has ceased to exist.

The fast tracked establishment of “Shamiram” came as a surprise in the political life and gave rise to a number of myths. The media was frequently circulating the idea of the party being created by Vano Siradeghyan (Minister of International Affairs) in order to support the Republic Union (led by Pan Armenian Movement Party) and ensure the absolute majority of the ruling regime in the parliament.

“Within political circles in Armenia it was commonly accepted to state that the elections were fraudulent. OSCE observers had called it free, but not fair. The key player in those elections was the Minister of International Relations Vano Siradeghyan, whose created “Shamiram” party took the second place after the ruling Republic Union.”¹ Party members disagree with this view. They accept the direct engagement of Vano Siradeghyan in creating the party, as well as effective functioning, but fully deny the thought that they were the puppet of Pan Armenian Movement Party. They refer to their independent views and often their overtly expressed opposed views in the parliament.

“We were not from Pan Armenian Movement Party (PMP), never, we were from nowhere that is why we were very independent, and we did not accept their authority, did not even understand it and were not at all

1. Hakobyan T., 20 years ago on this day (July 5, 1995) the first parliamentary elections of independent Armenia were held, July 5, 2015

interested in it. We acted independently, often we used to vote opposite to PMP position.”

“Shamiram” party member

Nevertheless, the fact of the party being created right before the 1995 elections with the purpose to participate in them and take seats, is not denied. The objective of Vano Siradeghyan to bring freshness to the parliament and bring in new people is mentioned as well.

Gender Related Impediments on Semiramis Party’s Way

During its existence “Shamiram” has come across multiple impediments, mostly because it was a party created by women. They felt on their skin gender related stereotypes and obstacles. Party members have clear memories of false views, critique and defaming words actively circulated and voiced in relation to them. These kinds of talks were being spread with each step of the party. The party was being criticized because of its name, the fact of taking seats in the parliament and overall actions.

“...They said, who the hell they are that have taken our seats?”

“Shamiram” party member

The “foreign” name of the party. “Shamiram” party has on numerous occasions been criticized for the choice of its name. The main reason for critique was linked to its foreign name, it was being viewed as an adversarial name, recalling the Assyrian queen Semiramis that had killed the Armenian king Ara, thus, the party was getting its share of the blame for taking the name of the enemy and applying it to the name of the party.

However, the rationale behind choosing this name was to have an image of strong female political leader:

“We decided Semiramis, so that we have a political leader, not Anahit, who was a Goddess of motherhood or martyred women. We wanted to choose an image of a strong woman.”

“Shamiram” party member

Witch hunt. The critique of party's name was not the only social pressure around Semiramis. The stereotypes around actively engaged women in politics surfaced at the time. The assigned gender roles that had no tolerance for politically active women, viewing them as ones going against their gender roles, shaped into certain descriptions about the member of the party. They were being labeled as "a collection of brazens", juxtaposing them with the discreet and submissive creature's assigned gender role, which was to be far away from the so called "dirty" business of politics, as it is a male world.

The role of a woman in politics is hard to grasp. In public perceptions self-reliant and smart women engaging through these powers in politics is almost inconceivable, which gives rise to the variety of myths when women enter politics. Their glory was credited to men, viewing women as mistresses. "Shamiram" party members were not immune to this naturally. Party members recalled the myths about them being circulated through the media, such as for instance being the mistress of this or that political figure or the nouveau riche or even of them being their protégées. Whereas for the party there was a general label widely used, which called it the "Harem of Vano", as a group of women implementing the whims and desires of Vano Siradeghyan.

"Papers wrote all kinds of things about me, they even called me an "immoral". One of the papers twice gifted the Nairi theatre to me. The first time they had written that Vano Siradeghyan had given it to me as a gift for March 8, months later, in October, the same paper wrote that he has given it to me as a birthday gift."

"Shamiram" party member

It is symptomatic that the party has not only been subjected to public pressure, but has also felt the criticism of women's organizations and the parliament.

Party members explain the anger of women's organizations by the argument that Vano Siradeghyan had given his preference to the party women not the women from those organizations.

"There were women's NGOs that were furious as they existed for so

2. Araratyan A. «NA elections» v1.0-v4.0, 1995 elections, Mediamax.am, April 5, 2012.

many years, why Vano took and placed them there instead of us?"

"Shamiram" party member

In the parliament their way was not an easy one either. The party members were greeted with spears. The party members think that there are many reasons for that. MPs did not like sharing their power with newly fetched MPs, even worse – females, which were professionally quite capable, but were lagging behind their parliamentary duties. The party members claim though, that over the years, due to their hard work and responsibility other members changed their views, they even say that succeeded in introducing new culture in the parliament, simultaneously playing a role of containing mediator when male MPs steam had the risk of going overboard. The latter, unintentionally assigns a new role to females – the role of containing mediators. That role afterwards became associated with parliamentary women. This is being confirmed through a number of other studies.

The party members assured that positions about women's role and political participation have remained unchanged. They are convinced that if now somehow an all-female party gets established it will face the same pressures as theirs was. According to them the society does not so far hold a civic conviction on dignified approach to individuals regardless of gender. A tighter oversight applied to female politicians and the position of rejecting a space for errors in their case, more criticisms arise when women do minor mistakes is being confirmed by the party members. According to them, **the zero tolerance for female mistakes still is the case.** If a woman made a mistake they were "scolded like dogs", for the same mistake committed by a man only a light criticism or not even that occurred. They are convinced that for an all-female party to get established at any time there is a need for the backing of a powerful authority, otherwise, due to patriarchal social pressure and negative position of male politicians, women would be pushed to the margins, taking the default roles assigned by the society.

"If they create another one again now, there will be an [opposition to it], because this society you want it or not does not have the culture of tolerance and is not eager to listen to, we are not a civic one, we don't get it that a normal person be it a male or female, is a good thing in

itself, if that person is self-assured and fulfilled then has no any issues of coming to terms, quite the opposite, all that can contribute greatly.”

“Shamiram” party member

The Political Agenda of the Party: Is It a Feminist One?

Having had 5000 party members, “Shamiram” was a movement of women from all walks of life with different professional backgrounds, experiences and education, which had set an objective in the parliament to represent women of the country. However, the objectives of the party did not limit themselves to only embracing the participation in parliamentary elections. The party had an objective of also working towards the improvement of the country, such as raising the issues related to small and medium enterprises, the army, raise questions related to social issues. It also engaged in benevolent activities. The diversity was also greatly conditioned by the fact of party members having diverse interests and professions, being able to raise issues relevant to their spheres and place them onto the party agenda. Although, the party used to engage in issues relevant to any citizen, the issues of women were prioritized. Nevertheless, the agenda of “Shamiram” cannot be called as a feminist one. Moreover, the party member, a signer Nadezhda Sargsyan in one of her interviews told: “Many called us feminists, but we always propagated for the image of a strong man.”³

In terms of political objectives, the party was trying to avoid any party or power related definitions of interest, instead considering as its aim the *“service to the state interest”*. Party members saw their success exactly in not having had defined any politically motivated objectives, thus, being able to freely express their views even when they were opposed to the political currents.

The dissolution of the party was most probably conditioned by the lack of political activity, leading to the reality when members continued doing

what they did even before the party was established.

Henceforth, the study of the short lived activities of “Shamiram” party is a vivid example of gender inequality in Armenia. Based on an example of one party all the impediments were exposed that affected any woman in the country that had engaged in a political activity. Although, the party operated in mid-90s, the case is still relevant, even more, it gives an opportunity to retrospectively examine the female political engagement and perspectives of participation, as well as challenges in independent Armenia. The case of “Shamiram” once again flags the issues of gender stereotypes and their impeding role, highlighting the importance of implementing a policy of gender equality, exhibiting the willpower for change and the essentiality of establishing a women’s movement.

3. Araratyan, A. «NA elections» v1.0-v4.0, 1995 elections, Mediamax.am, April 5, 2012,

CONCLUSION

The study was aimed at finding the opportunities of progress for women in political parties and initiatives and factors that impact them. Summarizing the findings of the study, it is possible to arrive at a number of conclusions.

Within political unions, particularly within the parties, gender balancing as such is mostly a fake category, which comes about as a result of a state mandatory quota requirement. Women are more engaged in sections or spheres, where there is mostly paperwork, logistics or representation, not decision making responsibilities. Political unions do not exhibit any signs of special gender policy, and what is more important, the necessity of it is not noticeable. The special attention on holidays dedicated to women is falsely considered as a gender policy.

The perceptions concerning gender balancing in politics and gender equality mostly reflect the general mood of the public and its approaches. This means that on theoretical level gender equality and its necessity is highlighted, but in reality that equality is limited to the engagement of women at the lower levels of the organization. The engagement of women at decision making and leadership levels is more an exception than a rule.

Such approaches concerning gender equality are shared both by men and women. Women mostly repeat those perspectives and behavioral models that are rather widely spread in the society and in their immediate environment. The rare exceptions stand out noticeably, but do not impact the general situation.

It is typical that as a result of entering the politics and most particularly, entering the political parties, women have recorded a heightened self-esteem, whereas the self-esteem has not changed among men, speaking of already high levels of self-esteem among the latter.

Interesting gender differences were also noticed in perceptions of leadership and personal images in the capacity of a leader. It is quite striking that among women the number of persons clearly viewing themselves as leaders, the number is much higher than among men. The latter are mostly reliant on the perception of the society with its expectation of men being leaders per se, ignoring their personal perceptions on the matter.

When describing politically active person two main groups were identified: (a) simply called citizens, who are politically active, and (b) political leaders. Two groups were given certain descriptions, which carry gender differences, i.e. descriptors given to men and women had specific differences, but there were also key similarities within principle descriptors. It is noteworthy, that when speaking of political leaders, tangible differences were not provided and gender sensitiveness was not noted, as well as socially stereotypical approaches and descriptors surfaced both among men and women.

The reasons for starting a political career had no gender overtone, the differences were rather along the lines of parties and initiatives. Joining a party is mostly motivated by the drive to play a role and be active in politics. While in the case of political initiatives, joining the ranks was mostly motivated by the desire to introduce serious, tangible and much needed changes in the political life.

Progress in political union, particularly in parties exhibited certain gender differences, especially when considering the progress from midlevel to higher levels of the structure. If from the lower ranks to midlevel the progress requires rather hard work and drive, and was not gender sensitive, from midlevel up this progress is mostly dependent on the third party, i. e. the final decision makers during the general meetings and assemblies.

The establishment of social networks within political parties and initiatives carries interesting nuances. Apart from intra-party and inter-party friendships, these relations frequently grow into familial unions, inter-family and godfather/godchild relations. This is true both for senior and young generations. In terms of vertical and horizontal social relations and communications picture, it can be described as positive and constructive, as non-constructive serious conflicts are not registered, whereas operational conflicts do not have any negative impact, on a contrary, they contribute to the effective work style.

The political decision making is viewed on two levels: (a) within the political organization and (b) within the country. Opposition parties are in a position of inaccessibility in terms of decision making at country level, taking into account their alienation from the structures of power. As a

result, gender issues and equality retreat to the background, making only one thing a priority, i. e. the immediate change of power. This struggle has no gender overtones.

In political parties and initiatives the decisions are being made based on plurality via a majority vote, thus, excluding the possibility of one-person ruling the structure, as the voting functions quite effectively. Although, the number of women within lower and midlevel ranks is quite sizeable, their engagement in decision making declines sharply. Simultaneously, respondents do not mention anything about intra-organizational gender inequality.

When referring to political goals, they are most of the times uttered in a very general and abstract way: the clarity and certitude are lacking. Frequently, the personal and party goals are identical. Certain levels of clarity are seen among the respondents of higher and at times mid levels. Gender specificities of political goals are also not identified. Thus, the absence of certitude in political goals predicts a cumbersome nature of tactics and activities aimed at the realization of those goals, which also puts limitations on the feasibility.

Henceforth, the study showed that engagement of women in politics, in reality, is quite low, and the existing share is a result of a quota applied on a country level. Absence of gender policy and low levels of engagement of women at higher levels of party politics excludes the possibility of widespread discourse on gender inequality. Gender sensitivity is another rarely observed aspect in politics, as a result of which fake categories are established and women are being engaged without clear objectives, thus, in non-influential spheres of political life, where decision making is not expected. As a result, politics in Armenia continues to remain patriarchal, at times masking it with artificial exposures of gender equality.

ԳՐԱԿԱՆՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՑԱՆԿ

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