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Article

Involvement of women in the political life of the country in Georgia

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Abstract: For decades, women in Georgia have been actively involved in the political life of the country. Despite this, society still has a mixed attitude towards the role of women in politics. Some of them consider the main function of women in Georgia to be raising children and taking care of the family and use the terms "Caucasian mentality" and "Georgian mentality" as arguments for this. However, part of society finds such an attitude towards women unacceptable. They believe that the problem of women's involvement in politics should not be discussed. As for the term, "Georgian mentality", it should be noted that historically in Georgia, women have always been involved in the political life of the country. We even had female kings. Recently, the role of women in the labor market has increased significantly. Today, more women are employed in various jobs. Accordingly, women are becoming more active in society, especially in politics. Therefore, women work in the workplace and are responsible for the family at the same time. A woman cannot be fully realized if she does not take care of her professional career along with family affairs. Women are more flexible in various critical situations. In addition, they are better diplomats than men. Women can also organize things better. Women are more emotional. Therefore, they take the problems of others closer to their hearts and have a greater desire to help them. There are many talented women in Georgia. The involvement of women in the decision-making process is increasing. This was facilitated by the fact that a lot of work has been done to protect women's rights. However, it should be noted that many challenges remain in terms of protecting women's rights. Here, we will focus on the status of women's rights and their inclusion in Georgian politics. We will focus on the achievements and challenges in this direction. The fact that women's political participation has become important in Georgia is clear from the fact that women's representation in parliament has exceeded 30%. This is evidence that a healthy environment has been created for women involved in politics. In addition, recent history shows that in the parliament, which is mostly staffed by male politicians, many important changes have been implemented to improve the rights of women.

Keywords: women; politics; Georgia; rights; involvement

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1. Introduction

Women's participation in politics is not easy to achieve naturally. It takes time. Accordingly, the need for intervention at the legislative level has become an urgent issue to accelerate the process. Along with many other mechanisms, one of the most effective mechanisms for increasing women's participation in politics in Georgia today is the establishment of an increased quota for women, which, in conjunction with the electoral system, effectively increases women's representation in politics.

It was not difficult for the Georgian authorities to implement legislative reforms to improve women's rights and increase their number in the country's political life. Throughout the history of independent Georgia, the struggle for women's political rights has been ongoing in stages. Throughout this time (since the 90s of the 20th century), representatives of civil society have also been actively involved in this matter. Given the urgency of the issue, they, together with the country's authorities, have taken more than one action in this direction, which has contributed to the rise of civil awareness. In parallel, work was carried out with political parties. These efforts have improved and increased the level of women's political involvement and participation in Georgia. The recent parliamentary elections (October 2024) confirmed that progress in this regard is clear.

Despite some progress in women's political involvement, several problems remain in the country regarding the protection of women's rights. It should also be emphasized that no matter what kind of electoral system operates in a country and what incentive measures are involved, the

increase in women's participation in politics also depends on political parties. It depends on their political will to present balanced electoral lists. For this, it is important to raise their political culture. Non-state actors, the non-governmental sector, play an important role in the political activation of women. Women's rights organizations play a large role in women's civil activism. Women's political participation in Georgia is increasing compared to previous years, which is also supported by Georgian legislation. The electoral system currently in force in Georgia supports and encourages women's participation in political processes. Despite the growth trend, the last two parliamentary elections (2020 and 2024) showed that there is still work to be done in this regard.

This study aims to analyze and highlight the reasons for the increase in women's political participation in Georgia, identify both enabling and hindering circumstances for women's advancement in the country's political life, and discuss recommendations developed based on best international practices to increase women's political activity in Georgia.

2. Methods

The main theoretical foundations of the research are the existing theories on the formation of civil society and gender. The theory of feminism is also used. Qualitative research methods were used in the work and historical descriptive method helped us to see the problems raised in the work in a historical context. Narrative analysis method. Comparative analysis method and case study method have also been used to describe the detailed findings.

3. Results and Discussions

Women's participation in politics is one of the most important prerequisites for the democratic development of a country. Without their involvement in politics, no country can ensure the formation of equal and fair policies that will be tailored to the interests of all groups in society. The women have different attitudes and perspectives on several issues. Women are more sensitive to several problems, better understand the importance of strengthening the economic status of women, state support for victims of domestic violence, improving access to kindergartens and childcare services, access to basic social infrastructure for women living in rural areas, the problem of single mothers, and more (United Nations 1994). When discussing women's participation in political processes in Georgia, it is important to note that the country has implemented legislative amendments that have been incorporated into the Election Code. This amendment concerns mandatory gender quotas and ensures increased representation of women in parliament (National Election 2024).

The number of women in elected bodies (in parliament and local governments) has gradually increased over time. In parallel, women's movements are expanding considerably, recommendations on women's issues continue to be presented at the government level, and most importantly, a large-scale educational campaign is being carried out to raise public awareness so that there is even greater demand from society to ensure equal rights for women in the country. When discussing this issue, it should also be considered that the double work that women do in the family and at work leaves less time for women to have the ambition to enter politics (United Nations Development Programme and United Nations Population Fund 2020).

It should also be noted that there is no solidarity among the political parties in Georgia on the issues of increasing the level of women's involvement in politics. The parties cannot unite to resolve this issue (Bagratia et al. 2011).

Despite the disagreements among political parties about the role of women in politics, many years of experience have shown that female members show great loyalty to their parties. In cases of problems, male members generally leave the party ranks, while women remain in the party. This clearly emphasizes the importance of women's role in politics. Although women are often the ones who make the biggest contributions to a party, they still show less ambition for advancement. A large proportion of women feel that they are not yet ready for a specific position and/or are not yet eligible for promotion (Global Gender 2020).

The current and previous governments of Georgia are trying to fully and effectively fulfill their international obligations to improve the situation of women. The reports submitted by the Georgian government are informative and comprehensive, fully reflecting the reality. The Georgian government is adequately supporting and implementing the legislative reform necessary to achieve an increase in the number of women in politics (Georgia 2017).

The participation of women in politics is a priority issue for the Georgian government. Representatives of political parties believe that the current trend of increasing the number of women in politics is the political will of the government. The government pays significant attention to the recommendations of civil society in terms of increasing women's participation in political processes (Women's Information Centre 2023). The Georgian government calls on relevant stakeholders (e.g. political parties) to increase the number of women on their lists. The implementation of state policies regarding women is being monitored. Public awareness and information campaigns are also being conducted in this regard.

Regional representatives of political parties were relatively less informed about civil society activities aimed at empowering women in politics. In the regions, they had less information about draft laws on equal rights for women and men initiated by the civil sector (Women's Political 2014). Compared to previous years, regional representatives of political parties are more sensitive to women's rights issues, which they believe is the result of the active work of civil society. There is a demand for the activation of civil society not only at the central level, but also in the regions (Barriers to Women 2022). Despite the effective and significant steps taken towards the active involvement of women in politics, patriarchal stereotypes are still prevalent in society, which negatively affects the political activation of women, especially in the regions. There is still a deep-rooted family theme there - the family does not allow women to enter politics. Therefore, the fear of possible attacks from society prevents women from taking a step and entering politics.

The media is interested in the issues of women's political activity. This is good, because the media has the greatest influence on the formation of public opinion. In Georgia, women are involved not only in the political, but also in the economic and social life of the country. In terms of political activity and the number of women in parliament, Georgia is almost no longer lagging European countries. This allows us to say that the indicator of women's political and public activism in Georgia is good. The last few parliamentary elections represent a step forward in terms of increasing women's participation in politics in Georgia. This is

confirmed by the fact that the number of women in parliaments convened before 2012 was smaller than in parliaments convened in subsequent years (Tchipashvili 2020).

It is noteworthy that since the restoration of Georgia's independence in the 1990s (the first parliamentary elections were held in October 1990), the number of women in parliament has been slowly but steadily increasing after each election. A significant step forward in terms of women's participation in politics was the October 2012 parliamentary elections, because of which the number of women in the Georgian legislature significantly increased. As already noted above, the growth rate has become more evident since 2016.

Despite the growing trend, this cannot be considered an irreversible process. That is, an indicator of growth at each subsequent election. The changing political environment in the country, not very fragile political parties, and inconsistent decisions on their part cannot guarantee that women will be represented in more or even the same number in the parliament and local councils at the next elections. Therefore, the mandatory requirement for women's involvement in the political life of the country has already been regulated at the legislative level (Gender in Georgia Policy Project 2024). This will achieve stable equality.

The low political participation of women is a challenge for any developed or developing country. Women's involvement in politics contributes to the democratic development of the country. Women, like men, have an equal right to participate in the governance of their country. They equally have the right to participate and take responsibility for the governance of the state (Georgian Young Lawyers Association 2019). A quantitative study of the activities of female members of the Georgian Parliament showed that they were not lagging and, on the contrary, worked more actively than male parliamentarians in the legislative body. Many of the bills initiated by members of parliament were initiated by female deputies. There are also joint bills. The activity of female members of parliament from the parliamentary rostrum is also noteworthy.

The above clearly confirms that women's participation in politics is needed first and foremost for politics itself, so that it becomes more inclusive, equal and result-oriented, which in turn will contribute to the development of democracy in the country. It has been noted many times that women's participation in politics in Georgia is at a good level, which has had a positive impact on the country's democratic development (Council of Europe 2017). It should also be noted that there are certain obstacles to women's involvement in political processes in the country, which must be overcome. It should be noted that women's political activity in Georgia is primarily hindered by the patriarchal attitudes still present in Georgian society, where a woman's duty is supposedly mainly to raise her family and children. The impediment to women's political activity is also related to the political barriers that political parties sometimes create for women in the process of advancing their careers in politics.

According to the Constitution of Georgia, all citizens of the country have the equal right to hold office and participate in elections by exercising their passive or active right to vote. This means that the highest law of the country does not prevent women from being politically active. We have the same provision in the Election Code. The participation of women in politics, as already mentioned, to some extent depends on political parties and their will. Georgia is no exception in this regard. It should be said that, like other countries, political parties in this country are not distinguished by their active work on issues of women's involvement in politics. I would also like to note here that the development of political parties in Georgia does not have a long history and, therefore, there is still a lot of work to be done in this regard.

One of the problems with political parties that hinder women's participation in politics is their instability. A political party created for electoral purposes only in a short period of time cannot ensure the advancement of women in politics. Women's participation in politics is associated with systematic work that cannot be implemented in a short period of time (Human Rights Education and Monitoring Centre 2023). In addition, the rapid turnover of political parties' forces party members to move to another political party, or to abandon politics altogether. The study revealed that female members are distinguished by their special loyalty to their political parties. Accordingly, they either do not leave the losing party and remain inactive members or leave politics altogether. The study also showed that it is women who perform the most important and meticulous work in political parties (Kroeber and Jule 2021). However, when forming election lists, they are unfortunately less likely to be included in the list of selected candidates (Council of Europe 2021).

In Georgia, political parties have few women in the positions they are nominated for, but those who are nominated are, in most cases, new faces - women who They are well-known to the public. There are few requests from the party center to work on women's issues in the region. Political parties at the central level are not distinguished by lobbying for women's issues either. In political parties, women themselves often refuse to hold high positions. They think that they are not yet ready for this or that position, or they say that they are not yet qualified to hold this position (Central Election Commission of Georgia 2024). This is a problem of the political party. Political parties should take care of democratic processes within the party, increasing the motivation of female members (National Democratic Institute 2019).

It should be noted that in Georgia there is no restriction on the voluntary increase in women's participation in politics, which means that a lot has been done in this country, especially in recent years, to increase women's participation in politics. At this stage, the quota for women has been increased. Obviously, increasing the quota is in line with the existing electoral system in the country (Women's Political Participation in Georgia 2024). It is important to note that this is also the will of society. According to some Georgian voters, women should make up at least 30% of the Georgian parliament, while others believe that the gender balance in parliament should be 50/50.

It should be emphasized that, in parallel with the development of democratic institutions, work has been underway in Georgia to improve the human rights situation of women since the restoration of independence, in the 1990s. This was facilitated by the appearance of international organizations in the country and the creation of local non-governmental organizations working on women's issues. One of the main directions for improving the human rights situation of women was the participation of women in politics, which was even lower at that time (Georgia 1997). On the one hand, the civil sector and on the other hand, the state itself began to work on women's rights. Georgia, as a member state of the UN, joined several international treaties and pacts at the end of the twentieth century, including treaties related to the increase of women's political rights (Additional Protocol 1994).

Despite some work, women's involvement in politics has remained problematic in every election for years. That is why civil society representatives have also started to fight for women's political rights. As a result, public awareness of women's issues has

increased, as has the number of supporters of women's participation in politics. Issues that are important in improving the quality of life of women and the decision-making process for women's involvement have been reflected in legislative amendments because of long-term work by women's rights organizations. In particular, the issue of maternity leave pay has been unregulated in the Election Code for a long time. Amendments have already been made to the Labor Code in this regard, because of which this problem has been resolved.

Part of society opposed the introduction of a gender quota due to the increase in women's political activity. Their argument was that the adoption of gender quotas is an artificial intervention in the political process and aims to give women an advantage based on gender, which contradicts the principle of equality. In response to this argument, I will cite Article XI of the Constitution. In Georgia, a new version of the Constitution came into force in 2018, the purpose of which is to recognize the principles of gender equality at the legislative level and create guarantees for the enjoyment of equal rights for women and men in all spheres. Article 11 of the Constitution prohibits discrimination on any grounds (Liparteliani and Ekaterine 2018). In Georgia, equality before the law is guaranteed at the legislative level, but in practice there is still a difference in the conditions of women and men. Therefore, according to Article 11, paragraph 3 of the Constitution, the state is obliged to create additional guarantees to achieve gender equality (Liparteliani and Ekaterine 2018).

Before the adoption of the quota bill, there was a widespread opinion in society that if the bill became a law, the parliament would be staffed with incompetent women. This was an unfounded opinion, devoid of any argument. Evaluating women as incompetent is clearly wrong. This argument is a manifestation of a stereotypical attitude towards women. The introduction of mandatory gender quotas should be positively assessed for women's involvement in politics in Georgia. It is also worth noting that such an important issue as inequality between women is often not paid attention to. The introduction of mandatory gender quotas, which is a step forward, allows for at least 20% of members of parliament to be women, and progress in this regard should be emphasized. It should also be said that a certain part of women cannot benefit from this achieved result. For example, single mothers, women with disabilities, women living in rural areas, etc.

One of the barriers to women's political participation in Georgia is their limited access to finance. In this case, the role of the state in the direction of women's economic empowerment is crucial. Equal initial conditions should be created for all women. It is important to see the needs of those women whose voices are still not heard in Georgian politics. Women make up more than half of the population of Georgia. Based on the principle of justice, they have the right to be proportionally represented in politics and to influence decision-making. The increase in the number of women involved in Georgian politics has been significantly facilitated by the transformation of public consciousness, because of which the still existing incorrect attitudes towards female politicians have changed. Using women's experience and knowledge in the conduct of political processes contributes to many good political decisions in Georgia. "More women in politics" means putting women's needs on the political agenda.

Georgia is striving to strengthen the role of women politicians and utilize their capabilities. The development of internal democratic structures of political parties is underway, because of which the views of women politicians have become more active in the parties themselves and their reflection in party platforms. It has become necessary for Georgian political parties to reach out to women voters. Therefore, they reflect issues important to women voters in their election programs. Parliamentary discussions of the "Agents Law" in March 2023 showed that the activity of women politicians can bring several positive changes in political processes.

Women's rights organizations have also played an important role in increasing women's involvement in politics. They call on the population and politicians to support female candidates regardless of their party affiliation. In addition, the number of women with higher education in the country exceeds that of men. In Georgia, women are not only in political parties and deputies in parliament, but there is also more than one woman minister. The increase in women's involvement in politics and the importance of their role is also confirmed by the fact that Georgia is the only country in the South Caucasus where a woman has been the president of the country (Caucasus Barometer 2024). Ms. Salome Zurabishvili held the post of President of Georgia for 6 years - from 2018 to 2024. This speaks of the active involvement and role of women in Georgia in the political life of the country. The role of women in the labor market has increased. More women are working in various jobs. Accordingly, women are becoming more active in society, especially in politics. Women are more flexible in different situations and are better diplomats than men. Women can also organize their work better.

4. Conclusions

All conditions have been created in Georgia for equal access to mandates in representative bodies for women and men. A large-scale educational campaign has contributed to the elimination of stereotypes in the country that hinder the active involvement of women in the country's political processes. Political parties have developed an effective system for recruiting and promoting female members. More female party members are being promoted to the level of decision-makers. A large-scale information campaign is being carried out on the importance of women's participation in politics. This campaign is based on the elimination of stereotypes in this direction among the population. Recommendations are being developed to increase women's political participation. Among them, initiatives are being submitted to the legislative body. The importance of women's participation in politics is being covered more intensively through various media outlets. Most importantly, women's participation in politics has become a subject of public demand.

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