

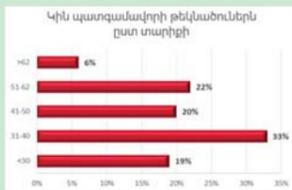
Facts

Gender Gap Index 2018: Armenia ranks 98th



It will take more than 202 years to achieve full equality between men's and women's rights and the most problematic area is that of economy. To reach gender equality in the areas of politics, healthcare, and education, it will take 108 years. This is the conclusion of World Economic Forum in its recently published Global Gender Gap Report 2018. According to this year's report, Armenia is ranked 98th among 149 countries. For comparison, in 2017 Armenia was ranked 97th among 144 countries in the world. During one year Armenia suffered a setback in three of the four key areas of Gender Gap Index.

Age and Occupation of Female Candidates



Nineteen per cent of the female candidates nominated for the snap parliamentary elections were young women of up to 30 years of age, 33% were in the 30-40 age group, 44% of middle age, and 6% over 60. The oldest female candidate was 83 years old. The youngest candidates were 25 years old, there were approximately 30 of them.

Twenty-one per cent of female candidates and 29% of male candidates included in the party lists have noted that they do not work. Twenty-six per cent of employed women worked in the area of education, 11% were from the non-governmental sector, 17% from private business and 40% of the latter were enterprise managers. In case of male candidates, the business area comes first (26%), followed by education (12%) and public administration system (10%).

Women in Electoral Commissions



Central Electoral Commission responsible for election administration consists of seven members, out of which four are men and three are women. Women make up 32% of the total number of members in Territorial Electoral Commissions (TEC), however, only two of 38 commissions are headed by women and eleven women are TEC secretaries. As regards the 2010 Precinct Electoral Commissions, around 61% of the PEC members are women and 49% are PEC Chairpersons.

Woman & politics

Women's Agenda for Development: Pre-election Debates

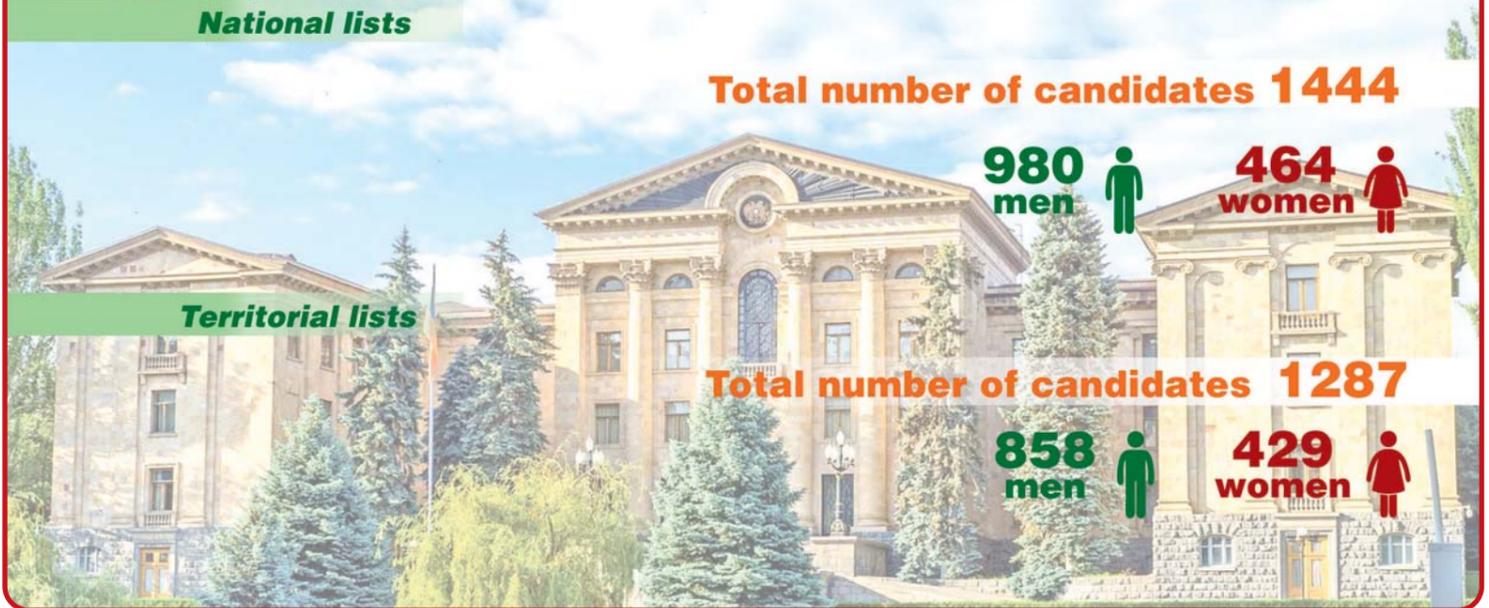


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PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS - 2018



Women in Party Candidate Lists: Progress or Regress?

Women made up 464 or 32% of 1444 candidates nominated in the national lists of eleven political forces - 9 parties and 2 alliances - for participation in the December 9th snap parliamentary elections. It is higher than the 29.5% of registered women for the 2017 elections. At the same time, the number of women is lower than the recorded 36.2% of women's representation in the Yerevan City Council elections held in September of 2018. Let us remind that under existing legislative regulations, the number of representatives of each sex in the party candidate lists should not exceed 75% in any integer groups of four (1-4, 1-8, 1-12 and so on).

30% Threshold Passed Stage

- The number of female candidates exceeded that of male candidates and made up 51.8% only in the electoral list of National Progress Party out of all the political forces standing for elections.
- Representation of female candidates was higher than 40% only in the electoral list of Citizen's Decision Socio-Democratic Party: 35 or 43.2% of 81 candidates were women.
- Four more political forces nominated 30-40% of female candidates in their electoral lists. Thus, the candidate list of Christian People's Renaissance Party included 31.3% of women, RPA - 35.4%, Sasna Tsrer -36.7%, and Orinatz Yerkir- 37.8%
- In the candidate lists of the remaining contestant forces the representation of female candidates was within the limits of 25-30%: Prosperous Armenia Party (29.5%), Bright Armenia (26.4%), My Step Alliance (26.3%), ARF (25.6%), and Menq Alliance (25.3%). For comparison, let us note that in the Yerevan City Council elections, women made up 29.8% of the ARF candidate list, and 28.8% of My Step Alliance list.

Looking at the female candidates' representation in the electoral lists of eleven political forces from the perspective of improving the gender quota, we can state that the concerns about women's potential and capacity were actually exaggerated. The greater part of the political forces have showed good will in relation to engagement of women and on average nominated 32% of female candidates. This number is higher than the 25% quota stipulated by the Electoral Code and the 30% quota envisioned by the draft amendments which failed to pass at the National Assembly. In fact the 30% quota can be considered to be a passed stage for parties, which is a sound argument for increasing the quota defining the proportion of sexes in the candidate lists to at least 40%.



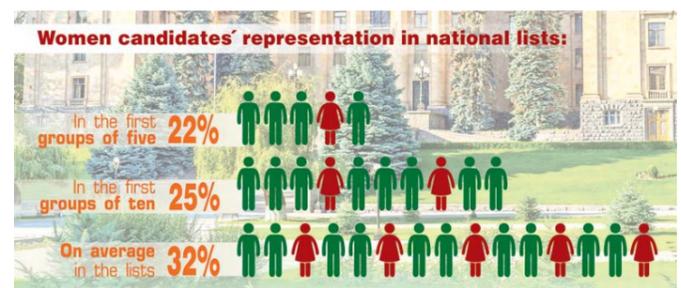
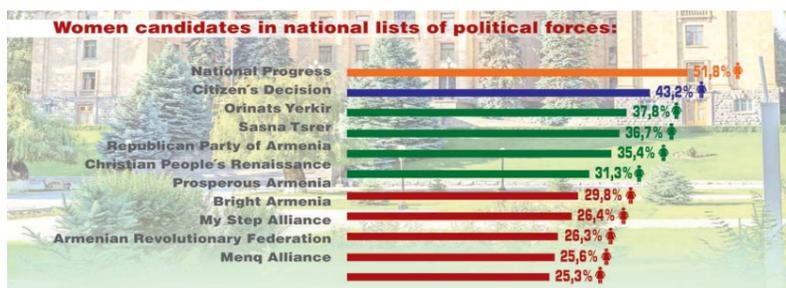
What is the Problem?

- The candidate list of only one force out of those running for the snap parliamentary elections, namely of National Progress Party, was headed by a woman, Lusine Haroyan.
- The candidate lists of only three parties featured women in the second place: RPA, Bright Armenia, and Christian People's Renaissance Party.
- Only one party, National Progress Party featured two female candidates in

the first group of five, all the other political forces included one woman each in the first group of five.

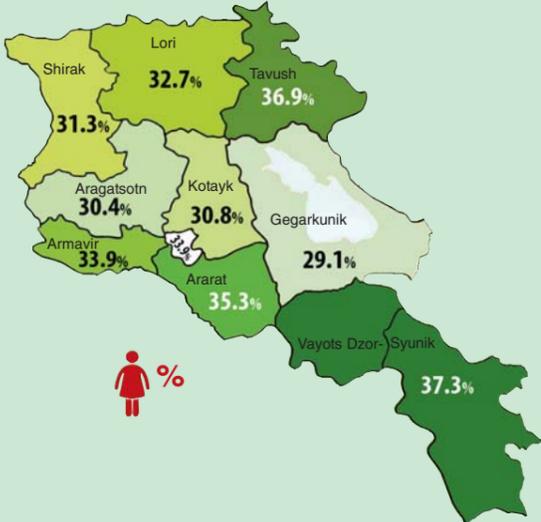
Only one political force featured four women in the top ten group (National Progress) and only four nominated three women (My Step Alliance, Bright Armenia, Orinatz Yerkir, and Menq Alliance), the others remained within the requirement of the law nominating two women in the first group of ten.

On average, women made up 25% in the first groups of ten of the contestants' candidate lists, which was a backslide as compared to the Yerevan City Council Elections, when female candidates made up 30.8% in the first groups of ten in the party lists. The same can be said about the first groups of five, which featured only 21.8% of women at the time when women made up 25% in the first groups of five in the party candidate lists during the Yerevan City Council elections. It appears that parties still have problems with featuring women in the front-runner positions, especially in the first group of five.



Preferential Votes

Female Candidates Making Up 33% in Territorial Lists



- In the 2018 National Assembly elections, overall 1 287 candidates were nominated in the territorial or so called rating lists. Out of this number 429 or 33% were women. This is a slight progress as compared to the 2017 parliamentary elections, when the number of women nominated in the territorial lists stood at 30.8%.
- Out of the republic's 13 electoral precincts, the largest number of female candidates (37%) was in electoral precincts #12 (Siunik, Vayots Dzor) and #13 (Tavush). The smallest number of female candidates (29-30%) was included in the lists of electoral precincts #8 (Gegharkunik) and #7 (Aragatsotn). Female candidates made up the average 34% in Yerevan's electoral precincts.
- Comparing the territorial lists presented by some parties in the 2017 and 2018 parliamentary elections, we can state that RPA has provided for 10.9% increase in female candidates, Orinatz Yerkir, which run in the previous elections under the name of Armenian Renaissance, about 9% increase, Prosperous Armenia Party, which was Tsarukyan Alliance in the preceding elections, has provided for 2.5% increase in women's representation, and the ARF 3.3% increase.
- As far as My Step and Menq Alliances are concerned, in the previous elections they participated in a different format: Civil Contract Party, a member of My Step Alliance, Bright Armenia, and Hanrapetutyun Parties participated in Yelk Alliance, and Free Democrats Party, which made up part of Menq Alliance, participated separately. For this very reason, the comparison is not so correct, although let us note that in 2017 Yelk nominated 33% of female candidates in territorial lists, and Free Democrats 36.4%

Post-election Developments

Female Candidates Garnering Largest Number of Votes

As it is known, as a result of the December 9th snap parliamentary elections, the National Assembly of the 7th convocation will have 132 deputies. According to the decision of the RA Central Electoral Commission, out of the three forces elected to the parliament My Step Alliance will receive 88 mandates, Prosperous Armenia Party 26 mandates, and Bright Armenia Party 18 mandates. Half of the received mandates is distributed to candidates elected through national lists, and the other half to those elected through territorial lists.



At this writing, it is not clear yet which candidates nominated in the lists will receive deputy mandates, and, therefore, how many women deputies the newly-elected Parliament will have. The following stage is that of self-recusals and possible executive appointments...According to very rough estimates, about 30 female candidates might enter the Parliament. These include also those who were elected through territorial lists.

The experience of the preceding elections demonstrated that rating system of election had a rich man's face and proved much more disadvantageous for female candidates than the former majoritarian system of election. Only two women were elected to the Parliament through territorial or "open" lists. Overall, only three out of 353 women nominated in the territorial lists garnered 4-5 thousand votes. Among those candidates who garnered largest number of votes were only men.

Because of this reality, the territorial lists started to be called "rating" lists. In 2018, larger number of women were able to overcome the obstacles caused by the rating system, although in none of the republic's 13 electoral precincts, as before, there are women among those candidates who garnered the largest number of votes (16-30 thousand).

- There are twelve women among the first five candidates who garnered the largest number of votes in electoral precincts. They are primarily from My Step Alliance and have garnered from 3 to 11 thousand votes.

- #1 (Avan, Nor Nork, Kanaker-Zeitun), Zaruhi Batoyan (3995 votes).
- #2 (Arabkir, Davtashen, and Ajapnyak), Lena Nazaryan (11 300 votes) and Lilit Makunts (5087 votes).
- #3 (Shengavit, Malatia-Sebastia), Hripsime Grigoryan (4019 votes).
- #4 (Nubarashen, Erebuni, Nork-Marash and Kentron), Mane Tandilyan from Bright Armenia Party (3636 votes).
- #5 (Ararat), Tatevik Gasparyan (9390 votes).
- #6 (Armavir), Mariam Grigoryan (6161 votes).
- #8 (Gegharkunik), Taguhi Tovmasyan (7114 votes).
- #9 (Lori), Arpine Davoyan (8139 votes).
- #11 (Shirak), Sofia Hovsepyan (5981 votes) and Nazeli Baghdasaryan (4771 votes).
- #13 (Tavush), Lusine Antonyan (3560 votes).

- According to preliminary estimates, seven female candidates nominated through territorial lists, who are among the candidates having garnered the largest number of votes for their parties, might receive mandates through this very election system.

Lena Nazaryan (# 2, 11 300 votes), Hripsime Grigoryan (# 3, 4019 votes), Tatevik Gasparyan (# 5, 9390 votes), Sofia Hovsepyan (#11, 5981 votes) from My Step Alliance.

Naira Zohrabyan (# 4, 2110 votes), Nora Arustamyan (# 7, 1994 votes) from Prosperous Armenia Party, though they were in the 8th and 9th positions among those leading with the number of votes in the first group of ten in their electoral precincts.

Mane Tandilyan from Bright Armenia Party is only behind the Party Chairperson Edmon Marukyan by 3636 votes in her electoral precinct #4.

Open [territorial] lists may work to the advantage of well-known male candidates. Thus, there is an inherent danger that the introduction of open lists may result in the election of fewer women. However, open lists need not hamper women's representation. To the degree that women organise themselves and actively campaign for voting female candidates, preference voting [rating system of voting] may not work against women.

From the Venice Commission's report (2009) on Impact of Electoral Systems on Women's Representation in Politics.

A Question to Candidates

Are you ready to defend women's interests in the Parliament?

Gayane Abrahamyan My Step



- For years, women's rights protection and issues of promoting women's involvement in political processes have been pivotal to my activities. These issues will also be my priorities in the National Assembly. It is really a problem when more than half of the population does not, to a satisfactory degree, participate in decision-making processes. Recently, during the elections of Yerevan deputy mayors I understood that we have a problem of defining certain quotas also for the executive body. I believe that we need to explore whether in other countries in the world there is a practice of defin-

ing quotas for the executive, but I am confident that it is necessary because, if there is no demand, equal elections do not take place and men always appear at least at top levels.

Mane Tandilyan Bright Armenia



- I cannot imagine a situation where I do not voice issues of inequality and discrimination against women. Unfortunately, equal opportunities for women continue to remain a problem in society's morals and state policies. We should exert tangible efforts to solve the problem. To politically activate women, I intend to initiate a school for female political figures which should aim at quality rep-

resentation of women in politics and formation of political interests. I am for natural equality which will result in 50/50 proportion not only in the Parliament, but also in different areas of life, work and activities.

Naira Zohrabyan Prosperous Armenia Party



- The more women we have in our parliament, the more laws adopted by us will aim at strengthening our families, our children, and the social base of our state. The 21st century is not a century of brutal force, but of soft power and female political figures should form the axis of this power. The more women there are in politics, the more politics will be centered on human beings.

Zaruhi Batoyan My Step



- Women's rights, their encouragement and empowerment are the key issues of my activities and also of this campaign. Moreover, in my party I am known as a feminist and defender of women, and this internal lobbying, I believe, is important. For me, the issues of the exercise of the right to work, political participation and prevention of domestic violence are priorities, which I am going to advance in my further activities...Women need experience and successful examples and we can set an example and encourage women. In an environment, where men form a majority and where men's rules of the game dominate, it is very difficult for women.

Lusine Haroyan National Progress



- Have you ever thought of the problems the single mother might have in Armenia? A completely unprotected layer. Since 2004 I have been taking care of my children alone, it is very, very difficult and it is one of the vulnerable points of the state. In our clannish Armenia an atmosphere dominates where if you have a backer you will advance, if not, you are lost. The state pension is just a penny, and it is cut off once you become of age and there are no allowances made at the university. Under these conditions I have had to combine everything, I have been a father, a mother, and a breadwinner. There is a need for immediate regu-

Pre-election Debates

Women's Agenda for Development

In the lead-up to the snap parliamentary elections political debates entitled Women's Agenda for Development were held in Yerevan. Participating in the debate were female deputy candidates from different political forces. They included those already known to the public and also new names who yet will say what they have to say.



In her opening remarks, Margarita Hakobyan, Executive Director of the OxyGen Foundation noted that the main goal of the debates was to invite the attention of political forces running for elections to the National Assembly to those issues that relate to women, and the more so since more than half of the RA electorate are women. In her words, the discussion would proceed around the key issues presented in the analytical document Women's Agenda for Development prepared by experts. By the way, the document had in advance been brought to the attention of all political forces and participant candidates had had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the issues raised in it.

The text of Women's Agenda includes a number of questions related to ensuring women's and men's equal rights and equal opportunities, facts on problems existing in different areas, as well as proposes possible solutions to these problems. For this very reason, the agenda is a rich source of information on the gender situation existing in Armenia for any political figure who is concerned with these issues. The issues raised in the Women's Agenda are based on the RA Constitution, laws and programs adopted within the

scope of the RA Conceptual Framework for Gender Policies, the international obligations of the Republic of Armenia, the RA statistical data, and on the recent research work and sociological surveys conducted in the republic.

During the discussion, representatives of the political forces that purported to be represented in the legislature clarified their attitude towards issues ensuring women's and men's equal participation in the country's development processes.

Let us note that after the debates a number of NGOs and mass media outlets appealed to the parties and party alliances participating in the 2018 National Assembly elections with a call to pay special attention to these issues and, if elected, to create guarantees for bringing to life policies ensuring women's and men's equal rights and equal opportunities.

The discussion was organized within the framework of the projects Equal: Promoting Women's Political Participation at National Level and Electoral Preparation and Monitoring by Civil Society Organizations in Armenia: Elections for All, with funding support from the Government of Sweden and the European Union.

The Key Issues:

1. Do you support the 50/50 participatory model formulated within the framework of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, which implies equal involvement of women and men in politics, economy and social life, as well as their equal representation at decision-making levels?
2. What steps are you planning to take to promote de facto equality of women and men as stipulated by Article 86 of the RA Constitution?
3. What steps are you ready to take for implementation of the RA Law on Ensuring Equal Rights and Equal Opportunities between Women and Men?
4. Are you prepared to be consistent in improving the legislative field on prevention of domestic violence and in advancing the ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence?
5. Are you planning to bring to life the principles declared within the scope of the RA Gender Policy Conceptual Framework and to take into account women's and men's interests and needs in socio-economic development programs?
6. Are you ready to initiate steps towards the formation of a national machinery ensuring equal rights and equal opportunities between women and men for the purpose of effective implementation of the relevant policy coordination?
7. What is your attitude towards and position on the following issues?
 - Insufficient representation of women in all the branches and at all the levels of state governance;
 - Ineffective utilization of women's potential and discrimination against women in labor market, lack of opportunities for combining work-related and family responsibilities;
 - The higher vulnerability of women and children and women-headed households in terms of poverty;
 - The higher vulnerability of rural women in terms of availability of resources and services;
 - Double discrimination against women with disabilities and absence of opportunities for full social inclusion;
 - Reproduction of gender stereotypes impeding women's progress through the educational system and mass media outlets;
 - Grave policy shortcomings in ensuring accessibility and affordability of healthcare services for women.

OSCE/ODIHR Observers

"As women are more than half of the population, this should be reflected in politics as well"



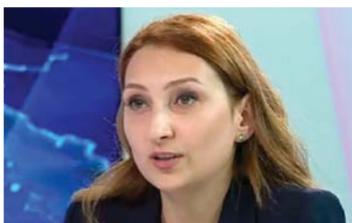
Summing up the December 9th snap parliamentary elections, international observers highly evaluated women's active participation and role in the electoral process. "All candidate lists met the 25 per cent gender quota requirement and women accounted for 32 per cent of the total of 1,444 candidates. This quota, however, does not ensure the same proportion of representation of women in the parliament, notably as half of the seats are distributed according to preferential votes. Parties rarely featured women candidates in their campaign - women only occasionally campaigned on their own and rarely appeared as speakers in rallies observed. Some women candidates were a target of disparaging rhetoric because of their gender," states the preliminary report of the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission.

Nahima Lanjri, Head of the OSCE PA Delegation, noted that "politics has historically been a man's world but, as women are more than half of the population, this should be reflected in politics as well." "I hope to see reforms that will encourage more women in politics and to ensure that the next elections are fully representative of both men and women," she said.

A Question to Candidates

lation of this field. Moreover, it is not only single mothers that have problems. The issue of complex regulation of the area of mothers', women's rights is urgent.

Lilit Makunts
My Step



- Vey often what is forgiven in case of men is not forgiven in case of women; what men say can be ignored, when a woman says something, it never misses attention. Women are under much bigger magnifying glass than men, which makes things several times more difficult and the existing burden increases. We, women, should support each other so that we can become participant in decision-making. I want each of you to feel how important it is to purport to achieve more, take up public responsibility, display will and determination,

at the same time remaining true to your essence.

Anna Alexanyan
Citizen's Decision



- I have heard a lot about women not electing women, they are more inclined to elect men. Vey often I have heard men saying that there is no difference whether men or women; the important thing is that the person be hard-working, or women say that it is better to elect men as they know better...The answer to these questions is not unequivocal, but, unfortunately, stereotypes still exist. Simply we should hope that over time we will succeed in overcoming them. On the other hand, we do not want to be elected as men or women; we want to be elected because of our programs, possible things to be done, and also because of the path we have passed.

Heriknaz Tigranyan
My Step



- In order to strengthen women's role, they should, first of all, feel strong and competent, get rid of stereotypes and do not underestimate themselves. In Armenia we already have many stereotypes broken, including in perceptions about women's participation in politics, which is the result of also legislative regulation: the result of fixing the quota in the Electoral Code in support of women. However, quota setting does not imply purely artificial representation, which will affect the quality of the legislative body; here we should take into consideration experience and the capacity for legislating work. At the same time, women's potential is not utilized to a sufficient extent and these capacities are lost resources. It is necessary to create mechanisms for reconciliation of

women's role in the family and at the workplace so that maternity of the working woman does not translate into work loss or a real danger of looking for a new job.

Anna Kostanyan
Bright Armenia



- If we speak about women's and men's equality, we should have 50/50 proportion... I also believe that the foremost problem related to women's political or economic participation is to what extent the given person is motivated to continue her self-education or work after graduation from a higher education institution. I, being a mother of two, have passed through these difficulties, at the same time having succeeded in not being cut off from education of my children: I worked, received my education and remained

devoted to my family. But we have obstacles of socio-cultural nature in our society and, if I am elected to the National Assembly, I will try to play a stimulating role for those women who desire to work and educate themselves in addition to being in a family environment, without being cut off from the family.

Maria Karapetyan
My Step



- The issue of women's and men's equality will start finding its solution once everybody sees this problem. When looking at the Council governing the National Assembly, we do not find it natural that there are few women. And the most important thing is not to explain this situation by women's "natural" abilities and inclinations since they are primarily the result of socialization.

Expert Opinion

Gender Equality in Pre-election Programs



In the entire world, parties are responsible for formation of political culture and political agenda. So it is not accidental that they are expected to take specific steps to ensure also gender equality. If we take into account that parties' attitude towards gender equality is an important indicator of the degree to which they are democratic, the issue becomes even more important. An analysis of the pre-election programs of the parties and alliances running in the snap parliamentary elections has demonstrated that:

- The parties have not yet developed an in-depth grasp of gender equality and the problem is not only their avoidance to use the term;
- The greater part of the programs have tackled not the issue of ensuring gender equality, but "women's issues" and did so with a paternalistic approach. It differs from a gender-sensitive approach by the fact that viewing, for example, the woman who has given birth as a beneficiary of state care, it does not view the woman as a citizen, specialist, who needs more than just a paid maternity leave and allowance. A specialist who is a mother needs a flexible work schedule, an opportunity to work from home, introduction of the institute of nannies, a broad and reliable network of preschool institutions and child care centers, adaptation programs to integrate in the labor market after her return from the maternity leave, etc.;
- The majority of the parties have not changed the traditional political approach to the issue of gender equality, however, the programs of **L Bright Armenia Party**, **My Step Alliance** and **Citizen's Decision Socio-Democratic Party** include a new, gender-sensitive component (although with some manifestations of paternalistic politics).

Specifically, Bright Armenia Party has displayed a dual approach to the issue: on the one hand, a half-paternalistic approach, promising development and implementation of demographic policies (birth rate increase, creation of the necessary conditions for immigration, coordination of family allowances, granting benefits targeting children through introduction of children's cards, the right to free use of kindergartens and educational institutions, adoption of a law on families with many children for the purpose of providing measurable benefits; on

the other hand, a liberal approach, for example promising to carry out targeted investment policies in separate areas (for example, in light industry, which actually solves the issue of women's right to work, ensuring demographic security, increase in funding for preschool institutions through allocations from the state and community budgets);

In its ideological theses, **My Step Alliance** has noted ensuring legal equality of women and men, which, however, means ensuring equality of rights and does not imply implementation of a policy of equal opportunities. Over the upcoming 20 years, it envisions doubling of the RA population's number, including through birth rate increase. A good indicator is provided for preschool education: to ensure, by 2023, the 70% enrolment of children above three years of age in preschool educational institutions. It is also envisaged to develop projects on providing affordable housing to young families to increase the birth rate. Women are also mentioned as targets of social protection. Very interesting is the party's following promise: to change "the philosophy of formation and development of the system of public administration," promising that it will not be based any more on... "gender stereotypical decisions and gender- and age-based or any other form of discrimination..."

Citizen's Decision Socio-Democratic Party is one of the young parties, however, it has taken a step forward with respect to the gender equality issue as compared to traditional parties. The program's social policy section includes a separate subsection entitled Social Protection of Women, which envisions solving the issue of legal equality of sexes, applying temporary regulatory tools by the state, mentions women's unpaid work, which is proposed to be included in work record calculations, social guarantees for rural women, creation of opportunities for return of mothers with children under three to work and development of the system of child care by preschool institutions and of alternative services.

The party's very sensitive approach to this issue can be explained by the fact that activists from some non-governmental organizations (including those NGOs that deal with women's rights) are among the party members.

As far as other parties are concerned, for example, the **Republican Party of Armenia** was the governing force for many years and the adoption of Gender Conceptual Framework, the Law on Gender Equality, introduction of sensitive quotas in the Electoral Code and making them more results-oriented, all this happened during its rule. Though gender experts positively evaluated these steps in all their analyses of the previous years, they, at the same time, always noted that this policy was imitational by its nature and the party lacked an in-depth perception of society. Concessions were largely the result of the international obligations and lobbying by women's NGOs. The 2018 pre-election program confirms this statement. The RPA program is gender blind. However, it being a conservative party, its program notes that "The basis of the Armenian society is the traditional family. Formation of strong and sound families, upholding and development of traditional national values by the family should be one of the most important objectives of the state."

Prosperous Armenia Party, in the paternalistic spirit, declares that "mothers and families with many children should be taken special care of by the state. It is envisioned to increase the amount of the lump-sum allowance for the birth of first and second children, and to increase the amount of financial assistance for the third and successive children. This will have both demographic and social importance."

Sasna Tsrer Party is a nationalist one and, naturally, the issue of birth rate is first and foremost viewed as national security issue. For this reason, it envisaged to develop and implement "a program on encouragement of birth rate and on care of motherhood and childhood, including multiplying the existing financial support in the area."

Menq Alliance promised to lean on strong and traditional family values.

Christian People's Renaissance Party had nothing at all to say on this issue.

Orinatz Yerkir Party promised provision of support and subsidies from the state means and at low interest rate to young families, i.e. social housing construction, provision of a lump-sum of 500 000 drams from the state budget to marrying couples, creation of mechanisms of state support for families with many children, introduction of a complex system for maintenance of the health of the mother and child, and development of a network of free kindergartens in the RA marzes (provinces) and communities.

The **ARF** only promised to promote the coming-to-be and development of young families, viewing low birth rate as a demographic disaster.

National Progress Party's program notes the doubling of Armenia's population in the upcoming five years as an issue of strategic importance, especially through promotion and increase of birth rate. As a means of promoting birth rate, the program mentions "provision of families, upon the birth of the third child, with a mortgage loan at up to 3% interest rate for a period of 20-30 years."

A Challenge

Let Us Rule Out Hate Speech



During the National Assembly snap elections campaign, Human Rights Defender made a statement noting that an independent monitoring carried out by his Office attested to the increase in dignity-offending and hate speech and intolerance on Internet and especially in social media.

"A targeted observation attests to the fact that an attitude of intolerance is manifested towards dissent accompanied by responses of aggressive nature, especially by seemingly fake users. Often no consideration is taken of the content of the speech or a comment is made only taking into account the opinion holder's personality. From the perspective of guaranteeing human rights, it is important to fully defend human dignity under all circumstances," reads the statement of the Human Rights Defender's Office.

The same issue is also raised in the interim report of OSCE/ODIHR observers published on December 2. It notes that during the campaign concerns were voiced "about intolerant and inflammatory rhetoric, particularly online."

Let us note that before the beginning of the electoral campaign, a number of NGOs and mass media outlets concerned about fair and peaceful process of the elections had appealed to all the participants in the elections and, first of all, to political forces with a call to rule out hate speech during the pre-election campaign.

"We propose that, for the sake of formation of a new political culture, all political forces running in the elections make a major step forward to reach an agreement on ruling out hate speech at all levels of the electoral campaign and safeguard this agreement by signing a joint memorandum.

The signing of a joint memorandum will

- Ensure a political content of the electoral campaign's debates and also give positive impetus to mass media outlets and the entire electorate, including the users of social networks;

- Guarantee a natural process of the elections and provide an opportunity to avoid fake agendas rejecting the fundamental rights of human dignity and equality during the electoral campaign;

- Provide an opportunity to put an end to any manifestation of discrimination towards candidates and ensure equal conditions and opportunities for all candidates during the electoral race;

- Set the foundation for realization of the ideas of justice and national unity which are imperative for the country's future development," reads the appeal.

The initiative was carried out with the framework of the projects Equal: Promoting Women's Political Participation at National Level and Electoral Preparation and Monitoring by Civil Society Organizations in Armenia: Elections for All.

"Independent Observer"

Women's Participation in Pre-election Rallies

According to the data of the Independent Observer initiative, the number of women participants in the 186 rallies that were observed during the campaign for the snap parliamentary elections did not exceed on average 30%. Women's participation was especially low in Ararat, Kotaik, Shirak and Gegharkunik and it was the highest in Yerevan, Lori and Vayots Dzor. The observation was made within the framework of the project Electoral Preparation and Monitoring by Civil Society Organizations in Armenia: Elections for All.



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