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# WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION & LEADERSHIP FINAL REPORT

## Kyrgyz Republic Assessment

October 2023

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## ACRONYMS

AT	Assessment Team
CEC	Central Election Commission
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women
CSO	Civil Society Organization
DRG-LER	Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance Learning, Evaluation, and Research
DPI	Development Policy Institute
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GBV	Gender Based Violence
IRI	International Republican Institute
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
KII	Key Informant Interview
KR	Kyrgyz Republic
LSG	Local Self Governments
MP	Member of Parliament
NAP	National Action Plan
NGO	Non Governmental Organization
NGS	National Gender Strategy
NDI	National Democratic Institute
NORC	NORC at the University of Chicago
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
MP	Member of Parliament
STA	Social Technology Agency
TEC	Territorial Election Commission
VAWPP	Violence against Women in Politics and Public Life
WPPL	Women’s Political Participation and Leadership
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
ZhDS	Women’s Democratic Network

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

The Kyrgyz Republic (KR) is widely regarded as the strongest democracy in post-Soviet Central Asia, though it has oscillated between authoritarian and democratic governance since its establishment as an independent country in 1991.<sup>1</sup> After significant turbulence since 2020, including the collapse of the government and formation of a new government with no electoral basis, nearly all measures of democracy in the KR have declined, according to Freedom House's 2023 report on Nations in Transit.<sup>2</sup> The KR has high levels of literacy and education, a Soviet history of women's workforce participation, a vibrant civil society and free media, and legally enshrined gender equality and quotas for women's political representation. On the surface, there are promising indicators of women's political participation and leadership (WPPL)—men and women vote at roughly equivalent rates and women elected officials at the national and particularly local levels have risen, thanks to quotas. However, that belies a lack of true political influence for women. Polling indicates that women do not feel represented by the political system and the KR ranks below regional peers for women's political representation. There are few women in positions of power in the government, currently women hold one of 21 cabinet positions and there is a lack of influence of women's wings of political parties, reflected in part by the lack of a women's or even gender agenda in any political party. The turbulence in the government further threatens women's participation including a closing civic space and increasing rates of gender-based violence (GBV), including in-person and online harassment of women in politics and public life.

Under the Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance – Learning, Evaluation and Research (DRG-LER) II Activity, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) tasked the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago (NORC) with implementing five country-level assessments on WPPL, based on the latest iteration of the WPPL Assessment Framework, including this one focusing on the KR. The WPPL Assessment Framework aims to identify key barriers and opportunities to advancing WPPL that exist at the individual, socio-cultural, and structural levels within focus countries. The findings are intended to guide program strategies, activity design, and allocation of resources aimed at advancing WPPL in the KR. The Assessment's findings are derived from a desk review of relevant literature, a survey of politicians, key informant interviews (KII), and focus group discussions (FGD) with politicians, civil society, and media in Bishkek city, Saruu village in the Issyk-Kul oblast, and Novo-Pokrovka village in the Chui oblast.

## BARRIERS TO AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR WPPL

### BARRIERS TO WPPL

- While the KR has much of the legal structure necessary to support WPPL, political and governmental institutions lack the capacity and political will to meaningfully promote WPPL. Political parties provide little institutional support, such as training, networking, and funding for women candidates. They may hesitate to promote women candidates as it will lose them votes in a populist regime; promoting gender equality has been unpopular among some of the population as it is seen as a “western” concept. As noted above, women's wings of political

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<sup>1</sup> Notably, 32 percent of respondents refused to answer the question. Engvall, Johan (2022). "The KR's Poison Parliament". *Journal of Democracy*. 33 (1): 55–69. doi:10.1353/jod.2022.0004. ISSN 1086-3214.

<sup>2</sup> Freedom House. (2023). *Nations in Transit 2023, Kyrgyzstan*. Available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/country/kyrgyzstan/nations-transit/2023>

parties are nascent and wield little power; no parties have women's or even gender agendas. Women are often overlooked in creating lists from which political appointees are selected.

- Norms, stereotypes, and perceptions of the role of women both inhibit women's political participation and reduce the efficacy of their political leadership. While women vote at roughly equal levels as men, their votes may be influenced by men family members or they may not feel that candidates adequately represent their interests. There is a prevailing belief in the KR that a woman's place is in the home as a wife and mother, the time requirements of domestic labor preclude political activity and the assumed personality characteristics of women (caring, non-confrontational, and passive, for example) undermine women's political efficacy. Women's political aspirations are undermined by the presumption that they do not have the skills necessary to be effective and by a lack of opportunities to build and demonstrate these skills. While there are organizations that target women for capacity building, due to cultural and social norms, women do not access these resources to the same extent as men. The effect is to both limit women's access to political positions and delegitimize them once in political positions.
- Violence against women in politics and public life (VAWPP), including online and in-person harassment, is common in the KR, as is domestic and intimate partner violence. High profile men have further normalized violence against women in public life. There is a high prevalence of violence against women politicians, including in person and online, from colleagues, family, and the public. Fear of violence may prevent women from running for office or even supporting other women's candidacies.
- There is a lack of civic education for both boys and girls that could give women the knowledge and skills to be successful political actors and help dispel harmful gender stereotypes. The civic education that does exist in the KR lacks instruction on inclusive and accountable politics. Moreover, there are few training opportunities for women through political parties or other government institutions to develop skills for political leadership, preventing women from being able to wield political influence effectively and promote women's and gender agendas.

## OPPORTUNITIES FOR WPPL

- Gender quotas, passed in 2007 and 2019, require 30 percent of seated Members of Parliament (MPs) be women. These quotas have been effective in increasing the number of women elected, particularly at the local level, they remain frequently misunderstood by the public and have not achieved their full potential; there is an opportunity to build upon the gains made by women politicians since the passing of the quotas to network and increase support and attention for a women's agenda. Used effectively, gender quotas have the potential to build a pipeline of qualified and effective women politicians who can achieve more powerful positions, influence political parties, and coordinate to represent a Kyrgyz women's priorities more effectively.
- The media is both a barrier to WPPL as it currently promotes stereotypes in the way that it portrays women politicians and an opportunity in the potential to change harmful gender norms and provide women politicians an opportunity to communicate with the public. Women also express a desire to learn skills to better use traditional and social media in their political work. Improved media skills will allow women in politics and in civil society to effectively communicate with the public and gain greater influence in the political system.
- In 2012, the KR adopted its first long-term National Gender Strategy (NGS) on Achieving Gender Equality in compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination

against Women (CEDAW), the strategy was then updated in 2022. The NGS is enacted through the National Action Plan (NAP), which includes national priorities over a three-year period and specifies an increased voice for women in decision-making and increasing WPPL. While the NGS has not yet lived up to its promise, due largely to a lack of funds, it provides a framework for the KR to support WPPL and its implementation could help to make Kyrgyz women feel that their government represents them.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

- Donors should work with civil society groups to train journalists and other media professionals to increase the gender sensitivity of coverage of women in politics to change the prevailing gender norms and stereotypes that discourage participation. These trainings should include a diverse set of media representatives-- regional/national, print, television, digital, bloggers, influencers—and address violence and harassment of women in politics and public life. Civil society should also advocate for giving women politicians and activists equitable coverage as compared to men politicians and activists.
- Donors should work with the administration to roll back recent actions that undermine and limit existing civil society and media and support civil society and media broaden their footprint in the political space and maintain and deepen support for WPPL.
- Donor programming should engage men gatekeepers to educate them on the pernicious effects of harmful gender stereotypes, giving them the tools to advocate for and promote women's political participation.

### INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

- The Kyrgyz government should make the NGS a priority and achieve the KR's gender empowerment goals.
- The parliament should work with CSOs to combat VAWPP through legal and legislative change, awareness raising, and monitoring.
- Donors, along with civil society, should undertake political advocacy to clarify the quota system both for the public and within the political system.
- Political parties should ensure equal treatment and funding of women candidates.
- Parliament and political parties should strengthen opportunities for women politicians to network and caucus with one another, including by building alliances between women MPs at the national and local levels.

### INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- Donors should work with the Ministry of Education and civil society to support civic education programs designed to improve democratic and political literacy in society, in concert with other activities to increase interest in political participation among women.
- Parliament and political parties should work with civil society bodies to build capacity and skills among women candidates and politicians, including legal literacy and networking support.



- Donor programming should be developed that trains women politicians to effectively use the media.
- Donors should continue to support activities that provide training, orientation, and information about democratic rules, relevant laws, and accessing information and resources for women councilors, which both help women to become more effective politicians and provide networking opportunities.

# INTRODUCTION

## ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVES

Under the DRG-LER II Activity, USAID tasked NORC with implementing five country-level WPPL assessments, based on the latest iteration of the WPPL Assessment Framework. WPPL encompasses women’s political rights, including political **participation**, which refers to activities women can engage in as citizens, and political **leadership**, which refers to activities women can engage in as elected and non-elected political representatives. It extends beyond the granting of political rights to consider how women can exercise those rights. This report therefore considers both access, women’s ability to take part in political processes and power, and women’s voice and agency as political actors. The matrix represented in Table I illustrates how the assessment presents these factors.

**Table I. WPPL MATRIX**

	ACCESS	POWER
Participation	Are women politically engaged as citizens?	Do women exercise political agency and influence as citizens?
Leadership	Do women serve as political leaders, whether in elected or non-elected roles?	Do women exercise political agency and influence as political leaders?

Source: DRG-LER II NORC WPPL Assessment Framework, 2023

The WPPL Assessment Framework aims to identify key barriers and opportunities to advance WPPL that exist at the socio-cultural, institutional, and individual levels. For the purposes of the assessment, socio-cultural factors are the norms and practices that shape social expectations as well as personal attitudes and behaviors, such as gender stereotypes, prevailing views on gender roles, and cultural ideas about gender equality. Institutional factors include the electoral system, the political party system, and the broader political and legal context. These institutions structure the political environment, establishing the formal and informal rules and systems in which political actors operate. Finally, individual factors are the decisions of individual women to participate (or not) in politics. These include levels of political ambition, as well as resources and support for their political engagement.

This report discusses the results of the KR WPPL Assessment that analyzes participation and leadership through the lens of socio-cultural, institutional, and individual factors. These results are intended to guide donor program strategies, activity design, and allocation of resources aimed at advancing WPPL in the KR as well as guide the work of other stakeholders working on gender and democracy in the KR.

## COUNTRY BACKGROUND

### POLITICAL CONTEXT

The KR is widely regarded as the strongest democracy in post-Soviet Central Asia, though it has oscillated between authoritarian and democratic governance since its establishment as an independent country in 1991.<sup>3</sup> The KR’s small population size (7 million), relatively modest resource base, geopolitical position amongst larger, strong economies, and continued economic dependencies, including large-scale labor

<sup>3</sup> Notably, 32 percent of respondents refused to answer the question. Engvall, Johan (2022). "The KR's Poison Parliament". *Journal of Democracy*. 33 (1): 55–69. doi:10.1353/jod.2022.0004. ISSN 1086-3214.

migration to and cultural ties with Russia and other authoritarian neighbor states, complicate efforts at democracy building.<sup>4</sup> Cultural, geographic, linguistic, and religious diversity have informed political decision-making and contributed to some growing fault lines in the country.<sup>5</sup> Two-thirds of the population lives in rural areas. Observers note growing conservative religious and nationalistic trends in the society which also influence politics and WPPL.

In 2022, Freedom House’s overall Democracy Score for the KR declined from 1.86 to 1.75 out of 7, keeping the KR in the range of a closed society.<sup>6</sup> Several events in recent years have likely led to the decrease in the KR’s score. In October 2020, thousands of Kyrgyz citizens took to the streets of Bishkek to protest a fraudulent election.<sup>7</sup> A new constitution that reduced the power of the parliament and gave more power to the president was adopted in April 2021. This led to a government upheaval in October 2022 when more than two dozen peaceful protesters were detained or jailed. Those arrested included MPs, a former head of the Central Election Commission (CEC), and high-profile activists and journalists—several women amongst them.<sup>8</sup> Together, these dynamics set democratic processes back and put the country at somewhat of a tipping point, with a great deal at stake in the upcoming elections (local elections in 2025; national elections in 2026).

## POLITICAL SYSTEM AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The government includes a popularly elected president, a parliament, and a judicial branch. A constitutional referendum in 2007 approved a new electoral system in which representatives to the Supreme Council (*Jogorku Kenesh*) are elected based on party-list voting—in which candidates are selected from central party lists rather than locally elected. A referendum in 2021 reduced the number of MPs from 120 to 90, with 54 seats elected by proportional representation, while 36 are from single-seat districts (based on majoritarian vote). Representatives serve for five years. Some 453 village units and 29 municipalities elect councils which then nominate executive chiefs. Elected local government councilors serve for four years.

The literature provides sometimes contradictory insights into citizen perspectives on governance and democracy in the KR, reflective of the dynamic situation of the country. A number of studies (and KIs in this study) indicate expanding disillusionment with successive governments which are seen as corrupt and

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<sup>4</sup> Stiftung, Bertelsmann. 2022. “BTI 2022 The KR Country Report.” BTI 2022. <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/KGZ>; USAID/PPL’s Analytics Team. 2023. “The KR MCST Contextual Data Placemat.”

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Freedom House. 2022. “Nations in Transit 2022.” *Freedom House*. Accessed March 2, 2023

<sup>7</sup> Doolotkeldieva, Asel. 2021. “The 2020 Violent Change in Government in Kyrgyzstan Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic: Three Distinct Stories in One.” In *Between Peace and Conflict in the East and the West: Studies on Transformation and Development in the OSCE Region*. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77489-9\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-77489-9_8).

<sup>8</sup> The Committee to Protect the Kempir Abad Reservoir was created on October 22, 2022 by politicians, activists, and members of parliament. After that, on October 24, almost all of its members were detained on suspicion of organizing mass disturbances. All of the arrested had publicly criticized the transfer of the Kempir-Abad reservoir to Uzbekistan and it is believed that these statements were the reason for their arrest. Not all of those 30 arrested were members of the committee. In spite of this, the indictments of all those involved in the case are similar. Most of the detainees still remain in custody in pre-trial detention centers. The court prolonged the preventive measure for almost all of them until the end of February 2023. Then it was extended until almost the end of April. In April, seven defendants were released under house arrest by court decision, including former member of parliament Asiya Sasykbayeva, former Ambassador of The KR to Turkey Mambetjunus Abylov, former judge of the Constitutional Court Klara Sooronkulova and former member of the CEC Gulnara Dzhurabayeva. All of them will be under house arrest until June 20. (Putz, Catherine and The Diplomat. 2022. “Opposition to Kyrgyz-Uzbek Border Deal Swept Up in Mass Arrest.” *The Diplomat*. October 26, 2022. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/10/opposition-to-kyrgyz-uzbek-border-deal-swept-up-in-mass-arrest/>) To date, legal processes have not been carried out.

disinterested in the welfare of the people.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, a 2022 International Republican Institute (IRI) poll suggests public optimism about the direction of the country.<sup>10</sup> Another study in the same year by Common Cause blames the low voter turnout in 2021 on distrust of election integrity (40 percent of respondents endorsed this view).<sup>11</sup> Other findings from the IRI poll point to low levels of political awareness and democratic literacy—echoing a finding from a 2020 NORC study.<sup>12</sup>

A 30 percent quota for women was introduced into law in 2007, requiring parties to include women as every third candidate in their lists (as well as at least 15 percent from ethnic minorities and at least 15 percent from candidates under 35 years) and at least two candidates with disabilities. Legislation enacted in 2019 included a 30 percent quota for women on city councils and village councils (*ayil kenesh*).

The country has enjoyed a vibrant civil society including free media, both of which are currently under threat from growing government control.<sup>13</sup> Currently, these organizations rely almost exclusively on international donors and are subject to nationalist attacks. While opposition to nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and anti-Western rhetoric is not new to the KR, hate speech against civil society, particularly those working in the gender equality and social inclusion space, intensified in 2021.<sup>14</sup> However, the commitment of and resourcing by international organizations is credited in part for maintaining a focus on the issues. Additionally, there are no formal links between these organizations and political parties or government institutions.

According to a 2022 Freedom House report,<sup>15</sup> current president Sadyr Japarov has waged a harsh attack on civil society and media as part of his broader consolidation of power. For example, during the fieldwork for this study, a prominent radio station—Azattyk, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Kyrgyz service—was suspended indefinitely by a district court on the request of the Ministry of Culture, Information, Sport, and Youth based on a supposed violation of national laws for a video covering the 2022 border conflict between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which was then annulled in July of 2023.<sup>16,17</sup> Other media houses are under threat. A new media law being considered by the parliament would further diminish the diversity of news outlets and constrict the space for open dialogue if passed. The shrinking space for media reflects broader clampdowns on free speech and civil society—both essential for continuing the push for WPPL in the KR and affecting some of the most active civil society groups engaged in WPPL. A closing civic space, as a reflection of a move toward semi-authoritarianism, further threatens women’s ability to and

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<sup>9</sup> Doolotkeldieva, Asel. 2023. “Uncovering the Revolutionaries from Epistemic Injustice: The Politics of Popular Revolts in Kyrgyzstan.” *Central Asian Affairs* 10: 99-122. [https://brill.com/view/journals/caa/10/2/article-p99\\_1.xml](https://brill.com/view/journals/caa/10/2/article-p99_1.xml)

<sup>10</sup> SIAR Research and Consulting, and International Republican Institute, Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR). 2022a. “National Poll of The KR April 2022.”

<sup>11</sup> Common Cause PA <https://www.commoncause.kg/analytics/124>

<sup>12</sup> SIAR Research and Consulting, and International Republican Institute, Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR). 2022a. “National Poll of The KR April 2022.”

<sup>13</sup> Freedom House. 2022. “Nations in Transit 2022.” *Freedom House*. Accessed March 2, 2023.

[https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/NIT\\_2022\\_final\\_digital.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/NIT_2022_final_digital.pdf); USAID/PPL’s Analytics Team. 2023. “The KR MCST Contextual Data Placemat.”

<sup>14</sup> SIAR Research and Consulting, and International Republican Institute, Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR). 2022a. “National Poll of The KR April 2022.”

<sup>15</sup> Freedom House. 2022.

<sup>16</sup> Amnesty International. 2022. “Kyrgyzstan: Closure of Azattyk Radio (RFE/RL) is a major blow to media freedom.” <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/04/kyrgyzstan-closure-of-azattyk-radio-rfe-rl-is-a-major-blow-to-media-freedom/#:~:text=The%20Kyrgyzstani%20authorities%20claimed%20that,demanded%20that%20it%20be%20removed.>

<sup>17</sup> Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. 2023. “Bishkek Court Annuls Decision that Shut Down RFE/RL’s Operations in Kyrgyzstan.” <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-radio-azattyk-court-overturms-decision/32500262.html>.

likelihood of voting and women seeking and obtaining political positions.<sup>18</sup> Democratic backsliding and eroding women’s empowerment often go hand in hand and countering these rollbacks of democratic freedom requires protecting women’s rights and ensuring the meaningful participation of women in politics.<sup>19</sup>

In the KR, political parties are fluid, without a significant ideological base, and will gain prominence ahead of elections and then fading away. National politics tend to be personality-based and increasingly dominated by individual strongmen, business interests, and high levels of corruption.<sup>20</sup> The country has had eight elections since its establishment in 1991 (though the election in 2020 was canceled because of significant irregularities).

## WOMEN'S STATUS

Post-Soviet KR continues to enjoy a legacy of high levels of literacy and education overall, with gender parity at the primary level and 20 percent more women than men graduating from tertiary educational institutions. Women dominate in the health and education sectors and are active in public and business spheres, particularly in middle management roles. Nonetheless, social norms, which elevate women’s domestic role, shape workforce participation (75 percent men; 46 percent women) and perpetuate a significant gender pay gap (25 percent). The fertility rate (2.9 children/woman) is higher than the global average (2.3 children/woman), and some 13 percent of women aged 20-24 were married before they were 18 years old. Pressure to marry and have children is also encouraged by generous maternity leave provisions coupled with a social stigma associated with being unmarried. Rates of domestic GBV are on par with global averages— 26 percent of women 15-49 experience intimate partner violence,<sup>21</sup> although the incidence increased significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic with an alarming 65 percent rise in reported domestic violence in Bishkek alone.<sup>22</sup> The KR ranks 111 out of 146 countries on the World Economic Forum’s 2022 political empowerment scale—coming in lower than countries in the region that it outranks on other measures of democracy and governance.<sup>23</sup>

There are several laws that guarantee voting and representational rights for both men and women, most notably the 2008 law on State Guarantees of Equal Rights for Men and Women which enshrined the principle of gender equality. Also, the 2017 law on Protection Against Family Violence aims to prevent family violence and provide protections to victims; however, this law does not specifically mention harassment or sexual violence. Further information on relevant laws and conventions is included in Annex C2.

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<sup>18</sup> Carothers, Thomas. 2016. “Democracy Support Strategies: Leading with Women’s Political Empowerment.” Available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2016/09/14/democracy-support-strategies-leading-with-women-s-political-empowerment-pub-64534>.

<sup>19</sup> Ortiz, Elena, Joshua Allen, Robert U. Nagel, and Jessica M. Smith. (2023). “Exploring the Links between Women’s Status and Democracy.” Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security.

<sup>20</sup> Chekirova, Ajar. 2023. “How are Populist Attitudes Activated? Understanding Revolutionary Mobilization in Kyrgyzstan.” *Central Asian Affairs*. [https://brill.com/view/journals/caa/10/2/article-p123\\_2.xml?ebody=abstract%2Fexcerpt](https://brill.com/view/journals/caa/10/2/article-p123_2.xml?ebody=abstract%2Fexcerpt).

<sup>21</sup> Gender Data Portal Kyrgyz Republic <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/countries/kyrgyz-republic>.

<sup>22</sup> COVID-19 Impacts on Livelihoods of Women and Men in the Kyrgyz Republic Gender Rapid Assessment as of 15 May 2020 [https://the KR.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/ENG\\_Gender\\_percent20Rapid\\_percent20Assessment\\_percent20of\\_percent20COVID-19\\_percent20impact\\_June\\_percent202020\\_final.pdf](https://the KR.un.org/sites/default/files/2020-07/ENG_Gender_percent20Rapid_percent20Assessment_percent20of_percent20COVID-19_percent20impact_June_percent202020_final.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report. 2022. [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2022.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf).

## METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the Assessment is to better understand the current state of WPPL and pinpoint challenges and opportunities for advancing WPPL in the KR. The assessment seeks to answer the following four questions:

- Are women politically engaged as citizens, in any of a wide range of possible political roles?
- Do women exercise political agency and influence as citizens?
- Do women serve as political leaders, whether in elected or non-elected roles?
- Do women exercise political agency and influence as political leaders?

The WPPL Assessment has three parts: Part I involves mapping the current state of WPPL; Part II entails analyzing barriers and opportunities to WPPL, and Part III involves transitioning from the research to the writing of the final report and making evidence-based recommendations.

## DATA SOURCES

The Assessment employs four tools: a desk review, a politician survey, KIIs, and FGDs. These tools provide quantitative and qualitative sources of evidence to better understand the current situation as well as barriers and opportunities for advancing WPPL, engaging a wide range of stakeholders and diverse groups of women.

The assessment findings discussed in this report are derived from a desk review of 100 documents including relevant literature and USAID documents, a survey of 110 politicians, 27 KIIs, and 10 FGDs with politicians, civil society, and media in Bishkek city, Saruu village, Issyk-Kul oblast and Novo-Pokrovka village, Chui oblast. The locations range from urban Bishkek to rural Saruu. The KR Assessment Team (AT) conducted in-country data collection between April 12, 2023, and 30 May, 2023. Please refer to Annex A for more details on the sources of information used for this assessment.

## CURRENT STATE OF WPPL

### WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

The KR is a relatively young democracy with a turbulent governance experience to date. On the face of it, women's political participation is relatively high. According to data from the CEC, voter turnout was 35 percent in the 2021 election and women and men voted at roughly the same rate (33 percent) and a substantial number of local election workers are women<sup>24</sup> Women's representation on local councils has also increased in recent years, up to 36 percent in 2021.<sup>25</sup> However, there is evidence from multiple sources that women faced barriers when voting. Barriers cited include time demands (such as work, family, childcare, and household), lack of agency (feeling as though their votes would not count), and pressure or active interference from others (such as friends and family).

### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC LIFE

Research in the KR has documented instances of physical, psychological (such as intimidation, humiliation, verbal abuse), economic, sexual, and media violence.<sup>26</sup> Sexual violence and harassment is particularly common, in one survey 97 percent of respondents reported being aware of cases of sexual harassment of women politicians. In focus groups conducted for this study, local voters referred to "family voting" where the men heads of household dictated who the family members should vote for. Previous research has found that a lack of support from a woman's spouse or family is a significant obstacle to women's political participation in the KR.

*"During the elections, I told my wife, daughter, [and] daughter-in-law who to vote for. [It was] candidates I knew. They all listen to me." – FGD community member, man*

### WOMEN AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Party loyalty in KR is often measured in terms of subservience to the exclusively male party leaders rather than to a specific political platform. Few parties appear to have an explicit women's or even gender agenda in their platform, and recent polling data suggests that voter perception of party sensitivity to the needs of women citizens is sharply divided along gender lines. Responding to the statement *Politicians and political parties do not listen to the needs and ideas of women* in a national poll (2022), 37 percent of men and 71 percent of women strongly agreed or agreed.<sup>27</sup> This suggests that a majority of Kyrgyz women do not feel represented by the political system and that men have a lack of awareness or interest in assessing whether women's viewpoints are truly being included.

In the period between 2010-2012, political parties were energized by the new constitution and were seeking broad citizen engagement for mobilized women's and youth wings. There were women's wings in eight political parties, which offered something of a focal point for women politicians to caucus within their own party. The most recent data found on which parties have women's wings is from 2013 and since

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<sup>24</sup> Territorial and Precinct Election Commissions are distinct from the Central Election Commission. The former are elected for 2 years with 2/3 members political party representatives and 1/3 representatives of local self-government authorities. The latter is formed for 5 years and has just 20 members.

<sup>25</sup> United Nations Development Programme. 2021. "Number of women in Kyrgyz local councils is increasing." <https://www.undp.org/kyrgyzstan/press-releases/number-women-kyrgyz-local-councils-increasing>.

<sup>26</sup> Kochorbaeva, Z., N. Prigoda, B. Islanbekova, and M. Tulegenov. 2022. "Насилие в Отношении Женщин в Политике в Кыргызской Республике: Результаты Исследования [Violence Against Women in Politics in the Kyrgyz Republic: Research Findings]." OSCE. January 2022. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I23ZIFj3eHUaor5bnIYEuBVmTOuLuXIP/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I23ZIFj3eHUaor5bnIYEuBVmTOuLuXIP/view?usp=share_link).

<sup>27</sup> SIAR Research and Consulting, and International Republican Institute, Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR). 2022a. "National Poll of The KR April 2022."

then, women's wings have been nascent at best. Based on the politician survey conducted by the AT, there is a considerable difference between men and women respondents regarding their awareness of the existence of a women's wing within their political parties. Across the nine major political parties in the survey, overall 42 percent of men politician respondents answered 'yes' about the existence of a women's wing in their party. This number was significantly less among women politician respondents where 21 percent affirmed the existence of a women's wing in their party. Additionally, 11 percent of men and 14 percent of women politicians responded they were unsure. This is telling as several of the parties do have women's wings.

Among survey respondents who said their party had a women's wing, a majority stated it was designed to provide capacity building for women party members (73 percent men; 42 percent women) and focus on gender equality (55 percent men; 58 percent women). Interestingly, men politicians were slightly more enthusiastic about the value of a women's wing (72 percent) than women politicians (61 percent), though another 33 percent of women respondents were unsure.

Respondents who saw value in a women's wing indicated that it should focus on gender equality (74 percent men; 89 percent women) or mentoring for women members and candidates (66 percent men; 63 percent women). Several men politicians who were interviewed advocated the idea of a women's wing so women could talk together and "solve their problems." These MPs saw women MPs as largely addressing social issues, such as GBV and childcare.

## WOMEN AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Historically, women have exercised most of their political power in civil society and have played an important role in civil protests, including at pivotal points in the country's struggle for democratic rights. There are multiple NGOs and CSOs, both locally and nationally, that are devoted to WPPL.<sup>28</sup> Many of these WPPL organizations are led by former politicians or political aspirants and offer a variety of services including training and mentoring of women candidates, advocacy, and research. Civil society successfully advocated for the gender quota in the legislature by working alongside women parliamentarians to support the legislation and ensure it was not undermined. Women leaders from civil society are also credited with mobilizing an important response to the COVID-19 pandemic, filling gaps in a number of critical roles that government and law enforcement typically play—for instance responding to the significant spike in GBV.<sup>29</sup> As one 2015 study wrote, "Non-profit organizations, including women's NGOs, became the school of leadership for some past and present members of parliament and government officials."<sup>30</sup> However, the study also noted that the women's movement was becoming "fragmented" and "older" as the leaders of many women's organizations have been at the helm for more than 20 years without empowering younger women to take over and failing to attract a mass of younger women to the cause.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Turdalieva, Cholpon, and Medet Tiulegenov. 2018. "Women, the Parliament and Political Participation in Post-Soviet The KR." *Central Asian Affairs*, April. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142290-00502003>; Europe Central Asia Monitoring, and Begimai Bekbolotova. 2021. "Emancipation or Back to the Kitchen? Gender and Civil Society in The KR – EUCAM." January 2, 2021. <https://eucentralasia.eu/emancipation-or-back-to-the-kitchen-gender-and-civil-society-in-the-KR/>.

<sup>29</sup> Europe Central Asia Monitoring, and Begimai Bekbolotova. 2021. "Emancipation or Back to the Kitchen? Gender and Civil Society in The KR – EUCAM." January 2, 2021; Dzardanova, Svetlana, and Niginakhon Uralova. 2022. "Covid-19 and the Gender-Based Violence Pandemic in Central Asia: Assessing Response Measures of the State, Civil Society, and International Actors in The KR and Uzbekistan." Edited by Pal Dunay. Institut für Europäische Politik. 2022. [https://iep-berlin.de/site/assets/files/2160/gbv\\_central\\_asia\\_final.pdf](https://iep-berlin.de/site/assets/files/2160/gbv_central_asia_final.pdf).

<sup>30</sup> Musabaeva, Anara, 2015. "Gender equality in The KR: the appearance of success". <https://cabar.asia/en/anar-musabaeva-gender-equality-in-the-KR-the-appearance-of-success>.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.



## WOMEN'S POLITICAL LEADERSHIP

In a 2022 study on women's political leadership, the KR ranked 114 out of 186 countries for women's political representation. Twenty percent of those in Parliament were women which was behind all other Central Asian countries—Uzbekistan ranked 53<sup>rd</sup>, Kazakhstan 80<sup>th</sup>, Tajikistan 84<sup>th</sup>, and Turkmenistan 92<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>32</sup>

## WOMEN ELECTED OFFICIALS

In 2010, a woman was elected head of the Interim Government. Roza Otunbaeva was the first and only woman president of the KR and the first in any Central Asian country. In 2011, several women were nominated as presidential candidates, but none of them reached the final candidate registration.<sup>33</sup> Since the country was established, only seven of the 101 cabinet ministers have been women.<sup>34</sup> Today, only one out of 21 cabinet ministers is a woman.<sup>35</sup> Thirty-four percent of judiciary and prosecutors are women; however, this number has been in steady decline over the years. There are two women judges on the Constitutional Court, but the Supreme Court and most local courts are led by men.<sup>36</sup>

Only 39 (13 percent) of the 294 parties registered with the Ministry of Justice are headed by women. Two out of the 21 parties that competed in the 2021 election were headed by women, but neither gained any seats in the parliament.<sup>37</sup> Five of the 19 current women MPs are serving a second term and one is serving a third term. With the recent changes in electoral laws as part of the President's consolidation of power, the number of seats in parliament has decreased from 120 to 90. Of those, 36 are decided in single-mandate districts (also called single-winner voting), with the remainder elected from national party lists.<sup>38</sup> These changes further disadvantages women candidates who struggle to win in single-mandate districts.

Figure 2 below shows a substantial increase in the percentage of women holding political office in 2007 after the quota system was introduced relative to prior years. However, this percentage has decreased over time. In the first year after the quota was introduced, 26 percent of women holding political office were women which decreased to 21 percent in 2021. While not election years, 2012 and 2016 are included in this graphic to show how quickly elected women were squeezed out of their elected positions, oftentimes intentionally by party leaders. Significant increases in women's political presence on village councils also occurred after the quota was introduced in 2019—from 9 percent in 2012 to 38 percent in

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<sup>32</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union, Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments. <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=12&year=2022>.

<sup>33</sup> Turdalieva, Cholpon, and Medet Tiulegenov. 2018. "Women, the Parliament and Political Participation in Post-Soviet The KR." *Central Asian Affairs*, April. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142290-00502003>.

<sup>34</sup> Women have held the following ministerial positions: foreign affairs (1), social welfare (1), justice (3), finance (1), and education (2). (Turdaliev, Cholpon, and Medet Tiulegenov. 2018. "Women, the Parliament and Political Participation in Post-Soviet The KR." *Central Asian Affairs*, April).

<sup>35</sup> Kochorbaeva, Z., N. Prigoda, B. Islanbekova, and M. Tulegenov. 2022. "Насилие в Отношении Женщин в Политике в Кыргызской Республике: Результаты Исследования [Violence Against Women in Politics in the Kyrgyz Republic: Research Findings]." OSCE. January 2022. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1123ZIFj3eHUaor5bnIYEuBVmTOuLuXIP/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1123ZIFj3eHUaor5bnIYEuBVmTOuLuXIP/view?usp=share_link).

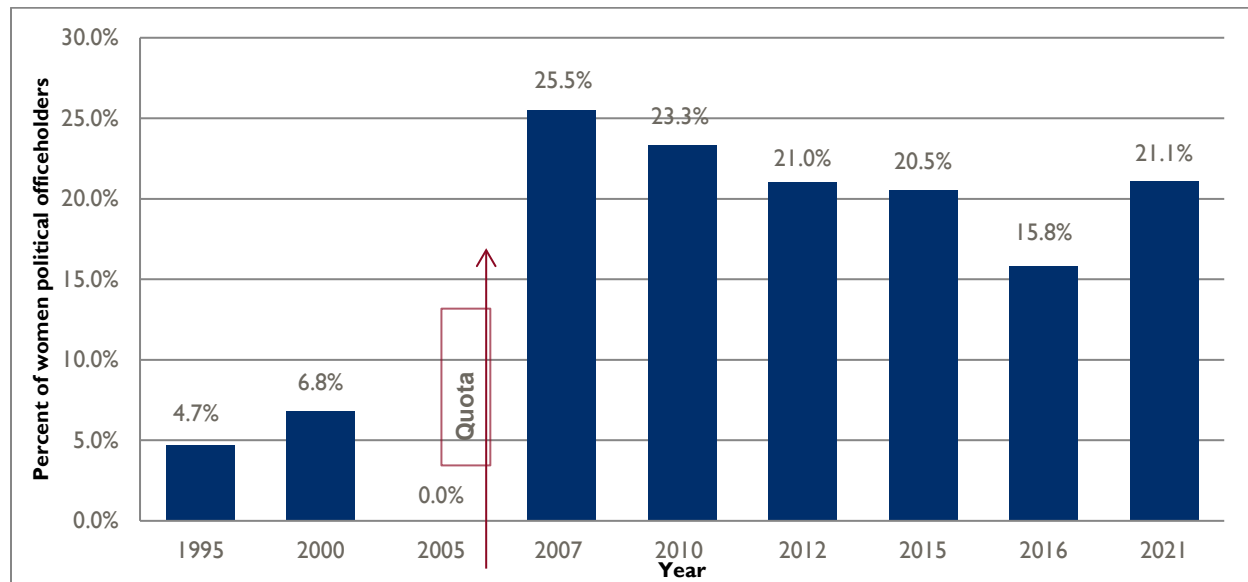
<sup>36</sup> Women and Men 2017-2021, National Statistical Committee of KR. 2021. <http://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/9471f65a-7cbd-4320-8651-ca2edf36de24.pdf>; Supreme Court of KR <http://sot.kg/>.

<sup>37</sup> Report on the results of gender monitoring of elections of deputies to Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic, held on 28 November 2021, [https://awli.kg/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/gendermonitoringjk\\_2021.pdf](https://awli.kg/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/gendermonitoringjk_2021.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Pannier, Bruce. 2021. "Controversy and Confusion Again in Kyrgyzstan's Parliamentary Elections." <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-elections-controversy-confusion/31494427.html>.

2021.<sup>39</sup> While the number of women seated has changed substantially, the gender distribution of candidates running in national elections has changed little since the quota was introduced in 2007, when 32 percent of candidates were women, to 2021 when 36 percent of candidates were women.

**Figure 1. The Percentage of Women Holding Political Office from 2007 to 2021<sup>40</sup>**



When asked in the politician survey about whether women have the same opportunity as men to take on positions of political leadership, 74 percent of women responded that women do not have the same opportunity as men, while only 38 percent of men agreed that women do not have the same opportunity as men. A recent study by the World Economic Forum ranked the advancement of women into leadership roles in the KR at 4.91 on a scale of seven.<sup>41</sup> Both of these statistics point to barriers women face when stepping into leadership positions and are exemplified by the fact that although women comprise over 40 percent of the public administration, their presence diminishes at senior levels.<sup>42</sup> However, women are well represented throughout election management bodies in the KR. Five of the 12 members of the election commission—which has a 30 percent gender quota—are women. The chair is a woman while the two deputies are men.

Women also face significant obstacles in being appointed to municipal positions. In 2021 there were only 20 women (3.9 percent) in municipal political positions, whereas women represented 38 percent of staff in municipal administrative positions. There is not a single woman among 40 *akims* (heads of districts) and 7 regional plenipotentiaries of the President. There are also no women among the 32 mayors of the country’s cities. Further, despite the large number of women employed in local self-government bodies

<sup>39</sup> UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls. 2022. “End of Mission Statement by Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls Visit to The KR.” United Nations Kyrgyz Republic. April 15, 2022. <https://theKR.un.org/en/189400-un-working-group-discrimination-against-women-and-girls>.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> World Economic Forum. 2022. “Global Gender Gap Report 2022.” July 13, 2022. <https://www.weforum.org/reports/global-gender-gap-report-2022/>.

<sup>42</sup> Gender Equality And Women’s Empowerment In Public Administration. The KR Case Study. 2012. UNDP. <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/TheKRFinal%20-%20HiRes.pdf>.

(ayil okmotu), only 22 of the country’s 452 municipalities are headed by women.<sup>43</sup> In the KR, political appointments are generally made from a national personnel reserve list. Formally women have little chance to become mayor or akim in the near future because they are not represented under the reserve lists for these positions; women make up a miniscule fraction (11.7 percent) of the personnel reserve list for the position of a Mayor nationally.<sup>44</sup> To summarize, Table 2 shows a breakdown of 2023 levels of elected officials by gender.

**Table 2. 2023 Elected Officials by Level of Government and Gender<sup>45</sup>**

ELECTED OFFICIALS	WOMEN	MEN
Parliament (90 deputies)	21% (19)	79% (71)
City Council (879 mandates)	28% (259)	72% (661)
Local Council (7,843 mandates)	38% (3,069)	62% (5,073)

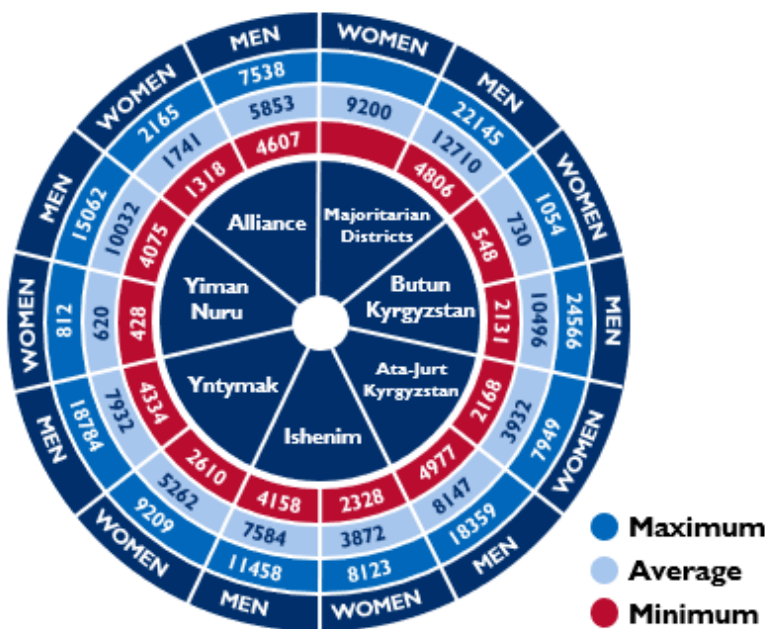
Figure 2 presents data on the votes received during the 2021 parliamentary election in single-mandate constituencies and in party lists for men and women candidates who were granted a mandate to Parliament. In all cases, women received a fraction of the votes received by men within their party. Successfully elected MPs who received the highest and lowest number of votes are presented, as well as the average for all mandated MPs, by party.

<sup>43</sup> Abdylidaeva J. How to strengthen women's political participation and leadership in The KR? 2023. <https://cabar.asia/ru/how-to-strengthen-the-political-participation-and-leadership-of-women-in-the-KR>.

<sup>44</sup> State Agency For Civil Service And Local Self-Government Under The Cabinet Of Ministers Of The Kyrgyz Republic <https://mkk.gov.kg/ru/%d0%bc%d1%83%d0%bd%d0%b8%d1%86%d0%b8%d0%bf%d0%b0%d0%bb%d1%8c%d0%bd%d1%8b%d0%b9-%d1%80%d0%b5%d0%b7%d0%b5%d1%80%d0%b2-%d0%ba%d0%b0%d0%b4%d1%80%d0%be%d0%b2/>.

<sup>45</sup> Central Election Commission of KR, <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/zhenshiny-i-vybory/zhenshiny-v-predstavitelnyh-organah/obshaya-informaciya-mestnyh-keneshej-kr/>.

Figure 2. Votes received during the 2021 parliamentary election, by gender and political party<sup>46</sup>



Women deputies also received different support from the electorate: two received more than 9,000 votes (one from the Yntymak party, the other elected from a single-mandate constituency on a majoritarian basis), while women from two parties received fewer than 600 votes. No maximum and minimum are provided for women in majoritarian districts because all votes went to the sole candidate.

Like men, women deputies do not represent a homogeneous group in terms of electorate support. Also, the women deputies who received the most votes in the Ata-Jurt-The KR, Ishenim and parties have stronger electorate support than the men from these parties on average. Nonetheless, in most cases, women gain very few votes, so without special measures (quotas) there will be practically no women in parliament.

In Parliament, there are eight standing committees, two of which are headed by women (Committee on Constitutional Legislation, State Structure, Judicial and Legal Issues and Regulations and the Social Policy Committee). Women hold deputy head positions on three of the committees (Committee on International Affairs, Defense, Security and Migration; Committee on Budget, Economic and Fiscal Policy; Social Policy Committee). One of the chairs, and all the deputy chairs are newcomers to parliament.

Committee selection is important, and according to multiple sources is undertaken through informal, men-only networks. One man MP interviewed in this study noted:

*“Once in parliament, women have the same status as men deputies, but there is also little chance of getting positions in committees. As soon as we enter parliament, all men try to get into strategic committees - the committee on budget, energy, environmental management, etc. Women themselves are targeted for non-prestigious, not influential committees - health care, education... Because even among men politicians there is a belief that women should be included just for show. We have a lot*

<sup>46</sup> Analysis based on data from the Central Election Commission, Republic of The KR, <https://shailoo.gov.kg/ru/>.

*of brawls in decision-making - on the sidelines, so to speak behind the scenes. men leaders gather and negotiate. they say, for example, let's give women a social committee...let them not be offended.” —MP, man*

## WOMEN'S INFLUENCE IN POLITICS

In the politician survey administered for this assessment, men and women differed in their perceptions regarding women's influence in politics. Politicians were asked whether men and women have an equal voice and influence in political debates. Fifty-seven percent of men responded “yes” while only 33 percent of women also responded “yes.” This may suggest that women are viewed as tokens and have little political influence even when elected to prestigious positions.

Budget committees represent a fulcrum of power in councils and parliament. While women appointed to budget committees often have the relevant credentials, they also have notable family ties with local elites. Among those that do not have such connections, which may be more typical, women deputies expressed frustration about their limited access to budget decision-making, lack of technical understanding of budgeting, and other topics such as water and electricity systems. Per Agarwal's Continuum of Participation,<sup>47</sup> members of a group fall into one of six levels of participation and influence. These range from membership in the group with nominal participation to being able to influence decisions through empowered participation. In the KR, many women are stuck in the first two levels of participation: nominal participation with membership in the group and passive participation which include being informed of decisions *ex post facto*; or attending meetings but not speaking up.

## WOMEN'S POLITICAL NETWORKS

There is no formal women's caucus in the national parliament, but two structures—the Women's MP Forum and the National Council on Women's Rights, Children and Gender Equality—offer a focal point for women's political leadership, networking, and gender issues at the national level. The Forum of Women MPs brings together current women MPs from all parties in the Parliament and the National Council on Women's Rights, Children, and Gender Equality brings together Parliament members with other government stakeholders and civil society organizations (CSO) working in the sector.<sup>48</sup> Neither the Forum nor the Council have received any financing from the Parliamentary budget. The Women's MP Forum was established in 2011 with support from the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and USAID as an informal structure to provide a mechanism for collaboration on legislation—including gender-relevant legislation, networking, and capacity building for women MPs. Thirty-one MPs have participated in the Forum since it was established, and members have jointly sponsored eight laws and bills.<sup>49</sup> Past and current members credit the Forum with providing a space for women MPs to caucus, network, and promote multiple laws that may transcend (or even be invisible in) party platforms. In different convocations, the Forum has played a significant role in promoting amendments to the Family Code, Child Code, Law on Domestic Violence, and in the introduction of a 30 percent quota in the election process and protection of seats won by women candidates.

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<sup>47</sup>Agarwal, Bina. Participatory Exclusions, Community Forestry, and Gender: An Analysis for South Asia and a Conceptual Framework. 2001 <https://ru.scribd.com/document/356746629/Agarwal-2001-Participatory-Exclusion#>; Agarwal, Bina. Gender, Presence and Representation: Can Presence Alone Make for Effective Representation? 2023. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00490857231158178>.

<sup>48</sup> Kyrgyz Republic Civic Platform. [https://platforma.kg/en/2023/sovet-po-pravam-zhenshhin-detej-i-gendernomu-ravenstvu-pri-t-raga-zhogorku-kenesha-kyrgyzskoj-respubliki/#:~:text=for%20juvenile%20justice,-.The%20Council%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20Women%2C%20Children%2C%20and%20Gender,Kyrgyz%20Republic%20\)%20of%20the%20Kyrgyz](https://platforma.kg/en/2023/sovet-po-pravam-zhenshhin-detej-i-gendernomu-ravenstvu-pri-t-raga-zhogorku-kenesha-kyrgyzskoj-respubliki/#:~:text=for%20juvenile%20justice,-.The%20Council%20on%20the%20Rights%20of%20Women%2C%20Children%2C%20and%20Gender,Kyrgyz%20Republic%20)%20of%20the%20Kyrgyz).

<sup>49</sup> NDI. “Forum of Women Parliamentarians of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic VI Convocation.” Slide show.

*The good thing about this caucus of women is that it allows us to go beyond our political differences, overcome the ideological contexts, unites women from different parties and from majoritarian districts. The Forum is the place for the gender agenda, the place where important issues like quota and violence against women override political agenda. – ex-MP, woman*

Many observers note that the current cohort of women MP's does not appear as cohesive as in prior sessions and interest in the Forum seems to be waning in the present convocation. Interviews and focus groups suggested several reasons for this: 1) Changes in women MPs' role over time — second and third-term women MPs may see the time and networking requirements of the Forum as too demanding and no longer a priority; 2) Women MPs are more beholden to party bosses who may see the Forum as a threat, or promoting priorities that are at odds with his priorities. At the extreme, one woman MP interviewed noted that many are “afraid of their party bosses.” And, 3) there is competition for the benefits offered by the Forum such as trips abroad, media exposure, and access to high-level diplomats.

When surveyed, men politicians knew about the Forum and were in favor of it because it offered women a place to network without threatening the power or insularity of their own networks. Several men even referred to it as a “women's wing.”

Early efforts to build networks between members of the Forum and women deputies at city and local levels were important but have been met with challenges. The Forum undertook a series of listening meetings between women MPs and local council deputies in 2017 and 2018. In these meetings, local councilors raised concerns and formally petitioned women MPs about specific local issues that needed national attention. This initiative seemed timely, relevant, and beneficial for all, but one local participant expressed disappointment that follow-up was not forthcoming. Another informant suggested that MPs used the meetings to build their constituent base rather than bridge divides between local and national platforms.

The National Council on Women's Rights, Children, and Gender Equality was established under the Council of Ministers and led by the vice chair of the Jogorku Kenesh in 2022 to advise and coordinate state policy on gender development with representation from state, civil society, trade unions, and international organizations.<sup>50</sup> The Council receives support from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and has met twice since its inception. The mandate of the Council has the traditional set of issues – women, children, violence, and gender equality. According to the information from the website of the Jogorku Kenesh, the Council has legislative, oversight functions and can represent the Parliament on issues of gender equality, gender violence, and discrimination.

The Council is strategic because it is headed by a male Speaker, who exerts considerable power. It has a charter and an established secretariat. Also, unlike the Forum, it is not perceived as catering only to the interests of women. Conversely, the weakness is that the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Council are not gender sensitive and neither brings a track record on gender issues. They are not focusing on WPPL at local or national levels and are concentrating on more general gender issues. The Council was often mentioned as a competing body in discussions about the Forum of Women MPs. Although membership overlaps, their roles are quite different and arguably complement each other as the Forum can help advance legislation that the Council can legitimize, monitor, and help mainstream through its membership.

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<sup>50</sup> Ministry of Justice of The Kyrgyz Republic, <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/93602>.

## BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES TO WPPL

This assessment finds that women in the KR face myriad barriers to political participation and leadership, as well as emerging opportunities. Village candidates and women competing for national office confront a range of family, party, and social pressures, which are largely derived from patriarchal norms and weak institutional structures. Successful candidates have been able to navigate these challenges, leverage the opportunities opened by gender quotas, and support from civil society and the international community, in addition to family connections.

## SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

### GENDER NORMS

Women’s role in society—and their participation in political life and political leadership—is significantly impacted by definitions of their roles and assumed innate characteristics and desires that are rooted in culturally-held gender norms. Because of the specific roles that women are expected to play, there may be an assumption that women are loyal, hardworking, dedicated, and intuitive, all of which shape whether and how women participate and lead in politics.

One woman activist informant said that girls are raised to “know their place” and take on a “secondary role” to men, where they are expected to focus on matters related to childrearing and homemaking. She goes on to talk about how these roles exclude women from political life:

*“And we, women, look at men as children. Indulgently, we let them do things they want. Men can say ‘stop talking, I am head of the family and I will decide.’... They want to play politics, we let them, and then we realize that they make decisions about our lives – and they do not pay attention to social issues – nothing has been done for women, single mothers, children; and we realize that we can no longer influence those laws.” –Village activist, woman*

Further, there is a gender norm that women’s place is in the home and there is a perception among some of the population that gender equality is a Western ideal that has no place in Kyrgyz culture. Tensions surrounding the appropriateness of gender equality—as a concept and social norm—in the Kyrgyz political context have been heightened in recent years.<sup>51</sup> At one extreme, opponents of gender equality – including the promotion of women in politics and decision-making – associate it with LGBTQI+ equality and aim to discredit it by assigning its rise to foreign interference in national affairs of state (and culture) through support from international organizations (IOs) to civil society “agents.” This is used by conservative religious and nationalist actors to justify a shrinking of the political space for civil society and the media, spaces which are largely led by women.<sup>52</sup> This includes WPPL organizations and, more broadly, human rights organizations. The CSOs working in this space face even greater criticism than other CSOs, even in a closing civic space, as a result. It has also catalyzed more caution among some IOs and civil society who are seeking to soften the gender equality framing and adopt new terminology. This response has troubled feminists who are concerned that progress and gains in WPPL might be diluted. Further complicating the landscape, some men key informants expressed a belief that the KR has already achieved

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<sup>51</sup> Europe Central Asia Monitoring, and Begimai Bekbolotova. 2021. “Emancipation or Back to the Kitchen? Gender and Civil Society in The KR – EUCAM.” January 2, 2021. Accessed March 12, 2023. <https://eucentralasia.eu/emancipation-or-back-to-the-kitchen-gender-and-civil-society-in-the-KR/>.

<sup>52</sup> Freedom House. 2022. “Nations in Transit 2022.” *Freedom House*. Accessed March 2, 2023. [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/NIT\\_2022\\_final\\_digital.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/NIT_2022_final_digital.pdf).

more gender equality in politics than its neighbors, despite current data on gender equality in the region that shows this is not true (see discussion in the Current State section of this report).

The media also plays a key role in perpetuating gender stereotypes and norms related to women as political leaders. A 2021 study by the Social Technology Agency (STA)<sup>53</sup> suggests that the portrayal of women politicians in the media plays into gender stereotypes and biases. Women are portrayed in a positive light in their caring roles as mothers, wives, and family members, with attention to their marital status, number of children, and age.<sup>54</sup> On the other hand, information about men’s professional accomplishments is more likely to be emphasized. Comments about a candidate or politician’s appearance, including body shaming, are far more common for women.

## PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN

The perceived belief that men should not fight with women was mentioned by multiple men key informants as a reason women should stay out of politics. Men politicians and citizens interviewed in this study maintained that it was inappropriate for men to argue or debate with women, citing this as another reason to keep women out of politics.

*Participant 1: In our Kyrgyz custom, it is impossible to raise a hand against women. If there is such a case, the men nearby will help her, and that man may lose authority. Participant 2: There are ethical standards for deputies, employees, and civil servants. They say that women should be treated more loyally and politely. This is tenderness itself, she is a mother, sister, and grandmother. You can't be rude to her. That's how we were brought up. —Local citizens, men*

Because of patriarchal values, women are viewed as lacking the skills to make a good politician or leader, such as willingness to engage in conflict, having good negotiation skills, and self-confidence to lead.<sup>55</sup> Their managerial abilities in the domestic sphere are typically not acknowledged when considering women’s fitness for the political realm. Men, on the other hand, are seen as having traits often associated with good political leaders, such as being calculating, competitive, collegial, logical, and more technically capable. One woman village council member posited that women’s collaboration skills are not as honed as men’s due to traditional, gendered activities:

*“Men are more collaborative. There is a cultural reason for this: women are always at home. Men’s cooperation is institutionalized through specific “man” forms of leisure: they go to the spa, fishing, etc. and there they make decisions. —Village council member, woman*

However, if women politicians exhibit confidence, they may be socially sanctioned for transgressing traditional gender norms, with others employing patriarchal narratives to diminish their power:

*“They try to show an image of a self-confident woman—have many children, take care of husband—but if you show you’re a confident woman then people don’t like you.” —MP, man*

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<sup>53</sup> Kochorbaeva, Z., N. Prigoda, B. Islanbekova, and M. Tulegenov. 2022. “Насилие в Отношении Женщин в Политике в Кыргызской Республике: Результаты Исследования [Violence Against Women in Politics in the Kyrgyz Republic: Research Findings].” OSCE. January 2022. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I23ZIFj3eHUaor5bnIYEuBVmTOuLuXIP/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I23ZIFj3eHUaor5bnIYEuBVmTOuLuXIP/view?usp=share_link).

<sup>54</sup> This is also mentioned in National Democratic Institute and Lake Research Partners. n.d. “Public Perceptions of Women’s Political Participation in The KR.” Slide show.

<sup>55</sup> National Democratic Institute and Lake Research Partners. n.d. “Public Perceptions of Women’s Political Participation in The KR.” Slide show.; NDI. “Forum of Women Parliamentarians of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic VI Convocation.” Slide show.



A recent study reflects the public perception that women are less suited than men for political leadership. The majority of respondents (75 percent of men; 71 percent of women) in a 2022 Foreign and Commonwealth Office study said that men make better political leaders than women,<sup>56</sup> and polling data from IRI shows that only 11 percent of respondents (8 percent of men; 14 percent of women) said they saw an expanded role for women in politics.<sup>57</sup> According to the IRI data, 47 percent of respondents said they were less likely to vote for a woman candidate. Fifty-five percent of men respondents said they would vote for a man candidate over a woman candidate even if they had the same qualifications.<sup>58</sup> Youth participating in a course run by a conservative Islamist political party expressed similar views, with young men uncomfortably laughing when questioned about women’s aspirations for equality, as well as raising concerns about women’s innate qualities and capacities to govern. Both men and women youth expressed limitations to women’s political leadership:

*“I also tell my feminist friends, “Fight for your rights, but don't cross the line. Because when you cross the line, you start to dominate men. And then the fighting starts.” – Youth participant in political party course, man*

*“It's harder for women in politics. ...even at our school, when they assign a task to a girl, there is some distrust...because of the mentality, they can say that you're a girl, it will be difficult for you, you may not do certain tasks” –Youth participant in political party course, woman*

Among politicians, the apparent acceptance of select women political figures is undercut by an overall perception by men politicians that women do not make good political leaders. Multiple politicians—including those who express conservative views—point with pride to outstanding women leaders throughout Kyrgyz history, including the sole woman president Roza Otunbaeva who one man MP described as the country’s best president. However, only 47 percent of men politicians in the WPPL survey indicated that they believe men and women are equally effective as leaders. While a majority of women politicians surveyed (75 percent) agreed with the statement that men and women are equally effective in leadership positions, the perception that the public does not agree may discourage women from running for political office:

*“[Women deciding not to run because they see no prospects of winning] is still the case with majoritarian elections; the local population, because of traditional patriarchal stereotypes, will choose men. Many women understand this.” – NGO Activist, woman*

Even when women are elected to office, they are still undermined by norms, biases, and sexism regarding women’s ability and role in public life. According to key informants interviewed for this study, many first-time women MPs have experienced criticism that they are unequipped for office, overly passive, and too beholden to party bosses. One woman key informant claimed that due to the lack of financial resources and low voter support, many women candidates must depend on party leaders for support within the party. However, the same informant said this can change over time if these same women politicians garner solid voter support during elections.

A striking number of men MPs interviewed for this study expressed concern that there may be insufficient numbers of women who are “ready” for office and that women generally needed more experience and

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<sup>56</sup> United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. n.d. “Gender Norms and Bias in Central Asia.” Slide show. Gov.Uk.

<sup>57</sup> SIAR Research and Consulting, and International Republican Institute, Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR). 2022. “National Poll of The KR April 2022.”

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

expertise to assume the responsibility of an MP. One of the main complaints about women MPs, voiced by both men and women, is that women mostly sit silently and do not assert any rights. But according to key informants, although there are many men MPs who "do not open their mouths," this seems to draw less criticism. This happens at the local level as well. However, contradictory sexist stereotypes about women as gossipers are also used to exclude them from informal decision-making spaces:

*“Behind-the-scenes negotiations of men parliamentarians take place both within the building of parliament and in saunas, on vacation. Why are women not included in behind-the-scenes conversations, at least within the walls of Parliament? There is no trust in women. It is believed that women do not keep secrets.” —MP, man*

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC LIFE

VAWPP, including sexual harassment, is common in the KR, belying the idealization and objectification of women described in the previous section.<sup>59</sup> Men have a much larger share of decision-making power in both domestic and public spheres and use various forms of gender-based violence.<sup>60</sup> The 2021 STA study<sup>61</sup> revealed an extremely high prevalence of violence against women politicians—97 percent of respondents reported that they were aware of such cases and that harassment took place repeatedly. Types of violence are shown in Table 3. Women key informants described online bullying and in-person harassment, including verbal abuse by colleagues and family members in association with their role as a candidate or political office holder. Women have also been the targets of death threats in online forums.

**Table 3. Violence reported by women politicians<sup>62</sup>**

TYPE OF VIOLENCE	RESPONDENTS REPORTING
Psychological violence, sexist remarks, insults, intimidation, humiliation, verbal abuse, threats, blackmail, discrediting in the eyes of society	32%
Economic violence, manifested through men's unequal access sharing of economic resources compared to men	30%
Obstacles to political activity, deliberately prevented from speaking, interrupted, or silenced	14%
Dissemination of offensive or sexual images or comments in social media, networks, and media outlets	11%

<sup>59</sup> A 2013 study by the National Statistics Committee suggests that 71 percent of ever-married women said that their husbands were jealous or angry if they talked with other men while 69 percent said their husbands insist on knowing where they were always, with a smaller proportion justifying hitting in such circumstances. (Women and Men 2017-2021, National Statistical Committee of KR. 2021. <http://www.stat.kg/media/publicationarchive/9471f65a-7cbd-4320-8651-ca2edf36de24.pdf>).

<sup>60</sup> UN Working Group on discrimination against women and girls. 2022. “End of Mission Statement by Working Group on Discrimination against Women and Girls Visit to The KR.” United Nations Kyrgyz Republic. April 15, 2022. <https://the.kg.un.org/en/189400-un-working-group-discrimination-against-women-and-girls>.

<sup>61</sup> STA. 2021.

<sup>62</sup> Kochorbaeva, Z., N. Prigoda, B. Islanbekova, and M. Tulegenov. 2022. “Насилие в Отношении Женщин в Политике в Кыргызской Республике: Результаты Исследования [Violence Against Women in Politics in the Kyrgyz Republic: Research Findings].” OSCE. January 2022. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I23ZIFj3eHUaor5bn1YEuBVmTOuLuXIP/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I23ZIFj3eHUaor5bn1YEuBVmTOuLuXIP/view?usp=share_link).

TYPE OF VIOLENCE	RESPONDENTS REPORTING
Unwanted attention, communication, or contact that caused fear	6%
Physical violence or threats of it	2% are victims 12% know victims

The normalization of GBV in the private sphere has implications for VAWPP. In 2018, MP Surabaldieva was assaulted in an elevator in the White House, seat of the president, received wide media attention. However, women politicians did not mention this particular cultural “norm” as a barrier to their work, and a number of women MPs were forthright in their ability to debate with men.

Informants interviewed for the STA study described the prevalence of sexual harassment of women in politics in more detail: “Harassment of women, including women politicians, is very common (violation of personal boundaries, light stroking in conversation, obscene jokes and innuendo, discussion of the figure and clothing, etc.). The problem is that we women ourselves do not define these cases as harassment, i.e., we are not used to protecting our personal boundaries and stopping such cases.”<sup>63</sup>

Key informants for the WPPL assessment corroborate these reports:

*“Women in politics are generally harassed, even deputies of parliament...especially if you are unmarried...It is necessary to keep the mask, to be an iceberg, to protect yourself from harassment. I dress very conservatively because I have been the object of harassment more than once...At the local level, there is more dirt in running for and providing services to the keneshes. It’s scarier downstairs - we are in plain sight, they have more bullying and discrimination.” —MP, woman*

The STA report also describes a broader gendered phenomenon. One informant in that study reported, “During the presidential election, when I was at the headquarters of the candidate for President, we were interviewing people, it wasn’t our electorate...we ran into a group of older women from the village, they were aggressive, they shouted that a woman’s place is at home...they started grabbing us with their hands, started kicking us out, shouting, ‘Politics is not a woman’s business, you have to take care of your family.’ We were forced to run away from there.”<sup>64</sup>

Women in political leadership may also become a target of violence due to perceptions that the quota unfairly places women in power. In one of the study sites for the WPPL assessment, the confirmation of women to the *ayil kenesh* led to violence and a protest letter signed by local leaders to the president, all of which gained national media attention. Today, with nine women representatives amongst the 21 members of the council, both men and women village leaders blame the situation on a misunderstanding with a CSO representative who had visited ahead of the election to explain the quota. Nonetheless, this shows that there is opposition to the quota and the idea that women can be placed in a position of power.

In some cases, fear of violence against women political candidates may prevent women from running for office or even supporting other women’s candidacies. A woman activist informant mentioned that during a political meeting discussing the quota, a woman participant from an ethnic minority community said she

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

would prefer to give her candidacy recommendation to a man because “tomorrow I will be beaten if I agree to run” and she would not wish that upon another woman. The activist also noted that due to fears of physical violence, many women will recommend their husbands, fathers, or neighbors instead of running themselves.

Social media was frequently mentioned by women politicians at all levels as a source of harassment and spreading of false information. Some say they have been injured and learned to ignore it; for some, it was a deterrent to continue in politics. One observer noted that because MPs are highly scrutinized by the media, it may serve as a protection for women from violence at the national level perpetrated by those who do not want legal or media attention. In contrast, it may explain why violence against women in local councils may go unreported since they are not in the spotlight as much.

However, data from this assessment suggest that politicians may downplay or fail to report instances of VAWPP. The majority (75 percent) of politicians surveyed for the WPPL assessment—both men and women—denied that women candidates face violence, intimidation, or harassment on the campaign trail, with no significant difference between men and women respondents (40 men and 42 women said “no”). Among the 12 women (21 percent) who indicated the presence of violence, the most common form of harassment noted was a request from a deputy to formally relinquish her seat.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, women candidates commonly reported being bullied or yelled at during a public speech. Perpetrators were described as mostly men candidates from the same or another party. Among men respondents, only 8 (15 percent) agreed that women candidates face violence, intimidation, or harassment during the campaign. Rural deputies interviewed in this study also downplayed their experience of violence, but they acknowledged that they experienced harassment—including from neighbors, other council members, and local government officials. Many said they felt unappreciated by constituents, and 83 percent of women who reported seeing violence or harassment of women candidates said this treatment impacted a woman’s ability to be elected.

The STA study observed that many women hesitate to admit they have been victims of abuse, preferring to say they know other women who have experienced such things. A potential reason women in political leadership may downplay violence they experience is negative, sexist reactions by their men colleagues. In one interview, a man MP was asked about any instances of observed harassment or violence towards women in politics. He mentioned a woman MP who claimed to have been harassed previously. However, when pressed, he stated that this woman MP was prone to hyperbolic language and believes “she may have exaggerated” her accounts.

## PATRIARCHY

Patriarchal norms affect how Kyrgyz society views women’s political participation and women in positions of political leadership, largely in a negative way. In IRI’s 2022 national poll, only 30 percent of respondents agreed that there should be more women in politics.<sup>66</sup> Although women hold professional jobs, their role in the domestic sphere—as wives, mothers, and caregivers—is elevated above all else in society. There are some examples of families and communities subverting this norm by supporting women in political leadership. For example, most women representatives on the *ayil kenesh* said their husbands had approved of their joining politics and some even proudly talked about sharing housework, and women deputies in one *ayil kenesh* credited community members with encouraging them to run for office. However, other women’s families have discouraged political leadership in favor of caretaking duties, with older *ayil kenesh* deputies indicating that their families could not understand their political ambition and encouraged them

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<sup>65</sup> This practice is now illegal at the national level, but not at local levels.

<sup>66</sup> SIAR Research and Consulting, and International Republican Institute, Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR). 2022. “National Poll of The KR September 2022.”

to stay at home and enjoy their grandchildren. Overall, there is a common societal view based on patriarchal values that suggests women who enter the political profession will compromise their reproductive role, and Kyrgyz women are expected to choose motherhood:

*“Let a woman not get married, not give birth, and go into politics. This is the kind of woman who can be president. She has to choose—either motherhood or politics. And our Kyrgyz women choose motherhood. This is the mentality.” – Rural citizen, man*

*"Political ambitions [are] not supported by family. The major objection by any family member is that girls should be married and that is enough." –Local Activist, woman*

Women’s political ambition is a threat to the status quo, undermining the central construct of the patriarchy where men oversee the public domain. Men participants in focus groups in this study describe cultural and religious norms underpinning the exclusion of women from political leadership:

*"In a Muslim family, as it were, men are ahead anyway. And in the future, we'll probably have it that way. Because when a woman marries, she will be behind her husband anyway." –FGD Participant, man*

It is important to note that men political leaders with significant influence are contributing to the perpetuation of these norms. President Sadyr Japarov, often references traditional gender norms that suggest that a woman’s place is in the home, leveraging these norms to keep women out of political leadership and delegitimize those who are currently in politics. The fact that the head of state openly speaks in this manner condones and reinforces these beliefs and behaviors by other men politicians. According to one MP:

*“The president understands the [patriarchal] mentality of our people. The president highlighted women doing bad things. Instead of taking care of the family, they are criticizing the president” – MP, man*

In general, the effects of patriarchal values and norms impact women’s access to and power within positions of political leadership. In a recent study of women councilors, barriers to their active participation in local politics that respondents cited included negative attitudes of the community (41 percent), negative attitudes of family and people close to them (41 percent), and open opposition from men (39 percent) and from women (26 percent).<sup>67</sup> The WPPL politician survey echoed some of these sentiments, as seen in Table 4.

**Table 4. Why are there fewer women in elected political positions than men?**

WHY ARE THERE FEWER WOMEN IN ELECTED POLITICAL POSITIONS THAN MEN?	WOMEN RESPONDENTS	MEN RESPONDENTS
Negative attitude of society; gender stereotype	83% (47)	45% (24)
Open opposition from men politicians; other leaders	44% (25)	8% (4)

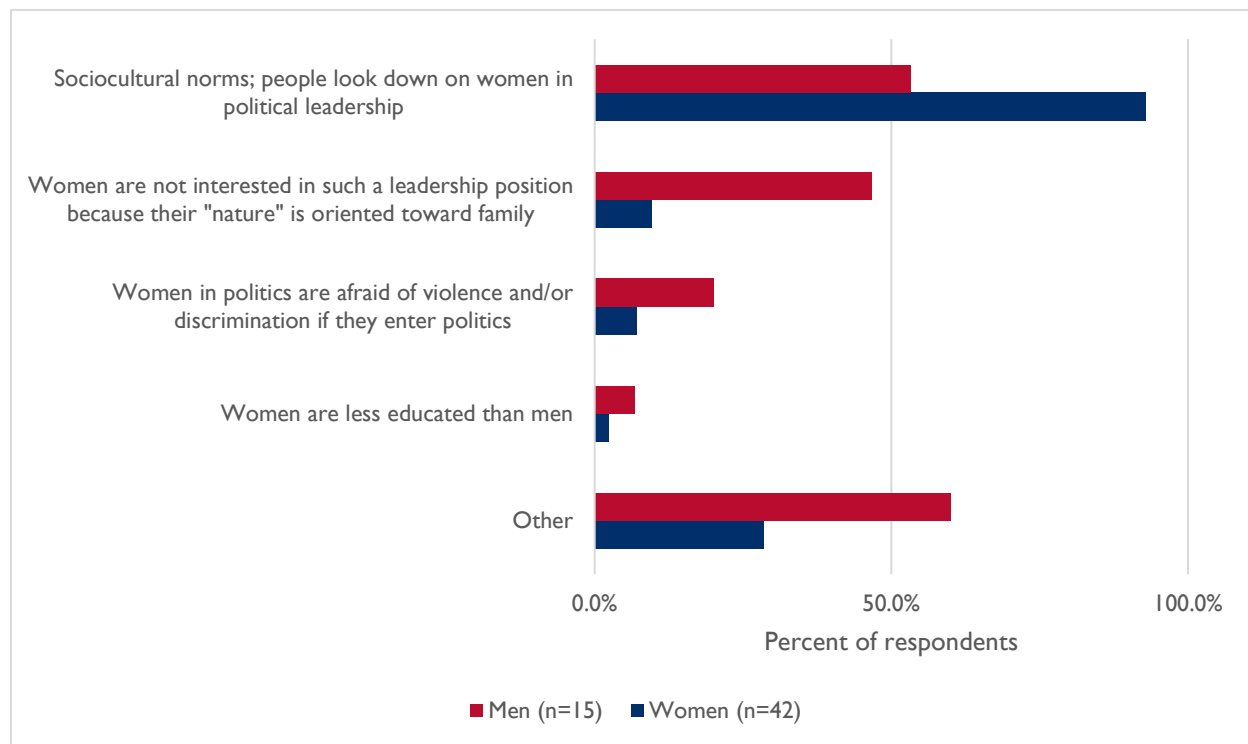
Source: Survey of politicians

<sup>67</sup> Factors affecting women's participation in local decision-making processes. DPI - FHI 360 USAID 2021. <http://dpi.kg/ru/monitor/full/25.html>.

Survey respondents were asked whether women had the same opportunities as men to take on positions of political leadership. Sixty-two percent (n=33) of men responded “yes” while 28.3 percent (n=15) said “no.” Conversely, only 22.8 percent (n=13) of women agreed that women had the same opportunities as men to take on positions of political leadership and an overwhelming majority of women, 73.7 percent (n=42) said “no.” This shows a stark difference in perception regarding political leadership opportunities available to women.

Furthermore, men and women WPPL survey respondents had starkly different answers when asked why they believe that women do not have the same opportunity as men to take on positions of political leadership. Of those who said women did not have equal opportunities to men in political leadership, 92.9 percent of women reported that people look down on women in political leadership. Figure 3 below shows the most common responses to this question.

**Figure 3. Main reasons women do not have equal opportunities in positions of political leadership (n=57)**



Source: Survey of politicians

The fact that nearly *all* women politicians attribute the disadvantages to social norms and stereotypes rooted in patriarchal characterizations of women’s assigned roles and characteristics, although only 8 men respondents recognized this as a main barrier (Figure 3). The data also shows that women reject the notion that they are not interested in or suited for politics, although a large portion of men continue to believe this: while 47 percent of men marked, “Women not interested —their nature is towards family” as one of their reasons, while only 10 percent of women selected this reason. Responses in the “other” category from men include gender stereotypes about women’s personality characteristics (such as being “shy” and “impatient”) as well as religious reasons under Islam that men are meant to lead. From women, these responses were more focused on barriers to leadership such as the low chance of being elected and a lack of trust in women candidates.

Patriarchal gender norms dictate that women do not belong in the realm of political leadership overall, furthermore, these same patriarchal norms result in perceptions that women politicians may be better suited than men to addressing certain policy areas. Responses to IRI’s 2021 national poll presented in Table 5 highlight areas where women—including women politicians—are seen to have expertise and interest.

**Table 5. Voter views on the role of women in society**

WHAT SECTORS OF SOCIETY DO YOU FEEL ARE MOST IMPORTANT FOR WOMEN TO PLAY AN EXPANDED ROLE?	
Education	71%
Healthcare	59%
Household	57% (65% men, 50% women)
Business	17%
Politics	11% (8% men, 14% women)
Civil Society	8%

Source: Survey of politicians

Some men politicians express similar views that women in politics may add value in specific, gendered areas:

*“I personally welcome the idea of the Forum of Women's Deputies. Women have their secrets (laughs), it's good when they see their specific questions. Perhaps we, men, do not notice something. For example, the problems of family violence and parenting.” —MP, man*

## GENDER QUOTA

The gender quota is also a target for sexist attacks and delegitimization of WPPL. Some respondents in interviews and focus groups for this assessment expressed a perception that the gender quota undermines democracy because setting aside positions for women means they do not have to compete for seats. Interview and focus group participants reported that gender quotas have not gained widespread recognition or support among either men or women and are widely misunderstood.<sup>68</sup>

Gender quotas are often associated with a public perception that all men who are elected to parliament or a local *kenesh* receive high voter support, while women candidates get elected with very limited votes simply because of the quota. For example, respondents felt that at both the local and national level, the quota allowed women to gain office without many votes. In one village, men in both FGDs said women were elected with one to two dozen votes of support, while men who did not make it to the *kenesh* had 200-300 votes. In fact, in this site 16 women were nominated to the *Ayil Kenesh*, and 9 were elected. Only one of the women candidates was "outvoted" by a man candidate, and the gap was only ten votes. Elsewhere, a man activist mused:

<sup>68</sup> Additional discussion of this is included in Annex C3 as a case study of two specific villages.

*“With quotas, some part of democracy also disappears. If the one who received more votes does not pass, then some principle of democracy disappears. Therefore, a woman and a man should have the same rights and the one who is stronger should win.” –Local activist, man.*

Women who are elected to positions due to the quota face scrutiny about their qualifications:

*“Deputies who came to the [local] council...after the introduction of the quota mechanism, are constantly questioned about their achievements and are almost threatened to justify the quota mechanism. Such questions come from journalists, from members of the local community, and even from individual politicians at the national level. At the same time, none of these "evaluators" ever conduct the same assessment of the activities of men MPs”. —Former local councilor and civil society activist, woman*

Focus group and interview participants for this study reported that many women who gain local office through the quota are members of the party leaders’ clan and presumably are therefore more beholden to the political agenda of the clan. Men have control over the candidate nomination process and may use it to nominate women who they see as more willing to support their interests.

In addition to receiving sexist criticisms from men once gaining political power, there is evidence of a lack of support among women politicians for other women. According to key informants, women deputies, who are often from privileged hierarchical groups, themselves carry out social exclusion of other women. This is particularly true in local councils where women who are members of minority political parties report feeling marginalized and defeated and are uninterested in continuing in politics. Women already on the village council in this study were negative or neutral about having more women on the council. One key informant attributed this lack of support to a broader phenomenon in which veteran women politicians feel competitive with younger or new deputies, and resist supporting them, fearing an erosion of their own power. There is a lack of group solidarity or shared interests among women officials, particularly at the local level. Another informant at the national level noted:

*“What they (men) have compared to women, they have more solidarity, and they help each other. Probably it is in their nature? I tell women—we are guilty of not having this solidarity. – MP, woman*

Likely due in part to the sexist scrutiny that women politicians face in comparison with men politicians, women deputies at every level tend to be more professionally and educationally qualified and work harder than their men counterparts to prove their merit. This double standard imposed by the public and men peers is evident in quotes from several informants:

*“In a study of 150 women members in Kara-Suu district—80 percent have higher educational status and hold more professional posts like teacher and health provider than men deputies who tend to be more involved in trade or agribusiness.” —MP, woman*

*“The resulting double standard is external and internalized, and ultimately has resulted in women politicians at all levels who are either significantly more qualified than their men counterparts or seen as docile and overly obedient to the party boss (national).” —MP, woman*

Data suggests that women have internalized this double standard as well, holding themselves to higher standard:

*“There is this effect where women are more demanding of themselves than men candidates. Women have to be sure that they really know and can do things. While men may not have*



*knowledge or qualifications, they do not have any doubts that they are worthy to be chosen.” –WPPL trainer and activist*

*“When I was in a senior government position, my working day lasted more than 14 hours. Because where men must contribute 25 percent of effort, women must contribute 250 percent. It is very psychologically draining. It is hard.” –MP, woman*

Additionally, the public may view women as less corruptible in positions of power due to their societally assigned roles of caretakers and nurturers. Although recent studies suggest that people have an increasingly negative view of politicians as distant, corrupt, and not in tune with their everyday problems,<sup>69</sup> several key informants in this study expressed that men politicians are more prone to these qualities. One man MP quoted in another study remarked, “We have a saying: ‘men can cheat, but women don’t cheat’. Women are mothers and mothers are more loyal and caring.”<sup>70</sup> This view is bolstered by the narrative that women are more inclined to care about and advocate for social services and the environment in politics as opposed to getting their hands dirty in matters considered more complicated or vulnerable to corruption, like the economy and security.

The media promotes stereotypes that women politicians are more suited to covering social issues. Women politicians in the media rarely raise gender overtly in the context of debates, but they do raise issues related to violence, inequalities in the labor market and employment, which few men discuss. One key informant from the media also noted that women tend to focus on social issues, which reinforces expectations of their political priorities in line with gender stereotypes that place women in the domestic sphere.

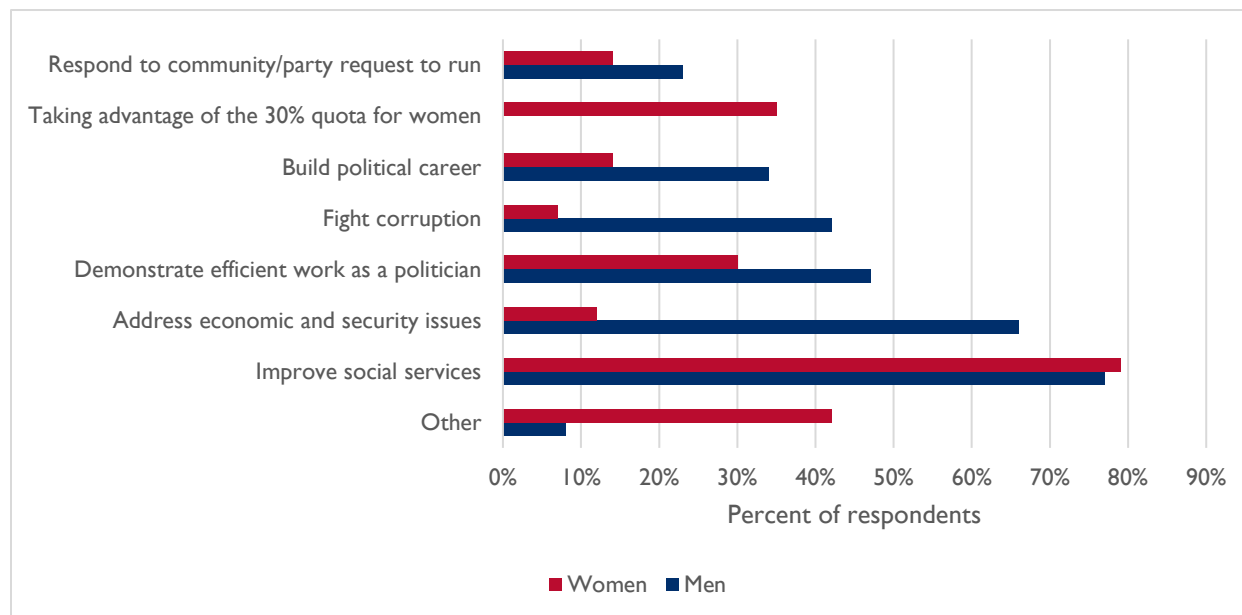
Cultural norms that assign women to specific realms of society may, in fact, influence the reasons why women become involved in politics. When asked what motivated them to get into politics, men and women politicians reflect widely held gendered expectations of politicians (Figure 4). While both say they want to focus on issues of “family, community, education, health, nutrition and culture” (summarized in the figure as improve social services), men politicians identify a wider range of options, including the economy, security, and corruption. Amongst the responses from women politicians coded as “other,” a third specifically mentioned women’s and youth issues. This theme of contributing to society is behind the ambition of many of the women officials interviewed in this study.

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<sup>69</sup> National Democratic Institute and Lake Research Partners. n.d. “Public Perceptions of Women’s Political Participation in The KR.” Slide show.

<sup>70</sup> Kochorbaeva, Z., N. Prigoda, B. Islanbekova, and M. Tulegenov. 2022. “Насилие в Отношении Женщин в Политике в Кыргызской Республике: Результаты Исследования [Violence Against Women in Politics in the Kyrgyz Republic: Research Findings].” OSCE. January 2022. [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I23ZIFj3eHUaor5bnIYEuBVmTOuLuXIP/view?usp=share\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1I23ZIFj3eHUaor5bnIYEuBVmTOuLuXIP/view?usp=share_link).

**Figure 4. Motivations to enter politics**



Source: Survey of politicians

## INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

### LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The KR is signatory to several international conventions relevant to WPPL. These include the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights, the CEDAW, the Convention on the Political Rights of Women, and the Convention on Standards for Democratic Elections, Electoral Rights and Freedoms in the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States. Notably, it has not signed the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

In terms of national laws and policies related to women’s political participation, the KR’s first long-term NGS on Achieving Gender equality was adopted in 2012 in compliance with CEDAW and updated in 2022.<sup>71</sup> The NGS is enacted through the National Action Plan (NAP) which includes national priorities over a three-year period.<sup>72</sup> The NAP “includes a goal of promoting gender parity in decision-making and increasing women’s political participation.”<sup>73</sup> One of the main challenges of the NGS action plans is a lack of resources dedicated to enacting them.<sup>74</sup>

Regarding gender-based violence, women MPs in the sixth convocation pushed legislation on domestic violence and sexual harassment, which was passed in 2017. However, there is no national law protecting

<sup>71</sup> National Gender Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic. <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/159472?cl=ru-ru>.

<sup>72</sup> National Action Plan 2022-2024. <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/159488?cl=ru-ru>.

<sup>73</sup> Abdylidaeva, Jyldyz. 2023. “How to Strengthen the Political Participation and Leadership of Women in Kyrgyzstan?” CABAR. <https://cabar.asia/en/how-to-strengthen-the-political-participation-and-leadership-of-women-in-kyrgyzstan-2>.

<sup>74</sup> Asian Development Bank. 2019. “Kyrgyz Republic: Country Gender Assessment.” *Adb.Org*, December. Accessed March 3, 2023. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/546966/kyrgyz-republic-country-gender-assessment-2019.pdf>.

VAWPP, including in the law “on state guarantees of equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women” (2008) which addresses mainstreaming gender equality in governance, elections, etc. (See Annex C2)

Several laws guarantee voting and representational rights for men and women, including the landmark 2007 law which required political parties to consider representation of candidates by sex, age, and nationality. The KR does have a quota law that requires political parties to include women candidates in every third position on their slate for national elections; parties then place women candidates in elected positions depending on the proportion of the slate they won in that election. The introduction of the 30 percent quota at the national level in 2007 and the local level in 2019 was a milestone in women’s gender equality in politics in the KR. The 2007 law mandates that to be qualified to contest the national election, a political party must include no more than 70 percent of candidates of the same sex, while the difference in order in the lists of candidates of women and men nominated by political parties should not exceed three positions. Respondents in this study were fairly consistent in their support of the quota, and women deputies at every level were unanimous in crediting the quota with their role in elected office (including the few national women politicians who were elected from majoritarian districts).<sup>75</sup> Sixty-two percent of respondents to IRI’s 2022 national poll think the quota is positive (70 percent women; 53 percent men).<sup>76</sup> Broad support for the quota may be partly attributed to historical precedent, as there was a 33 percent gender quota during the Soviet era. However, although the quota mandate has provided a gateway to political candidacy and elected positions for women through the party at national and city council levels<sup>77</sup>, it has offered little else in the way of constructive support.

A law implemented in 2021 buttressed the effectiveness of the quota by prohibiting a practice where parties removed women from their positions after elections. Once the quota went into effect, it was not uncommon for political parties to replace women from the slate of elected officials post-election, or even into their tenure in office. This happened to men as well, but not as frequently. Lobbying from civil society resulted in legislation passed by the sixth convocation (2020) that protected women elected under the quota mandate from being removed in this way. Articles 52, 54, and 65 ensured that early termination of an elected deputy to the parliament and city or village councils, respectively, would need to be replaced by the candidate of the same sex who received the next highest number of votes. It was implemented in 2021 during the election for the seventh convocation.

*“After 2010 there was terrible pressure on women MPs – they were almost by the hair pulled out of parliament. Party’s leaders used to say: ‘Hey you have to leave, this man candidate won a lot of votes for us - he should come to parliament, give him a seat.’ There were women parliamentarians who spent 5-6 months in Parliament and left under the pressure of leaders. So we should thank god for the law: men politicians have to live by it. Now we are fully protected by the law.” –MP, woman*

However, other legal stipulations act as barriers for certain women to be selected as candidates for political office. A conflict-of-interest provision in Article 5 introduced in 2013, prior to the quota, bans public servants in public service leadership roles – for instance, school principals, hospital directors, and

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<sup>75</sup> At present only one of the 19 women in parliament was elected from a majoritarian district. Another woman was elected, but when it came to light that she had engaged in illegal practices to win, the court tossed out her win. This has happened with men politicians as well.

<sup>76</sup> SIAR Research and Consulting, and International Republican Institute, Center for Insights in Survey Research (CISR). 2022. “National Poll of The KR September 2022.”

<sup>77</sup> For the ayil kenesh the nomination is not always related to the party. Candidates run as individuals, but they can also be nominated by the party. The quota still applies.

lawyers affiliated with the government – from running for local council.<sup>78</sup> Many of these positions, like school principals and heads of hospitals, are held by women. Thus, even though the quota opened a pathway for women with managerial and technical skills and leadership ambitions to run for office, government regulations prevented senior managers in the social service sector from running as a deputy of a local *kenesh* because of their position in the public service.

In terms of legal attention to VAWPP, there are no laws addressing this, including none specifically for women candidates and holders of public office. Although efforts to address widespread harassment of women politicians have not gained much traction, discussions are currently underway in the Parliament about ratifying the ILO Convention on the elimination of violence and harassment in the workplace—seen by some as a step toward redressing these omissions and protecting women in politics.

## GOVERNMENTAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL SUPPORT

There are several government agencies responsible for oversight of elections and ethical practices in the conduct of government. If there are violations of the electoral process, in the campaign, financing, or violation of voters' rights, the law enforcement agencies are responsible for investigating these offenses.<sup>79</sup> The Criminal Code stipulates punishments for vote-buying, violation of election financing, and falsification of electoral documents. However, there is no stipulation for such violations on the political party lists. Additionally, the ethics committee in the parliament, which is described as an “ad hoc committee on the violation of legislation and guarantee of rights of citizens,” was active in the fifth convocation but has been reportedly dormant since then. There is no specific language in the scope of the committee about protection against gender-based harassment or violence.

Overall, perceptions of governmental support for women's political leadership appear to be mixed. A 2021 study of women councilors found that 28 percent of respondents cited a lack of support from state organs as a barrier to their active participation in politics, although only seven percent listed a lack of support from local authorities.<sup>80</sup>

Although political parties do not provide much in the way of training for women candidates or political office holders, several institutions do provide trainings relevant to women in political leadership. For example, the ECE provides training to citizens and to candidates on election processes. In the civil society space, the Women's Democratic Network (ZhDS) offers training to prepare women candidates for local elections, as well as training for parliamentarians. The Forum of Women's NGOs also offers training and mentorship opportunities for women local councilors, while Innovative Solutions trains women MPs on

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<sup>78</sup> According to Article 5. (Incompatibility of the status of a deputy of a local *kenesh* with certain positions and activities) of the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On the status of deputies of local *keneshes*”: A deputy of a local *kenesh* cannot be in the public service or other municipal services in the following cases: 1) if the state body or local self-government body in which he holds a leading position is located within the territory of the same *ayil aimak* or city as the representative body of local self-government (local *kenesh* of an *ayil aimak* or city), of which he is a deputy; 2) if the state body or body of local self-government, in which he is in the state or municipal service, is accountable to the representative body of local self-government (local *kenesh* of *ayil aimak* or city), of which he is a deputy; 3) if the election, nomination for appointment, dismissal of the head of the state body or local self-government body, in which he is in the state or municipal service, relates to the powers of that representative body of local self-government (local *kenesh* of an *ayil aimak* or city), of which he is a deputy.

<sup>79</sup> These stipulations are in Articles 27, 28, 42 and 43 of the Law on the Election of the President and the Deputies of Jogorku *Kenesh*, dated 2 July 2011 #68 and Article 27 and 28 of the Law on the Election of Local council members dated 14 July 2011 #98. Ministry Of Justice Of The Kyrgyz Republic <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/203244?cl=ru-ru/>  
<http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/203103/30?cl=ru-ru>

<sup>80</sup> Factors affecting women's participation in local decision-making processes. DPI - FHI 360 USAID 2021. <http://dpi.kg/ru/monitor/full/25.html>.

the National Action Plan's 1325 agenda. Many of the women politicians interviewed for this assessment had received some form of support from CSOs working in the WPPL space.

## POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties provide very little institutional support for women to participate in politics. In a majoritarian system, parties may be less likely to support women candidates who they believe are less likely to win. Although political parties provide the conduit for women to enter politics, the very transient nature of parties and weak party structures in the KR offer women little in the way of the support or networks they need. Parties form (or re-form) several months prior to an election, recruit their slate, and then more or less melt away after the election. They often coalesce around a charismatic leader and lack a coherent platform of issues.

Related to resources and training, some political parties do have women's wings, but they do not provide them with financial or technical resources on par with other membership bases within parties. A key informant from a WPPL non-profit organization noted that she had been approached by members of a women's wing to offer a training for women politicians. Their parties claimed a lack of resources for women's capacity building and were not willing to provide such trainings in-house. The informant noted that the same parties easily gather resources for youth wings and sporting events for men party members; however, when women in the political parties want to organize trainings or other events they are told to "look for the money themselves."

Apart from the legal framework, support for women in leadership is weak within political parties. For example, political parties do not appear to protect women against violence in politics and public life. According to the 20 politicians (12 women and 8 men) in the WPPL survey that reported that women candidates face violence, intimidation or harassment on the campaign trail, their political parties do not have formal policies in place to address violence against women politicians, but such policies are needed.

Article 41 of the Constitutional Law on Elections dictates that each party must establish an election fund for any candidate it has nominated to underwrite the campaign. However, any citizen not nominated by a political party that is running in an election is responsible for establishing their own election fund account to finance their campaign. As such, political parties provide little or no direct financial support to candidates. Eighty-three percent of politicians in the WPPL survey agreed with this statement (76 percent of men and 90 percent of women), as did all of the local candidates interviewed. Only 13 men (25 percent) and 6 women (10 percent) said "yes" when asked "Does your party provide any financial support to its candidates."<sup>81</sup>

Candidates and other sponsors may contribute to the fund based on the level of office for which the candidate is running. Candidates running for the national parliament can contribute up to 1.5 million *som* (no more than US \$17,000). However, it is widely believed that participation in elections even to the Bishkek or Osh city *keneshes*, and even more so to the parliament, requires tens of thousands of dollars from a candidate.<sup>82</sup> As such, the amount that political parties can contribute to campaigns is negligible. Lesser-known aspirants are expected to pay into party coffers to secure a position on the slate. In general, women in the WPPL assessment who ran for local office said they paid for their own campaigns and mobilized volunteers to help. National-level candidates similarly underwrote their campaign materials.

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<sup>81</sup> The nature of the support indicated by respondents includes financing: (1) activities in the electoral headquarters, (2) production and dissemination of promotional products, and (3) logistical costs of meeting with voters.

<sup>82</sup> National Democratic Institute. 2022. "Forum of Women Parliamentarians of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic VI Convocation." 2022. Slide show.

However, a 2018 study highlights that the quota has nominally lessened the pressure for women candidates to provide campaign finances since political parties need winnable women on the slate.<sup>83</sup>

Political parties' support for candidates includes publicity and media attention, although parties tend to focus their efforts on men candidates. Free television and other media are available to political parties in the lead up to elections, largely from state media. Several independent media houses—which tend to be more gender sensitized and trusted by the public—do not offer this platform to political parties, largely because they do not want to promote biased information or political promises that often fall short. In the free media, as well as campaign posters and pamphlets produced by the party, women members of the party slate are rarely featured independent of party leaders; several women consulted in the WPPL assessment noted that they were included in party-sponsored posters and flyers and given free media airtime, but generally with others on the slate. If a woman is well known, she may be featured. Party and media focus on publicizing men is evident once candidates are elected as well. A 2018 study noted that on the website of the Parliament, men representatives garner more space, with details about their activities, photographs, and quotes, whereas women tend to be included in group photographs. The same study noted a similar trend in newscasts about parliamentary initiatives that are led by both men and women—with men getting more attention.<sup>84</sup>

In the WPPL survey when asked whether their party had measures in place to recruit women as candidates: 65 percent of men said yes, while 72 percent of women said no. Furthermore, political parties' methods for recruiting and selecting women as candidates focus on profiles that favor the agenda of the men-dominated leadership. As noted by a man MP respondent: “We especially appreciate the devotion and fearlessness of women in defending the leader and party comrades.” The evidence suggests parties search for women who will strengthen the party slate of candidates—either because the woman is well known or connected by kinship ties, brings resources, or because she can be “managed,” or both.<sup>85</sup> In recent years, parties have appeared to prioritize candidates that will toe the party line. One woman key informant in this study discussed how parties focused on recruiting well-known and respected women candidates when the quotas were first introduced. However, some of these women were seen as too independent and lacking “loyalty” to their political party.

*“When the quotas were introduced a lot of women were included in the party lists who were well-known politicians, respected, but who were themselves quite wealthy and independent in their actions. The parties saw that it was difficult to ensure a certain ‘loyalty’...so in the most recent elections we saw many unknown women, who were not involved in any kind of political activity before.... Now we see that they are loyal enough to obey the leadership's instructions to vote for this or that bill, or not to vote, or to sabotage it...” –Civil society activist, woman*

One way that political parties choose women candidates who will remain loyal is through nepotism. Study findings suggest that it is not uncommon for powerful men to put women kin forward as candidates to meet the quota and ensure their business or other interests are protected. While kinship contributes to the visibility of women candidates when they come from families that are well known, it may hamper her ability to represent constituents when family pressures conflict.

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<sup>83</sup> Turdalieva, Cholpon, and Medet Tiulegenov. 2018. “Women, the Parliament and Political Participation in Post-Soviet The KR.” *Central Asian Affairs*, April. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22142290-00502003>.

<sup>84</sup> Social Technology Agency (STA). Report on gender monitoring of the activities of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic. 2018. [https://awli.kg/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/gendermon2017-2018\\_sta.pdf](https://awli.kg/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/gendermon2017-2018_sta.pdf).

<sup>85</sup> Freedom House. 2022. “Nations in Transit 2022.” *Freedom House*. Accessed March 2, 2023. [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/NIT\\_2022\\_final\\_digital.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2022-04/NIT_2022_final_digital.pdf).

## INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

### KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS, AND CONFIDENCE

In general, democratic literacy is still a work in progress in the KR; civic education is not part of the school curriculum. Where civic education does exist, there is a lack of overall understanding of inclusive and accountable politics. All too often, elected officials are not adequately equipped with the knowledge and skills or an understanding of the procedures, norms, regulations, and laws needed to do their work.<sup>86</sup> Multiple key informants in and outside of political office noted that deputies need a better grounding in legal regulations and normative procedures.

Political and civic knowledge, as well as skills pertinent to political leadership, are key factors influencing women's decisions to run for office and their effectiveness when in leadership positions. Local women deputies in particular feel daunted by their lack of technical knowledge – such as the inner workings of municipal infrastructure and how to prepare and monitor budgets – and frustrated by perceived barriers to attaining higher levels of government. They compared themselves to their men counterparts who in their view had grasped all of these skills, and who made them feel inadequate. The women deputies held a keen interest in addressing constituent priorities, but this was not matched by an understanding of where and how to seek out needed information and help on-line and elsewhere. Furthermore, the Development Policy Institute (DPI) study of women councilors cited above reported that lack of knowledge and information was a common barrier to these councilors' active participation in local politics (31 percent of respondents).<sup>87</sup>

A veteran councilor, WPPL advocate, and trainer considers negotiation and communication the most important skills women politicians need to learn. Women's socialization as well as strong cultural constructs against intergender conflict for men and women described earlier—particularly conflict with women outside of the family—means it is difficult for women to develop good negotiating skills. It is also difficult for men to engage with women in debate, which is integral to the political process. The same council member and trainer also mentioned that women's limited budget skills as well as other fundamental capacities like networking are all sources of frustration for deputies and a cause for criticism from other council members—contributing to the diminished credibility of women deputies overall (although men deputies may not be held to the same standard). As described above, several international and civil society agencies offer training for women deputies to address many of these gaps. The results of this study suggest that the need and the demand remain significant, and that follow-up and mentoring are critical.

Another critical area of expertise where women may have fewer skills is media, both traditional and social. Women politicians also have limited skills in effectively working with the media. Social media has been used effectively by some politicians to promote their campaigns and by at least one *oblast*-based NGO to advance networking amongst local councilors—providing chat rooms, online advice, and mentoring. There were few examples of such positive use of social media for campaigning, constituent outreach, and networking, compared to the clear and expressed need, suggesting significant potential in this regard; although women candidates and local deputies recognize the power of social media, they often do not know how to use it effectively.

*“Social media helps women deputies in the city, at the national level. At the local level, women do not know how to use networks and the electorate is no longer guided by social media. In the city, many*

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<sup>86</sup> The LSG Best Practices Portal, <https://myktyaimak.gov.kg/forums?lang=en>.

<sup>87</sup> Factors affecting women's participation in local decision-making processes. DPI - FHI 360 USAID 2021. <http://dpi.kg/ru/monitor/full/25.html>.

*women also do not understand the potential of networks. Most women in the KR believe that social networks are about being beautiful. But really, it's about the message. Social media is the best resource for those who are literate to work with them, you can manage your image.”—MP, woman*

Women who have less political experience in a general sense may be more susceptible to influence or pressure by men colleagues once in office, while the opinions of those with more tenure carry greater weight:

*“I have seen so many young girls who are used by men politicians (leaders of factions), to do whatever they are told. No experience, no will, no strength. They need time to prepare them for big politics. Everything is defined by your political participation experience.” —MP, woman*

*“Being young it was hard. I battled all the time. But now because of my age and political weight, I can morally press anyone who will try to press me. Most other MPs are recognizing my political weight; leaders consult with me on the sidelines.” —MP, woman*

A lack of knowledge also affects women’s self-confidence, impacting their decisions to run for office. In the politician survey for this assessment, 21 percent of women and 36 percent of men indicated a belief that there are fewer women in elected positions than men due to women’s low self-confidence. Once in positions of political leadership, women may also suffer from low self-confidence, in part due to being held to a higher standard than their men peers, as described above:

*“It is more difficult for women to enter and be in politics. Overall, expectations of others from her are higher, and her expectations of herself are high too – she thinks whether she has enough skills and whether she can perform well, etc. While men do not have high expectations of themselves.” — Government official, woman*

## WOMEN’S COMPETING ROLES

In addition to limited skills and knowledge, time constraints, and other obligations may prevent some women from political participation and engaging in political leadership. In the WPPL politician survey, about half of women politicians indicated that they believe household and job demands to be two reasons why there are fewer women in elected positions than men (Table 6). Furthermore, the DPI study of women councilors showed that professional duties (15 percent) and being overburdened with household chores (27 percent) were two barriers to these women’s active participation in local politics.<sup>88</sup> Women are not a homogenous group and time constraints may look different for rural women and urban elites, however, respondents in both rural and urban locations noted this issue and balancing familial and public roles is likely a concern to some extent for women across the geographic and socio-economic spectrum.

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<sup>88</sup> Factors affecting women's participation in local decision-making processes. DPI - FHI 360 USAID 2021. <http://dpi.kg/ru/monitor/full/25.html>.



**Table 6. Barriers to women's access to political positions**

WHY ARE THERE FEWER WOMEN IN ELECTED POLITICAL POSITIONS THAN MEN?	WOMEN RESPONDENTS	MEN RESPONDENTS
Household demands	53% (30)	53% (28)
Job demands	44% (25)	8% (4)

Source: Survey of politicians

Women who are unmarried, childless, or no longer taking care of children may be more easily accepted in positions of political power, as they are not seen as choosing political careers over their families. Women who are beyond their childrearing age are more likely to run because they have more time and greater social legitimacy.

*“Even despite the reputation and clan ties of my father...the first time I ran for office, the aksakals (men elders) asked me: you are young, you will get married, you will forget about us. But by that time, I was 36 years old, divorced, and I assured them that I am not going to get married, and I am not going to deceive their expectations....After getting the mandate I tried to visit, if not all 68 villages of the district, but at least most of them. Meet, hear needs, help where I can...” – MP, woman*

## FAMILY SUPPORT

Another factor that can benefit individual women with political aspirations is family support and kinship ties. As described earlier, some women enter political leadership through familial ties within the field, although this can have negative consequences on a woman’s autonomy and perception once in office. Apart from having family members in the political arena, support from families and friends is an important element that plays into women’s decisions to run for office. When asked why there are fewer women in elected political positions than men, politicians polled in the WPPL survey cited a lack of family and friend support as one reason (37 percent of women and 43 percent of men selected this option). These findings are consistent with a 2016 study by UN Women/UNFPA that cited lack of support from family as the major impediment to women’s political participation—something about which both men and women respondents agreed.<sup>89</sup> However, some persevere with a political career despite disapproval and lack of family support:

*“Some of my relatives said politics is not the proper fortune for women, even people close to me...But I would tell them: if I don’t do this, who will do it.... My community asked me to run. The elders called me. They said, you started many things, you must finish them.” –MP, woman*

In the more homogeneous (and more rural) study site, jealousy and mistrust amongst women deputies were largely grounded in kinship affiliation. Pressures to conform to gender norms were also high, leading women to worry most about expectations of men kin. In the more ethnically diverse *kenesh* outside of Bishkek (which also included representation from recent migrants to the area), women were more worried about constituent approval of their performance. They were also much more forthright in articulating their own limitations and capacity needs, and astute in their analysis of the gender dynamics within the *kenesh*.

<sup>89</sup> “Gender in Society Perception Study.” 2017. UNFPA The KR. July 12, 2017. <https://the KR.unfpa.org/en/publications/gender-society-perception-study>.

## WOMEN'S NETWORKS

Outside of familial ties and support, networks are a crucial component of success for political leaders. However, many women do not have robust networks, and there is a societal perception that women do not know how to network or build coalitions. Because women move closer to their husbands' families when they marry, they may leave behind any potential political networks that would serve them in running for office, which are frequently crucial to men politicians.<sup>90</sup> In rural communities where tribal roots run deep, trust-building and networking take time:

*“We talked with the women deputies of local keneshes, one of them said: until she gave birth to five children, lived there for 20 years, the local community did not recognize her. Only now they perceive her as their own.” – MP, woman*

Women are generally shut out of men's networks. A range of key informants, including men MPs and council members, acknowledged the importance of *informal* networking to advancing their political agenda—and described subtle and overt ways in which women are marginalized. Numerous examples were offered of how men politicians caucus in settings which are explicitly off-limits to women: spas, bars, and even mosques. Examples of such exclusion were given at Parliament as well as local councils.

*“...when women come to the kenesh, they find themselves alone, because as soon as a new kenesh is formed, men form microgroups...and no one accepts women in microgroups because she is a woman...women are not always able to unite and create their own women's microgroup.... They don't know how to negotiate very well, they don't work well with men, and they can't negotiate with each other.” – Civil Society Activist, woman*

There is little networking or mentorship among women themselves in the political space. Vertical linkages among women politicians, which would normally be promoted within a party structure, are weak. Women city and village council representatives say they would like contact with women MPs to help resolve issues that need national-level input. In a similar vein, the DPI study of women councilors showed that 36 percent felt a lack of women allies was a barrier to their active participation in local politics.<sup>91</sup> Contact with other women in the political arena is also important for mentoring the new political talent and the next generation of MPs—doubly important given the paucity of nationally known women role models. Many key informants interviewed for the WPPL assessment did reference veteran women political representatives,<sup>92</sup> the past woman president, and a handful of ex-MPs and historical women leaders, suggesting that they serve as examples in politics. They provide important, symbolic and real reminders that women's political leadership is possible and even powerful in the KR. Women's wings within political parties may serve as networking spaces; of the 61 percent of women national and city level politicians in the WPPL survey who said they “see value in creating a women's wing in political parties,” 60 percent said they envisioned the role of the women's wing as *a forum for dialogue amongst women party members with different ideologies* and 63 percent said it could serve as a *venue to provide mentoring and support to women party members and candidates*. Actors in the civil society space may also help fill networking gaps for women politicians, such as the ZhDS.

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<sup>90</sup> Ismailbekova, Aksana. 2021. “A New Big Boss? Interethnic Patronage Networks in Kyrgyzstan.” Foreign Policy Centre. <https://fpc.org.uk/a-new-big-boss-interethnic-patronage-networks-in-kyrgyzstan/>.

<sup>91</sup> Factors affecting women's participation in local decision-making processes. DPI - FHI 360 USAID 2021. <http://dpi.kg/ru/monitor/full/25.html>.

<sup>92</sup> There are currently six women MPs who have already served one (and in one case two) previous terms. The others are serving their first time.

However, it is worth noting that networking and mentorship among women in political leadership may face resistance. Although women deputies from *ayil kenesh* expressed an interest in engaging with women MPs, veteran women MPs appeared less interested, seeing little political benefit. Additionally, both men and women informants in the WPPL study remarked that women politicians tend to be competitive and distrustful of one another—protective of their hard-won gains in the political space.

## FINANCIAL ASSETS

Financing is another factor that heavily impacts women’s political careers and participation. About half (49 percent) of the women respondents in the WPPL politician survey reported lack of financing as a reason for fewer women in elected political positions than men, although only 21 percent of men respondents selected this answer. In a recent study of women councilors, barriers to their active participation in local politics that respondents cited included a lack of money for a down payment (10 percent).<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Factors affecting women's participation in local decision-making processes. DPI - FHI 360 USAID 2021. <http://dpi.kg/ru/monitor/full/25.html>.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

This section provides recommendations for USAID, other donors, and CSOs working to advance WPPL in the KR. The recommendations are based on the barriers and opportunities identified in the previous section. The first set of recommendations relate to participation, and the second set relate to leadership. Within each area, the section provides recommendations for addressing social-cultural, institutional, and individual-level barriers.

### SOCIO-CULTURAL FACTORS

As described above, social-cultural factors inhibit women from fully participating in politics in the Kyrgyz Republic. Changing deeply ingrained views about women's role in public life will not be easy. Women lack the full support of political parties, face violence from society, and are undermined by deeply held cultural norms that specify the role of women in society. The recommendations outlined here aim to strengthen the capacities of women's rights organizations and the media to bolster progressive initiatives while also engaging societal factions that oppose expanding women's rights and participation.

- Donors should work with civil society groups to train journalists and other media professionals to improve coverage of women in politics. Increasing the gender-sensitivity of media coverage can help to change prevailing gender norms and stereotypes that discourage women's political participation. The findings suggest that currently, the media promotes stereotypes of women. Offering fair and respectful coverage of women leaders and recognizing the diverse contributions of women in politics can help to change perceptions among both men and women about the potential of women in politics and encourage broader participation. Media strengthening programming could also mandate equal participation of men and women journalists and politicians and incentivize coverage of women candidates or elected officials on issues including but not limited to those considered culturally to be 'traditional' women's issues. What is more, this programming can engage influential new media representatives, such as bloggers and activists who use social media.
- International organizations should support protections for existing civil society and media to broaden their footprint in the political space to maintain and deepen support for WPPL. An active, independent, and strong civil society is crucial to encouraging women's political participation sustainably. Civil society in the KR faces serious threats from closing civic space and is currently almost entirely reliant on international donors. What is more, a move toward softening the gender equality framing has troubled feminists who are concerned that progress in the WPPL space may be diluted. As stated earlier the KR's civil society and free media have come under threat from growing government control, and a new media law being considered by the Parliament would further diminish and constrict the space for open dialogue if passed. Currently, multiple NGOs and CSOs both locally and nationally are devoted to WPPL issues in the KR. This includes the ZhDS and the Forum of Women's NGOs. Strengthening these groups' organizing, networking, and advocacy capacity could be accomplished through a targeted campaign linked to the KR's commitments outlined in the NAP and leveraging existing forums in Parliament (see below). Additionally, putting in place rapid-response protection mechanisms such as legal assistance for human rights defenders targeted by the government will help maintain support for WPPL. This programming should also engage younger civil society activists to ensure that diverse capabilities and views are represented and encouraged and there is a pipeline of professionals.
- Donor programming should engage gatekeepers to educate them on the pernicious effects of harmful gender stereotypes, giving them the tools to advocate for and promote women's political

participation. In order to change social norms that prevent women's full political participation, international donors and relevant national stakeholders will need to engage gatekeepers in decision-making and positions of power, men and women alike, to educate them on the pernicious effects of patriarchal gender stereotypes and other harmful attitudes toward women in politics. These programs can give these powerbrokers the necessary tools to appreciate their responsibility and take action to combat harmful gender norms and better encourage women's political participation. These programs should target both men and women, who often hold the power to help unlock broader change and whose support—or lack thereof—directly enhances or hinders WPPL. However, distinct approaches to engaging men and women gatekeepers should be employed.

- This could include political party strengthening programming that targets male leadership to: address the socio-cultural beliefs they hold on gender and the role of women, as a foundation to transform men's attitudes and their sense of responsibility to advocate for aligning recruitment, resources, and retention for women and men equitably. The findings in this study also suggest that there is an opportunity for more women already in politics to support expanding political participation. In order to successfully engage these women, their motivations and the effect of intersecting roles (such as their relationships with men leaders) will be crucial. One potential inroad would be to organize mentoring components where seasoned women politicians are included in coaching of newcomers – thereby highlighting their unique value (as separate from male leadership or family) and cultivating personal relationships that have the potential to transform stereotypes about women's ability and interest to collaborate. As a compliment to party strengthening programming, coordinated private diplomatic efforts – co-led by men and women leaders -- reinforcing gender equity principles and the specific value of women's political participation with Kyrgyz men's leadership could further incentive shifts in mindsets.

## INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS

Despite the introduction of gender quotas in 2007 (national) and 2019 (local), which has contributed to more women politicians at all levels of government, political parties remain fluid in the KR, often disappearing after their candidate is elected, those quotas are often not maintained after an election. While the KR is signatory to several international conventions relevant to WPPL and has a NGS, it lacks resources. To address these institutional barriers to participation, USAID and other stakeholders will need to engage with the government of the KR, and parties – to the extent possible.

- The Kyrgyz government should **make the National Action Plan (NAP) a priority in the NGS**. While the KR made an important step in adopting the NGS in 2012 in compliance with CEDAW, many of the benchmarks of the strategy have not been achieved. Currently, the NAP lacks the resources to be an effective mechanism to enact change related to increasing and protecting women's political participation. Innovative Solutions currently trains women MPs on the National Action Plan's 1325 agenda, which could be expanded to generate support and enthusiasm among men and women politicians. In addition, implementation monitoring of the NGS could be an opportunity to build cooperation between the Forum and the Council. CSO facilitation of a review process for the NGS could also create a level playing field between the two institutions and better promote collaboration between governmental and nongovernmental institutions.
- Parliament should work with CSOs to **combat VAWPP and protect women from violence when voting**. While there is legislation that protects women from harassment and violence,

there is no national law protecting VAWPP. Provide technical support to relevant legislative offices to draft a law with clear operationalization strategies to deal with harassment and violence against women in political and public life, including online harassment. Support the Parliament to ratify the ILO Convention on the elimination of violence and harassment in the workplace and undertake further legal redress to protect women in politics and public life. The Parliament, elected offices at the local level and within the judiciary, and political parties should develop sexual harassment policies that include mechanisms for enforcement and consequences for perpetrators and introduce a confidential grievance mechanism that ensure that women coming forward are not retaliated against. Work with the Parliamentary ethics committee to prevent VAWPP, such as by conducting awareness raising within parties on violence against women and developing mechanisms through which the parties provide justice to victims. Additionally, such programming could include working with women's wings and political party leaders to orient women on violence against women in politics, redress mechanisms, ways to advocate against it, and opportunities to offer support to each other. Endorsement and participation of male leadership in this work done at the party level would reinforce programs proposed above under sociocultural change and present an opportunity for men leaders to demonstrate tangible support. Furthermore, CSOs, including sympathetic faith-based CSOs, can be equipped to monitor violence and harassment, including i) violation of rights in legal councils; ii) legal services to enable the use of grievance mechanisms; and iii) using media and social media to spotlight issues in constructive ways.

- Political parties should **ensure financial and technical resources for women's wings**. Women's wings are currently under-resourced and lack decision-making power to influence political decisions or agendas. Donors could support strategic planning for women's wings to amass influence within their party structures, including advocating for dedicated budgets for training, candidate campaigns, and official representation within party decision-making bodies. Greater resources could also help women's wings to search for, mentor, and build the capacity of possible women candidates who may run for office at the local and national level. Donors could also support additional capacity building for women's wing members to address individual barriers and networking support between women's wings to encourage leveraging of influence.
- Civil society should **undertake public advocacy to clarify the quota system both for the public and within the political system**. The findings suggest that there is a widespread misunderstanding of the quota system, the result of which is that women political officials are not taken seriously or allowed a mandate from the electoral process. Further education on this topic for elected officials and the public could increase women's political participation, making them more engaged in elections and increasing their willingness to run for office. Public information campaigns organized by relevant government bodies or election authorities in partnership with faith-based or WPPL organizations would further underscore the legitimacy of quotas in promoting political participation.
- Donors should work to **strengthen the Forum for Women MPs and Council on Women's Rights, Children and Gender Equality in the Parliament**. The Forum and the Council are important and provide opportunities for women to caucus and promote gender agendas within their party and the parliament. Technical assistance to these two entities can help them provide the backing and support/capacity building needed by new and seasoned women politicians and MPs. A work planning session may help reinvigorate the Forum by identifying areas of common interest amongst current women MPs. Strengthening the networks of women MPs may help to increase women's authority in their parties and help women MPs to see the Forum

as beneficial to them. The Forum can build on its previous work organizing listening meetings between local and national MPs to follow-up on local concerns and generate links between local and national women MPs. Associated milestones and indicators based on workplan objectives should be reported to the media to generate a higher profile and accountability for the Forum. Links between the Forum and the Council could also be formalized to promote collaboration and synergies on gender issues, with regular meetings focused on advancing the country's gender agenda. To further incentivize action on the NGS, the National Council for Women's Rights, Children, and Gender Equality should be tasked with coordination of stakeholders to elaborate and set gender targets in compliance with the strategy. The Forum of Women MPs, given their oversight responsibilities, could also be empowered to develop a monitoring plan - thereby creating opportunities for women MPs to develop agency and autonomy from party bosses who may take less interest in the topic.

## INDIVIDUAL FACTORS

- The Ministry of Education and civil society should **support civic education programs designed to improve democratic and political literacy in society**. There is a significant demand and need for democratic and political literacy and skills amongst politicians and aspiring politicians, as well as voters. Attention is needed to ensure that programs and tools are not co-opted for promoting conservative, misogynist norms. Civic education programs could also contribute to **increasing interest in political participation among women**. As a complement to other recommendations, USAID and other stakeholders should prioritize initiatives focused on civic education targeting women to increase interest in exercising their political and civic rights, including registering, voting, and joining political parties and/or CSOs. This is another opportunity for partnership with civil society, which could build stronger working relations and lessen the likelihood for government attacks on these organizations.
- Partnering with civil society, donors should **support efforts at capacity building for women candidates**. The CEC provides training to citizens and to candidates on election processes. In the civil society space, the ZhDS offers training to prepare women candidates for local elections, as well as training for parliamentarians. The Forum of Women's NGOs also offers training and mentorship opportunities for women local councilors. Many of the women politicians interviewed for this assessment had received some form of support from CSOs working in the WPPL space. Additional capacity building in budgeting, financial management, state security, and crime would help women MPs to join committees outside of the health and education sectors.
- Donors should develop programming to **help women politicians to effectively use the media**. Although women politicians, both national and local, recognize the power of traditional and social media, they often do not know how to use it efficiently. There are limited examples of positive use of social media for campaigns and constituent outreach and a clearly expressed need to use this important tool. Programs could focus on strategic communications plan development, and how to use specific tools to craft compelling messages to achieve objectives. This would also be an opportunity to partner with media outlets to run interview and debate simulations where women could practice, while also building familiarity with journalists and media operations, to translate into more inclusive and consistent coverage.
- Donors should **continue political literacy capacity building and networking support for women councilors**. Donors should continue supporting activities that provide training, orientation, information about democratic rules, relevant laws, and accessing information and

resources that deputies in the *ayil kenesh*, city councils, as well as Parliament, need to carry out their work. At the local level, joint trainings for new women and men councilors could offer a platform for breaking down gender barriers and promote full collaboration within the council. Donor activities should also continue training, mentoring, and coaching for women local *kenesh* council members on communications (including the use of social media for constituent outreach); financial literacy and local government budgeting; and negotiation skills. Horizontal networking amongst deputies can also be promoted through trainings, events, private information-sharing sites, and intentional mentoring arrangements.



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## POLITICIANS SURVEYED

*Table A.1. Politicians Surveyed*

POLITICAL PARTY	GENDER	NO. OF SURVEYS
Ata Zhurt Kyrgyzstan	Women	9
	Men	10
Yiman Nuru	Women	8
	Men	7
Yntymak	Women	10
	Men	12
Alliance	Women	7
	Men	9
Social Democrats	Women	12
	Men	9
Emgek	Women	9
	Men	5
Ordo	Women	1
	Men	0
Ishenim	Women	1
	Men	0
Ata Meken	Women	0
	Men	1
Note: Total women = 57, Total men = 53.		

## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

*Table A.2. Key Informants Interviewed*

STAKEHOLDER GROUP	SEX	CHARACTERISTIC 1	CHARACTERISTIC 2	NO. OF KIIS
Politician - Elected	Woman	National		5
Politician - Elected	Man	National		5
Politician - Elected	Man	National	Political Party Leader	1



Politician - Non-Elected	Woman	National	Ex-MP	1
Politician - Elected	Man	Local		1
Politician - Elected	Woman	Local		2
Journalist/Media Worker	Woman	National		1
Civil Society	Woman	National	NGO Head	3
Academic	Man	National		1
Academic	Woman	National		1
Donor	Man	National		1
Donor	Woman	National		1
USAID & Mission Staff	Woman	National		2
Implementing Partner	Man	National		1
Implementing Partner	Woman	National		1
CEC	Man	National		1
Coordinator of School for Youth provided by PP	Text	National	Txt	1

## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

*Table A.3. Focus Group Discussions*

NO.	GROUP DESCRIPTION	LOCATION	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
1	Local Council Members, Men	Saruu Village, Issyk-Kul Oblast	5
2	Local Council Members, Women	Saruu Village, Issyk-Kul Oblast	4
3	Local Activists, Men	Saruu Village, Issyk-Kul Oblast	10
4	Local Activists, Women	Saruu Village, Issyk-Kul Oblast	12
5	Local Council Members, Men	Novo-Pokrovka Village, Chui Oblast	4
6	Local Council Members, Women	Novo-Pokrovka Village, Chui Oblast	7

NO.	GROUP DESCRIPTION	LOCATION	TOTAL PARTICIPANTS
7	Local Activists, Men	Novo-Pokrovka Village, Chui Oblast	9
8	Local Activists, Women	Novo-Pokrovka Village, Chui Oblast	10
9	Participants of School for Youth provided by PP, Boys	Bishkek City	5
10	Participants of School for Youth provided by PP, Girls	Bishkek City	6

**Table A.4. Profile of FGD Respondents**

This data includes demographic information on the 72 respondents who participated in 10 FGDs:

TYPE OF STAKEHOLDER	MEN	WOMEN
Local Government Councilors	2 (9 individuals)	2 (11 individuals)
Community activists	2 (19 individuals)	2 (22 individuals)
Aspiring politicians (youth)	1 (5 individuals)	1 (6 individuals)
<b>Total</b>	<b>5 (33 individuals)</b>	<b>5 (39 individuals)</b>

**Table A.5. Demographics of FGD Respondents**

INDICATOR	STATISTIC: MEN	STATISTIC: WOMEN	OVERALL
Age of respondents			
18-35			20%
36-55			49%
56+			31%
Respondents holding political positions (20 MCs)	27%	28%	
Member of council			100%
No party affiliation			100%
Years active in politics			
2-3 years	22%	78%	
4-10 yrs	33%	9%	
11+	11%	9%	

INDICATOR	STATISTIC: MEN	STATISTIC: WOMEN	OVERALL
n/a	33%	9%	
<i>Reasons for running for election (multiple response options)</i>			
Family member encourage	17%	25%	
Neighbors, community encourage	50%	50%	
Colleagues encourage	42%	25%	
Political party or activists encourage	8%	25%	
Expectations from friends	17%	8%	
Raise issues of family, health, culture etc	25%	25%	
Fight corruption, efficient resource management	42%	0	
Build political career	8%		
<i>Discouraged from running</i>			
Family	17%	0	
Community	0	9%	
Political leader or activist	25%	0	
Social norms against WPPL	8%	9%	
Nobody	58%	82%	
Non-MCs (52 activists, youth)			
Professional (lawyer, teacher, doctor etc)	46%	11%	
Worker (cattle, driver, plumber etc)	25%	4%	
Jobless	8%	0	
Housewife/pensioner	0	64%	
Student	21%	21%	

## ANNEX B. METHODOLOGICAL NOTES AND LIMITATIONS

As anticipated in the Strategy Report, data was drawn from 90 reports, other gray literature and online sources; 27 key informant interviews; 10 focus group discussions; and a survey of 110 politicians. NORC provided useful frameworks and guidance and on-going support from the mission was essential.

Because Kyrgyzstan is a small country with a short history, it was relatively straightforward to generate a list of key informants from amongst prominent women and men politicians, WPPL civil society activists and other experts. Key informants, Focus Groups participants, and some of the documents were provided thanks to the knowledge and networks of local members of the Assessment Team.

The decision to use the focus groups to garner input from elected village deputies (m and f) and local activists/voters in two sites turned out to be a good one. The study benefited from insights gained from FGDs in two very different sites. The last-minute addition of FGDs with youth participants and coordinator of a party-led pilot training course provided useful insights as well. One unanticipated interview with the executive head of the Ayil Okmoty (executive body on the village level). Table 4 provides a snapshot of challenges and limitations encountered, and how the AT addressed them.

**Table A.6. Methodological limitations**

CHALLENGE/LIMITATION	DETAILS AND MITIGATION STRATEGY
A number of important key informants were difficult or impossible to reach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A number of conservative men politicians were particularly difficult to reach and had to be dropped from the list.</li> <li>• USAID/K helped with securing a meeting with the head of the Central Election Commission (last minute).</li> <li>• USAID/K also followed up with the author of two recent studies on gender in politics which were commissioned by USAID, but the author never responded.</li> <li>• Many of the national politicians who were difficult to confirm appointments with were present during a one-day voting period at the parliament. The AT used that day to conduct KIs and survey data with as many as possible.</li> <li>• Several politicians who were unavailable were replaced with others in the same position.</li> </ul>
Some of the political parties selected for the survey did not have sufficient women candidates or elected officials.	Women respondents were selected from other (larger) parties that were on the study list.
Survey respondents were difficult to reach.	The logistician and her team were persistent with repeated calls.
The entire team got Covid and lost a week at the end of the fieldwork.	NORC provided a couple of extra days for the deadline.

## ANNEX C. ADDITIONAL FINDINGS

### CI. PREVIOUS CAPACITY BUILDING FOR YOUTH POLITICIANS IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

INITIATIVE	DETAILS	IMPLEMENTER	YEAR
Capacity building training for parties	Training of party representatives aimed at developing youth and women’s wings; some of parties, namely Ar Namys, Respublica disseminated the knowledge to party members - for women and youth (they had wings at that time)	NDI/IRI, funded by USAID	2007-2008
Youth parliament	The initiative to prepare youth, who participated in the revolution in 2010 for the politics - was supported by newly established Ministry of Youth in an effort to engage promising, active youth in politics. Initially party youth wings members were enrolled, thus explaining the support from the Government and the Jogorku Kenesh. Alumni of youth parliament are now among MPs (Meder Aliev), politicians in executive bodies (Deputy head of state agency of regulation of religion Kanat Midin uulu, municipal dept heads, etc.)  Today the YP is working across the country (there are district units of YP)	Public Foundation for the Support of Democracy (leader Nazgul Zholdosheva),  Funded by USAID	2011- 2023
Model parliament project	First systematic course including not just leadership, but “whole spectrum” of training for political participation and leadership, practically oriented, working on real parliamentarians tasks, , developed for the Parliamentarian republic first (in 2020) and in 2023 was revised and edited for the Presidential Republic. The authors included a group of AUCA’ professors from Law dept. The first group of students were studied in 2021. The module was also introduced to some politicians, incl. the leader of PP Yiman Nuru, who was very much interested to learn the approach.	American University Central Asia/NED  coordinated by prominent lawyer Saniya Toktogazieva and famous human rights protection activist Dinara Oshurakhunova	2021-2023

## C2. INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS AND NATIONAL LEGISLATION

INTERNATIONAL COMMITMENTS	KEY PROVISIONS RELATED TO WOMEN'S RIGHT TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND LEADERSHIP	RATIFICATION / ACCESSION / SUCCESSION DATES
<b>UN Charter</b>	The member country acknowledges and is committed to promoting the universal respect for and observance of human rights, and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion.	6 Jan 1992
<b>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</b>	Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.	1994
<b>International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights / ICCPR</b>	<p>Principle of equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights.</p> <p>No one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with her/his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attack on her/his honor and reputation. Everyone has the right to the protection of the law against such interference or attacks.</p> <p>Every citizen has the right and the opportunity to take part in the conduct of public affairs, to vote and be elected at genuine periodic elections.</p>	07 Oct 1994
<b>Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights</b>	The Optional Protocol establishes an individual complaints mechanism for the ICCPR.	07 Oct 1994
<b>International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights</b>	<p>Equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all economic, social and cultural rights set.</p> <p>The right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favorable conditions of work which ensure safe and healthy working conditions.</p>	07 Oct 1994
<b>Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</b>	<p>The States Parties to the International Covenants on Human Rights have the obligation to ensure the equal rights of men and women to enjoy all economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights.</p> <p>States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right:</p>	10 Feb 1997

	<p>(a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies;</p> <p>(b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;</p> <p>(c) To participate in nongovernmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.</p>	
<b>Convention on Political Rights of Women</b>	Establishes the rights of women: a) to vote in all elections on equal terms with men, without any discrimination; b) be elected to all publicly elected bodies, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination; c) to hold public office and to exercise all public functions, established by national law, on equal terms with men, without any discrimination.	10 Feb 1997
<b>Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women</b>	The Optional Protocol allows individuals to make a communication to the CEDAW Committee about a violation of rights protected under CEDAW.	22 Jul 2002
<b>Beijing Declaration and Platform of Actions</b>	<p>The BPA notes that despite a worldwide movement towards democratization, participation of women in key decision-making as full and equal partners with men, particularly in politics, has not yet been achieved. Empowerment of women and equality between women and men are prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security among all peoples. Sustainable development and economic growth that is both sustained and sustainable are possible only through improving the economic, social, political, legal and cultural status of women.</p> <p>The empowerment and autonomy of women and the improvement of women’s social, economic and political status is essential for the achievement of both transparent and accountable government and administration and sustainable development in all areas of life. Achieving the goal of equal participation of women and men in decision-making will provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition of society and is needed in order to strengthen democracy and promote its proper functioning.</p>	1995

<p><b>Sustainable Development Goals (#5)</b></p>	<p>Dedicated SD Goal 5 "Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" addresses the vital role of women and the need for their full and equal participation and leadership in all areas of sustainable development. Several targets are formulated to track the progress:</p> <p>5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.</p> <p>5.2 Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation.</p> <p>5.5 Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life.</p> <p>5.c Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.</p>	<p>2015</p>
<p><b>Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)</b></p>	<p>All parties take the commitment to undertake necessary legislative and other measures to promote and protect the right for everyone, particularly women, to live free from violence in both the public and the private sphere.</p> <p>The Convention also establishes a specific monitoring mechanism ("GREVIO") in order to ensure effective implementation of its provisions by the Parties.</p> <p>Parties shall recognize, encourage and support, at all levels, the work of relevant nongovernmental organizations and of civil society active in combating violence against women and establish effective co-operation with these organizations.</p>	<p>Not ratified</p>
<p><b>Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women</b></p>	<p>Solely proclaims the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and urges that every effort be made so that it becomes generally known and respected.</p>	
<p><b>Convention on Standards for democratic elections, electoral rights and freedoms in the member states of the Commonwealth of Independent States</b></p>	<p>The Party strives to take the necessary legislative measures to ensure that women have fair, real, and equal opportunities to exercise the right to vote and to be elected to elective bodies and elected positions, both personally and as members of political parties (coalitions).</p>	<p>1 Aug 2003</p>



<p><b>ILO Violence and Harassment Convention</b></p>	<p>Convention protects workers and other persons in the world of work, including employees as defined by national law and practice, as well as persons working irrespective of their contractual status... (Art.2)</p> <p>The Convention applies to all sectors, whether private or public, both in the formal and informal economy, and whether in urban or rural areas.</p> <p>Without prejudice to and consistent with Article I, each Member shall adopt laws and regulations to define and prohibit violence and harassment in the world of work, including gender-based violence and harassment. (Art 7)</p>	<p>Not ratified</p>
<p><b>Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic</b></p>	<p>The Constitution ensures respect and protection of the human and civil rights and freedoms of all persons within its territory and jurisdiction. No one shall be subjected to discrimination on the basis of sex, race, language, disability, ethnicity, religion, age, political or other opinion, education, origin, property or other status, or other circumstances. Men and women have equal rights and freedoms and equal opportunities for their realization.</p> <p>Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic have the rights: a) to elect and be elected to national and local governmental bodies, as well as to participate in referenda; b) to participate in the management of public and state affairs both directly and through their representatives; c) and opportunities when entering the state and municipal service and promotion in the manner prescribed by law.</p>	<p>Accepted by referendum on 11 Apr 2021</p>
<p><b>The Law “On state guarantees of equal rights and equal opportunities for men and women”</b></p>	<p>The Law establishes state guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for persons of different sexes in political, social, economic, cultural and other areas of human life; is designed to protect men and women from discrimination on the basis of sex; and is aimed at establishing progressive democratic relations between men and women.</p> <p>The state guarantees and creates equal opportunities for persons of different sexes to participate in government by ensuring gender representation of persons in all branches of state power through legal, organizational and other mechanisms (Article 9).</p> <p>In the personnel structure of state and local self-government bodies' employees shall not be dominated by employees of the same sex. The system of quotas in state and local self-government bodies (no more than seventy percent of the staff, including at the decision-</p>	<p>4 Aug 2008</p>

	<p>making level) shall be established by the regulatory legal acts of the Kyrgyz Republic (Art 10).</p> <p>Men and women have equal rights to participate in elections of the head of state, supreme state bodies and local self-government bodies. During elections women, on an equal basis with men, shall be provided with fair and real opportunities to exercise the right to elect and be elected to state and local self-government bodies. In order to achieve parity democracy the state shall be entitled to establish special measures aimed at supporting candidates of the under-represented sex (Art 11).</p> <p>The Jogorku Kenesh within its competence, taking into account the representation of not more than seventy percent of persons of the same sex: i) On the proposal of the President, elects judges of the Supreme Court (including judges of the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court); ii) Approves the composition of the Council for the Selection of Judges; iii) Elects the members of the Central Commission for Elections and Referendums; iv) elects the members of the Chamber of Accounts; v) elects deputies of the Akyikatchy (Ombudsman) upon the recommendation of the Akyikatchy (Ombudsman).</p>	
<p><b>Constitutional Law “On the Election of President of the Kyrgyz Republic and Deputies of Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic”</b></p>	<p>Women on an equal basis with men are provided with equal opportunities to exercise the right to elect and be elected to the office of President and deputy of the Jogorku Kenesh. (Article 2).</p> <p>When determining the list of candidates, a political party must take into account the representation of no more than 70 percent of candidates of the same gender, and the difference in the order of women and men in the lists of candidates nominated by political parties must not exceed three positions (Art. 60).</p> <p>In the case of early termination of the powers of a deputy elected from a single electoral district, his mandate is transferred to the next candidate of the same sex (Art. 65).</p>	<p>26 Aug 2021</p>
<p><b>Law “On elections of deputies to local councils”</b></p>	<p>The Law defines the electoral rights and guarantees, regulates relations related to the preparation and conduct of elections of deputies to local councils. The Law stipulated that when forming lists of candidates for city councils, political parties must take into account the representation of no more than 70 percent of persons of the same sex, and the difference in the order of women and men in the lists of candidates nominated by a</p>	<p>14 Jul 2011</p>

	<p>political party must not exceed two positions (Article 49).</p> <p>In the case of early termination of the powers of a woman local council deputy elected under the proportional system (in city <i>keneshes</i>) or who received a mandate on the basis of reserved mandates (in <i>ayil keneshes</i>), the mandate is transferred to the next woman candidate who received the highest number of votes in the respective constituency (Art. 52).</p> <p>In case of a candidate’s withdrawal from further participation in the elections, a candidate of the same sex should be included in the list of candidates (Art. 54).</p>	
<b>Law “On Protection and Defense Against Family Violence”</b>	<p>The Law defines the legal basis for the prevention and suppression of family violence, and for the social and legal protection of victims of family violence (family members and persons equivalent to family members living together).</p> <p>No law to protect from harassment, sexual harassment.</p>	27 Apr 2017
<b>Law “On Public Civil Service and Municipal Service”</b>	<p>Citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic have equal access to public civil service and municipal service regardless of gender, race, language, disability, ethnicity, religion, political or other beliefs, origin, property or other status (Art.4).</p>	30 May 2016
<b>National Strategy on Gender Equality 2023</b>	<p>Promoting gender parity in decision-making and the development of women's political participation is one of the five priority areas of the Strategy. Two priority tasks are set in the Strategy: 1) development and introduction of special measures to ensure gender representation in political state and municipal positions and in administrative state and municipal positions (no more than 70 percent of persons of the same sex); 2) introduction of a gender approach in the activities of political parties and support of women's political leadership.</p>	16 Sep 2022

<p><b>National Gender Equality Action Plan 2022-2024</b></p>	<p>The National Plan envisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Introduction of legislative initiatives to integrate special measures; raise public awareness to promote special measures and build capacity of heads of state and municipal bodies on application of special measures.</li> <li>● Monitoring of special measures implementation and assessment of women’s representation in political and administrative positions in national and municipal bodies.</li> <li>● Organizational, informational, and methodological support to political parties on integration of gender equality agenda into their programs and actions.</li> <li>● Development and implementation of a program to increase political participation of women from underrepresented social groups.</li> <li>● Capacity building for women activists, women deputies of the parliament and local councils (for example schools of women's leadership, trainings, and other training activities).</li> <li>● Providing mentoring support for newly elected women parliamentarians and local councils.</li> <li>● To analyze and amend the Standard Code of Ethics for deputies of local councils in terms of its gender sensitivity and consideration of special needs of women deputies in the process of organizing the work of local councils.</li> </ul>	<p>16 Sep 2022</p>
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**C3. CASE STUDY ON THE IMPACT OF GENDER QUOTAS-SARUU AND NOVO-POKROVKA VILLAGE KENESHES**

**INTRODUCTION: DOES QUANTITY MATTER?**

The struggle for women's political participation and leadership has been ongoing in the KR for decades. The mechanism of gender quotas for the national parliament in 2007 and more than a decade later, in 2019, gender quotas for local *keneshes* (councils) were adopted thanks to lobbying by civil society. At the local level, according to the results of the 2016 parliamentary elections, one in five *ayil keneshes* (village councils) had no women deputies, and only 4% of *ayil keneshes* had a critical mass of 30% or more women.

**The purpose of this case study** is to assess the impact of the gender quota mechanism on the further development of women's political participation and leadership. The case study describes two local elected bodies - Saruu Ayil Kenesh of Issyk-Kul oblast and Novo-Pokrovski Ayil Kenesh of Chui oblast. The AT conducted four focus group discussions with local residents - men and women voters and local activists, as well as men and women deputies of the *kenesh* in each AO (*Ayil Okmoty*-village administration). In addition to the information received, the AT conducted short interviews with the head of the AO in Saruu and civil activist of ZhDS (Women’s Democratic Network) who directly participated in the 2019 pre-election protests.

The two *keneshes* represent seemingly different types of gender culture. Ayil Kenesh Saruu in the Dzhety-Oguz district of Issyk-Kul region was the first in the country where elections were held according to the new legislation, with a quota of 30% seats for women candidates (elections were held on September 22, 2019). Those elections were marked by protests by men from AO Saruu, which were widely covered in the national media. Protestors disagreed with the quota mechanism, which they perceived as unfair and undemocratic. Despite the protests, nine women were elected deputy and a woman was elected as the chairman of the *kenesh* and another heads the Budget Commission.

Elections to Novo-Pokrovski Ayil Kenesh were held in 2021 and were not accompanied by protests. Of 21 deputies in the *kenesh*, nine are women. Deputies selected a man as *kenesh* head, but a woman deputy chairman and a woman heads the traditional social committee.

The differing gender expressions of gender culture in the Saruu Ayil Kenesh and the Novo-Pokrovski Ayil Kenesh illustrate how myths regarding gender quotas influence political outcomes.

## MYTHS REGARDING GENDER QUOTAS IN THE KR

Discussions with respondents in the field revealed that a significant number of myths exist around gender quotas. Among these myths, the most common are:

**Myth 1:** Women passed through the quota without any competition - as many women were nominated as seats were reserved. Therefore, the belief was that women were elected to the parliament with one to two dozen votes,<sup>94</sup> while men who did not make it to the *kenesh* received 200-300 votes.

The study showed that this is an extremely distorted view. For example, 16 women were nominated to the Saruu Ayil Kenesh, and nine were elected. One of the women candidates was supported by 190 electors; she was "outvoted" by only one man candidate, and the gap was only ten votes.

**Myth 2:** The opinion was often voiced among men in FGDs that, compared to other countries, women in the KR have significant representation in politics. Men FGD participants also compared the KR to countries such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, stating that in these neighboring countries, women have only recently received voting rights. However, these men did not recognize that in these authoritarian countries, the representation of women in politics at all levels is higher than in the KR.

**Myth 3:** Respondents also suggested that women themselves do not want to go into politics and they have no ambitions to be deputies. It is important to note that the candidates are predominantly rural activists, women who are already involved in public activities and know the community firsthand. It is no coincidence that among the deputies of the local level there are many neighborhood workers, schoolteachers, and medics. Often, as interviews with respondents showed, it is the community that nominates women candidates, trusting them to stand up for local interests. It is also noteworthy that women respondents from both *keneshes* are highly motivated to participate in politics at the local level and are happy to say that they want to be recognized in the community and raise their social status.

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<sup>94</sup> It is important to note that FGD participants often noted that quotas opened the door to women in parliament, for whom no one, including women themselves, votes. In the FGD of men activists in Novo-Pokrovka, respondents said, "Of all the post-Soviet states, we have the most unbridled democracy. And now a young man, who is now 32, is reaping the consequences. All his brains are washed. And now we will see the results of it. The products of democracy we will now collect. And gradually the women will come forward. It is up to them. Now, with worthless votes they get a quota (for deputies). One got 280 votes and was elected to Jogorku Kenesh. The only thing now is that they have to work for the people. If they don't get too carried away, like some NGO workers."

**Myths 4 and 5:** For many reasons the national culture hinders women entering politics,<sup>95</sup> but those women who do pursue political ambition are considered unscrupulous and incapable.<sup>96</sup> Respondents often repeated this myth, even while contradicting themselves, saying that Kyrgyz women have always been free, recognized by society, and could become leaders of the people, as evidenced by the historical Queen of Alai, Kurmanjan Datka. It is also often said that women are afraid to engage in corrupt conspiracies and are more responsible in their work. Such contradictory statements are frequently uttered by the same people, practically in the same dialogue, but do not raise doubts for the speaker about the logic of what is being said.

**Myth 6:** Women's reproductive functions prevent them from becoming a politician, otherwise they will have to give up their feminine identity. This myth largely reflects men's fears of losing their status and role in the family and society. In an FGD in Novo-Pokrovka, men activists in the village, on the one hand, acknowledge the importance of women's leadership, yet on the other hand, state: "Let a woman not get married, not give birth, and go into politics. That's the kind of woman who would be president. She chooses to be either a mother or a politician. But our Kyrgyz women choose motherhood. This is a mentality. A woman has a responsibility to give birth, everything! Then, let's start having babies. Take 7-8 million, go to Canada, remake yourself there..., and let's give birth!" This idea did not cause any objections in the group, though all participants undoubtedly know that former president of the KR (President of Provisional Period) Roza Otunbaeva has a family and children, which was not an obstacle for her in ascending to the highest political office.

**Myth 7:** A group of men in Saruu AO stated a unique case of "rewriting" the recent history protest the introduction of gender quotas. Everyone - both men and women - participates in the reconstruction, re-interpretation, and rewriting the history of conflict. In this case, men in the FGD argued, a) Men never opposed women, there was a misunderstanding. They simply misunderstood the quota principle, and they wrote a letter in error, after which they understood and supported gender quotas. B) Among the dissatisfied authors and signers of the open letter sent to the President of the country, Ombudsman of the Kyrgyz Republic, and Chairman of CEC of the Kyrgyz Republic, there were not only men, but also women. The speech was not against women, but against procedural violations of electoral process. C) The conflict and protest happened because of provocative information provided by civil activists, who congratulated women candidates several days before the elections, loudly stating that even if each of them got only one vote, even if they voted for themselves. With only one vote they would automatically be deputies, due to the nature of quotas they would automatically already be deputies.

Interviews and discussions with residents and deputies showed that a significant portion of men still cannot accept the gender quotas. The AT examined the published letter, which shows that only men were signatories. In one of the interviews, a respondent suggested that Saruu men were used by the head of the TEC, who inspired and helped to write the open letter protesting quotas. The civil activist referenced by the men went to Saruu village after being informed of the impending protests in the TEC. It is interesting that after four years those involved do not want to remember and analyze the conflict that happened. The

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<sup>95</sup> In an FGD with men deputies of Novo-Pokrovski AK: "R1: In a Muslim family, as it were, men are ahead anyway. And in the future, we'll probably have it that way. Because when a woman marries, she will be behind her husband anyway. R2: Getting married needs a husband, children, a home..., and if both are in politics, it's the same as keeping a girlfriend.

<sup>96</sup> In an FGD with men voters in Saruu: "R1: now the problems and quarrels arise because of those who are more involved in politics, for example Umetalieva, Karasartova, they should just be calmer, why to nominate their candidate for president, we are Kyrgyz, how can you make a president - a woman. We saw Otunbaeva. Facilitator: what happened? R1: she worked for six months, ate everything, and left. R1: I do not think that women should be involved in politics, they are very confrontational, you must be careful with them, otherwise they will often speak out. If they are so tough it is necessary to make such women directors of schools, ministers, let them work."

version of events blaming the civil activist for misleading or incompetent information is shared today by both men and women who passed to the *kenesh*, and those who did not.

Why do these myths exist? According to Roland Barthes in his 1972 book *Mythologies* (pp. 269),<sup>97</sup> "The main purpose of political myth is the struggle for power, the legitimization of that power, the exercise of political domination. Political myth always seeks to be similar to the truth, it is a tool to manipulate the masses, the foundation for the development of the political ideology of the existing regime."<sup>98</sup>

## THE QUESTION OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS THROUGH QUOTAS

The debate about the "validity" of quotas for women in politics at the local and national level has been going on in most countries for decades. This debate includes the existence of quotas and at what level they should be set i.e., what is the "critical mass" of women's representation (15%, 20%, 30%, or 50%) so that they have substantial influence.

After the introduction of quotas at the local level in the KR, questions about the effectiveness of the system of reserving 30% of seats for women have become more relevant in public discourse. Avazkan Ormonova, who was repeatedly elected deputy of the local council in Osh oblast, stated in an interview: "Deputies who came to the council under the new electoral law, after the introduction of the quota mechanism, are constantly questioned about their achievements and are almost threatened to assess the justification of the quota mechanism. Such questions come from journalists, from members of the local community, and even from individual politicians at the national level. At the same time, none of these categories of "evaluators" of the effectiveness of women MPs have thought to conduct the same assessment of the activities of men MPs."

One of the main complaints about women deputies, which are voiced by both men and women, is that women mostly sit silently and do not assert any rights. Although there are many men deputies who "do not open their mouths," it is women who are presented with the lens of effectiveness.

During a discussion with village activists and women employees of Saruu AO, one of the respondents noted that it seems that women are not just sitting with their hands folded, they seem to be working. But few remember any significant results from the work of those women. Women deputies of the *kenesh*, discussing what has been achieved, agreed that they work hard, but their contributions are invisible. Women from the Novo-Pokrovski *kenesh* noted that whatever priority task they took up was impossible to solve due to limited budget for hugely expensive social and communal problems (lighting, water, heating, access to education, etc.).

As one gender expert noted in an interview for this assessment, gender quotas are a necessary mechanism in Kyrgyzstani politics, which provides only the technical conditions for women's "entry" into political leadership. However, there are many other mechanisms and resources with which a woman must be "equipped" to influence decisions and the quality of politics. But even symbolic participation ("token participation") is important because it creates a favorable environment for overcoming conservative social norms and personal restraint.

## THE ISSUE OF HETEROGENEITY OF THE WOMEN'S COMPOSITION OF THE KENESH

Deputies in the *kenesh* or in parliament represent a variety of social strata, varying in age, ethnicity, class (economic capital), religiosity, and other characteristics. Often, being included in privileged hierarchical

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<sup>97</sup> Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies: Roland Barthes*. Hill and Wang. pp. 269.

<sup>98</sup> In this case: patriarchal.

groups, women MPs themselves can carry out practices of social exclusion of other women. Therefore, in terms of women's political leadership, it is important to consider not only the gender of the subjects but also the intersectional complex.

The case of the Saruu AK is interesting in terms of heterogeneity: among the nine women deputies, there are only two married women, while the rest are either widows or divorced. At least 2 out of 9 women are affiliated with the head of the executive branch, being members of his nuclear or extended family. Among the women, there are those who are employed in public service and there are also retired housewives. Most women deputies are 50+ years old, with only one under 35 and two in the 45-50 category.

Women deputies of Novo-Pokrovski AK are distinguished by ethnicity (there are three Russian women), by age, and by geography. There are women who live in the most peripheral, marginalized parts of the territory and those who live in the more developed parts of the AO and, moreover, have significant capital. Finally, there are patriarchal and conservative women who themselves deny the right of women to be leaders, and there are those who are ready to be politicians. Residents also mentioned the distinction of belonging to certain regional groups. Behind each of these distinctions was the default notion that nominating women to local politics is essentially the strategy of the leaders of these groups and that the women nominated are merely tools in the hands of traditional leaders.

The intersection of women deputies' statuses (intersectionality) affects intragroup dynamics and solidarity or social exclusion within the group of women deputies. The interviews and FGDs demonstrated that attitudes towards gender quotas, assessments of practices of personal political participation and leadership, and women's role in solving local issues differ significantly depending on the affiliation of women deputies with certain socio-economic groups. So, for example, a woman activist and pensioner felt that there is significant discrimination against women in the community and if it were not for quotas, there would be no women in government. Furthermore, the interviewee stated that if the woman is single, she is at risk of being stigmatized. In general, it seems to this interviewee that the work of a local deputy is labor intensive and not always within the reach of women, because they are not listened to, and most importantly, ungrateful because the community does not see and recognize women's work.

A younger woman deputy, who has a good position in the civil service and was selected to head a key committee under the *kenesh*, is a member of the extended family of the head of the executive local government and evaluates her activity in the *kenesh* very highly. At the same time, she views gender quotas negatively, believing that too many women multiply gossip and hinder effective work. She feels there should be women in the *kenesh* who are finance specialists, like herself, and in general there could be 2-3 of them, but no more.

Communication with the deputies of both *keneshes* revealed the following specific aspects:

- There is no group solidarity among the women of the *kenesh*, and the dynamics in the groups are characterized by mutual distrust and hostility among women toward one another.
- Women from both *keneshes* had no experience with cooperation and joint lobbying for decisions, involving external forces and resources (for example, appealing to women MPs to strengthen a deputy request or lobbying for a decision) and were surprised at the question regarding possible strategies for such cooperation.
- In none of the discussions, nor in any of the interviews did respondents raise questions about what such different women, representing different interest groups, who came to the elected body in such different ways had in common. Using the idea of supporting motherhood and childhood



as common ground might be fundamentally flawed. The concept is based on the biological commonality of women but does not encourage social commonality.

## CONCLUSIONS

- Even though gender quotas were introduced into the electoral legislation four years ago, until now the mechanism has not gained recognition and support among a significant portion of men and women.
- The quota mechanism is presented as a kind of bricolage or method of connecting the unconnected: the ideas of women's political leadership and participation are used for men to benefit from the nomination of women members of the clan or tribe (extended or nuclear family).
- Women in the *kenesh*, if they are not members of the dominant power group, get from the experience of being a deputy "a feeling of deep disappointment and frustration, an unwillingness to continue working in politics at the local level. The reason for this is that the people who supported them in the elections act as the main detractors."
- Mass expectations of women's involvement in politics are often unrealistic. There is no understanding of different methods of participation and that conditions are needed to empower women and develop their ability to influence decision-making.

## ANNEX D. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

### POLITICIAN SURVEY INSTRUMENTS

#### WOMEN'S VERSION

##### CONSENT

This survey is being administered by the NORC KR Assessment Team conducting an assessment of Women's Political Participation in Leadership in the KR. We do not represent the government or a political party.

##### Purpose of study

Together with NORC at the University of Chicago, we are gathering information about the experiences of elected officials in the KR, as well as their views regarding women's political participation and leadership. This study will be used to help inform the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) programs related to these topics in the KR.

##### Description of the study procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to answer survey questions about your experiences, your household, politics, civic engagement, and other topics. The survey will take approximately 30-45 minutes to complete ONLINE.

##### Risks/discomforts of participating in this study

Your participation in this study does not involve any risks other than what you would encounter in daily life. You may be uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics we will ask about. If you are uncomfortable, you are free to not answer or to skip to the next question.

##### Benefits of participating in the study

Your participation is important to help us and USAID learn more about the experiences of elected officials in the KR.

##### Confidentiality

Your responses to this survey will be kept strictly confidential. We will report all results as averages. We will never share any information that could be used to identify you outside of the research team. As such, no one will know whether you participated in the survey or which answers are yours. Since no one will know which answers are yours, we ask that you answer all questions honestly.

##### Right to refuse or withdraw

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the study at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the research team delete your answers. There are no penalties for refusing or withdrawing.

##### Right to ask questions and report concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, feel free to contact **Laurie Zivetz MPH, PhD** at [lzivetz@gmail.com](mailto:lzivetz@gmail.com) or by telephone at [PHONE NUMBER]. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant that has not been answered by the investigators, you may contact April Baker, NORC's Senior Institutional Review Board Manager, at [irb@norc.org](mailto:irb@norc.org).

Consent. Do you agree to participate in this survey?

1. Yes
2. No

## INTRODUCTION

This survey seeks to gather the views of women in politics with regard to women's political participation and leadership in the KR. The survey should take 30-45 minutes to complete.

## BACKGROUND

I. What is your current political position?

- a) MP
- b) Member of local council
- c) Political party representative (if not in the elected bodies)
- d) Civic activist
- e) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your political party?

- a) «Ata Zhurt the KR»
- b) «Ishenim»
- c) «Yntymak»
- d) «Alliance»
- e) «Butun the KR»
- f) «Yiman Nuru»
- g) «El Umutu»
- h) «Azattyk»
- i) «Ata Meken»
- j) «Social Democrats»
- k) «Uluttar Birimdigi»
- l) «Mekenchil El»
- m) «Bagyt»

- n) «The KRdyn Biriktiruucgu patriottuk partiyasy»
- o) «Uluu Zhurt»
- p) «Kuchtuu Region»
- q) «Legalize»
- r) «Ordo»
- s) «Aruuzat El Kutu»
- t) «Zhashasyn The KR»
- u) «The KR Zhashyldar Partiyasy»
- v) “Emgek”
- w) “Onuguu Progress”
- x) Other political party (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your age?

- a) 18-24
- b) 25-28
- c) 29-35
- d) 36-40
- e) 41-45
- f) 46-50
- g) 51-55
- h) 56-60
- i) 61+

4. What is your ethnic group?

- a) Kyrgyz
- b) Russian
- c) Uzbek
- d) Other ethnicity (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your religion?

- a) Islam
- b) Christianity
- c) Atheism
- d) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Where do you work?

- a) Bishkek city
- b) Batken oblast
- c) Chuy oblast
- d) Jalalabad oblast
- e) Issyk-Kul oblast
- f) Naryn oblast
- g) Osh city
- h) Osh oblast
- i) Talas oblast

#### POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

7. How many years have you been active in politics?

- a) 1 year
- b) Less than 3 years
- c) 3-5 years
- d) 6-10
- e) 11+

8. Have you ever run as a candidate in elections?

- a) Yes
- b) No

8a. If so, which political offices have you contested? (note all that apply)

- a) MP
- b) Member of local council
- c) Leader of political party
- d) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

9. Have you ever held a formal leadership position in politics?

- a) Yes
- b) No

9a. If so, what leadership positions have you held? (select all that apply)

- a) Member of Local council
- b) Head of Local council
- c) Head of local council member's commission
- d) Member of National parliament
- e) Head of political faction, commission or MPs group in National parliament
- f) Speaker of National Parliament
- g) Head of political party
- h) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

10. What was your motivation for getting involved in politics? (select up to 3 options)

- a) Opportunity to participate in solving social problems
- b) Opportunity to contribute to economic development or national security
- c) Opportunity to raise issues of family, community, education, health, nutrition, culture, etc.
- d) Opportunity to fight corruption and manage resources more effectively
- e) Community/political party proposed me to run in (local) elections.
- f) Opportunity to take advantage of the 30% quota for women
- g) Opportunity to build own political career

- h) Opportunity to demonstrate efficient and decent work as a politician.
- i) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

11. Does your party provide any financial support to its candidates?

- a) Yes
- b) No

11a. If so, what is the nature of this support?

- a) Financing the organizing the activities of the electoral headquarters
- b) Financing of production and dissemination of promotional products
- c) Logistics costs of organization of meetings with voters
- d) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- e) Not sure

12. Is this support distributed evenly across candidates?

- a) Yes
- b) No

12a. If not, what are the determinants of party support for particular candidates?

- a) Number in party electoral lists
- b) Social status and network
- c) Candidate's financial contributions
- d) Popularity among the population
- e) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

## WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

13. In general, there are fewer women than men in elected political positions. In your view, what are the main reasons for this? (Select up to 3)

- a) Lack of support of family members and close associates
- b) Negative attitude of society, gender stereotypes
- c) Women lack political networks

- d) Women have lower education
- e) Women have lower self-confidence
- f) Women are overloaded with household chores
- g) Professional, job responsibilities
- h) Lack of funding
- i) Threat of violence to women who engage in politics
- j) Open opposition from men politicians and other public leaders
- k) Open opposition from women politicians and other public leaders
- l) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- m) Not sure

14. Does your party have any measures in place to recruit women as candidates?

- a) Yes
- b) No (skip to Q 16.)

14a. If so, what are these measures?

- a) Actively recruit prominent businesswomen, civic activists and civil servants to join the political party
- b) Engage women youth in the activities of political party and organizational development
- c) Introduce more women candidates in the electoral lists of the party than what is required by law
- d) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- e) Not sure

15. Have these measures led to an increase in the number of women standing as candidates?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not sure \_\_\_\_\_



16. Do you support such measures to increase the number of women in elected positions?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not sure \_\_\_\_\_

17. Do women have the same opportunities as men to take on positions of political leadership – for example, as party leaders, parliamentary committee chairs, or cabinet ministers?

- a) Yes (skip to Q18)
- b) No
- c) Not sure \_\_\_\_\_

17a. If not, what are the main reasons for this, in your view? (Select all that apply)

- a) Sociocultural norms; people look down on women in political leadership
- b) Women are not interested in such a leadership position because their “nature” is oriented towards family
- c) Women are lazy
- d) Women are less educated than men
- e) Women in politics are afraid of violence and/or discrimination if they enter politics
- f) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

18. When women are appointed to leadership positions, what types of issues are women given responsibility for? (select up to two)

- a) Social issues related to child care, health, and education
- b) Economic development
- c) Crime
- d) State security
- e) Equal rights and opportunities, social inclusion
- f) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

19. Is there a women's wing in your political party?

- a) Yes
- b) No (skip to Q20)
- c) Not sure (skip to 20)

19a. If so, what is the main role of the women's wing? (select up to two)

- a) focus of party support for gender equality and equity.
- b) forum for dialogue between women party members with different ideologies
- c) venue to provide mentoring and support to women party members and candidates
- d) promote positive public view of the party's inclusive position
- e) other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

20. Do you see a value in creating a women's wing in political parties?

- a) Yes
- b) No (skip to Q21)
- c) Not sure (skip to Q21)

20a. If so, what would you envision as the role of the women's wing in the political party?

- a) focus of party support for gender equality and equity.
- b) forum for dialogue between women party members with different ideologies
- c) venue to provide mentoring and support to women party members and candidates
- d) promote positive public view of the party's inclusive position
- e) other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

21. Are women represented in the party's executive committee?

- a) Yes
- b) No (skip to Q22)
- c) Not sure (skip to Q22)

21a. If so, what kinds of positions do they hold? (select all that apply)

- a) Head
- b) Deputy head
- c) Member
- d) Technical staff
- e) Administrative/secretarial
- f) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**PERSONAL EXPERIENCES**

22. Have you experienced any of the following behaviors when trying to participate in politics?

22a. If so, who were the main perpetrators of these acts?*** (put the relevant letter)	FREQUENTLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY	ONCE	NEVER	DECLINE TO RESPOND
Someone hit or beat you or assaulted you physically in some other way						
Someone prevented you from leaving the house						
Someone made threats against you and/or your family						
Someone tried to rape you						

Someone made unwanted sexual advances towards you						
Someone attempted to destroy your property						
Someone attempted to destroy your livelihood						
Someone harassed you online						
Someone hacked your email or social media accounts						
Someone spread “fake news” about you that was sexual in nature						
Someone spread “fake news” about you that was gendered in nature						

\*\*\*

- a) *Party leader*
- b) *Man Member of the same party I belong to*
- c) *Woman Member of the same party I belong to*
- d) *Man Member of another party*
- e) *Woman Member of another party*
- f) *Man Colleague (person with whom I work in the same organization)*
- g) *Woman Colleague*
- h) *Unknown person, stranger*

- i) *Husband*
- j) *Father or brother*
- k) *Other members of my family*
- l) *Men Neighbors*
- m) *Women neighbors*
- n) *Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_*

22a. Has anyone threatened or tried to kill you when you were trying to participate in politics?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not sure

23. How did experiencing these acts affect your willingness to participate in politics? (select all that apply)

- a) I try to defend myself with legal procedures
- b) I try not to pay attention to such aggression
- c) Such violence demotivates me to participate in politics
- d) Such violence forces me to unite with other politicians who share my beliefs in order to effectively confront aggression
- e) Such violence motivates me to work actively to remove the systemic barriers and causes that make such violence *and* aggression possible.
- f) *Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_*
- g) Not sure

24. Have you witnessed other women being targeted for trying to participate in politics?

24a. If so, who were the main perpetrators of these acts?**** (put the relevant letter)	FREQUENTLY	SOMETIMES	RARELY	ONCE	NEVER	DECLINE TO RESPOND
Someone hit or beat her or assaulted her physically in some other way						
Someone prevented her from leaving the house						
Someone made threats against her and/or her family						
Someone tried to rape her						
Someone made unwanted sexual advances towards her						
Someone attempted to destroy her property						
Someone attempted to destroy her livelihood						
Someone harassed her online						
Someone hacked her email or social media accounts						
Someone spread “fake news” about her that was sexual in nature						

Someone spread “fake news” about her that was gendered in nature						
Someone tried to kill her						

\*\*\*\*

- a) *Party leader*
- b) *Man Member of the same party I belong to*
- c) *Woman Member of the same party I belong to*
- d) *Man Member of opposite party*
- e) *Woman Member of opposite party*
- f) *Man Colleague (person with whom I work in the same organization)*
- g) *Woman Colleague*
- h) *Unknown person, stranger*
- i) *Husband*
- j) *Father or brother*
- k) *Other members of my family*
- l) *Men Neighbors*
- m) *Women neighbors*
- n) *Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_*

25. *How did experiencing these acts affect their willingness to participate in politics? (select all that apply)*

- a) *It demotivated or stopped the survivor(s) from participating in politics*
- b) *It motivated the survivor(s) to directly confront the aggressor(s)*
- c) *It motivated the survivor(s) to work actively to remove the systemic causes that make such violence and aggression possible*
- d) *Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_*
- e) *Not sure*

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

26. Do women candidates face violence, intimidation, or harassment on the campaign trail?

- a) Yes
- b) No (skip to Q33)
- c) Not sure

26a. If so, what does this intimidation look like? (mark all that apply)

- a) Unequal distribution of party' resources including financing and human resources
- b) Unfair distribution of electoral districts
- c) Minimize exposure to voters (order of speeches, advertisements, promotion by party spokespeople, selection of venues that re not voter friendly)
- d) Request to sign a declaration of refusal to receive a deputy's mandate.
- e) Requirements that women candidates perform party work beyond her agreed role in the elections.
- f) Shouting or bullying during a public speech by a woman candidate.
- g) Other (specify)

27. Who are the main perpetrators? (mark all that apply)

- a) Head of the party's campaign headquarter.
- b) Head of party
- c) Men candidates from the same party
- d) Men candidates from other parties
- e) Voters
- f) Representatives of electoral commissions
- g) Law enforcements bodies.
- h) Other (specify)
- i) Not sure

28. Do these attacks affect women's ability to be elected?

- a) Yes
- b) No (skip to Q33)



c) Not sure

29. Are existing laws sufficient for addressing violence, intimidation, and harassment of women on the campaign trail?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Not sure

30. Does your party have any policy in place to deal with this problem?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Not sure

30a. If so, is this policy enforced?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Not sure

31. Are other measures needed to address this problem?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Not sure

31a. If so, who should be responsible for stopping these acts and holding perpetrators accountable? (select up to three)

a) National Electoral committee

b) Law enforcement bodies

c) Local government

d) Courts

e) Presidential Administration \ Government

f) Electoral bodies

- g) National parliament
- h) Civil society
- i) International organizations
- j) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- k) Not sure

#### IMPACT OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

32. Do men and women have equal voice and influence in political debates in the KR?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Don't know
- d) Other (specify)
- e) Not sure

33. Are men and women equally effective as leaders in the KR?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Don't know
- d) Other (specify)

#### MEN'S VERSION

##### CONSENT

This survey is being administered by the NORC KR Assessment Team conducting an assessment of Women's Political Participation in Leadership in the KR. We do not represent the government or a political party.

##### Purpose of study

Together with NORC at the University of Chicago, we are gathering information about the experiences of elected officials in the KR, as well as their views regarding women's political participation and leadership. This study will be used to help inform the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) programs related to these topics in the KR.

##### Description of the study procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to answer survey questions about your experiences,

your household, politics, civic engagement, and other topics. The survey will take approximately 30 minutes to complete ONLINE.

#### Risks/discomforts of participating in this study

Your participation in this study does not involve any risks other than what you would encounter in daily life. You may be uncomfortable with some of the questions and topics we will ask about. If you are uncomfortable, you are free to not answer or to skip to the next question.

#### Benefits of participating in the study

Your participation is important to help us and USAID learn more about the experiences of elected officials in the KR.

#### Confidentiality

Your responses to this survey will be kept strictly confidential. We will report all results as averages. We will never share any information that could be used to identify you outside of the research team. As such, no one will know whether you participated in the survey or which answers are yours. Since no one will know which answers are yours, we ask that you answer all questions honestly.

#### Right to refuse or withdraw

The decision to participate in this study is entirely up to you. You may refuse to take part in the study at any time. You have the right not to answer any single question, as well as to withdraw completely from the study at any point during the process; additionally, you have the right to request that the research team delete your answers. There are no penalties for refusing or withdrawing.

#### Right to ask questions and report concerns

You have the right to ask questions about this research study and to have those questions answered by me before, during or after the research. If you have any further questions about the study, feel free to contact **Laurie Zivetz MPH, PhD** at [lzivetz@gmail.com](mailto:lzivetz@gmail.com) or by telephone at [PHONE NUMBER]. If you have any other concerns about your rights as a research participant that has not been answered by the investigators, you may contact April Baker, NORC's Senior Institutional Review Board Manager, at [irb@norc.org](mailto:irb@norc.org).

#### Consent. Do you agree to participate in this survey?

3. Yes
4. No

## INTRODUCTION

This survey seeks to gather the views of women in politics with regard to women's political participation and leadership in the KR. The survey should take 30-45 minutes to complete.

## BACKGROUND

I. What is your current political position?

- a) MP
- b) Member of local council

- c) Political party representative (if not in the elected bodies)
- d) Civic activist
- e) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

2. What is your political party?

- a) «Ata Zhurt The KR»
- b) «Ishenim»
- c) «Yntymak»
- d) «Alliance»
- e) «Butun The KR»
- f) «Yiman Nuru»
- g) «El Umutu»
- h) «Azattyk»
- i) «Ata Meken»
- j) «Social Democrats»
- k) «Uluttar Birimdigi»
- l) «Mekenchil El»
- m) «Bagyt»
- n) «The KRdyn Biriktiruucgu patriottuk partiyasy»
- o) «Uluu Zhurt»
- p) «Kuchtuu Region»
- q) «Legalize»
- r) «Ordo»
- s) «Aruuzat El Kutu»
- t) «Zhashasyn The KR»
- u) «The KR Zhashyldar Partiyasy»
- v) “Emgek”
- w) “Onuguu Progress”
- x) Other political party (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

3. What is your age?

- a) 18-24
- b) 25-28
- c) 29-35
- d) 36-40
- e) 41-45
- f) 46-50
- g) 51-55
- h) 56-60
- i) 61+

4. What is your ethnic group?

- a) Kyrgyz
- b) Russian
- c) Uzbek
- d) Other ethnicity (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

5. What is your religion?

- a) Islam
- b) Christianity
- c) Atheism
- d) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

6. Where do you work?

- a) Bishkek city
- b) Batken oblast
- c) Chuy oblast
- d) Jalalabad oblast

- e) Issyk-Kul oblast
- f) Naryn oblast
- g) Osh city
- h) Osh oblast
- i) Talas oblast

## POLITICAL EXPERIENCE

7. How many years have you been active in politics?

- a) 1 year
- b) Less than 3 years
- c) 3-5 years
- d) 6-10
- e) 11+

8. Have you ever run as a candidate in elections?

- a) Yes
- b) No

8a. *If so, which political offices have you contested? (note all that apply)*

- a) MP
- b) Member of local council
- c) Leader of political party
- d) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

9. Have you ever held a formal leadership position in politics?

- a) Yes
- b) No

9a. If so, what leadership positions have you held? (select all that apply)

- a) Member of Local council
- b) Head of Local council
- c) Head of local council member's commission
- d) Member of National parliament
- e) Head of political faction, commission or MPs group in National parliament
- f) Speaker of National Parliament
- g) Head of political party
- h) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

10. What was your motivation for getting involved in politics? (select up to 3 options)

- a) Opportunity to participate in solving social problems
- b) Opportunity to contribute to economic development or national security
- c) Opportunity to raise issues of family, community, education, health, nutrition, culture, etc.
- d) Opportunity to fight corruption and manage resources more effectively
- e) Community/political party proposed me to run in (local) elections.
- f) Opportunity to take advantage of the 30% quota for women
- g) Opportunity to build own political career
- h) Opportunity to demonstrate efficient and decent work as a politician.
- i) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

11. Does your party provide any financial support to its candidates?

- a) Yes
- b) No

11a. If so, what is the nature of this support?

- a) Financing the organizing the activities of the electoral headquarters
- b) Financing of production and dissemination of promotional products

- c) Logistics costs of organization of meetings with voters
- d) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- e) Not sure

*I2. Is this support distributed evenly across candidates?*

- a) Yes
- b) No

*I2a. If not, what are the determinants of party support for particular candidates?*

- a) Number in party electoral lists
- b) Social status and network
- c) Candidate's financial contributions
- d) Popularity among the population
- e) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

#### WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

**I3. In general, there are fewer women than men in elected political positions. In your view, what are the main reasons for this? (Select up to 3)**

- a) Lack of support of family members and close associates
- b) Negative attitude of society, gender stereotypes
- c) Women lack political networks
- d) Women have lower education
- e) Women have lower self-confidence
- f) Women are overloaded with household chores
- g) Professional, job responsibilities
- h) Lack of funding
- i) Threat of violence to women who engage in politics
- j) Open opposition from men politicians and other public leaders
- k) Open opposition from women politicians and other public leaders



l) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

m) Not sure

14. Does your party have any measures in place to recruit women as candidates?

a) Yes

b) No (skip to Q 16.)

*14a. If so, what are these measures?*

a) Actively recruit prominent businesswomen, civic activists and civil servants to join the political party

b) Engage women youth in the activities of political party and organizational development

c) Introduce more women candidates in the electoral lists of the party than what is required by law

d) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

e) Not sure

*15. Have these measures led to an increase in the number of women standing as candidates?*

a) Yes

b) No

c) Not sure \_\_\_\_\_

16. Do you support such measures to increase the number of women in elected positions?

a) Yes

b) No

c) Not sure \_\_\_\_\_

17. Do women have the same opportunities as men to take on positions of political leadership – for example, as party leaders, parliamentary committee chairs, or cabinet ministers?

a) Yes (skip to Q18)

b) No

c) Not sure \_\_\_\_\_

17a. If not, what are the main reasons for this, in your view? (Select all that apply)

- a) Sociocultural norms; people look down on women in political leadership
- b) Women are not interested in such a leadership position because their “nature” is oriented towards family
- c) Women are lazy
- d) Women are less educated than men
- e) Women in politics are afraid of violence and/or discrimination if they enter politics
- f) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

18. When women are appointed to leadership positions, what types of issues are women given responsibility for? (select up to two)

- a) Social issues related to child care, health, and education
- b) Economic development
- c) Crime
- d) State security
- e) Equal rights and opportunities, social inclusion
- f) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

19. Is there a women’s wing in your political party?

- d) Yes
- e) No (skip to Q20)
- f) Not sure (skip to 20)

19a. If so, what is the main role of the women’s wing? (select up to two)

- a) focus of party support for gender equality and equity.
- b) forum for dialogue between women party members with different ideologies
- c) venue to provide mentoring and support to women party members and candidates
- d) promote positive public view of the party’s inclusive position
- e) other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

20. Do you see a value in creating a women's wing in political parties?

- d) Yes
- e) No (skip to Q21)
- f) Not sure (skip to Q21)

20a. If so, what would you envision as the role of the women's wing in the political party?

- f) focus of party support for gender equality and equity.
- g) forum for dialogue between women party members with different ideologies
- h) venue to provide mentoring and support to women party members and candidates
- i) promote positive public view of the party's inclusive position
- j) other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

21. Are women represented in the party's executive committee?

- d) Yes
- e) No (skip to Q22)
- f) Not sure (skip to Q22)

21a. If so, what kinds of positions do they hold? (select all that apply)

- g) Head
- h) Deputy head
- i) Member
- j) Technical staff
- k) Administrative/secretarial
- l) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

#### VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

22. Do women candidates face violence, intimidation, or harassment on the campaign trail?

- a) Yes
- b) No (skip to Q33)
- c) Not sure

22a. *If so, what does this intimidation look like? (mark all that apply)*

- a) Unequal distribution of party' resources including financing and human resources
- b) Unfair distribution of electoral districts
- c) Minimize exposure to voters (order of speeches, advertisements, promotion by party spokespeople, selection of venues that re not voter friendly)
- d) Request to sign a declaration of refusal to receive a deputy's mandate.
- e) Requirements that women candidates perform party work beyond her agreed role in the elections.
- f) Shouting or bullying during a public speech by a woman candidate.
- g) Other (specify)

23. *Who are the main perpetrators? (mark all that apply)*

- a) Head of the party's campaign headquarter.
- b) Head of party
- c) Men candidates from the same party
- d) Men candidates from other parties
- e) Voters
- f) Representatives of electoral commissions
- g) Law enforcements bodies.
- h) Other (specify)
- i) Not sure

24. *Do these attacks affect women's ability to be elected?*

- a) Yes
- b) No (skip to Q33)
- c) Not sure

25. Are existing laws sufficient for addressing violence, intimidation, and harassment of women on the campaign trail?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not sure

26. Does your party have any policy in place to deal with this problem?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not sure

26a. If so, is this policy enforced?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not sure

27. Are other measures needed to address this problem?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not sure

27a. If so, who should be responsible for stopping these acts and holding perpetrators accountable? (select up to three)

- a) National Electoral committee
- b) Law enforcement bodies
- c) Local government
- d) Courts
- e) Presidential Administration \ Government
- f) Electoral bodies
- g) National parliament

- h) Civil society
- i) International organizations
- j) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- k) Not sure

## IMPACT OF WOMEN IN POLITICS

28. Do men and women have equal voice and influence in political debates in the KR?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Don't know
- d) Other (specify)
- e) Not sure

29. Are men and women equally effective as leaders in the KR?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Don't know
- d) Other (specify)

## DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SURVEY AND KII

1. What is your age?
  - a. 18-24
  - b. 25-28
  - c. 29-35
  - d. 36-40
  - e. 41-45
  - f. 46-50
  - g. 51-55
  - h. 61+
2. Are you
  - a. Man
  - b. Woman
3. Do you currently hold a political position?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No (skip to Q7)

**4. What is your current political position?**

- a. Member of National Parliament
- b. Member of city *kenesh* (council)
- c. Member of *ayil kenesh* (council)
- d. Other (clarify) \_\_\_\_\_
- e. I am not in a political position at present (skip to Q.7)

**5. What is your political party?**

- a. «Ata Zhurt The KR»
- b. «Ishenim»
- c. «Yntymak»
- d. «Alliance»
- e. «Butun The KR»
- f. «Yiman Nuru»
- g. «El Umutu»
- h. «Azattyk»
- i. «Ata Meken»
- j. «Social Democrats»
- k. «Uluttar Birimdigi»
- l. «Mekenchil El»
- m. «Bagyt»
- n. «The KRdyn Biriktiruucu patriottuk partiyasy»
- o. «Uluu Zhurt»
- p. «Kuchtuu Region»
- q. «Legalize»
- r. «Ordo»
- s. «Aruuzat El Kutu»
- t. «Zhashasyn The KR»

- u. «The KR Zhashyldar Partiyasy»
- v. “Emgek”
- w. “Onuguu Progress”
- x. Other political party (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- y. I am not a member of a political party

**6. How many years have you been active in politics (member of political party, member of local council or parliament, occupied the position at executive body, etc) ?**

\_\_\_\_\_ years

**7. Which of these describes you (mark all that apply);**

- Journalist
- NGO leader/activist
- Professional (e.g. teacher, lawyer, doctor)
- Other worker (explain)\_\_\_\_\_
- Other (explain)\_\_\_\_\_

**8. Have you ever run as a candidate in an election?**

- Yes
- No (skip to Q.12)

**9. Which political offices have you contested? (select all that apply)**

- Local elected bodies (city, *ayil kenesh*)
- Local executive bodies (local state administration, *ayil okmoty*, mayor’s office, etc)
- National elected body (parliament)
- National executive bodies (Government, state organs)

**10. What people or motivations encouraged you to stand as a candidate? (select all that apply)**

- Family members (parents, spouse, children, siblings)
- Community representatives (neighbors, leaders of community)
- Colleagues (man, woman)



- Leaders or activists of political party
- Social expectations towards me from my friends
- Quota for gender \ youth \ ethnic minorities
- Opportunity to raise issues of family, education, health, nutrition, culture etc.
- Ability to fight corruption and manage resources more effectively
- Opportunity to build my own political career.
- Other (clarify) \_\_\_\_\_

**11. Did anyone \ anything particularly discourage you from standing as a candidate? (select all that apply)**

- Family members (parents, spouse, children, siblings)
- Community representatives (neighbors, leaders of community)
- Colleagues (man, woman)
- Leader or activists of political party
- Social norms which don't support the idea of women political participation and leadership
- Other things (clarify) \_\_\_\_\_

**12. Have you ever held a formal leadership position in politics?**

- Yes
- No (end questionnaire)

**13. What exact leadership positions have you held?**

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## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDES

### WOMEN POLITICIANS

#### CONSENT

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[START THE RECORDING TO GET VERBAL CONSENT]

Do you agree to participate in this discussion today?                      Yes                      No

[IF THE RESPONDENTS SAY “YES”, CONTINUE DISCUSSION]

**\*\*Administer the questionnaire before starting the KII**

#### BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES: WOMEN CANDIDATES

**I. Many countries around the world have introduced gender quotas for candidates. What impact have quotas had on the number of women standing as candidates in the KR?**

*Did quotas play a role in your own nomination?*

*Do you support quotas as a measure to promote women in politics?*

*What kinds of women tend to benefit from quotas in the KR?*

**2. Does your party provide any financial support to its candidates?**

*If so, what is the nature of this support?*

*Is this support distributed evenly across candidates?*

*If not, what are the determinants of party support for particular candidates?*

**3. Did you have to raise any of your own funds for your political campaign?**

*If so, how did the amount of these funds compare to what you received from your party?*

*What kinds of actors donated to your campaign?*

*Do you think, in general, it is more difficult for women than men to raise campaign funding?*

**4. Does your party help candidates with their campaigns in any other ways?**

*If so, what does the party offer in the way of support?*

*Is this support distributed evenly across candidates?*

*If not, what are the determinants of party support for particular candidates?*

*Do parties place women in electable districts or list positions?*

**5. What is the media environment like for women candidates?**

*Do women candidates receive the same level of media coverage as men candidates?*

*Are women candidates treated differently than men in terms of the substance of media coverage?*

**BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES: WOMEN LEADERS**

**6. In general, there are fewer women than men in elected political positions. In your view, what are the main reasons for this?**

**7. After they are elected, do women have the same opportunities as men to take on positions of political leadership – e.g., as party leaders, parliamentary committee presidents, or cabinet ministers?**

*If not, what are the main reasons for this, in your view?*

**8. When women are appointed to leadership positions, what types of issues are women given responsibility for?**

**9. Are there any forms of institutional support for women after they have been elected? Examples might be training, mentorship, or staff.**

*If so, are these different in any ways from the forms of institutional support available to men?*

*Are these provided through formal channels, like parliaments or political parties, or just informally?*

**10. Is there a women’s caucus in parliament?**

*If so, what is its main role?*

*Have you been involved in its activities?*

*What type of issues this caucus promote? (social, economic, budget, etc)?*

*How effective has it been in advancing gender equality?*

**11. Based on what you have observed, are women taken seriously as political leaders?**

*How do their experiences compare to those of men?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be taken seriously?*

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS**

**12. Have you ever experienced any of the following behaviors when trying to participate in politics?**

1. Someone hit or beat you or assaulted you physically in some other way
2. Someone prevented you from leaving the house
3. Someone made threats against you and/or your family
4. Someone tried to rape you
5. Someone made unwanted sexual advances towards you
6. Someone attempted to destroy your property
7. Someone attempted to destroy your livelihood
8. Someone harassed you online
9. Someone hacked your email or social media accounts
10. Someone spread “fake news” about you that was sexual in nature
11. Someone spread “fake news” about you that was gendered in nature
12. Someone tried to kill you

*If so, who were the main perpetrators of these acts?*

*How did experiencing these acts affect your willingness to participate in politics?*

**13. Have you ever witnessed other women being targeted for trying to participate in politics?**

1. Someone tried to kill her
2. Someone hit or beat her or assaulted her physically in some other way
3. Someone prevented her from leaving the house
4. Someone made threats against her and/or her family
5. Someone tried to rape her
6. Someone made unwanted sexual advances towards her
7. Someone attempted to destroy her property
8. Someone attempted to destroy her livelihood
9. Someone harassed her online
10. Someone hacked her email or social media accounts
11. Someone spread “fake news” about her that was sexual in nature
12. Someone spread “fake news” about her that was gendered in nature

*If so, who were the main perpetrators of these acts?*

*How did experiencing these acts affect their willingness to participate in politics?*

**14. Based on what you have observed, is it common for women candidates to face violence, intimidation, or harassment on the campaign trail?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women’s ability to be elected?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be targeted?*

**15. Based on what you have observed, is it common for women leaders to face violence, intimidation, or harassment for their political work?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women’s ability to exercise their political functions?*

Are some types of women more likely than others to be targeted? RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**16. What kinds of policies or strategies do you think are needed to advance women’s political participation and leadership in the KR?** These could include actions by the government, political parties, or civil society, for example.

**17. What support do women in politics need (training, skills, resources) to be able to inform local/national government policy?**

## MEN POLITICIANS

### CONSENT

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[START THE RECORDING TO GET VERBAL CONSENT]

Do you agree to participate in this discussion today? Yes            No

[IF THE RESPONDENTS SAY “YES”, CONTINUE DISCUSSION]

**\*\*Administer the questionnaire before starting the KII**

**1. Many countries around the world have introduced gender quotas for candidates. What impact have quotas had on the number of women standing as candidates in the KR?**

*Do you support quotas as a measure to promote women in politics?*

*What kinds of women tend to benefit from quotas in the KR?*

**2. How do candidates finance their campaigns in the KR?**

*Does your party provide any funds to its candidates?*

*Is this support distributed evenly across candidates?*

*Do candidates have to raise their own funds for their campaigns?*

*Do you think, in general, it is more difficult for women than men to raise campaign funding?*

**3. What is the media environment like for women candidates?**

*Do women candidates receive the same level of media coverage as men candidates?*

*Are women candidates treated differently than men in terms of the substance of media coverage?*

**BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES: WOMEN LEADERS**

**4. In general, there are fewer women than men in elected political positions. In your view, what are the main reasons for this?**

**5. After they are elected, do women have the same opportunities as men to take on positions of political leadership – e.g., as party leaders, parliamentary committee presidents, or cabinet ministers?**

*If not, what are the main reasons for this, in your view?*

**6. When women are appointed to leadership positions, what types of issues are women given responsibility for?**

**7. Based on what you have observed, are women taken seriously as political leaders?**

*How do their experiences compare to those of men?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be taken seriously?*

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS**

**8. Based on what you have observed, is it common for women candidates to face violence, intimidation, or harassment on the campaign trail?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women's ability to be elected?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be targeted?*

**9. Based on what you have observed, is it common for women leaders to face violence, intimidation, or harassment for their political work?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women's ability to exercise their political functions?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be targeted?*

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**10. What kinds of policies or strategies do you think are needed to advance women's political participation and leadership in the KR?** These could include actions by the government, political parties, or civil society, for example.

## **POLITICAL PARTY LEADERS**

### **CONSENT**

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[IF THE RESPONDENTS SAY "YES", CONTINUE DISCUSSION]

**\*\*Administer the questionnaire before starting the KII**

BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES: WOMEN PARTY MEMBERS

**1. In general, there are fewer women than men who join political parties. In your view, what are the main reasons for this?**

**2. Does your party have any special initiatives to attract women members?**

*If so, do these differ in any way from efforts to attract men members?*

**3. Are party meetings equally accessible to women and men?**

*At what kinds of locations are party meetings held?*

*At what times of the day are party meetings usually scheduled?*

*Does the party offer childcare for members during its meetings?*

**4. Is there a women's wing in your political party?**

*If so, what is the main role of the women's wing?*

*Does the party provide any financial support or other resources to the women's wing?*

*Can the women's wing give input on the party platform?*

*Can the women's wing suggest political candidates?*

**5. If not, have there ever been discussions in the party about a women's wing?**

**6. Do women have representation in the party's executive committee?**

*If so, what kinds of positions do they hold?*

*Does the party have any policies to ensure women's participation in party leadership?*

## BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES: WOMEN CANDIDATES

**7. Many countries around the world have introduced gender quotas for candidates. What impact have quotas had on the number of women standing as candidates in the KR?**

*Do you support quotas as a measure to promote women in politics?*

*What kinds of women tend to benefit from quotas in the KR?*

**8. Does your party provide any financial support to its candidates?**

*If so, what is the nature of this support?*

*Is this support distributed evenly across candidates?*

*If not, what are the determinants of party support for particular candidates?*

**9. Does your party help candidates with their campaigns in any other ways?**

*If so, what does the party offer in the way of support?*

*Is this support distributed evenly across candidates?*

*If not, what are the determinants of party support for particular candidates?*

## BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES: WOMEN LEADERS

**10. In general, there are fewer women than men in elected political positions. In your view, what are the main reasons for this?**

**11. After they are elected, do women have the same opportunities as men to take on positions of political leadership – e.g., as party leaders, parliamentary committee presidents, or cabinet ministers?**

*If not, what are the main reasons for this, in your view?*

**12. When women are appointed to leadership positions, what types of issues are women given responsibility for?**

**13. Based on what you have observed, are women taken seriously as political leaders?**

*How do their experiences compare to those of men?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be taken seriously?*

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

**14. Based on what you have observed, is it common for women candidates to face violence, intimidation, or harassment on the campaign trail?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women's ability to be elected?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be targeted?*

**I5. Based on what you have observed, is it common for women leaders to face violence, intimidation, or harassment for their political work?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women's ability to exercise their political functions?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be targeted?*

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**I6. What kinds of policies or strategies do you think are needed to advance women's political participation and leadership in the KR?** These could include actions by the government, political parties, or civil society, for example.

**ELECTORAL OFFICIALS**

**CONSENT**

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[START THE RECORDING TO GET VERBAL CONSENT]

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[IF THE RESPONDENTS SAY "YES", CONTINUE DISCUSSION]

BACKGROUND

### **1. What is your role in the electoral process?**

BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES: WOMEN VOTERS

### **2. Do women register to vote at the same rates as men?**

*If not, what are some of the reasons that women are less likely to register as voters?*

### **3. Do women turn out to vote at the same rates as men?**

*If not, what are some of the reasons that women are less likely to turn out to vote?*

### **4. Are polling places equally accessible to women and men?**

*Are polling places segregated by gender?*

*Are there measures in place to increase accessibility to women?*

### **5. Are women able to cast their votes in a free, secret, and secure manner?**

*If not, what are some of the key challenges to women exercising their full right to vote?*

BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES: WOMEN CANDIDATES

### **6. Many countries around the world have introduced gender quotas for candidates. What impact have quotas had on the number of women standing as candidates in the KR?**

*Do political parties respect the quota requirements?*

*What does the electoral management body do, if anything, to ensure quota compliance?*

*Based on what you have observed, what kinds of women tend to benefit from quotas in the KR?*

### **7. Have quotas make a difference in terms of women's representation and political voice?**

### **8. In general, there are fewer women than men in elected political positions. In your view, what are the main reasons for this?**

## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

### **9. Based on what you have observed, is it common for women voters to face violence, intimidation, or harassment on the campaign trail?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women's ability to be elected?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be targeted?*

### **10. Based on what you have observed, is it common for women candidates to face violence, intimidation, or harassment on the campaign trail?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women's ability to be elected?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be targeted?*

### **11. Based on what you have observed, is it common for women election workers to face violence, intimidation, or harassment?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women's ability to facilitate and/or observe the electoral process?*

### **12. Does the electoral management body monitor and/or respond to incidents of gender-based violence during elections?**

*If so, what are the details of these interventions?*

*What is the impact, if any, of these interventions?* RECOMMENDATIONS

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- 13. What kinds of policies or strategies do you think are needed to advance women's political participation and leadership in the KR?** These could include actions by the government, political parties, the electoral management body, or civil society, for example.

## WPPL EXPERTS

### CONSENT

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[IF THE RESPONDENTS SAY "YES", CONTINUE DISCUSSION]

### BACKGROUND

- 1. How are you involved in issues related to women's political participation and leadership?**
- 2. How many years have you been active in this field?**

### BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES: WOMEN CANDIDATES

- 3. Many countries around the world have introduced gender quotas for candidates. What impact have quotas had on the number of women standing as candidates in the KR?**

*Do you support quotas as a measure to promote women in politics?*

*What kinds of women tend to benefit from quotas in the KR?*

**4. What sort of financial support, if any, do women receive for their campaigns?**

*Do parties provide any financial support to their candidates?*

*Is this support distributed evenly among women and men?*

*Do women have to raise any of their own funds for their political campaign?*

*Do you think, in general, it is more difficult for women than men to raise campaign funding?*

**5. Do parties help women candidates with their campaigns in any other ways?**

*If so, what does the party offer in the way of support?*

*Is this support distributed evenly across women and men?*

**6. What is the media environment like for women candidates?**

*Do women candidates receive the same level of media coverage as men candidates?*

*Are women candidates treated differently than men in terms of the substance of media coverage?*

**7. Do civil society organizations provide any resources or support to women candidates?**

*If so, what is the nature of these organizations?*

*What kinds of resources or support do they provide?*

**BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES: WOMEN LEADERS**

**8. In general, there are fewer women than men in elected political positions. In your view, what are the main reasons for this?**

**9. After they are elected, do women have the same opportunities as men to take on positions of political leadership – e.g., as party leaders, parliamentary committee presidents, or cabinet ministers?**

*If not, what are the main reasons for this, in your view?*

**10. When women are appointed to leadership positions, what types of issues are women given responsibility for?**

**11. Are there any forms of institutional support for women after they have been elected? Examples might be training, mentorship, or staff.**

*If so, are these different in any ways from the forms of institutional support available to men?*

*Are these provided through formal channels, like parliaments or political parties, or just informally?*

**12. Is there a women’s caucus in parliament?**

*If so, what is its main role?*

*How effective has it been in advancing gender equality?*

**13. Based on what you have observed, are women taken seriously as political leaders?**

*How do their experiences compare to those of men?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be taken seriously?*

**BARRIERS AND OPPORTUNITIES: WOMEN IN CIVIL SOCIETY**

**14. In many countries, women are very active participants in civil society. In your view, is this also true in your country?**

*What are the key barriers to women’s civil society participation?*

*Do civil society organizations engage women with diverse backgrounds?*

**15. Are there any powerful women’s organizations in civil society in the KR?**

*If so, what are their particular areas of focus?*

*Have they been successful in getting women’s voices heard?*

*What kinds of barriers do they face in getting women’s voices heard?*

**16. Are there any official women’s organizations connected to the government?**

*If so, have they been successful in getting women’s voices heard?*

**17. Thinking about women in civil society more broadly, are there opportunities for women in civil society to inform government decision-making?**

*If so, are there official channels for communicating with and influencing the work of the government?*

*How effective are these channels for reflecting the voices of women in civil society?*

**18. Are there any civil society organizations that actively seek to advance women’s civic and political rights?**

*If so, do these organizations mainly focus on women as voters, candidates, or leaders?*

*What types of activities do they engage in to promote WPPL?*

*What impact, if any, have these activities had on WPPL in the KR?*



**19. Are there any civil society organizations that actively seek to repress women’s civic and political rights?**

*If so, what kinds of organizations are these?*

*How vocal and effective are their efforts in restricting WPPL in the KR?*

**VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS**

**20. Based on what you have observed, is it common for women candidates to face violence, intimidation, or harassment on the campaign trail?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women’s ability to be elected?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be targeted?*

**21. Based on what you have observed, is it common for women leaders to face violence, intimidation, or harassment for their political work?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women’s ability to exercise their political functions?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be targeted?*

**22. Based on what you have observed, is it common for women in civil society – including women human rights defenders – to face violence, intimidation, or harassment for their political work?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women’s ability to participate in civil society?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be targeted?*

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**23. What kinds of policies or strategies do you think are needed to advance women’s political participation and leadership in the KR?** These could include actions by the government, political parties, or civil society, for example.

**24. What support do women in politics need (training, skills, resources) to be able to inform local and national government policy?**

## DONORS AND IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS

### CONSENT

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The purpose of our discussion today is to hear about your experiences and views on barriers and opportunities for women in politics. NORC at the University of Chicago is non-political research organization, and we are not related to the government any political parties. We are completely neutral on all of the issues we'll be talking about; we're just here to learn about your experiences.

Our discussion should take approximately 60 minutes, but if your time is more limited, I can prioritize my questions [sample priority questions marked in bold]. Your participation does not involve any risks other than what you would encounter in daily life. Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can choose not to answer a question or leave the discussion at any time without providing a reason.

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[START THE RECORDING TO GET VERBAL CONSENT]

Do you agree to participate in this discussion today? Yes      No

[IF THE RESPONDENTS SAY "YES", CONTINUE DISCUSSION]

### BACKGROUND

**1. How is your organization involved in issues related to women's political participation and leadership in the KR?**

**2. What is your role within the organization?**

### DONOR AND PARTNER ACTIVITIES

**3. What kinds of WPPL programming has your organization supported in the KR?**

*Why did the organization choose these particular priority areas?*

*How effective was this programming in terms of its design and impact?*

## STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

### **4. In the KR, who are the main actors, stakeholders, or institutions interested in advancing WPPL?**

*What is your impression of this programing in terms of its design and impact?*

*What strategies do they favor for advancing WPPL?*

*Do they work together to advance WPPL?*

*If so, can you give some examples of joint activities?*

### **5. In the KR, who are the main actors, stakeholders, or institutions that oppose advancing WPPL?**

*What strategies do they use to oppose advancing WPPL?*

## LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### **6. Based on your experiences, what are the major barriers to advancing WPPL in the KR?**

*Have donors/partners focused adequately on these barriers?*

*In your view, which interventions have been most effective?*

*In your view, which interventions have been least effective?*

### **7. Based on your experiences, what more could donors/partners do in this space?**

*In your view, what are some promising opportunities for action?*

**8. In general, what kinds of policies or strategies do you think are needed to advance women's political participation and leadership in the KR?** These could include actions by the government, political parties, or civil society, for example.

## USAID STAFF

### CONSENT

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[START THE RECORDING TO GET VERBAL CONSENT]

Do you agree to participate in this discussion today? Yes          No

[IF THE RESPONDENTS SAY "YES", CONTINUE DISCUSSION]

## BACKGROUND

### **1. What is your role at USAID?**

### **2. How long have you been working at USAID and elsewhere on issues related to WPPL?**

#### DONOR AND PARTNER ACTIVITIES

### **3. What kinds of WPPL programming has USAID supported in the KR?**

*Why did the organization choose these particular priority areas?*

*Can you provide some details on specific activities?*

*How effective was this programming in terms of its design and impact?*

*Does the Mission have any additional programming planned related to WPPL?*

### **4. Are there any activities by other donors or implementers that you think have been effective in advancing WPPL in the KR?**

*If so, can you provide some details on these activities?*

*What was your impression of this programing in terms of its design and impact?*

## STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

**5. In the KR, who are the main actors, stakeholders, or institutions interested in advancing WPPL?**

*What strategies do they favor for advancing WPPL?*

*Do they work together to advance WPPL?*

*If so, can you give some examples of joint activities?*

**6. In the KR, who are the main actors, stakeholders, or institutions that oppose advancing WPPL?**

*What strategies do they use to oppose advancing WPPL?*

**LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**7. Based on your experiences, what are the major barriers to advancing WPPL in the KR?**

*Have donors/partners focused adequately on these barriers?*

*In your view, which interventions have been most effective?*

*In your view, which interventions have been least effective?*

**8. Based on your experiences, what more could USAID do in this space?**

*In your view, what are some promising opportunities for action?*

*Are there any partnerships that you think would be particularly fruitful?*

**9. In general, what kinds of policies or strategies do you think are needed to advance women’s political participation and leadership in the KR?** These could include actions by the government, political parties, or civil society, for example.

**FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDES**

**WOMEN IN POLITICAL PARTIES (NATIONAL)**

**CONSENT**

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Do you agree to being recorded for today's interview? Yes      No

[Start recording if all participants all agreed to recording]

## INTRODUCTION

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## FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

### **1. How active are women in political parties in the KR?**

*How important are the women's sections of political parties?*

*What is their primary purpose?*

*What type of support, if any, do they receive from the party?*

*Do the women's sections play any role in candidate selection?*

*Do the women's sections have any influence over the party platform?*

### **2. Are party meetings equally accessible to women and men?**

*At what kinds of locations are party meetings held?*

*At what times of the day are party meetings usually scheduled?*

*Does the party offer childcare for members during its meetings?*

### **3. What support, if any, does your party give to women candidates?**

*Do they encourage women to run for office?*

*Do they provide funding or training to women candidates?*

*Do they place women in electable districts or list positions?*

### **4. Do women in political parties face violence, intimidation, or harassment for their political work?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women's ability to participate in civil society?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be targeted?*

### **5. What is the purpose of the Women's MP Forum? Council?**

*How and why it was established?*

*What are the benefits of participation in the Forum? Council?*

*What are some of the major achievements of the Forum? Council?*

*What challenges has each body faced?*

*How were challenges addressed or overcome?*

### **6. What policies or strategies do you think are needed to give women a greater voice in political parties – and politics more generally – in the KR?**

### **7. What support do women need (e.g. training, skills, resources) to be able to better inform local and national government policy?**

## **LOCALLY ELECTED WOMEN**

### **CONSENT**

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**\*\*Administer the survey before the FGD starts**

## FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

### I. How active are women in local politics in the KR?

*Why did you decide to run as a candidate in local elections?*

*Did anyone particularly encourage you to stand as a candidate?*

*Did anyone particularly discourage you from standing as a candidate?*

*How important is local politics as an entry point for women leaders, compared to men?*



## **2. What support, if any, does your party give to women candidates?**

*Do they encourage women to run for office?*

*Do they provide funding or training to women candidates?*

*Do parties tend to support certain types of women candidates over others?*

## **3. Based on what you have observed, are women taken seriously as local leaders?**

*How do their experiences compare to those of men?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be taken seriously?*

*Do women have equal chances as men to be elected as (head of the village or deputy of the local kenesh)?*

## **4. Do women in local politics face violence, intimidation, or harassment for their political work?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women's ability to participate in civil society?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be targeted?*

## **5. What policies or strategies do you think are needed to give women a greater voice in local politics – and politics more generally – in the KR?**

## **6. What support women need (training, skills, resources) to be able to inform local government policy?**

## **LOCALLY ELECTED MEN**

### CONSENT

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**\*\*Administer the survey before the FGD starts**

## FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

**1. In general, there are fewer women than men in elected political positions. In your view, what are the main reasons for this?**

**2. How active are women in local politics in the KR?**

**3. What support, if any, does your party give to women candidates?**

*Do they encourage women to run for office?*

*Do they provide funding or training to women candidates?*

*Do parties tend to support certain types of women candidates over others?*

**4. Based on what you have observed, are women taken seriously as local leaders?**

*How do their experiences compare to those of men?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be taken seriously?*

*Do women have equal chances as men to be elected as (head of the village or deputy of the local kenesh) mayor?*

**5. Do women in local politics face violence, intimidation, or harassment for their political work?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women's ability to participate in civil society?*

*Are some types of women more likely than others to be targeted?*

**6. What policies or strategies do you think are needed to give women a greater voice in local politics – and politics more generally – in the KR?**

**7. What support do men need to be able to inform local government policy?**

**LOCAL MEN AND WOMEN ACTIVISTS/VOTERS**

CONSENT

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## FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

### **1. Are women able to cast their votes in a free, secret and secure manner?**

*If not, what are some of the key challenges to women exercising their full right to vote?*

### **2. In general, there are fewer women than men in elected political positions. In your view, what are the main reasons for this? (norms, individual, institutional)**

### **3. How active are women in political parties in the KR?**

### **4. After they are elected, do women have the same opportunities as men to take on positions of political leadership?**

### **5. Do women in political parties or political leadership face violence, intimidation, or harassment for their political work?**

*If so, what do these attacks look like?*

*Who are the main perpetrators?*

*Do these attacks affect women's ability to participate in civil society?*

### **6. What policies or strategies do you think are needed to give women a greater voice in political parties – and politics more generally – in the KR?**