



## VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS IN GEORGIA

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### RESEARCH GOAL AND METHODOLOGY

A national survey on the violence against women in politics in Georgia was conducted by CRRC-Georgia with the initiative of UN Women. The survey aimed at examining the experiences of women in politics in Georgia. Namely, the survey focused on studying the factors that facilitate and/or obstruct women’s engagement in politics, including the forms of violence against women in politics, women’s experiences with seeking support, and the impact of violence on women’s engagement in politics and leadership.

The survey used qualitative as well as quantitative methods to better study women’s experiences and evaluate the situation evolving around women in terms of violence. In total, during the years

2020–2021, 10 interviews were conducted with experts under the qualitative research component, as well as 15 interviews with women in politics who experienced violence during their career. In total, 151 women took part in the survey, 104 of whom represented the city assemblies (*sakrebulo*) or local governments elected for the period 2017–2021; nine women were Members of Parliament between 2016 and 2020; and 50 women ran for office in the 2020 parliamentary elections. In order to better interpret the findings of this stage of the survey, 12 participants of the survey and three high-level appointed officials took part in the in-depth interviews, which gave them the opportunity to speak about their own experiences of violence. This brief presents the main research findings and recommendations.

### VIOLENCE EXPERIENCED BY WOMEN IN POLITICS

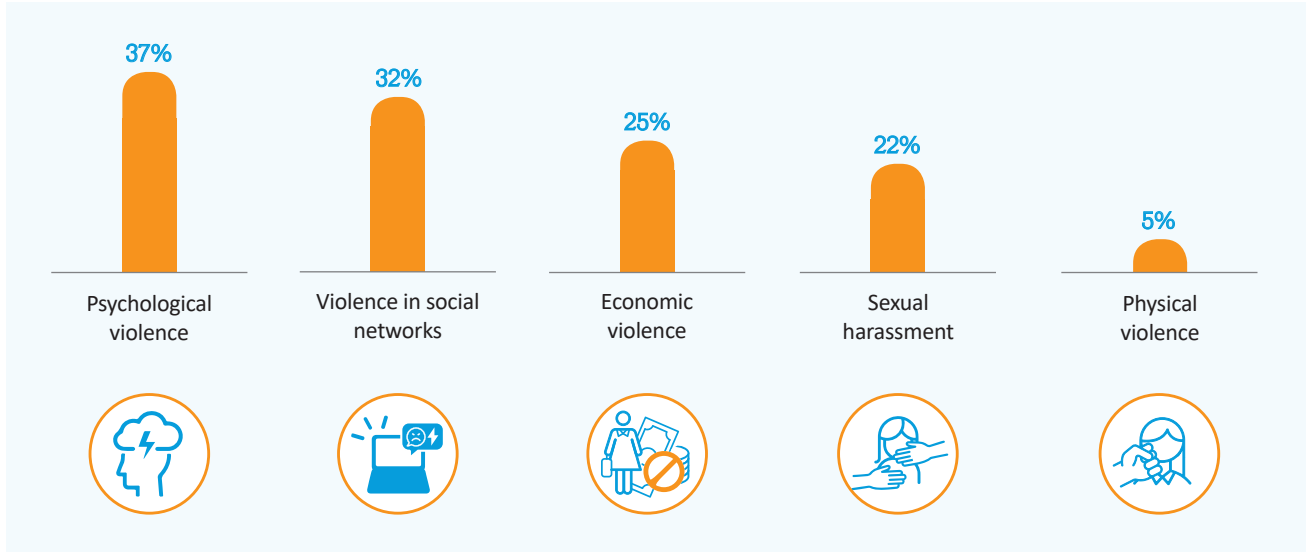


**More than half of the respondents (54 per cent) have experienced some form of harassment or violence during their tenure as an appointed official or during their campaign work.**

Less than half (48 per cent) of the representatives of the local governments remarked that they have been experiencing some form of harassment or violence during their tenure, while this share increases by up to one third among the women who ran for office in the 2020 parliamentary elections. In addition,

almost all women Members of Parliament (except for two) highlighted that they have experienced at least one form of harassment. The most common forms of violence against women in politics are psychological violence and violence on social media (Figure 1).

**FIGURE 1:**  
 The most widespread forms of violence against women in politics<sup>1</sup>



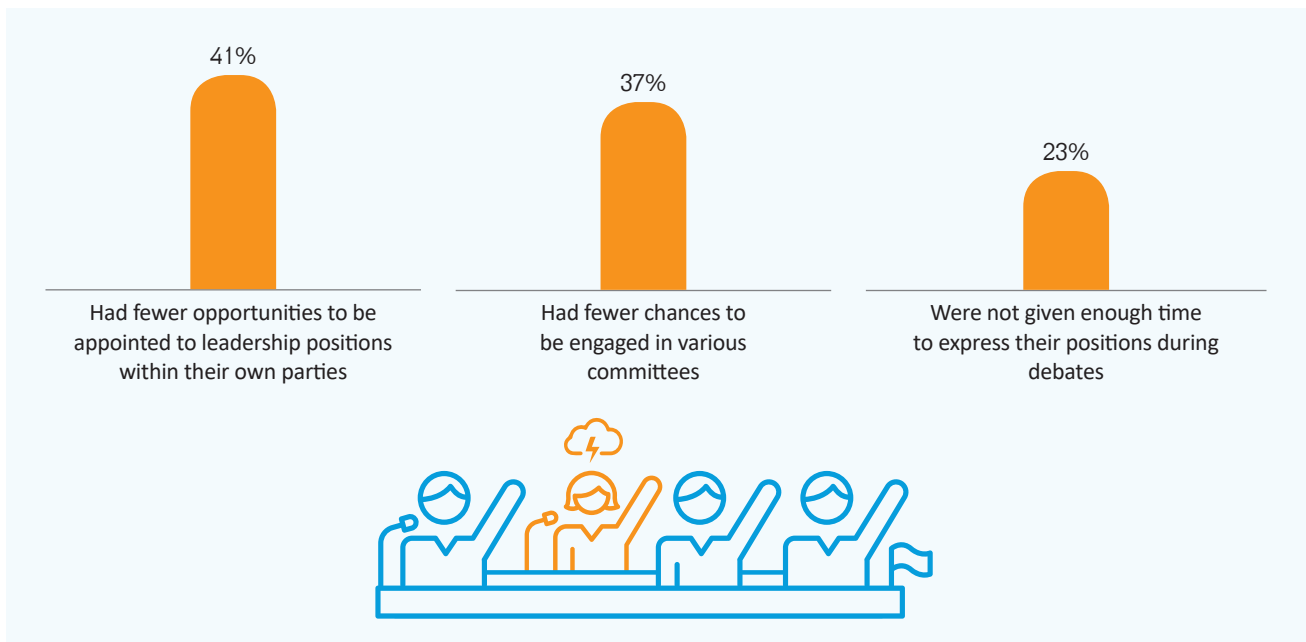
Note: Economic violence implies denying any funds or other resources to which one is entitled or intentionally destroying one's property.



**Single or divorced women who are actively engaged in politics are more likely to become the targets of violence than other women.**

Almost one third of the respondents believe that threats, intimidation, harassment and hate speech are more significantly used against women politicians. More than half of respondents (56 per cent) have personally experienced violence at work, in addition to experiencing various forms of discrimination (Figure 2).

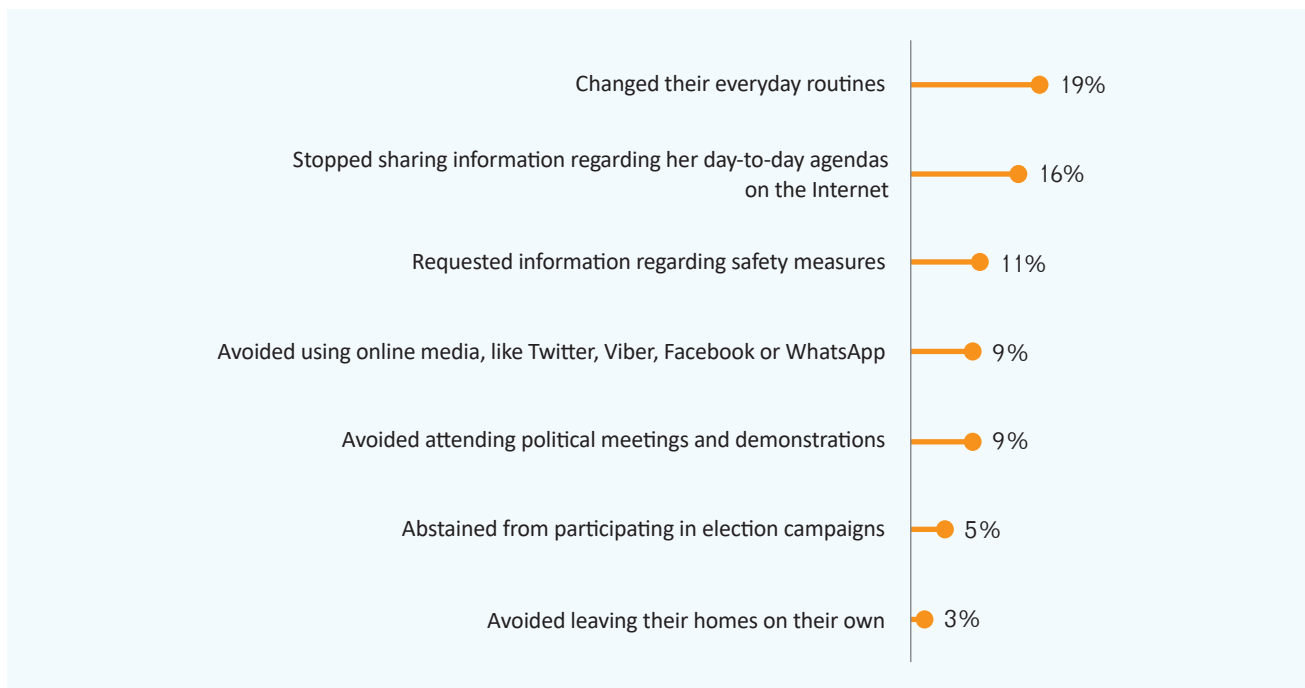
**FIGURE 2:**  
 Women's experiences of discrimination during the course of their political career



**THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE ON WOMEN IN POLITICS AND THE WAYS THEY SEEK SUPPORT**

Violence experienced women, switched in politics (41 per cent), have taken certain measures to protect themselves. As a result of having experienced violence, women in politics often take certain measures to protect themselves (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3:**  
 Protective measures taken by women in politics



**Both the qualitative and quantitative studies show that when women raise their voices against violence, it empowers other women politicians too.**

Experiencing violence negatively impacts the psychological well-being of women in politics, with 37 per cent of respondents noting that their mental health has deteriorated as a result.

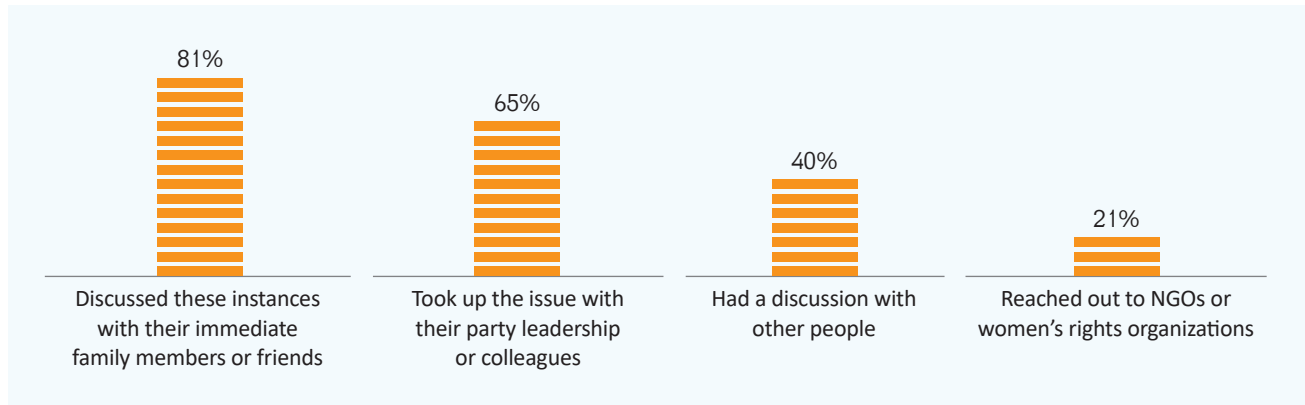
The largest share of the women politicians that participated in the study (60 per cent) agrees or fully agrees with the statement that speaking out about the harassment and intimidation that they experience helps other women engaged in politics and encourages them to also speak up.



**More than half (52 per cent) of the respondents who had experienced violence have never reported the case to the authorities.**

When experiencing violence, women mostly talk about this experience with their family members and friends (Figure 4).

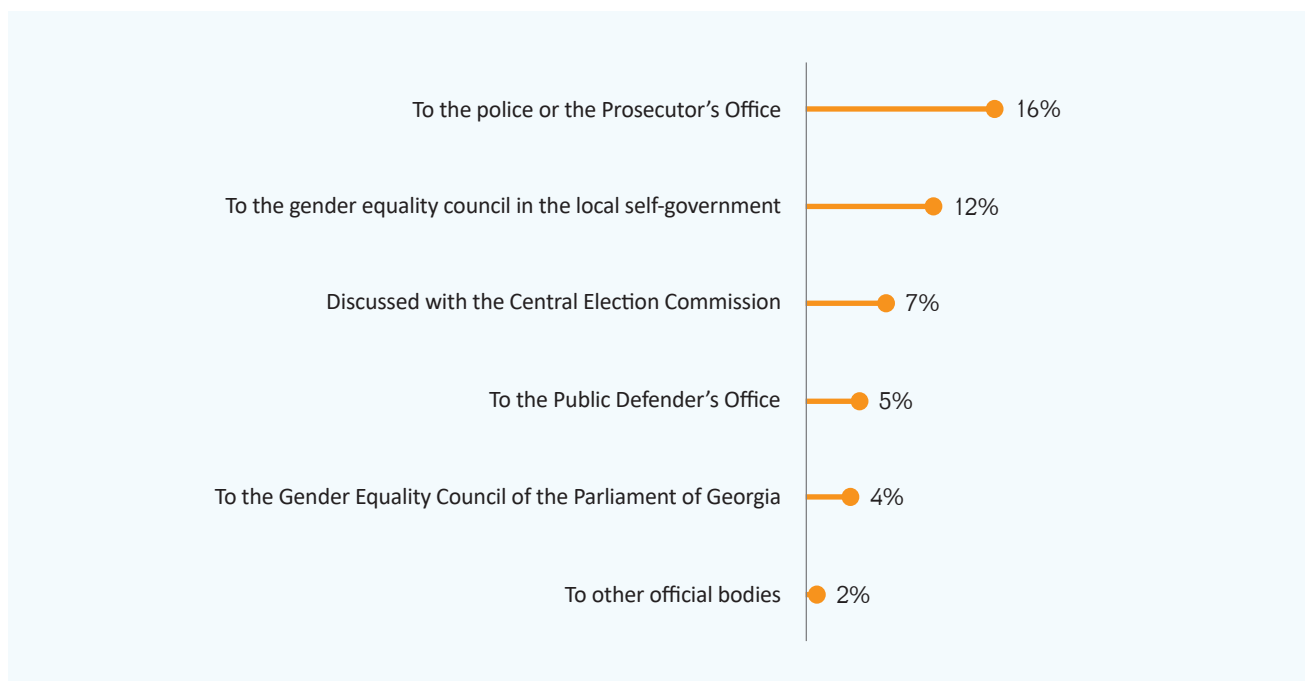
**FIGURE 4:**  
 Help-seeking behaviour taken by women in politics



Note: This question was asked to only those respondents who noted that they felt like victims of any instances of violence.

Those who reported an incident of violence did so to a variety of official entities (Figure 5). Those who did not report an incident of violence explain their inactivity with the argument that their case required a political response and not legal proceedings (43 per cent) or remarked that they were able to tackle the issue themselves (36 per cent), while 21 per cent did not consider the incident relevant or serious enough.

**FIGURE 5:**  
 Authorities to which women have reported a case of violence



The qualitative study shows that the factors obstructing reporting on violence are the lack of trust towards the respective authorities, the fear of disrupting the overall image of the party and the fear that women's stories will not be taken seriously enough.

**MECHANISMS TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS**

Assessments of women engaged in politics regarding the existing legislation, mechanisms and services to respond to violence are rather polarized. A larger share of the respondents disagree rather than agree with the opinion that in Georgia, there are effective mechanisms to help avoid cases of violence against women in politics (47 per cent) and to effectively respond to such incidents.

Respondents of the qualitative study believe that significant steps have been taken to enhance the work towards the elimination of violence against women. They see execution mechanisms and services to be a bigger problem than the legislation itself.

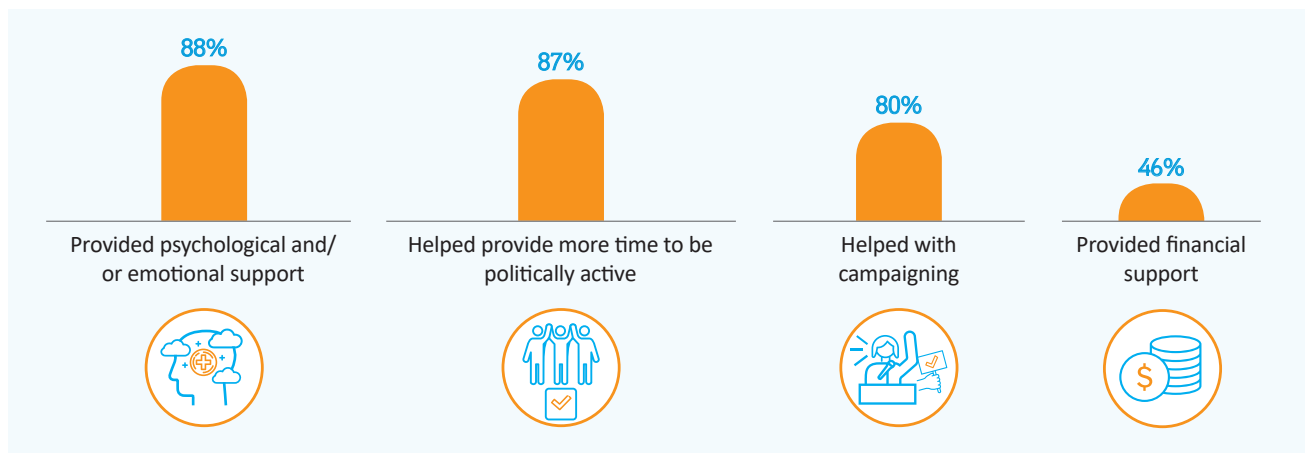
Women in politics believe that political will is a necessary prerequisite to effectively investigate the incidents of violence against women in politics.

**SUPPORT FOR AND BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS**

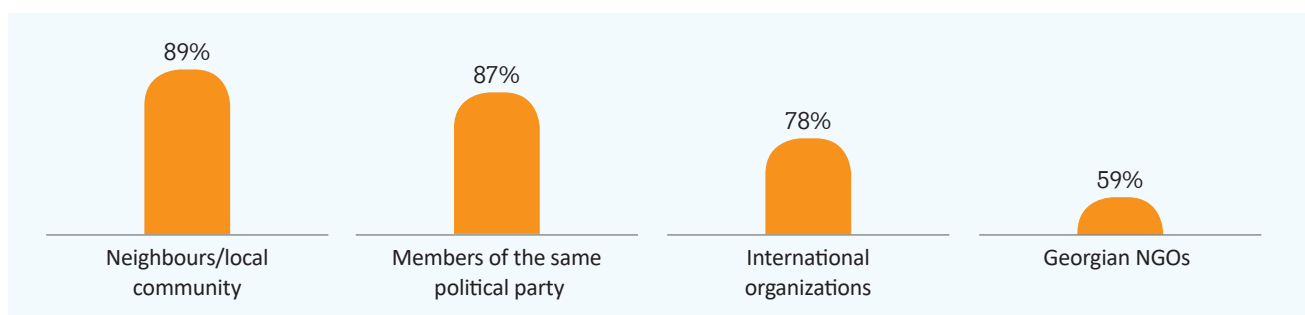
For the majority of the surveyed women in politics, the main source of support in their political career came from their family (Figure 6). The majority of respondents also received support from their

local community, the members of their own political party, and international and local non-governmental organizations (Figure 7).

**FIGURE 6:**  
 Family support provided to women in politics



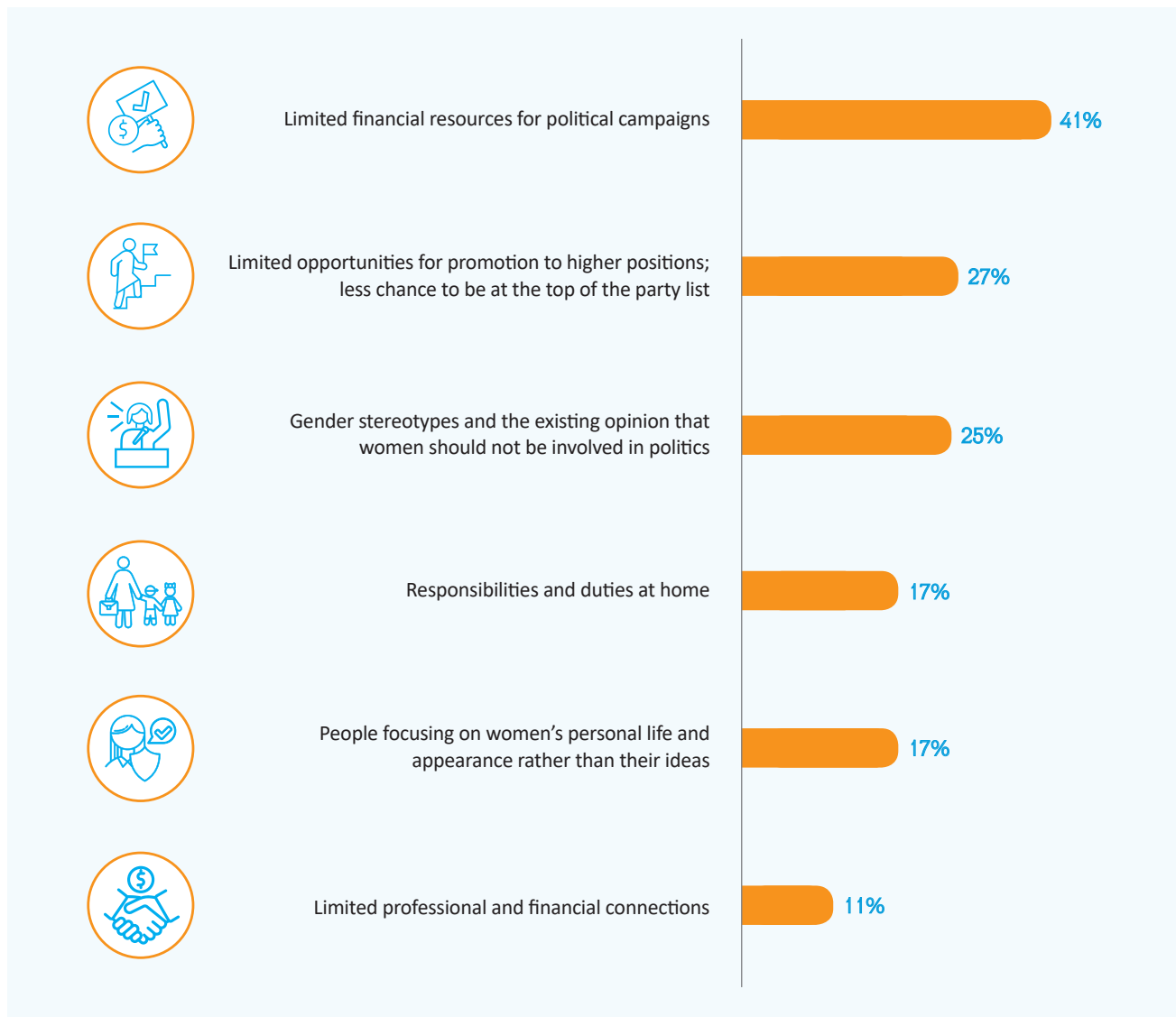
**FIGURE 7:**  
 Non-family sources of support received by women in politics



Limited financial resources are considered to be the biggest barrier for female candidates, while for the women representing local governments, opportunities or limited opportunities for promotion to higher-level positions was mentioned as a similarly significant barrier alongside limited financial resources (Figure 8).

Despite the fact that the largest share of party-related work during the parliamentary or municipal elections is carried out by female activists (e.g. door-to-door canvassing, organizational or office work, organizing meetings), they are rarely given the chance to be promoted and rarely end up at the top of party lists.

**FIGURE 8:**  
 Barriers that women in politics face in Georgia



On the other side, the lack of family support was named as one of the obstructing factors discouraging other women who might want to engage in politics.

Domestic work, such as taking care of their homes, children, parents and partners, gives women less time to actively engage in politics. This problem has deteriorated even further during the pandemic.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of both the quantitative and qualitative studies show that violence against women engaged in politics in Georgia is a rather widespread phenomenon that, despite its prevalence or severity, rarely becomes a topic for public discussion. The study shows that acknowledging this problem and having relevant discussions around it significantly empower the women who otherwise would not dare to discuss this issue, despite having experienced it themselves. **For these reasons, it is recommended that the issue of violence against women in politics is given relevant attention from the representatives of the Government as well as political parties, international organizations, the Central Election Commission and the media**<sup>2</sup> and that it is regularly discussed on all levels by both the central and local governments and political parties, as well as at public debates, particularly during the pre-election period when the risk of violence is significantly higher.

As incidents of violence have been reported not only between the representatives of different parties but also within the parties, in order to protect the women engaged in politics, it is recommended that **the political parties create intra- and inter-party mechanisms** (among them, codes of conduct and response mechanisms to prevent violence) and publicly condemn any violence practised on social networks.<sup>3</sup>

The study shows that the lack of trust towards the respective authorities and the lack of instances where effective investigation was carried out suppress the overall level at which violence is reported by women engaged in politics. Instances of effective investigation are very important for this reason and will **significantly increase the trust towards the existing system**,

thereby facilitating growth in the level of reporting. In order to increase the levels of trust and reporting, it is also important to **increase the awareness of the representatives of law enforcement authorities** regarding the violence perpetrated against women engaged in politics and to strengthen the authorities' opportunities to effectively investigate, prosecute and initiate legal proceedings.<sup>4</sup>

Women engaged in politics and the experts in the field consider **strengthening of the state institutions** (particularly the Inter-Agency Commission on Gender Equality, Violence against Women and Domestic Violence, the Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia, the local gender equality councils operating at the self-government level and the Public Defender's Office) to be a critically crucial aspect of keeping women politicians safe. Coordinating the work of these institutions with other authorities will significantly **facilitate the collection and monitoring of data on the violence against women in politics and help plan strategies for respective prevention on the national level**.<sup>5</sup>

Participants of the survey believe that non-governmental organizations play an important role in the improvement of mechanisms to prevent violence. It is recommended that civil society continues **to support and empower the victims and survivors of violence to help them raise their voices to speak about the existing problems and to increase the awareness of not only women but also men** regarding these issues. It is of vital importance that the women in politics break the silence and start to speak up about the problems, as the promotion of gender equality and the elimination of gender-based violence are equally important in both politics and public life.<sup>6</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> In the figures, the response percentages may exceed 100 per cent, as the respondents were permitted to give multiple answers.

<sup>2</sup> Dubravka Šimonović, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics* (2018), para. 82. A/73/301. Available at <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1640483?ln=en>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., para. 85.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., para. 83(k).

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., para. 83(e).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., para. 89.