



# **Kosovo's Vibrant Democracy:**

## **Closing the deficit in women's full participation**

**Gender Assessment**

July 2021

# 1. Foreword

*“Democracy in any country is difficult, but without women, democracy in any country is impossible.”*

— *NDI Chair, Madeleine Albright*

The February 2021 snap parliamentary elections marked the beginning of a new chapter for Kosovo. For the first time since Kosovo's independence in 2008, a single political party has a majority in the Assembly. It also elected a female president for the second time and a record 43 women representatives to the 120 seat National Assembly. Public opinion research shows that women are perceived as being more “honest,” “compassionate,” and “intelligent” than men by a significant proportion of voters, indicating an opening for women to position themselves as well-placed to tackle some of the most pressing challenges facing Kosovo today.

Despite these clear signs of progress, there is still much to be done to ensure the full participation of women in Kosovo’s democracy. The total number of women members of parliament (MPs) in Kosovo is still well below parity, and more work is needed at all levels of society to empower women economically, socially, and politically. The success of Kosovo’s democracy depends on the full and equal participation of women.

The legislative quota continues to play an important role in ensuring that women are well-represented in Kosovo’s National Assembly, but it is encouraging that a record 34 of the 43 women elected gained their seats without the quota—they secured seats in parliament by receiving more votes than their competitors. It is also encouraging to see the election of Kosovo’s second woman president, the appointment of two women deputy prime ministers, the selection of women for one-third of cabinet positions, and as chair of eight out of 14 parliamentary committees. There was also an important increase in the engagement of women in the election, both as voters and campaigners. The concerted effort by the winning party to better engage women and youth during the election may serve as both an inspiration—and a warning—to others about ignoring the voting power held by these two groups.

In 2015, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) undertook a gender assessment to analyze the state of women’s political participation in Kosovo and identified significant gaps in Kosovo’s progress towards achieving full and equal participation. Political parties included women on their election lists to meet the quota but were doing little else to cultivate and empower women as leaders. Women in parties expressed their frustration at the hostile political environment and the challenges in acquiring financial and political support.

This 2021 assessment sought to evaluate areas where progress has been achieved since 2015, and identify persistent obstacles impeding parity in women’s political participation and leadership. While women’s political participation has since made considerable gains, much more remains to be done. This assessment reveals that few of the most significant barriers have changed over the past six years. Major impediments to women’s participation in politics persist across parties which have failed to provide the necessary political, financial, and mentoring support to women.

Political parties have much more to do to include, elevate, and empower women. Candidate recruitment and nomination processes within parties remain opaque at best, and women candidates struggle to access the same donor and fundraising networks as men.

Kosovo's patriarchal norms present a significant barrier. The media publish stories focusing on women candidates' appearances and, in the 2021 campaign period, the majority of coverage was of male candidates. Violence against women in politics remains a serious and pervasive issue that political parties deny or ignore altogether.

Women take on a disproportionately high level of household chores and caregiving, a significant barrier to workforce participation, let alone political activity. The low rate of women's labor participation—prior to the pandemic, 31 percent of women were employed, compared to 65 percent of men—is a major barrier to economic independence. Many of these barriers have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

Kosovo has not harmonized two conflicting laws related to gender representation. The first—the law on general elections—requires party lists to be composed of at least 30 percent of both genders and at least 30 percent of members of parliament to be of the less represented gender. The other—the law on gender equality—sets a 50 percent gender quota across all legislative, executive, and public institutions. In practice, only the election quota is implemented

NDI public opinion polling revealed that perceptions of women as leaders are largely positive, indicating a potential turning point for women's political empowerment. The 2021 parliamentary elections are evidence that political parties are beginning to realize what is at stake. Women voters played a decisive role in determining the outcome of the election, with exit polls estimating that 61 percent of women voted for Vetevendosje Movement (LVV). It is increasingly clear that parties cannot take them for granted. If political parties in Kosovo take the recommendations outlined here seriously, they can go well beyond paying lip service and appeal to a powerful voter base.

Through this analysis, NDI underscored the need for widespread, institutionalized change to sustain the momentum from these recent elections. The recommendations and conclusions drawn from the research of this assessment, which included research, interviews, and focus groups, can inform political parties, government institutions, media, and civil society actors as they continue their work towards lasting change.

NDI extends its appreciation to the assessment team which included Birgitta Ohlsson, Director of Political Parties at NDI, former Swedish Member of Cabinet and Member of Parliament, Sonja Lokar, an expert on gender equality and former Member of Parliament of Slovenia; Eva Barboni, an international campaign strategist and founder and CEO of Atalanta; Pranvera Lipovica, NDI Program Director; and Nita Bicurri, NDI Program Manager.

The findings and recommendations in this report offer a roadmap to bring women fully into Kosovo's political landscape, especially in leadership positions, and ensure more equitable responses to citizen priorities. Thirteen years after independence, it is well past time to take these steps to address this deficit in Kosovo's democracy.

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### 3. Methodology

From November 6, 2020 to April 30, 2021, NDI carried out an in-depth assessment of women’s political participation in Kosovo, aimed at understanding women’s current roles within society, government, political parties, and campaigns; the barriers to gender equality across these four spheres; and the interventions that may be required in order to accelerate progress.

NDI used five research methods to conduct the assessment: focus groups, interviews, a public opinion survey, an online survey of NDI alumni, and desk research. All focus groups and interviews were held virtually and the contracted public opinion research firm adhered to stringent Covid-19 protocols when carrying out the face-to-face survey.

**Focus groups:** Nine focus groups were carried out from November 30 to December 4, 2020. Participants included representatives from political parties, civil society organizations (CSOs), and the media. In order to ensure representation from Kosovo’s minority communities, focus groups were conducted in both Albanian and Serbian languages. Participants included representatives from Albanian, Bosnian, Gorani, Roma, and Serbian communities. It should be noted that while men and women were invited to take part in both the focus groups and interviews, many more women accepted the invitation to participate (16 men and 44 women participated in total).

**Individual interviews:** Twenty interviews were carried out from December 7 to 22, 2020 with representatives of political parties, CSOs, international organizations, government agencies, academia, and the media. Similar to the focus groups, the assessment team was careful to ensure balanced representation from across the political spectrum, as well as representation from across ethnic groups (including those from Albanian, Bosnian, Egyptian, and Serbian communities). Interviews were conducted in Albanian, Serbian, and English.

**Public opinion survey:** From November 18 to December 3, 2020, NDI carried out quantitative research, conducting face-to-face interviews with 1,700 respondents over the age of 18. The poll used a stratified random sample (by region, settlement type, gender, and ethnicity) and was conducted using a random walk technique. Weighting was implemented in order for the final results to reflect the structure of the population in terms of ethnicity and age-group.

**Online survey of NDI alumni:** From March 31 to April 8, 2021, an online survey was carried out, soliciting responses from current and former political leaders and candidates who have participated in NDI's previous programming in Kosovo. One hundred and eighty-one respondents took part in the survey, including 22 who have stood as candidates in National Assembly elections.

**Desk research:** These methods were supplemented by in-depth desk research, including a detailed review of previous election reports, political party statutes, and Kosovo's legal framework. The report also draws upon the findings of NDI's 2015 report, "[Kosovo: Overcoming Barriers to Women's Political Participation](#)," its "[Post-Election Analysis of February 14, 2021 Parliamentary Elections](#)," and NDI's monitoring and analysis of social media engagement conducted during the elections.

## 4. Key Findings

NDI's assessment revealed that significant barriers to women's political advancement remain. These include the absence of clear and formalized processes for candidate selection, unequal access to finance, persistent social and political gender bias, and contradictory legislation.

Despite these barriers, there are promising signs that Kosovo could be approaching a turning point, with the most recent election illustrating the power of women voters and the leadership skills of women politicians.

- **Kosovo may be at a turning point concerning women's political leadership.** NDI's public opinion polling indicates women are perceived as being more "honest," "compassionate," and "intelligent" than men by a significant proportion of voters, indicating an opening for women to position themselves as well-placed to tackle some of the most pressing challenges facing Kosovo today. The electoral success of the LVV, which made a concerted effort to advance women in positions of leadership and engage women voters, may also serve as a catalyst for other parties that did not see such strong results to change their approach. It is clear from this and other recent NDI public opinion research that the voting power of women and youth has the potential to determine elections, and parties ignore this at their peril.
- **Public research found an improvement in the perception of women's leadership and understanding of the barriers women face.** A majority of the public believes that family responsibilities are a reason why there are not more women in leadership. A majority also notes that reluctance by men to see women advance and broader forms of gender discrimination were primary causes of gender disparities in leadership.
- **Political parties often lack clear, formalized processes for identifying, proposing, selecting and placing candidates on their lists,** making it especially difficult for women to navigate informal, male-dominated processes. When asked about this during interviews and focus groups, most representatives of political parties were not able to point to formalized, consistently applied procedures. It was clear from the qualitative research that, in order to meet the minimum requirement for the election quota, many parties select women candidates at the last minute and devote insufficient time and resources to enable

them to run effective campaigns. Efforts to include women beyond the quota requirements appeared to stem from personal, rather than institutional, motivations, with one male interviewee suggesting that “*we are not yet at the place where women will step up and take that place.*”

- **Lack of access to finance remains a significant barrier to women’s political participation.** This was frequently raised by women candidates and party representatives during interviews and focus groups. Campaign finance is largely left to individual candidates, and men are much more likely to have access to the personal and professional networks needed for fundraising. Neither parties’ policies nor existing legislation include mechanisms for counteracting this imbalance. In focus groups with representatives of the four largest political parties, none reported providing fundraising support and training for candidates.
- **There is a need to harmonize the law on gender equality and the laws on general and local elections,** which are contradictory. The law on gender equality sets a 50 percent gender quota across all legislative, executive, and public institutions, which is not implemented in practice. Meanwhile the law on general elections requires that party lists for National Assembly elections are composed of at least 30 percent of the lesser represented gender, and that one candidate from each gender is included at least once in each group of three candidates; similarly, the law on local elections requires that candidate lists for municipal elections are composed of at least 30 percent of the lesser represented gender. While numerous interviewees and focus group participants raised this issue, there appears to be little political will to harmonize these laws.
- **Women are often restricted (and often restrict themselves) to engaging in stereotypical “women’s issues”** and are often excluded from topics such as the economy or defense. This is true both during election cycles and once women are elected to parliament. This both limits their potential impact and reinforces gender norms regarding women’s role in society. Women who participated in interviews and focus groups noted that they often are not included in wider policy discussions and that they are frequently limited to discussing “women’s issues” when being given media or debate opportunities.
- **Gender-biased portrayals of women candidates and political leaders remain common in the media**—and were pervasive in the most recent election. Thirty-two percent of respondents to a survey of former candidates who are alumni of NDI programs felt that women were not treated properly by the media during the election period. However, there are promising signs that the public perception of women may be at an inflection point, with an opening for women leaders to engage on topics that have become more urgent priorities in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. NDI’s public opinion research shows that women are perceived as being more “honest,” “compassionate,” and “intelligent” than men by a significant proportion of voters, indicating an opening for women to position themselves as well-placed to tackle some of the most pressing challenges facing Kosovo today.
- **Violence against women in politics (VAW-P) takes many forms—including online, physical, psychological, and sexual violence—and remains a pervasive problem,**

which, left unaddressed, can worsen. Political parties are ill-equipped to combat it within their ranks, and in many cases, there appears to be a culture of silence and denial on this topic. There is also a lack of women's cross-party solidarity on this issue, and most political entities do not provide training for candidates on how to handle instances of violence. Representatives of political parties who participated in interviews and focus groups were largely unable to point to specific policies and procedures for dealing with violence.

- **Greater focus on women's leadership as mayors and at the municipal level is needed**, where women often face even greater challenges to political success. Kosovo has only ever had one woman mayor. Sixty-seven percent of women elected to municipal assembly seats secured their positions due to the quota. However, much of the attention of both political parties and international donors is focused on Pristina. Civil society representatives lamented that there was little interest in supporting their activities outside the capital and noted that more attention should be devoted to municipal elections.
- **Covid-19 has exacerbated barriers to women's political participation**, compounding economic hardship and heaping greater household responsibilities on women's already full plates due to lack of childcare, closed schools, and care for the sick and elderly. In NDI's public opinion polling, 67 percent of women reported spending three to four hours per day on educating children and household chores since the Covid-19 outbreak, compared with 24 percent of men. Representatives of political parties and government agencies who participated in interviews and focus groups noted that the pandemic had set back progress for women and that the lingering impact needed to be addressed.
- **Women in politics often face a lack of support from their families** and are sometimes actively discouraged from seeking active participation and leadership positions, making it difficult for them to successfully run for office or rise up the ranks in their parties. Multiple focus group participants and interviewees pointed to family obligations restricting women's political participation, with one focus group participant noting, *"if a woman doesn't have the support of her family, it's a big problem to run a campaign."*
- **Women in minority communities continue to face greater political and/or cultural challenges** to participating in politics. NDI research showed that there is a significant disconnect in the perception of women's political leadership between the Kosovo Albanian and Kosovo Serbian communities. Minority parties—including those representing Kosovo Serbian as well as Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities—also have fewer human resources and mechanisms for addressing these challenges.
- **Men in political parties often treat gender equality as an issue for women to engage with.** While a few of the male interviewees and focus group participants stood out for their proactive interest in engaging directly with issues related to gender equality, many seemed to believe that beyond setting up a structure for women within their party, it should be left to women to address this topic.

## 5. Recommendations



These challenges can be addressed by political parties, government agencies, men and women political leaders, members of the media, and civil society organizations implementing the following recommendations within the next 18 months in order to ensure that meaningful change can be achieved prior to the next elections.

## 5.1 Political Parties and Leaders

Political parties need to address significant, persistent issues within their cultures, bylaws, and structures which inhibit women's equal participation. There is significant work to be done in formalizing and opening up selection processes for candidates so women are better equipped to navigate what is currently an opaque and male-dominated process. More work is needed to level the playing field within parties and prepare women candidates for success—both before and during the campaigning period and once they are elected. Therefore, party leaders should implement changes in party structures and provide greater support for women candidates.

### Steps to make party structures more inclusive:

#### **Make party culture inclusive**

- Place women in leadership positions and encourage women within the party to put themselves forward for these positions.
- Implement clearer, more stringent policies for addressing VAW-P and gender-based discrimination within the party.
- Consistently encourage women party members and staff to take part in all elements of the party's operations, to report any incidents of discrimination or violence they experience, and provide appropriate resourcing to support this.
- Conduct training for men within the party on combatting gender-based discrimination and violence against women.
- Address the challenge of women being perceived as disloyal to the party if they collaborate across party lines by actively encouraging women to engage in cross-party action, including on gender issues.
- Actively consider and address the ways in which differing social norms across Kosovo impact the perception of women in leadership and work to change attitudes by elevating women leaders within the respective ethnic communities and championing their successes.
- Recognize the exclusion of women in all-male public panels (“manels”) and avoid participation in them.

#### **Make party bylaws and structures inclusive**

- Conduct a gender audit to assess the party as compared to international democratic norms concerning transparency, meaningful inclusion, and accountability.
- Where lacking, consider implementing quotas, perhaps even at parity, within party leadership structures at all levels.
- Develop and advocate for party policies on gender equality.
- Empower parties' women's organizations, including to develop policies on gender equality.

- Enable the party's women's organization to develop systematic training for women activists, candidates, and women elected to government on different levels.
- Work to ensure that candidate recruitment and selection is transparent, clear, and inclusive particularly in minority parties with less-defined structures, limited resources, and over reliance on party leaders.

### **Provide women's organizations within the party with greater power and autonomy**

- Provide sufficient budget to women's organizations within the party to implement a robust program of activities and give them the autonomy to allocate that budget as they see fit.
- Give women's organizations control over selecting their leadership.
- Ensure that women's organizations have a seat at the table (with decision-making power) in all relevant party structures.

### **Strengthen municipal-level party structures**

- Develop linkages between women at the municipal and national levels in order to create networks of support.
- Put women in positions of power within party structures at the municipal level.

### **Create more inclusive structures for policy development**

- Formalize the party's structures for policy development and ensure that women's views and experiences are reflected in policies across a range of issue areas, not just those directly focused on gender equality.

### **Create policies that account for the unequal distribution of care work:**

- Rather than minimizing women's participation in party activities in response to the additional burdens of care that they often face, or the professions they hold, take proactive steps to account for and mitigate this impediment. Consider, in particular, the way that care work has changed and increased due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Provide women with strategies to navigate challenging conversations with family members who may not be supportive of their political ambitions, and consider hosting events for family members to include them in the process and mitigate potential opposition.

### Steps to better support women candidates:

#### **Recruit and train women candidates**

- Implement clearer processes for the identification, nomination, selection, preparation and placement of candidates, publicize them widely, and stick to them.
- Undertake more proactive and early outreach to potential women candidates, particularly those who are already active within the party.
- Enable women's organizations within the party to propose women candidates for positions that are competitive for the party.
- Create more inclusive practices for recruiting women candidates at the municipal level and actively encourage women to put themselves forward as potential candidates.

#### **Prepare women candidates to succeed**

- Enhance the training provided to candidates and provide specific training to women candidates in areas that address their unique needs and/or help to overcome common skill gaps. (e.g., fundraising, VAWP, strategies for combatting gender-based discrimination)
- Carry out training and organize mentoring for successful candidates to ensure they are prepared to govern effectively.

#### **Finance women candidates**

- Offset financial imbalances for women candidates, such as allocating a percentage of the funding the party receives from the state budget to women candidates.

#### **Improve the portrayal of women candidates**

- Provide women with opportunities to address topics beyond “women’s issues” (e.g., put women forward to represent the party during debates on a diverse range of policy topics).
- Develop and implement clear protocols to ensure women’s equal space in the media and representation in campaign materials.

#### **Engage women voters**

- Implement a proactive and robust plan for engaging women voters, both during and between campaigns, ensuring their interests and needs are represented in the party’s platform and activities

## 5.2 Government

Government bodies, including legislative, executive, judicial bodies and other public institutions at the central and local level, should implement measures to ensure gender balance amongst leaders, place women in key and visible positions, make gender-disaggregated data available on a timely and predictable basis, tackle gender-based discrimination and violence against women, support women as they transition into government, and devise and implement family friendly work policies.

#### **Improve gender balance in leadership positions and enhance visibility of women leaders**

- Ensure better gender balance in top leadership positions, including in public forums.
- Recognize the exclusion of women in all-male public panels (“manels”) and avoid participation in them.

#### **Generate and disseminate data to inform more inclusive policy development and implementation**

- All government bodies should track and publish gender-disaggregated data. Where gender-disaggregated data may already exist, it should be published immediately. Bodies that do not yet collect such data should begin to do so, and then publish it.
- Consider legislative measures to fund, compel, and enforce the public release of gender-disaggregated data by government departments.

#### **Train civil servants and government officials on gender-based discrimination and inclusive policymaking**

- Ensure that all new civil servants and government officials receive training on combating gender-based discrimination within their departments / organizations.
- Carry out training on gender-responsive budgeting and inclusive policy development.

#### **Craft and implement a clear plan for tackling VAW-P**

- Ensure that government bodies have clear protocols in place for addressing violence against women within the organization.
- Develop and implement a clear government policy for addressing violence against women across Kosovo’s political system.

#### **Support women in transition to governing**

- Provide training for women entering government to ensure that they are able to effectively navigate power structures and develop networks of support within and across departments.

#### **Create policies that account for the unequal distribution of care work**

- Rather than minimizing women’s participation in response to the additional burdens of care that they often face or the professions they hold, take proactive steps to account for and mitigate this impediment. Consider in particular the way that care work has changed and increased due to the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Provide women with strategies to navigate challenging conversations with family members who may not be supportive of their political ambitions, and consider hosting events for family members to include them in the process and mitigate potential opposition.

#### **Address the contradiction in current legal frameworks**

- Launch initiative to amend the law on General Elections in order to increase the gender threshold for candidate lists in accordance with Law on Gender Equality.
- Enforce implementation of the Law on Gender Equality in all levels of decision-making bodies in political and public life.

### **5.3 Women Political Leaders**

Based on NDI’s experience working with women political leaders around the world, women need to have the “three Cs” in order to be successful in politics: capacity, confidence, and connections. While it is clear that many women in politics in Kosovo have considerable capacity to lead, connections and confidence remain significant barriers. Women will need to deploy strategies to both bolster individual power and harness the collective power of women within their parties and beyond to overcome these barriers.

The burden of ensuring women’s full and equal political participation does not fall only to women. Men, particularly those in power and leadership, are often positioned to lead in advancing all the recommendations put forward in this report.

Nonetheless, women political leaders should play a crucial role in supporting other women and fostering a spirit of collaboration and mentorship within and across parties. They can also play a greater role in advocating for change to all parties’ culture, bylaws, and structure, in order to make

the playing field more level for the next generation of women. Women political leaders can also unite with civil society leaders in this effort, as well.

### **Improve public perception of women candidates and in government**

- Introduce women candidates / leaders without strong ties to the media to journalists with whom they have relationships.
- Highlight other women's accomplishments while speaking to the media.
- Speak out when other women are portrayed unfairly.

### **Combat violence against women, support survivors**

- Stand up for women who are survivors of VAW-P, regardless of their party affiliation.
- Work with women legislators in a cross-party and ethnic setting (e.g. women's caucus) to prepare a model of zero tolerance to violence against women for all political parties, and advocate for its adoption within parties.

### **Promote women's leadership and issues in parliament**

- Create cross-party women's coalitions on issues of common interest for all women.
- Actively participate in the women's caucus.

### **Advocate for changes in bylaws and structure to make parties more inclusive**

- Advocate for the implementation of the recommendations for parties and government bodies above.
- Actively engage in the party's women's structure.

### **Promote selection and placement of women candidates**

- Proactively seek out and identify potential women candidates.
- Provide mentorship and advice to women candidates who do not already have high-level links within the party.

### **Assist in the preparation of candidates**

- Assist with training programs for first-time candidates, passing on personal knowledge and expertise.
- Advocate for training programs that address the specific needs of women candidates.
- Take part in training programs for newly elected women, sharing the knowledge more experienced candidates wish they had when starting out.

## **5.4 The Media**

The media should take urgent proactive action to address its unequal—and often harmful—portrayal of women. This includes setting and implementing clear journalistic standards regarding the portrayal of women, implementing monitoring of their reporters' output, and carrying out training for their staff.

### **Ensure fair and equal coverage of women in politics**

- Carry out gender-sensitive media training for all staff.

- Set clear standards for the portrayal of women, including providing guidelines on the use of imagery and standards for reporting on sexist stereotypes and gender-based violence.
- Put in place a process for measuring reporters' coverage of women and men candidates and political leaders.
- Recognize the exclusion of women in all-male public panels (“manels”) and avoid participation in them.
- Clearly identify misogynistic language in media coverage, avoiding amplification.

**Report responsibly on violence against women**

- Appropriately cover the issue of violence against women, ensuring that coverage does not contribute to stigmatization of survivors or re-victimize those subjected to abuse.
- Ensure that all staff are trained on this topic and provide them with clear and consistent guidelines.

**Contribute to greater transparency of campaign financing**

- Increase coverage of campaign financing, highlighting inequities and seeking to uncover the allocation of the funding parties receive from the state budget to women candidates.

5.5 Civil society organizations (CSOs)

Civil society organizations already play a crucial role in advocating for gender equality. They can redouble their efforts in pushing back against sexism and misogyny in the media and strengthen their relationships with the women’s structures of political parties to help them advocate for change from within. CSOs can play a greater role in raising the capacities of women candidates and newly elected leaders in developing and implementing specific gender equality policies and programs, including at the municipal level where activities are currently limited.

**Help improve the public perception of women in politics**

- Monitor coverage of women candidates and political leaders, and speak out against sexism, misogyny, hate speech, and biased coverage.
- Recognize the exclusion of women in all-male public panels (“manels”) and avoid participation in them.

**Support strengthening gender equities in party bylaws and structure**

- Develop relationships with the women’s structures of political parties and help to strengthen and support their activities.
- Advocate for greater autonomy and resources for women’s structures.

**Support the preparation of women candidates**

- Focus efforts on the municipal level, where fewer organizations are currently operating, and provide training and support to women candidates.
- Design and implement training programs aimed at building critical skills for newly elected women and women holding political office who would like to advance their careers.
- Carry out training on gender mainstreaming and gender-sensitive budgeting, for both men and women.
- Carry out training on intra-party advocacy campaigning for gender equality policies.

## 6. Background

### 6.1 Gender Equality in the Political Process: Prior Assessment

In 2015, the NDI report “[Kosovo: Overcoming Barriers to Women’s Political Participation](#),” assessed women’s political participation in the 2013 local election and 2014 parliamentary election cycles. The report identified challenges for the recruitment of women candidates, evaluated women’s access to decision making positions, analyzed how they are nominated for positions in political parties, and assessed their roles within election campaigns.

The gaps identified were significant. The [assessment](#) found that despite Kosovo’s robust national framework for women’s political participation, the spirit of the laws was not being implemented. Political parties were forced by the law to include women in order to meet quotas but failed to cultivate and empower women as candidates or leaders. Due to the lack of formal nomination procedures—or failure to adhere to them—the process for nominating candidates was skewed in men’s favor. The primary path for women to be included on candidate lists was to be handpicked as loyal supporters to senior party leadership, while men could compete through many different informal paths.

The opaque nature of political processes in Kosovo was also evident in the campaign period, which also favored men. Incumbents (more likely to be men) received the most financial resources, political support, visibility, and logistical support from their political parties during the campaign period. Women running for the first time were unable to build name recognition as they tend to have less independent wealth, smaller networks, and lower public profiles.

The [assessment](#) found a disconnect between party leadership and women interviewed. While party leadership reported being unable to find sufficiently qualified women, women interviewees cited significant challenges, including insufficient financial and political support and a political environment hostile to women and incapable of advocating for women’s aspirations and needs.

### 6.2 Gender Equality Policy

In 2012, 200 leaders from Kosovo and across Europe, North America, Africa, and the Middle East [gathered in Pristina for a summit](#) hosted by the President of the Republic of Kosovo at the time, Atifete Jahjaga, in partnership with NDI and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

The discussions—including political and business leaders, civil society activists, and academics—led to the creation of the [Pristina Principles](#), which affirm the rights of women to security, justice, political participation and representation, and economic resources.

In her opening remarks at the summit, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, NDI’s chair, emphasized the importance of gender equality for accelerating national development: “*Countries that are rising the fastest are the ones that have done the most to eliminate gender-based limitations and stereotypes.*”

Nine years later, the *Pristina Principles* continue to serve as a foundation and guide for efforts to advance women's full and equal participation in society. However, their promise has yet to be realized, as women continue to face significant barriers across all of the areas addressed in the principles. As Albright's words make clear, this lack of progress is to the detriment of the entire nation.

### 6.3 Women's Political Representation

The Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo has a total of 120 seats. Representatives of the Serbian community—including political entities, coalitions, civic initiatives, and independent candidates—have 10 guaranteed seats. Ten other seats are held by other non-majority communities: one seat each for the Ashkali, Egyptian, and Roma communities, plus an additional seat to whichever of these communities receives the highest number of ballots, two seats for the Bosniak community, two for the Turkish community and one for the Gorani community.<sup>1</sup>

Kosovo has two conflicting laws that regulate women's representation in government. The law on gender equality sets a 50 percent gender quota across all legislative, executive, and public institutions. However, this is in direct conflict with the law on general elections, which requires that party lists are composed of at least 30 percent of the less represented gender. The same rule is applied to the distribution of seats in parliament, where at least 30 percent of members must be of the less represented gender.

The 30 percent quota stipulated by the law on general elections is what is currently implemented in practice. However, CSOs have advocated for the 50 percent quota in the law on gender equality to become the standard that is applied across government.

Kosovo is one of few countries which has had more than one women leader: Atifete Jahjaga served as Kosovo's president from 2011 to 2016, and current President Vjosa Osmani first assumed office as Acting President in November 2020 before being elected President by the new parliament in April 2021.

After the October 2019 Assembly elections, under one-third of seats in the National Assembly were held by women (39 seats), three seats over the 30 percent quota. Sixteen of the women elected were reliant on the quota during this election, a positive signal for the movement towards voters' increasing acceptance of their right to equal political representation.<sup>2</sup> This means that 23 women secured seats in parliament by receiving more votes than their competitors in their district (see chart "Legislature VII (2019-2020)- )" in section 8.1 on p. 37).

In the February 2021 Assembly elections, a record 43 women (36 percent) were elected to the Assembly, 15 of whom were elected for the first time. Two of the women elected were elevated to serve as ministers and were replaced by men, bringing the total number of seats held by women to

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<sup>1</sup> Democracy in Action, "[Election Observation Report: Kosovo Assembly Elections 2019](#)," 2019, pp. 14

<sup>2</sup> D. Halili, "[Women's Political Empowerment Meets its Limit](#)," Kosovo 2.0, February 14, 2020



41, or 34.17 percent.<sup>3</sup> This is above the 30 percent quota and an increase from the 39 seats held by women after the October 2019 Assembly elections, but far short of the 50 percent representation that many civil society groups and advocates are calling for.<sup>4</sup> Nine of the women elected were reliant on the quota, a sign of further progress.<sup>5</sup>

Women's representation in the cabinet remains low, reflecting the continuing lack of political will to appoint women in central decision-making positions. Under Prime Minister Albin Kurti's previous government (February 2020 – June 2020<sup>6</sup>), five out of the 15 appointed ministerial positions were held by women, a record high. However, the cabinet formed under Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti in June 2020 appointed three women as ministers (out of a total of 16) and one woman as deputy prime minister (out of a total of four deputy prime ministers). The government formed by Albin Kurti after the February 2021 elections again included five women ministers out of 15, and a record two women appointed as Deputy Prime Ministers:

1. Second Deputy Prime Minister, and Minister on Foreign Affairs and Diaspora
2. Third Deputy Prime Minister for Minorities Affairs and Human Rights
3. Minister of Economy
4. Minister of Education, Science and Technology
5. Minister of Industry, Entrepreneurship, and Trade
6. Minister of Justice

Women's representation in executive positions on the local level is also low, although representation in municipal assemblies meets the quota. Kosovo has seen one woman serve as mayor since independence in 2008, who served from 2013-2017. In rural areas, women's participation in political processes is estimated to be as low as five to 10 percent.<sup>7</sup>

[Civil society organizations' research](#) has highlighted a disconnect between national and local policymaking, which has hindered collaboration amongst women at various levels of government and hampered efforts to drive change. Few parties have clear and coherent approaches to coordinating policy development between the national and local levels, and monitoring of policy implementation is lacking.

## 6.4 Voter Behavior

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<sup>3</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), "[Post-Election Analysis of February 14, 2021 Parliamentary Elections](#)," NDI Kosovo, 2021, p.7

<sup>4</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), "[Post-Election Analysis of February 14, 2021 Parliamentary Elections](#)," NDI Kosovo, 2021, p.1

<sup>5</sup> UK Election Expert Mission, "[Kosovo Early Assembly Elections 2021: Final Report and Recommendations](#)," British Embassy Pristina, March 2021, p.47

<sup>6</sup> Prime Minister Albin Kurti's government was formed on February 3, 2020 and lost a vote of no confidence on March 5, 2020. This government stayed on in a caretaker capacity through 3 June 2020, when parliament voted in Avdullah Hoti as the new prime minister.

<sup>7</sup> Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, "[Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024](#)," Republic of Kosovo Office of the Prime Minister, 2020, pp. 44

Voter turnout in recent elections has been increasing, as illustrated below. In 2021, the rise in turnout was attributed to high turnout among diaspora voters.<sup>8</sup>

**Table 1.**

Year of Elections	Total Voters	Trend (based on total voter turnout)	Percent of registered voters <sup>9</sup>
2021	903,379	Increase	48.8%
2019	826,916	Increase	44.6%
2017	779,729	Increase	41.3%
2014	734,055	Increase	42.6%

Source: [Central Election Commission of Kosovo](#)

The Central Election Commission (CEC) has not provided public, gender-disaggregated voter data for the 2017, 2019, or 2021 elections. However, in the 2014 general elections, women voters accounted for 36 percent of all voters, down from 51 percent in the 2013 municipal elections.<sup>9</sup> This suggests that women are an untapped constituency. In the June 2017 general elections, 34 percent of polling stations reported instances of “family voting,” where men heads of households voted on behalf of women family members.<sup>10</sup> The practice remains a concern.

## 6.5 The Enduring Impact of Conflict in Kosovo

Kosovo formally declared independence on February 17, 2008, nearly one decade after the official end to the conflict between ethnic Serbs and Albanians. The 1998-1999 conflict, which included a 78-day NATO bombing campaign, resulted in the deaths of about 13,000 people and the displacement of, by one estimate, 80 percent of the Albanian Kosovar population.<sup>11</sup> Serious allegations of violations of international humanitarian law during the armed conflict, including the committing of war crimes, such as extrajudicial killings, still hang over Kosovo. Victims of sexual violence committed during the conflict still feel the shame and stigma and are not empowered to speak out. In November 2020, then-President Hashim Thaci resigned from office to face a war crimes indictment in the Hague.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> UK Election Expert Mission, “[Kosovo Early Assembly Elections 2021: Final Report and Recommendations](#),” British Embassy Pristina, March 2021, pp. 64

<sup>9</sup> Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, “[Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024](#),” Republic of Kosovo Office of the Prime Minister, 2020, pp. 47

<sup>10</sup> Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, “[Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024](#),” Republic of Kosovo Office of the Prime Minister, 2020, pp. 47

<sup>11</sup> Human Rights Watch, “[Under Orders: War Crimes in Kosovo](#),” October 26, 2001

<sup>12</sup> “[Kosovo Leader Thaci in Hague detention over war crimes charges](#),” BBC, November 5, 2020

According to one interviewee, one of the major legacies of the conflict is men's domination in Kosovo: *"Coming out of war, a lot of the warring factions were men. And then the people who forged the peace were men. That has kept men in power very firmly and has also reinforced and re-anchored the male networks."*

Serbia has not accepted Kosovo's independence and vehemently opposes Kosovo's membership to international organizations. Ninety-eight out of 193 UN member states recognize Kosovo as an independent state. Interviewees spoke of Serbia's power over the 3.4 percent of Kosovars who are ethnic Serbian,<sup>13</sup> as well as its backing of the political party Srpska List: *"Everything that happens in Belgrade has to be followed 100 percent top to bottom. We have to obey the party, the decisions 100 percent."*

## 7. Women in Society

### 7.1 Public Perception

Throughout the focus groups and interviews, participants raised concerns about the media's portrayal of women and how it can reinforce problematic, gendered stereotypes. While this remains a significant challenge, which will be discussed later in this report, the findings of NDI's public opinion polling indicate that Kosovo may be approaching a crucial turning point for the perception of women in power.

As described below, NDI's research shows that women are perceived as being more "honest," "compassionate," and "intelligent" than men by a significant proportion of voters, indicating an opening for women to position themselves as well-placed to tackle some of the most pressing challenges facing Kosovo today.

Women in public office are also seen as being better at "keeping government honest," and "representing your interest," similarly providing an opportunity for women leaders to differentiate themselves and appeal to voters.

However, significant challenges remain. For example, there are wide variations in the perceptions of women across ethnic groups that need to be further investigated and addressed.

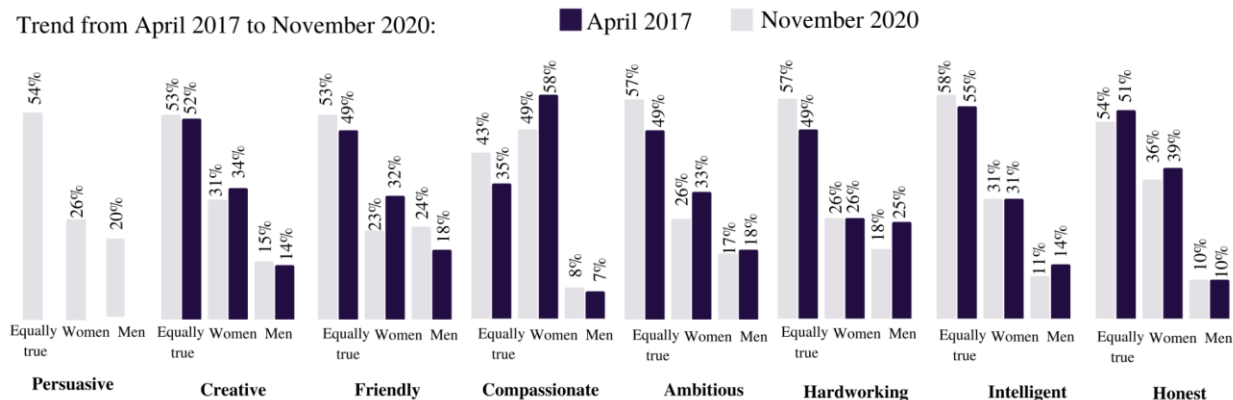
#### Women outperform men across a number of key traits

NDI's November 2020 public opinion research tested a number of traits, asking respondents to indicate whether they thought more about men or women when hearing the trait. The findings revealed some promising signals in terms of the public perception of women, which could be leveraged to encourage greater inclusion of women in decision making. On nearly all of the positive traits measured, a plurality of voters felt that they equally described men and women. However, for those who perceived a difference between genders, women were cited as more likely to embody the positive trait than men on all but one of the traits assessed.

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<sup>13</sup> Kosovo Agency of Statistics, "[Republic of Kosovo Statistical Yearbook 2019](#)," Republic of Kosovo, 2019, pp. 32

**Chart 1. When you hear the following traits, do you think more of men or of women?**



Source: NDI Public Opinion Research, November 2020

For example, 36 percent of voters said that women were more “honest” than men.<sup>14</sup> Given that a significant proportion of voters cited corruption as one of the biggest problems facing Kosovo in the next six months, this may provide an opening for women to position themselves as the right leaders to tackle this pressing issue.

Women were also perceived as more “compassionate” by a significant proportion of voters (49 percent).<sup>15</sup> Given the widespread unemployment and issues related to healthcare during the Covid-19 pandemic, this may similarly provide an opportunity for women leaders to demonstrate that they are best-placed to understand the difficult circumstances that Kosovars are facing.

Across all traits, there has been a rise in the proportion of voters who believe that they are “equally true” of both men and women from 2017 – 2020. It is worth noting, however, that the percentage of Kosovars who perceive women as being more compassionate than men has dropped nearly 10 percent since this question was previously asked in April 2017, indicating that the perception of women on this metric has worsened in recent years.

Finally, women were perceived as more “intelligent” by 31 percent of voters.<sup>16</sup> Given the complexity of the challenges facing Kosovo, this may again provide an opportunity for women to positively position themselves as leaders who are able to effectively lead the country through post-Covid-19 recovery.

### Women candidates have a clear opening to engage women voters

When looking at the same question by respondents’ gender, interesting trends emerge. A majority of men and women believe that each trait is equally true of men and women. The exception is “compassionate,” which women are more likely to associate with their own gender than believe it

<sup>14</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), “Kosovo Public Opinion Survey,” NDI Kosovo, November 2020

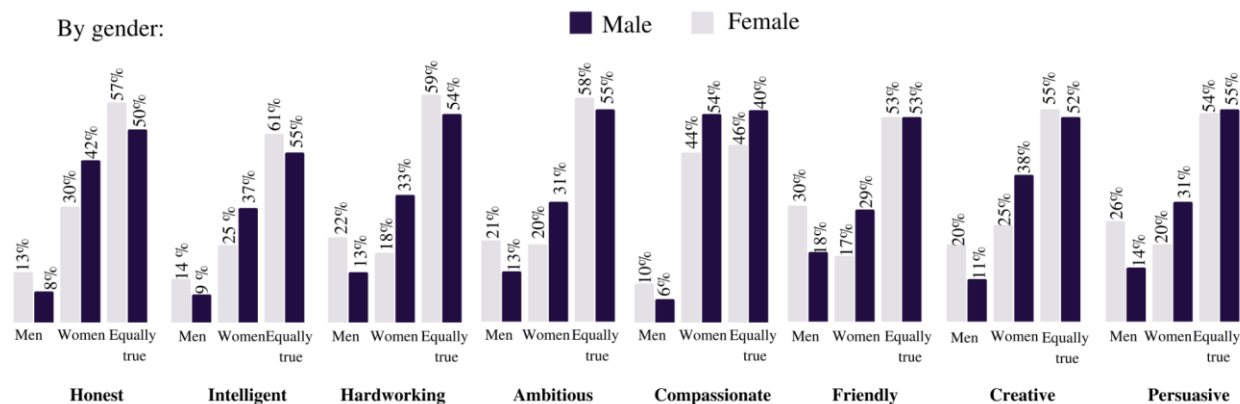
<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

is equally descriptive of both genders.<sup>17</sup> The traits “honest,” “intelligent,” and “compassionate” had the biggest gaps in perception across genders.

Across every trait, for those men and women who do not believe it is equally true of both genders, they are more likely to associate it with their own gender than the opposite gender. This may provide an opening for women political leaders to engage women voters, given their greater propensity to associate these positive traits with other women.

**Chart 2. When you hear the following traits, do you think more of men or of women?**



Source: NDI Public Opinion Research, November 2020

There are clear differences in the perception of women across ethnic groups

A plurality of respondents in each ethnicity associated each positive trait equally with men and women. However, a few notable differences also emerged. For example, a much greater proportion of Albanians associated “honest” more with women (37 percent).<sup>18</sup> Albanians were also much more likely to associate “compassionate” with women (50 percent).<sup>19</sup> On nearly every trait, apart from “hardworking,” Serbians were less likely than Albanians to say that they associated the trait more with women.<sup>20</sup>

This aligns with the views shared by many of the participants in the Serbian focus groups, who indicated that the perception of women became worse in the Serbian community than in the Albanian community over recent decades, and that it presented a barrier to women’s political leadership and participation.

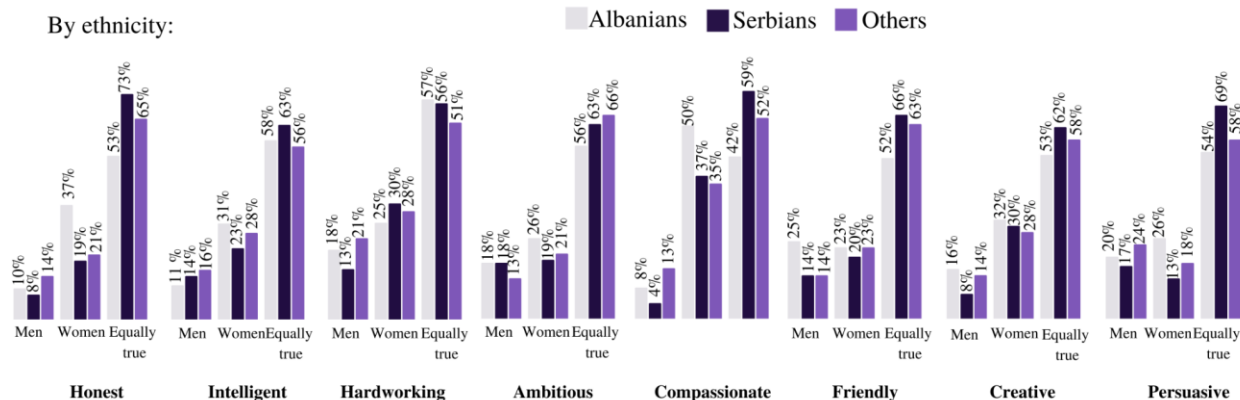
<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

**Chart 3. When you hear the following traits, do you think more of men or of women?**



Source: NDI Public Opinion Research, November 2020

### Women in public office are perceived as more honest and compassionate

When specifically asked about women in public office, participants’ responses also provided insight into openings for women leaders to differentiate themselves. Aligned with the finding noted above that women are perceived as being more “honest” by a significant proportion of respondents, women in public office were also seen as being better at “keeping government honest” by more than a third of respondents.<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, aligned with the perception of women as being more “compassionate,” women in public office are perceived as being better at “representing your interest” (27 percent) and “dealing with social issues” (31 percent) by nearly a third of respondents.

One finding that was perhaps more surprising—and less aligned with gender stereotypes—is that women in public office were perceived as being better at “managing finances” by more than a third of voters (35 percent).<sup>22</sup> Given the significant economic issues facing the country, this could provide a significant opening for women candidates to differentiate themselves and appeal to voters.

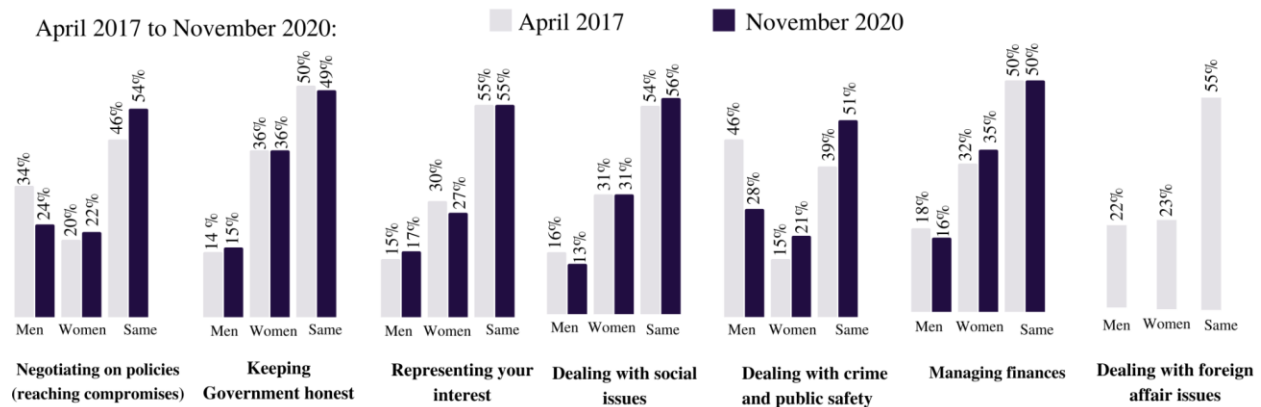
The issues on which a greater proportion of voters felt that men outranked women were “negotiating on policies” (24 percent) and “dealing with crime and safety” (28 percent). However, it is notable that the percentage of respondents who felt that men were better on these issues has dropped substantially since 2017.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

**Chart 4. Can you please tell us, are men or women in public office better at the following activities?**



Source: NDI Public Opinion Research, November 2020

Similar to the questions about traits, both men and women respondents who do not believe a given characteristic is equally true of both genders are more likely to associate it with their own gender than the opposite gender.

Voters largely recognize the impact of discrimination on women’s ability to reach leadership positions

When asked why there are not more women in top leadership positions, a range of reasons were cited. Encouragingly, a majority (61 percent) do not think that it is because “women do not make as good leaders as men” or that women “aren’t tough enough for politics” (55 percent).<sup>24</sup> A majority of respondents (55 percent) also do not believe that it is because “fewer women have the experience for leadership positions.”

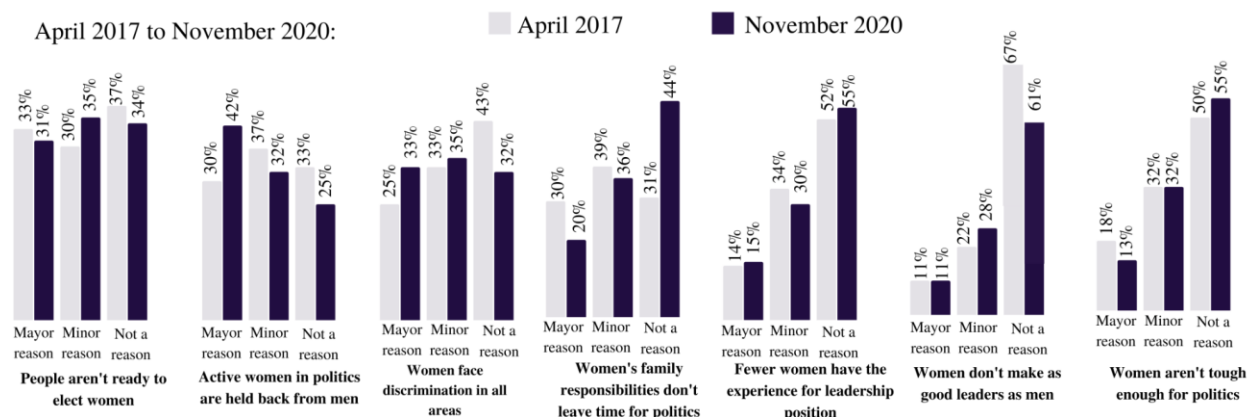
Majorities of respondents cited issues related to public perception and family responsibilities as either minor or major reasons why there are not more women in leadership. Majorities also noted that women being held back by men and women facing discrimination were minor or major reasons for gender disparities in leadership.<sup>25</sup>

These findings illustrate improvements in the perception of women’s leadership and understanding of the barriers women face since 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

**Chart 5. Can you please tell us, why aren't there more women in top leadership positions?**



Source: NDI Public Opinion Research, November 2020

Looking at responses by gender, men (43 percent) are more likely than women (34 percent) to say that women not being “as good leaders as men” is a minor or major reason that there are not more women in leadership. Meanwhile, women are more likely than men to cite women being actively held back by men (47 percent of women vs 38 percent of men) or facing discrimination (37 percent of women vs 29 percent of men) as major reasons for gender disparities in leadership.

When examining responses by ethnicity, Serbian respondents (46 percent) were more likely than Albanian respondents (39 percent) to say that women not being “as good leaders as men” was a minor or major reason why women are underrepresented in leadership. More than twice as many Serbian respondents (49 percent) than Albanian respondents (24 percent) said that women being actively held back by men was not a reason for the lack of women in leadership.<sup>26</sup>

## 7.2 Finances

Financial dependence remains a significant barrier to the advancement of gender equality. This plays out in the home, in the political sphere, and across society. Addressing economic inequality will be a central component of any effort to advance women’s leadership.

### Women remain financially dependent on men

Economic inequality and financial dependence were raised as significant barriers to women’s political advancement consistently throughout the focus groups and interviews. NDI’s public opinion poll showed that both men (79 percent) and women (78 percent) cited unemployment as the biggest problem for Kosovo in the near future.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, a large proportion of both men (66 percent) and women (68 percent) noted that one of their top five priorities for government in the next six months was to stimulate job creation through government policies.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.



Unemployment has long been a significant challenge for women. Even before the pandemic began, 31 percent of women were employed, compared to 65 percent of men.<sup>29</sup> One of the reasons cited for women's low participation in the labor market is the lack of affordable preschools and daycare.<sup>30</sup> Combined with the greater level of responsibility that women shoulder for household chores and caregiving, this poses a significant barrier to entering or remaining in the workforce.

One interviewee who is a senior government figure noted that *“women's access to the labor market is the most important thing to look at when it comes to discrimination against women and their lack of power.”* The interviewee added that *“when you are economically dependent, it is hard to have an idea to become part of politics.”*

### Women's status in society mirrors their role in the family

Women's lack of financial independence is clear within the family, as well. Women often have little decision-making power over their family's finances, limiting their autonomy. This is a vicious cycle—women have little power within the family because they are often dependent upon their husbands' incomes, and their standing is therefore further lowered in society because of this dependence.

### Lack of property ownership compounds financial inequalities

The issue of property ownership and inheritance was also frequently cited as a barrier to women's leadership. While legal frameworks protect women's rights to property and inheritance, cultural norms often prevent women from exercising these rights. The [report from the Office of the Prime Minister](#) highlighted above notes that *“although legally, property created during conjugal life must be registered in the name of both spouses, according to the data, this is not applied in practice... [I]n 2016, only 11 percent of women were owners of houses/flats while... in 2014, only 4.9 per cent of agricultural land was owned by women.”* Without property in their name, women are less likely to be able to access bank loans, compounding financial inequalities.

### Women in political parties and campaigns lack financial resources

As noted later in this report, women in political parties and campaigns lack financial resources and decision-making power. Women's organizations within parties typically do not have dedicated budgets that they have the freedom to allocate. And women running for election often face difficulties fundraising for their campaigns due to their lack of access to potential donors.

## 7.3 Gender Roles

Patriarchal norms continue to persist across society in Kosovo, with women internalizing gender stereotypes and shaping their public personas to meet traditional standards. Women in the Kosovo Serbian community noted that they face greater challenges than their Kosovo Albanian counterparts when it comes to attitudes towards women's participation in politics, which was also borne out in NDI's recent polling.

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<sup>29</sup> United Nations, [“Rapid socio-economic impact assessment of COVID-19 in Kosovo,”](#) United Nations, 2021

<sup>30</sup> D. Morina and N. Farnsworth, [“Budgeting for Better Education,”](#) Kosovo Women's Network and Austrian Development Cooperation, 2016, pp. 4

### Patriarchal norms remain prevalent across society

Patriarchal social norms remain a significant barrier to women's political leadership. The head of the women's structure of one political party said, "*the patriarchal mentality dominates Kosovo but also the region.*" This sentiment was echoed by several other interviewees and participants.

Other participants highlighted the social expectations for women to fulfil an unattainable ideal. One woman journalist noted that "*women are expected to get educated, get married, get a career, do the chores, take care of the kids.*" Others noted that while women are expected to be highly educated, as soon as they start a family, they are expected to put their own career ambitions aside in order to put their families—and their husbands—first.

### Women have internalized gender stereotypes

As [an OSCE report](#) noted, the "legacy of marginalization means that women themselves have internalized many of the gender stereotypes perpetuated in and by society." Women, therefore, may hold themselves back from pursuing political careers because they have been taught from a young age that these are men's jobs and that they aren't up to the task. This theme was picked up by a number of interviewees and participants, with one woman in a high-level government position noting, "*younger generations see politics as preordained for men...The roles we teach our children from early ages is to see some jobs for women and some for men.*" A male journalist echoed this point, adding that women's career "*choices are based on taking care of families.*"

### Household obligations place a significant burden on women seeking political office

Household obligations were consistently highlighted as a barrier to women's political advancement, with one participant noting that responsibilities at home demotivate women from getting into politics, which is a "24 hour a day obligation." There was an interesting disconnect between the views shared by those interviewed and the findings of the public opinion poll. Forty-four percent of respondents in the poll said that family obligations were not a reason for women's underrepresentation in top leadership positions,<sup>31</sup> whereas participants in interviews and focus groups consistently cited this as a challenge. This may indicate that the struggles that women in politics face to maintain a balance between their careers and their lives at home are not widely understood and appreciated by the general public.

These struggles are clearly taking place behind the scenes, however. As one male local assembly representative noted, "*women have to work twice as hard to get something because they have to take care of their families.*"

This issue is a double-edged sword, as powerful men within political parties also use women's family obligations as an excuse or justification for not being able to find enough qualified or motivated women candidates.

On the other hand, some women interviewed highlighted that having a family is an asset in politics—noting that it is crucial for shielding themselves from both harassment and rumors. One woman who is very senior within her party noted, "*even if you are in politics it's important to*

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<sup>31</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), "Kosovo Public Opinion Survey," NDI Kosovo, November 2020

*create a family. There are different stereotypes and prejudices. When I have to go have coffee with men, people are saying bad things.”*

#### Women feel a need to carefully craft their images in order to fulfil gendered expectations

Women political leaders who have succeeded in reaching higher ranks have had to carefully craft their images in order to remain acceptable within the prevailing cultural context. An academic pointed to Vjosa Osmani as an example of this, saying *“think about [her] message in her campaign, that yes, she is a politician, but she is also a mother. It’s a heteronormative, nuclear, Albanian family. It’s an indication of what is permitted within the parties because of the underlying ideological foundations.”*

#### Significant differences exist across ethnic communities

The focus groups and interviews revealed differences between ethnic communities. Several women from minority communities noted that the attitude towards women’s participation in politics was more restrictive for them than for their Kosovo Albanian counterparts. This echoed some of the findings from the public opinion polling, which showed that Kosovo Serbian respondents were less likely to associate positive traits more with women than with men compared to Kosovo Albanian respondents.<sup>32</sup>

As one Kosovo Serbian journalist noted, *“the attitude towards women is very different [in the Serbian community] than in the Albanian community. We have seen more emancipation of women in the Albanian community. Their voices are heard. They are very present...This is totally opposite in the Serb population.”*

## 7.4 Violence

VAW remains a widespread problem in Kosovo and across the Western Balkans. While recent legislation has sought to strengthen measures for combating VAW, more remains to be done.

In particular, while violence against women was highlighted as a widespread, cultural problem linked to patriarchal norms by many participants, there is a need for greater focus on how institutions allow this problem to persist. Given the lack of engagement from many parties on strengthening internal structures and protocols for preventing and addressing violence in politics and beyond, this is an issue that warrants additional attention.

Encouragingly, the Covid-19 crisis has prompted greater public engagement on this topic. The challenge will be in channeling greater public awareness and dialogue into concrete, sustainable action.

#### Violence against women remains a widespread problem in Kosovo and across the region

A [study conducted across the Western Balkans in 2018](#) found violence against women is widespread in Kosovo and across the region. The report raised a number of obstacles in developing effective policy and legal responses, including challenges in data collection and monitoring; the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

classification of domestic violence as a misdemeanor rather than a criminal offence; low levels of reporting; and long and complicated procedures for accessing support, protection and rehabilitation.

The [report](#) cites a further study conducted by the Kosovo Women’s Network, which identified a number of challenges with gender-based violence legislation and the prosecution of offenders, including *“problems around what counts as evidence, rare perpetrator imprisonment, delayed issuance of protection orders, inadequate follow-up of protection orders and mild sentencing in cases of violating protection orders.”*

It is clear that domestic violence was widespread long before the Covid-19 pandemic, with the [2018 Kosovo Women’s Network report](#) noting that 62 percent of Kosovars (56 percent of men and 68 percent of women) have experienced some form of domestic violence. However, lockdowns and travel restrictions imposed to halt the spread of the virus, combined with increased economic stress, have led to an increase in reports—and additional hurdles for women seeking to escape violence at home. Data released by the Kosovo Police showed that reports of domestic violence between January and September 2020 were up by more than 10 percent compared to the same period the previous year.<sup>33</sup>

This data may not reveal the whole picture, as many incidents of domestic violence go unreported. Concerningly, 59 percent of respondents surveyed by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in November 2020 felt that domestic violence had increased since the beginning of the pandemic.<sup>34</sup>

#### The government has recently implemented measures to protect women

Notwithstanding the challenges highlighted above, there has been some recent progress in addressing gender-based violence through legislation in Kosovo.

In September 2020, the Kosovo Assembly voted to incorporate the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, which seeks to combat violence against women, in the constitution. The vote followed years of advocacy from both women political leaders and civil society organizations.

The government has also implemented specific measures aimed at addressing domestic violence during Covid-19, including providing exemptions to restrictions of movement, and launching a campaign to inform survivors of their rights.<sup>35</sup>

Promisingly, there appears to be an increase in awareness about where to seek help and support in cases of domestic violence. In the UNDP survey noted above, 70 percent of respondents in November 2020 reported knowing where to seek support compared to 64 percent in May 2020.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> United Nations, [“Rapid socio-economic impact assessment of COVID-19 in Kosovo,”](#) United Nations, 2021

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> European Commission, [“Kosovo 2020 Report,”](#) European Commission 2020 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, 2020, pp. 29

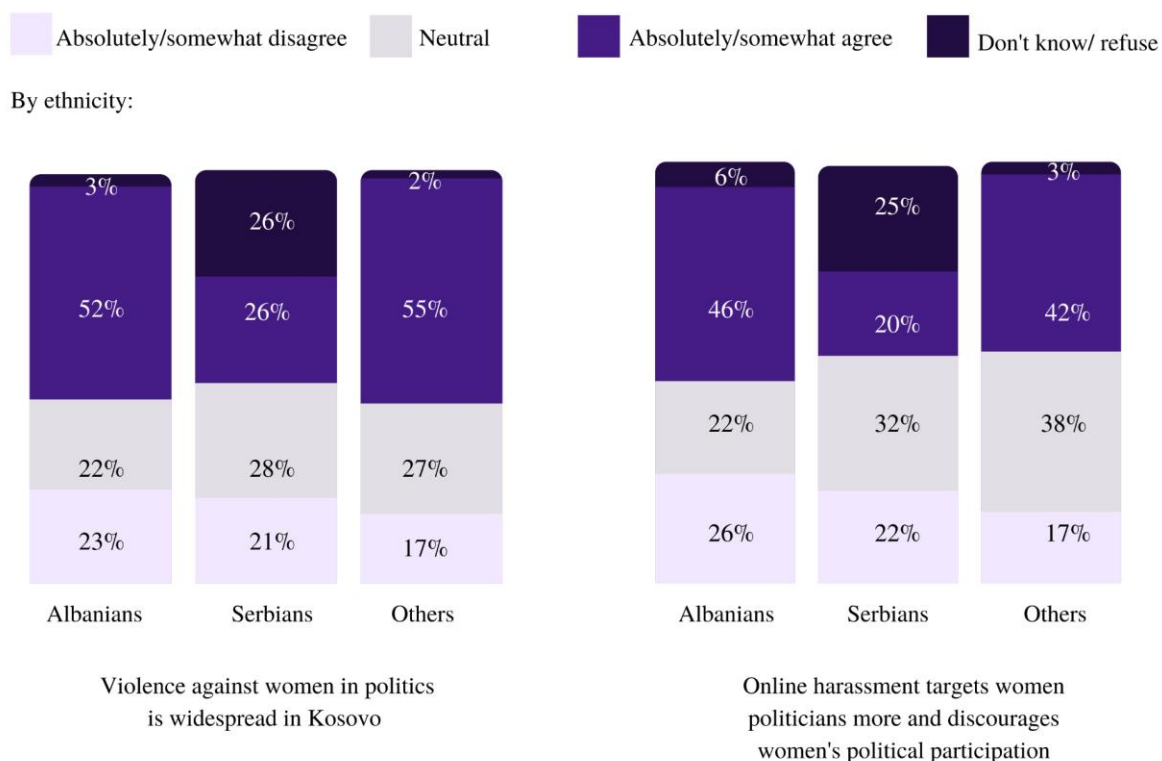
<sup>36</sup> United Nations, [“Rapid socio-economic impact assessment of COVID-19 in Kosovo,”](#) United Nations, 2021

## Public awareness about violence against women has increased

As the #MeToo movement swept the globe several years ago, interviewees and focus group participants noted that it did not seem to reach Kosovo, with political institutions and parties left largely untouched by conversations about addressing violence and harassment.

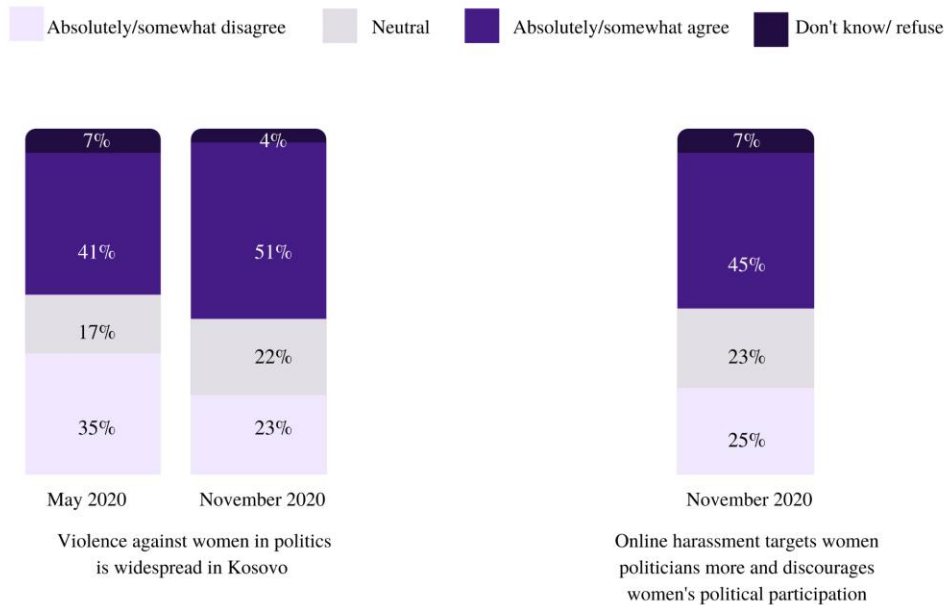
However, violence against women in Kosovo has become a more prominent topic of discussion over the course of the Covid-19 crisis. Alongside the increased focus on this issue by political leaders and the media during this period, there has been a parallel increase in public awareness. Over the six months between NDI’s most recent public opinion polls (in May and November 2020), the proportion of respondents saying that “violence against women in politics is widespread in Kosovo” increased by 10 percent, with a majority of respondents now agreeing with that statement.<sup>37</sup> Nearly half of respondents (45 percent) also believe that “online harassment targets women politicians more and discourages women’s political participation.”<sup>38</sup> A plurality of respondents of both genders agree with these statements, though women are more likely to do so.

**Chart 6. Can you tell us how much you agree with the following statements?**



<sup>37</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), “Kosovo Public Opinion Survey,” NDI Kosovo, November 2020.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.



Source: NDI Public Opinion Research, November 2020

When looking at responses by ethnicity, some significant discrepancies emerge. While more than half of Albanian respondents (52 percent) believe that violence against women in politics is widespread, about a quarter of Serbians (26 percent) do. Similarly, while nearly half of Albanians (46 percent) believe that online violence targets women more and discourages their political participation, one fifth of Serbians (20 percent) agree. This aligns with concerns raised by some of the participants in the focus groups and interviews, who noted that the topic of violence against women persisted as a strong taboo in the Serbian community.

### Violence against women is a significant barrier to political participation

Interviewees and focus group participants regularly raised the issue of violence against women in politics as posing a significant barrier to women’s political participation, with many citing it as one of the biggest challenges facing women in Kosovo today. They highlighted a range of categories of violence against women in politics, including verbal, physical, sexual, psychological, threats and coercion, and online violence. One woman representative of a CSO noted that *“hate speech is the biggest barrier for women entering politics.”* This was reinforced by a senior woman in a political party, who noted that *“women have to fight for their place. Psychological violence is more present towards women in politics.”* Another male representative of a minority party noted, *“whatever is said in public, we cannot close our eyes. There are attacks against women in our parties.”*

The CSO representative also highlighted the role that the media often plays in exacerbating and amplifying psychological violence against women in politics, noting that they *“do it for likes. They can’t wait for women to make a mistake and then talk about it for days.”*

*Parties have not implemented sufficient measures to combat violence against women; a culture of silence persists*

When asked about specific measures that parties take to combat violence against women, few interviewees and focus group participants were able to give concrete answers. Some noted that there are mechanisms within their parties to both prevent violence and punish the perpetrators. However, the information provided about these mechanisms was vague. When pressed for a specific example of how an incident of violence against women was dealt with inside their party, one interviewee provided a concrete answer. Others pointed to violence perpetrated by members of other parties against women within their party, and some said that inter-party violence did not exist and that they had never heard of such incidents.

These responses could be due to a desire not to air internal party dynamics with external audiences. Or they could indicate that incidents of violence taking place in the lower ranks of political parties simply are not reaching the members of senior leadership who were interviewed. In some cases, they could also be due to leadership being complicit in violence against women. Regardless of the reason, while there seems to be recognition within political parties that violence against women is an issue that needs to be addressed, there is a lack of acknowledgment that their own parties could be contributing to the problem—as well as a lack of understanding of political parties' responsibility to combat it.

There is a lack of cross-party solidarity between women political leaders in addressing violence against women. Apart from one high-profile case of a woman MP who was verbally attacked in parliament—drawing cross-party condemnation—there is little evidence of women speaking up for other women not within their own party structures.

## 7.5 Covid-19

Covid-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities—at home, at work, and in politics. It has also exposed and increased public awareness of challenges, such as violence against women, which had previously remained taboo topics of discussion. As institutions seek to address the impact of Covid-19 and build back better, it will be crucial to understand and analyze the uneven impact that the crisis has had on women.

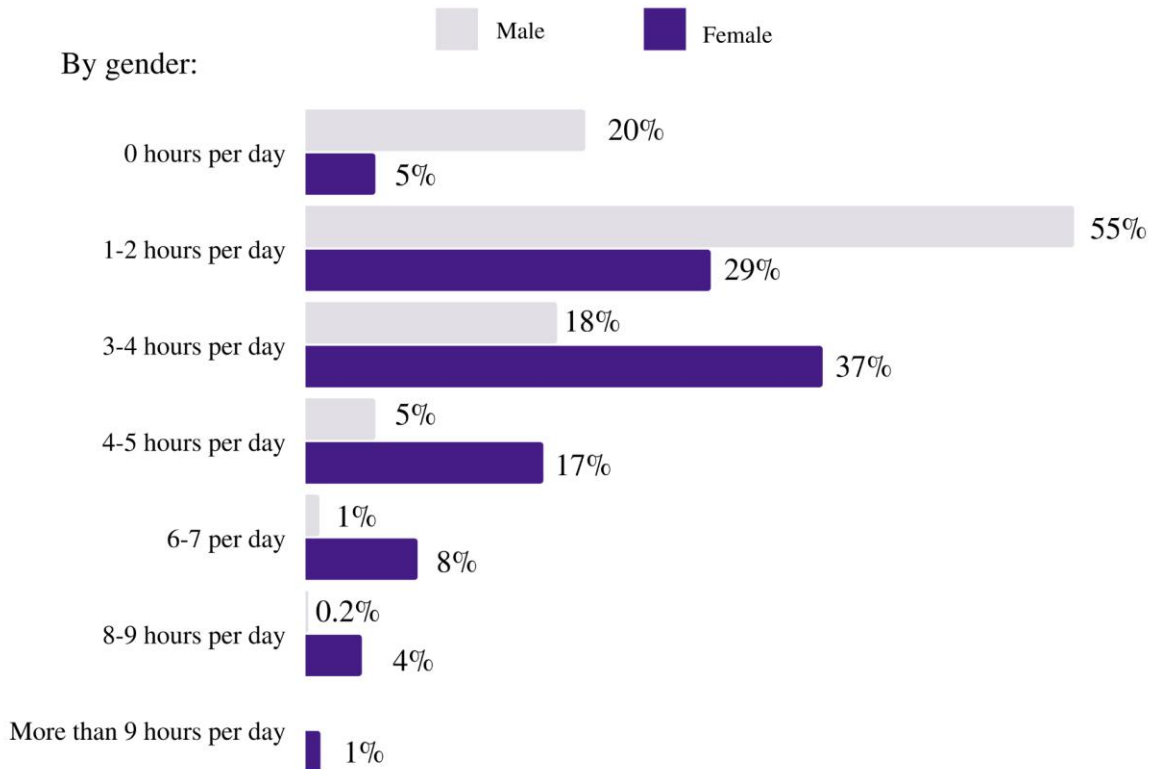
Covid-19 has placed additional burdens on women

In addition to contributing to an environment that enables an increase in domestic violence, as noted above, Covid-19 has also resulted in a significant increase in household responsibilities for women. This has created an additional barrier to their participation in politics and in the workplace. According to results from NDI's public opinion polling summarized in the chart below, since the Covid-19 outbreak, a significant majority of women (67 percent) report spending at least three hours per day on educating children and household chores. Less than a quarter of men (24 percent) report spending that much time, and one fifth of men (20 percent) report spending no time at all on household chores and education.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

**Chart 7. Since the Coronavirus outbreak, how many hours a day do you spend on education of children and household chores, including cooking, cleaning, and buying groceries for your family?**



Source: NDI Public Opinion Research, November 2020

Lack of access to childcare has been particularly challenging for women during this period. With schools closed, many women are forced to choose between keeping their jobs and staying home with their children.

The economic impact of Covid-19 has also been uneven

The economic impact of the pandemic has also hit women harder than men. Because women are more likely to be employed in the informal economy, they can slip through the cracks in accessing the mitigating measures being implemented by the government. A male Member of Parliament noted that the “pandemic has been brutal for the economy in general” but that “the data we see is that women are losing more jobs than men” and are “more likely to report a decrease in working hours.”

Even before the pandemic, women were less likely than men to own a business. Now, according to another Member of Parliament, the percentage of businesses led by women has declined further. Another senior government representative noted that “we have seen that women-led companies have had a lot of challenges. They employ a lot of women, so this has a knock-on effect.”



### These additional challenges have created barriers to political participation

For women in politics, the lack of access to childcare and safe transportation during Covid-19 has created a significant barrier to staying actively engaged, particularly given the long hours and the propensity for meetings and events to be scheduled during evenings and weekends.

### 7.6 Women's policy priorities

While women and men are largely aligned in their policy priorities amid Covid-19, with a particular focus on combating the pandemic and addressing unemployment, it is clear that both of these issues affect men and women differently. Taking a gender-responsive approach to policy development will be critical to ensuring that the measures implemented take into account men's and women's unique realities and needs. The Women's Caucus could play a critical role in advancing gender-responsive policy across party lines.

### Men and women voters are largely aligned in their policy priorities

NDI's November 2020 public opinion poll showed that men and women are largely aligned in their current policy priorities amid the Covid-19 pandemic, with unemployment ranking as the top priority by a significant margin.<sup>40</sup> Economic recovery from Covid-19 is similarly a significant priority for both men (44 percent) and women (39 percent), with corruption coming in third (24 percent and 26 percent respectively).<sup>41</sup> When asked to share the top issue that will determine their vote choice in the next election, excluding corruption and unemployment, visa liberalization was cited first amongst both men (44 percent) and women (43 percent).<sup>42</sup> This was followed by health-related issues; quality service in primary health care was cited as the most important issue by 38 percent of men and 35 percent of women, while health insurance was cited by 36 percent of men and 38 percent of women.<sup>43</sup>

Both men (69 percent) and women (70 percent) cited the need to introduce measures to effectively fight Covid-19 as their top priority for government in the next six months, with job creation, financial assistance to poorer members of society, tackling corruption, and strengthening the rule of law as additional priorities.<sup>44</sup> Men and women were largely aligned in citing these priorities, with the most significant difference on the issue of providing financial assistance to the poor.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

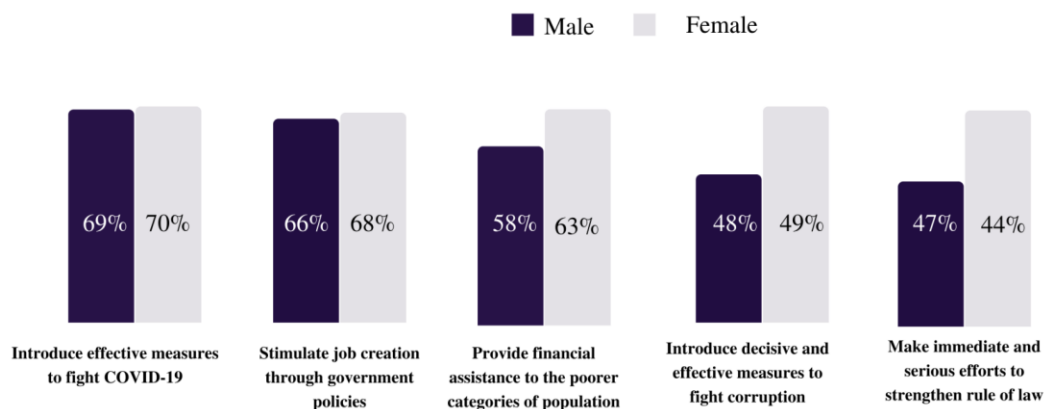
<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

**Chart 8. Please rank the issues according to your priority for the government in the next six months (top five ranking)**



Source: NDI Public Opinion Research, November 2020

During the focus groups, childcare and education were also frequently raised as policy issues of significant importance to women. Participants from outside Pristina also raised issues related to lack of access to transportation and lack of employment opportunities in rural areas.

### The Women’s Caucus has sought to address a number of issues crucial to the advancement of gender equality

Over the past three years, NDI has worked with the Women’s Caucus in the Assembly to advance a range of policy priorities. This work began in May 2018, when NDI presented public opinion research to the caucus in order to identify key areas of importance for voters and drive priorities for policy development. Following the discussion, the caucus board selected three priority interventions: discussions in the field with the citizens regarding corruption; organizing different roundtables in municipalities to encourage women to vote; and starting a discussion with parliamentary committees on the issues of persons with disabilities, women, youth, and LGBTQI+ community.

During that same year, the Women’s Caucus successfully secured an amendment to the Draft Criminal Code related to punishment for physical, psychological, sexual, or economic violence within the family. The caucus has also secured funding for domestic violence safehouses and carried out visits to safehouses in order to evaluate their conditions and identify additional needs.

In the following legislature (2019-2020), NDI worked closely with the caucus to help improve its internal and external communications and develop a workplan with clear priorities for the final months of 2020. Work carried out by the caucus during this period focused on protecting human rights through Project Civil Code. The caucus also advocated strongly for greater involvement of civil society in the development of the civil code.

In September 2020, the caucus secured a significant political victory, successfully advancing the adoption of Constitutional Amendment no. 26, through which the Istanbul Convention ([The Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic](#)

[violence](#)) became part of the Constitution of Kosovo.<sup>45</sup> This landmark legal framework is aimed at protecting women against all forms of violence.

## 8. Women in Government

Women have made advances in being directly elected to parliament through preferential votes. However, the quota remains crucial to ensuring women’s representation. Once in parliament, women continue to face significant barriers to shaping the legislative agenda, including underrepresentation on some key committees—although there have been notable improvements in the current legislature. The Women’s Caucus holds significant promise for advancing policy priorities that matter for women, but its work has been disrupted due to the pandemic. In addition, its influence remains muted due to the lack of strong women’s forums within political parties, the sporadic coordination between women activists in civil society and in political parties and elected positions in government, and the top-down nature of operating within political parties.

### 8.1 Women in Parliament

#### The quota remains critical for ensuring women’s representation in parliament

Almost all of the interviewees and focus-group participants highlighted the critical role that the gender quota plays in advancing women’s representation in parliament. Not only does it ensure that women’s representation does not dip below the 30 percent quota, it is also a crucial motivating factor for the parties to put women on their lists. This, in turn, has enabled an increasing number of women to get voter support without the application of the quota.

In the 2021 elections, 20.5 percent of women elected as MPs were reliant on the quota, fewer than in the 2019 elections (33 percent).<sup>46</sup> For women who are able to secure election without the quota—and for their parties—it is often a point of pride and presented as proof that they are in the parliament based on merit rather than affirmative action. Notably, for the second time, none of the women MPs affiliated with LVV were elected with the help of the quota.

The percentage of women members of parliament elected with and without the quota varies significantly by political party, as shown in the table below.

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<sup>45</sup> Council of Europe, “[The National Assembly of Kosovo\\* decides to apply the Istanbul Convention](#),” September 25, 2020

<sup>46</sup> UK Election Expert Mission, “[Kosovo Early Assembly Elections 2021: Final Report and Recommendations](#),” British Embassy Pristina, March 2021, pp. 46

**Table 2.****Legislature VIII (2021- )**

<b>Political entities</b>	<b>Women MPs elected with quota</b>	<b>Women MPs elected without quota</b>	<b>Male MPs</b>
Self Determination Movement (LVV)	--	23	35
Kosovo Democratic Party (PDK)	3	3	13
Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)	4	1	10
Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK)	2	1	5
Serb List (SL)	--	3	7
Kosovo Democratic Turkish Party (KDTP)	2	1	1
SDU	--	1	0
New Democratic Party (NDS)	1	1	0
RI	--	1	1
Vakat	--	0	1
New Democratic Initiative (IRDK)	--	0	1
Gorani United Party (JGP)	--	0	1
Ashkali Party for Integration (PAI)	--	0	1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>76</b>

## Legislature VII (2019-2020)

Political entities	Women MPs elected with quota	Women MPs elected without quota	Male MPs
Self Determination Movement (LVV)	--	10	18
Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)	3	6	19
Kosovo Democratic Party (PDK)	7	1	16
Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) Social Democratic Party (PSD)	3	1	
Serb List (SL)	--	3	7
Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA) New Kosovo Alliance (AKR) Justice Party (PD)	2	--	4
Coalition Vakrat (Koalicija Vakrat)	--	1	1
Kosovo Democratic Turkish Party (KDTP)	1	--	1
Liberal Egyptian Party (PLE)	--	--	1
Ashkali Party for Integration (PAI)	--	--	1
New Democratic Party (NDS)	--	1	1
Gorani United Party (JGP)	--	0	1
United Roma Party of Kosovo	--	0	1
New Democratic Institute (IRDK)	--	--	1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>81</b>

## Legislature VI (2017-2019)

Political entities	Women MPs elected with quota	Women MPs elected without quota	Male MPs
"PAN" Coalition: Kosovo Democratic Party (PDK) - Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK) - Social Democratic Initiative (NISMA)	8 (7 PDK; 1 Nisma)	4 (2 PDK; 2 AKK)	27
Self Determination Movement (LVV) (including MPs who left that party to join a new party (Social Democratic Party of Kosovo - PSD) during this legislature)	4 (2 LVV; 2 PSD)	6 (5 LVV; 1 PSD)	22
"LAA" Coalition: Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) - Alternative for Kosovo - (Alternativa) - New Kosovo Alliance (AKR)	4 (4 LDK)	5 (4 LDK; 1 Alternativa)	20
Serbian List (SL)	--	4	5
SLS	--	--	1
Kosovo Democratic Turkish Party (KDTP)	1	--	1
Coalition Vakat (Koalicija Vakat)	1	--	1
New Democratic Party (NDS)	1	--	--
Gorani United Party (JPG)	--	--	1
Democratic Ashkali Party for Kosovo (PDAK)	--	--	1
Liberal Egyptian Part (PLE)	--	--	1
United Roma Party of Kosovo	--	--	1
Ashkali Party for Integration (PAI)	--	--	1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>82</b>

Source: [Assembly of Kosovo](#) and [Assembly Archive](#)

Women now make up the majority of heads of parliamentary committees. However, they are underrepresented in some committees traditionally dominated by men, including those dealing with defense

In the legislature formed after the February 2021 elections, women make up 57 percent of heads of parliamentary committees.<sup>47</sup> This is the highest number of any post-independence legislature, and represents an increase from 42 percent in the two previous legislatures (six out of 14).

Their representation in First Deputy positions has increased from 28 percent to 42 percent, and their representation in Second Deputy positions has stayed stable at 35 percent between the previous and current legislatures.

When looking at the committee leadership and membership of women across the last three legislatures, as illustrated in the table below, several themes become apparent.

First, women are underrepresented on committees dealing with defense. They make up 10 percent of the committees on Security Affairs and Defense and Oversight of the Intelligence Agency; and they hold one out of the six leadership positions on these committees.

Second, there has been an increase in the representation of women on several key committees dealing with the economy in the new legislature. Women now make up 54 percent of the Committee for Oversight of Public Finances, and they hold the Head and First Deputy positions. The representation of women on the Committee on Economy, Industry, Entrepreneurship, and Trade has also doubled from 18 percent in the previous legislature to 36 percent in the current legislature. Women also currently hold the First and Second Deputy positions on this key committee, where in the previous legislature, they held none of the three leadership positions.

Third, women's representation on the prestigious Committee on Foreign Affairs and Diaspora has declined from 54 percent in the previous legislature to 36 percent in the current legislature. Women had also previously held the Head and First Deputy positions, whereas they now do not hold any of the three top leadership positions. However, women's representation on another key committee dealing with foreign relations issues—the Committee for European Integration—has increased from 36 percent to 54 percent during the same period.






Finally, while women continue to make up the vast majority of members of the Committee for Gender Equality, Human Rights, and Missing Persons, there has been an increase in men's representation on this committee—from 10 percent in the previous legislature to 19 percent in the current legislature. This is a promising sign that men may begin to engage more on issues related to gender equality.

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<sup>47</sup> This includes only functional committees, which deal with specific topics.

**Table 3.**

**Key:**

Percentage of members who are women		Gender of committee leadership	
<30%		Man	
30-50%		Woman	
50%+			

Committee	Members (% Women)			Head (Gender)			First Deputy (Gender)			Second Deputy (Gender)		
	VIII	VII	VI	VIII	VII	VI	VIII	VII	VI	VIII	VII	VI
Budget, Labor, and Transfers	36%	27%	30%	M	M	M	M	M	W	W	W	W
Rights and Interests of Communities and Returns	27%	17%	33%	W	W	M	W	M	M	M	M	M
Legislation, Mandates, Immunities, Rules of Procedure of the Assembly and Oversight of the Anti-Corruption Agency	27%	27%	33%	M	M	W	M	M	M	M	W	M
European Integration	54%	36%	33%	W	M	W	W	M	M	M	M	M
Foreign Affairs and Diaspora	36%	54%	50%	M	W	W	M	W	W	M	M	M
Education, Science, Technology, Innovation, Culture, Youth and Sports*	54%	45%	70%	M	W	M	W	M	W	M	M	W
Economy, Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade*	36%	18%	N/A	M	M	N/A	W	W	N/A	W	M	N/A
Economic Development, Infrastructure, Trade, Industry and Rural Development	N/A	18%	33%	M	M	W	N/A	M	M	N/A	M	M
Agriculture, Forestry, Rural Development, Spatial Planning, and Infrastructure*	36%	N/A	25%	W	N/A	M	M	N/A	W	M	N/A	M
Health*	36%	27%	60%	W	W	W	M	M	M	W	M	W
Public Administration, Local Government, Regional Development and Media*	27%	36%	30%	W	M	M	M	M	W	W	W	W



Security Affairs and Defense *	10%	27%	12%	M	W	M	M	M	M	M	M	M
Gender Equality, Human Rights, and Missing Persons*	81%	90%	72%	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
Oversight of Public Finance	54%	45%	25%	W	M	M	W	M	M	M	W	W
Oversight of Intelligence Agency*	10%	18%	22%	W	M	M	M	W	W	M	M	M

\*Indicates that the committee was renamed between legislatures.

Source: [Assembly of Kosovo](#) and [Assembly Archive](#)

### The Women’s Caucus plays a key role in advancing women’s policy priorities across parties, but its work has been disrupted

As noted above, Kosovo has a relatively active Women’s Caucus, which brings together representatives across political parties to develop policy and advocate on issues impacting women. The caucus has seen several notable victories over recent years, including securing the adoption of a constitutional amendment through which the Istanbul Convention became part of the Constitution of Kosovo. However, the work of the caucus has often been disrupted due to the political turmoil in the country and resulting early elections.

Interviewees also noted that the caucus could play a greater role in building a culture of support and mentorship among women. While the caucus seeks to foster such a culture across party lines, this has been challenging in practice. As a woman interviewee active in the caucus said, *“it is a difficult thing to do because of the political party line that we need to take.”*

Indeed, many elected women are completely reliant on their party leadership and have very little political profile and public voice in their own right. This poses a challenge when it comes to proactively advancing policy priorities that have not been dictated from the top.

## 8.2 Women in the Cabinet

Women remain underrepresented in cabinet and have been entirely absent from several key ministries. The wide variation in women’s representation across the last four mandates illustrates the fragility of women’s positions in these key government positions. Significant political will is required in order to advance progress.

### Women’s representation in the cabinet has varied widely

Women’s representation in cabinet positions has varied widely over the previous three mandates. During the 2017-2019 and February to June 2020 mandates, neither the Prime Minister nor any of the Deputy Prime Ministers were women. Women’s representation at this level improved during the June to December 2020 mandate, with a woman making up one of the four Deputy Prime Ministers. It improved further in the most recent mandate (March 2021), with women making up two of the three Deputy Prime Ministers.

## Women remain underrepresented in key positions

Women have also been underrepresented as Ministers, to varying degrees. During the 2017-2019 mandate, women held two out of 21 ministerial positions (nine percent). This increased significantly during the February to June 2020 mandate, when women held five out of the fifteen ministerial positions (33 percent). This number dropped to three out of 16 ministerial positions (18 percent) during the June to December 2020 mandate but improved in the March 2021 mandate to five out of 15 ministerial positions (33 percent). Across all four mandates, there has not been a woman serving as minister of agriculture, defense, infrastructure, health, communities and return, or internal affairs.

**Table 4.**

Ministry	Minister Gender (Mar Mandate)	Minister Gender (Jun – Dec 2020 Mandate)	Minister Gender (Feb – Mar 2020 Mandate)	Minister Gender (2017 – 2019 Mandate)
Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Rural Development*	M	M	M	M
Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports	M	W	W	M
Ministry of Defense*	M	M	M	M
Ministry of Infrastructure*	M	M	M	M
Ministry of Health	M	M	M	M
Ministry of Justice	W	M	W	M
Ministry of Economy and Environment*	M	M	W	M
Ministry of Communities and Return	M	M	M	M
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Diaspora	W	W	M	M
Ministry of Education and Science*	W	M	W	M
Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare	M	M	N/A	M
Ministry of Regional Development	M	M	M	N/A
Ministry of Local Government*	M	M	W	M
Ministry of Finance*	W	W	M	M
Ministry of Internal Affairs*	M	M	M	M M M
Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Entrepreneurship*	W	N/A	N/A	N/A
Ministry of European Integration	N/A	N/A	M	W
Ministry of Industry and Trade	N/A	N/A	N/A	M M
Ministry of Rural Development	N/A	N/A	N/A	M
Ministry of Innovation and Entrepreneurship	N/A	N/A	N/A	M
Ministry of Public Administration	N/A	N/A	N/A	M
Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning	N/A	N/A	N/A	W
Ministry of Diaspora and Investments	N/A	N/A	N/A	M

\*Indicates that the name of the ministry has changed between mandates

### Data gaps pose challenges to detailed analysis

It was not possible to access complete data for the gender of Deputy Ministers of the last three mandates. However, the data available indicates a significant gender imbalance, with women underrepresented in these positions as well.

### 8.3 Women in local government

While women have made gains in representation at the local level, they continue to face a harsh political climate, as well as significant barriers to engagement in the policymaking and legislative process. Mayoral positions have remained largely unattainable for women.

There is a need for greater networking with visible women in the parliament and in the government and greater attention and resources in order to accelerate progress at a local level.

### Women have made advances in local government, but mayoral positions remain largely out of reach

Following the 2017 elections, women secured 35 percent of all municipal assembly seats across Kosovo. Sixty-seven percent of those elected secured their positions due to the quota, while 33 percent were directly elected. As noted in [an analysis by the Kosovo Women's Network](#), “this represents a remarkable increase in the direct election of women, without the quota, at the municipal level, from 30 women in the [previous] elections to 109 women in 2017.”

However, women did not secure any of the 38 mayoral seats contested during that same election. In fact, very few women ran for mayoral positions; they made up four percent of the 204 candidates.<sup>48</sup> To date, Kosovo has had one woman serving as mayor, Mimoza Kusari-Lila. She was consistently cited by interviewees and focus-group participants as a positive example for women's political leadership at the municipal level.

### Once in government, women are often excluded from policy making and legislation

During the interviews and focus groups, a number of participants also raised issues related to the lack of substantive engagement of women municipal assembly members in policy making and legislation. Many noted that women who secured their positions through the quota were often unprepared to serve once they came into office. One municipal assembly member said that it was left up to them to learn how the assembly worked and the powers that it held, noting that there was very little support from the parties. There was some discussion amongst participants about whether this was intentional in order to ensure that women elected through the quota simply voted the way that they were told and did not put forward their own ideas.

The feeling that the engagement of women MPs is low was reinforced in the alumni survey, with 56 percent of respondents agreeing that their party consults with women to ensure that they are playing an equal role in party procedures, policy shaping, selection of priorities, and leadership.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> N. Farnsworth, D. Morina, D. Ryan, G. Rrahmani, V. Robinson-Conlon, and I. Banjska, “[Kosovo Gender Analysis](#),” Kosovo Women's Network, 2018, pp. 9

<sup>49</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), Survey of alumni of NDI Kosovo programming, NDI Kosovo, 2021

## Women face significant opposition and backlash to engagement in local politics

Another municipal assembly member noted that the *“harsh political agenda towards women”* posed a significant barrier for women interested in getting into local politics. He highlighted that women often have *“pressure from their families who don’t want to see them in politics being attacked.”*

A woman who serves in a senior position in government echoed these concerns about the pressures facing women at the municipal level and highlighted the difference between what happens in the capital, Pristina, and the reality in the rest of the country. *“Pristina is a bubble. It doesn’t give you a clear picture of what is happening. The discrepancy between what is happening in Pristina and the rest of the country is extreme.”*

Other participants had a more positive outlook about women’s engagement in municipal assemblies, with one noting that, *“you see strong participation of women in local assemblies, but their voices are not heard in Pristina. At the local level women bring attention to things like transportation and childcare.”*

## Greater resources are required to advance progress at the local level

Whether they were more positive or pessimistic, interviewees and focus-group participants consistently highlighted the need to direct greater attention and resources to advancing women’s participation at the municipal level. When asked whether they had any advice for NDI’s programming over the coming years, this was a frequent recommendation. Civil society representatives noted that there is very little activity from international organizations at the municipal level and that this is a significant gap that will need to be addressed in order to advance progress. Several party representatives also noted the lack of interest from donors and the international community regarding advancing women’s political participation at the local level, noting that funding often goes to activities at the central level.

## 9. Women in Parties

### 9.1 Party Culture

Women continue to face a patriarchal culture within their political parties, which hampers their meaningful participation in decision making. A culture of support is lacking both within and across parties, which means that women are often pitted against each other in competition for the few roles available to them. A focus on party leader loyalty further prevents women from advocating for change from within. While many high-level party representatives interviewed focused on the written bylaws and rules that mandate women’s political participation, there is a need for greater emphasis on the culture within the party and how this is set from the top.

### Many parties have a patriarchal culture that inhibits the involvement of women in decision making

While it was not universal, many of the women interviewed highlighted the patriarchal and male-dominated culture of political parties as barriers to progress. They noted that men occupy the primary decision-making roles and that women are often sidelined in areas that are less powerful.

In conversations with senior leaders from political parties, many of them emphasized their parties' commitment to gender equality and their desire to have more women involved in leadership positions. However, a frequent refrain was that women either weren't ready to hold these positions or that they did not put themselves forward for them. The onus was placed on women to summon the "guts" and "courage" to take up positions.

This clashed with the perspectives of many women interviewees outside the party leadership, who often shared that women had the desire and the qualifications to serve in senior positions but that there was not sufficient space given to them. One senior man within a political party seemed to acknowledge this problem, noting that *"power is not easily shared by men. They see ten seats at the table and if there is gender equality, they only have five."*

### A lack of support from women for other women and a focus on party loyalty above all else holds women back

Support for women amongst other women—or the lack thereof—was also a consistent theme across the interviews and focus groups. One woman who leads her party's women's organization noted, *"our biggest problem is ourselves. Women are not supportive of women."* Another woman who is a former Member of Parliament commented, *"women should support women. Men are barriers to women but sometimes women are also barriers to other women."* Other women highlighted the "jealousy" that can exist between women vying for the limited space at the table.

Several interviewees highlighted that party loyalty—and specifically loyalty to the party leader—was expected to come before solidarity with other women or efforts to advance women's participation. One interviewee noted that *"the alliance to political parties is still stronger than the alliance to feminist principles."*

This attitude of loyalty above all else can prove problematic when it comes to the issue of violence against women in political parties. Both men and women hesitated to respond when asked about specific incidents of violence and harassment within their ranks, and a number of interviewees stated that it simply does not happen within their party. Given the prevalence of violence against women in politics, this jars with the reality that many women face.

### There is a need for more allyship within and across parties

There is also a need for greater male allyship both within political parties and across them. While there was anecdotal evidence of men coming to the defense of their women colleagues within their parties, there were no formal structures or networks for this allyship. Cross-party allyship is also lacking, with most examples of men standing up for women political leaders happening within parties.

## 9.2 Party Bylaws and Structure

Due to legislated mandates, all parties have at least some measures for the inclusion of women in their bylaws. However, awareness and implementation remain significant challenges. Parties' structures for the inclusion of women vary widely, although forums remain the most common. While most representatives of political parties interviewed believe that these structures are important for ensuring women's involvement within the party, many acknowledge that a lack of autonomy over their activities and finances inhibits their effectiveness.

### Legislated requirements ensure at least some written commitments to gender equality, but awareness and implementation are often lacking

Political parties are required to implement measures to ensure compliance with the legislative quota, and the law on gender equality also states that they are *"obliged to implement measures to promote equal participation of men and women at authorities and bodies of the parties."*<sup>50</sup>

While interviewees and focus-group participants noted that their parties' bylaws did include such provisions, many said that their implementation was lacking. One former candidate noted, *"of course it's all on paper in theory, but in practice it's totally different."* She added that when parties are seeking to fulfill their quota obligations, women *"are being chased and respected,"* but *"later we have to fight a lot to reach the same level of equality with men."*

There is also a lack of awareness about the specific measures included in party bylaws. When asked about this during the interviews and focus groups, many participants were not able to share concrete details.

### Parties have a range of structures for the inclusion of women, though the majority continue to favor forums

Political parties in Kosovo have a range of different structures for the inclusion of women. Based on the interviews and focus groups with party representatives, as well as a review of publicly available statutes and bylaws, the structures implemented by each party are outlined below. The structure used by the majority of parties is a forum. However, there are significant variations in terms of the level of autonomy these forums have and the activities they undertake.

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<sup>50</sup> Kosovo Agency for Gender Equality, "[Kosovo Program for Gender Equality 2020-2024](#)," Republic of Kosovo Office of the Prime Minister, 2020, pp. 47

**Table 5.**

Party	Forum	Secretariat	Department	Other	Notes
Partia Demokratike e Kosoves / The Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK)	Y	N	Y	N	PDK has a forum, which they call the Democratic Women and a Department for Gender Issues. The Democratic Women is organized at the national and local level. It organizes activities for all women members of the party. Recently, PDK has also created the Department for Gender Issues, which functions only at the national level. Its role is to develop policies and strategies that target gender empowerment within the party.
Lidhja Demokratike e Kosoves / Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)	Y	N	N	N	LDK has a forum, which according to the statute is organized at the central level, branch level, and sub-branch level. The forum at the branch level is also part of the presidency of the branch. According to the party statute the forum is regulated separately by their own bylaws.
Levizja Vetevendosje / Movement Self-determination (LVV)	N	N	N	Y	A recent statutory amendment has transitioned the Women's Secretariat to the decentralized structure of Women for LVV . The change also made It mandatory for the head of the Women for LVV to be a member of the presidency.
Aleanca per Ardhmerine e Kosoves / Alliance for the Future of Kosovo (AAK)	N	N	Y	N	AAK has a department for women. There is no publicly available information about how it is organized or its mandate within the party.
Partia Alternativa / Alternativa Party	Y	N	N	N	Alternativa has a forum, which is structured at all levels. According to the statute, representation of women in all of the party structures should not be less than 30 percent.
Nisma Social Demokratike / Social Democratic Nisma	Y	N	N	N	Nisma has a forum, which is structured at three levels. The head of the women's forum at the branch level is also a member of the branch council.
Aleanca Kosova e Re / New Kosovo Alliance (AKR)	Y	N	N	N	AKR has a forum, which is structured at all levels. At the local levels, four members of the women's forum participate in the branch parliament. At the branch level, the head of the women's forum is part of the branch presidency.
Partia Egjiptiane / Egyptian party (IRDK)	Y	N	N	N	IRDK has a forum, which establishes its own bodies through a general assembly, which takes part every two years.
Kosova Demokratik Türk Partisi / Kosovo Democratic Turkish Party (KDTP)	N	N	N	Y	KDTP has a women's coordination board as a central organization unit, which is formed of the heads of women's branches. It has a council, a board of directors, and a chair.
Partia Liberale Egjitipane / Liberal Egyptian Party (PLE)	N	N	N	N	PLE has a women's forum, which consists of all women represented in the PLE presidency. The women's forum has its own chairperson.

Socijaldemokratska unija /Social Democratic Union (SDU)	Y	N	N	N	SDU has a forum, which is structured at all levels. The women’s forum elects the president of the forum, the board, and the presidency.
Nova Demokratska Stranka / New Democratic Party (NDS)	Y	N	N	N	NDS has a forum, which elects the president of the forum, and the board of the forum, which consists of at least five members.
Srpska Lista / Serbian List (SL)	N	N	N	Y	SL has a union of women established by the presidency.

\*Note: There was insufficient publicly available information about PSD -E Majta Demokratike / PSD -The Democratic Left to include them in the chart above.

Views on the effectiveness of these structures vary widely

The representatives of political parties that took part in the interviews and focus groups were largely supportive of the structures that their parties use to organize women. However, participants from outside the political parties were much more critical, believing that women’s forums and other structures were used to sideline and marginalize women, rather than giving them true decision-making power and independence. Indeed, one representative of the media said that women’s forums were “ridiculous.” Another member of the media said that *“the way these groups are organized, and their values are very problematic. They are inherited from the 1990s when everything was very traditional.”*

A participant from academia, while supportive of the idea of women’s forums, argued that they often lack a clear sense of purpose. She noted that *“there is often a sense that they come together just because they are biologically female and therefore, they are women. But it’s not clear why they are coming together.”*

A representative from a civil society organization went further, saying that women’s forums *“have a bad reputation within society. Maybe they are more structured now, but they are not strong enough...The general opinion is that these forums don’t do anything.”*

In order for women’s organizations to be effective, they need a greater level of power, autonomy, and financial resources

Common themes cited by the critics of women’s forums and other structures for organizing women included lack of budget, lack of autonomy, and lack of clear mission or purpose. Others objected to the idea of women being *“put in a corner”* or *“divided from men.”* Finally, some noted that women’s forums were a way for senior men within the party to keep women occupied and outside the real decision-making structures and that the women who are strongest within the parties are not engaged in these structures.

Amongst the 22 former candidates surveyed who are NDI program alumni, views were split as to the level of autonomy that their parties’ women’s wings enjoyed. Forty percent either “strongly” or “somewhat” agreed with the statement “The women’s wing in my party has independence and autonomy over their budget, priorities, and activities.” However, 32 percent either “somewhat” or “strongly” disagreed. Nearly a quarter of respondents, 23 percent, said they didn’t know.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), Survey of alumni of NDI Kosovo programming, NDI Kosovo, 2021



Among a wider group of NDI alumni surveyed—including those who have not stood as candidates—views were similarly split regarding whether their parties provided training or financial support to their women’s structure. Nearly 38 percent said no, 34 percent said yes, and 28 percent didn’t know.<sup>52</sup>

For women’s organizations to fulfill their purpose, parties should ensure that they have a seat at the table in decision-making processes (including policy development and candidate selection), they have autonomy to determine their own programming, and they have sufficient financial resources to carry out that programming.

Most agree that while these structures have their faults, they are still important for ensuring the inclusion of women

That said, the alternative—removing formal structures for women within parties—was also met with criticism. One woman whose party had removed its women’s forum noted, *“previously we had the forum of women, and women were more appreciated, had more activities. Now we don’t have that anymore...I think this was a mistake.”* She added that the dismantling of the forum had also posed challenges for the party’s ability to engage women voters at the grassroots level, as women were much more likely to accept an invitation from a women’s organization than from a male leader within the party. This view was echoed by two of her colleagues, who noted that *“by removing the forum, the women in the party were damaged a lot.”*

Others expressed the view that while, in an ideal world, separate structures for women should be removed, they are not yet ready to take that step.

### 9.3 Policymaking

Because of the ad hoc nature of policy development within many parties, there are few formal processes to ensure the inclusion of women. Based on the platforms put forward during the most recent election cycle, few parties have robust, established procedures for the advancement of gender equality in policymaking. More work is required to improve parties’ policymaking processes and ensure both women’s involvement in these processes and the gender-responsiveness of the policies put forward.

Women’s role in policymaking within parties often remains confined to stereotypical “women’s issues”

Few interviewees and focus-group participants could point to specific mechanisms through which their parties engaged women in the policymaking process. Some noted that they deferred to their MPs based on their specific areas of focus and the committees on which they sit. Given the underrepresentation of women on parliamentary committees, as noted earlier, this would likely put women at a disadvantage in terms of meaningfully contributing to the process.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Other interviewees noted that women were largely relegated to discussions about stereotypical “women’s issues” and were not called upon to contribute to policy development or comment publicly about their parties’ established policies on other topics. Policies often do not address issues connected to the everyday lives of people but rather focus on ideological issues and themes related to national identity.

### Parties’ policy platforms are often developed by a small group, dictated by party leadership

Based on the interviews and focus groups, none of the parties appeared to have clear frameworks for ensuring that diverse viewpoints are represented in the development of parties’ policy platforms. Those who write the parties’ platforms in advance of elections seem to be selected at the discretion of the party leadership, and there do not appear to be formal policies for ensuring that women are represented among these groups.

Understandably, political parties’ platforms for the snap elections in February 2021 were compiled hastily, with little visibility into the process. NDI analyzed the platforms of nine political parties and found that the inclusion of issues specifically impacting women varied widely between them. While a few parties provided a robust range of policies to address gender inequality, others made little mention—if any—of women or gender, with few specific details.

Of those that did address gender, supporting girls’ education, equal property inheritance, and women’s employment and business ownership were common themes. Many also noted that they would fight discrimination and violence against women and girls.

Other policy proposals put forward in party platforms include: providing tax incentives for businesses that employ women and for women-owned businesses; developing scholarship programs for women; investing in preschool education so that young mothers can enter the workforce; supporting survivors of domestic violence through social housing, employment, vocational training, and assistance in social services; setting public-sector employment quotas; and establishing maternity leave regulation.

While it is difficult to assess parties’ commitment to policies to advance gender equality based on the current election cycle alone given the short timeline for preparation, it is clear that most parties need to spend more time developing comprehensive and coherent policies to address the unique challenges women face. It is also apparent from the focus groups and interviews that most parties do not bring a gender lens to their assessment of policies—an issue that must be addressed to ensure that they do not have the unintended consequence of exacerbating existing gender gaps. There is also a need for greater focus on how policies could be implemented in practice, ensuring that they are not simply empty promises.

## 10. Women in Campaigns

### 10.1 Selection and Placement of Candidates

The opacity and arbitrariness of parties’ candidate selection and placement processes stack the cards against women candidates. Few parties go beyond meeting the requirements of the gender

quota, and women candidates are often marginalized or even encouraged not to run robust campaigns once they are selected. Making selection and placement processes and criteria more transparent could go a long way towards advancing equality, but further measures may be required to even the playing field.

### Parties' unclear and informal processes for selecting candidates often disadvantage women

Interviewees and focus-group participants were asked to describe their parties' processes for identifying, proposing, selecting, and placing candidates on lists. While some parties seemed to have clearly defined policies, which involved different levels of the party structure, many others were either unable to articulate their party's process or appeared to have informal practices that left the selection and placement of candidates at the discretion of the party's senior leadership. [NDI's 2015 report](#) found that the informal nature of candidate recruitment and nomination processes in Kosovo were a major disadvantage to women due to the male dominance of political networks.

Focus group and interview participants echoed these findings, highlighting the opaque nature of the process. One party representative noted that women who are selected as candidates often come from "*top to bottom, not bottom up.*" She added that they are often connected to powerful men within the party, enabling them to bypass formal selection processes. Among the 22 former candidates surveyed who are alumni of NDI programs, 18 said that they were selected as a candidate due to their long-serving activism in the party, while six were invited by the party branch leader or mayor to join the list.<sup>53</sup>

Illustrating this point, a former candidate added that party presidents are "*like gods*" and that "*they decide on everything.*" The decisions about which candidates to select, especially for the winnable positions on the lists, are often based on who can bring in the most money and the most votes to the party, which rarely includes women.

Amongst the respondents to the survey of former candidates who are NDI alumni, there were divergent views as to whether their parties' processes for both selecting and proposing candidates were equally favorable to men and women. A majority of those surveyed believed that these processes were equally favorable (59 percent and 55 percent, respectively), while nearly a third (31 percent) saw both processes as much more favorable to men.<sup>54</sup>

### Political parties' support for women candidates

Political entities used their official social media channels to post about the elections during the campaign period, and the major political parties published posts promoting women candidates. Of the five parties analyzed by NDI, LVV posted about its women candidates far more than the others: 41 percent of the official LVV page posts pertained to women candidates, compared with nine percent of LDK posts, seven percent of PDK posts, six percent of AAK posts, and three percent

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

of NISMA posts.<sup>55</sup> This indicates that LVV is making more effort to increase the visibility of its women candidates.

Among the 22 alumni of NDI programs surveyed who had previously stood as candidates, one respondent said that their party held specific campaign activities to support women candidates.<sup>56</sup>

### Parties rarely go beyond the requirements of the legislative quota

In terms of the selection and placement of women candidates in particular, interviewees, focus-group participants, and academic research have all noted that most political parties in Kosovo are merely meeting the mandated quota for women's inclusion on party lists. According to [an analysis of the 2019 parliamentary elections](#), 343 of 1,067 total candidates (32 percent) were women—barely over the 30 percent quota. This failure to significantly exceed the legal quota on candidate lists indicates the presence of gender bias in the parties' candidate selection processes, as well as possible reluctance of women to put themselves through a process skewed in favor of men.

NDI's [previous gender assessment in 2015](#) found that recruitment timeframes are also an obstacle for women due to the short notice of elections, and women candidates “were often recruited at the last minute to meet the minimum number of legally required positions.” While this points to shortages in pools of potential candidates, the same report also found in interviews that potential women candidates are more heavily scrutinized than male candidates.

More than half of respondents (55 percent) in the survey of former candidates said that their political party has a strategy to promote women candidates, but less than half (46 percent) of those who said yes believed that the strategies were being implemented.<sup>57</sup>

Women interviewees and focus group participants noted that women were often courted when it was time for political parties to fulfil their quota obligations, but that they were then sidelined once the lists were established and election campaigns commenced.

In the snap February 2021 elections, parties largely stuck to the 30 percent quota. LVV surpassed the 30 percent quota with 37 percent women candidates, and minority parties had a higher proportion of women than the average.<sup>58</sup>

### Women are often not put in positions that could be won without the quota

While the recent election saw more women being elected to parliament without the quota than ever before, many of those who took part in focus groups and interviews in late 2020 felt that women selected to run in the districts were often not nominated to winnable positions. Some women candidates selected to run on party lists reported that they were told by male colleagues not to actively campaign because they would win their seats anyway due to the quota and they should not take preferential votes away from the men.

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<sup>55</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), “Internal Report —Monitoring the information disorders in media during Kosovo’s February 14, 2021 snap elections”, 2021

<sup>56</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), Survey of alumni of NDI Kosovo programming, NDI Kosovo, 2021

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), “Internal Report – February 2021,” NDI Kosovo, March 2021

This poses a significant challenge for women being taken seriously, both as candidates and—ultimately—members of parliament or municipal councilors. As noted earlier, women who are not elected through the quota are often treated as more qualified and are better respected amongst their colleagues than those elected through the quota.

Among former candidates who responded to the NDI alumni survey, nearly 55 percent believed that the process for placing candidates in winnable positions on lists was “much more favorable to men,” while nearly 41 percent believed it was equally favorable.<sup>59</sup>

## 10.2 Preparation of Candidates

Training and support for candidates are uneven across parties, with some larger, more well-resourced parties providing robust programs, while others offer very little support. Given the unique challenges that women candidates face—particularly when it comes to gendered discrimination and harassment—the fact that none of the parties provides tailored training programs to women is a gap that should be addressed. Training for candidates who succeed in the elections is also lacking. More emphasis could be placed on preparing them to assume office.

### Some parties offer robust training programs for candidates, while others provide little support

Interviewees and focus-group participants were asked to describe the types of support that their parties provide to candidates. In the focus groups with representatives of the four largest political parties, three of the four parties noted that they provided campaign skills training, messaging and media training, deployment of volunteers, and access to party databases. Two of the four parties noted that they provided support on digital campaigning, policymaking, and countering violence against women in politics. Notably, none of the four largest parties reported providing fundraising support and training, which was identified by interviewees and focus group participants as one of the major barriers to success for women candidates in particular.

Some parties have implemented working groups or committees during campaigning periods in order to build candidates’ skills. These groups have focused on areas including public speaking, media training, and debate preparation. They have also sought to build candidates’ understanding of specific policy areas. However, these appeared to be the exception rather than the norm.

Candidates from a number of parties said that they received little to no support from their party, with one woman candidate from a large political party noting, “*There is no support. No support from volunteers, no financial support.*” Another woman candidate added, “*I had to help myself as a candidate. I didn’t get any training.*”

Among surveyed alumni, 39 percent were not aware of trainings organized by their political entity to improve women candidates’ chances of being elected, while 38 percent said they were aware of such trainings. Among the 22 NDI program alumni surveyed who had previously stood as candidates, half said they received support for digital campaigning. Other support provided by the

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<sup>59</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), Survey of alumni of NDI Kosovo programming, NDI Kosovo, 2021

party included: mentorship from more experienced party campaigners, transport to meet with voters, campaign skills training, policy development and messaging training, and deployment of volunteers for grassroots outreach.<sup>60</sup>

### None of the parties provide training that specifically addresses the unique challenges women candidates face

None of the parties said that they provided specific training to women candidates. This is concerning as a gender-blind approach cannot properly address the unique challenges that women candidates face. The only special consideration that seems to have been given to the needs of women candidates was the provision of daycare by one political party to ensure that women could take part in the training program. Of the 22 NDI program alumni who previously stood as candidates who responded to the survey, percent one said she received training on combatting violence against women.<sup>61</sup>

### There is insufficient focus placed on the transition from campaigning to governance

The transition from campaigning to governance is also an area in need of greater attention by both political parties and civil society organizations. Several candidates, particularly those who ran at the municipal level, noted that they were not adequately prepared to assume office and meaningfully contribute to the legislative and monitoring process.

One participant noted that going into the municipal assembly was like “*signing up for another university*” and that it took her six months to read all the administrative instructions and laws. She said that some of her women colleagues “*just raise their hands when it comes to voting without understanding it*” because they are not sufficiently prepared to govern.

When asked whether their party ensures mentoring and advice to new and less experienced women members, the majority of respondents in NDI’s recent alumni survey either did not know (18 percent) or said that it was not provided (43 percent).<sup>62</sup>

A number of interviewees and focus-group participants highlighted training for successful candidates on how to govern effectively as a key area for NDI and other organizations to engage in the coming years.

## 10.3 Women Campaigners

Previous research has shown that women’s participation in campaign activities is very low. In the 2019 parliamentary elections, one-quarter of speakers at campaign activities organized by political entities were women, and a similar proportion of participants in those activities were women. While [the report](#) noted that this proportion was higher than the 2017 parliamentary elections, there is clearly an enduring gender imbalance.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

Ahead of the February 2021 elections, there appeared to be a significant change in engagement. Women were active campaigners, particularly on social media platforms. Women candidates also visited local businesses, met with constituents, and organized meetings with vulnerable constituencies. However, many of these activities were organized by women candidates independently, rather than through a concerted and coordinated effort by their parties.<sup>63</sup>

## 10.4 Financing of Campaigns

Fundraising challenges were a key theme throughout the focus groups and interviews, with women’s lack of access to campaign finance raised as a significant challenge. Parties do not seem to have proactive measures for addressing this imbalance, and fundraising is largely left up to individual candidates. Given the economic inequalities raised earlier in this report, women face difficulty accessing the same moneyed networks as their male counterparts. The view that women do not have to run robust campaigns due to the quota adds another dimension to the challenges they face in fundraising.

### Campaign finance is opaque, making thorough analysis challenging

Campaign finance in Kosovo remains opaque. While parties are legally required to account for funding allocated by the state, money that is raised by individual candidates is not subject to reporting requirements. Parties are also not required to report on the percentage of government funding allocated to men and women candidates.

In the absence of stricter financial disclosure requirements, most political parties have not been forthcoming about campaign fundraising and expenditures. Attempts by the media and civil society to push for greater transparency in campaign finance have largely been unsuccessful. Representatives of the media who took part in focus groups noted that they had tried to press candidates to disclose their funding but had not received any responses. In 2019, Democracy in Action sent a funding questionnaire to 26 political entities—percent five responded.<sup>64</sup>

In a survey of alumni of NDI programs, 40 percent of the 181 respondents said that their party financially supported women candidates in the same way as men candidates, while the remaining respondents were equally split between “no” and “don’t know.”<sup>65</sup>

### Incumbents typically receive greater financial support, and women face significant challenges fundraising

[Previous NDI research](#) highlights evidence that incumbents receive greater financial resources and support during campaigns. Given that incumbents, particularly in senior leadership positions, tend to be men, this results in a gender imbalance in funding.

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<sup>63</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), “Internal Report – February 2021,” NDI Kosovo, March 2021

<sup>64</sup> Democracy in Action, "[Election Observation Report: Kosovo Assembly Elections 2019](#)," 2019, pp. 28

<sup>65</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), Survey of alumni of NDI Kosovo programming, NDI Kosovo, 2021

As one former candidate at the municipal level noted, women candidates' campaigns "*are not funded at all...We are there for the quota. I wanted to do a campaign, but I was told to stay at home and whatever comes, comes.*"

When asked to elaborate on how campaigns are funded within their parties, both larger and smaller parties indicated that this was left to the individual candidates. Some noted that their parties provided in-kind support using the budget they are allocated from the government, which is used to provide materials, such as business cards and professional headshots to candidates. Most noted that this in-kind support was provided equally to all candidates on the list, regardless of gender.

More than half (14) of the 22 alumni of NDI programs surveyed who had previously stood as candidates said that "fundraising challenges" was the biggest challenge faced in their campaigns.<sup>66</sup>

#### Women's lack of access to business and professional networks compounds fundraising challenges

Given that candidates are largely expected to finance their own campaigns, personal business and professional networks are crucial. Men are more likely to have access to these networks, through which they can secure both funding and in-kind support, such as vehicles or office space. Women are largely excluded from these networks, with many relying on the support of their families in order to mount campaigns. One woman focus-group participant noted that "*if a woman doesn't have support from her family, it's a big problem to run a campaign.*"

#### Women who do effectively fundraise are criticized as behaving "like men" in how they act after being elected

This dynamic affects the profile of women candidates who are able to run effective, well-financed campaigns. One representative from a civil society organization said "*we have seen that some women MPs don't do so badly with finances...But they don't use this money for the greater good for women. They became the same as men.*"

### 10.5 Portrayal of Candidates

Women continue to face unequal access to the media—and unequal treatment when they are interviewed or profiled. They face significant challenges when it comes to commenting on topics that are not stereotypically viewed as "women's issues." They also face violence, harassment, and negative portrayals, which could have a chilling effect on women's willingness to participate in politics.

#### Women face unequal access to the media

[Media monitoring](#) ahead of the February 2021 National Assembly elections found pervasive gender imbalances and sexism across all forms of media, although there was improvement in representation. Television coverage of the elections focused on women for seven percent of minutes observed; 16 percent of advertisements were for women candidates; and women candidates made up 20 percent of participants in debates. However, while women's representation

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.



at the debates was low, they discussed topics beyond “women’s issues,” such as economic policy, education policy, and rule of law.

In other online news outlets, NDI identified numerous online news articles and social media posts which contained misogynistic narratives. For the February elections monitoring report NDI found 11 online news articles and posts that directly attacked women candidates for MP. Moreover, the misogynistic language had a high reach among the voters. These articles had a combined reach of 442,000+ and the same narratives were republished by seven or more other online news portals on average.<sup>67</sup> Online portals and social media contributed to the promotion of false or misleading information, and misogynistic memes were circulated on Instagram.<sup>68</sup>

Both men and women candidates were attacked for their political stances, but women candidates received harsh criticism for their personal lives and appearance. Women candidates were also portrayed as benefitting from or flirting with men political leaders.

Women’s lack of access to the media was cited by many interviewees and focus-group participants as a key barrier to electoral success. One woman MP noted that *“one of the biggest challenges prohibiting women politicians is access to the media.”* Another woman who previously served in parliament added that *“media promotion is very problematic. Usually, it’s concentrated on the men in the party. I had to fight a lot to ask to be part of a debate or TV show during the election.”*

Thirty-two percent of respondents to a survey of former candidates who are alumni of NDI programs felt that women were not treated properly by the media during the election period. When asked why, one respondent suggested that if the media gave more space to women during the campaign, *“political parties would have no choice but to give more space to women.”*<sup>69</sup>

When asked about women’s access to the media within their parties, however, several men interviewed placed the blame on women. They argued that women were equally able to put themselves forward for interviews but that many were afraid to do so. It is worth noting that one party member said they had a policy of rotating between candidates in order to give every candidate equal access to the media, but this was not the norm.

Ahead of the February 2021 assembly elections, the woman candidate receiving the most media coverage and attention was candidate Vjosa Osmani. Osmani had started her own political list just prior to the elections (“Guxo List”), and joined in a pre-election coalition with LVV. [Media monitoring efforts](#) showed that women candidates from other parties did not receive as much attention. Three of the 21 TV debates were dedicated to the promotion of women candidates. However, women’s representation in all of the debates, particularly the prime-time debates, was low at 20 percent.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), “Internal Report – February 2021,” NDI Kosovo, March 2021

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), Survey of alumni of NDI Kosovo programming, NDI Kosovo, 2021

<sup>70</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), “Internal Report —Monitoring the information disorders in media during Kosovo’s February 14, 2021 snap elections”, 2021

### Women are pigeonholed and expected to comment only on “women’s issues,” or are set up to fail

Other participants noted that even when women do have access to the media, they are often asked to comment solely on gender issues, while their male colleagues are invited to speak about a broader range of topics.

When women are put in front of the media on other topics, a number of participants noted that they were asked to comment on sensitive or problematic issues with little upside for the candidate. The woman could then easily become a scapegoat for the unpopular topic.

### Media often focus on women’s appearance, rather than substance

Many participants highlighted the media’s focus on women’s appearance as a significant barrier to being taken seriously as political leaders. One male party representative noted that the “*media’s focus on women is more on what they wear, how they do their hair...This is very damaging for women in politics.*” He added that the “*media is more showbiz than content*” and that outlets are focused on inviting candidates who will bring the most viewers, who are rarely women.

In the run-up to the February 2021 elections, President Vjosa Osmani was interviewed on television and asked 50 questions covering her time as acting President of Kosovo as well as her interests and passions. However, media coverage of the interview focused primarily on what she said she cooks and eats rather than the more substantive topics, a clear example of how the media portrays women.<sup>71</sup>

### Women continue to face violence and harassment in the media

Beyond the showbiz, there is also a darker side to the portrayal of women in the media. Many participants noted the rise in hate speech directed towards women candidates, which often goes unchecked. This may have a chilling effect on women’s interest in standing for election.<sup>72</sup> One representative from a civil society organization said that it makes women “*think about whether they want to get into politics and they are intimidated by this because the hate speech is so harsh.*”

This viewpoint was echoed in NDI’s recent public opinion poll. About half of respondents (49 percent) said that the negative portrayal of women in the media poses an added obstacle for women’s electoral success.<sup>73</sup> While women respondents were more likely to agree with this statement, a significant proportion of men did as well.

The picture is markedly different between Serbs and Albanians: while half of Albanians (50 percent) agreed with the statement, one fifth of Serbs (20 percent) did.<sup>74</sup>

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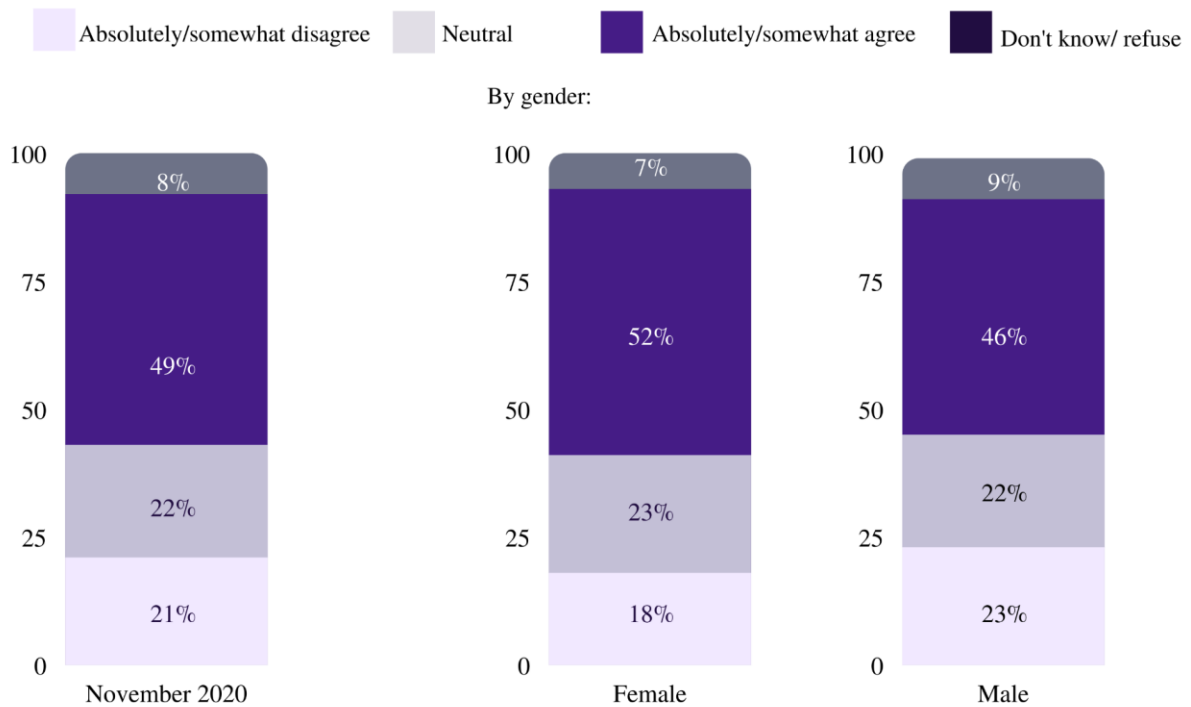
<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), “[Tweets That Chill: Analyzing Online Violence Against Women in Politics](#)”, 2019

<sup>73</sup> National Democratic Institute (NDI), “Kosovo Public Opinion Survey,” NDI Kosovo, November 2020

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

**Chart 9. Can you tell us how much you agree with the following statements?**



**The negative portrayal of women in the media poses an added obstacle for women's electoral success**

Source: NDI Public Opinion Research, November 2020

### 10.6 Women Voters

Analyzing the views and voting patterns of women is challenging due to a lack of reliable, gender-disaggregated data. However, it is concerning that parties appear to be doing little to proactively engage women voters. The recent election could provide a turning point for parties to take women voters more seriously moving forward.

Lack of publicly available, gender disaggregated data hampers analysis

While the CEC collects gender data, it does not report gender-disaggregated figures. This makes it difficult to accurately gauge the percentage of women voters across the country or their voting patterns.

Recent polling shows worrying signs that women may be less likely to vote than men

Concerningly, NDI’s recent opinion poll found that women (12 percent) were more likely than men (nine percent) to say that they would “definitely not” vote if an election were held on that day.<sup>75</sup> Women (51 percent) were also less likely than men (58 percent) to say that they would

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

“definitely” vote.<sup>76</sup> While the reasons for voting or not voting were not explored in the poll, when combined with the insights from the focus groups and interviews, this may be a signal that women’s lack of inclusion in the political process is having the effect of discouraging them from participation in elections.

### The practice of “family voting” curtails women’s political autonomy

[Previous research](#) on women’s political participation in Kosovo has also raised concerns about the practice of “family voting,” where men heads of households vote on behalf of women family members. During the 2017 elections, 34 percent of polling stations reported this phenomenon.

### Parties typically do little to proactively engage women voters—but when they do, it pays off

During the interviews and focus groups, several parties highlighted the role of their women’s forums in engaging women voters. However, few could point to specific initiatives or policy proposals that had been put forward in the previous election to specifically appeal to women.

One man holding a very senior role within his political party admitted that his party is *“still in the old habit of ‘we will talk to them later’”* when it comes to engaging women voters. He added that *“I think we are losing a big chunk of voters because of our old approach to politics, particularly on women’s participation.”*

The recent election signaled that parties that take engaging with women voters seriously stand to gain. Women and youth were critical to the electoral success of LVV, with 61 percent of women and 61 percent of 18 to 24-year-olds voting for the party, according to exit polls.<sup>77</sup> LVV’s victory may serve as both an inspiration—and a warning—to other parties.

## 11. Conclusion

The research and analysis conducted for this report provided both sources of frustration and hope for the advancement of women’s political leadership in Kosovo.

The February 2021 elections—and the formation of the government that followed—illustrate that significant progress can be achieved in a short period of time. A record number of women were elected to the National Assembly, with one in five reliant on the quota to secure their position. Women’s representation in cabinet jumped from 18 percent to 33 percent. And women now make up the majority of heads of parliamentary committees.

These gains should be acknowledged and celebrated. However, as recent history has shown, without widespread, institutionalized change, they can be short-lived. Strong leadership and political will are essential, but this must be backed by an effort to reform political parties from within, ensuring that processes governing issues ranging from candidate selection to policy development and tackling violence are codified, communicated, and implemented consistently.

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> See UBO Consulting exit polls, presented on TV Dukagjini.

NDI hopes that the recommendations outlined in this report—which have been informed by extensive research, interviews, and focus groups—provide the beginnings of a roadmap for actors across parties, government, media, and civil society to drive meaningful and lasting change.

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