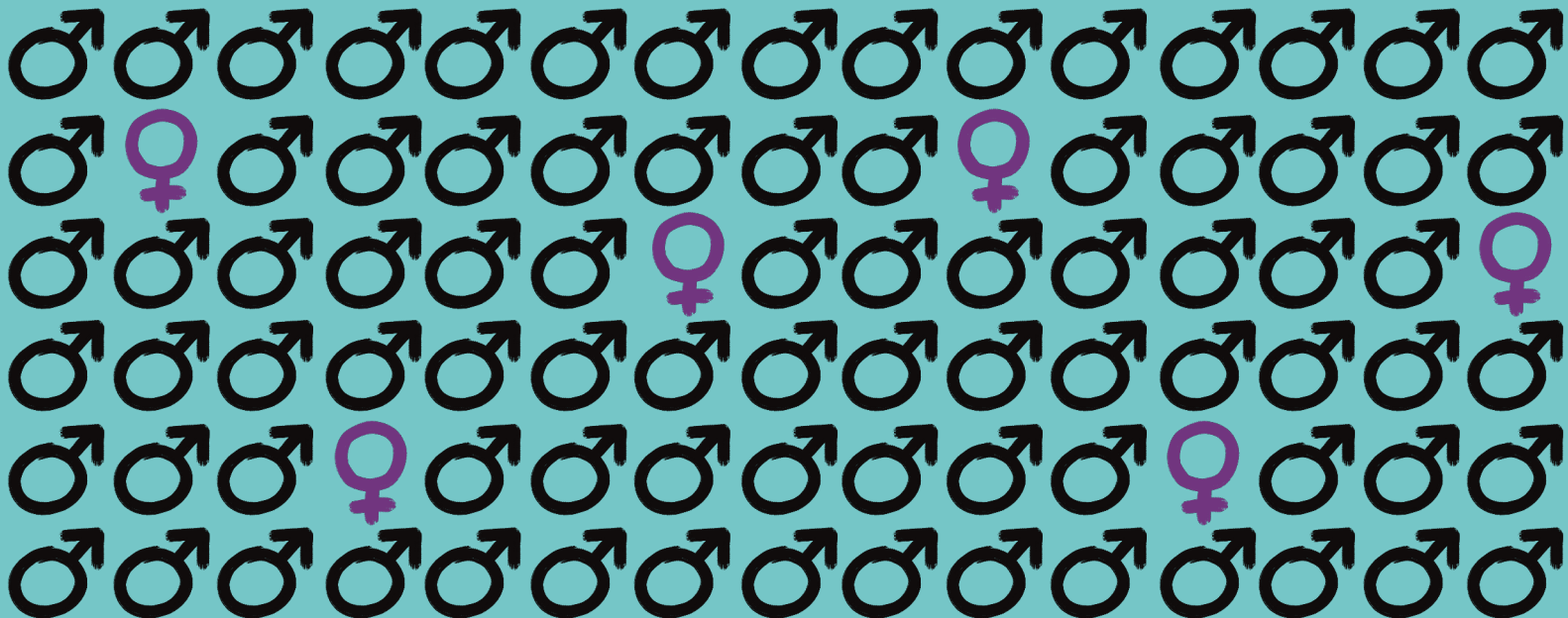


# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC



The experience of women candidates in the 2021 elections

BRIEF VERSION

# Table of Content

The context: challenges for women in politics in the Kyrgyz Republic .....	1
What is violence against women in politics? .....	2
The purpose of the study .....	3
Methodology .....	3
Data collection .....	4
Who are the women candidates in the Kyrgyz Republic? .....	7
To whom formal complaints were addressed? .....	19
Recommendations .....	22



# Acknowledgements

This study is part of the global UN Women initiative to develop harmonized survey tools to collect comparable data on violence against women in politics. The study was overseen by a team from UN Women Country Office in the Kyrgyz Republic. A technical team based at UN Women's headquarters in New York and the regional office in Istanbul provided indispensable inputs into the design of the study, development of the survey questionnaire, analysis and structuring the findings. This joint team included Ionica Berevoescu, Julie Ballington, Sagipa Djusaeva, Rachel Weston, Juncal Plazaola Castano, and Raphaelle Rafin.

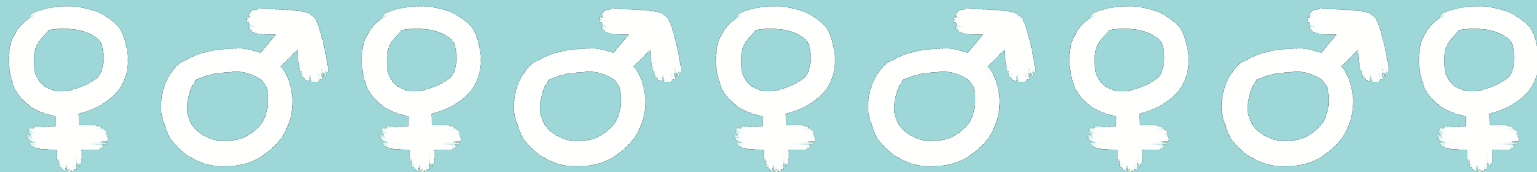
The study was implemented by the research organization «Evidence Central Asia» under the direction of Elnura Kazakbaeva, and with the support of Natalia Nikitenko, UN Women consultant, and former member of the Parliament of Kyrgyz Republic. The preparation of the report was led by Dr. Shairbek Dzhuraev.

The study would not have been possible without the participation of 1,106 women candidates for local elections and 105 women candidates for parliamentary elections who answered the survey and took part in focus groups and in-depth interviews. We are deeply grateful for their time and for sharing their experiences with us.

Special gratitude also goes to the Chairperson of the Central Commission for Elections and Referendums of the Kyrgyz Republic (CEC) Nurzhan Shaidabekova and the Head of the Department for the Organization of Elections of the CEC Makhabat Kozhokeeva, for their partnership.

The survey was made possible thanks to Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency's generous contributions to UN Women's Strategic Partnership Framework.

2024 UN Women. All rights reserved. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of UN Women, the United Nations, or any of its affiliated organizations.



# The context: challenges for women in politics in the Kyrgyz Republic

Since gaining independence in 1991, Kyrgyzstan has been lauded as an «island of democracy» in Central Asia, renowned for its open political system, free media, and vibrant civil society.<sup>1</sup> Despite these accolades, the nation's political landscape reveals a stark gender disparity that came to the forefront in 2005. The parliamentary elections that year made world headlines for triggering a regime change known as the “Tulip Revolution.” Yet, these same elections are also notable for another unprecedented outcome: they produced a parliament composed entirely of men. This event was the culmination of an ongoing trend, as women had not held more than 7% of the seats in the previous two

elections. These results underscored a systemic issue within Kyrgyzstan's democratic process and prompted significant reform efforts, leading to the introduction of a 30% gender quota for the parliament and local councils.

The persistent gender imbalance in elections reflects the broader male-dominated nature of Kyrgyzstan's political landscape. Despite the notable achievement of having had a female president, a rarity in the region, the overall track record for women's participation and leadership in politics remains disappointing. Since independence, Kyrgyzstan has had 26 prime ministers, none of whom have been women. As of February 2024, only three of the 21

cabinet ministers are women.<sup>2</sup> The representation is even more stark among deputy ministers; a 2020 analysis showed that only 5 out of 55 deputy ministers were women.<sup>3</sup> This historical context illustrates not just a failure to elect women but also a broader systemic reluctance to embrace women in significant political roles, highlighting a deep-rooted cultural and structural resistance to gender parity in the political sphere.

Global ratings confirm the above trends. As of January 2024, Kyrgyzstan ranks 111th out of 187 countries regarding women's representation in the national parliament.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, in the Global Gender Gap Index, Kyrgyzstan is ranked 86th out of 146

1 For instance, see John Anderson, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Democracy?* (Routledge, 1999).

2 Cabinet of Ministers of the Kyrgyz Republic, “List of Members of the Cabinet,” accessed April 21, 2024, <https://www.gov.kg/ru/gov/s/103>

3 Social Technologies Association, “Report on the Results of Gender Monitoring of the Elections of Deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic, Held on October 4, 2020 (Otchet Po Rezul'tatam Gendernogo Monitoringa Vyborov Deputatov Zhogorku Kenesha Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki, Proshedshikh 4 Oktyabrya 2020 g)” (Bishkek, 2020), 14.

4 Inter-Parliamentary Union, “Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments,” IPU Parline, 2024, <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=11&year=2022>

countries overall but notably ranks 111th in ‘political empowerment’ for women.<sup>5</sup>

Violence against women in politics is a key challenge to obtaining parity in representation. However, few studies focused on understanding the nature and scale of violence against

women in politics. Most relevant was the OSCE-commissioned study that conducted an online survey with women candidates in two regions of Kyrgyzstan.<sup>6</sup> The report concluded that violence against women in politics was “a widespread phenomenon” in Kyrgyzstan, with sexual harassment and psychological violence being

the most common forms. While the study resulted in valuable findings, its scope and methodology did not allow for assessing the prevalence of VAWP among women candidates in the country.

## What is violence against women in politics?

To define the key concepts and approaches to studying VAWP, this study draws on two UN documents: the Guidance Note on Preventing Violence against Women in Politics and Preventing Violence against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide.

One of the foundational documents on VAWP, “Preventing Violence against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide”, produced by UN Women and UNDP, defines VAWP as **«violence against women in political life is any**

**act of, or threat of, gender-based violence, resulting in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, that prevents them from exercising and realising their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including the right to vote and hold public office, to vote in secret and to freely campaign, to associate and assemble, and to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression. Such violence can be perpetrated by a family member, community member, and or by the State.”**

The above offers a comprehensive definition that helpfully clarifies several essential aspects that are relevant to designing the present study. First, VAWP includes both an act of violence and a threat of violence. Second, the definition points to the importance of distinguishing a) different types of VAWP, b) the contexts within which such violence may occur, and c) perpetrators ranging from close family members to community members to state actors, to name some.

5 World Economic Forum, “Global Gender Gap Report 2022,” Insight Report, July 2022, 16, [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2022.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2022.pdf)

6 Z Kochorbayeva et al., “Violence against Women in Politics in the Kyrgyz Republic: Results of Study” (OSCE, January 2022)

7 UN Women and UNDP, 23

## The purpose of the study

The primary goal of the study was to assess the prevalence of violence against women candidates in local council elections and in the national parliament.

The present study is based on a candidate survey explicitly designed to generate reliable statistics and data-based knowledge on violence against women candidates during the election campaign period.

The study is part of the UN Women's global project to develop harmonized survey-based tools to collect comparable data on violence against women in politics. The research was implemented by the research team from Evidence Central Asia.

## Methodology

To ensure that this study aligns with the definition above, the survey instrument included questions designed to capture both acts of violence and threats of violence. Furthermore, the questions aimed to capture different types of violence, including psychological violence, sexual violence, sexual harassment, economic violence, and physical violence. Finally, the questionnaire was organized into sections

1. In-person campaign activities
2. Campaign organization and materials
3. Media
4. Social media and communication tools

The study included both quantitative and qualitative components, with data collection conducted in July-September 2023. The target population of the survey

corresponding to specific settings or the contexts within which women candidates might face violence. Since this is a candidate survey with a focus on violence in the context of the election campaign, seven contexts were identified, capturing both distinct phases and distinct settings of the campaign process:

5. Political parties
6. Family
7. Voting day and seat distribution

included 8,927 female candidates in local council elections who ran for one of 28 city councils and 452 village councils. The total number of survey respondents was 1,106 local

council candidates. The qualitative component included eight focus groups conducted before the survey and fifteen in-depth interviews held after the survey was completed.

Additionally, a smaller-scale separate study was conducted with women candidates for the national parliament, with a total of 105 respondents.

In addition to the primary goal of evaluating the overall prevalence of violence against women candidates, the study also sought to gain insights on:

- prevalent forms of violence and contexts most often associated with violence
- perpetrators of violence against women candidates
- risk factors affecting the vulnerability of women to violence
- reporting and help-seeking strategies of victims of VAWP and
- impact of violence on personal well-being and political trajectories of victim candidates.

## Data collection

### Women candidates in local parliament elections

The study involved both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The quantitative component involved a survey of women candidates for local councils, with a total number of respondents being 1,106. The qualitative component included eight focus groups and 15 in-depth interviews.

Local councils in Kyrgyzstan include city councils (shaardyk kenesh) and village councils (aiyl kenesh). The survey targeted all women candidates participating in local council elections in April 2021. These include elections for 28 city councils and 452 village councils, with a total number of women candidates being 8,927

Selection of respondent was done through a computer-assisted random selection of the phone number of out of the pool of phone numbers for each subgroup that Central Elections Commission (CEC) provided.

Due to high non-response rate, primarily in the cities, and outdated phone number information provided by CEC, the number of completed surveys was 1,106 which is short of planned 1,325.

## A sampling of women candidates in the local parliament elections

Primary strata	Number of members of each subgroup	Number of people in the sample	Number of completed interviews
City council candidates	4323	725	502
Village council candidates	4604	600	604
Total	8927	1325	1106

## Women candidates in national parliament elections

In addition to the survey of local council candidates, the study also included a smaller-scale survey of women who ran for the national parliament in the 2021 elections. A total of 368 women candidates were registered in the said elections, of whom 105 were interviewed for this study.

The Jogorku Kenesh, the national unicameral legislature of Kyrgyzstan, comprises 90 members, utilizing a mixed electoral system. Specifically, 54 seats are allocated via a proportional representation (PR) system, while the remaining 36 seats are filled through majoritarian elections in single-member districts. In the 2021 elections, 21 parties vied for the 54 seats available through the PR system.

According to the Central Election Commission (CEC), the elections saw 368 women candidates participating in the PR system, alongside 30 women engaging in the majoritarian elections. Of these, there were interviewed 91 women who ran in PR elections through six parties (out of 21 parties competing in elections) and 14 who took part in majoritarian elections.



## A sampling of women candidates in the national parliament elections

Subsets of women candidates	Number of women candidates	Number of surveyed women candidates
Candidates - PR system	368	91
Candidates - SMMD system	30	14
Total	398	105

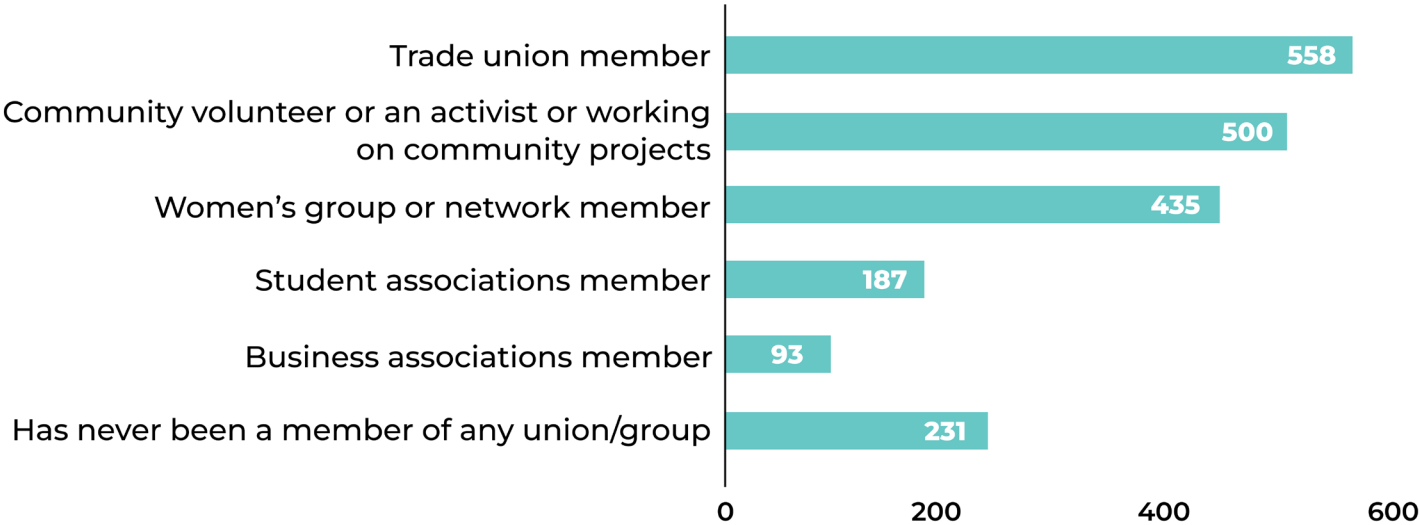
The sample size and composition were limited by the lack of contact information for all women candidates. The six parties from which women candidates were surveyed included five that secured seats in the parliament, surpassing the electoral threshold, and one that did not. The resulted convenience sample, thus, had a bias towards respondents from successful parties. This composition suggests a potential implication for the survey results: the higher stakes associated with bigger parties (that eventually secured parliamentary representation) might correlate with an increased incidence of VAWP in contrast to most contesting parties, which had minimal expectations of surpassing the electoral thresholds.<sup>8</sup>

**Qualitative component.** The qualitative component of the study included eight focus groups and 15 in-depth interviews with women candidates. The focus groups, conducted before the survey, helped the research team better understand the context and informed the development of the questionnaire. The in-depth interviews conducted after the survey provided deeper insights into issues related to violence against women in politics in Kyrgyzstan. The respondents, all women candidates, had direct experiences of violence and were selected through non-random purposive sampling.

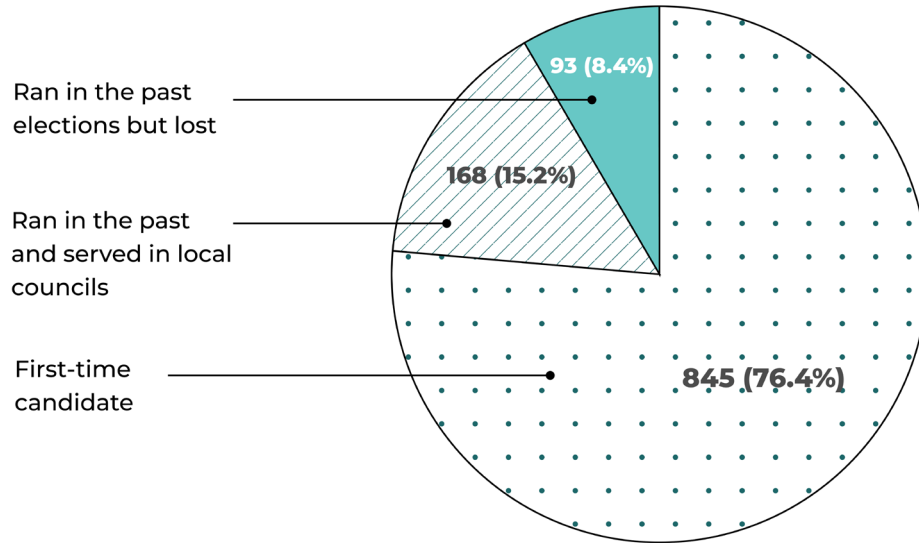
<sup>8</sup> Nine parties received less than 1% of votes out of 15 that failed to secure 5% of votes (the national threshold to enter the parliament).

# Who are the women candidates in the Kyrgyz Republic?

## Community activists but novices in politics



## Past experience in local council elections (% women)



### Middle-aged, educated women.

The average age of women candidates was 48.4 years, with the youngest female candidate was 23 and the oldest being 72. Noteworthy is that city council candidates were slightly younger (average age 46.5 years) than village council candidates (50 years). Candidates between 40-49 and 50-59 were the largest group, accounting for 30.6% and 32.6%, respectively, while 97% of all respondents were above 30.

Most women candidates had a university degree (67.6%), followed by those with vocational training (16.8%) and secondary education (13.5%). A small fraction of respondents (3.4%) reported having a disability.

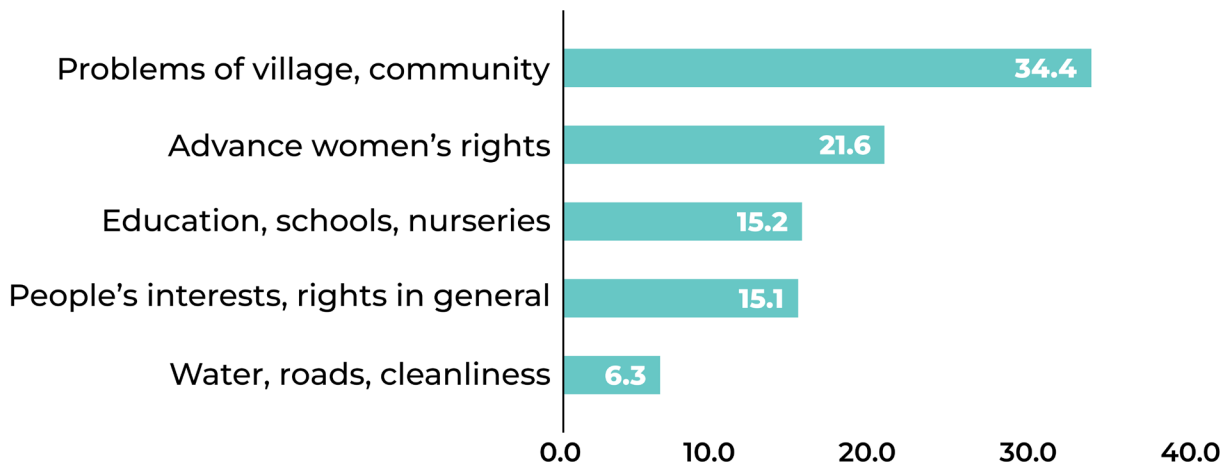
## Mostly married, Kyrgyz, employed in the education sector.

While women candidates were predominantly married (77.2%), the group also included widows (9.8%), divorced (7.1%), and single women (4.6%).

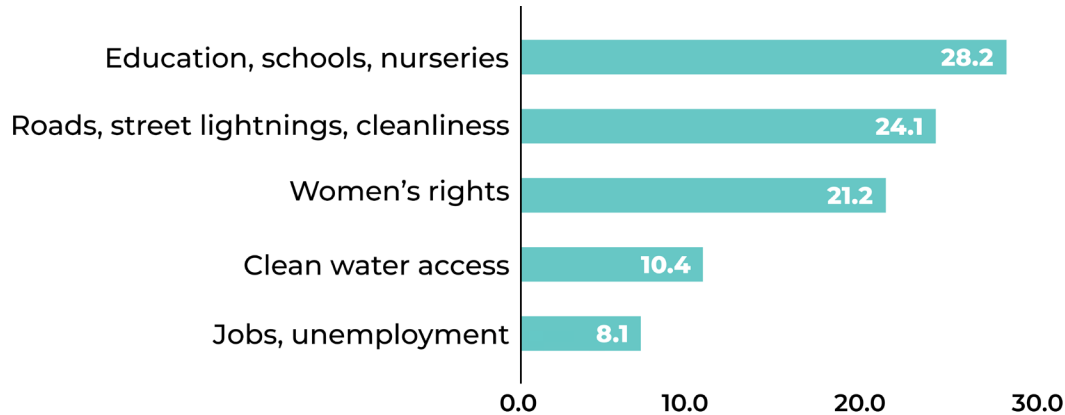
The predominant majority of surveyed women candidates were Kyrgyz, followed by Uzbeks, Russians, and Kazakhs.

While the largest ethnic groups residing in the country were represented in the sample, the figure suggests the overrepresentation of Kyrgyz and the under-representation of most ethnic minorities when compared to the ethnic composition of the population.

## Key motivations and challenges in the path to politics (as a percentage of total respondents)



## Campaign priorities for women candidates (as a percentage of total respondents)

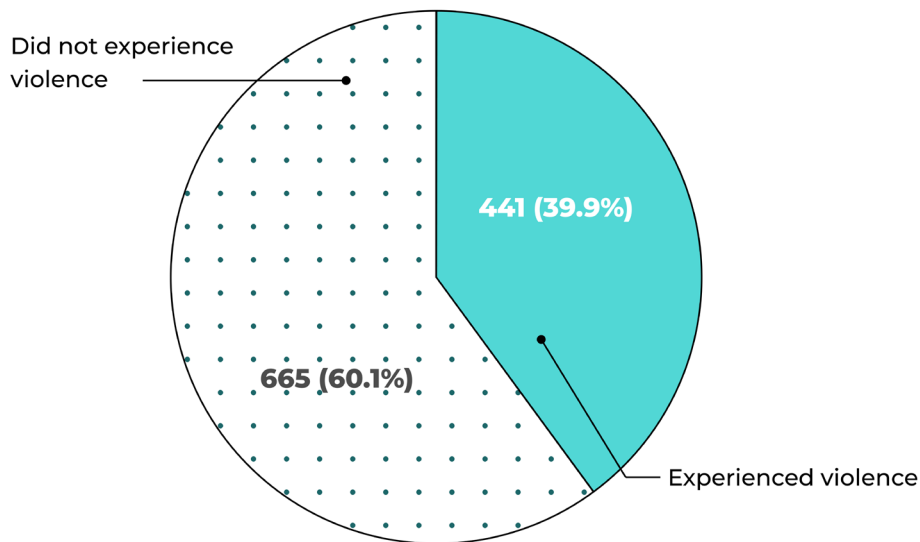


An open-ended survey question revealed three main categories of difficulties encountered by candidates during the elections:

- **Documentation hurdles:** Candidates highlighted challenges with paperwork and documentation related to registering as a candidate.
- **Work-life balance and campaigning:** The survey underscored the difficulty of balancing family and work commitments with election-related activities.
- **Financial constraints:** Limited financial resources emerged as a significant barrier for candidates.

## ! KEY FINDINGS: PREVALENCE AND RISK FACTORS

Out of 1,106 women local candidates surveyed, 441 (39.9%) reported having experienced violence at least once during the electoral campaign.



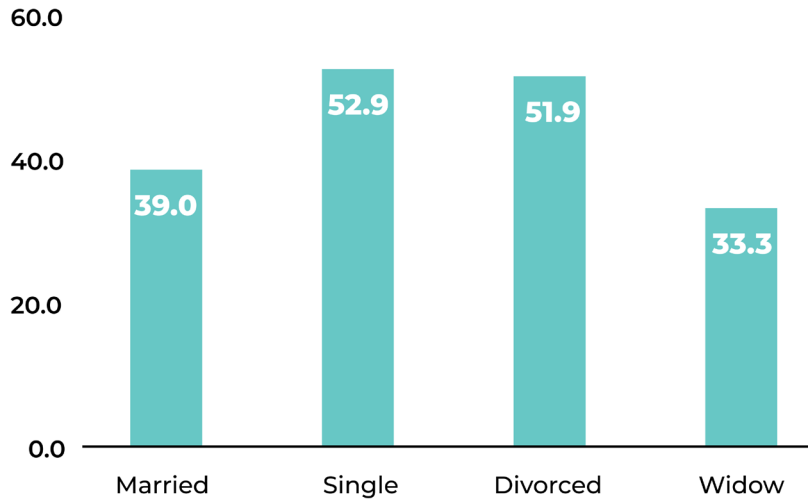
## ! KEY RISK FACTORS: CITY COUNCIL CANDIDATES, SINGLE AND DIVORCED WOMEN, AND CANDIDATES WITH HIGHER EDUCATION LEVELS ARE MORE EXPOSED TO VIOLENCE

VAWP prevalence among women candidates running for city councils was 48.6%, much higher than among village council elections (32.6%). The prevalence of violence is particularly

high in the capital city, Bishkek (69.4%), and the second-largest city, Osh (61.5%). The city-village discrepancy overlaps with party-nominated and independent candidates since all

city council candidates were party-nominated and nearly all (98%) village council members were independent candidates. Survey results demonstrate marked differences across women of different marital status. Single and divorced

women were more likely to be victims of VAWP than other groups, with 52.9% and 51.9% prevalence, respectively.



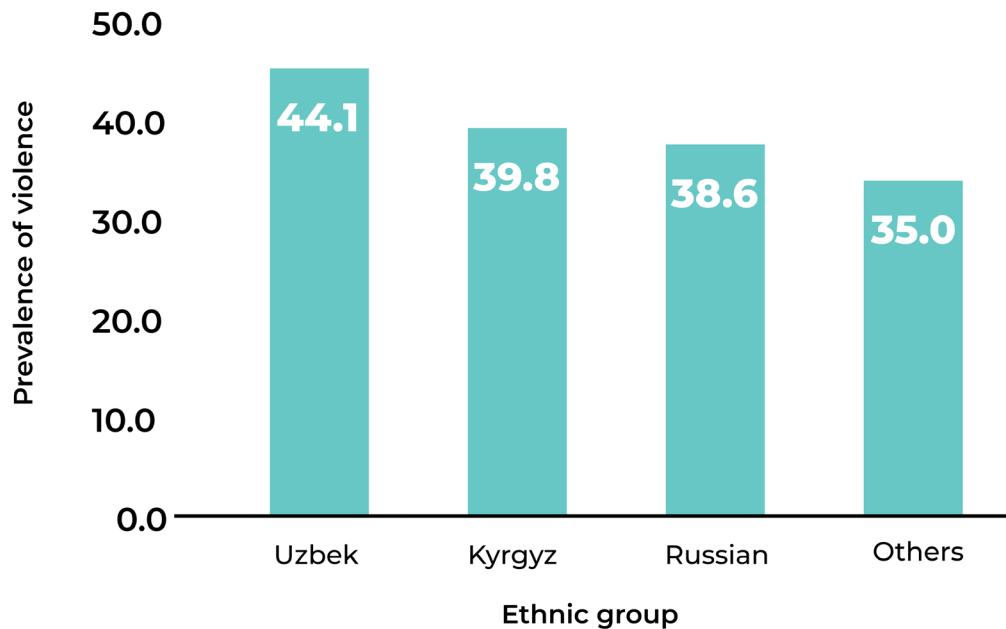
Risks of facing violence during the election campaign were higher for candidates with higher education degrees. Candidates holding university and post-graduate degrees had a prevalence of violence of 42.4%, while the figure for those with lower levels of education was 34.3%.

The marital status and education are linked to urban-rural divide. Thus, single and divorced women made 7.3% of respondents of village council candidates and 17.1% among city council candidates. Similarly candidates with university or post-graduate degree made 72.7% in city councils and 66.2% in village council elections.

## Younger candidates face a higher risk of violence.

Age group	Total	Victims	Prevalence (% women)
40 and below	238	104	43,7
41-59	699	278	39,8
60 and older	169	59	34,9

## Uzbek women candidates face higher risks of violence.





## ! KEY FINDINGS: TYPES, CONTEXTS, AND PERPETRATORS

### **Violence against women candidates in Kyrgyzstan is most widespread in the form of psychological violence.**

It was faced by 34,6% of respondents, followed by sexual

harassment (10,7%) and economic violence (9,1%). In contrast, physical violence and sexual violence are rare, each reported by less than 1% of respondents.

### Women who experienced at least once violence of any type

Types of violence	Count	Percentage
Psychological violence	383	34.6
Sexual harassment	118	10.7
Economic violence	101	9.1
Physical violence	9	0.8
Sexual violence	6	0.5

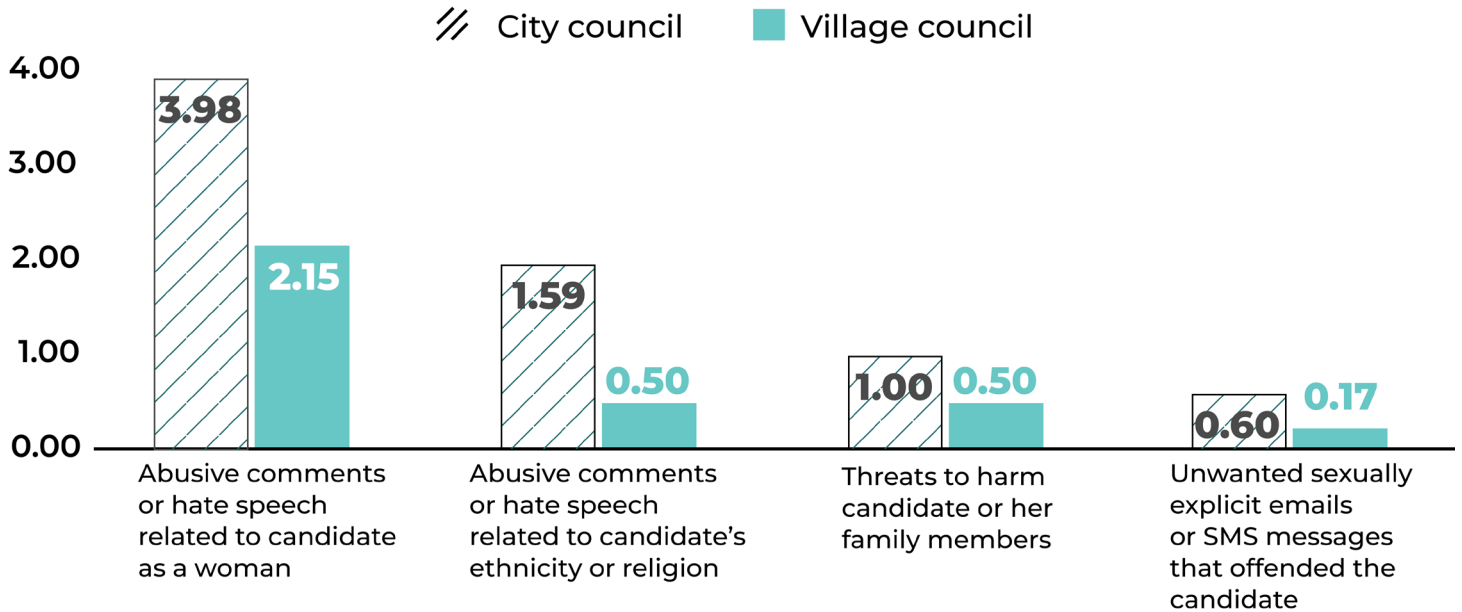
**Violence during in-person campaign activities.** Overall, 244 women candidates, or 22% of all respondents, reported having faced at least one instance of violence in the context of in-person campaign activities. The prevalence is 28.6% if we consider that 854 candidates, not all 1,106, were directly involved in in-person campaign activities.

**Social media is where violence is faced most.** Women candidates faced violence in all election-related contexts that the survey focused on, but three stand out for their magnitude: social media, media, and in-person campaigning.

The most common form of violence in the social media context came in the form of claims that the candidate was only able to run due to the gender quota. Such claims, as a woman politician said, “not only reject the idea of the quota but primarily aim at belittling women as candidates and politicians”. In the context of in-person campaigning, women candidates mostly faced derogatory comments about the candidate’s role and capability, as a woman, to be in politics, or about women in politics in general, and sexual comments or suggestions related to candidates or women in general.

Forms of violence during the candidate's media interaction	Number of victims
Journalists/moderators focusing on the candidate's appearance instead of the issues on which she campaigned	32
Spreading false information about candidate's professional conduct or experience	18
Sharing in media of private information about the candidate without her consent	16
Journalists/moderators granting the candidate less speaking time compared to men candidates	12
Spreading false information about candidate's private and sexual life	11
Opponents cursing, insulting, and demeaning the candidate during the debate	2

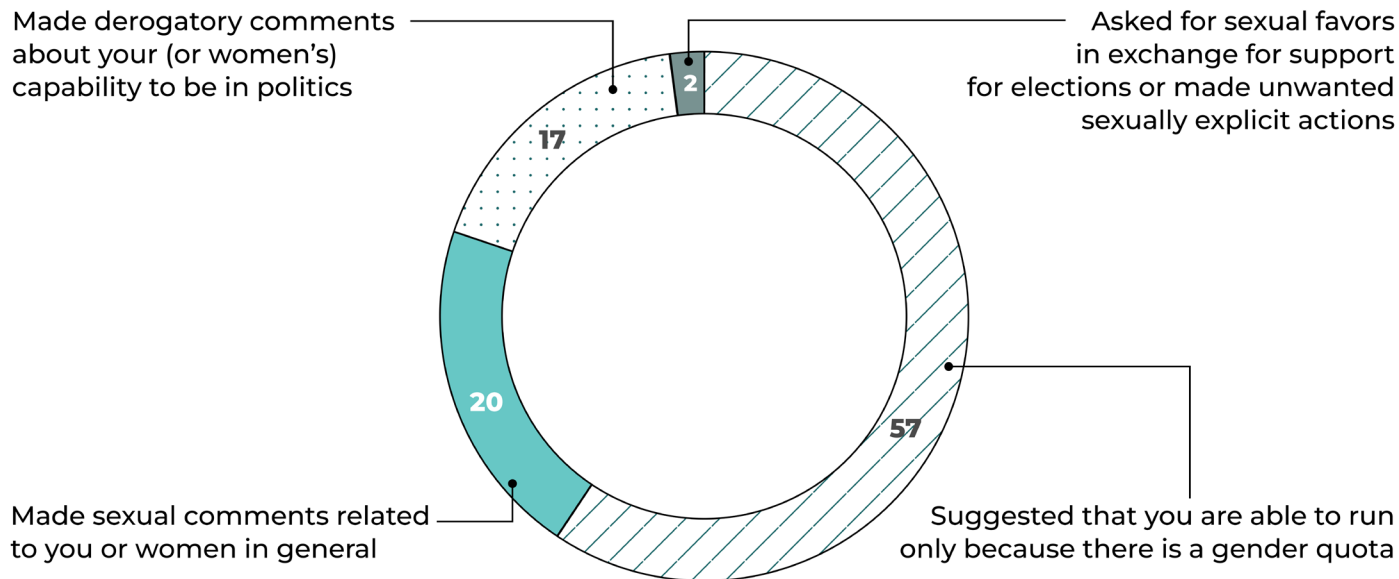
### Share of candidates who faced forms of violence through ICT (email, phones)



Community members at large were the most common perpetrators in the context of in-person campaigning. For most women candidates, the perpetrators were community members at large and supporters of political opponents, followed by community leaders, government employees, and their own party

members. Perpetrators of violence against women within political parties include, in descending order, other candidates, other members of the party, and party leaders or high-ranking party members. As for the family context, perpetrators of violence against women candidates are mainly husbands, as pointed out by half of victims in this context.

## Forms of violence against women in the context of political parties (number of women who experienced violence)



**On voting day**, 72 women candidates, accounting for 6.51% of the total, reported experiencing violence either directed at themselves or their observers. Of these, thirty-seven candidates faced verbal or physical attacks at the

polling stations. The majority of these incidents, involving 32 candidates, consisted of verbal abuses—ranging from overtly harsh to subtly denigrating comments about women. The following quotes reflect the kinds of pressure women faced.

## ! KEY FINDINGS: RARE REPORTING, EVEN RARER PUNISHMENT

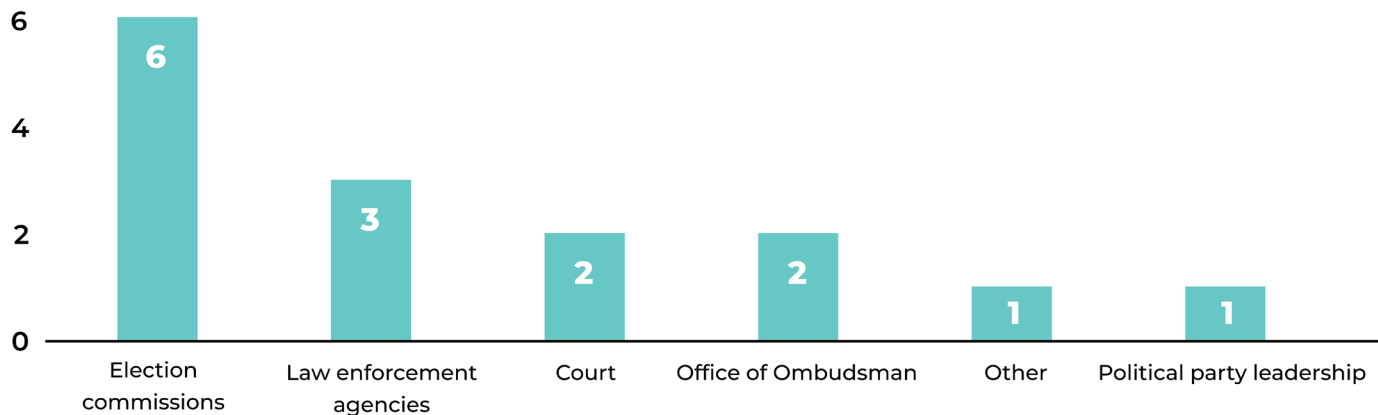
**Victims discuss their experiences informally but avoid public discussion.** Among the 441 women who faced at least one instance of violence, 143 (32.4% of all victims) confirmed they informally discussed the case with someone. In contrast, the share of women who raised the issue in public was 3.4%. Female candidates who chose to discuss the issues informally were most likely to do so with family members and close friends and, to a lesser extent, with people in the party and party leaders.

**Parties do not prioritize supporting victims of VAWP.** Indeed, seeking support or accountability within the party does not appear to be a viable option for women candidates. Only 12% of women who faced violence in the party said their political party has a Code of Conduct or Code of Ethics that regulates issues of sexual harassment, discrimination, or violence against women.

**Reporting violence is very low.** The level of reporting violence remains extremely low. Only 104 respondents, 23.6% of victims, said they were aware of a formal complaint mechanism to report incidents of harassment, discrimination, or violence against women. Of this group, only 11 filed a formal complaint, 2.5% of victims. A total of 16 complaints were filed, and in three cases, the perpetrator was found guilty.

**“Not serious enough”: violence is considered normal.** The majority of victims (430, or 97.5%) did not file a formal complaint. The biggest reasons for that were respondents not seeing the issue warrant a formal legal complaint (50.3% of responses), a sense of fear and insecurity (32.2%), or the lack of awareness or resources (11.3%).

## To whom formal complaints were addressed?



### Outcomes of formal complaints about violence

Outcome of complaint	Count
The perpetrator was found guilty	3
The charges were dismissed	2
The case is pending	3
No action was taken that I know of	3
I dropped the complaint	1
I don't know	1
Other	2

In an illustrative case, a woman candidate reported a case of violence to the court but eventually decided to drop the case. During the campaign, in her absence, her home was attacked by supporters of another candidate. Intruders

video-taped her children and later, during the night, returned, kicking the doors. However, filing the case to the court led to nothing.

*I don't believe in the court now. When we went to the court, the judge 2-3 times expelled us from the room, calling us to «find an amicable solution». They [intruders] kept mocking me. [...] Moreover, that man filed a counterclaim, accusing me of beating him. He, a man... Also, attending every court hearing was costly, with 400-500 soms to travel there, and hearings often are canceled because someone is ill or some witnesses are needed. I eventually said I left them all to God and dropped the case.*

## ! KEY FINDINGS: VAWP IS HIGHER AMONG NATIONAL PARLIAMENT CANDIDATES

Out of 105 respondents among women candidates in parliamentary elections, 81 faced violence at least once during the election campaign, making the overall prevalence of violence among women candidates in national elections, or 77,1%. The figure was higher among women candidates who run through proportional representation (PR) system than those who took part in majoritarian elections. Similar to local elections, psychological violence is the most common

type, with social media and in-person campaigns being the contexts where violence most often occurs.

Reporting among national parliament candidates was very low, with only three of 81 victims filing a formal complaint. The most common reason for not reporting included considering the cases of violence as too minor to report.

### Types of violence against women in politics in national parliamentary elections

Types of violence	Number of victims	Prevalence (%)
Psychological violence	73	69.5
Sexual harassment	44	41.9

Types of violence	Number of victims	Prevalence (%)
Economic violence	37	35.2
Physical violence	3	2.9
Sexual violence	1	1.0

**Contexts of violence.** Women candidates faced violence in all contexts during the election campaign. The highest prevalence is noted in the context of social media: 67.5% of respondents who used social media in their election campaign reported at least one case of violence.



## Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, four broad recommendations are proposed to effectively combat violence against women in politics in Kyrgyzstan.

### Strengthen legislative and policy frameworks to address violence against women in politics

The prevalence of violence against women in politics underscores the urgent need to strengthen the country's laws and policies to address the root causes of the problem. The current legislation does not define violence against women in politics. Similarly, the criminal code has no clause on sexual harassment, the second most common type of VAWP in Kyrgyzstan identified in this survey. Concerted efforts from the national government, parliament, and civil society are necessary to ensure an adequate legal basis for the accountability of perpetrators of violence against women in politics.

The government's commitment to ensure balanced gender representation in elected bodies through special measures remains incomplete. The latest round of changes to the electoral legislation in 2021 addressed some loopholes in implementing the law by political parties. However, the introduction of single-member majoritarian elections canceled the positive changes, keeping the share of women in the national parliament well below 30%, the declared target of the gender quota legislation. The recent high-level policy document «State Program to Support Women's Leadership until 2030» (adopted in March 2024) highlights

the above discrepancy but fails to stress its roots in the existing electoral legislation.

Combating VAWP depends on legal and policy frameworks designed and operating to support victims' reporting of violence. Survey data demonstrate that victims, as a rule, do not file a formal complaint. While many reasoned that the issue did not warrant a formal legal complaint, others did not file a complaint due to fear, insecurity, or lack of trust in justice (32.2% of victims who did not report) or the lack of awareness or resources (11.3%). The figures point to ample work necessary to ensure every potential victim of VAWP is not only aware of the importance of reporting violence but also trusts the process of seeking justice. Reporting must be made safe and not burdening for each victim, an important step to tackle the problem at a broader scale.

In addition to legislation, combating violence against women in politics should be included as a national priority in strategic government documents and programs. Developing a bold and consistent message in high-level policy documents on the unacceptability of violence against women in politics is a necessary, though not sufficient, step towards enforcement of legislative provisions on VAWP.

## Establish organizational policies and procedures to document, address, and prevent violence against women in politics

Women in politics interact with a set of formal institutions, from political parties to election management bodies to local governments. It is imperative that measures to combat violence against women are ingrained in the organizational processes, procedures, and culture of these institutions. A symptom of the issue is the finding that many political parties in Kyrgyzstan do not have an adequate register of their candidates in past elections, not to mention operational procedures to address VAWP.

Political parties must step up their efforts to create necessary rules and documents on VAWP and communicate them to all relevant stakeholders, including women candidates. Only eight respondents out of 515 party-nominated candidates confirmed their party had a Code of Conduct or Code of Ethics that regulates issues of sexual harassment, discrimination, or violence against women. Whether the parties actually have such documents or not, such low level of awareness indicates weak

institutionalization of measures aimed at tackling gender-based discrimination and violence within political parties.

Institutions central to the electoral experience of women candidates, including election commissions, law enforcement agencies, governmental bodies at local and national levels, and the judiciary, must develop and incorporate comprehensive policies on VAWP into their operational frameworks. These policies should aim at effective identification, addressing, and prevention of violence against women in politics. Potential victims must be well aware of safe and trusted mechanisms for reporting violence and seeking support. Law enforcement and justice systems should introduce mechanisms for reviewing and responding to violence against women in politics. The national government can help speed up such measures by initiating gender self-assessment in relevant institutions with the involvement of independent experts and making the results open to the public.

## Promote public awareness to help identify, address, and prevent violence against women in politics

There is an urgent need to raise public awareness about violence against women in politics. Survey data revealed that psychological violence is the predominant form of VAWP in Kyrgyzstan. This prevalence is due not only to insufficient legislative frameworks but also to a cultural normalization

that tolerates insults, humiliation, and condescension toward women. It is not solely a problem within the political elite. Survey results show that community members at large were a prominent category of perpetrators, highlighting the broader societal acceptance of such behaviors.

The government and civil society must jointly communicate that gender quotas are not a concession to women but a matter of national importance. In other words, there should be a broad societal consensus on implementing special measures to enhance women's representation in elected bodies as beneficial for the nation's progress rather than a privilege granted to women. One marker of success here will be the reversal of the trend of women candidates being targeted and unjustly accused of gaining undue advantage from gender quotas.

Given the centrality of entrenched cultural norms, it is critical that the government promotes gender equality and zero tolerance for violence in the country's education system. In addition to relevant legislative and policy frameworks, this task requires genuine political commitment at the highest level.

### Invest in providing professional development and support for women in politics

To effectively respond to and combat violence against women in politics, it is necessary that the government, civil society, and development partners join forces to support women in politics. This is especially relevant to local council elections, where women candidates combine their electoral campaign with a full-time job and the "invisible labor" at home. In addition to this, professional development opportunities are less accessible in rural areas.

The government should fully support the implementation of the "State Program to support women's leadership until 2030," adopted in March 2024. One of the document's central goals is to increase women's representation in political decision-making through training women candidates for leadership positions. Effective enforcement of this goal can provide a sound basis for tackling violence against women in politics.

Establishing cross-party women's groups at local and national assemblies can be extremely helpful in ensuring women's mutual support in politics and jointly developing and promoting measures to tackle VAWP. In the past, some of the most consequential legislative initiatives, such as the introduction of gender quotas, were spearheaded by cross-party women groups.



**UN WOMEN IS THE UNITED NATIONS ENTITY DEDICATED TO GENDER EQUALITY AND EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN. A GLOBAL CHAMPION FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS, UN WOMEN WAS ESTABLISHED TO ACCELERATE PROGRESS ON MEETING THEIR NEEDS WORLDWIDE.**

UN Women supports UN Member States as they set global standards for achieving gender equality and works with governments and civil society to design laws, policies, programmes and services needed to ensure that the standards are effectively implemented and truly benefit women and girls worldwide. It works globally to make the vision of the Sustainable Development Goals a reality for women and girls and stands behind women's equal participation in all aspects of life, focusing on four strategic priorities:

Women lead, participate in and benefit equally from governance systems; Women have income security, decent work and economic autonomy; All women and girls live a life free from all forms of violence; Women and girls contribute to and have greater influence in building sustainable peace and resilience, and benefit equally from the prevention of natural disasters and conflicts and humanitarian action. UN Women also coordinates and promotes the UN system's work in advancing gender equality.

[www.unwomen.org](http://www.unwomen.org)

[www.facebook.com/unwomen](https://www.facebook.com/unwomen)

[www.youtube.com/unwomen](https://www.youtube.com/unwomen)

[www.flickr.com/unwomen](https://www.flickr.com/unwomen)

[www.instagram.com/unwomen](https://www.instagram.com/unwomen)

[www.instagram.com/unwomenkyrgyzstan](https://www.instagram.com/unwomenkyrgyzstan)

220 East 42nd Street

New York, New York 10017, USA

