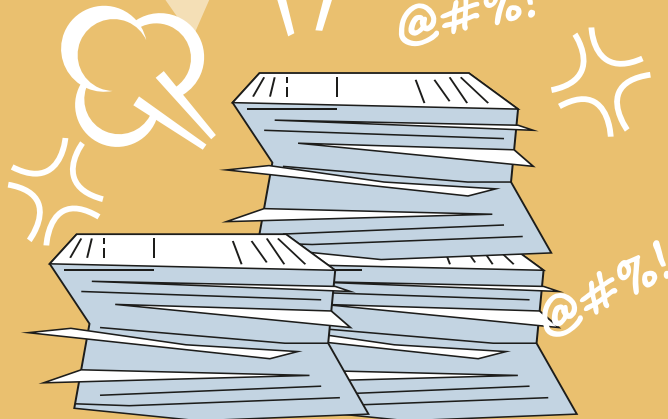


Examining and Analyzing the Challenges Faced by Women Coordinators in their Work



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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the participation of women in politics has increased significantly around the world. The participation of women voters and candidates in politics is higher today than it has ever been. For example, more than 10,000 women around the world are members of parliament, and more than a million carry out activities in political parties. Today, women have a much more active role in managing political processes than in the past (UN Women and UNDP, 2018). Despite these achievements, the task of gender balance of women's political participation set out within the frames of the Beijing Platform for Action of 1995 has not yet been achieved. Women are still underrepresented in politics on various levels. The same is true for Georgia, despite the increased rates of women's participation in politics, they still cannot be compared with the numbers of men's involvement¹.

The reason for low participation of women in politics (VAWP) and especially in elections, may be the phenomenon of violence against them (VAWE). Gender-based violence in politics and elections becomes increasingly visible and takes such forms as sexual harassment, intimidation and physical violence. At the same time, the state, part of the society and a number of media outlets are not impartial and serious when discussing violence against women in elections. As a result, sometimes women involved in politics, both in party, legislative and executive power, as well as ordinary coordinators, are forced to leave political life. Violence against women in elections remains one of the main barriers in the realization of their political rights. Violence against women in elections is a global phenomenon, which represents a violation of women's fundamental rights and freedoms.

¹ See statistics: <http://gender.geostat.ge/gender/index.php?action=Influence%20and%20Power>

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS, ITS CAUSES AND RESULTS

Violence against women in elections prevents them from exercising their political rights, both in public and private space. The main task of violent actors is to prevent women's intention to pursue their political career, or their independent political activities. During violence against women in elections, the perpetrators try to emphasize the deviation of women in politics from their traditional gender roles: as if they are not women who take care of the family, are loyal to men, and therefore they try to punish them, when in fact they want to remove women from politics. Violence against women in elections can prevent women political candidates from winning, women coordinators from party activities, and women citizens from voting. As already mentioned, violence against women during elections can be encountered in their families, community and district, in any public or private space.

TYPES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS

The typology of violence against women in elections repeats internationally agreed types of violence against women. Each of them is discussed below ².

Psychological violence aims at intimidation, persecution and humiliation of women participating in politics. Psychological violence is many-sided. It includes harassment and threats against representatives of almost all groups of women, including candidates, party supporters, voters, and election administration representatives as well as coordinators (UNDP 2018). Women are threatened with social isolation, divorce, punishment of their imprisoned child, rejection, loss of a job, disclosure of their private lives, all of which prevent them from obtaining and maintaining a political position, even if it concerns being a coordinator.

² UN Women. "Glossary of Terms from Programming Essentials and Monitoring and Evaluation Sections, Virtual Knowledge Center to End Violence Against Women and Girls. <http://www.endvawnow.org/en/articles/347-glossary-of-terms-from-programming-essentials-and-monitoring-and-evaluation-sections.html>;

Often, psychological pressure creates a barrier for them even to just vote - they cannot go against the will of the family and vote for the desired candidate. The psychological damage humiliates and demoralizes the female victims. Threats often precede physical violence. As with other forms of violence against women, psychological violence can occur at home, in the community, including online space, on the Internet (UNDP, 2018). And finally, psychological violence is added by economic violence, which is used against women to threaten them with losing their job and being left without salary.






Physical violence involves the intentional use of physical force against a woman to cause death, trauma or physical injury. It is expressed in shoving, throwing things, attempt to strangle, shaking or hitting, burning parts of the body, restricting movement and using any other kind of physical force. Additionally, it may include abduction and restriction of physical freedom, beating, forcing to change the place of residence, killing. Physical violence occurs everywhere, including at home, in the society and in the state, but it is most visible in public spaces, such as during election campaigns, meetings, trainings and/or when political candidates start going door-to-door. It can also take place in institutional settings (political party offices, polling stations and other civic spaces).

The next type of violence against women in elections is **sexual violence**. It includes any non-consensual sexual act, attempted sexual act, unwelcome comments of sexual nature, as well as physical violence, insults, harassment and rape. Threats and violence of a sexual nature can occur both in public and in a woman's private environment, when a woman expresses different political views from her husband or family, or when she tries to break traditional gender roles by holding a public position. As gender inequality and gender-based violence still exist in a patriarchal society, the tension of the election period may intensify the existing problems and lead to increased rates of sexual violence against independent women who express different political views or want to participate in politics.

Rape and sexual violence by women's partners at home as a means of controlling their political choices or participation are common. This can happen both from the partner and from strangers (police, politicians, etc.), even in public space (UNDP, UNWOMEN, 2018).

CHALLENGES OF STUDYING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS, MAIN VIOLENT ACTORS AND INDICATORS OF VIOLENCE

Despite its importance, violence against women during elections remains beyond study and generally beyond the political agenda, therefore, reports and data related to this issue are scarce. This issue is not studied and there is a stigma of disclosing gender-based violence in general, therefore violence against women in the elections is still invisible in many societies. Oppression and violence against women, such as coordinators, is especially invisible. Those interested in studying violence against women in elections encounter several major barriers. These include:

-  Lack of real indicators, through which violence against party (candidate, coordinator) women will be revealed in elections;
-  There are no basic quantitative and qualitative data to analyze the prevalence and frequency of such violence;
-  There are no victims' stories and their voices cannot be heard, especially if they are ordinary party coordinators and not female candidates;
-  The media covers the mentioned issues in a gender biased manner;
-  There is no political will to fight this type of violence in any country.

Also, it is interesting to look at the main actors of violence against women in elections. Table #1 lists the mentioned subjects³:

³ *UN Women and UNDP, Preventing Violence Againsts Women in Elections: programme guide; 2018, p. 3;*

TABLE #1

POLITICAL ACTORS	PUBLIC ACTORS	STATE ACTORS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ LEADERS OF POLITICAL PARTIES▶ PARTY AND INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES;▶ PARTY MEMBERS;▶ MEMBERS OF THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ VOTERS;▶ FAMILY MEMBERS;▶ PARTNERS /HUSBANDS;▶ COMMUNITY AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS;▶ MEDIA;▶ EMPLOYERS AND COLLEAGUES;▶ FOLLOWERS OF CRIMINAL SUBCULTURE/ THE SO-CALLED "DZVELI BICHEBI";▶ YOUNG PEOPLE;	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▶ POLICE;▶ STATE INSTITUTIONS;▶ MEMBERS OF ELECTION ADMINISTRATION;▶ JUDICIARY

As for the indicators⁴ for identifying violence against women in elections around the world, they are divided according to the pre-election, election day and post-election period and they are the following:

⁴ UN Women and UNDP, *Preventing Violence Against Women in Elections: programme guide*; 2018, p. 9;

TABLE #2

<p>PRE-ELECTION PERIOD</p>	<p>ELECTION DAY</p>	<p>POST-ELECTION PERIOD</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AND OPPRESSION ▶ INTERFERENCE WITH WOMEN CANDIDATES' REGISTRATION PROCESS ▶ ATTEMPTS TO KILL WOMEN CANDIDATES, WOMEN COORDINATORS ▶ VERBAL INTIMIDATION, HARASSMENT AND BULLYING ▶ RAPE OR SEXUAL VIOLENCE; ▶ DEFAMATORY GOSSIPS ▶ WOMAN CANDIDATE WHO HAS WALKED AWAY FROM ELECTION BATTLE; ▶ ARBITRARILY ARRESTED WOMAN; ▶ ABDUCTED WOMAN ▶ ONLINE HARASSMENT, SEXIST POSTS ABOUT WOMEN; ▶ MEDIA ARTICLES AND STORIES THAT NEGATIVELY DEPICT WOMEN ▶ KILLING OR PHYSICAL ASSAULT OF FEMALE CANDIDATE'S FAMILY MEMBERS ▶ PHYSICAL ATTACKS ON THE ASSISTING STAFF OF FEMALE POLITICIANS' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ FORCED VOTING (BY FAMILY, PARTY) ▶ PRESSURING OF WOMEN BY THE RELIGIOUS / LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN THE VOTING PROCESS ▶ INSULTING WOMEN ON THE DAY OF ELECTIONS. ▶ INTIMIDATING OR THREATENING WOMEN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ A WOMAN WAS FORCED TO LEAVE HER RESIDENTIAL PLACE; ▶ SEXUAL HARASSMENT OF WOMEN; ▶ GENDER BASED VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ▶ MEDIA ARTICLES AND STORIES THAT NEGATIVELY PORTRAY WOMEN LEADERS; ▶ ONLINE HARASSMENT AND BULLYING OF THE CHOSEN FEMALE CANDIDATES ▶ PRESSURING THE CHOSEN FEMALE CANDIDATE (SUBORDINATE POSITION)

In the research report, the incidents of violence during the pre-election period, election day and post-election period are given according to the forms of violence, not the stages of the elections, although this will be discussed later in the chapter on the results of the study.

GEORGIAN REALITY

Before describing the aim, objectives and methodology, the research briefly analyzes the information available before the research about the female coordinators of the political parties operating in Georgia. Women in Georgia are often forced to accept the job of a party coordinator due to various reasons, including poverty, pressure or intimidation. Sometimes, they engage in such illegal activities as: giving money in exchange for vote, intimidation/threatening of voters etc.⁵ In some cases, they are not even aware that they are involved in illegal activities. Involvement of women in such activities by political parties is a specific form of gender-based violence and exploitation⁶ of women, and violation of human rights.

It is noteworthy that in Georgia, in general, the party culture is saturated with gender stereotypes. In political parties, women are less represented in decision-making positions, and their involvement is mostly expressed in their participation at the lowest hierarchical level. According to various studies, women's participation in politics in Georgia is accompanied by many barriers, including violent barriers, among which psychological, sexual and economic violence are most common (Sapari, 2017). For example, the sexist hate speech is used against women (Urchukhishvili, 2020), women are appointed only at the position of a coordinator and this is passed off as women's participation in politics (Dolidze, 2017), etc. Also, multiple violations against women are observed in the pre-election period (intimidation by loss

⁵ <https://ge.usembassy.gov/ka/https-ge-usembassy-gov-u-s-embassy-statement-following-the-second-round-of-georgian-municipal-elections/>;

⁶ *Prevention of violence against women during elections*, UN WOMEN, UNDP, 2017, See: <https://www.undp.org/publications/preventing-violence-against-women-elections-programming-guide>.

⁷ "Women in political parties", Sapari, UNDP, 2017, See: <https://sapari.ge/politic/>.

of a job, using the family members of imprisoned individuals, female civil servants, school and kindergarten principals in the pre-election period (ISFED, 2021).

As for party coordinators, they are mostly economically underprivileged women who may not share the values and vision of the party they work for. Due to the high rate of poverty in rural Georgia (Statistics Department, 2020), many women are forced to accept this type of political involvement in exchange for low payment, and some do so for fear of losing their jobs, which represents forced labor. However, some of them may actually be real supporters of the party they work for.

The main types of work that party coordinators are asked to do are walking door-to-door, campaigning for a specific party, voicing political promises, and collecting electoral information about voters, which sometimes includes personal data and is illegal⁸. In addition, they are also asked to mobilize voters to vote, organize protests, etc. during which women often face verbal abuse and sometimes physical violence (ISFED, 2021).

In addition, party coordinators are often paid in cash without employment contracts, which not only distorts the actual picture of the number of political party coordinators and financial costs, but also shifts the working relationship into an informal environment and robs women of the right to legally protect themselves against potential labor exploitation. This fact makes women coordinators more vulnerable and further worsens their legal situation.

As already mentioned, the involvement of women in this type of political activity is often presented by political parties as women's participation in politics. In fact, they are instrumentalized - these women do not have the right to participate in party decisions. An in-depth analysis of the challenges and factors faced by women party coordinators is needed in order to identify the problems they face and develop evidence-based policies/legislation that will help regulate this area and eliminate violence against women in the election process in the future.

⁸ Article 164 of Criminal Code (hereinafter CC)

RESEARCH AIM, OBJECTIVES, METHODOLOGY, METHOD AND DATA ANALYSIS

Violence against women in elections is not studied worldwide; The same is true for Georgia. Although studies are conducted and articles are written on women's political participation, specifically, violence against women in elections remains unexplored. This is especially true for female party coordinators. To this day, their voice cannot be heard in any study. There are no exact statistics on the number of coordinators. Therefore, there is no accurate data of their gender imbalance and balance. However, according to pre-election and election day observations, the majority of coordinators are women. For example, according to the 2021 ISFED data, on election day, 61% of party members outside the polling stations were women. For this reason, it was decided to conduct our sociological research in order to collect information that will reveal the practices of violence against female coordinators of Georgian political parties in elections.

The **aim** of the study is to facilitate the collection of information about gender-based violence against female coordinators during the election process in Georgia.

The **objective** is to determine/study the forms and types of violence against women before, during and after the elections and general challenges faced by them.

During the research, information was collected using the qualitative methodology of social research, namely, focus group and informal interview methods. A semi-structured questionnaire and a discussion plan have been used as research tools. This includes questions based on indicators for determining violence against women in elections, which are given above⁹. For example, have the coordinators personally experienced incidents of physical violence, oppression or verbal intimidation, harassment and bullying before, during and after the elections. In order to refine the survey instruments, an additional focus group was conducted with regional representatives of ISFED, who shared their experiences with the research author and provided recommendations regarding potential questions.

⁹ See Table #2.

Informal interviews and focus groups were conducted online using the Zoom platform in September 2022; informal interviews were carried out in a dialogic model (Chirban, 1996, 62) between the interviewer and female coordinators of different political parties, and the focus groups were conducted using a group moderation method, between a moderator and women coordinators.

For the selection of participants for focus groups and expert in-depth interviews, the method of organizational recruitment was used (Krueger, 2006). The regional coordinators of the organization ISFED searched for and invited respondents for both focus groups and informal interviews. In total, 31 female coordinators (from government and opposition parties) participated in the research. Following fieldwork, transcripts of informal interviews and focus groups were made. The collected qualitative information was analyzed using qualitative analysis methods of informal interviews and focus groups, namely the transcript-based (Krueger 1994, 143) method of analysis. After coding and categorizing the data, according to the respondents' narratives, categories of violence related to the research question were created.

A **limitation** of the study was the potential lack of trust and openness on the part of female coordinators to disclose incidents of pressure, violence or exploitation that they had experienced while working as coordinators. During the fieldwork, it was found that the representatives of the opposition party spoke openly about the issues of violence against women during the elections, while the female respondents representing the ruling party had difficulty speaking openly about the mentioned issues. Additionally, the respondents often talked about the facts of violence in the third person, as if they personally had never experienced such facts.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH RESULTS

The objective of the research was to determine/study the forms of violence before, during and after the elections as well as general challenges. The analysis of qualitative data is arranged according to the logic of the forms of violence. The study describes the types of violence, challenges and threats that women coordinators generally face and experience in Georgia before, during and after the elections. The theoretical categories of possible violence identified as a result of qualitative data analysis are given below.

THREAT FROM POPULATION

The coordinators participating in the study unanimously point out that they face danger during door-to-door campaigning. They say that they are not safe from the population's aggression. It depends on which party they represent and what the attitudes are towards these parties in the society.



„I cannot repeat these words to you, the words they use, over these ten years we have been through such days, we have never felt safe, we have always been the protectors of ourselves” (coordinator, opposition party).

The study revealed that, in general, society does not have a positive attitude towards women coordinators. According to one of the coordinator respondents, voters "don't even consider them as human beings". At the same time, it should be noted that the parties mainly employ female coordinators. In fact, they sacrifice women to do this dirty work and to take on themselves the aggression that exists towards this or that party in a specific historical period.

Other studies (Sapari, 2017) show that men in the party explain this phenomenon in the following way: They say that women are employed as coordinators because if men are sent to campaigning, they will not be able to tolerate the bad attitude from the population and may enter into conflict. In other words, due to men's "self-respect", "protection of manhood and aggressiveness", the majority of parties send women to do the campaigning. Female coordinators say that this process is very awkward and unpleasant for them:



“You know it is so awkward, when you knock on a family’s door, and they do not open, and you know they are at home, and the second thing is, when you know that that person will insult you for some reason and let’s say you’ve been a coordinator of this district for two years. . . you meet them, they will say some words, some indecent words and it is not pleasant, that’s the situation” (woman coordinator, ruling party).

PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

As one of the coordinators reports, physical violence against female coordinators is common before the elections. According to her, when she was agitating on the street, the district governor almost beat her. Additionally, this governor put her under psychological pressure. Also, the mentioned respondent tells that after she exposed the fact of bribing the voters, where a policeman was involved, that policeman threatened her with a gun. At the same time, she notes that despite the fact that this incident was recorded in the documents, no legal proceedings followed and no one was questioned to investigate the case. She explains this by the fact that he was an active police officer, and she was nobody, just a coordinator from the opposition party.

According to one of the respondents, during the pre-election period, the employees of the local city hall actively inflict physical and psychological violence on women coordinators. According to her, after she exposed the fact of bribing a voter, when representatives of the City Hall entered the election headquarters to distribute money and bribe people, a high-ranking official of the City Hall almost beat her but the people managed to stop him.

One of the respondents tells us that before the elections, she was verbally abused by a member of the Tbilisi City Assembly:



“So even the deputy of City Assembly insulted me, it is even recorded, it is on the video, it just is not visible that he is insulting me, that these insults are directed at me, when he is swearing, it is about me, I’m just not in the shot” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

The coordinators agree that intimidation and threats against them are common during the pre-election period. An example of this is endangering their cars during the campaigning process. One of the respondents even recalled how an unknown person cut her car tires. Also, the same respondent recalls that it is common for strangers to threaten and intimidate them with cold weapons in order to stop the agitation.



“they were not letting women, my coordinators, to pass, they were threatened with knives, and we’ve been through these intimidations, and we’ve been like that to this day” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

The research revealed that female coordinators representing the opposition party may be threatened with gunshots after the election if the opposition candidate wins. According to one of the opposition coordinators, after the election was won, there was a shooting at the office of the opposition party and an attempt to intimidate them.



„They fired gunshots outside, in front of our office, the shooting was not specifically for someone, they just fired shots, to intimidate us” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

A female coordinator reports that in 2018, in one of the villages of Kakheti, representatives of the ruling party turned off the electricity at the polling station to falsify the ballots. The woman coordinator of the opposition party objected to this and accordingly, she and her mother were physically abused - a man representing the local ruling party physically assaulted both of them. As the respondent says:



„He even hit the coordinator’s mother with a kick and threw her out” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

According to a female coordinator representing one of the opposition parties, civil servants are particularly aggressive towards the members of the National Movement during the elections. They mainly express their aggression verbally - verbal abuse is a common practice.



“I can say that the public servants are especially aggressive against the National Movement” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

The study revealed that the actors who influence the intimidation and harassment of women coordinators are, in many cases, people employed in public services. According to the respondents from the opposition parties, the ruling party makes good use of the people employed in the cleaning service as "controllers"; for example, one of the cleaning service workers in Zugdidi was even arrested for violence against a coordinator¹⁰.

Additionally, according to the respondents, the government parties use not only civil servants, but also their family members as important violent actors.



“That’s how it generally happens in Zugdidi: if one family member is a public servant, all family members are involved in this. Sisters, brothers, mothers, cousins, and everybody is together, they do campaigns, it is not their job at all, but they still do it. Let’s say someone works in the City hall, a sister or a brother, and all family members can do the campaign and make promises for elections, they walk in the streets and do that “ (woman coordinator, opposition party).

Also, school directors and kindergarten managers are involved in violence against women during elections. According to the respondents, the chairman of the election commission is often a school director/teacher or a kindergarten manager/caregiver, and they try in every way to harass (intimidate, verbally abuse, shame) coordinators and observers representing the opposition party.

¹⁰ The mentioned information is the respondent’s viewpoint and may not represent a reality

As the respondents from the opposition parties agree, psychological pressure and verbal abuse on election day are widespread both inside and outside the polling stations. According to one of them, she often experienced threats and verbal abuse at the outer perimeter of the polling station by the so-called "dzveli bichebi" of the district. Another respondent experienced verbal abuse from members of the commission at the polling station.

One of the respondents tells us that on the day of the elections, women representatives of the opposition party often experience verbal abuse and intimidation outside the polling station by the district's "dzveli bichebi" in favor of the ruling party. Another respondent also mentions that she has often experienced intimidation and threats.



“Yes, there was intimidation as well, that if you don’t do this, you won’t be able to walk in the street, and you have a child etc. – in such a form that it is hard to tolerate that, but when you participate in elections and you are already involved in these things, I at least never paid attention to that” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

Another respondent states that she has experienced the so-called hand-to-hand fight at the polling station, and she had to call the patrol. It is true that no one physically touched her, but she experienced verbal abuse from the so-called “dzveli bichebi from the district”.



“I had to work at the 20th polling station, there was literally a hand-to-hand fight in 2021 as well, and I stood next to these people. Yes, I have also called the patrol police. In 2016 there was verbal abuse, no physical but verbal insults against me . . . these neighborhood boys, the so called “good guys” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

The research showed that several types of actors are involved in violence against women during elections. As the respondents say, often such actors are strangers, "you can't figure out who they are and where they work", however, they may approach the coordinator and say a threatening sentence: "Don't you want to live in your village afterwards? In your district?"

The study also showed that the main actor involved in intimidation and violence against female coordinators is the so-called "dzveli bichi" from the district. According to the respondents, the ruling party has granted them unlimited freedom.



“They do not engage in physical violence, its ‘more like showing power, they intimidate their peers, the population and among them coordinators. They verbally insult the latter, they harass and intimidate them” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

According to one of the respondents, these are:



“ The street boys, the so-called “old boys” those who stand in the street all day and do nothing. This kind of people, “the street boys”, I don’t even know what name to call them (woman coordinator, opposition party).

The research showed that the strangers and the so-called “good guys” are not the only ones who abuse the coordinators. Other type of actors are police officers and the employees of State Security Service. Respondents note that the police often engage in psychological violence against them. Also, an employee of the State Security Service may approach them and demand to stop their activities.

BLACKMAILING BY LOCAL RELIGIOUS LEADERS

As a female coordinator representing one of the opposition parties reports, local religious leaders sometimes manipulate the personal lives of female coordinators and the contents of confidential confessions. According to her, one of the clergymen was blackmailing the female coordinator, a member of the opposition party, that if she continued to agitate in support of a specific opposition party, he would divulge her confession.



“The priests are involved in this system, this is very bad and this is about women, if they have confessed something. . . I encountered this in my village (I was in charge of 7 villages) that the priest was intimidating a woman, saying the confessions you gave me, I am going to expose them. This way he frightened the coordinators - do not dare and go there, because I know everything about you and I am going to reveal that” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

In addition to threatening opposition female coordinators with exposing confessions, religious leaders use their power during sermons to make the congregation support a particular party and try to shame those who disagree with their political viewpoint. A respondent in the study, a female coordinator of one of the opposition parties, said that the priest even called her a "devil":



“the priest told me I was the devil, that I served the devil. Those who stand beside Misha Saakashvili . . . you are serving the devil and you know what else he told me? That we would hold a special religious rite, to free me from this sin. . . “(woman coordinator, opposition party).

INTIMIDATION BY SUSPENSION OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AND LOSS OF HOUSING

As the respondents representing the opposition parties agree, they are often threatened by suspension of the social assistance. According to them, many female coordinators have told that they were threatened with termination of social assistance if they continued to campaign in support of the opposition party.

The research revealed that there may be pressure on the coordinators' families: if the coordinator has a supporter of the opposition party in her family, their social assistance will be suspended. According to one of the coordinators, this should not be the case, because being a coordinator is a specific job. Sometimes party affiliation is irrelevant and they agree to this work for hardship and financial benefit.



“By my observation, sometimes the positive attitude and affiliation to a specific party is not decisive. Often women coordinators agree to this job due to hardship” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

Another respondent also states that the family itself pressured her not to continue working against the government in order to keep their social assistance. Using the family as a leverage during pre-elections is a common form of violence against women coordinators.



„There was pressure on the family, because being beside an opposition party somehow frightens them, if somebody has social assistance, they will take it away, if someone has some other type of assistance they will not give it to them and they are advised not to go against the government” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

In addition to suspension of social assistance, the study revealed that there are other cases of manipulation with family in general. According to one of the respondents, a female coordinator, representing an opposition party, who was earlier provided with a house by the government and lived there with her children, was threatened that she would lose everything if she agreed to be the coordinator of the opposition party. Because of this, the young woman had to refuse the job.



“A young woman was supposed to come and work as a coordinator, she has small kids. She did not come. I got interested why she did not come and she told me that the representative of the city Hall had come to her at night, she is my fellow villager, you know how she is? They are very poor and the state bought her a house and she lived there. This woman told her that she would throw her out of the house and would cause trouble to her kids. . . and she said to me she was sorry she could not come; she is so impoverished, she could not even hide, she got to her knees and begged for her children. . . with me she did not have any high position, I just needed someone and she told me that she would work for 50 GEL and that’s why. . .”(woman coordinator, opposition party).

THREATS TO FIRE THE COORDINATOR OR AN EMPLOYED FAMILY MEMBER /CLOSE RELATIVE

As the study showed, before the elections, women coordinators are often intimidated by firing their employed family members. According to them, there are frequent threats that if they do not "let go of the coordination of the opposition party", their son or husband will lose their job. Also, it is common to use their student children for blackmailing, that their children will not get good marks in school. One of the respondents recalls how her sister, a police officer was threatened with getting fired if she continued agitating for the opposition party.



“I will tell you my personal example: my sister is employed, she is a police worker and in previous years there was an incident when they forbade her my participation in election campaign, they did not want me to engage and be a part of it – that’s what they forbade. There are cases like that, if someone from the family is employed, they try to stop them and stop their participation” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

One of the respondents recalled how they threatened her relative who was a military man that they would discharge him if he continued working as a coordinator.



“My relative is a soldier; he serves in Kutaisi. He told me that he was summoned by his chief and he showed him a picture, he asked him if he knew the lady on the photo and he said of course he knew me, he told him that I was his uncle’s wife, and he had trembling all over his body he did not know what to think, and the chief told him – if you don’t stop your uncle’s wife, then give me your report, there is a paper on the table, he said. . . .” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

One of the respondents said that the State Security Service is involved in the manipulation of family members who have jobs. They behave in such a way that the family members themselves tell the coordinators to stop such activities so that they themselves do not get in danger. One of the respondents recalls how she was intimidated by threatening her minor child:



„Don't be in that party, or else, know that you have a 17-year-old child – that's what they told me” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

According to the research, often there may be cases when the female coordinator herself is forced to stop working as coordinator of the opposition party for fear of losing her job. According to one of the respondents:



“There was a girl working in the kindergarten and that kindergarten was built by the current government, I am talking about the new kindergarten, it is in Gldani 8th district – one of our coordinators worked there and she was told that if she continued working as a coordinator, she would lose her job” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

The research revealed that all government parties, starting with the Union of Citizens and ending with the Georgian Dream, used the method of intimidating female coordinators by firing them from their public jobs. In particular, it is common for the government to use kindergarten and school teachers as coordinators, or on the contrary, to neutralize them by threats to their jobs.

As one respondent states, this is a problem especially in regions and villages, because locally there are already few employment opportunities, and schools and kindergartens are the only means of employment.

ABUSE OF ADMINISTRATIVE RESOURCES AND THE USE OF STATE AGENCIES FOR PARTISAN GOALS

ꞑApart from the intimidation by suspension of social assistance or loss of a job, the study revealed an interesting finding - instead of intimidation, ruling parties abuse administrative resources/use state agencies for partisan goals. For example, if the sons/husbands of female coordinators have their driving licenses confiscated, they are promised that in exchange for help in the elections, they will get these licenses back if they campaign well for the ruling party. And those who have children in prison are promised that they will be released. One of the respondents recalled that a prisoner's mother was forbidden to be the coordinator of the opposition party, but instead, her son was released from prison.



„I have heard in our region, that one of the women coordinators, whose child was a convict, was not allowed to work in an opposition party, and in exchange they released her child” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

The study showed that such facts do not happen often, but, as already mentioned, if the coordinators supporting the winning party work well, on the contrary, they are employed and encouraged, which can also be considered as a form of violence against women.



„The current government gave all the women coordinators public jobs and left us outside (laughs)” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

Also, as already mentioned above, after the elections, coordinators are illegally encouraged in exchange for their "loyalty", for example, their sons and husbands do not have to pay patrol fines any more.

ILLEGAL DETENTION AND CHASING ON THE ELECTION DAY

As one of the respondents, a female coordinator from the opposition party tells us, she has witnessed the restriction of free movement of a woman, who was a member of the commission and accompanied the mobile ballot box. According to her, on the day of the election, a young woman representing her party followed a mobile ballot box to a senior citizen for voting. When this woman entered the room, they locked her with the voter and left. According to the respondent, the party searched in vain for the mentioned woman throughout the day, the police were also involved in the case, and then as it turned out, someone admitted that she was locked up with the bedridden senior citizen. Her phone was taken away from her, consequently, she was not able to call anyone for help. According to the respondent, all this happened to keep the young female coordinator representing the opposition party away from the mobile ballot box, so that she could not control the situation.

The research revealed that on election day, it may be common to intimidate drivers of coordinators, or illegally chase female coordinators' cars and create emergencies on the road. One of the respondents, a female coordinator, says that her driver was threatened.



„I had hired a driver, who was bringing the representatives from my village. There were threats. There was irritation because of that, why are you bringing these people why are you helping them and things like that, I am going to drill your legs, I am going to cut your tires, how dare you do that and in that moment there was a conflict between us” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

Another respondent recalls how someone chased their car and created an emergency situation in order to intimidate them.



„I hired a girl as a driver, a car started following us because they know my car. We had kids in the car, and someone in that car (it was a black car without numbers, a sedan type) almost killed all of us including children . . .he was creating these emergency situations on the road, until we stopped and I started chasing him on foot. When I already approached the car to drag him out, he started the engine and drove off, the car did not have any numbers” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Most of the respondents had the same attitude towards sexual harassment. They seem to consider it a personal insult even to be asked that kind of question and say that nothing like this happens. The majority of respondents answered this question with an almost standard phrase - "how do you ask that, that has never happened to me". When the researcher was trying to explore this issue in more depth, the findings went in three directions: one, the coordinators may be unaware of sexual harassment and the reality about it; second, when they talk about sexual harassment, they only remember verbal sexual harassment, and third: due to influence of the widespread

attitudes in the society the coordinator women know that if they start talking about sexual harassment, they may end up in a disadvantageous position and may themselves become the victims of "bad reputation". In any case, they felt uncomfortable talking about sexual harassment:



„Oh no, no, no sexual harassment (laughs). Such thing has not happened to us. I also have not heard about such a thing from Dream“ (woman coordinator, opposition party).

Another respondent recalls that she has often encountered verbal and sexual harassment of female coordinators at the polling station, for example, by the "good boys". Additionally, another interesting fact was revealed, the ruling party rotates the district's "good guys" among polling stations so that these individuals are free to sexually harass (mockery using obscene words) other district's female coordinators and not have to harass their own district's female coordinators. Presumably, this rotation was invented precisely because of the fact that it would be difficult for them to do this to the women of their own district, they would be ashamed and uncomfortable.

TAKING A PHOTO OF A BALLOT (BREACH OF SECRECY OF VOTING, ARTICLE 164 OF CC)

The research revealed that another type of actor of violence against women coordinators is the so-called "party police", forcing coordinators to bring voter ID cards, personal numbers, ballot photos, etc., and this is especially uncomfortable and embarrassing for women coordinators who do not have information on how to protect themselves from their own party members, from the so-called "Party Police".

As one of the coordinators mentions, the parties often ask the female coordinators to take a photo of the ballot to really prove the effectiveness of their campaign. In exchange, the coordinators are often bribed - as the respondent says, they are given cooking oil, pasta, meat.



„Yes, this photo taking of the ballots, that you really voted, that's how they prove... and yes, in exchange they distribute oil, pasta, the last time they distributed meat” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

LEAVING THE COUNTRY FORCEFULLY AFTER ELECTIONS

The study revealed that women party coordinators may have to leave the country because of their work and emigrate if their party loses the election. One of the female respondents mentions that she had to leave the public service and go abroad. According to her, this was caused by the "change of government and political indicator". More specifically, after her party was defeated and another party won the elections, the latter employed its own coordinators in the public service, and she had to leave both the service and the country, because she was being verbally intimidated and threatened.

DISORGANIZED WORKING RELATIONS

The study collected information on the labor rights of women coordinators. Female coordinators find it difficult to talk about labor contracts and payments. The research identified the difference regarding this issue. Coordinators representing the ruling party say that they work based on contracts and the party pays them on time, while the majority of coordinators representing the opposition party said that female coordinators in Georgia do not have contracts. There was a sense of awkwardness and fear in the narrative when talking about this issue. Representatives of the opposition party say that their agreement with the party is verbal. This is where the strange attitude of the coordinators can be observed: they say that they are loyal employees and don't care about the money and the contract. As with sexual

harassment, it is very difficult for them to openly talk about it, because talking about money and expressing the wish to earn money causes aggression in society towards those very people who have such a wish. Therefore, while talking about this issue, the respondents tried to state their own opinions according to the influence of the so-called public opinion. Maybe they think that if they start talking about money, they will be the ones who will end up being isolated, and this probably aggravates their exploitation even more. Some coordinators also said that everything was registered legally, but they could not remember any details about the contract. However, the respondents firmly repeated this sentence: "Everything was legal." Perhaps they themselves have a fear of this unlawfulness, and this is once again used by the parties as a lever to control them. "I don't remember if I had a contract or not" is one of the common answers from the respondents.



„I really do not remember if I signed a contract or not in that moment, I cannot recall” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

One of the respondents said that mostly impoverished women from low social class are employed as coordinators so that they can be easily managed, manipulated and exploited.



“They specifically appoint the people that they can be more or less be sure about. At the same time, they additionally demand from them to bring family members, relatives and friends to the district and plus they control that” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

The coordinators mentioned that their party pays money and royalties, but representatives of other parties lie to the women, they do not pay them, or delay their salaries. It can be assumed that all party representatives delay or do not give honorarium to female coordinators, maybe they simply do not talk about negative sides of their party out of loyalty to them.

Research has revealed that the party may no longer pay the salaries to the coordinators, and since the coordinators often have their acquaintances employed as coordinators, they will have to pay these amounts from their own pockets.



“When I personally had a district, I did not have a contract with them, we had a verbal agreement and I will tell you this is very bad, because those who are above us, often the coordinators have become the victims of lies, I mean they have not been given the promised amount, and afterwards we ourselves, those who were in charge of districts we have paid our own money to those coordinators who worked for us, we have made these payments” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

Also, the study revealed the practice of paying half of the royalties. The female coordinators may not be completely "left high and dry" but they won't get the full payment either. The respondent coordinators of the study agree that they do not ask for contracts and organized working relations, and in this direction, the awareness of women coordinators should be raised.

GENDER ROLE EXPECTATIONS AND ONLINE SEXIST HATE SPEECH

Research has shown that a coordinator's husband may be approached and asked to "stop" his wife. It seems that the method of emphasizing the deviation from gender role is being used, that a woman going out on the street and agitating is not the role model of a "good woman", and this "bad behavior" should be prevented by the head of the family, that is, a man.



“ They even threatened my husband, do not let your wife work, you know where we all live. My husband told them that he was not afraid and that people should decide. I did not get scared, but the threats, there were a lot of them.” (woman coordinator, opposition party).

Finally, the study identified the sexist hate speech online against female coordinators. As one of the respondents notes, sometimes they are shamed by sexual comments and posts, in which both party bots and civil servants are involved.

One of the respondents recalled that she posted a photo on Facebook with a representative of her party, which was immediately followed by mockery and her shaming, the so-called slut-shaming, as if this female coordinator was in some relationship with a man from the party. As one of the female coordinators of an opposition party noted, she was accused of "falling in love" with the party leader just because she took a photo with him.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study revealed that women coordinators face different types of risks and challenges during elections. Their women's rights are violated everywhere: both inside the party and outside, which is caused by the negative attitude of the population towards them, physical and psychological violence against them by public officials and various actors, unregulated working conditions in the parties, disorganized work agreements and lack of other legal guarantees. Accordingly, recommendations based on the research results were developed for political parties, as well as for organizations outside the parties and state structures, whose involvement can prevent gender-based violence against female coordinators in elections. Below are recommendations for political parties, international and local organizations, election administration and state structures¹¹.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLITICAL PARTIES:

- In order to protect the labor rights of women coordinators hired for the election campaign, the parties should draw up individual labor agreements with them, which will regulate in detail the rights and duties of the parties and the working conditions, including - the employee's salary and payment deadlines;
- Female coordinators must receive non-cash payment, which, on the one hand, will limit the flow of undeclared financial resources during the campaign and, on the other hand, will make the actual amount of the party's pre-election expenses more visible;
- It is necessary to conduct an awareness raising campaign for the population. Additionally, parties should train their female coordinators on gender-based violence during elections, violations of women's rights in general, identification of possible threats, crisis behavior and rules for avoiding conflict. Female coordinators should be provided with information

¹¹ *The recommendations have been elaborated based on the joint work of Sapari and the International Society for Fair Elections and Democracy (ISFED).*

on how to address the relevant authorities in case of danger and/or violation of their rights, as well as how to address the General Inspection of the Ministry of Internal Affairs if the perpetrator of gender-based violence is a police officer;

- The ruling party should give up the practice of employing civil servants as coordinators, including school and kindergarten teachers, which is one of the reasons for the politicization of this sector and the elimination of the border between the state and the party;
- The parties must provide reimbursement for injuries caused to the coordinators while carrying out their duties, as well as health insurance;
- Parties must refuse to give tasks to coordinators which may have the signs of criminal offenses or violations of election legislation and/or may be threatening to female coordinators.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR INTERNATIONAL AND LOCAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS:

- It is desirable that the organizations start campaigns to raise the awareness of voters about the role and status of women coordinators of the parties, in order to reduce the aggression of the society towards women coordinators during the elections;
- In addition, organizations should contribute to raising the knowledge of party coordinators about the legal framework of election processes and the possibilities of protecting their rights (labor, health, social security, safety);
- They should also work to increase the resilience of party coordinators to various types of pressure (for example, performing illegal tasks, forcing to violate the secrecy of the vote during voting process, etc.);
- It is necessary to provide free legal assistance to women coordinators during elections, regarding the facts of gender-based violence against them.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE ELECTION ADMINISTRATION:

- The election training module should include information on gender issues, in particular, gender-based violence against women in elections;
- The election administration must follow the legal rules that prohibit the participation of members - appointed by the party in election commissions - in political campaigning.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATE STRUCTURES:

- The Ministry of Internal Affairs must develop operational rules and guidelines for employees to prevent and effectively respond to gender-based violence against women in elections;
- The General Inspection of the Ministry of Internal Affairs must respond effectively to the facts of illegal involvement of a police officer in the election process, abuse of authority or misconduct.

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