

Violence against women in Montenegrin politics

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Basic information

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Note:

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily represent the views of the Westminster Foundation in Montenegro. All terms used in the research in the masculine grammatical gender encompass both male and female gender of the persons referred to.

Key recommendations

Violence against women in politics is a serious challenge all around the world, including Montenegro. Through our research and discussions with relevant stakeholders, we identified key problems in this field. This resulted in articulation of a number of recommendations focused on combating this form of violence and developing inclusive political environment. Here are the key recommendations that should be considered:

SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS: Training and awareness raising

Description: Implement training programmes and raising awareness to reduce gender role stereotypes and promote importance of gender equality in politics. These programmes should target broad public, political stakeholders, media, and civil society organizations. Additional trainings about security in the Internet are also of particular importance. These should be accessible to political stakeholders, particularly women in politics.

Action measures:	
Government institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implementing mandatory gender equality courses for politicians and public officials.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investing in public campaigns that promote gender equality and raising awareness on the damaging effects of gender role stereotypes.
Media	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing guidelines for reporting on gender equality and educating journalists about the importance of neutral and inclusive reporting.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring higher participation of women and other marginalized groups in the media, to show diversity of gender roles and perspectives.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting programmes that emphasise positive examples of gender equality and provide platform for discussing these topics.
Civil Society Organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizing workshops, seminars and public events dedicated to education on gender equality.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitoring implementation of policies and programmes related to gender equality and providing feedback to government institutions about their efficiency and needs for improvements.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increasing cooperation with local communities and support initiatives that promote gender equality on the local level.
Education institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introducing education programmes that deal with gender equality in school and university curricula.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring that teaching materials and activities support understanding and respect for various gender identities and roles.

- Providing support to teachers and professors so that they can teach these topics efficiently and recognize and react on gender-based violence and discrimination in the school setting.

SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS: Reinforcing legal and political framework

Description: Adoption of comprehensive legislation against violence against women in politics that includes strict sanctions, protection measures and policies within political parties and government institutions, is of key importance for ensuring a legal framework and prevention of violence against women in politics. Additionally, for prevention of online violence, it is important to develop strategies for prevention of online violence that include cooperation with social media platforms and strengthening of legal mechanisms. Political parties also must actively support women in politics through mentorship, training, and promotions to high party positions. It is important to establish clear guidelines within parties for prevention and sanctioning of violence against women in politics. It is also exceptionally important to increase visibility of women in politics by encouraging active participation of women in politics through media campaigns, public debates and promotion of positive examples of women leaders. Contribution of women to politics has to be recognized and awarded to encourage their engagement.

Action measures:	
Governments and legislative bodies	• Adoption and implementation of comprehensive legislation against violence against women in politics, including strict sanctions for perpetrators.
	• Adoption of special policies and programmes within government institutions for protection of women politicians from violence and discrimination.
	• Ensuring legal framework that allows for prompt and efficient processing of cases of violence against women in politics.
Political parties	• Implementation of inter-party policies that condemn and sanction violence against women in politics, including training of members of political parties about importance of gender equality.
	• Promoting active participation of women in politics through quotas or other affirmative measures.
	• Providing support to women politicians that are exposed to violence, including provision of safe spaces and guidance.
Civil society organizations	• Providing training and education to women politicians about their rights and protection measures.
	• Monitoring implementation of the laws and policies for protection of women in politics and reporting on cases of violence and discrimination.
Media	• Promoting inclusive reporting that does not tolerate violence against women politicians and does not contribute to stereotypes.

- Providing support to women politicians so that their voice is heard and that they are presented in an equal way as their male colleagues.

SET OF RECOMMENDATIONS: Collecting data and research

Description: Systematic collection of data and research are key for understanding and combating violence against women in politics. Findings of the research provide a basis for developing policies and laws, support advocates in their efforts to change policies and action to ensure gender equality, democratic governance and respect for human rights in political spaces.

Action measures:	
Governments and legislative bodies	• Financing research projects on violence against women in politics and supporting independent research organizations.
	• Establishing a system for collecting data about violence against women in politics, including systematic monitoring of incidents and their categorization.
	• Establishing mandatory reporting for political organizations and institutions in cases of violence against women.
Non-governmental organizations	• Implementing research about violence against women in politics to identify trends, causes and consequences.
	• Providing training for researchers and activists about methodologies to collect data and analyse results.
	• Promoting cooperation among various organizations so that the data and findings of research are shared and used in advocating changes in politics.
International organizations	• Providing technical support to developing countries to build capacities for collecting data and doing research about violence against women in politics.
	• Financing research projects and initiatives dealing with this topic.
	• Organizing international conferences and fora dedicated to violence against women in politics to exchange best practices and improving cooperation.

Implementation of these recommendations requires coordinated efforts of political leaders, institutions, civil society organizations and wider public. Only by concerted efforts can we create a political environment where women will have equal opportunities and certainty to contribute to political process without any fear from violence or discrimination.

Introduction

Violence against women in politics is the field in conception when it comes to the studies of violence and gender studies. Therefore, this field lacks definitions and concepts that are accepted by certain consensus, but also systematic research that could offer a theoretical, but also a broader practical contribution to understanding of this phenomenon. At the same time, violence against women in politics has become a global phenomenon with significant negative implications for our societies.

There are several ways to define violence against women in politics, one being that it comprises acts or threats by violence resulting in physical, psychological or symbolic consequences and sufferings of women involved in or connected with politics.¹ One of the criticisms of the efforts to define this phenomenon adequately is that scientists succumbed to activist definitions, and that, without any need, they are defining something that is only a sub-category of violence in politics. Advocates of this approach are focused on the fact that such acts of violence do not only violate political rights of women but also other laws, since legislation is inadequate, given the widespread impunity for criminal offences related to this type of violence.²

Still, those who study this phenomenon increasingly advocate the thesis that violence against women in politics differs from violence in politics, since its aim is to prevent participation of women as such.³ Bias against women in the role of politicians comes from structural violence, uses cultural violence and results in symbolic violence, that is a distinctive feature of this phenomenon in comparison to other forms of political violence.⁴ This problem exists in all parts of the world and it is more than a criminal law issue with serious consequences and challenges for democracy, human rights and gender equality.

The increase of violence against women in politics is followed by an increase of women's presence in the political sphere.⁵ During the last decade, namely, the mandatory representation of women in politics, in terms of numbers, increased worldwide. In Montenegro, we can note a significant and relatively stable trend since the more efficient system of election quotas was adopted in 2013. In theory, the mandatory representation should lead to the increased substantive representation and that is precisely what violence against women in politics is trying to prevent. Targeting active politicians and discouraging active participation of women in politics, combined with acts of violence, lead to making women passive when in positions of power, which in its turn then strengthens the argument about their (lack of) quality.

Violence against women in politics has several forms – physical, sexual, psychological, economic... On top of this, violence against women in politics can appear also in a specific, semiotic form. This

¹ Kuperberg, Rebecca. 2017. "Sexual Violence against Women in Politics." Unpublished manuscript.

² Krook, Mona Lena, Restrepo Sanin, Juliana. 2016. „Violence Against Women in Politics. A Defence of the Concept.“ *Politica y gobierno*, vol.23. no.2

³ Ibid.

⁴ Krook ML, Restrepo Sanin J. The Cost of Doing Politics? Analyzing Violence and Harassment against Female Politicians. *Perspectives on Politics*. 2020;18(3):740-755.

⁵ Krook, Mona Lena. „Violence Against Women in Politics.“ *Journal of Democracy*, Vol. 28, no. 1

type of violence can be defined as the violence using sexist words and illustrations to hurt a woman in politics, to discipline her and in the end to subdue her.⁶ This type of violence can take two forms: making women invisible and making women incompetent. The former pursues to erase women as political actors and to deny their right to speak and be heard in political debates. The latter rejects qualifications of women to play political roles on the basis of gender stereotypes connected to the disposition, knowledge, sexual objectification and femininity.⁷ Semiotic violence is not only a part of broader phenomenon of violence, but also the most widespread, the most concealed and the most relativized form of violence against women.⁸ Recognizing the semiotic type of violence is therefore important both for feminist research and for activism.

Understanding and recognizing all forms of violence against women in politics is important due to several reasons. Firstly, because it allows us to understand various forms of violence that women are faced with in political environment, which can help us in shaping prevention and protection strategies. Secondly, researching this phenomenon emphasizes the need to make changes in political structures and in culture to ensure equal participation of women. Recognition of this problem also encourages public awareness to understand and accept the difficulties that women in politics face. This, in its turn, encourages activism and support for changes. Finally, researching violence against women in politics contributes to developing broader understanding of gender inequality and structural violence in society.

Research Methodology

Agency DeFacto Consultancy conducted comprehensive research using a combined methodology to collect data from various sources, ensuring a thorough analysis of violence against women in politics. The research was conducted with the following key components:

- › Public opinion poll,
- › In-depth interviews with prominent persons from Montenegrin politics,
- › Focus groups from youth circles of political parties,
- › Monitoring media sources and comments in social networks and portals,
- › Desktop research of the existing published sources.

Public Opinion Poll

For the purposes of researching public opinion, the DeFacto Consultancy agency did a field (face-to-face) research on the nationally representative sample of 1008 male and female respondents above 18 in Montenegro. The data obtained from the sample designed in this way guarantee maximum error in measuring of $\pm 3.1\%$, with the interval of trust of 95% for all phenomena measured with the 50% incidence of responses. The poll was implemented with the data collection method

⁶ Krook, Mona Lena. „Semiotic Violence against Women: Theorizing Harms against Female Politicians.“ Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society. Vol. 47. no.2

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

CAPI (Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing) that implies live interviews between the interviewer and interviewee. The questionnaire is programmed on tablets that the agency has for this purpose. This form of data collection is accepted today as a golden standard in research worldwide, due to a reduced possibility of human error in interviewing, fast access to data, reliability of data collection platforms and better control of work of interviewers and quality of collected data.

During the sample definition process, a two-stage stratification was done. In the first step, general population in Montenegro was divided into three groups (strata) based on the geographic regions in Montenegro (North, Centre, South). In the second step, the stratification was done based on the size of settlements. All polling stations, that were used as Primary Sampling Units (PSU), were divided into three categories, withing three regional groups: large, medium and small polling stations. This reflects the size of settlements and urban-rural division within the country, where larger polling stations are more urban, while smaller polling stations are more rural. After division of all the polling stations into these nine cells (three by region and additional three by size in every region), 84 PSUs were chosen, proportionally, on the basis of the regions' size. These PSUs were chosen using the PPS (Probability Proportional to Size) method. Total of 12 interviews were conducted in every PSU.

In addition to this, within the chosen PSUs the interviewees were chosen using the defined procedures of work. For the start, the interviewer chooses the households using the random walk procedure and choice of every third house/household. In the end, within the household, the interviewee is chosen using the method of the last birthday of all household members that meet the set requirements and can thus be participants in the poll. After the process of collecting data is completed, post-stratification of data is done using the basic demographic features of interviewees, on the basis of the latest data available through Montenegrin Statistics Office - MONSTAT. Particular attention was dedicated to integration of gender perspective, and we ensured the minimum of 50% of female interviewees. Collection of data in the field lasted from 15 January 2024 to 28 January 2024.

The questionnaire was prepared in close cooperation with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), given the sensitivity of the topic. The questionnaire included the following themes: gender roles in Montenegrin society, women in politics in Montenegro, online violence, violence against women in politics and protection of women in politics from violence. The entire questionnaire is attached in the Annex to this Report.

In-depth Interviews

The component of interviews with politicians was a constituent part of our comprehensive research of violence against women in Montenegrin politics. The interviews were designed to provide a nuanced insight into perceptions and experiences of politicians, both male and female, within the political sphere. The goal was to understand the extent to which violence against women is present, as well as challenges that they face and the role of male and female politicians in addressing those problems.

Our approach to interviewing male and female politicians included in-depth, semi-structured interviews that provided our collocutors with an opportunity to express their opinions and share their experience openly. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, priorities in these interviews were confidentiality and anonymity of interviewees. The interviews included a wide range of questions and topics, including the following:

- › Perception of the nature of violence against women in politics,
- › Personal experience and challenges faced by female politicians,
- › The most frequent forms of violence that women experience in politics,
- › Media presentation of female politicians in comparison to presentations of their male colleagues,
- › Approaches and policies of political parties in addressing violence against their female members,
- › Awareness about existing policies or legislation aimed at combating violence against women in politics.

In selecting our interviewees, we ensured representation of different political parties in Montenegro. The selection included the current, but also some former male and female politicians from different parties, ideologies and demography, with a view to capturing a broad range of experiences. The interviews were conducted with the following prominent figures in Montenegrin politics:

- Valentina Minić (Democrats)
- Drita Lolla (DPS)
- Sabina Muratović (Bosniak Party)
- Božena Jelušić (URA)
- Branka Bošnjak (PZP)
- Jovana Marović (former member of URA)
- Draginja Vuksanović Stanković (former member of SDP)
- Aleksandra Vuković Kuč (DPS)
- Ana Novaković Đurović (URA)
- Boris Mugoša (SD)

These interviews provided us with rich qualitative data and deeper understanding of personal experience and perceptions of current and former male and female politicians. The complete guide for in-depth interviews is enclosed in the Annex to this Report. This component of the study was implemented with the highest standards of ethics, ensuring informed consent and protection of data for all interviewees.

Focus Groups

DeFacto Consultancy research team conducted six focus groups as a part of its comprehensive research in violence against women in Montenegrin politics. These focus groups constitute a key component for understanding nuanced perspectives and experiences of individuals, particularly young representatives within the political landscape. The focus groups provide a dynamic platform for participation in structured discussions led by a moderator, and exploring attitudes, beliefs and experiences related to certain research goals. Through an interactive dialogue, participants provide in-depth insights that supplement quantitative data collected through polls and by monitoring of the media.

Methodological approach to recruiting and designing focus groups was carefully conceived to ensure inclusiveness of various backgrounds, including variations in gender balance, employment and geographic locations. Every focus group consisted of 6 to 8 participants, of the age 18 to 34, which ensured an intimate environment conducive to open discussion. Six focus groups were organized with youth wings of the following political parties: Bosniak Party (BS), Democratic Montenegro (DCG), Democratic Party of Socialists of Montenegro (DPS), New Serbian Democracy (NSD), Movement Europe Now (PES), and Social Democrats of Montenegro (SD). Discussions within these focus groups addressed key topics like perception of violence against women in politics, personal experience of participants, media presentation and policies that deal with violence against women in politics. Probing into these topics, we wanted to identify key challenges and opportunities for developing more inclusive and more just political environment. The guide for focus groups is enclosed in the Annex to this Report.

The decision to conduct these focus groups online facilitated participation of persons from geographically distant areas, eliminating obstacles related to transport and availability of time. This approach ensured that diverse voices could be heard, which contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the given phenomenon.

Monitoring of Media Sources and Comments in Social Networks and Portals

Monitoring of media sources is one of the key components of this research of violence against women in Montenegrin politics. This part describes a detailed methodology for monitoring media reporting about this issue, ensuring systematic and detailed analysis of the media landscape.

This analysis provides a thorough examination of the narrative used in presentation of women in politics, taking into account aspects like language, tone, framework and prevalence of gender bias. For the purposes of this research, we assessed how media present women in politics in Montenegro. We identified the following media sources as the most prominent ones in Montenegro: RTCG, Vijesti, In4S, Borba, Antena M, Analitika and CDM. The analysis includes reporting about the topics of violence against women in politics in the period of six months (from 1 July 2023 to 31 December 2023). For the needs of this analysis, we collected the material about reporting of the above-listed media in the given period, from the base of newspaper articles of the agency Arhimed. DeFacto Consultancy organized a team of associates who analysed each of the media sources and their reporting. To analyse media sources in a uniform manner, the research team designed a specific set of indicators that was followed by a team of programmers. This was done through an individual analysis of each media content and simultaneous following of the set code scheme to identify how the media report on women in political environment. The total of 2048 unique texts were coded. The code scheme served as a structured guide for programmers so that they can assess media sources in a uniform manner. It helped systematic identification of patterns of bias and disbalance in media reporting about women politicians. This analysis provided valuable insights into how media shape public opinion and contribute to the issue of violence against women in Montenegrin politics.

In parallel with the monitoring of the media sources, we did an analysis of online violence in the comments in the above-listed portals and Facebook pages in the period from 1 July to 31 December

2023. The research team first identified the women politicians who were exposed to explicit online violence. The women politicians included in this analysis are: Aleksandra Vuković Kuč, Anđela Jakšić Stojanović, Božena Jelušić, Draginja Vuksanović Stanković, Jelena Borovinić Bojović, Jelena Božović, Jevrosima Pejović, Kenana Strujić Harbić, Maida Gorčević, Simonida Kordić, Suada Zoronjić, Vesna Bratić and Zdenka Popović. This was followed by an analysis of 24909 comments from portals and 5378 comments from Facebook in two cycles.

The first cycle of the analysis comprised an overview of all comments with a view to establishing the presence of online violence or stereotypes about women and gender roles. The comments that were identified as violence against women or inappropriate comments were additionally coded according to the pre-designed code scheme to classify the type of violence. The data were also collected about the number of likes (positive reactions) and dislikes (negative reactions) that the comments got, as well as about the names of the accounts that posted them. This is particularly important to see if online violence against politicians is generated by the same profiles or if there is a smaller number of those who repeatedly comment using the language of online violence or stereotypes regarding women in politics.

We additionally analysed how many responses were generated by comments that constitute online violence, to be able to get the frequency of interactions. In the end, the results were divided into two units: violence against women politicians in the comments on portals and violence against women politicians in Facebook comments.

Desktop Research of the Existing Published Sources

Along with the monitoring of the media sources in Montenegro, DeFacto research team also did a desktop research about recommendations and best practices. We collected a wide range of recommendations and best practices from advanced democracies. This analysis is a precious resource for analysing violence against women in Montenegrin politics.

In-depth analysis of best practices was done too, taking into account Montenegro's unique political, cultural and social context. This contextual analysis is the key in ensuring that the given recommendations are not only based in theory but also feasible and useful in practice.

The key goal is to contribute to improving the environment for women in politics in Montenegro. This approach ensures that we can provide practical and tailored recommendations for empowering women in the Montenegrin political sphere. The goal is not only to identify efficient strategies that exist around the world, but also to adapt them to the specific needs and challenges that women face in Montenegrin politics. In this way we contribute to development of more inclusive political environment for women, promoting their active participation both on the party level and on the national level.

Public Opinion Poll

Violence against women in politics is a serious challenge that demands thorough understanding and research to identify sources, consequences and adequate prevention strategies and protection measures. This part of the study focuses on the analysis of results of the quantitative research about violence against women in politics in Montenegro. It contributes to better understanding of the complexity of this problem, offering deeper analysis of perceptions and experiences related to violence against women in politics in Montenegro.

After an overview of the key results of the quantitative research, through seven key units, we will analyse various aspects of this topic:

1. **Perceptions of gender roles:** In this unit we show gender role perceptions of Montenegrin citizens, and positions they think men and women should take both in private and in professional life. This analysis ensures consideration of traditional attitudes and expectation related to women in the political context, exploring how these stereotypes can be connected to the occurrence of violence.
2. **Perceptions of the position and role of women in politics in Montenegro:** This part of the analysis is dedicated to deeper understanding how women are perceived in the political space in Montenegro. We explore attitudes about position and role of women in politics, identifying the possible factors that contribute to or limit their participation.
3. **Online violence:** In this unit of the research, we analyse perceptions of Montenegrin citizens about what online violence is, and to what extent it is present in modern society.
4. **Perception of violence against women in politics:** In this unit, we provide an insight into how violence against women in politics is perceived in the society. Exploring the public opinion and attitudes, we analyse the level of awareness of and sensitivity to this problem.
5. **Media reporting about cases of gender-based violence in Montenegro:** Here, we indicate to perception of Montenegrin citizens about the quality of media reporting about the cases of violence against women in politics, and perception of their role in combating, or increasing the number of cases.
6. **Online violence against women in politics:** Analysis of online violence shows the specific challenges that women in politics are faced with in the digital space. The focus is on identifying the types of online violence and their potential impact on political participation of women.
7. **Perception of mechanisms for protecting women in politics in Montenegro:** The last unit is focused on researching the perception of available mechanisms for protecting women in politics. Identification of the efficient mechanisms and indicating to the need for improvements of the existing ones provide guidelines for development of sustainable protection framework.

Key findings

Gender Role Perceptions

- › Although 55% of the respondents emphasise that they do not agree with the statement that children suffer if their mother has a job, other 45% of the respondents agree with it.

- › More than a half of citizens of Montenegro (62.9%) think that it is the task of every woman to be a mother. In addition to this, 58.1% of the respondents say that a good wife is the wife that obeys her husband, while 30.6% say that woman should be a housewife and not to work for salary.
- › More than one third of the respondents (38.8%) think that „When there aren't sufficient jobs in a society/state, men should have precedence in finding jobs and not women“ – 12.8% of them fully agree with this statement, while 25.5% agree to a certain extent.
- › Cumulatively, 48.2% of Montenegrin citizens think that men are better political leaders than women.
- › On the other side, 82.1% of Montenegrin citizens say that women should work and be equal in the labour market, while 66.8% think that it is unacceptable that a woman is only a housewife (to take care of the household) and not to work and have a salary.

Perception of the Position and Role of Women in Politics

- › Citizens of Montenegro think that women in politics more often have a charisma (31.9%), empathy (30.6%), honesty (26.6%), responsibility (19.5%). On the other side the features that they particularly connected to men in politics are leadership (48.2%), integrity (36.9%), self-confidence (35.3%), diplomacy (35%), and strategic thinking (33.9%).
- › More than a half of Montenegrin citizens (61.1%) think that there are adequate opportunities for participation of women in politics, while 23.7% think they do not exist.
- › Similarly, 62.9% of the respondents say that they would like to see more women in the decision-making positions in Montenegro, while 20.7% (even a fifth) say that they would not like that. The remaining 16.4% of the respondents say that they do not have any opinion about this.
- › In addition to this, as many as 34.4% of Montenegrin citizens think that stronger presence of women in politics would make them be more interested in political developments in Montenegro. On the other side, 65.5% of the respondents say that a higher participation of women in political life in Montenegro would not affect at all their level of interest in political developments.
- › In 70% of cases, the respondents say that they think women in politics have a positive impact on the politics in Montenegro. Additionally, 16.7% of the respondents say that they do not recognize the influence of women in politics in Montenegro at all.
- › When asked to give a name of the women they believe had a large influence on political developments in Montenegro, Montenegrin citizens dominantly mentioned Draginja Vuksanović Stanković (13.3%), Olivera Injac (6.3%), Aleksandra Vuković Kuč (5.9%), Jelena Borovinić Bojović (4,6%) and Zdenka Popović (3.6%). However, as many as 43.8% of the respondents could not remember any woman from Montenegrin political scene.
- › The respondents dominantly mentioned lack of support by political parties (51.4%), gender based discrimination (44.8%), and cultural and social norms (41.2%) as the basic barriers that women face in their political work.

Online Violence

- › Almost one third of citizens (31.4%) say that online violence comprises threats and blackmails, while 29.5% citizens mention insults and inappropriate language as types of online violence. In

addition to this, 4.9% of citizens say that, for them, sending inappropriate contents is online violence, while 3.6% of the respondents mention ridicule. As many as 20.5% of the respondents say they are not sure what they could give as an example of online violence.

- › As for security of social networks, as many as 51.2% of citizens think that they are secure to a certain extent or that they are not secure at all.
- › The same number of the respondents (51.2%) think that social networks and mobile operators do not do enough to prevent online violence.

Perception of Violence against Women in Politics

- › More than a half of the respondents (62.4%) recognize that the problem of violence against women in politics exists in Montenegro. However, 18.2% of them say that it is a serious problem, while 44.2% say it is a problem but not serious.
- › As many as 22.2% of the respondents think that violence against women in politics is not a problem at all in Montenegro.
- › Asked to say how often they hear/read about violence against women in politics in Montenegro, 10% of citizens say that they often hear for such cases, 35.9% say sometimes, 34.5% say rarely, while 19.6% say that they have never heard of such a case.
- › The respondents recognize that women are dominantly faced with online/digital violence (total of 58.7%), psychological (55.8%), economic (42.6%) and structural/systemic violence (40.9%).
- › One quarter of the respondents recognize that violence against women in politics influences the situation where smaller number of women decides to do politics in Montenegro (25.4%). On the other side, as many as 47.2% say that they think violence does not influence women's decisions to do politics or not, while 9.4% say that women engage in politics more, precisely because of violence.
- ›
- › In addition to this, 17.7% of the respondents think that violence against women in politics motivates them to work in a higher quality manner, while 45.4% of the respondents say that they think violence demotivates them.
- › In 14.2% of cases, citizens of Montenegro say that they consider women engaged in politics in Montenegro are significantly more endangered than men, while 43.3% say they think women are more endangered to a certain extent.
- › In 55.8% of cases, citizens of Montenegro recognize that, by their statements, men in politics contribute to an increase of violence against women in politics.

Media Coverage of Cases of Violence against Women in Politics

- › More than one quarter of the respondents (28.5%) think that media sufficiently cover the topics related to violence against women in politics, while 60.5% of the respondents say that such topics are not sufficiently covered in the media. The remaining 11% of the respondents say that the topic of violence against women in politics is covered more than it should be.
- › In addition to this, citizens of Montenegro in 13.5% of cases think that the media, when they report about violence against women in politics, provide fully objective information, while 12.2% think that, in their coverage, media contribute to sensationalism.

- › On the other side, 63.1% of Montenegrin citizens say that, in their opinion, with their reporting, media contribute to the increase of violence against women in politics – out of which 5.7% say that media influence that increase to a large extent, 26.2% that they mostly influence, while 31.2% that media influence to a certain extent. The remaining 36.9% of the respondents say that they think the media do not have such an influence.

Online Violence against Women in Politics

- › As many as 27.7% of the respondents say that they had the opportunity to see the comments threatening women politicians in social networks and/or portals in Montenegro.
- › In 29.2% of cases the respondents recognize that there is a difference between the insults that target women in politics in the comments in social networks and portals and the insults that target men. The remaining 70.8% say that there is no difference.
- › The respondents that recognize the difference (N=294) say that it can be dominantly seen in the fact that when the comments target a woman they more frequently contain indecent language and vulgarities (55.1%), they contain stereotypical statements about woman's role (21.5%) or threats with sexual violence (5.7%).

Protection of Women in Politics from Violence

- › Almost half of male and female respondents (46.7%) say that they would report violence to the police, while almost one quarter of them (22.4%) say that they would not report violence at all.
- › As for the question about whether writing of insulting and threatening comments in portals and social networks should be punishable, a dominant majority of the respondents (87.5%) say yes, while only 12.5% of them think that it should not be punishable.
- › A bit more than half of Montenegrin citizens (52.6%) think that the existing political and legal systems provide an adequate protection for women politicians who are victims of violence.

Overview of the Results

Gender Role Perceptions

Researching gender role perceptions in the context of violence against women in politics is of key importance since it allows for better understanding of how traditional attitudes and expectations related to women can contribute to their exposure to violence. Analysis of these perceptions provides an insight into social norms and stereotypes that shape political environment and facilitate identification of the areas where interventions are needed to create more inclusive and more secure political space for all.

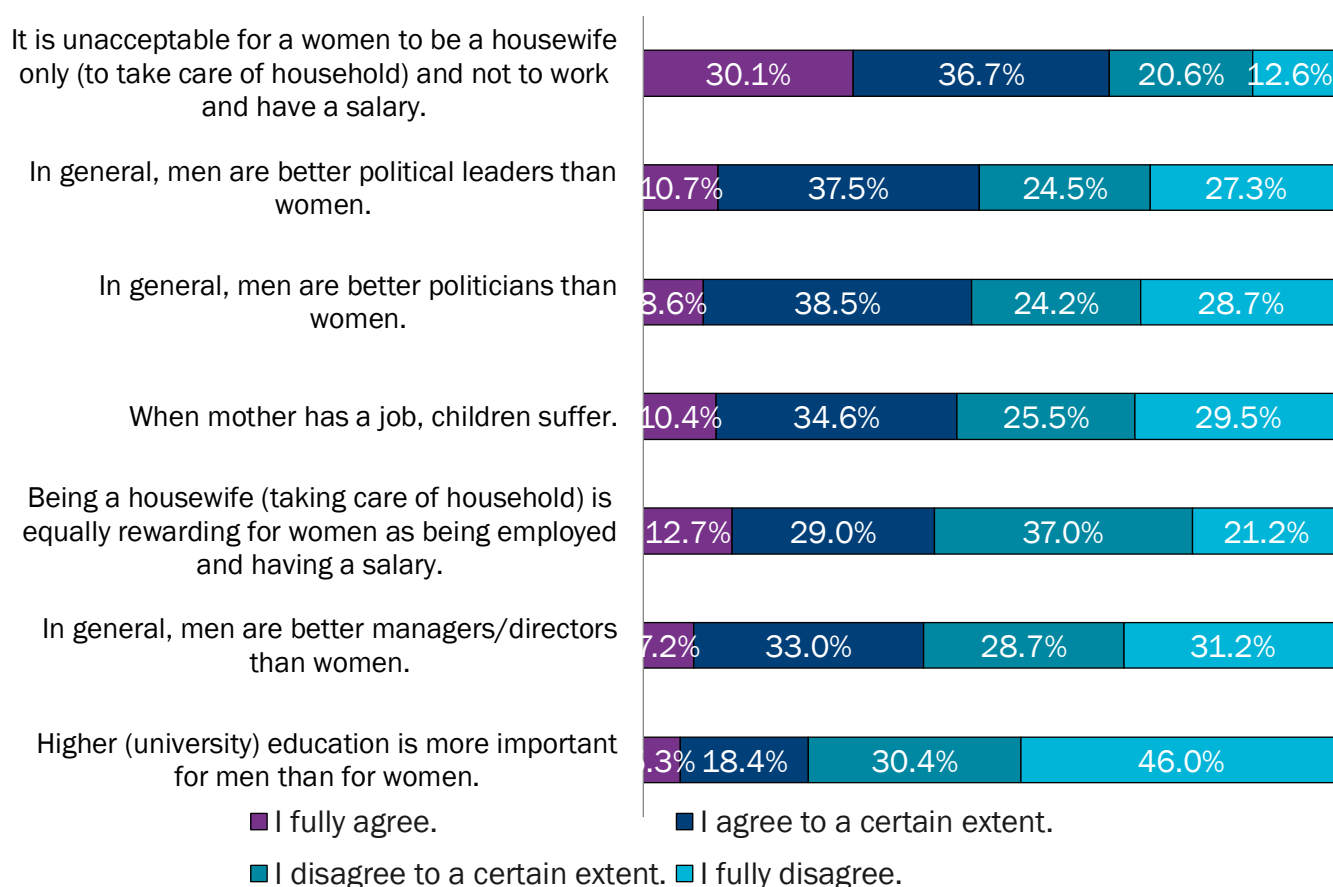
To explore this dimension, the respondents were asked to say to what extent they agree with the statements related to gender roles.

To the question to what extent they agree with the statement „It is unacceptable for a woman to be only a housewife (to take care of the household) and not to work and have a salary“, the total of

66.8% of the respondents say that they agree – 30.1% agreeing fully, and 36.7% agreeing to a certain extent.

Cumulatively, 48.2% of the respondents say they consider men to be better political leaders than women – 10.7% of them saying that they fully agree with this statement, and 37.5% saying they agree to a certain extent. Similarly, 8.6% of the respondents say that they fully agree with the statement that men are better politicians than women, while 38.5% say they agree with this statement to a certain extent. In addition to this, although 55% of the respondents say they do not agree with the statement that children suffer if their mother has a job, the remaining 45% agree with it – out of which 10.4% agree fully.

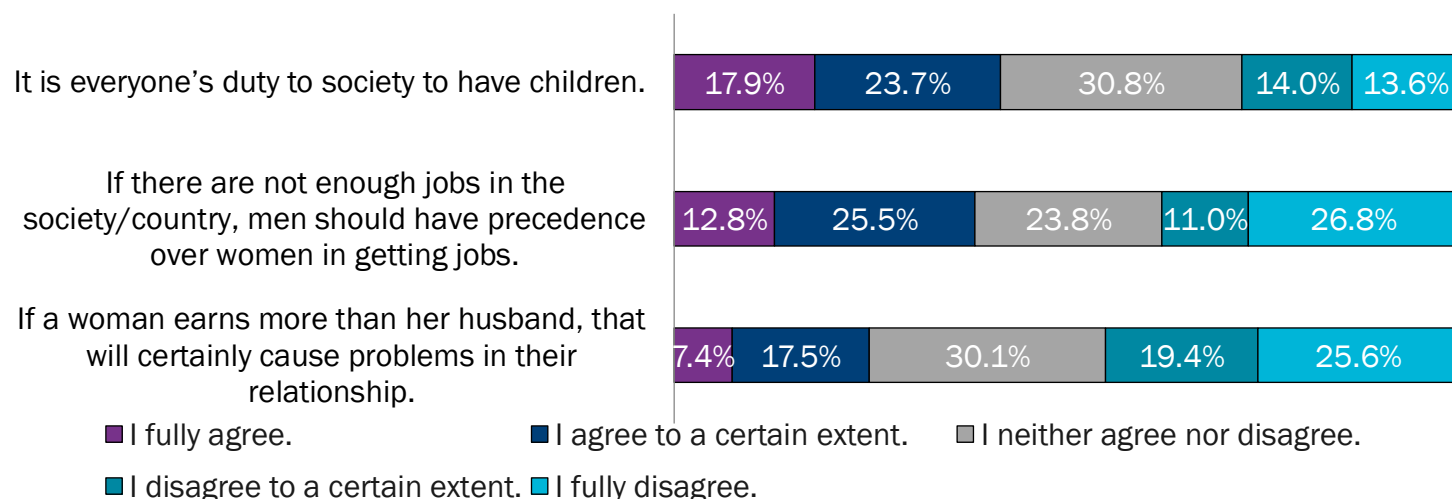
Figure 1 To what extent to you agree with the following statements?



In addition to this, 41.6% of the respondents say they think it is everyone's duty to the society to have children, while 30.8% of the respondents did not take any position about this question (Figure 2). Similarly, 38.3% of the respondents agree with the statement „When there are no sufficient jobs in the society/state, men, and not women, should have precedence in finding jobs“, - out of which 12.8% fully agree with this statement, while 25.5% agree to a certain extent.

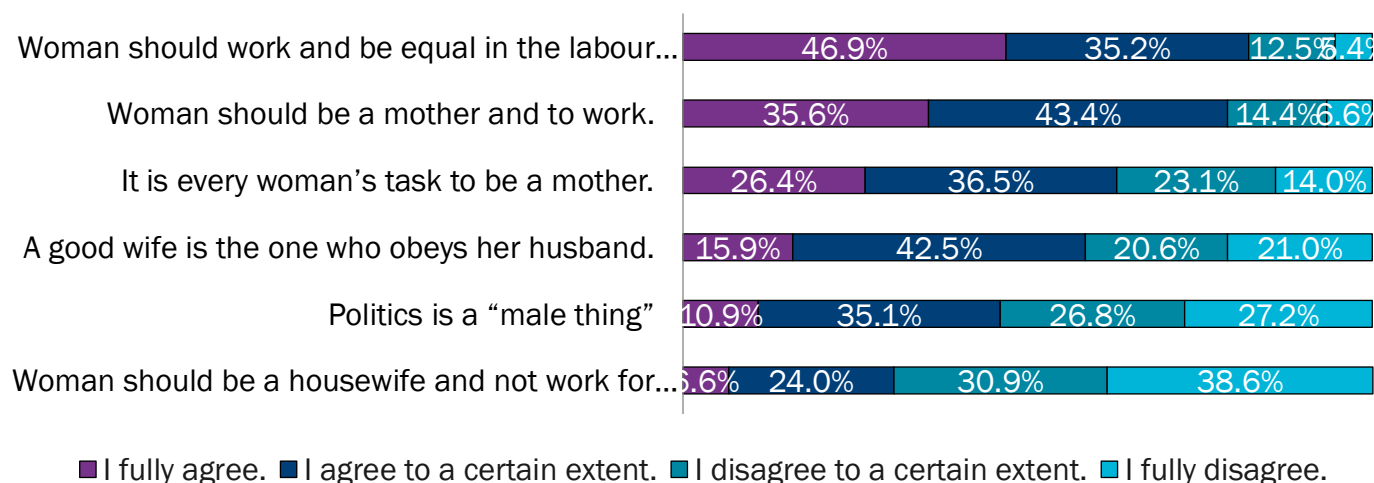
It is important to say that 24.9% of the respondents think that if a woman earns more than her husband it must cause problems in their partnership relations, while 30.1% of the respondents did not express their opinion about this topic.

Figure 2 To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



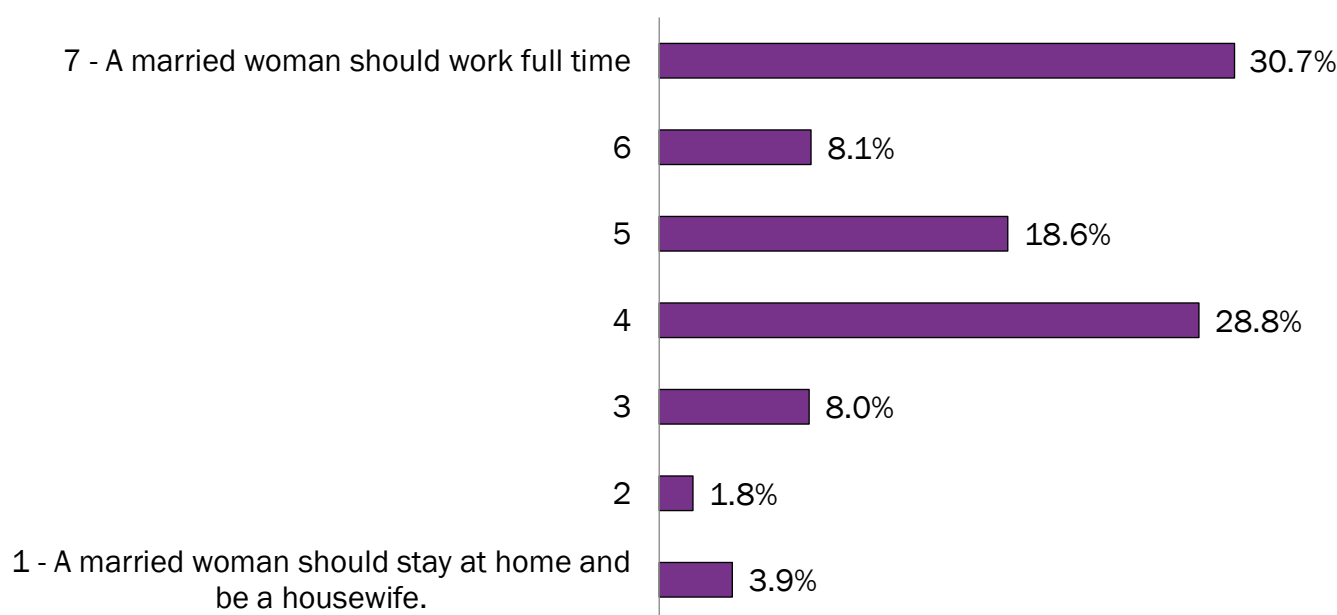
Furthermore, 82.1% of the respondents say that they agree with the statement that women should work and be equal in the labour market – out of which 46.9% say that they fully agree with this statement, while 35.2% say that they agree to a certain extent. It is worth noting that 79% of the respondents say that they agree with the statement that woman should be a mother and work as well. On the other side, 62.9% of the respondents say that it is the task of every woman to be a mother – 26.4% say that they fully agree with this statement, while 36.5% say that they agree to a certain extent. In addition to this, 58.1% of the respondents agree with the statement that a good wife is the one that obeys her husband, while 30.6% agree with the statement that a woman should be a housewife and should not work for salary.

Figure 3 To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



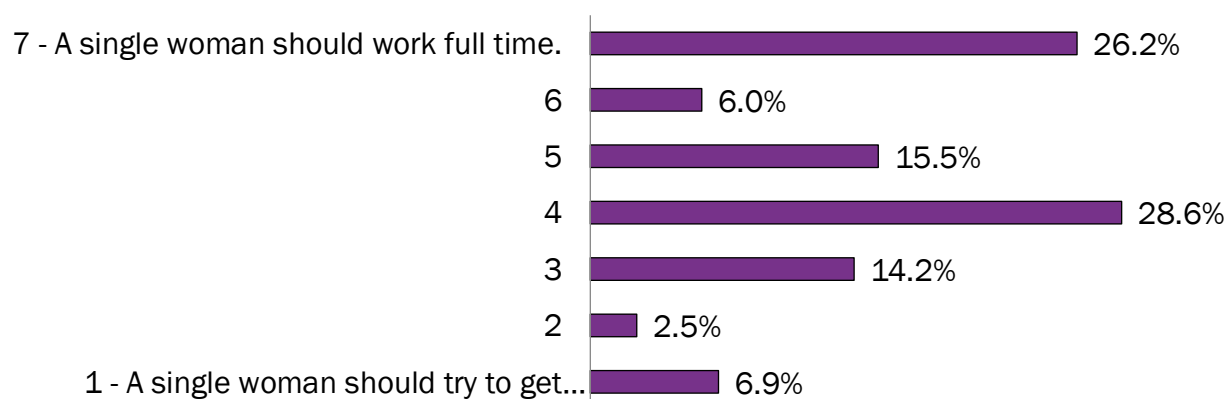
We asked the respondents to mark on the scale from 1 to 7 which attitude they are closest to, where 1 stands for „Married woman should stay at home and be a housewife“, while 7 stands for „Married woman should work full time“. As many as 30.7% of Montenegrin citizens chose 7 on this scale, while 3.9% chose 1.

Figure 4 In your opinion, what attitude are you the closest to?



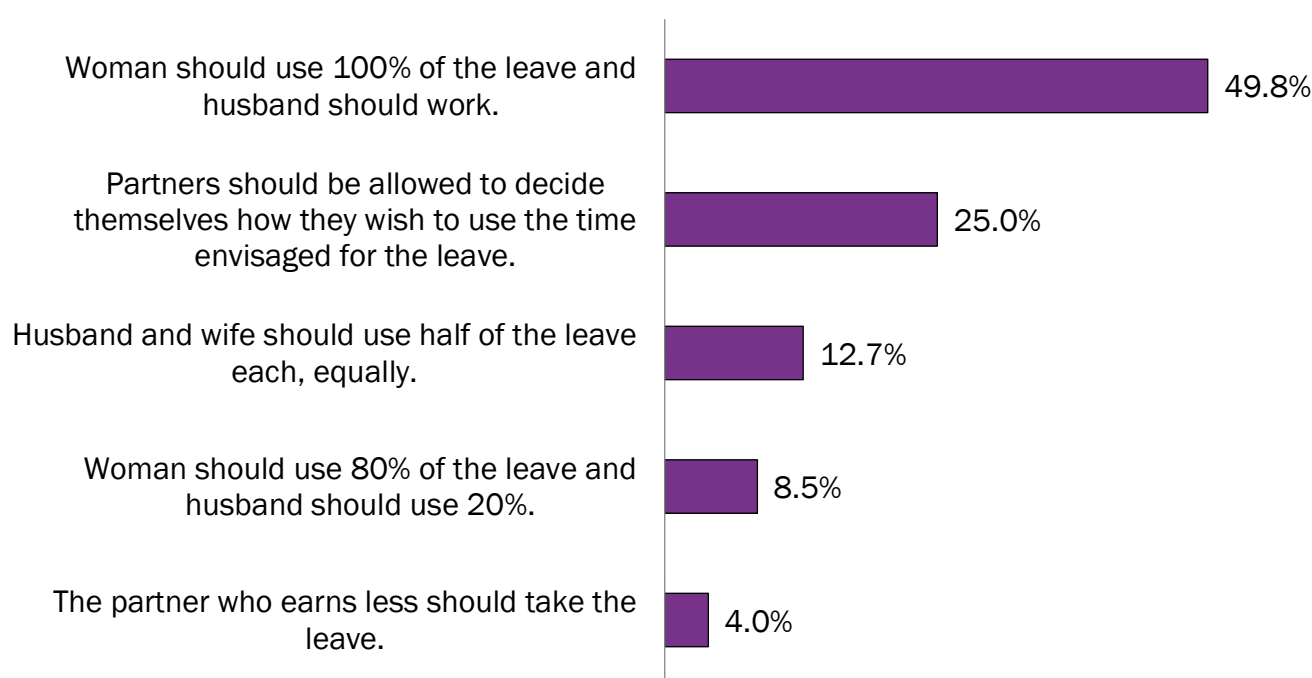
According to the same principle, we asked the respondents to mark their position on the scale from 1 to 7, where 1 stands for „Woman who is not married should try to get married as soon as possible,“ while 7 stands for „Woman who is not married should work full time“. A bit more than one quarter of the respondents (26.2%) chose number 7, while 6.9% chose number 1.

Figure 5 In your opinion, what attitude are you the closest to?



When asked how the maternity leave should be divided, as many as 49.8% of the respondents say that woman should use 100% of the leave. In addition to this, 25% of Montenegrin citizens say that the partners should be allowed to choose themselves how they want to use the time envisaged for maternity leave. Only 12.7% of citizens say that maternity leave should be used equally; 8.5% say that woman should use 80% of the leave, and husband should use 20%, while 4% of the respondents say that maternity leave should be used by the partner who earns less.

Figure 6 What do you think, how should maternity leave be divided between husband and wife?



These data show that, in the opinion of Montenegrin citizens, there is a strong presence of stereotypes and prejudice about the role a woman should take in family and in professional life.

It is important to mention that the presence of stereotypes about the role of woman and prejudice against them are damaging for the society because they limit the potential of women and create injustice. Such stereotypes make it more difficult for women to access political, economic, and social sphere, reducing their visibility and impact. In addition to this, supporting inequality and discrimination, stereotypes about woman's role contribute to maintaining patriarchal structures of power that prevent progress of the society to a more just and inclusive environment for all.

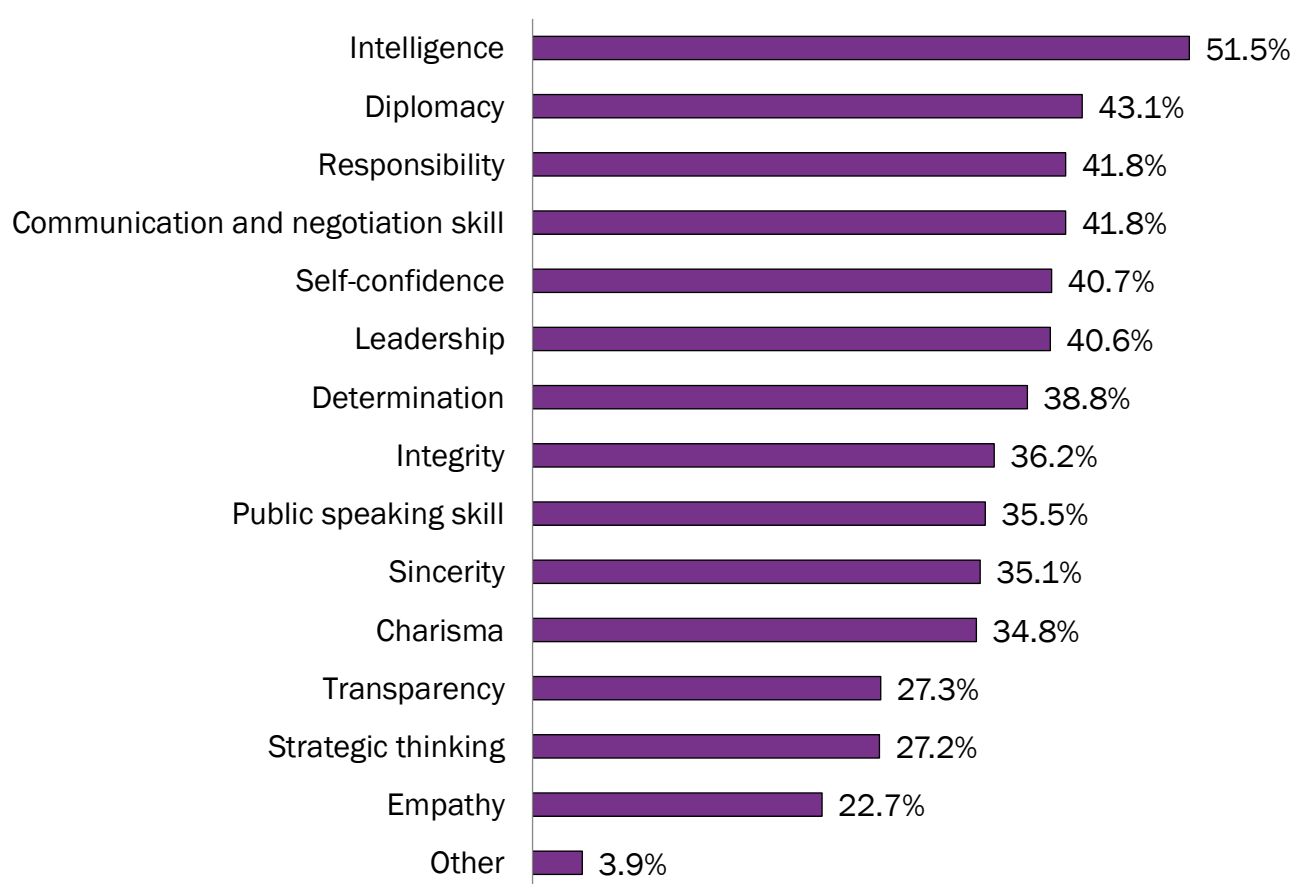
Perception of the Position and Role of Women in Politics in Montenegro

Researching perception of women's role and position in politics is of essential importance because it provides a deeper insight into the issue of how citizens perceive their role and position in the political environment. Understanding these perceptions ensures identification of obstacles that

women face in political work, but also before they enter into political life. Understanding the social context related to perceptions of women in politics, their importance and role, ensures that barriers and obstacles for their work can be recognized, as well as potential sources of violence and discrimination.

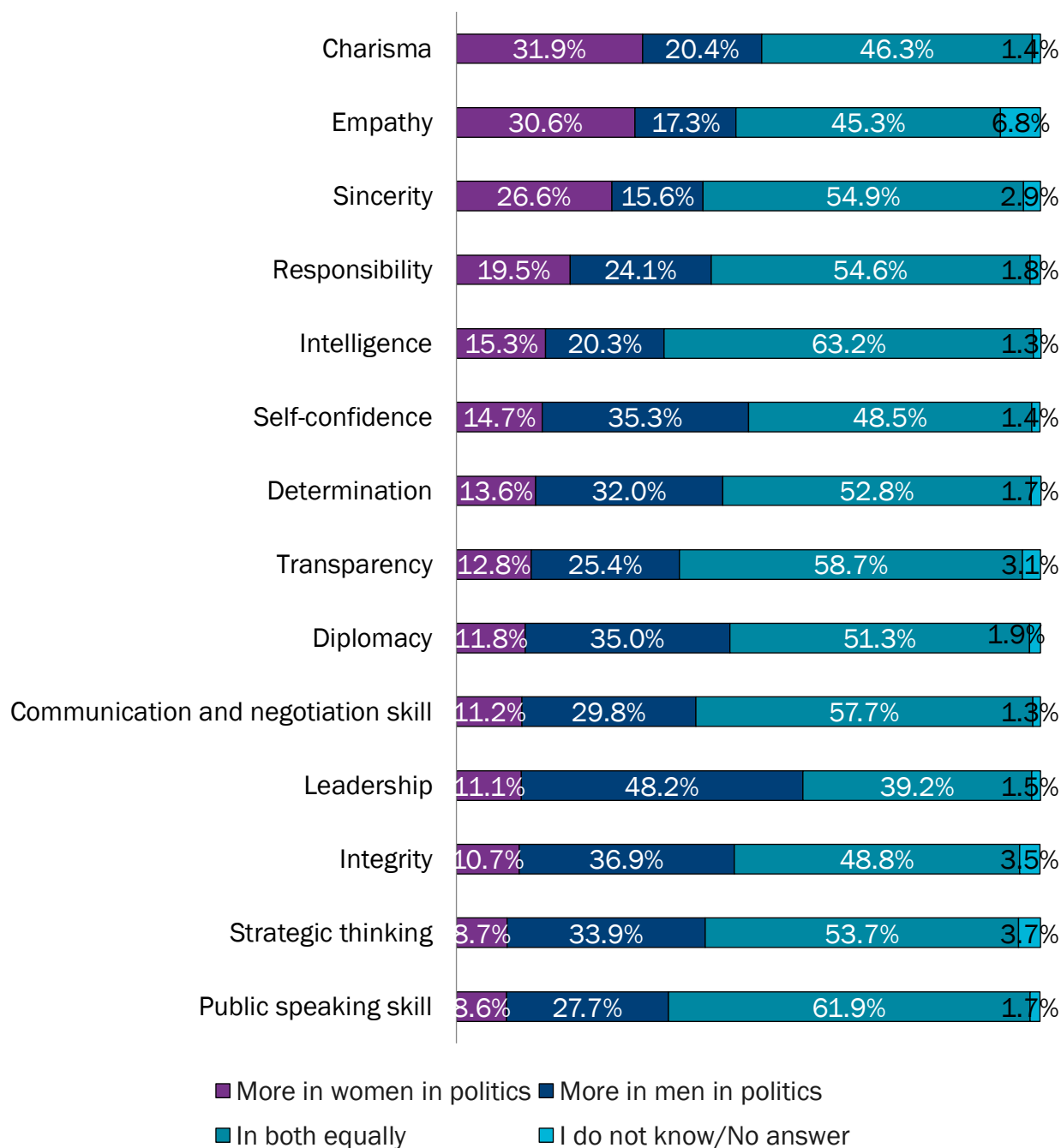
To explore this topic, we asked the respondents what the features that they connected with the persons doing politics were. In this respect citizens particularly emphasized intelligence (51.5%), diplomacy (43.1%), responsibility (41.8%), skills of communication and negotiation (41.8%), self-confidence (40.7%) and leadership (40.6%).

Figure 7 When you think about persons in politics, what features would you say they have? (More than one answer is possible)



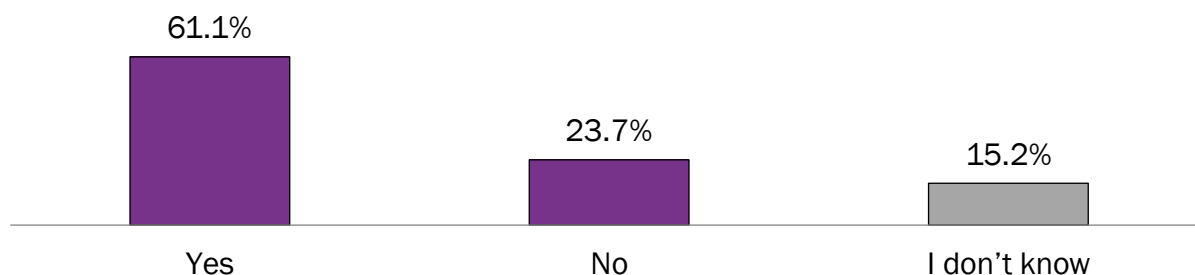
Asked to mark the features that they connect with male and those they connect with female gender, the respondents marked that women had more charisma (31.9%), empathy (30.6%), honesty (26.6%), and responsibility (19.5%). On the other side, the features that they particularly connected to men were leadership (48.2%), integrity (36.9%), self-confidence (35.3%), diplomacy (35.%) and strategic thinking (33.9%).

Figure 8 Would you say that the following features are more of women in politics or men in politics, or both equally?



Then we asked the respondents if they think there were adequate opportunities for women to engage in politics in Montenegro. More than a half of Montenegrin citizens (61.1%) say that they think there are adequate opportunities, while 23.7% say they think adequate opportunities do not exist.

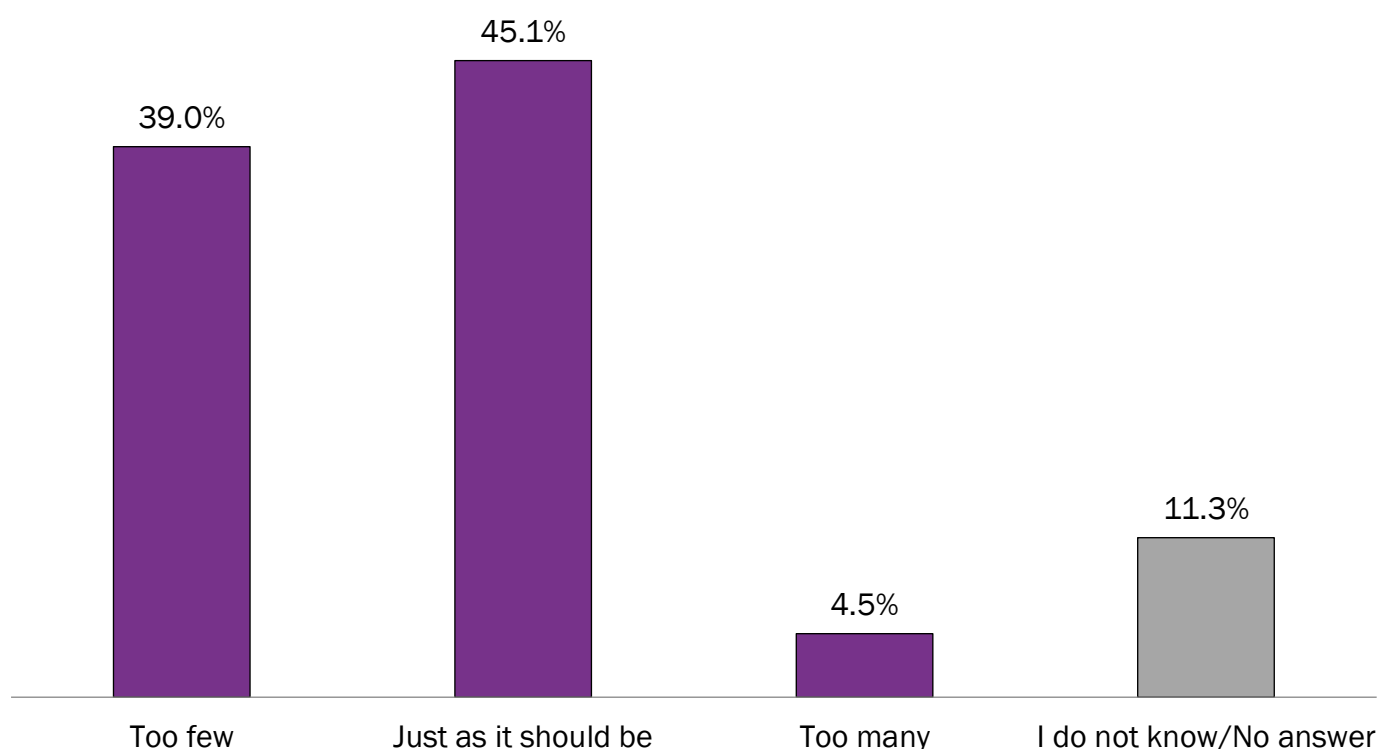
Figure 9 Do you believe there are adequate opportunities for women to engage in politics in Montenegro?



Even 39% of the respondents say that the current share of women in the Parliament of Montenegro is small, while 45.1% say that this share is sufficient. In addition to this, in 4.5% cases the respondents say that the share is too large.

Further cross-tabulation shows that women more frequently think that the share of women in the Parliament is small (49.8%) than men who think so only in 27.8% cases.

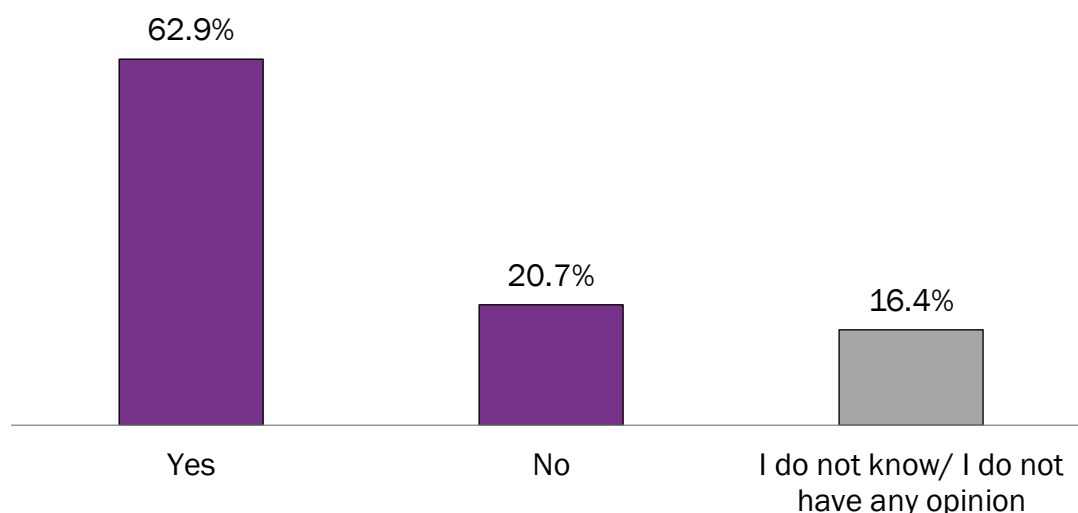
Figure 10 In the new convocation of the Parliament of Montenegro, established after the elections held on 11 June 2023, the current share of women MPs is 20%. Do you think it is:



Similarly, when asked if they would like to see more women in the decision-making positions in Montenegro, 62.9% of the respondents say that they would, while 20.7% say they would not. The remaining 16.4% of the respondents do not have any opinion about the topic.

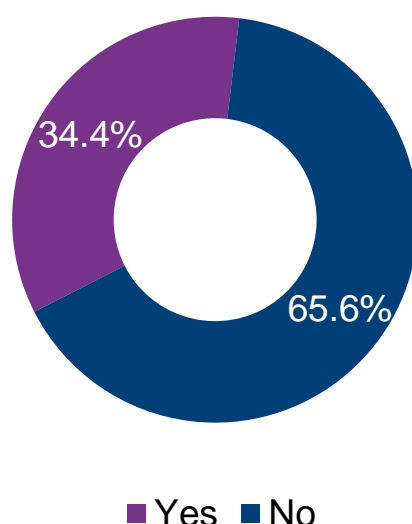
Female respondents more frequently (in 74.1% cases) express their wish to see a larger number of women in the decision-making positions in Montenegro. 51.2% think the same.

Figure 11 Would you like to see more women in the decision-making positions in Montenegro?



In addition to this, as many as 34.4% of Montenegrin citizens think that more women in politics would raise their additional interest in political developments in Montenegro. On the other side, 65.5% of the respondents say that more women in Montenegro's political life would not have any influence on their interest in political developments.

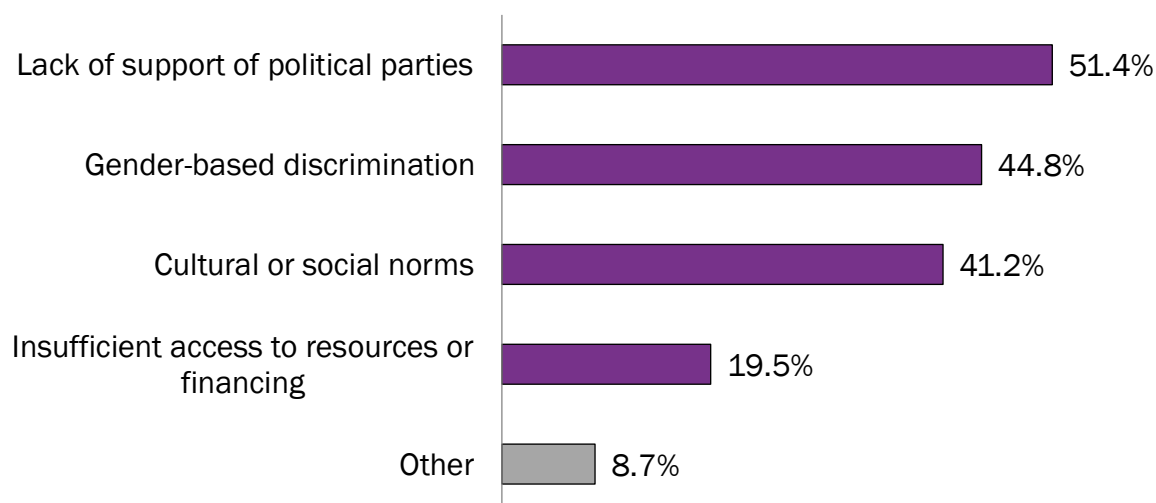
Figure 12 Would a larger number of women in politics in Montenegro raise your interest in political developments in the country?



Asked to list the barriers which, in their opinion, prevent and/or make it more difficult for women to participate more in Montenegro's political life, the respondents dominantly mention a lack of support

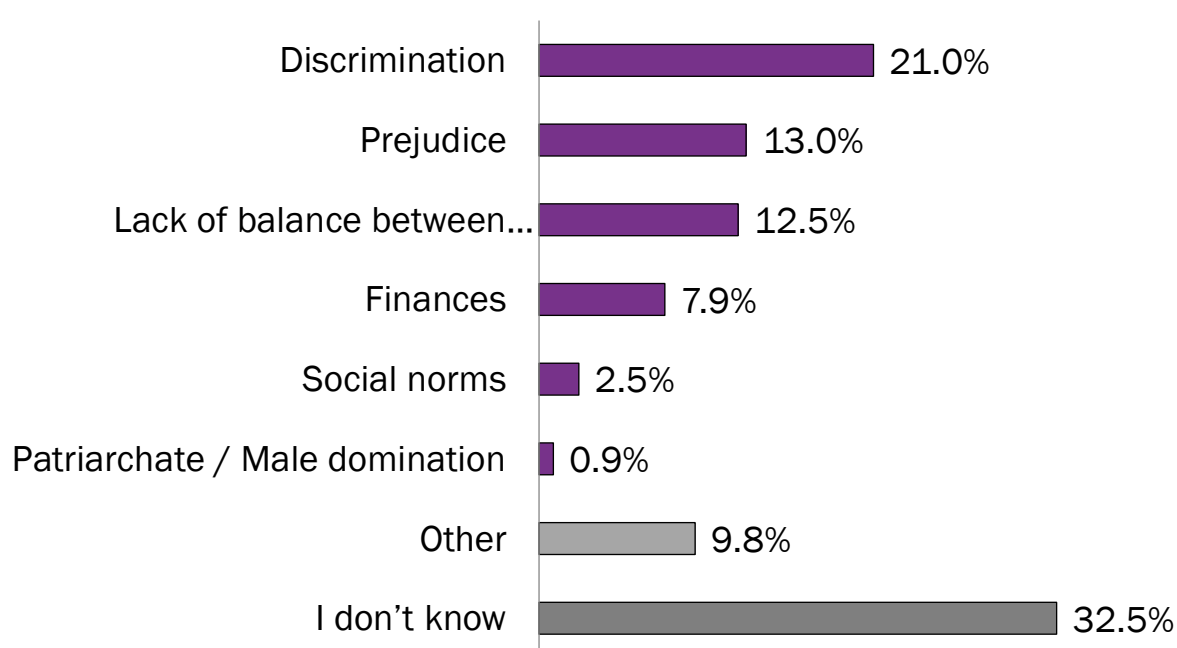
by political parties (51.4%), gender-based discrimination (44.8%) and cultural and social norms (41.2%).

Figure 13 Which barriers, in your opinion, hinder higher participation of women in politics? (More than one answer is possible)



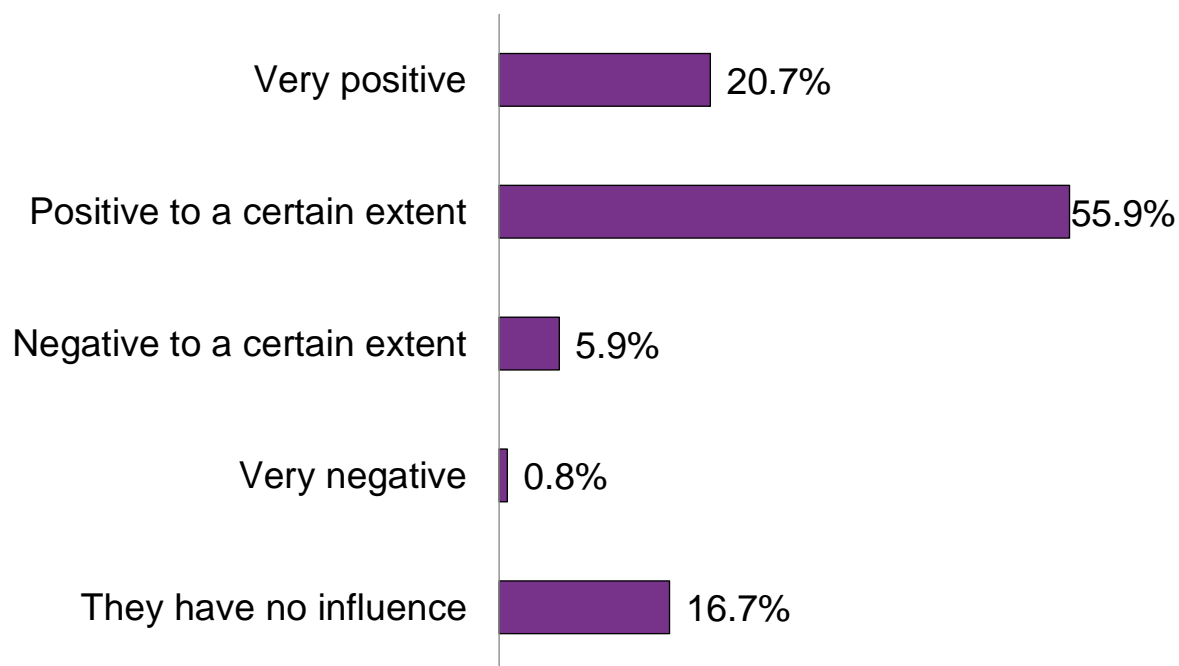
We further asked the respondents about the challenges that women doing politics in Montenegro face. As many as 21% of the respondents say that the most serious challenge they face is discrimination, 13% say it is prejudice, while 12.5% say it is the lack of balance between family and professional life

Figure 14 In your opinion, what are the most serious challenges that women doing politics in Montenegro face?



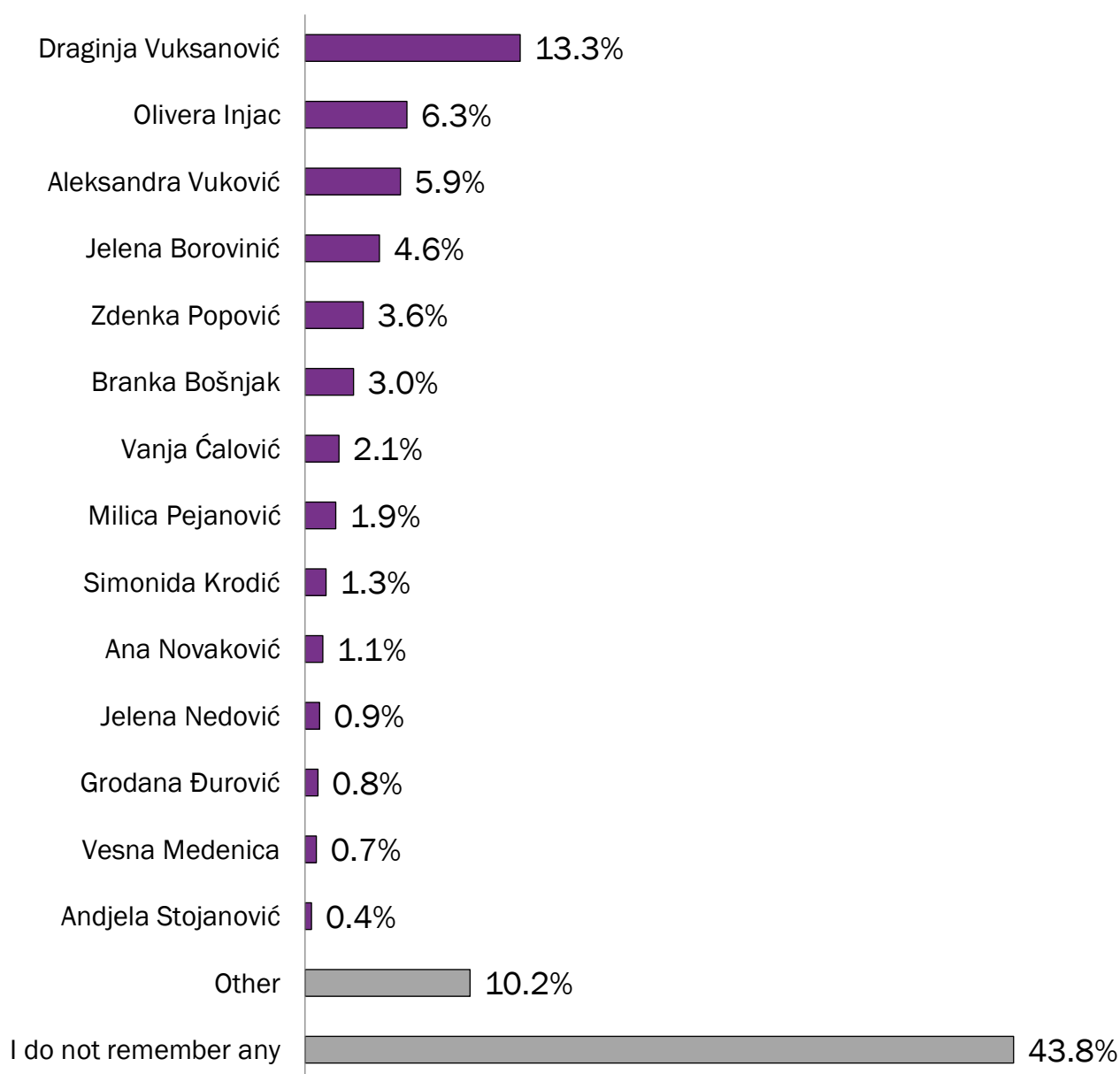
In more than 70% of cases, the respondents say they think that women in politics have a positive influence on politics in Montenegro, out of which 20.7% think that their influence is very positive, while 55.9% say it is positive to a certain extent. On the other side, 16.7% of the respondents say that they do not recognize any influence of women in politics on the political developments in Montenegro.

Figure 15 In your opinion, what is the influence on women in politics on the politics in Montenegro?



Asked to name the woman they believe had a great influence on the political developments in Montenegro, the citizens of Montenegro dominantly mention Draginja Vuksanović Stanković (13.3%), Olivera Injac (6.3%), Aleksandra Vuković Kuč (5.9%), Jelena Borovinić Bojović (4.6%) and Zdenka Popović (3.6%). However, as many as 43.8% of the respondents were not able to remember any woman active in Montenegro's political life.

Figure 16 Can you name a woman who is active in politics through a political party that in your opinion had a great influence on political developments in Montenegro?



These data show openness of Montenegro's citizens for greater participation of women in politics and their ability to recognize challenges they are faced with when they enter the political scene. At the same time, these data reveal the presence of certain stereotypes about woman's role, understanding that there is a 'need' to balance professional and family life, as well as the insufficient visibility of women in political sphere.

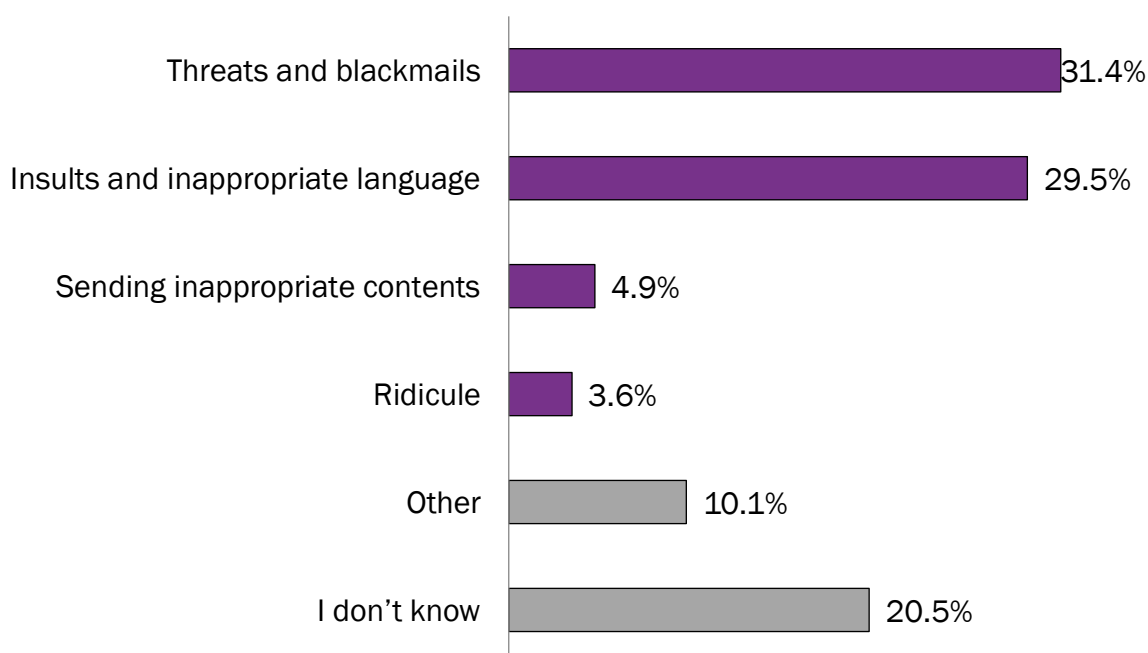
This situation indicates to further implications that may be reflected in further limitation to participation of women in politics, which leads to preservation of gender inequality.

Online Violence

To introduce the respondents to the topic of violence against women in politics in the digital space, we first asked several questions about how they understand online violence.

Thus, we asked the respondents to say what, in their opinion, constitutes online violence. Close to one third of the citizens (31.4%) mention threats and blackmailing, while 29.5% mention insults and inappropriate language as forms of online violence. In addition to this, 4.9% of citizens say that for them, sending inappropriate contents is online violence, while 3.6% of the respondents mention ridicule. As many as 20.5% of the respondents say that they are not sure what they could give as an example of online violence.

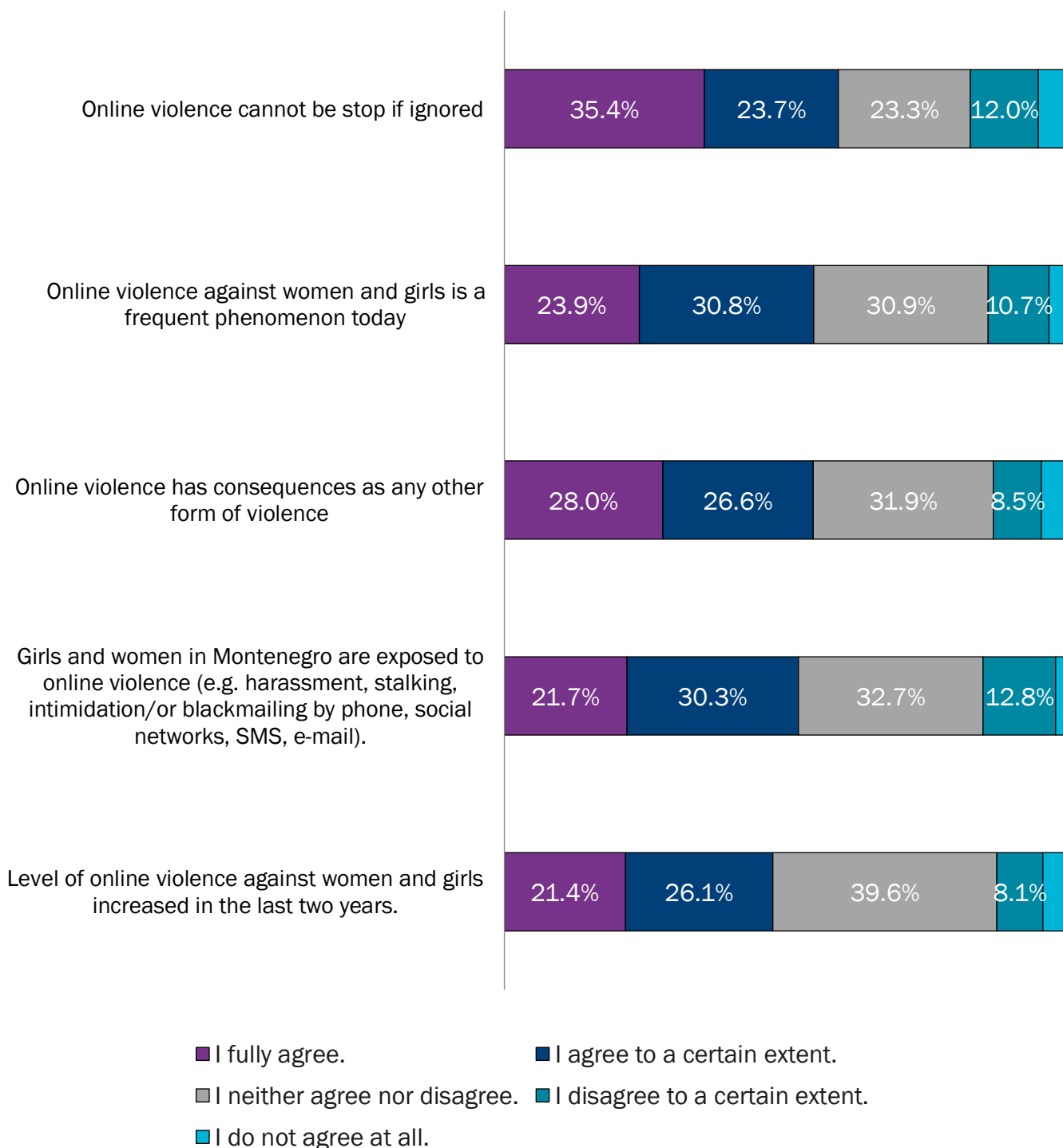
Figure 17 In your opinion, what is online violence? Please, give as many examples as you can think of.



Then we asked the respondents to say to what extent they agree with the given statements. In total 59.7% of the respondents think that online violence can be stopped if it is ignored, and out of this number 35.4% fully agree with this statement, while 23.7% agree to a certain extent.

More than a half of Montenegrin citizens (54.7%) think that online violence against women and girls is a frequent phenomenon nowadays, while 52% of citizens agree that girls and women are exposed to online violence. In addition to this, 47.5% of citizens think that the level of online violence against women and girls increased in the last two years, and 39.6% of the respondents do not have any opinion about this topic.

Figure 18 On the basis of what you saw, heard, or read, to what extent would you agree with the following statements?



As for the security of social networks, as many as 51.2% of citizens think that they are secure to a certain extent or that they are not secure at all (Figure 19). In addition to this, the same number of respondents (51.2%) think that social networks and mobile operators are not doing enough to prevent online violence (Figure 20).

Figure 19 In your opinion, are social networks secure?

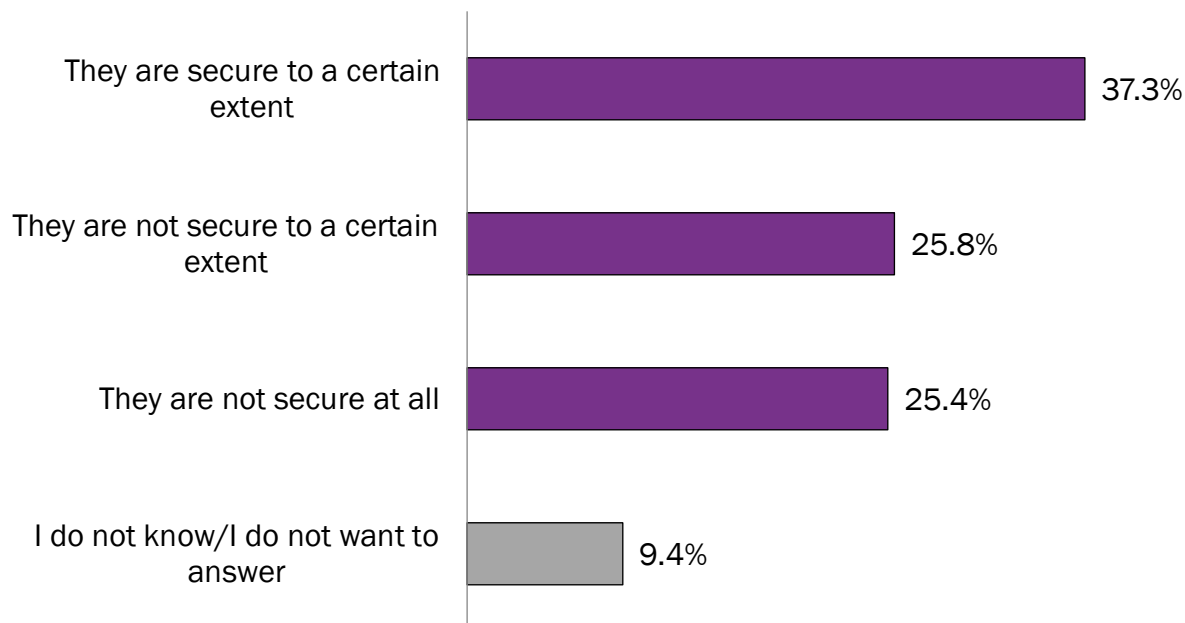
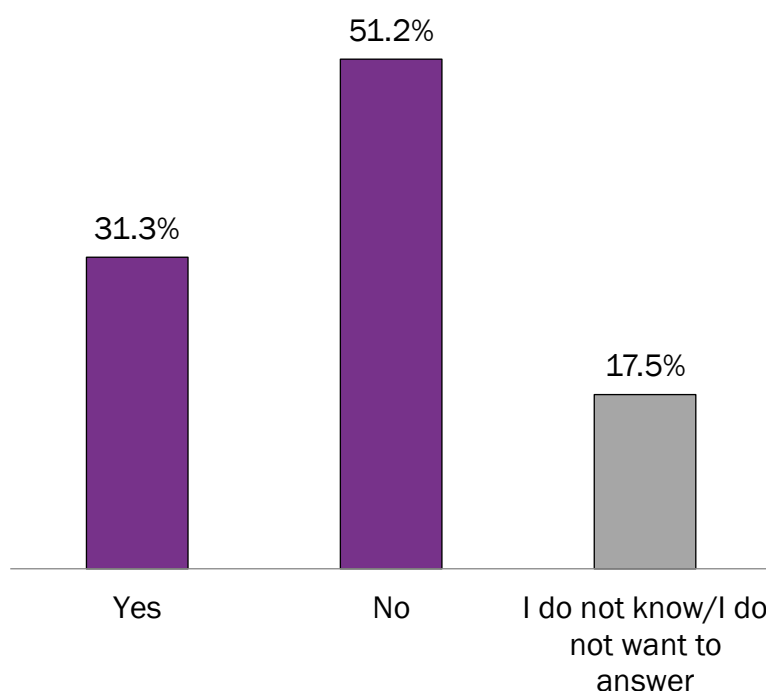


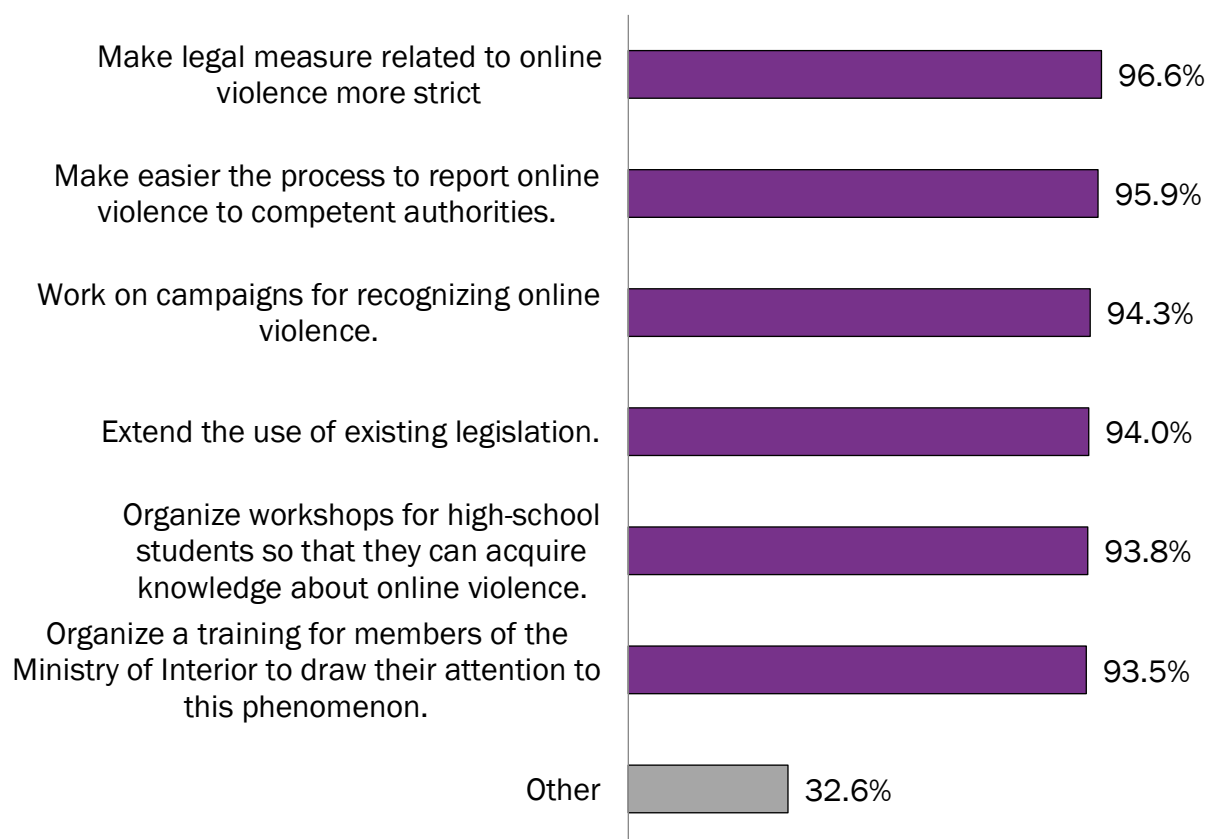
Figure 20 In your opinion, are social networks and mobile operators doing enough to prevent online violence?



Asked to say if they thought the listed mechanisms could help reduce the numbers of cases of online violence, 96.6% of the respondents agreed that such a result could be achieved by making the legal measures related to online violence stricter. 95.9% of the respondents agree that such an influence would be produced by making the process for reporting online violence easier. 94.3% recognized that such an influence might come from the results of campaigns that could work on

recognizing online violence. Additionally, 94% of the respondents say that the application of the existing legislation needs to be more strict; 93.8% of the respondents think workshops for high-school students should be organized, and 93.5% think trainings for police should be implemented.

Figure 21 In your opinion, what should be done to reduce online violence? (Answer Yes)



These data show that there is a high level of awareness among citizens of Montenegro about the presence of online violence, which at the same time reveals challenges in clearly defining both the notion of online violence and its different manifestations. Although there is general awareness that online violence exists as a problem of modern society, the lack of precise definition and scope of this phenomenon poses a significant obstacle in dealing with it and in developing prevention and protection strategies.

Perception of Violence against Women

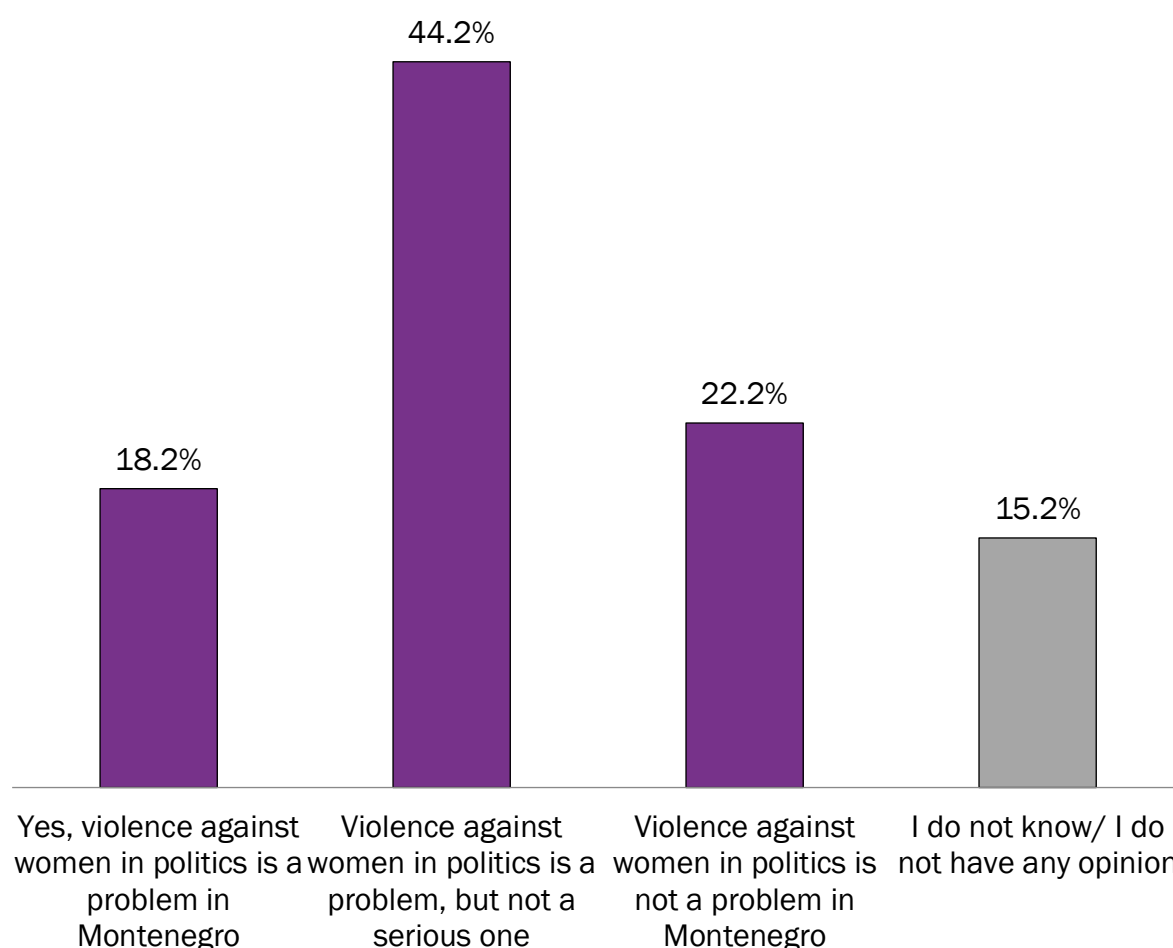
Importance of the topic of violence against women in politics cannot be exaggerated since it is the issue that undermines the foundations of democratic society and gender equality. This violence is not only an attack against an individual woman, but also against democratic processes and institutions.

Understanding, researching, and solving this problem is of key importance for creating inclusive political environment where every person, regardless of gender, can freely express their attitudes, participate in political processes, and achieve their potentials. Dealing with violence against women

in politics is not only a moral obligation, but also a necessary step towards building of a more just and more inclusive society where human rights and values of democracy are respected.

To explore this topic more thoroughly, we asked the respondents if they thought that violence against women in politics was a problem in Montenegro. More than a half of the respondents (62.4%) recognize that this problem exists in Montenegro. However, 18.2% of that number say that it is a serious problem, while 44.2% think that it is a problem but not serious. As many as 22.2% of the respondents think that violence against women in politics is not a problem at all in Montenegro.

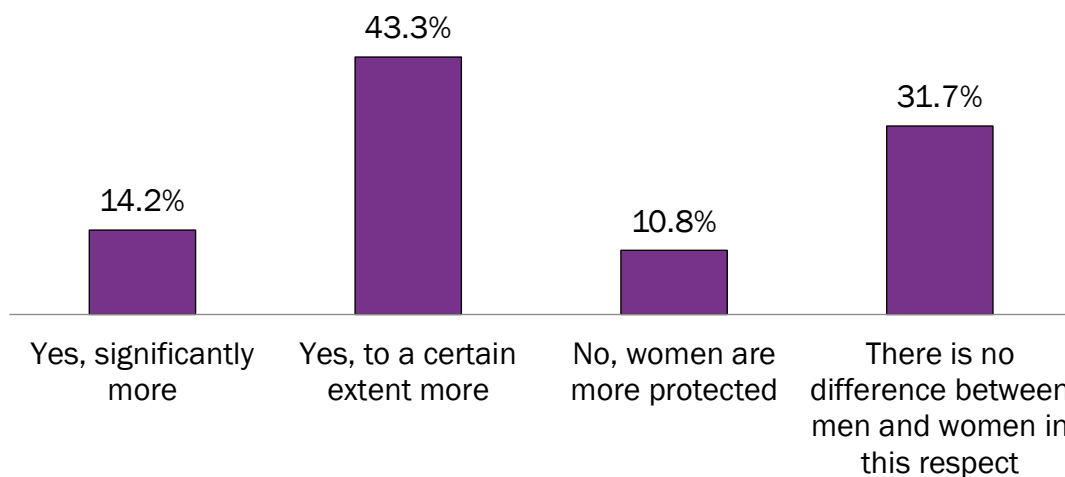
Figure 22 Do you think that violence against women in politics is a problem in Montenegro?



In 14.2% of cases, Montenegrin citizens emphasize that they think that women who do politics in Montenegro are significantly more jeopardized than men, while 43.3% say that they think they are more jeopardized to a certain extent. In addition to this, 10.3% of the respondents say that they think that women who do politics are more protected than men who do politics. The remaining 31.7% say that there is no difference between men and women on this basis.

It can be noted that, among 14.2% of the respondents who say that women who do politics are significantly more jeopardized than men in the same field, there is a significantly larger number of women – as many as 18.1% of women claim this, in comparison to 10.1% men.

Figure 23 Do you think that women in politics in Montenegro are more jeopardized than men who do politics?

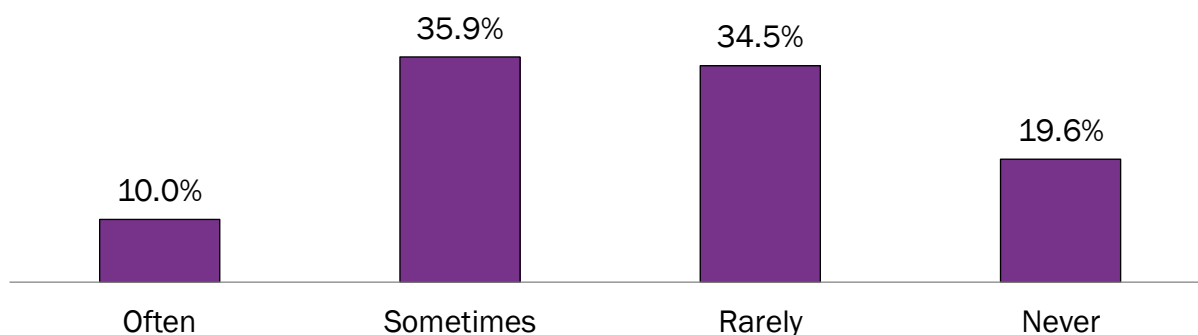


Recognizing Cases of Violence against Women in Politics

To understand the depth of the problem of violence against women in politics in Montenegro, it is exceptionally important to understand how frequently citizens can recognize if something is a case of violence, and how visible these cases are, taking into account the overall context of the country.

Therefore, we asked the respondents to say how often they heard/read about violence against women in politics in Montenegro. Only one tenth (10%) of citizens say that they often hear about such cases. 35.9% say that they hear of them sometimes, 34.5% rarely, while 19.5% say that they have never heard of such a case.

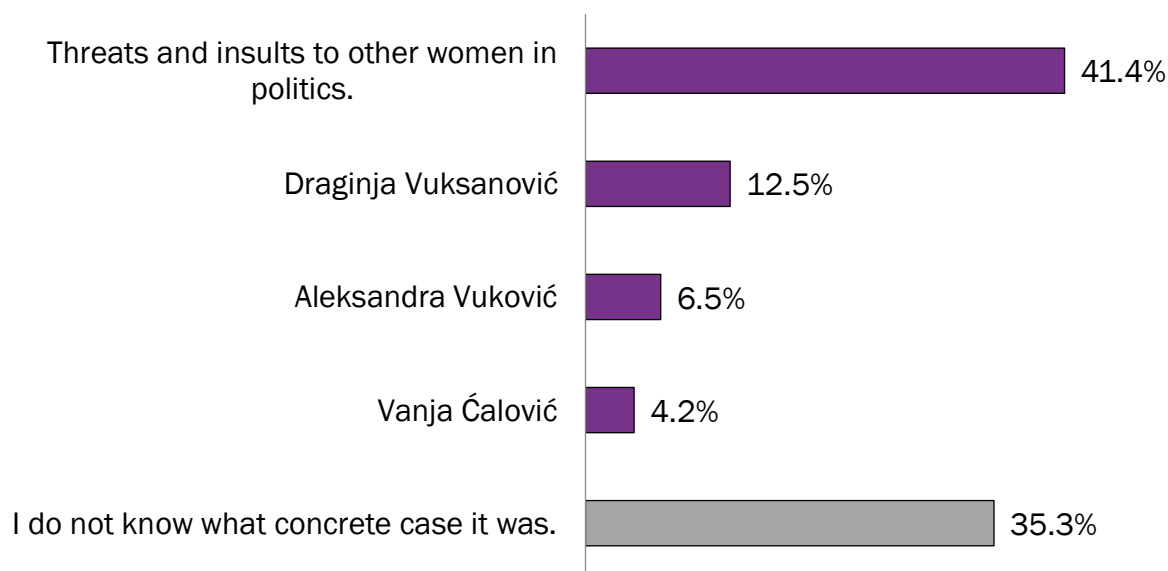
Figure 24 How often do you hear or read about violence against women in politics?



In 18.7% of cases, the respondents say that they know of a concrete case of violence against a woman in politics in Montenegro, while the remaining 81.3% say that they do not know of any such

case. Among those respondents who say that they know of a case of violence against woman (N=188) in politics, as many as 12.5% mention the case where the victim was Draginja Vuksanović Stanković, 6,5% Aleksandra Vuković Kuč, and 4,2% Vanja Čalović. The remaining 76.7% say they cannot remember any concrete case.

Figure 25 Do you know of any case of violence against a woman in politics in Montenegro. Can you tell us what it was about?



Influence of Violence on the Level of Participation of Women in Politics

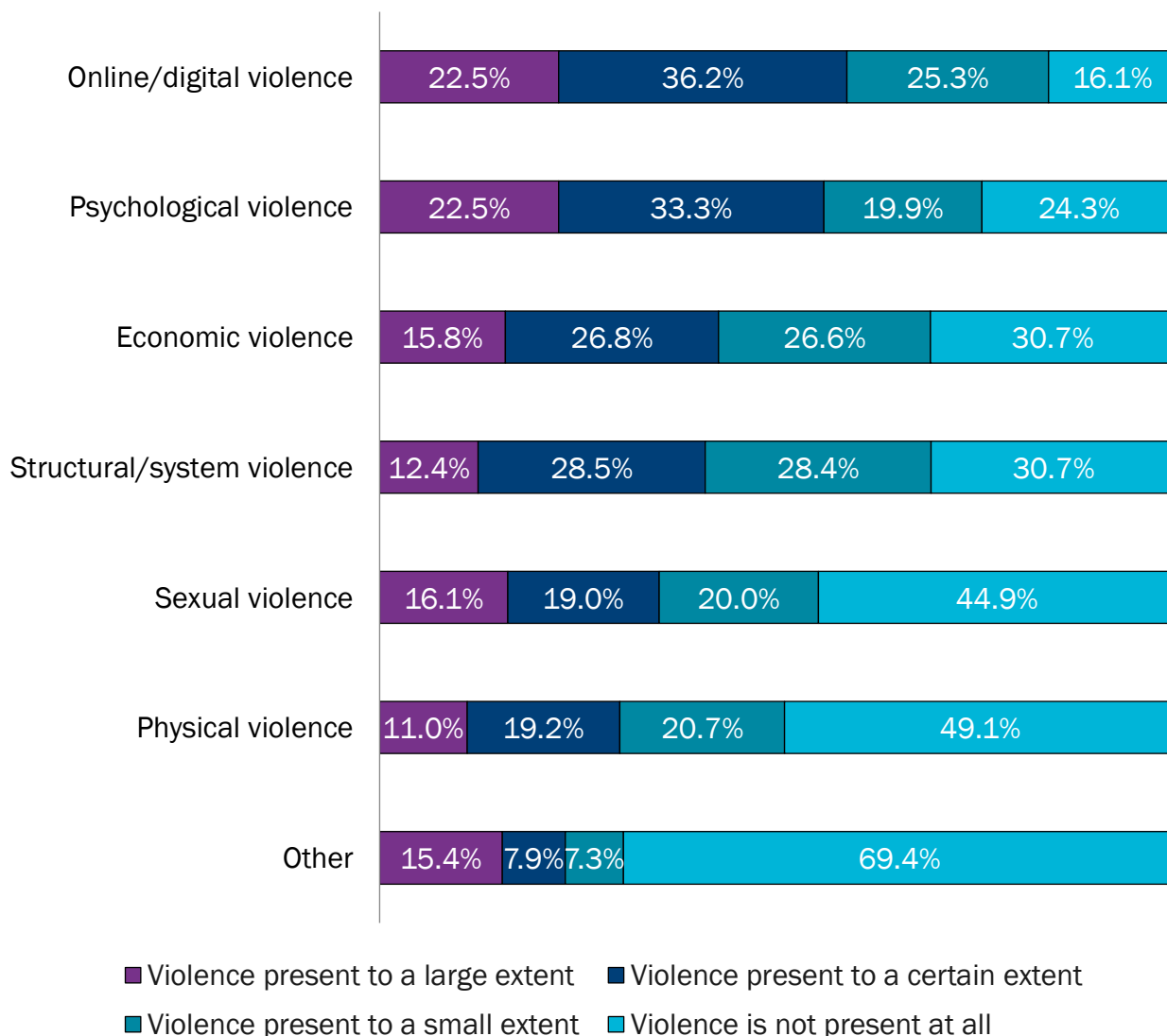
Understanding the influence of violence against women in politics on their participation in the political life is of key importance due to several reasons. Firstly, such violence can create a hostile environment that discourages women from political engagement, since they are afraid of threats and attacks, both online and offline. This can lead to reduction in political participation of women and their representation in political processes, limiting thus their opportunities for advancement in their political careers. Traumatic experience of violence in politics can also have long-term consequences on the mental health of women, which makes their political activism additionally difficult. In the end, violence against women in politics can jeopardize democratic processes, creating an atmosphere of fear and mistrust, which can lead to the reduction of trust in political institutions and democratic values.

All in all, understanding influence of violence on participation of women in politics, but also perception of citizens about that influence constitute a very important dimension of the problem that this research deals with.

To understand this dimension better, we asked how citizens of Montenegro identify violence against women in politics in Montenegro.

Respondents recognize that women are dominantly faced with online/digital (58.7%), psychological (55.8%), economic (41.6%), and structural/systemic violence (40.9%).

Figure 26 In your opinion, to what extent are women in politics faced with these types of violence?



One quarter of the respondents recognize that violence against women in politics influences the situation where fewer women decide to engage in politics in Montenegro (25.4%). On the other side, as many as 47.2% say that they think violence does not influence their decision to do politics, while 9.4% say that women engage in politics more precisely due to the violence (Figure 27).

In addition to this, 17.7% of the respondents think that violence against women in politics motivates women to work in a higher quality manner, while 45.4% of the respondents think that violence demotivates them. The remaining 36.9% of the respondents think that violence does not influence the quality of political work of women in any way (Figure 28).

Figure 27 What do you think, how does violence against women in politics influence their decision to engage in politics?

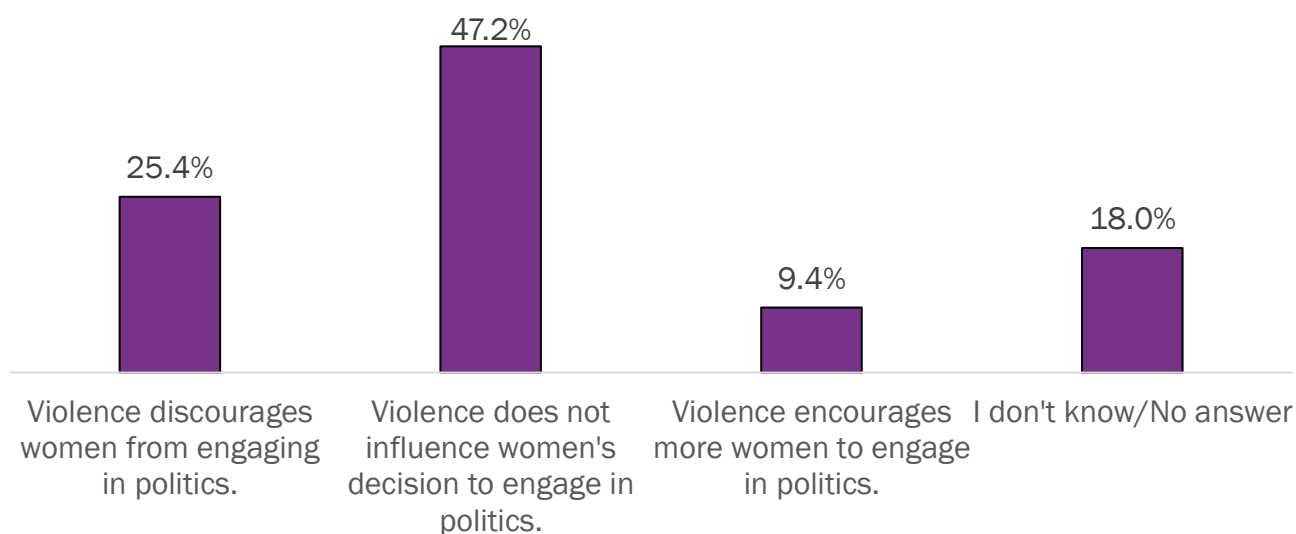
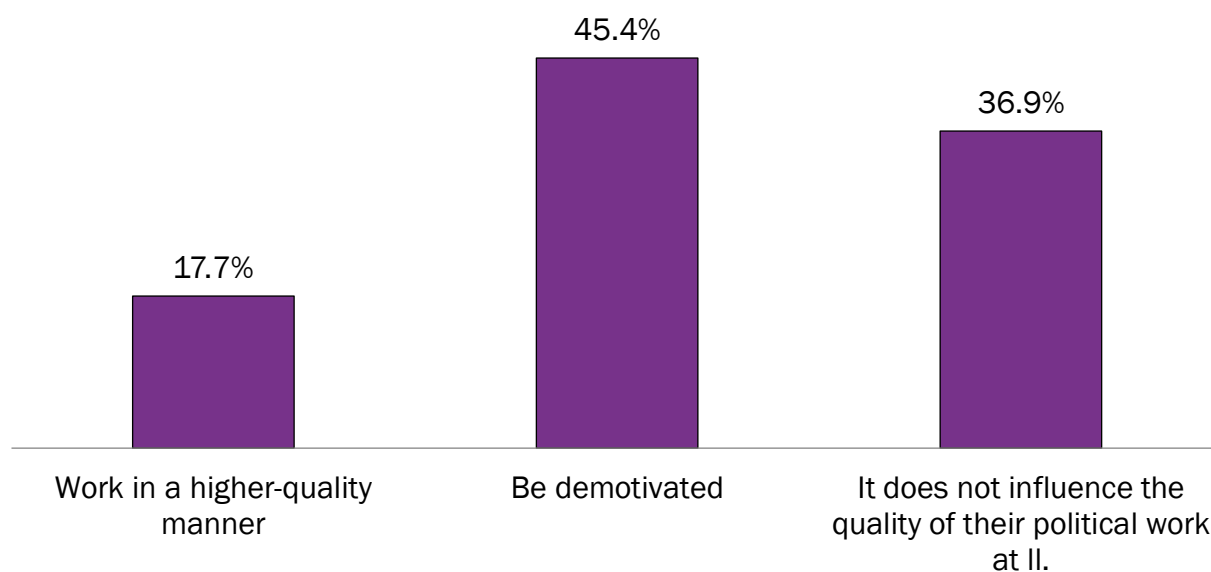


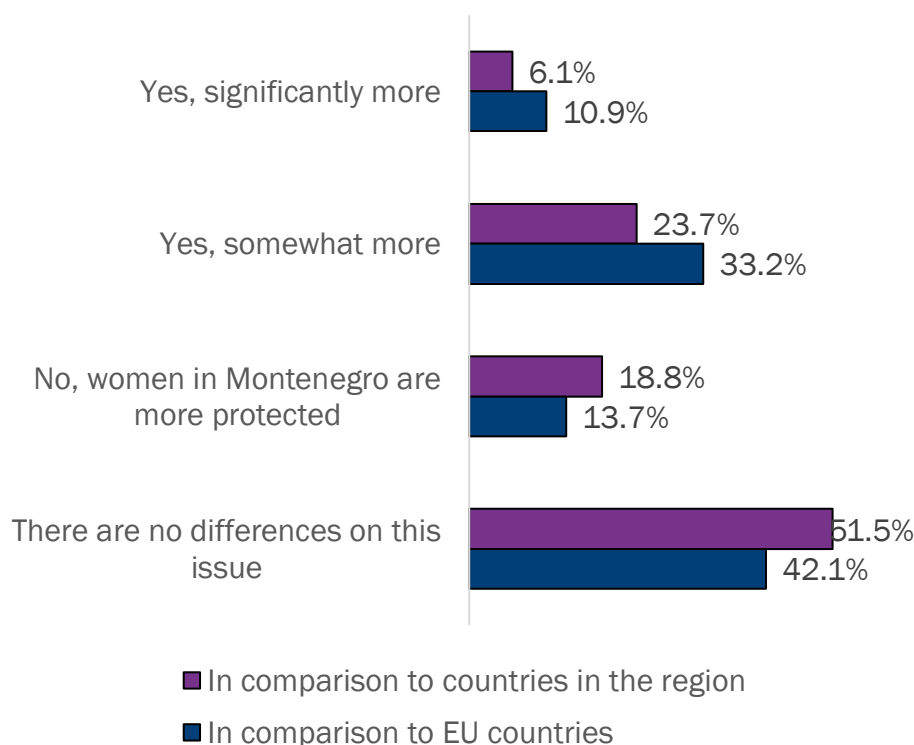
Figure 28 What do you think, does violence against women in politics make women in politics:



Asked to assess if women in politics in Montenegro are more jeopardized than women politicians from the countries in the region (Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania); the respondents, in more than a half of the cases (51.5%), say that there are no differences between them in this respect. On the other side, cumulatively 29.8% of the respondents say that women in politics in Montenegro are more jeopardized than the women in the region, while 18.8% of the respondents say that women in Montenegro are more protected in this respect than women engaged in politics in other countries in the region.

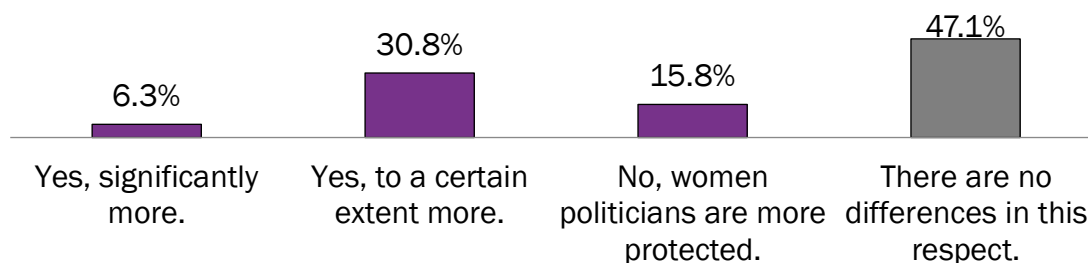
Similarly, in 42.1% of cases the respondents say that there is no difference between women engaged in politics in Montenegro and those in the European Union countries. However, 10.9% of the respondents say that women in Montenegro are significantly more jeopardized than women politicians in the European Union countries, while 33.2% say that they are more jeopardized to a certain extent.

Figure 29 Do you think that women in politics in Montenegro are more jeopardized than women doing the same jobs in the region and European Union countries



In 47.1% of cases citizens of Montenegro say that there are no differences in the level of jeopardy between women engaged in politics and women doing other public jobs, while the total of 37.1% say that women in politics are to a smaller or bigger extent more jeopardized than women in other public jobs.

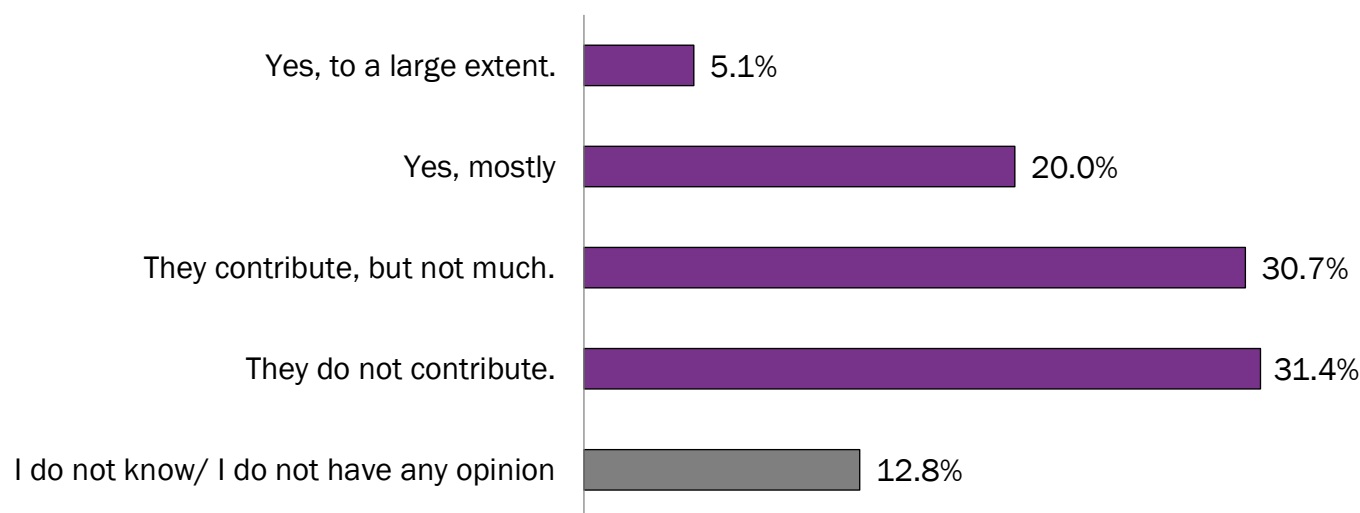
Figure 30 Do you think that women in politics in Montenegro are more jeopardized than women doing other public jobs in Montenegro?



Cumulatively, in 55.8% of cases, Montenegrin citizens recognize that, with their statements, men in politics contribute to an increase of violence against women in politics. Out of this number, 5.1% think that their statements contribute to that to a large extent, 20% that they mostly contribute, and 30.7%

that they do contribute, but to a smaller extent. On the other side, 31.4% of the respondents say that, with their statements, men politicians do not contribute to any increase of violence against women in general.

Figure 31 Do men in politics contribute with their statements to an increase of violence against women?



Media Coverage of the Cases of Violence against Women in Politics

Importance about media coverage of the cases of violence against women in politics is exceptional from several aspects. Firstly, media coverage of these cases provides public with an insight into the real nature of the issue and allows for raising awareness about the violence that is taking place. That can encourage discussions about the importance of gender equality in political engagement and pressure on the society and institutions to take concrete steps to combat violence. Media coverage can also provide support to victims of violence, providing them with a platform to share their stories and to feel supported in their fight against violence.

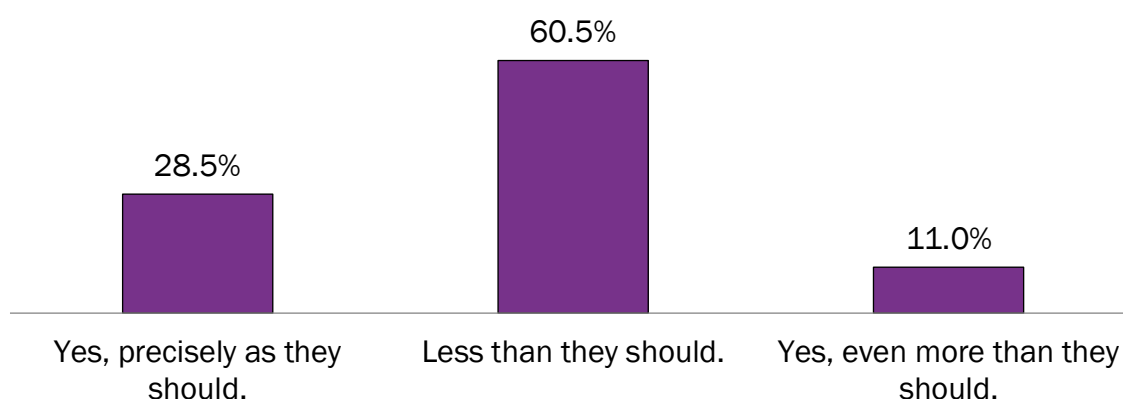
In addition to this, media attention can influence political actors and institutions to recognize how serious these problems are and to undertake concrete steps for prevention of and protection from violence. This may include adoption of new policies, strengthening of legislation and improvement of institutional mechanisms for supporting victims. Finally, media attention may create pressure that is exerted on political actors to ensure that those responsible for violence against women in politics face consequences for their acts. This may include public condemnation of perpetrators, starting of investigations and criminal proceedings and ensuring that victims see justice and compensation for their sufferings.

All in all, media coverage of the cases of violence against women in politics plays the key role in creating awareness, supporting victims, encouraging changes and ensuring accountability of perpetrators. All of this shows that this topic is important as one of many dimensions of the problem of violence against women in politics.

However, in addition to analysing the contents of the media coverage, it is very important to establish how citizens perceive it, and how it influences their perception of the very issue of violence against women in politics.

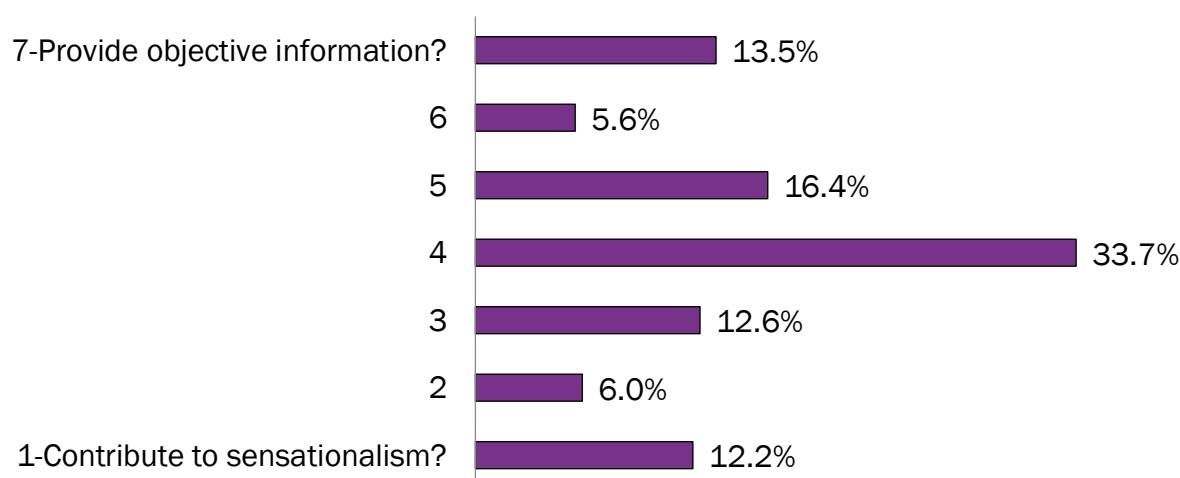
Therefore, we asked the respondents to say to what extent, in their opinion, media cover the topic of violence against women in politics. More than one quarter of the respondents (28.5%) think that media sufficiently cover the topics related to violence against women in politics, while 60.5% of the respondents say that these topics are not sufficiently covered. The remaining 11% say that the topic of violence against women in politics is covered more than it should be.

Figure 32 Do you think that there is sufficient coverage in the media of the topic of violence against women in politics?



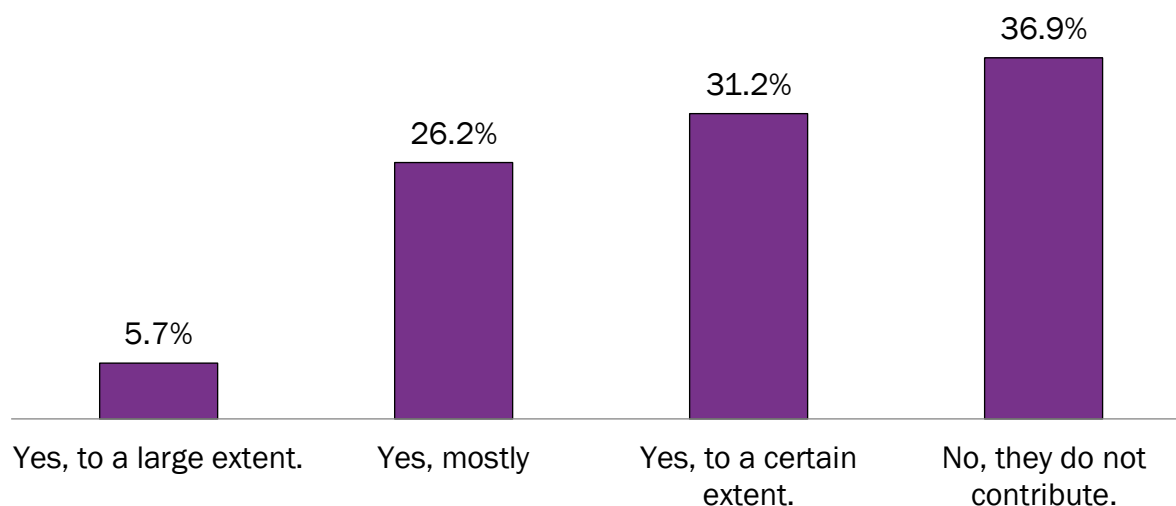
In addition to this, in 13.5% of cases, Montenegrin citizens think that the media, when reporting on violence against women in politics, present fully objective information, while 12.2% think that, in their reporting, media contribute to sensationalism.

Figure 33 What do you think, in their reporting about violence against women in politics, do the media?



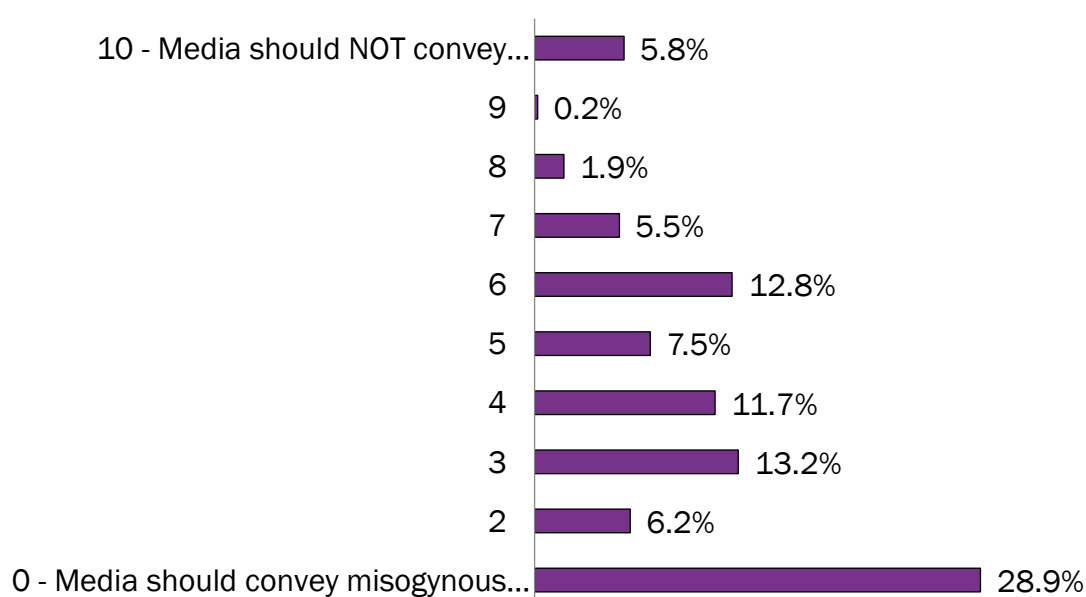
On the other side, 63.1% of Montenegrin citizens say that they think that, with their reporting, media contribute to an increase of violence against women in politics – out of which, 5.7% say that media do influence the increase to a large extent, 26.2% say mostly, while 31.2% say that they do influence that to a certain extent. The remaining 36.9% of the respondents say that media do not have such influence at all.

Figure 34 Do the media, with their reporting, contribute to an increase of violence against women in politics?



In 28.5% of cases, citizens of Montenegro take a strict position that media should convey misogynous statements of politicians, because it is in the interest of public to know, while 5.8% say that media should never convey misogynous statements because, conveying them, they contribute to the increase of violence against women.

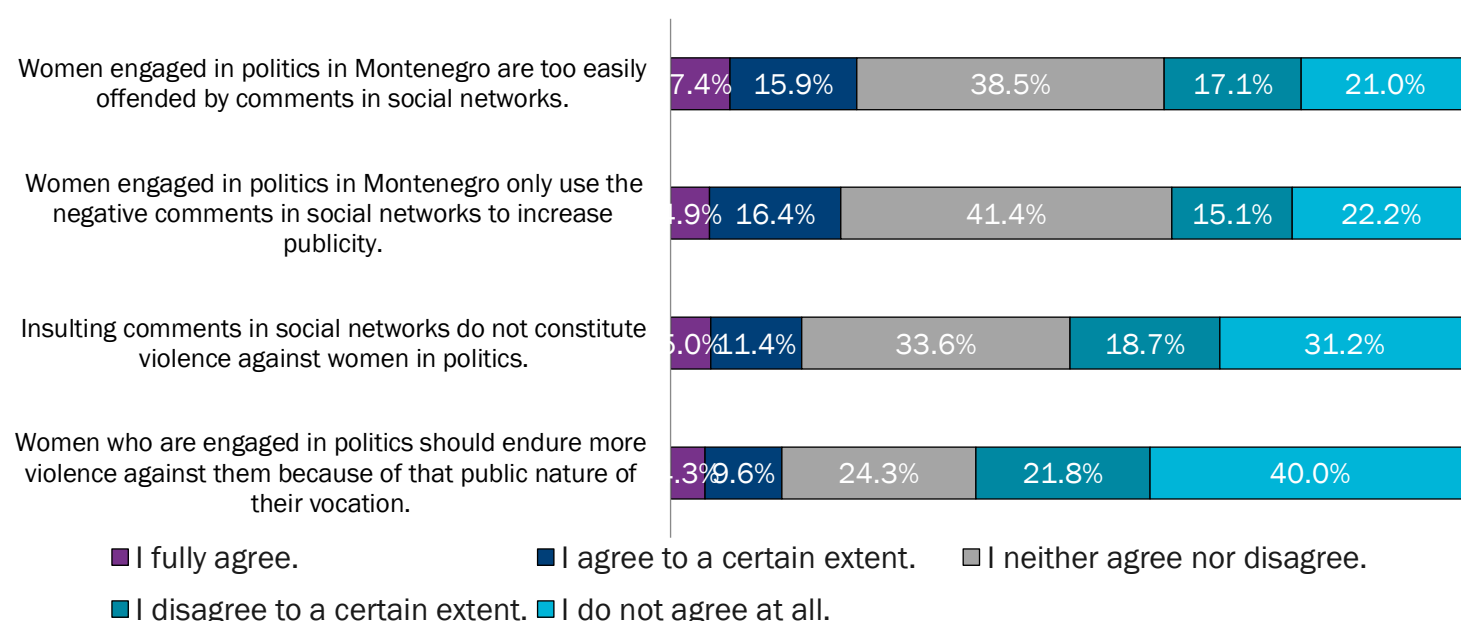
Figure 35 In your opinion, which of these two statements is right?



In 23.3% of cases, citizens of Montenegro agree with the statement that women in politics in Montenegro are too easily offended by the comments in social networks, while 38.1% of the respondents do not agree with this statement. In addition to this, 21.3% of the respondents agree with the statement that women who do politics in Montenegro use negative comments in social networks only to increase their publicity.

On the other side, 49.9% of the respondents disagree with the statement that insulting comments in social networks do not constitute violence against women in politics, while 61.8% of the respondents say that women in politics should not put up with more violence against them because of the public nature of their vocation.

Figure 36 To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

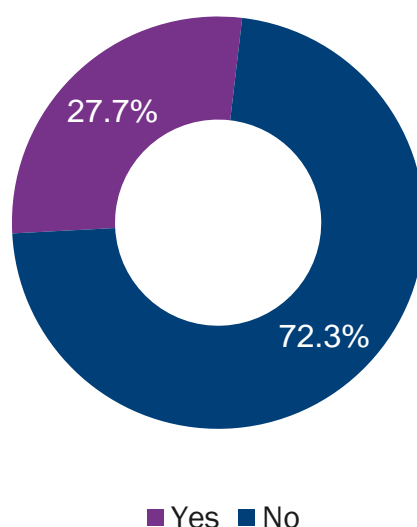


Online Violence against Women in Politics in Montenegro

To ensure a full overview of the issue of violence against women in politics, we had to analyse the issue of how citizens perceive online/digital violence against women in politics, and to what extent these cases are visible and how much attention is attached to them. To understand this dimension of the issue, we asked the respondents to say how frequently they were in the position to see in social networks and/or portals any comments threatening women politicians in Montenegro. Thus, as many as 27.7% of the respondents say that they were in the position to see comments of that type in social networks and/or portals. (Figure 37).

Among those 27.7% (N=278) say that those comments contained insults and indecent language. 5.7% say that they contained threats to one or more women politicians, while 4.9% give concrete example of threats against Draginja Vuksanović Stanković. The remaining 50.2% of the respondents cannot remember any concrete example.

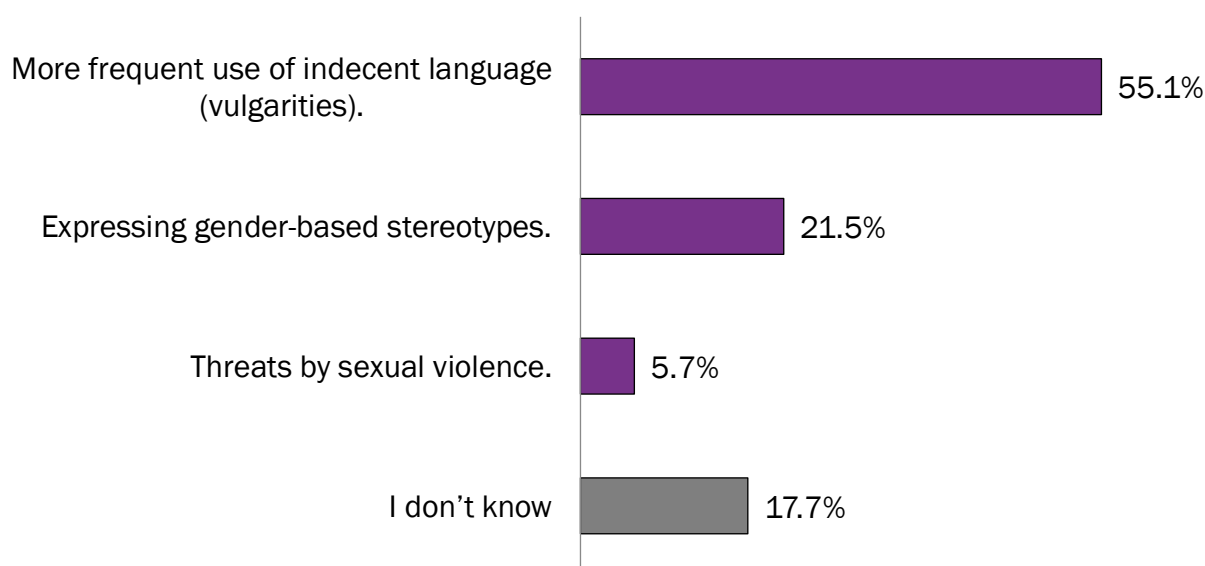
Figure 37 Have you ever seen that somebody in social networks or in comments on portals threatens women in politics?



In 29.2% of cases, the respondents recognize that there is a difference between insults that target women in politics, in the comments in social networks and portals, and such insults and comments that target men. The remaining 70.8% of the respondents, however, think that there is no difference at all.

The respondents who recognize that difference (N=294) say that it can be dominantly seen in the fact that comments against women more frequently contain indecent language and vulgarity (55.1%), as well as stereotypical statements about woman's role (21.5%) or threats by sexual violence (5.7%).

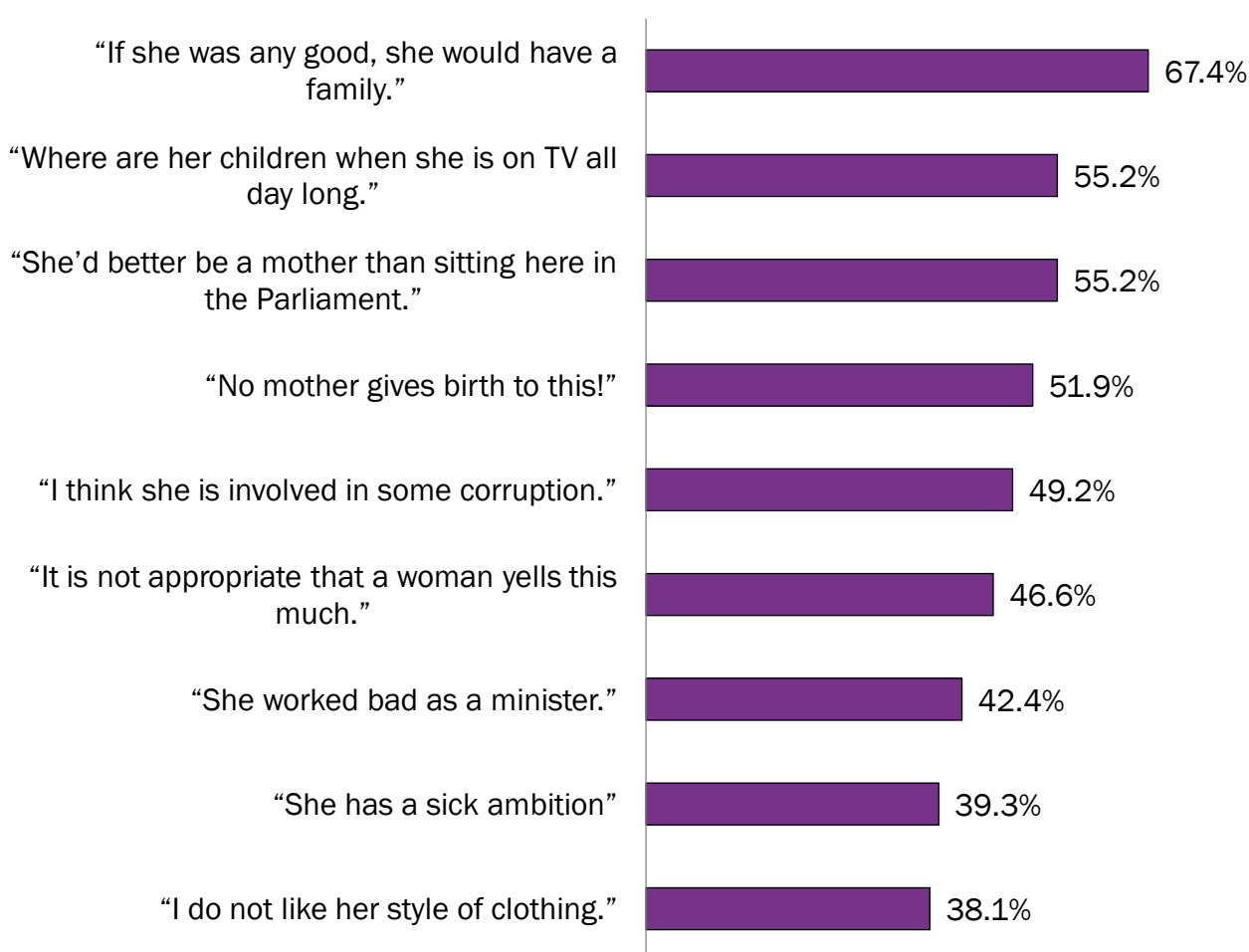
Figure 38 Is there any difference between insults that target men in politics in social networks or in comments on portals and those that target women in politics? How can this difference be seen?



We asked the respondents to choose among the offered comments those that they see as violent against women. Thus, 67.4% of the respondents say that the comment „If she was any good, she would have a family“ constitutes violence against women. Similarly, 55.2% of the respondents perceive the following comments as violence against women: „Where are her children while she is on TV all day long,“ and „She'd better be a mother to her children than sitting here in the Parliament“.

In addition to this, the comments like „She has a sick ambition“ are perceived as violence only in 39.3% of cases, and the comment „I do not like her style of clothing“, is perceived as violence in 38.1% of cases.

Figure 39 Do you think the following comments in portals and social networks, in texts about women in politics, constitute violence against women?

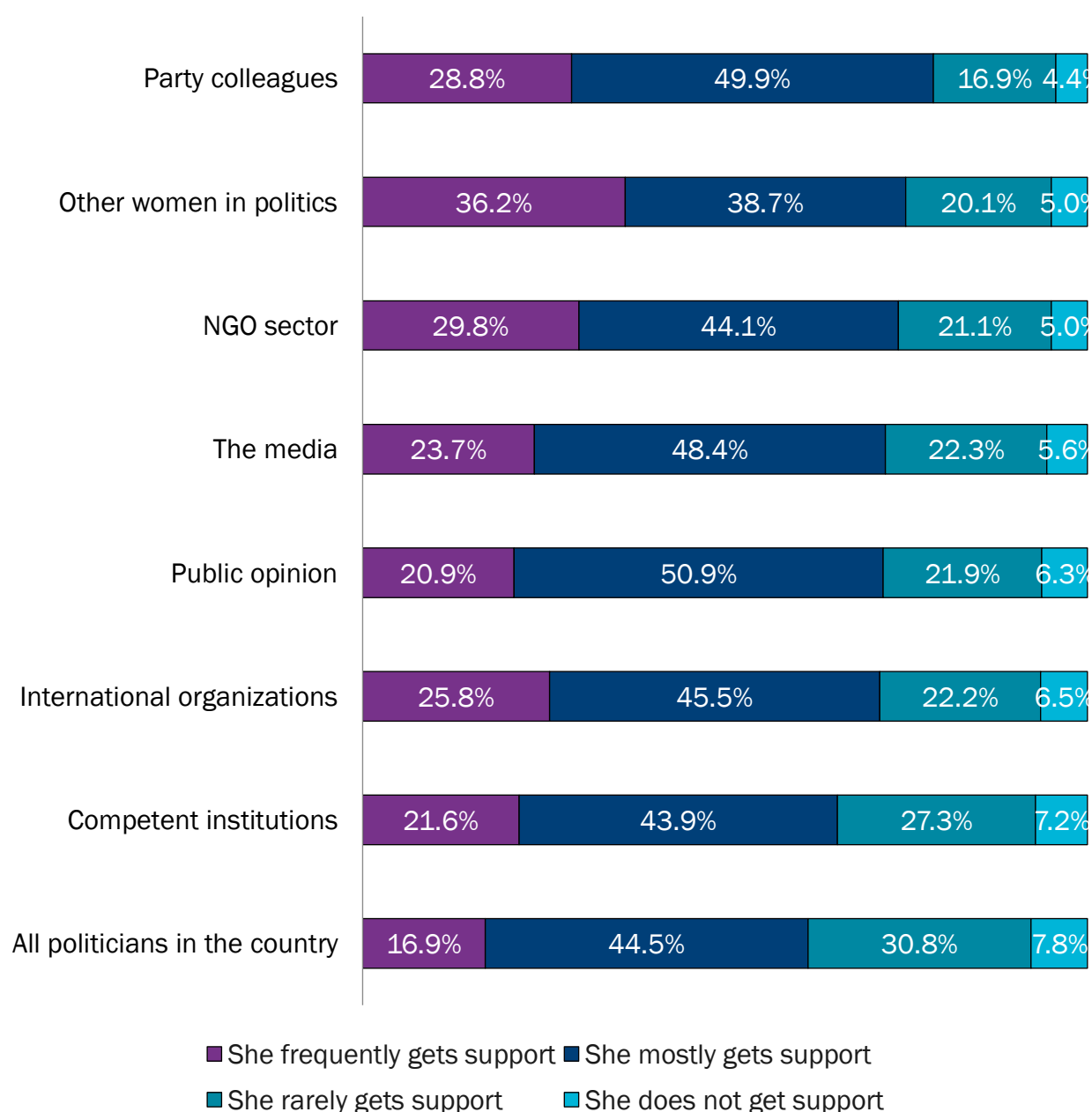


Protection of Women in Politics from Violence

In today’s politics, women face numerous challenges and obstacles on the path to achieving their political goals. Unfortunately, violence against women is not unknown in political circles and its manifestations may vary – from verbal attacks to threats of physical violence. In this context, support to women victims of violence becomes the key to preserving their integrity, freedom and ability to do

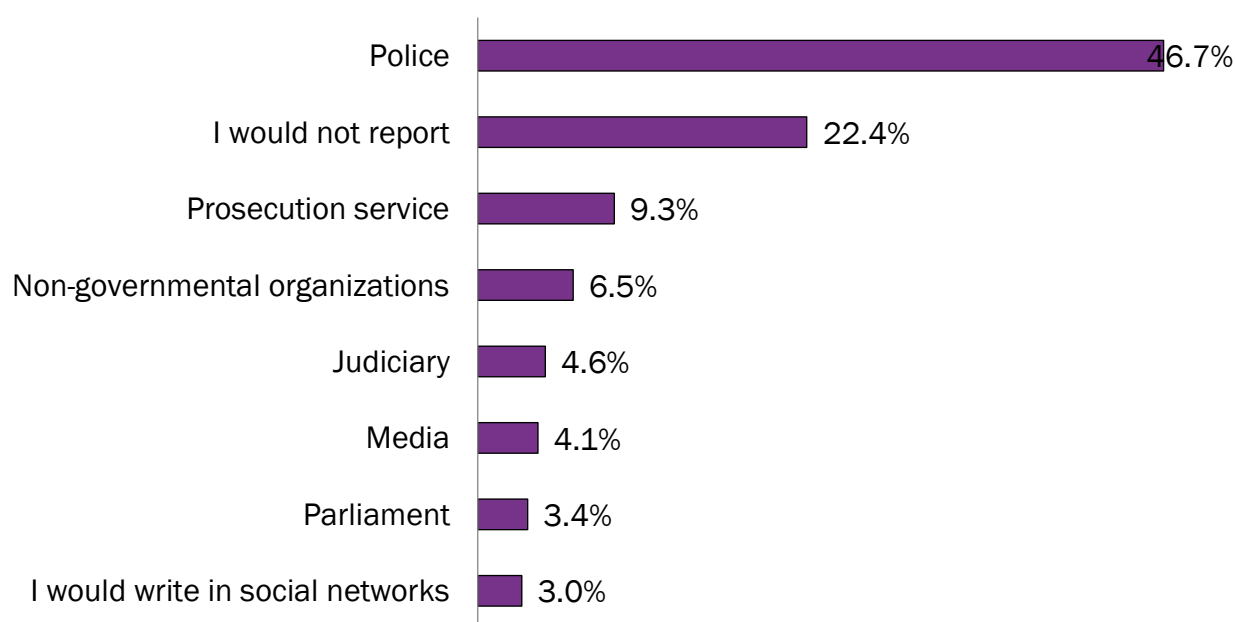
political work without fear. This introductory part will explore the topic of support to women in politics who are faced with violence, analysing the various forms of support that can be provided to ensure their protection and integrity in political processes. The research results show that there is a significant support that women in politics in Montenegro get if they become victims of violence. Almost 80% of Montenegrin citizens think that women in politics who are victims of violence frequently or mostly get support from their party colleagues. Almost all options, including the support of other women in politics, non-governmental sector, media, public opinion, international organizations, and relevant institutions, show a high level of support to women exposed to violence.

Figure 40 When a woman in politics in Montenegro is a victim of violence, in your opinion, who does she receive support from?



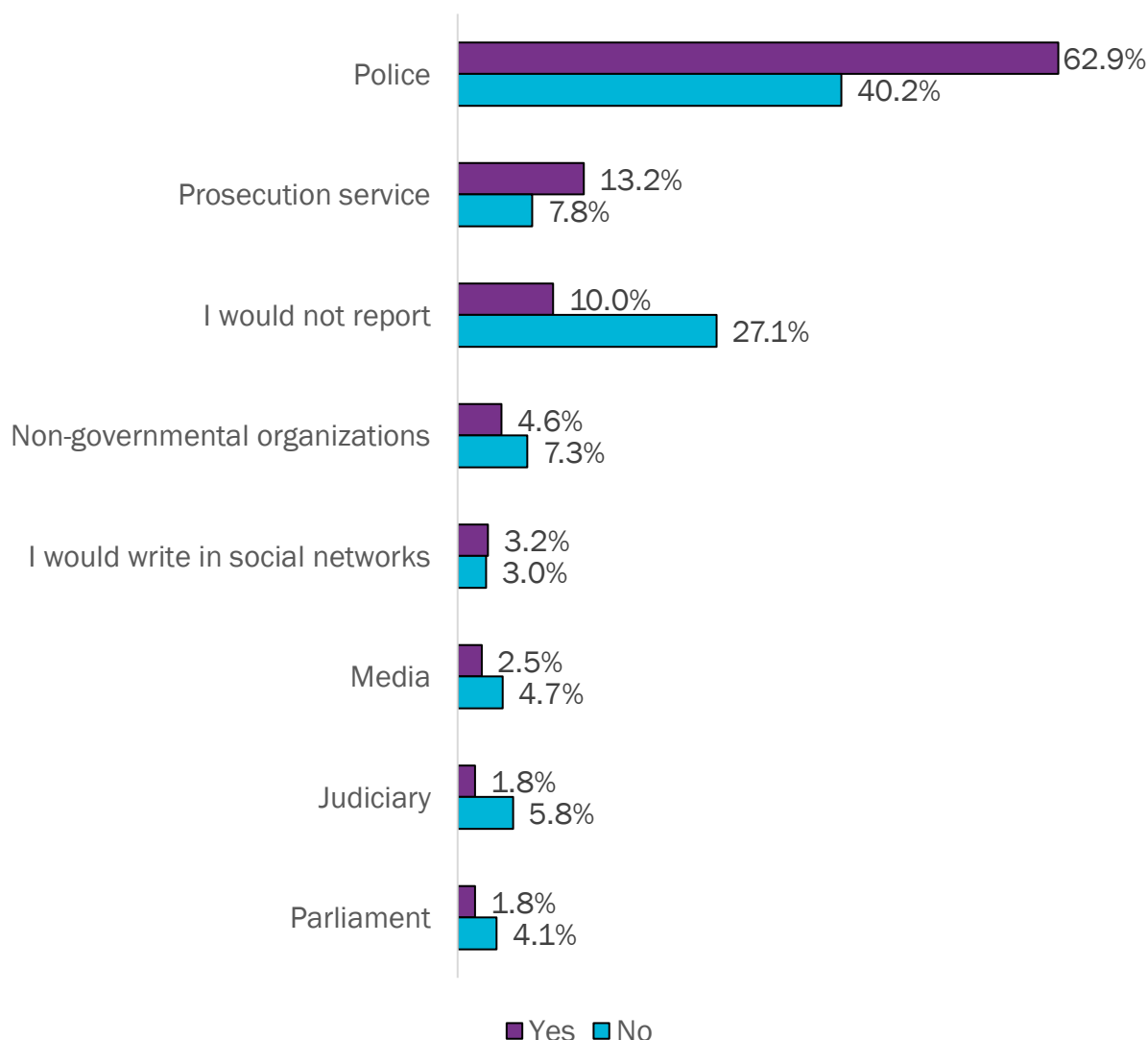
The respondents were also asked who they would report to if they were aware of a case of violence against women in politics. Almost half of the respondents (46.7%) said that they would report such violence to the police, while one quarter of the respondents (22.4%) said they would not report violence at all.

Figure 41 Who would you report to if you saw a case of violence against women in politics?



In our additional analysis we cross-tabulated the data with the question of whether the respondents noticed that in social networks or in comments on portals there are threats against women in politics. The data show that one third of the respondents who say that they saw threats against women in politics would report the case to the police, while 40.2% of those who did not notice any threats say the same. A particularly important finding shows that only 10% of those who saw threats against women in politics would not even consider reporting, while a bit more than one quarter of the respondents (27.1%) who say they did not see any threats would not report.

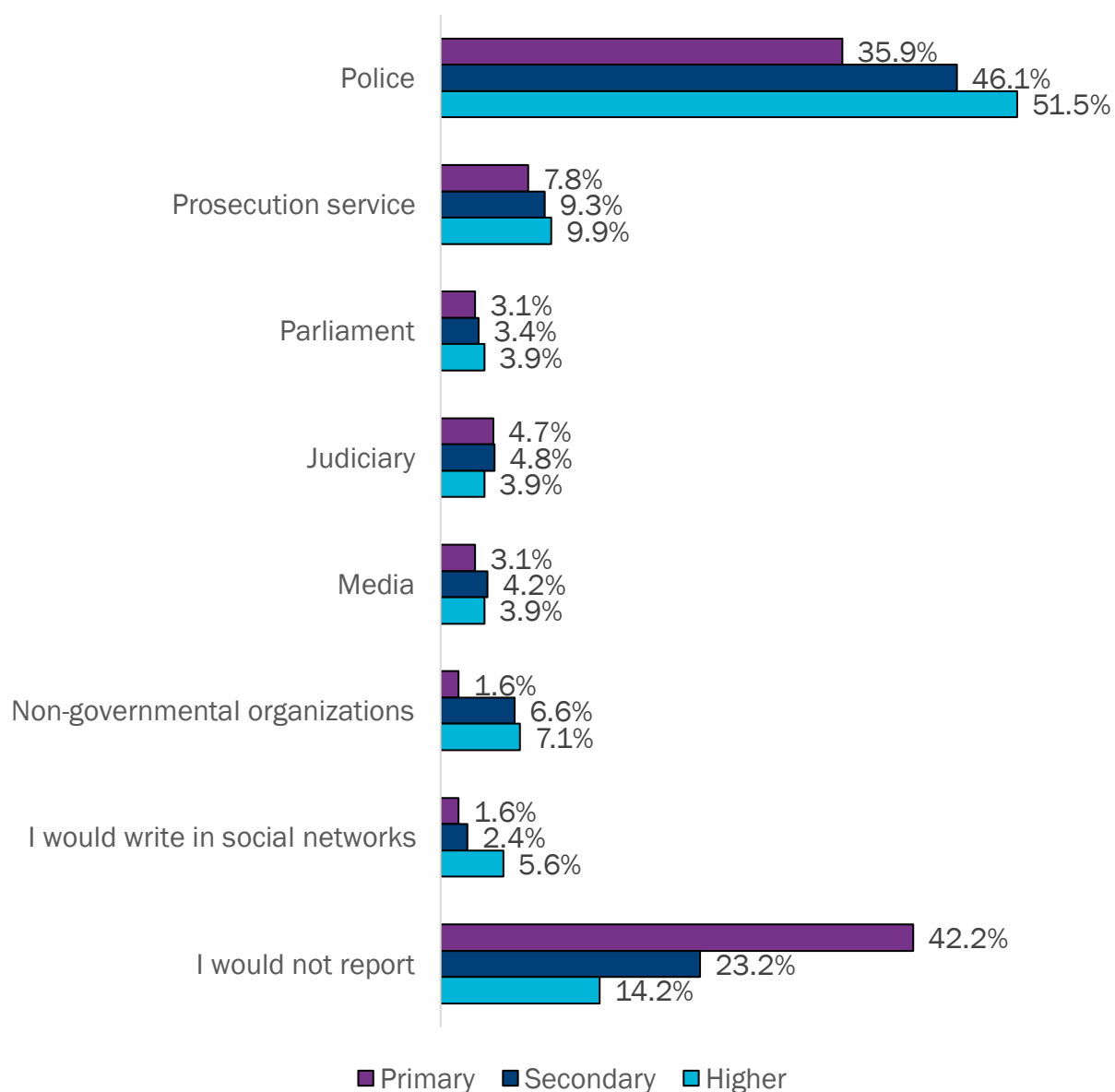
Figure 42 Cross-tabulation „Have you ever seen that somebody in social networks or in comments in portals threatens women who are engaged in politics?“ and „Who would you report to if you saw a case of violence against women in politics?“



Furthermore, differences were also noted in the level of education of the respondents who would and who would not report violence against women in politics and who they would report to. The data show that 42.2% of the respondents with primary education level would not even consider reporting violence against women in politics, while for those with secondary school education this percentage is 23.2% and for those with higher education it is only 14.2%.

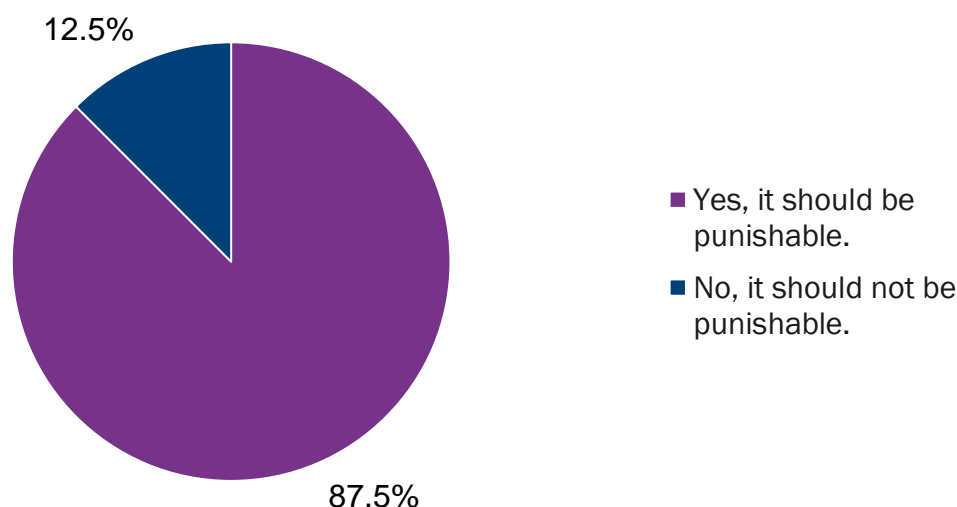
We can conclude that the higher the level of education of the respondents, the higher is the probability that they will report to somebody if they see violence against women in politics. These data show that efforts should be invested in better education about violence against women in politics, as well as about how to report cases of violence.

Figure 43 Who would you report to if you saw a case of violence against women in politics? By level of education



As for the question of whether writing insulting and threatening comments in portals and social networks should be punishable, the dominant majority of the respondents (87.5%) say yes, while only 12.5% think that it should not be punishable.

Figure 44 Should writing of insulting and threatening comments in portals and social networks be punishable?



There is a difference in attitudes between men and women regarding the issue of whether writing of offensive and threatening comments on the Internet should be punishable. Majority of women think it should be punishable, while majority of men think it should not. The data show that among those who think that writing of offensive and threatening comments on the Internet should be punishable, more than a half (53.3%) are women. On the other side, among those who think that writing of offensive and threatening comments on the Internet should not be punishable, two thirds are men (65.6%).

Figure 45 Should writing of offensive and threatening comments in portals and social networks be punishable? By gender

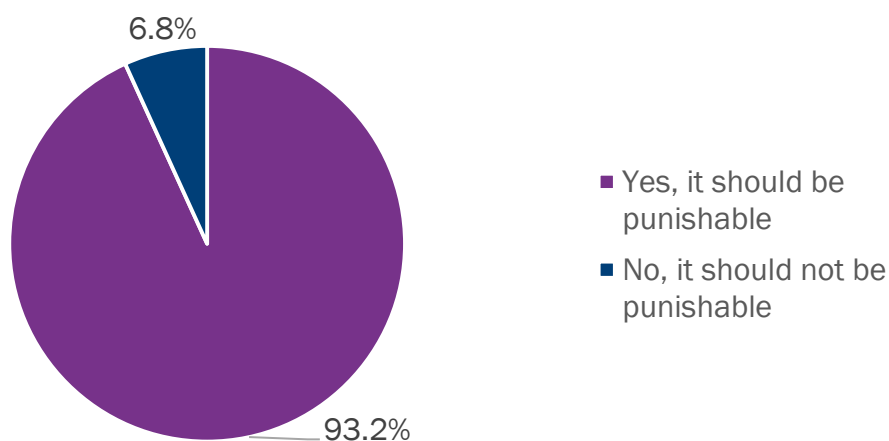


Analysing these data by the respondents who saw that somebody in social networks or in comments threatens women in politics, the dominant majority (93.2%) think that writing of offensive and threatening comments should be punishable. These data lead to the conclusion that there is a strong

support to punishing writing of offensive and threatening comments on the Internet, particularly among those respondents who saw threats to women in politics. Almost all of them support punishing.

Figure 46 Percentage of the respondents who saw that somebody in social networks or comments threatened women in politics who think that writing of offensive and threatening comments in portal and social networks should be punishable

% of the respondents who saw that somebody in social networks or comments threatened women in politics



A bit more than half of Montenegrin citizens (52.6%) think that the existing political and legal systems provide adequate protection to women politicians who are victims of violence. If we analyse differences between regions, we can see that the respondents from North and South in slightly higher percentage think that the existing systems do not provide adequate protection to women politicians who are victims of violence, while almost two thirds of the respondents in the Central region think that the political and legal systems provide adequate protection.

Figure 47 Do the existent political and legal systems provide adequate protection to women politicians victims of violence?

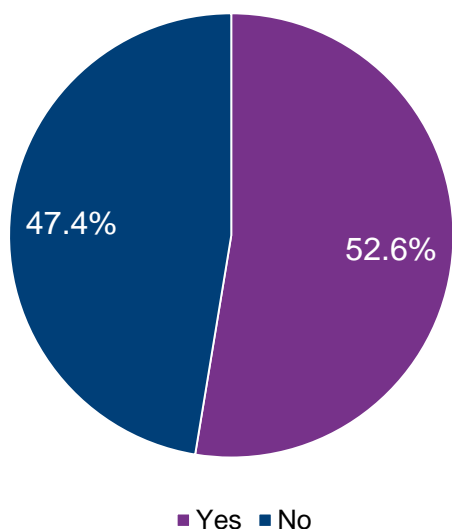
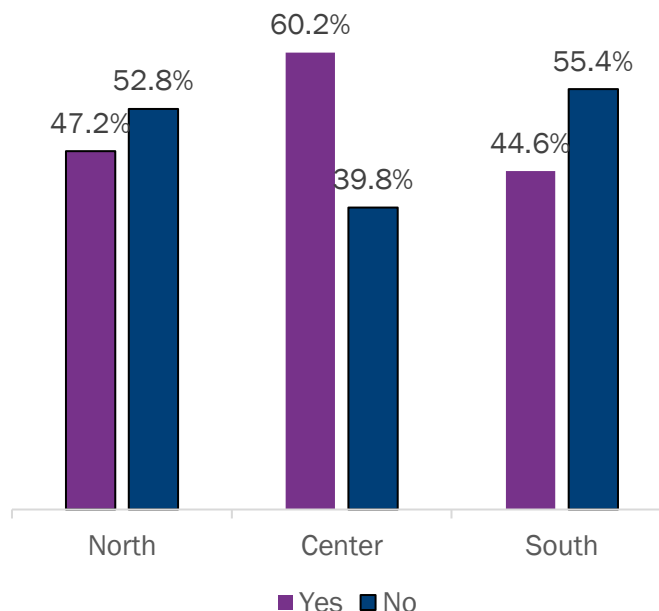


Figure 48 Do the existent political and legal systems provide adequate protection to women politicians victims of violence? By region



An additional analysis of these data shows that there are differences based on gender of the respondents, where a smaller number of women than men think that the political and legal systems are adequate to protect women in politics from violence. Among those who think that the political and legal systems are adequate, 53% are men. On the other side, more than a half of the respondents (55.6%) who think that the political and legal systems are not adequate to protect women in politics are women.

Figure 49 Do the existent political and legal systems provide adequate protection to women politicians victims of violence? By gender



The respondents who think that the existing political and legal systems provide adequate protection to women politicians victims of violence express various claims to support their opinion. Some of them think that there are laws and the court who react in such cases and that the punishments should be in line with the law. Some say that women are protected to the maximum and that the law is now more on the side of women. Among members of this group there is also the opinion that every report of violence is processed and that the law reacts to such cases. Most of the opinions lead to the conclusion that there is a belief that the legal system is adequate or at least that it should be in order to ensure protection of women politicians who are victims of violence.

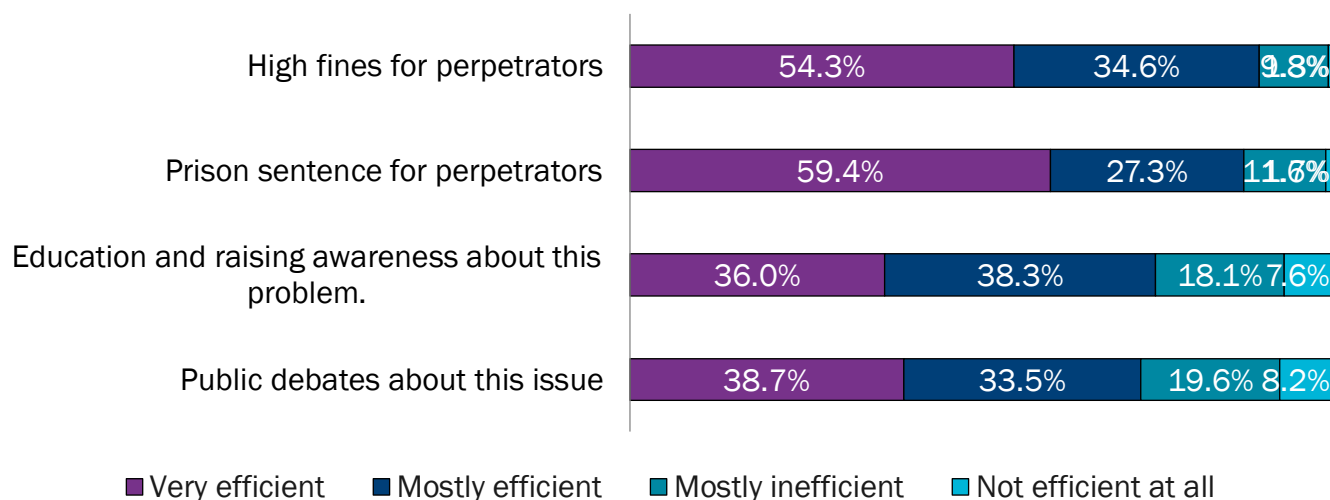
Montenegrin citizens who think that political and legal systems are not adequate to protect women in politics from violence express several key reasons for this claim. Firstly, they say that not much care is given to it, which shows that there is lack of attention and prioritisation in dealing with this problem. They also say that women do not get adequate support that could change the way in which they themselves deal with violence. Many say that little or nothing is being done in this respect and that the punishments that are imposed are either inadequate or that they are not imposed at all, which additionally weakens the protection system. In addition to this, they say that there are only condemnations, without concrete actions or sanctions, and that the situation is not changing. Many also say that there is a lack of information and lack of knowledge about what is done to protect women in politics from violence. As the key problem, they emphasize a lack of adequate laws and institutional support, as well as the lack of efficient enforcement of the laws and sanctioning of perpetrators. All of this contributes to the feeling of dissatisfaction and lack of trust into the legal and political system when it comes to protection of women in politics from violence.

The respondents were also asked to what extent they thought the following activities could be efficient in combating violence against women in politics:

- › High fines for perpetrators
- › Prison sentences for perpetrators
- › Training and raising awareness about this problem
- › Public debates about this problem

As for all of these activities, a dominant majority of the respondents think that they would be very efficient or mostly efficient. Almost 89% of the respondents believe that high fines for perpetrators are very or mostly efficient in combating violence against women in politics. In addition to this, 86.7% of citizens think that prison sentences are effective, 74.3% support training and awareness raising about this problem, while 72.2% support public debates about it.

Figure 50 To what extent do you think these activities would be efficient in combating violence against women in politics?



Recommendations

Research results allowed us to identify certain problems related to the topic of violence against women in politics:

- › Gender role stereotypes: There is a significant percentage of citizens who support traditional stereotypes, like expectations that a woman's role is primarily related to motherhood, household, and obedience to her husband. These attitudes may hamper women's engagement in politics.
- › Hostile attitudes towards women in politics: the results show that there is a significant percentage of citizens who think that men are better political leaders than women, while at the same time they recognize the need for higher participation of women in politics. This paradox can make it difficult for women to advance in political career.
- › Online violence: The results show that online violence against women in politics is present, including threats, insults, and inappropriate language. This violence may create a hostile environment and discourage women from political engagement.
- › Lack of support from political parties: citizens recognize the lack of support coming from political parties as one of the key barriers that women face in their political work. The lack of support may restrict women in their access to political resources and positions.

That gives us an opportunity to indicate to mechanisms that may be used in the future to respond to complex problems that women in politics in Montenegro deal with. These are:

- › Training and sensibilisation: Implement programmes of training and sensibilisation to reduce gender role stereotypes, and to inform public opinion about the importance of gender equality in politics.
- › Support of political parties: Political parties should actively work on supporting women in politics, including mentorships, trainings, and promotion of women in high positions within parties.

- › Prevention of online violence: Develop strategies for prevention of online violence against women in politics, including cooperation with the social media platforms and strengthening of legal mechanisms.
- › Increase visibility of women in politics: Encourage active participation of women in politics through media campaigns, encouraging public debates and creating positive examples of women leaders.
- › Change media reporting: Encourage media to provide objective information about violence against women in politics, avoiding at the same time sensationalism and supporting just and balanced coverage.

In-depth Interviews

*„The most frequent attacks against male politicians are political attacks.
The most frequent attacks against female politicians are hate speech attacks.“
(an interviewee)*

When we discuss violence against women in politics, it is of key importance that we take into account the perspective of persons who are directly exposed to violence – male and female politicians or former politicians. This is the only way to get a direct insight into the experience and challenges that women face in political environment. This may include various forms of violence, like verbal, psychological or digital, that might not be visible or sufficiently documented in public sources. In addition to this, by interviewing female politicians, we are able to get personal stories that illustrate the width and depth of the problem, which is the key for understanding complexity of violence against women in politics.

Very often politics reflects a broader social and cultural context, while violence against women in politics may be deeply rooted in patriarchal norms and gender prejudice. Through conversation with male/female politicians, it is possible to identify specific forms of violence that might be characteristic for certain political culture or system, as well as strategies that women use to deal with such challenges.

In addition to this, interviewing male/female politicians we discover the need for new initiatives or approaches that would better suit the needs of women in politics and give a legal and political framework for improving the position of women in politics. In the end, the interviews provide a platform for male/female politicians to express their opinions and recommendations for improving the situation. This does not only value their experience and expertise, but also contributes to development of more inclusive and more efficient strategies for combating violence against women in politics. Including women's voices in developing policies and initiatives is of key importance for ensuring that the solutions are adequate for the problems that they face.

For these semi-structured in-depth interviews with male/female politicians, we designed a guide as a comprehensive tool for this qualitative part of the research. Using the approach based on a number of questions, this guide ensures in-depth understanding of opinions, experiences and policies related to participation of women in political life, as well as challenges that they face, including violence and discrimination.

The questions are designed to cover a broad range of topics, from the role of political parties in promotion of gender equality, through personal experiences of politicians and perceptions and treatment of women in the media. It is particularly important that the guide includes questions referring directly to personal experiences of women politicians. In addition to this, the questions related to media coverage and the role of social networks in shaping perception of women in politics indicate to the complexity of the problem and the need to have a multi-disciplinary approach in dealing with it. The guide also emphasizes the importance of institutional responses to violence

against women in politics through the questions about the existing policies, rules and procedures within political parties, as well as through questions about legislation and political initiatives. This indicates to the need for systemic changes that would ensure development of a more secure and more inclusive political environment for women.

Finally, through the questions that refer to concrete proposals and initiatives, the guide reminds male and female politicians to think about practical steps they can undertake to contribute to the fight against violence against women in politics. This does not only provide an insight into the current strategies and practices, but also encourages thinking about new solutions and approaches that might be used.

In this way, through several different units, we analysed the answers we got. All the participants were guaranteed anonymity. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, the participants were guaranteed anonymity, and their responses will be presented as direct quotes, but without reference to the concrete interview that the quote was taken from. In this way, we tried to allow the interviewees to speak openly about their experiences, opinions, and feelings without any fear that they might reopen a case of violence against women in politics from the past, or that their responses will be abused.

Practice of Political Parties

Interviews with male and female politicians show that almost none of the political parties in Montenegro has formally established rules related to violence against women in politics. This statement shows that there is a systemic problem in the political environment that not only hampers the fight against violence against women, but also reflects a general lack of awareness about this topic within political structures. Without clear rules and mechanisms for reporting and sanctioning violence, women in politics remain exposed to risk without any adequate protection or support. This creates an atmosphere in which, at best, such violence is ignored, and at worst it is normalized, which encourages culture of silence and fear.

„That did not exist in the past, and it does not exist now. And it seems to me that nothing is being done in that direction, not only in that party, but in any of the parties in Montenegro. “

„That is only sporadic. It is not regulated, there are no regularities. And, if there are no regularities, then there is no predictability, and there is no responsibility either. Everything is left to individuals and individual cases. “

There are also some positive examples, but the interviews left the impression that it is questionable if such positive things function in practice or they exist on the formal level.

„We have our legal team that is available to our female members all the time, to provide advice and legal representation if needed. “

Reality is still that the fight of political parties against violence against women in politics is rather frequently reduced to providing support to victims through statements.

„Unfortunately, we do not have any rules on the level of our party. It is more reduced to following political life and trying to react whenever something happens. It seems to me that so far we have managed to react in the largest number of cases.“

On the other side, the statements of interviewees that they regularly follow the situation in political life and try to react against violence, regardless of which party the victim belongs to, suggest that there is a certain level of awareness and willingness to act. However, they themselves admit that such reactions are not always consistent or that they do not have equal intensity.

„There is a lot of inconsistency in that. Maybe we are to blame sometimes for reacting a bit more and a bit stronger if the attack is directed against somebody who is, conditionally speaking, ours, and a bit less if the attack is against our political opponents.“

The admittance that reactions are not always consistent and that sometimes they are even selective, shows deeper rooted problems like political bias and gender prejudice. This selectivity in reactions may additionally weaken the trust of women engaged in politics into the existing mechanisms of protection and support, which undermines the fight against violence.

All interviewees agree that the parties should do more and establish clear inter-party rules against violence against women in politics. This agreement certainly constitutes a positive step towards identification of the problem. It creates the basis for development of concrete strategies and policies that will deal with this issue. Introducing clear rules, trainings about gender equality and sensibilisation about the issue of violence, as well as creating secure channels to report incidents, can contribute significantly to creating a safer and more inclusive political space for women.

All of this is the inevitable first step toward higher participation of women in Montenegro's political. We can frequently hear in the public discourse that it is important to see more women participating in political life. Through interviews we tried to find out why it is important and what is it that women bring into political life that makes their participation indispensable.

Importance of Participation of Women in Political Life in Montenegro

„There is no awareness that women make a difference, the mindset is still – we must have women, let us find a woman and parade with her around.“

Interviewees from Montenegrin political sphere have a broad consensus about the need to have stronger engagement of women in the political life of the country. There is a generally accepted opinion that the current number of women in politics is insufficient, which indicates to a gender

disbalance in relation to the demographic structure of the society in which women are a majority. This gender gap in political representation is perceived as a problem that demands urgent measures.

„It is not enough, you know, to have hardly 20% of women in the parliament, while in the society you have more than 50%. It is not natural, it is not good, either for politics or anybody in the country.“

„It is 2024, and I do not see why the largest number of the ministers in the government always have to be men. I mean, it cannot be that all the wisdom of this society is in men, it must be that women have something to offer to this country.“

„I do not know exactly how many women there are, but I know that in spite of the quotas we do not manage to reach the point where one third of the Parliament are women. I think that the record figure was 29% two convocations ago if I am not mistaken. That is still insufficient, but it is better than 10 or 20 years ago when there were not even 5%.“

When they observe a broader time span, all interviewees notice a positive trend of an increase in the number of women in politics. They all give credit for that to the introduction of quotas for less represented gender in the lists of candidates for elections. The system of quotas is considered to be the key factor in the increase of the number of women in political positions, which improves gender equality in political representation.

„If it weren't for the quotas, I cannot even think what the situation would be like today.“

„Thanks to the quotas we are where we are. It is not good, but it is significantly better than if the quotas weren't introduced and if everyone did not start paying more attention to women in politics.“

„I would really love if we didn't have to have quotas, and if the best quality persons got opportunity in politics, regardless of their gender. But that is not our reality. As long as it is like that, the quotas are necessary and they are the only way.“

However, in spite of this progress, the interviewees underline that efforts for promotion of higher participation of women have been significantly slowed down since the initial period when the quotas were introduced and that there are no new legislative initiatives that would lead to further increase of the number of women in politics. Some of the interviewees propose that the quotas for less represented genders on the lists of candidates for elections are increased to 40%, which would additionally strengthen presence of women in the political life in Montenegro. They consider this increase in quotas necessary for achieving stronger gender equality and better reflection of demographic structure in political representation.

„I do not understand why we do not raise the quotas to 40%. I cannot see anything bad in it. It would also motivate the parties to activate more women, and to work more on it. “

„I think that increasing the quotas, to at least 40% is the next step that we need.“

In the interviews everybody underlined the importance of higher participation of women in politics, not only due to the principle of equality, but also due to the specific qualities and perspectives that women bring into the political process. Women are considered to approach problems frequently in a more rational and pragmatic manner than men, and to have stronger inclination to compromise and seek for joint solutions. These features are seen as key for overcoming political divisions and contributing to peace and stability in Montenegrin society.

„I think that women give politics a more humane, more sincere tone, and that they are more inclined to make compromises and solve problems through dialogue. They also frequently prove to be more courageous in facing problems.“

„Women are better at reaching compromises. Women are better managers. Women work better with other people. I did not make this up, that is what all research show. These are all features that are important for politics and for this society. So, women are desperately needed in politics.“

„Women are a genuine refreshment. But I do not like the fact that they are still on the level of quotas.“

Interviewees say that they have noticed the regularity that women take the position with the heaviest workload.

„You will not find women in the three key positions in the society – the President, the Prime Minister or the President of the Parliament, with the exception of two Presidents of the Parliament in the past. But you will find women in the positions with the heaviest workload – directors of directorates or deputy ministers... politicians choose women for the positions where hard work is needed.“

„They might be less visible, but if you look at all the positions, you can see, if the positions require hard work, women make the majority.“

„Women do not have political power, but they are in the positions where hard work is demanded.“

Although there are many reasons for women's engagement in politics, all interviewees notice that their number is not even close to sufficient. They see violence against women in politics as one of the explanations for this situation.

Violence against women in politics

„Violence against women in politics is widespread. I would not be surprised if women who would like to engage in politics think like – why would I do this to myself, look what other women in politics go through.“

Interviewees from political life in Montenegro express a shared opinion that women in politics frequently face violence, particularly emphasizing that this phenomenon is dominantly manifested in online space. Digital space, with its inherent anonymity, has become a fertile soil for spreading

negative comments and attacks against politicians. Anonymity on the Internet allows individuals to express their opinions and attitudes that frequently cross the line of decent communication without any fear from direct consequences.

„Problem of social networks is the problem of anonymous commentators.“

As for the Montenegrin case, the analysis shows that many people in Montenegro do not hesitate to comment and exert online violence against women in politics under their full name and last name in social networks. Some public persons were even marked as online bullies. Many of them later said that their profiles were hacked. Some of the interviewees mention that with irony.

„In the last three years, hacking is on an increase. As soon as somebody writes something in social networks, he/she is being hacked.“

Although some people think that setting a clear line between freedom of speech and inappropriate and sometimes even violent comments is not simple, there is a shared understanding that anonymity contributes to strengthening such behaviours.

„We have to find the line between the freedom of speech and hate speech.“

Our female interviewees talked in detail about the violence they experience. Almost every woman politician that we talked to has had some experience with online violence. Even young women politicians that participated in the focus groups with youth wings of political parties also had such examples and let alone the women politicians who are in politics for a longer time and who are more frequently in the media.

There are many examples of online violence, say our female interviewees. They all understand that violence does not affect only them, but also people from their environment.

„While I had the position, I read all the comments in social networks. It would affect me deeply. I do not know how people can write such things, make up, curse, invent things about my family. I cannot understand that and it used to hurt me deeply.“

„Those are mostly inappropriate comments in social networks and in the comments below the articles with some of our statements, and since the comments are anonymous, they can be vulgar and discrediting but untrue; and the expressions like old hag, cow, turkey, etc. are maybe the mildest ones ...“

„I was able to endure everything, everything that they would make up, the affairs, the lovers, but I could not endure when they would touch my family. That's where I always had to react. But our reactions in such instances are too emotional.“

„They wrote to me that they would kill me. Everybody knows that.“

They say that the fact that online violence spreads so quickly is a huge problem.

„When you are faced with online violence and the things they make up about you, at certain point you come to the conclusion that it is completely irrelevant if you try to defend yourself or not, if you deny the lie or not, you cannot stop it anyway.“

„When people in social networks see that you are hurt by their comments, they only hit stronger and comment more frequently.“

In the context of discussion about sanctioning online comments, the opinions are divided. While some see the need to regulate and sanction in order to protect victims and maintain civilized discourses, others worry about potential restrictions of the freedom of expression. This balance between protection of individuals from violence and protection of fundamental right to freedom of expression is a challenge for political and social environment in Montenegro. All the interviewees agree that it is the responsibility of the legislation to regulate at least the online space in the segment of comments in the portals of Montenegrin media. They understand that regulation in social networks is much more challenging issue that not even the countries much bigger than Montenegro can successfully deal with.

„Let us first clean our backyard. That is the most important. Let us regulate the segment of Montenegrin media.“

„It would be good if more attention could be given to comments in portals, and that is where the legislature has to be clearer. But we have a problem there. Some portals, where various disgusting things are written about certain male and female politicians, are not registered in Montenegro at all, but are some companies from Latin America. That is how they hide.“

In addition to the comments in the portals, the interviewees recognize that also the texts published in the portals can contain elements of violence against women, and definitely sexism and misogyny. According to their observations, there is a significant difference in how man and women are presented in the media space. Women are more frequently subject to reporting that focuses more on personal aspects, like appearance, clothing, or family status, while men are presented more through the prism of their professional achievements and political attitudes. These double standards do not only reduce professional qualities and contributions of women in politics, but also reflect the obsolete gender roles that see women primarily through personal and emotional aspects.

The interviewees also underline the importance of visual presentation in the media, particularly the choice of photographs with the texts. Photographs that are used for women in politics are frequently selected in such a way as to emphasize personal and not professional attributes, which can have a deep impact on the perception in public. Contrary to this, the photographs of men in politics more frequently show authority, professionalism and seriousness. This practice not only influences the way in which individuals are perceived, but also the general opinion about appropriateness of women for political roles and their ability to make important decisions.

„I completely disagree with her in politics and in everything else, but I was disgusted when I say what kind of photographs Vijesti choose to give with the stories about Vesna Medenica. There is no need to show her entire body every time deliberately in those photographs, and sometimes even from behind.“

This kind of reporting in the media not only reproduces and reinforces gender stereotypes, but also contributes to creation of social environment that is hostile to women in politics. This creates an additional barrier for women who want to engage in political life and advance in their political careers. The interviewees think that it is necessary to change the way in which media report about women in politics.

In addition to journalists and comments in portals and social networks, the interviewees say that women are also faced with stereotypes and gender-based roles that marginalize or trivialize them and their contribution to political life that come from their colleagues, male politicians, sometimes even without them being aware of it. This practice of putting women in gender roles not only undermines their authority and professionalism, but also reflects structural barriers that hamper full participation of women in political process.

“Some allusions of your physical appearance or male-female relations, jokingly, but to annoy you... Rarely you get any direct comment, but the way in which they comment their female colleagues who are not present also shows that they comment me in the same way when I am not there.“

„He said to our female councillor that she was toxic. You will never hear such a comment for a man, men are never toxic or poisonous. It is always the woman who is the snake, who carries the poison. In that narrative only women can be toxic.“

The interviewees recognize all of these as serious problems that Montenegrin society has to deal with. We asked them how and what should be changed to make the situation better, with a particular reference to the legal framework.

Legislation and Recommendations for Improvements

Our conversations with interviewees show clearly that there is awareness of the need for systemic changes that would ensure higher participation of women in politics. In addition to the need to raise quotas, they underline the need for continuous promotion of the policies that encourage gender equality, so that it can be ensured that women not only participate in politics, but also have an opportunity to influence decision-making and shaping policies in line with general interest of the society.

In these interviews about violence against women in politics in Montenegro, the interviewees emphasize the need to introduce stricter punishments for perpetrators of this kind of violence. Almost all of them agree that the fines constitute an efficient mechanism for corrections, and therefore they advocate making the sanctions stricter as a way to combat violence more efficiently. This shows that

there is a broader need to strengthen legal and institutional responsibility, and to strengthen mechanisms for enforcement of the current legislation.

„There is no other way, you have to start fining people, or send somebody to prison for some time... then the others will figure out that the things are getting serious and that it is not like anybody can do anything.“

Although the interviewees think that the existing legal framework has to be upgraded, they say that the key problem is that the enforcement of laws is slow and sometimes problematic. In addition to this, some of them are warning that enforcement of the laws is often selective, which leads to the perception of injustice and lack of trust into the legal system. This shows that there is a need to improve efficiency of the justice system and ensure it is impartial and that all citizens are equal before the law.

„It is good that there are sanctions, but that must not be abused to punish political opponents of the parties that are in power at certain moment.“

„It takes too much time for me to get satisfaction before Montenegrin courts. That is simply the system that is too slow, not adapted to the time we live in.“

The interviewees further propose that legislation should define more precisely the concepts like violence against women, violence against women in politics, as well as online violence. A clear definition of these terms may allow for easier identification, processing and sanctioning of violence, particularly in a rapidly-changing context like online space. Precise definitions may also help in developing targeted policies and strategies for preventing and combating violence.

In addition to this, some interviewees say that additional improvements of the election legislation in this field have to be made, particularly in the time when the story about the reform of election legislation in Montenegro is topical again. That is where they see the opportunity to improve the existing system of quotas for the lists of candidates.

„A woman may decide not to take her seat and in such a case her seat may be taken by a man. That is the room for abusing the system of quotas.“

The interviewees also say that there is a clear division in the Parliament of Montenegro to female and male committees, and almost all of them say that in Montenegrin politics there is this division to female and male topics. They think such a practice should end, even by introducing legal measures, if needed.

„That is a disgrace. It is known which committees are for women and which are for men. Why is that so? Does that mean that women cannot contribute to a discussion about Ministry of Interior or about security?“

„Quotas, compliance with the law, stronger authorities for the gender equality committee, stopping the divisions to male and female committees in the Parliament... all of this should be done.“

All of them think that gender equality committee and the female political club in the Parliament should have their authorities extended.

And finally, the interviewees underline the importance of working on raising awareness about the problem of violence against women, in addition to legislative efforts. Education of the public, promotion of gender equality and fighting stereotypes are key to creating a social atmosphere where violence is not tolerated. Raising awareness campaigns, education programmes and public discussions can contribute to a change in attitudes and behaviours, which will contribute to creating a more secure and just environment for women in politics and in society in general.

Focus Groups

As one of the key steps in researching violence against women in Montenegrin politics, DeFacto Consultancy research team conducted six focus groups. Focus groups ensured better understanding of various perspectives and experiences, particularly of the young, within the political landscape. Providing a platform for structured discussions, the focus groups contributed to the research of attitudes, beliefs and experiences related to this topic. Carefully designed methodological approach ensured inclusiveness of various contexts, while each focus group attracted participants from various political parties. The discussions focused on the key topics like perception of violence against women, personal experience of participants and media presentation. The decision to organize focus groups online ensured participation of persons from various regions, which contributed to deeper understanding of this problem.

In this analysis we will explore the rich qualitative data obtained from these focus groups, synthesizing the key insights, and identifying the recurring topics. In that way, we will try to shed a light on the multi-faceted nature of violence against women in Montenegrin politics and inform the evidence-based recommendations for solving this problem. Through a rigorous analysis and interpretation of focus groups discussions, we are trying to give a significant contribution to the efforts that are already being invested in promoting gender equality and creating a political landscape where women can succeed without being afraid of violence and/or discrimination.

Women in Politics

Focus groups started with the question about the general state-of-affairs and participation of women in the political life in Montenegro. In the modern political discourse, the question of representation of women is attached an increasing importance as the key element of gender equality and democratic development. In Montenegro, just like in many other countries, this topic is subject to a lively discussion and analysis. The first thing that we noted was a general consent among participants of all six focus groups that the number of women in politics in Montenegro is not sufficient and that it is necessary to work on increasing it and ensuring that women can take decision-making functions in politics. The participants also underline the lack of women in high positions in the ministries and political structures which indicates to deeper problems in the society.

„Well, the number of women in politics is certainly not sufficient. I think that it is enough to say that, after the parliamentary elections ended, there were supposed to be 16 women in the Parliament. I am not sure how many of them are there now, but this shows how marginalized women are in the political scene in Montenegro. I mean, being in the Parliament is not the only political function, but this clearly shows in percentages how much we think women should be present on the political scene and how much we think they should be deciding about our future. Even in the ministries, the number of women in the positions of ministers is very small. It seems to me that, even when women are appointed to the positions where they can make decisions, it does not mean much since they are surrounded by men only.” – A female participant N2, DPS Focus group

„As for me, I think that a larger number of women is needed in politics because women are more aware of the needs, which then increases opportunities to present problems that they are faced with in Montenegro to broader public. Therefore, it would really be better if the number of women in politics increased. Particularly since we are a patriarchal community and since women are not so much involved in politics, at their own choice and also because of the community we live in.” – Male participant N2, NSD Focus group

„I think that we cannot say that there are not enough women in politics, but that there are not enough women on top positions in politics. In some parties you might have 50% of women, but men are always the first on the lists because in our society words are taken more seriously if uttered by a man than if uttered by a woman. In some cases even, if they say the same sentence, with the same form and context, the word coming from a man will always be taken more seriously. That is why on the top of the lists, there are always men.“ – Female participant N1, SD Focus group

One of the key arguments supporting the need for higher representation of women in politics is the need to achieve gender equality in the society. Participants in focus groups underline that women have a potential to contribute to the political process in the same way as men, but they face obstacles like violence and stereotypes. Some say that women are frequently discouraged from active participation in politics due to the fear of violence or lack of support within the political structures. However, the problem is not only in the lack of women in politics, but also in the lack of support and opportunities provided to women to make themselves visible and to be promoted. Many participants criticise political parties due to the insufficient support to women and using quotas for women as formalities without real opportunities for active participation of women. Another key aspect that the focus groups underline is the need to change social norms and expectations from women. Discrimination of women in politics reflects a broader problematic culture that implies unequal opportunities and expectations from women in different spheres of the society. Many participants say that it is of key importance to change these deeply rooted opinion patterns in order to create a more just and more inclusive political environment. Finally, it is important to emphasize that an increase in the number of women in politics is not sufficient in itself, if women do not have genuine power and influence on political processes. High quality work and engagement of women are key for an efficient change. Women need to be actively involved in decision-making and they need to have an opportunity to be visible because of their abilities and credits, and not only because of the formal quotas or political correctness.

„I think that there is a general problem of the lack of motivation for women to engage in politics, because our society has always been such that we degrade women, we push women aside, we give them to do some administrative job in the shadow and let the men shine. I think that it is one of the problems because I participated in a workshop where research was presented to us and one of the questions was what motivated women to engage in politics. Most of the women said that nothing could motivate them to engage in politics. So I think it is also a big problem for women.“ – Female participant N6, DCG Focus group

„Well, the system is set in such a way that it favours men, particularly in politics... generally speaking, but particularly in politics, I would say... so, the entire system is such that they stick together and perceive women as someone that will be there when needed on the lists, for organizing this or that... the system favours men... we have laws that support positive discrimination but I think that with that law the situation is like with most of the laws in our country, all of that tends to be a dead letter on the paper and is not used properly... that implementation of those legal norms, those laws that refer to positive discrimination and their implementation.. I think that is the most serious problem here.”– Male participant N3, BS Focus group

„I agree with [...] that it is more difficult for us in the North. It is different because we inherently carry the burden of the weaker sex and everything is then observed in that way – like, you cannot do it, you are a woman, what would you do in politics, it is not for you, let it pass... And then attacks in social network..., and so many times in TV programmes, you can see attacks against women in politics, in public scene in general, and then the lack of response of state bodies, the lack of reaction of public and then... of course that only contributes to the situation that people around us additionally constrain us and say – do you need such problems, why would you want to deal with something like that, if you were a man it would not happen or somebody would protect you or they wouldn't dare say anything of the sort “ – Female participant N5, PES Focus group

„Well, it's because we are not a society of equal opportunities, that is where the answer lies, I think, to all the questions we are about to discuss today. The reason is simply that if you are a woman, particularly a young woman, you are simply not in an equal position as your young male colleague, or any male colleague for that matter, because politics as a profession, and in general any other profession looks as if it was created for men... so "it's a man's world".“ – Female participant N4, DPS Focus group

Media

In the focus groups that were organized with the participants from youth wings of political parties in Montenegro, various opinions and perceptions were expressed about the media and their influence on public perception of women in politics. The discussions revealed deep layers of the problems that are related to the manner in which the media shape the image of women politicians and influence their political careers. Firstly, the participants emphasize that media play the key role in shaping public opinion about women in politics. Women politicians are frequently presented in a sensationalistic manner, with a focus on their physical appearance or personal characteristics, rather than on their political attitudes and competences. This can contribute to development of a negative picture of women in politics and reduce their seriousness and authority.

„...I think that the media... since we live in 21st century and everyone has the possibility to follow the media... media simply create a picture and our opinions about certain topics. If they present certain case as if not deserving any attention, then it will indeed remain low profile. So, I would say that media are exceptionally important in that and that they should really mobilize and write about issues, particularly about this topic since it is exceptionally important... but they should write about it in an objective manner” – Female participant N2, DPS Focus group

„I can notice differences in comments and that is the greatest reason why women lose self-confidence to engage in politics, because they are afraid that they will be exposed to such criticism and insults. That is one of the reasons why there are fewer women in politics.”– Participant N4, SD Focus group

„When media start talking about this and when you read some titles, she said this, she said that... she is arrogant... this and that etc. ... then a bad picture is already created about any move or wish of the woman to do anything related to politics. So, we might say that the media are objective, but the truth is that media and the entire society in Montenegro perceive women differently than men, so that is also the problem we have as the society.” – Female participant N2, PES Focus group

Secondly, media might have a tendency to favour certain political parties or individuals, which can further hamper the political careers of women that do not belong to those parties or do not have support of influential individuals. Thirdly, participants say that the media frequently use stereotypes and sexist narratives in reporting about women politicians, which can contribute to their marginalization and discrimination in political space. This type of media pressure may make it difficult for women to engage in politics and to make progress in their political careers. The participants expressed concern due to the lack of responsibility and objectivity in media reporting about politics, particularly when it comes to women politicians. It happens frequently that media convey information that are not verified or use sensationalistic headlines to attract attention of readers, which can harm reputation and integrity of women politicians. Finally, the participants underlined the need to change media discourse about women in politics and pay more attention to their political attitudes and achievements. They appealed for more objectivity, responsibility and professionalism in media reporting about politics, to ensure fair treatment of women politicians and promote their equal participation in the political life of the country.

„Generally, the problem is that, for example, when they start appearing in public, their physical appearance is always in the focus, and then their clothing style, which I haven't noticed is the case with men. So, the emphasis is always what woman wears, what she looks like, and what she presented and talked about and similar things are always diminished. So I haven't noticed the attention is paid to that when it comes to men, so it is also a problem that a woman can immediately be degraded and demotivated to do any kind of public job, not only politics, because the emphasis is always on what she looks like and such things.” – Female participant N6, DCG Focus group

„I would just like to add that it is the lack of professionalism of the media because they bring such topic into politics, but I do not think it is directed against women, but it is collecting of certain political points through some arguments and therefore the topic like that is welcome with a view to deteriorating position of an opponent. I think that it is political daily life in Montenegro.” – Male participant N2, NSD Focus group

Analysis of the focus groups shows complexity of the problems that are related to the influence of the media to public perception of women in politics in Montenegro. It is necessary to undertake

concrete steps to ensure fair and objective reporting about women politicians and promote their active role in political life of the country. This requires hiring of all relevant stakeholders, including the media, political parties and social organizations in order to create inclusive political culture that respects and supports gender equality.

„Well, media mostly appeal, particularly since feminism appeared in Montenegro, that every woman should report violence and that there will be someone to help her. As for sexism, we can see that it is frequent, not only in Montenegro but worldwide. Media always appeal that every woman should report violence and that the state will stand behind her, as well as the police and party colleagues, but there are so many cases that nobody stopped it. There are so many cases where nothing was done... some of the women even published the messages that they got: indecent offers from their colleagues. They reported some things and presented publicly, but all of that just disappeared. On the other side, if something like that happens to a man it is talked about in the media for days. We keep seeing on TV if a man is threatened, but if it happens to a woman it is always just a one-day-talk and everything disappears.“ – Female participant N1, NSD Focus group

„I would like to add to this, and say that media love sensationalistic topics, media practically survive because of such topics, because people click when they see a clickbait, etc. I think that is the key problem. They focus on this issue only when a disgraceful caricature appears or something similar.

So, only if there is something extremely scandalous. And if there are some things that are less scandalous in the society, then media do not cover that. So, I am afraid that they only focus on the things that will provoke reaction in their readers, in those who follow their media and that they do not focus at all on the significance of the topic they tackle “ – Female participant N2, DPS Focus group

„I would also love if the media could deal a bit more with raising awareness about more women in politics, that there should be more women engaging in political life. The media shouldn't only cover some bad news that happened or... Anyway, it would be better if they worked on raising awareness about it, on investigating, to see how we can have more women in politics, and how state authorities can protect them.“ – Female participant N1, PES Focus group

Social Networks

In today's digital age, social networks became the key space for political dialogue and expressing opinions. However, the increase in activities in those platforms, is followed by an increase in violence, harassment and discrimination, particularly against women in politics. This form of violence, that is frequently manifested through sexist, insulting comments or even threats, does not only have a deep emotional and psychological influence on victims, but can seriously jeopardize their security and motivation for further political engagement. Within the focus groups, we explored influence of violence in social networks on political participation of women. Through the discussion and exchange of opinions, we identified the key topics and opinions that shape these issues.

Firstly, the participants said that violence in social networks was a serious problem with a deep influence on political engagement of women. Frequently victims of violence are faced with sexist

comments, insults and even threats, which demotivates and discourages them from taking an active part in the political dialogue. Secondly, the participants underlined that violence in social networks was not only the issue of individual security, but also of broader problem in the society. The lack of diversity in political arena caused by a reduced participation of women results in the lack of perspectives and voices in making decisions, which can have negative consequences on the society as a whole. Asked if they notice differences in online reactions towards men and women politicians, the participants had the following comments:

„Certainly, very much, particularly in the comments: “you’d better sit at home”, “take care of the children”, “your place is not here”... while men are always given full support, and the problem is that women feel fear because there is nobody to stand by them. In online comments we can see how men say to women that they should not do politics, that they do not belong there and that they are to blame for everything that is happening to them because they asked for it. These are the reasons why women do not run for higher positions.”– Female participant N1, NSD Focus group

„I notice differences in comments and that is the key reason why women lose self-confidence to get engaged in politics, because they are afraid that they will be exposed to such criticism and insults. That is one of the key reasons for having so few women in politics.“ – Male participant N4, SD Focus group

„I want to explain this using my personal example. It happens very often when my statements appear in the media that below that statement, in social networks and in the portals, there are numerous insulting, sexist comments that maybe very often have nothing to do with me personally, but are connected with the politics that I personify. So, a woman must be ready for enduring not only comments regarding their physical appearance, but also about the politics the values of which she believes in, advocates them and works for them.” – Female participant N4, DPS Focus group

Thirdly, we discussed potential solutions for this problem. Participants underlined the importance of stricter policies for regulating contents in social networks, including fast response to reports of violent or offensive comments. They also supported the idea of education and raising awareness about gender equality and respect in networks as the key step to solve this problem. Participants emphasized the importance of legislative measures in protecting victims of violence in social networks. Stricter laws and their efficient implementation may serve as a strong deterrence for perpetrators of such offences and provide better security to women politicians.

„Precisely this lack of reaction of state bodies dealing with these issues encourages individuals to do these things under the umbrella of social networks and profiles. I think that they are not aware at that moment to what extent they harm the persons with their actions, but as soon as they see that the response to it is very weak or that it does not exist at all, they will keep doing it. Thus, I definitely think that we need to work on that reaction and, if necessary, we need to have some parts of the law changed or whatever, only to ensure adequate punishment and stop them in that way. Maybe they would be afraid next time when they want to write something or do something similar from their profiles on social networks, they will probably stop because they know that there

*is a fine or a more serious sanction... I think this is the only way.” – Female participant N5, PES
Focus group*

„I think that we simply must change a paradigm and that is that a woman cannot be a politician. So, in the region we have cases, the Prime Minister of Serbia is a woman, former President of Croatia is also a woman. So, the situation is simply not so bad in the region, why would it be so bad in our country. The space for work exists, but what the parties have to do is to put the women, that they definitely have in the party, more to the front.” – Male participant N5, DCG Focus group

*„I would just like to add in relation to the comments to certain statements... OK, everyone has the right to have an opinion and to express it, but I think that any form of expression should be signed by first and last name. We see that in most cases of hate speech they are posted under a nick that does not present identity of the person which gives them this kind of freedom that they think they can write whatever and that we do not know who stands behind.” – Female participant N6, BS
Focus group*

All in all, these focus groups provided a better insight into the complexity of the problem of violence in social network and identified the key steps that are to be undertaken to create more secure and more inclusive digital space for political dialogue.

Political Parties

Violence against women in politics is a serious social problem that demands attention of political leaders and institutions. Through analysis of opinions expressed in focus groups, we can get an overview of different perspectives and recommendations for improving the situation. Firstly, there is a general consent among participants that political parties do not address the problem of violence against women in politics in an adequate manner. Although the political parties adopted policies and initiatives on the paper, in practice it seems that those measures are insufficient or are insufficiently efficient. This indicates to the need for more concrete actions and change of the approach in dealing with this issue.

„I will be frank and say that I do not think that any of the political parties in Montenegro does enough on improving the position of women in Montenegrin society, including politics. I am afraid that the parties often just meet the quotas.” – Female participant N2, DPS Focus group

„I agree, the most that political parties do are verbal appeals and there are no concrete steps. I think that they do not have enough ideas about this. Maybe we should look for help of some societies that have a better level of democracy, I mean we are already a candidate for EU membership.” – Male participant N1, NSD Focus group

Secondly, proposals were given for improving the situation, like stronger support to victims of violence through concrete actions, instead of symbolic support in social networks only and activating institutions in punishing perpetrators of violence. This suggests that there is a need for various stakeholders in the society to integrate in combating violence against women in politics. It is very

important to see public engagement of political leaders in condemning and sanctioning violence against women in politics. Active distancing from violent or discriminatory procedures and public support to women who are victims can send a strong message and contribute to creation of a more secure political environment for all. It is noticed that the support is frequently reduced to publishing a status in social networks, without any concrete actions or politics that would indeed provide protection and support to victims. This kind of activity of political parties was not considered adequate and it was noted that much more is needed than the symbolic support in social networks.

„I mean, filing a criminal report sounds like a minor thing, but it is, actually, a concrete action that is much more useful than ten pages of statements about why misogyny is bad and why our society should not accept it... we are used somehow that it is just a theory. Whenever we go to practice as politicians in the society, when somebody does something concrete like increasing salaries, increasing pensions and other such things that are concrete, that is where we truly see that people accept such things better, so I believe that if anyone...” – Male participant N4, PES Focus group

„I think that the parties should change the way they see women in politics because it is a fact that when such a situation happens our male colleagues see that more as an opportunity to get space in the media. I mean, it is abused and done to cover the media space and not because they express their true opinion. So, I think they should work on having their policies for more women in politics and not to see how women will be part of their parties due to financial and media motives. Since in Montenegro we have the practice that there is a very small number of women in politics, political parties should try to introduce as many women in politics as possible. They need to put more women on the lists to show that they really want that. In a couple of situations, when some female MPs were attacked, we could see that their colleagues comment, only day after, in a declaratory manner, briefly, just that it can be seen that they gave some support. When I look at the lists of candidates, I would say that rarely any party truly wishes to improve the position of women in politics.“ – Male participant N2, SD Focus group

Analysis of Comments in Social Networks

Through focus groups, we analysed the real comments in social networks that target women politicians in Montenegro. These comments are enclosed in the Annex to this Report. Discussion about these comments provoked various reactions among participants, and the key topic was making a distinction between freedom of speech and hate speech. It was noted that the comments were frequently explicit, misogynous, and that they often relied on national and religious divisions. These comments are not only exceptions; they are a frequent practice in social networks in Montenegro. This statement indicated to a serious problem of violence against women in politics manifested through verbal attacks and threats in social networks.

„This is a form of psychological violence. But you know what, I think that the problem in our community is that it is understood as something that is not serious. I mean, we are used to it and it is a problem, generally. We are used to comments of this type, and to this type of behaviour and for us it is “well, it’s ok, let’s move on”. And that is a problem generally, they always say that the first

step is to recognize the problem to be able to solve it. I think that our awareness is still not mature that much.” – Female participant N4, BS Focus group

„No, we in principle have something else on top of misogyny and that something is inspired by national and religious issues, this eternal polarization in Montenegro. And the worst is that we have all read the comments of that type hundred times... It is literally the practice that is seen too many times in Montenegro, unfortunately “ – Male participant N1, DCG Focus group

Participants expressed disappointment because such comments frequently remain unpunished, while political parties and other institutions rarely undertake any measures to combat them. The lack of responsibility of the owners of social networks in removing such comments is also emphasized as a worrying factor. The interesting thing is that participants in focus groups noticed that certain persons who publish negative comments are “awarded” by page moderators as “top fans”. It was also noticed that the comments frequently focus on personal characteristics and life choices of women politicians, rather than on their political agenda or work. This shows that there are deeply rooted gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms that still dominate in Montenegrin society.

„This looks to me as if they are competing among themselves in who will give the worst comment and I think that moderators are to be blamed. If they sanctioned one bad comment, these people would think twice before writing something like that again. The moderator should post only normal comments, because in that way the negative ones would not look so prominent.” – Female participant N1, SD Focus group

„I would like to add, if I can, that comments of this kind can be seen every day now. As for those comments that contain threats for life, in particular, I would definitely punish that severely and a lot could be researched in that respect, particularly since these profiles, as we can see here, they are not fake, that should be severely punished, fined or otherwise, but state authorities should definitely take care of that.“ – Female participant N1, PES Focus group

As for the discussion about the freedom of speech, the participants underline that freedom of speech should not be used to justify hate speech and verbal violence. In that, they note that freedom of speech must be distinguished from expressions of hate and threats that constitute violation of fundamental human rights and jeopardize democratic values. Some participants say that there is also a problem of the lack of female solidarity in responding to such comments. Instead of support, it was noticed that women frequently perpetuate gender stereotypes and attack other women, by which they contribute to maintaining patriarchal structures of power.

„I would also like to ask for how long the questions like “have you had any children” will be tolerated and ignored. Why people question whether a woman is less or more worthy and connect that with the fact of whether she had given birth to a child or not. I think that is also a serious problem because, I mean, somebody who is privately close to you, when he/she asks you this question, you do not feel comfortable, and let alone when you see this kind of comments.” – Male participant N3, DPS Focus group

„I think this is a disgrace and it is devastating for women and for entire Montenegro. Particularly this comment is striking, this woman who wrote this comment should ask herself what she would feel if anybody sent something of this kind to her or her family.“ – Female participant N5, NSD Focus group

In the end, the conclusion is that these comments constitute a clear demonstration not only of the lack of respect for women in politics, but also of deeply rooted problems in Montenegrin society. These comments are certainly not freedom of speech, but abuse of the freedom of speech in order to spread hate and discrimination. It is therefore necessary that political parties, institutions of the society and the society as a whole undertake concrete steps to tackle this problem and create secure and inclusive environment for all women politicians in Montenegro.

Conclusion of this research clearly shows that violence against women in politics is a complex and deeply rooted problem in Montenegrin society. Analysing the opinions expressed in focus groups, we can see that there is no adequate number of women in political structures, and that there is a lack of support to them and opportunities for their participation. Media play the key role in shaping public opinion, and they frequently present women politicians in a sensational manner, marginalizing their political competences. Social networks also offer space for spreading violence and discrimination against women in politics which seriously jeopardizes their security and their political motivation. Policies of political parties frequently do not address this problem adequately and urgent steps are needed to ensure change. Therefore, to create more inclusive and more just political environment, Montenegro needs concrete steps on all levels of the society, including media, political and societal sphere, aimed at securing equal participation of women in political life.

Monitoring Media Sources and Comments in Social Networks and Portals

„Oh my God, what got into these women? Nobody prohibits you from having your own opinion, but majority decides.“ comment from a portal)

When we talk about online violence, particular attention should be dedicated to online space, since the largest number of cases of registered violence against politicians in Montenegro is violence in form of comments in portals of Montenegrin media or in social networks.

Violence against women in politics is frequently most present in online space due to the anonymity provided by Internet. Online platforms make it possible for the users to hide their identity behind a nickname or totally anonymous profiles. This frequently leads to the feeling of impunity, where individuals think they can express aggressive, sexist, or discriminatory comments without any fear

from consequences. Online space also provides everyone with the platform through which it is very simple to spread negative messages. Social networks and comment sessions in portals ensure rapid spreading of contents to a large number of people, through which negative messages and threats can be quickly amplified and go viral.

Another factor is dehumanization that frequently takes place in online communication. People can become less aware or sensitive to consequences of their words when they communicate with the screen and not face-to-face. This can lead to more brutal and more aggressive behaviour towards women in politics.

Violence against women in politics in online space, particularly in portals and social networks, is a serious problem that jeopardizes fundamental human rights and democratic processes. Women in politics are often targeted by sexist comments, threats, discrimination and other forms of online violence. This type of violence does not only have a negative influence on women politicians, but also on a broader picture of engagement of women in political processes, limiting their visibility, influence, and ability to act as equal participants in political life.

To get a better understanding of the scope and nature of online violence against politicians, we collected all the comments from the most popular Montenegrin portals posted to the texts that mention at least one of the women politicians that we identified as those particularly targeted by online violence. These are the texts published in the six-month period from 1 July to 31 December 2023. We analysed in total 24909 comments from the portals in two cycles. In the first cycle we analysed all comments to establish which constitute online violence or stereotype of women or gender roles. All the comments identified as violence were additionally coded, using the pre-designed code scheme, with a view to identifying the type of violence and understand better how citizens who comment women politicians in the portals actually do that. In addition to this, we collected data about how many likes (positive reactions) and how many dislikes (negative reactions) the comments on the portals got, as well as the names of accounts posting comments, to find out if online violence against women politicians is generated in the comments by the same profile or a smaller number of those who comment several times using the language of online violence or stereotypes of women in politics. We also collected data about how many responses these comments generate, to analyse if the comments that constitute online violence generate discussions in social networks or remain “isolated” without reactions.

In addition to this, we collected data from Facebook, comments from official accounts of the portals to the post, if the portal shared the link with the story mentioning one of the given politicians in the given period. In this way, we collected 5378 comments. The same process as with the comments from the portals was implemented for these comments too.

The findings are presented separately in two parts: violence against women politicians in the comments from portals and violence against women politicians in the comments from Facebook.

Violence against Politicians in the Comments from Portals

For the purposes of this project, we analysed 24909 comments from portals. The analysis shows a concerning data that one in nine comments (2709) from the portals contains a form of violence against women, or presentation of women politicians through stereotypes.

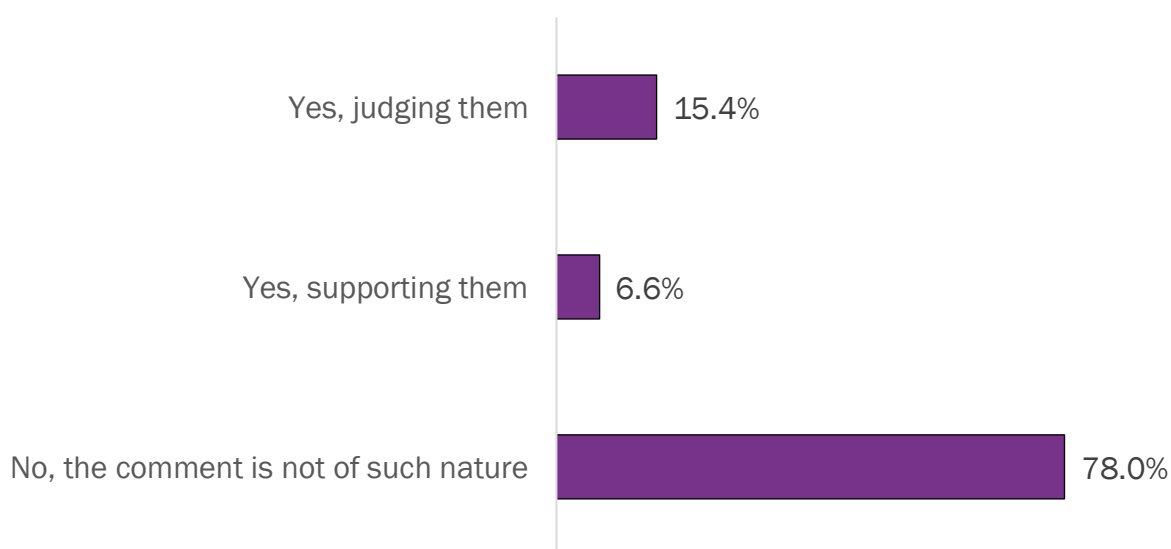
Particularly concerning is the fact that such comments generate discussions in portals, while other users like them significantly more than dislike them. The comments that we identified as online violence or stereotypes, namely, get on average 39 likes (positive reactions), while they get on average hardly 20 dislikes (negative reactions) from other users of the portal. Comments like “what an old hag”, “Cry, baby, cry.” “Sad is the house that you came to” have more than 300 likes (positive reactions) and only a dozen negative reactions. In as many as 78.1% of cases the comments of this type have more positive than negative reactions, and that relation is sometimes significantly in favour of positive reactions (likes) to this kind of comments.

In 27% of cases (almost one third) these comments generate reactions of other portal users, while in 15% of cases they get a response, as a reaction to comments. However, those responses often express support and not criticism.

Out of all comments that constitute online violence against women, more than a half (52%) are written by profiles/accounts that had more than two of such comments in portals of the media. This data shows that most of the comments that contain online violence against women politicians are generated by the same people.

The Figure below shows that 1 in four comments refer to the character, personality, or moral values of politicians.

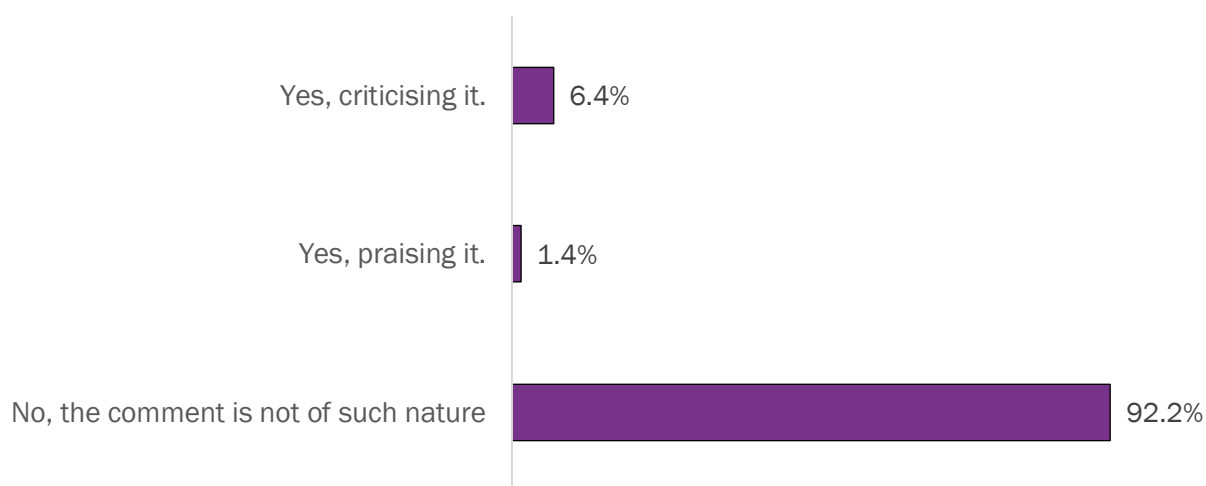
Figure 51 Does the comment refer to character, personality, or moral values of politicians? (portals)



Out of those comments that refer to the character, personality, or moral values of politicians, most of the comments contain criticism against women politicians. The emphasis on criticising characteristics, personality or moral values of women politicians, rather than their professional competence or political attitudes may reflect deeply rooted social norms that frequently set higher expectations or different standards for women in politics. Such comments, as we could hear in the interviews with women politicians (or former women politicians), but also in focus groups, may discourage women from political engagement, due to the fear from public condemnation and criticism.

In addition to this, users in portals rather often comment physical appearance of politicians.

Figure 52 Does the comment refer to physical appearance of woman politician? (portals)



Almost one in ten comments in portals, among those identified as inappropriate, deals with physical appearance of woman politician. This information indicates to a worrying trend of sexism and objectivization of women in politics, particularly in online space. Focusing on physical appearance of politicians reduces the value and significance of women’s contribution to politics and to society. An additional analysis should deal with the dimensions of differences between women and men in politics in this respect. However, anecdotal evidence suggest that readers of portals do not comment on physical appearance of male politicians almost at all.

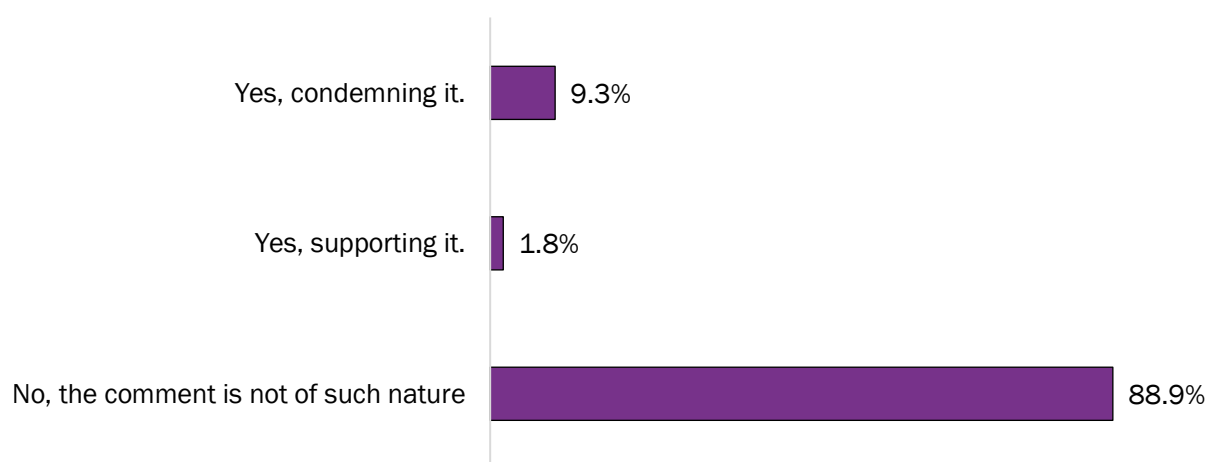
It is to a certain extent positive that we noticed that comments in the portals very rarely refer to private/family life of women politicians. Out of all comments in social networks that we marked as inappropriate, only 1.7% refer to private/family life of women politicians. However, although the percentage is low, tolerance for such phenomena should be minimal and therefore even this low percentage is too much. These comments were particularly present in case of former MP Draginja Vuksanović Stanković. Her husband is also a public figure, and frequently the comments refer to him and their marriage.

Additionally, we identified only 45 comments (2.2%) containing stereotypes about the role of women in politics. The comments of the following type: *“The woman is not worthy of working in MilPop even”*

/ “After this Draginja’s mono-drama, Njegoš is definitely right with his “THE MIND OF A WOMAN IS A FUNNY THING”/ “You take other person’s seat and nobody can tell you anything because you are of female sex. Is that the point? Or corruption?” are in significant minority, but indisputably attract attention in the portals, because they get a high percentage of positive reactions. In addition to this, such comments generate responses and other comments and, although they are not numerous, they attract significant attention.

National, i.e. ethnic origin of woman politician in Montenegro is almost an inevitable category.

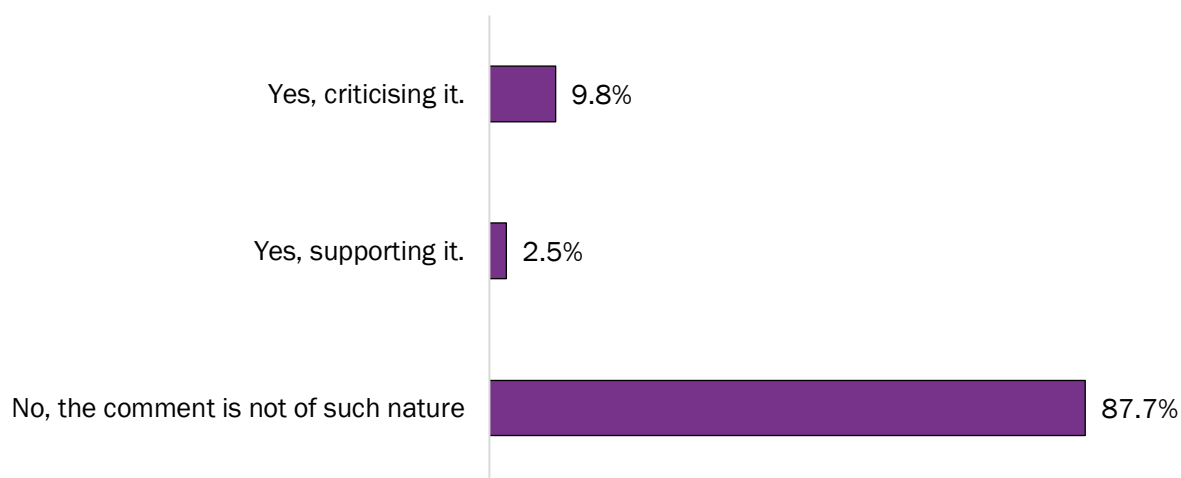
Figure 53 Does the comment refer to national/ ethnic origin of woman politician?



Also, when it comes to this indicator, we can see that a bit more than one in ten comments refer to national/ethnic origin of woman politician. Among such comments, the dominant are those that condemn, i.e. criticize national/ethnic origin. Such comments are rarely of very low nature, and they emphasize that the woman politician is of the nationality that is not desirable for the person posting the comment. In this case, more targeted are women politicians that are declared in public as Montenegrins (like Draginja Vuksanović Stanković or Aleksandra Vuković Kuč), i.e. those who come from the parties perceived as defending interests of national Montenegrins.

In addition to the comments regarding their national affiliation, there are often comments saying that woman politicians are less worthy or less educated than their male colleagues. One in ten comments criticizes education or intelligence of woman politician.

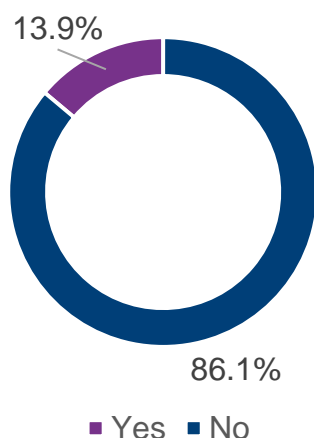
Figure 54 Does the comment refer to intelligence or education of woman politician? (portals)



This finding indicates to the existence of deeply rooted gender-based prejudice in the perception of women in politics. Women politicians frequently face challenges that come not only from their political position, but also from stereotypical prejudice about roles and competences of women. The comments that present them as “less worthy or less educated” than their male colleagues directly reflect sexism and gender discrimination that unfortunately still dominate in a part of Montenegrin society.

Criticising education and intelligence of women politicians, particularly when it is done in a significantly greater measure than is the case with their male colleagues, does not only undermine their professional reputation and integrity, but also creates additional barriers for women in politics. Such comments may contribute to creation of hostile environment that does not only make it difficult for women politicians to do their jobs efficiently, but also discourages other women from engaging in politics. A particularly negative data is that as many as 13.9% of these comments contain curses, i.e. inappropriate language.

Figure 55 Does the comment contain curses or inappropriate language? (portals)



A very high percentage of comments, among those identified as online violence, contains inappropriate language or curses, as many as 13.9%. This data shows that there is a concerning tendency in online communication, particularly when it comes to public figures like women politicians. It is important to emphasize that we accessed these comments in December 2023, quite some time after they were published. We are aware that some portals erase comments, or do not allow some comments to be published. Therefore, what we analysed is the situation as it was, after the portals had already intervened. This suggests that it is the minimum, and that the situation is potentially even worse, given the deleted comments and the comments that were for some time in the portals before being deleted by the administrator.

The problem of comments that stay published for a long time, although they obviously constitute violence against women in politics, is even more serious in Facebook.

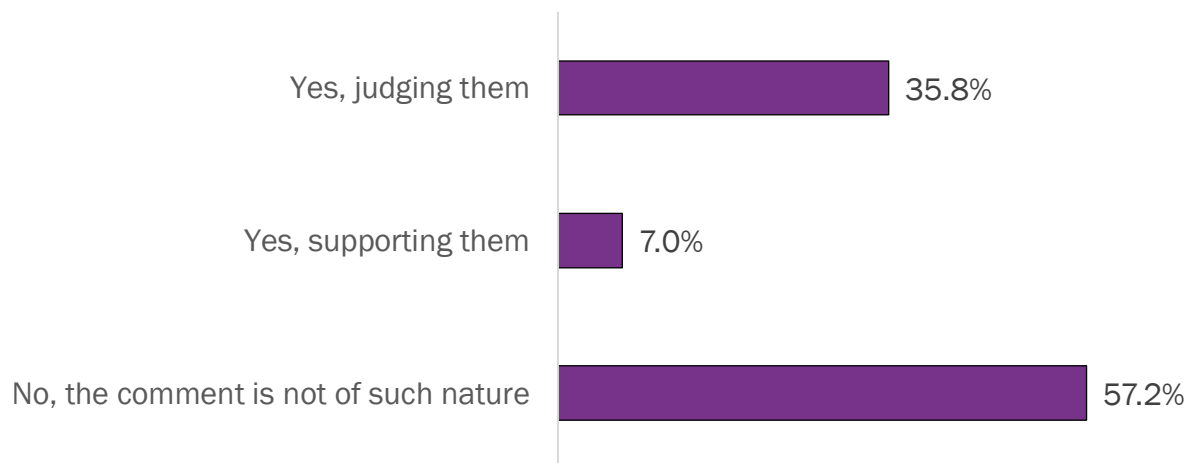
Violence against Women Politicians in Facebook Comments

In addition to collecting comments from portals, our research team also collected comments from Facebook. In the first step, we located official Facebook accounts of all the media that were subject to our analysis. After that, we found every case in which those accounts shared the texts we analysed about politicians. In the end, we collected all the comments of Facebook users to the news in which the official portals shared the links with texts about some of Montenegrin women politicians. We analysed all the comments collected in that way. Analysing the collected material (5387 comments in total), we identified a kind of inappropriate comments, frequently violence, against women in politics in as many as 1422 (26.4%). Unlike some of portals, Facebook does not offer the option for other users to post a negative reaction to (dislike) someone's comment. On the other side, there are different types of reactions to comments, that due to technical reasons we did not manage to classify in categories. Still, these comments get on average 4 reactions in Facebook. Given the fact that most of the Facebook reactions are likes (positive reactions), it is not difficult to assume that it is the same with the comments we analysed.

Prior to a detailed analysis we should emphasize that the problem of violence against women politicians in Facebook is undoubtedly of much greater proportions. We focused on the comments published about the news shared by the official pages of the media. So, for example, if a text about a woman politician was published in the CDM or Vijesti portal, we found a post in the official Facebook page of the given media and collected comments to that post. We were not in the position, due to technical constraints, and due to privacy of the contents, also to collect comments from private profiles that shared the text. We are here as well on the side of conservative approach and the data that we collected present the minimum of online violence against woman politicians. The reader should have in mind that the scope of violence is undoubtedly much broader than what is presented in the data that follow. Still, we have to have in mind that this report includes analysis of the media and comments of users of the media and those who follow the official Facebook pages of these media.

In the analysis of comments, the same code scheme was used as for analysis of Facebook comments. We firstly analysed if the comments referred to character, personality, or moral values of women politicians.

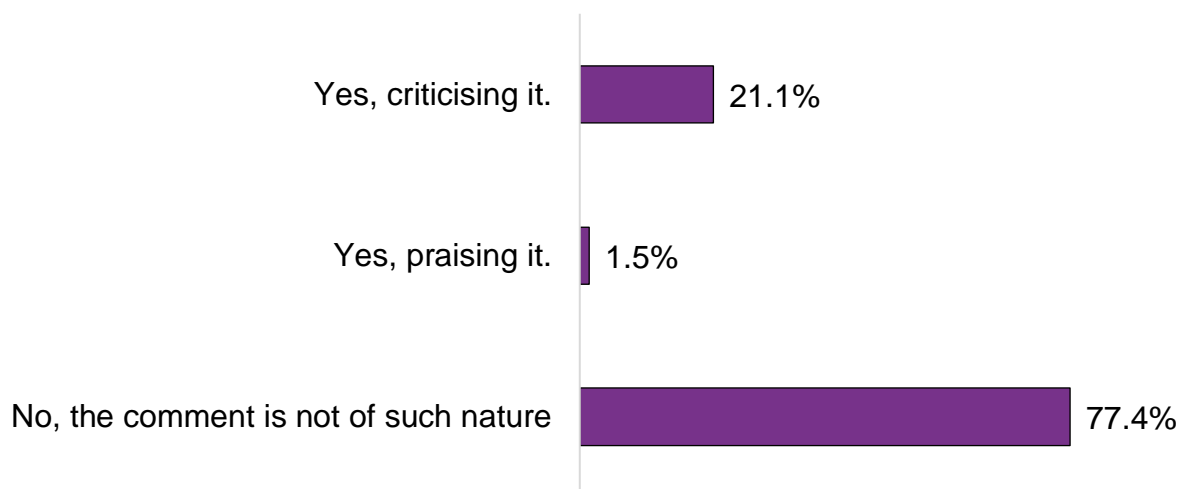
Figure 56 Does the comment refer to character, personality, or moral values of woman politician? (Facebook)



It is noticeable that Facebook comments are much more personal than those in the portals, and a significantly larger number of them refer to character, personality, or moral values of women politicians. More than a third of comments that we identified as violence against women or inappropriate comments, condemn personality or moral values of woman politician. Facebook, as a platform, encourages a “more personal” engagement of users, where people feel closer to the persons they follow, which can lead to a more direct and intimate ways of expressing opinion.

We found a confirmation for this in the following data.

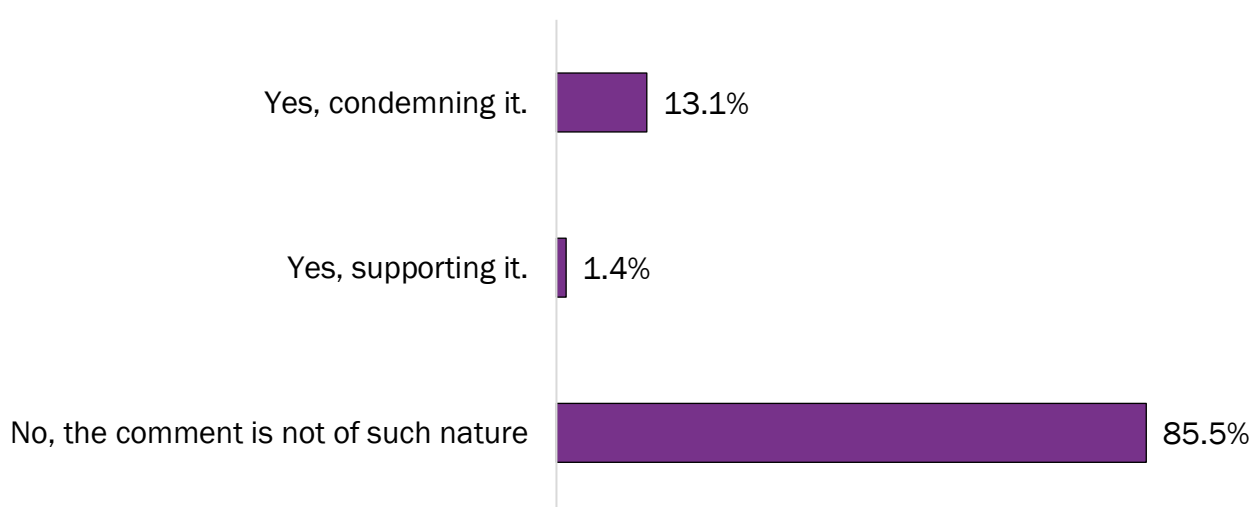
Figure 57 Does the comment refer to physical appearance of woman politician? (portals)



We can see that as many as one in five comments, that we identified and marked as inappropriate, contains a negative comment of the physical appearance of woman politician.

In both cases, when it comes to the character and personality of politician, but also when it comes to physical appearance, the numbers are significantly higher than when we talk about comments in the portals. The same pattern is noticeable in the comments that refer to family life of women politicians. In 3% of cases (which is two times more than in the portals) these comments refer to the family life of woman politician. We should also reiterate that the percentage is small, but that there should be zero tolerance for these phenomena.

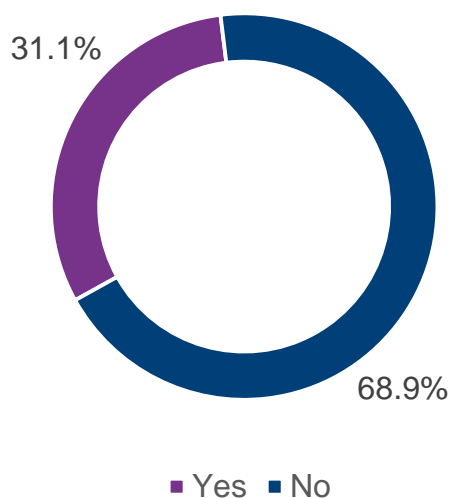
Figure 58 Does the comment refer to intelligence or education of woman politician? (Facebook)



More than 15% of comments in this group refer to intelligence and education of woman politician. Also, when it comes to Facebook too, these comments about intelligence or education are dominantly criticism or denigration. Unfortunately, a regular phenomenon that persists in Facebook pages of media portals, is having comments like “That is what happens when turkeys do politics”, or “The woman cannot compose a simple sentence, I was watching, every time she has to write a speech, even a couple of sentences, she reads from a laptop or from the paper, illiterate peasant”. These comments, used as illustration, are milder ones that can still be found in Facebook about Montenegrin women politicians.

The best proof of what kinds of things are written is the following data that shows that, among the comments we identified as violence against women in politics or inappropriate comments, as many as one third contain curses or inappropriate language.

Figure 59 Does the comment contain curses or inappropriate language? (Facebook)



The finding that one third of comments identified as violence against women in politics or inappropriate comments are full of curses or inappropriate language, is an alarming signal about the current situation of the online discourse. This trend exerts a negative impact not only on individuals that are targets of such attacks but also on the atmosphere in the society, hampering any constructive and civilized exchange of opinions.

In the end, we should emphasize that a large number of comments is written from the profiles that have real name and last name (or use full name and last name of a person), frequently even a photograph. Although social networks give an opportunity to the users to comment daily-political events from anonymity, many of them do not use that, and do not hesitate to use their full name and last name and photograph and write all forms of online violence against women politicians.

Media Monitoring

Media monitoring or monitoring of the media is the process that ensures a systematic collection and analysis of contents from various media sources about a topic of interest. One of the first steps in fighting any problem is to understand it, and media monitoring provides a detailed insight into the ways in which women in politics are presented. This approach can be used to detect not only obvious cases of violence, but also more subtle forms of discrimination and bias that may be equally damaging.

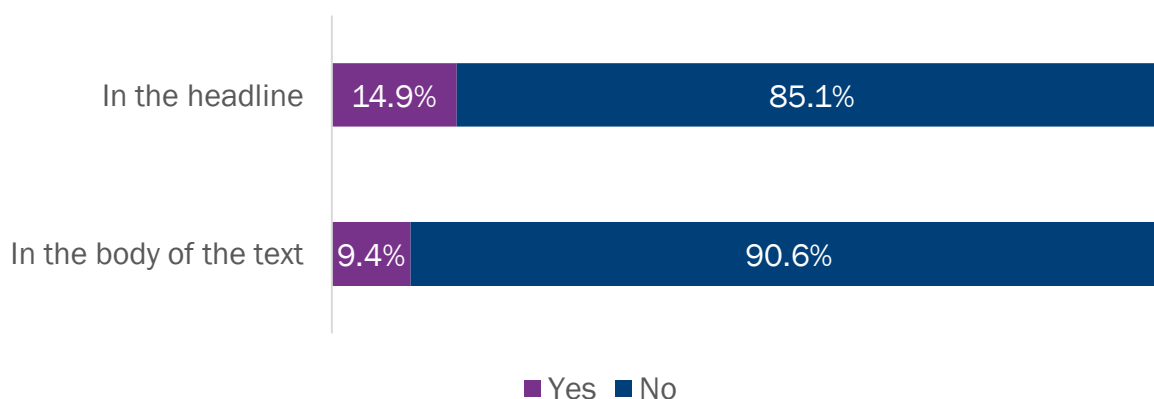
The analysis of media reports and comments also provides a basis for developing strategies and campaigns that may raise awareness about the problem, educate the public and encourage changes in behaviour and attitudes. For example, through identifying most frequent types of violence and platforms where it occurs, we can develop specific tools and approaches for combating them.

In order to try to understand these topics better, all articles that we collected, as articles that in the six-month period written directly or indirectly about one of 13 women politicians, were coded so that we can follow if they contain abundance of sensationalism, prejudice and if the journalists who wrote them use stereotypes about women, if the articles comment physical appearance of a woman politician, her private life, and in the end if the journalists in Montenegrin media use gender-sensitive language when writing about Montenegrin politicians.

We analysed the total of 4156 texts from portals (the analysis includes comments from the following portals: Portal Analitika, Antena M, Borba, CDM, IN4S, RTCG, and portal Vijesti).

We firstly focused on sensationalism in media coverage. Sensationalism, for the purposes of this research, is defined as using provocative, overly dramatic or sensational headlines/ elements in the text that often aim at attracting attention of the readers and increasing the number of clicks to the news, i.e. text in the portal.

Figure 60 Are sensational elements present in ...?



When writing about women politicians, media in the portals, in as many as 15% of cases, use sensational headlines. In addition to this, one in ten articles contains an element of sensationalism in the text.

The headlines like “Draginja Vuksanović Stanković is waging a lion battle“ or „Revamp chetnik action of Vesna Bratić“ are only some of the headlines that we identified as an overly naïve attempt of dramatization or exaggeration in the headline with a view to attracting readers. It is similar with the elements of sensationalism in the texts, where *inter alia* we can read the following:

- › „With a strange string of destiny Dubravka and Draginja were embraced by Njegoš’s philosophical syntagm that “without fools of a dumb look bright minds could not shine”
- › “they are victims of propaganda terror because they had the courage to oppose revamped fascism and to give an example through their fight how the values of civic, secular and multi-cultural society are defended in a dignified and consistent manner.”

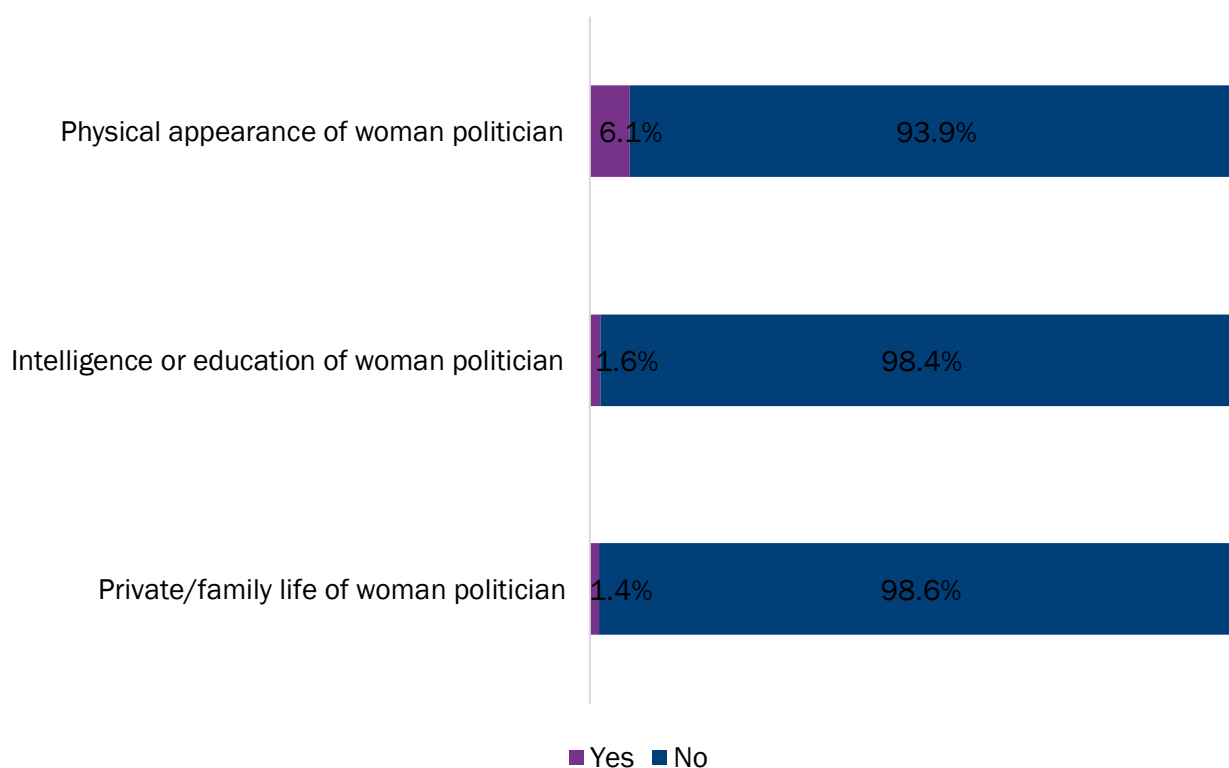
This trend of sensationalism, both in headlines and in the texts, may have broad and long-term consequences on the perception of political figures and on the political discourse in Montenegro. It

can lead to superficial understanding of political issues, where attention of the public is diverted from more important to less important aspects, frequently with a view to attracting broader audience and to the detriment of high-quality information for the public.

Sensationalism is much more present than stereotypes in the society. While sensationalism aims at attracting attention of the readers through dramatization and exaggeration, stereotypes serve as simplified, frequently negative associations that are attributed to a woman politician and can influence perception of that or all woman politicians in the eyes of the readers.

In only three percent of cases, journalists used stereotypes when they wrote about women politicians. Most frequent examples include calling Vesna Bratić a “woman chetnik” or when they write about women politicians using the terms “woman, wife, mother, politician”. This type of referencing women politicians first through their gender roles (like “woman, wife, mother”) before then their professional role is mentioned (“politician”) illustrates how stereotypes can be used for diminishing or discrediting women in politics. This language does not only devalue professional qualifications and achievements of women, but also contributes to maintaining gender-based expectations and barriers in political life. A huge difference between readers commenting in portals and in Facebook and the journalists writing about women politicians can be seen in the three indicators given in the following Figure.

Figure 61 Does the text discuss ...?



Much less than the citizens who comment, journalists write about intelligence or education of women politicians (1.6%) or private /family life of women politicians (1.4%). A bit more frequently they write

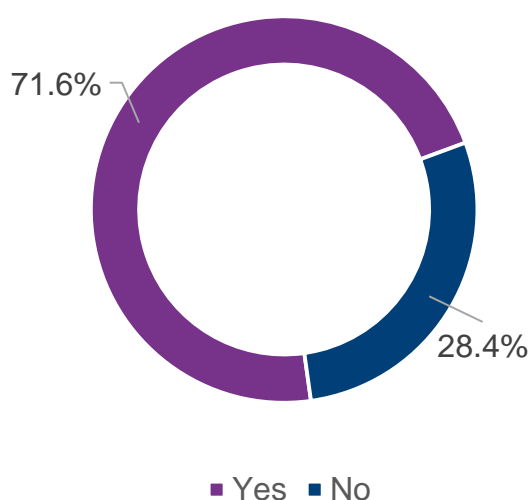
about physical appearance of women politicians (6.1%), which indicates to the presence of certain stereotypes and gender-based bias, even among journalists.

In addition to this, in 3% of texts we have noticed that journalists also tend to undermine successes of women politicians in Montenegro. This is most frequently seen in how they belittle the progress that women politicians make, in the allegations that question how women politicians made it to a certain position. A typical example is “although it is not quite clear how she came from the position of a senior adviser to the position of a Director General of the Directorate for Labour.” This shows an intention to degrade professional successes of women politicians or to question if they can indeed make progress using their knowledge and abilities and get a high position thanks to their professional engagement.

Montenegrin journalists often use certain expressions to insult women politicians or certain inappropriate language. This can be seen in the columns where women politicians are often insulted directly (“the female leader of the cocaine Belvedere gangs” or “she is worthy of an adviser to a weather forecaster, and not for this high position”). Still, offences and inappropriate language are most frequently indirectly written about woman politicians, or they can be read clearly in the tone of the text or the manner in which it was written. These phenomena also aim at diminishing significance of women politicians in Montenegro and question the possibility that women can give a contribution to Montenegrin society through engagement in politics.

In the end, we also analysed if gender-sensitive language is used in reporting about women politicians. In a large majority of cases, journalists indeed use gender-sensitive language (like “političarka” (woman politician), “ministarka” (women minister) or “liderka” (woman leader)). In as many as 71.6% of cases journalists use gender-sensitive language, while in almost a third of analysed texts gender-sensitive language is not used.

Figure 62 Is gender-sensitive language used?



This finding shows that, in reporting, there is a positive trend towards a more inclusive and more just approach in the media. Using gender-sensitive expressions like "političarka", "ministarka" or "liderka" helps in recognizing and affirming women political figures, which contributes to diversity and equality in public space. However, the finding that almost one third of analysed texts do not use gender-sensitive language shows that there is a need for further progress in this field. The lack of gender sensitive language can result in an unfair or incomplete presentation of women political leaders, which can influence perception of their role and contribution to the society.

We should also have in mind that these texts are about women politicians, where probability that journalists will use gender-sensitive language is higher.

Desktop research

Violence against women in politics is a concerning issue, and this analysis aims at contextualizing it and providing data against it in Montenegro. Relying on the best practices from all around the world, we aim at articulating recommendations that can efficiently mitigate and prevent violence, creating a secure and inclusive political environment for women in Montenegro.

In the field of politics, where various voices should be heard, the omnipresent question of violence against women remains a significant obstacle to democratic representation. This desktop research starts with the key examination in the specific context of Montenegro, with a view to meeting and eliminating multiple challenges that women in politics face. The overarching goal is to rely on the best global practices, learn from successful strategies applied in different countries and create in that way tailored recommendations for cherishing secure and inclusive political environment for women in Montenegro.

Bleak reality of violence against women in Montenegrin political sphere demands meticulous attention. Cases of harassment, threats and discriminatory practice often create an environment that silences participation of women in political discourse. Violence against women in politics is a significant obstacle to full participation of women in election processes and broader political engagement. In Montenegro, Women's Political Network (WPN) cooperated with the parliament of Montenegro and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on organizing conferences dedicated to violence against women in politics.⁹ The research presented in this meeting by WPN revealed alarming statistics which shows that 9 out of 10 women politicians in Montenegro have experienced gender discrimination while 7 out of 10 have experienced some form of violence related to their political engagement. To understand how serious these challenges are, we will start our research by a detailed overview of the existing published sources, trying to detect the subtle nuances and prevailing patterns that characterise violence against women in the political landscape in Montenegro. This research recognizes the urgency to adopt a comprehensive approach to solving

⁹ "Conference on violence against women in politics". (2021) Parliament of Montenegro website. Retrieved: <https://www.skupstina.me/en/articles/conference-on-violence-against-women-in-politics-2>

the issue of violence against women in politics. Obstacles that women face go beyond physical violence and include psychological trauma, system discrimination and an increasing threat of online harassment, particularly given the technological advancement in the artificial intelligence (AI) area. Urgency does not only refer to setting the diagnosis, but also to prescribing effective solutions in line with the social and political tissue of Montenegro. In the search for such solutions, a comparative analysis of the best practices in the world serves as a beacon. Every country can offer examples of successes and challenges, providing a precious insight into the range of strategies that are used. From firm legislative frameworks and support policies, to innovative campaigns for raising awareness and joint engagements, the global landscape offers an abundance of experiences that can be used for strengthening Montenegro's response to violence against women in politics.

Doing this research, we do not only strive for presenting a critical analysis of the problem, but also to being architects of change. Recommendations stemming from this research will be thoroughly elaborated, given the complex political, cultural, and social dynamics of Montenegro. Our goal is to provide implementable strategies that overcome theory, ensuring that they are not only theoretically sound, but pragmatically implementable. Urgency of this endeavour cannot be overrated. Since Montenegro aspires to have a political landscape that reflects genuine diversity of its population, dealing with violence against women in politics has become not only a moral imperative but also a strategic necessity. Going through the best world practices and weaving them into the tissue of the unique context of Montenegro, we want to contribute to transformation of Montenegro's political sphere into a safe, empowering and genuinely representative one for all voices.

Mapping the Concept of Violence against Women in Politics

To be able to go deeper into the possible remedies for eliminating violence against women in politics, it is important to have an overview of the history behind this concept. This research, therefore relies on Mona Lena Krook and her article "Global Feminist Cooperations and the Concept of Violence against Women in Politics".¹⁰ Her research explores the global rise of the concept of violence against women in politics, emphasizing its diverse origin in Bolivia, Asia and Kenia. Developed on the basis of efforts of elected women in Bolivia in late 1990s, initiatives of networking all around Asia in mid 2000s and response of Kenia to the election gender-based violence in late 2000s, this concept attracted international attention at the end of 2000s and beginning of 2010s. This article underlines the key role of the formation of this concept in the global feminist politics, illustrating thus how cooperation and recognition of women's experience are key to initiating changes.

Furthermore, Krook says that, in South Asia, discussions about violence against women in politics started in 2006, encouraged by the project "South Asia Partnership International". Regional conferences in 2007, 2008 and 2009 dealt with the widespread discrimination and violence that women in politics are faced with. With the support of international stakeholders, like UN Development

¹⁰ Krook, M.L. (2019). GLOBAL FEMINIST COLLABORATIONS AND THE CONCEPT OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS. *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 2, pp. 77-94

Fund and National Democratic Institute, these conferences contributed to wording the Kathmandu Declaration in 2008, inviting for zero tolerance for violence against women in politics. The conferences that followed in 2008 and 2009 were focused on laws, policies, role of the media, and global actions for fighting against this problem.

In Kenia, the concept of gender-based violence in the elections arose from the response to violence against female candidates and voters during the elections in 2007. The case of parliamentary female candidate Flora Terah, who survived a brutal attack, caused strong attention. After that, the Unit for Rapid Response to Election Gender-Based Violence was established with the support of UNIFEM to provide medical support, counselling about trauma and legal support to the survivors. This concept evolved into a comprehensive approach that includes legislation, training and raising awareness campaigns, showing the importance of dealing with gender-based violence in the election context.

Krook's article ends by emphasizing the critical role of international cooperation and feminist politics in shaping the discourse on violence against women in politics. South-Asian initiatives and Kenia's response illustrate the power of collective efforts in raising awareness, developing framework and mobilization for changes in the global fight against gender-based violence in politics.

Best Practices and Recommendations for Eliminating Violence against Women in Politics

Interparliamentary union set the guidelines for eliminating sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments.¹¹ The document describes a three-step strategic approach aimed at eliminating sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments, emphasizing the critical role of the committed management, policy development and fundamental implementation. Guidelines propose a plan in three steps.

The first step is mobilization for action. This fundamental step includes mobilization of political will of the parliamentary management against any tolerance of sexism, harassment or violence. This commitment is manifested through establishment of inter-party, gender-balanced working group with the task to transform parliamentary environment into a safe space with respect. The group is implementing a comprehensive assessment of the existing legal frameworks, policies and complaint mechanisms, ensuring compliance with national and international obligations. It is important that data are collected and used in the assessments of how to prevent various forms of sexist behaviour and gender-based violence, addressing obstacles in reporting.

The second step demands inclusion of standards in politics. This step focuses on development of and agreement on new standards incorporated into a solid parliamentary work-place policy. The

¹¹ Guidelines for the elimination of sexism, harassment and violence ... (n.d.-b).
<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reference/2019-11/guidelines-elimination-sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliament>

policy covers critical elements, including the set goals, delineated roles and responsibilities, allocated budget funds and monitoring and evaluation processes. It clearly outlines prohibited behaviours, covers all categories of parliamentary staff, and establishes preventive measures, support services and efficient mechanisms for addressing complaints. The policy includes disciplinary sanctions, ensuring accountability for proven cases of harassment or violence.

The last step focuses on active implementation of the policy. Communication becomes crucial, and members of the parliament are invited to align their activities with the principles of this policy. Programme for raising awareness and training for safety in the workplace, health and fight against sexism, harassment and violence is adopted and potentially mandatory. Confidential support and counselling services for victims are provided to deal with medical, psychological, and legal aspects. Special security measures refer to protection of those who are exposed to threats or violence. Continuous improvement of work-place culture, allocating sufficient resources, as well as regular monitoring and evaluation make constituent components of this step.

Additionally, another issue that should be put in focus is the issue of violence against women in politics that is increasingly present during the elections, where women who run for offices are more visible in public. Elections constitute a key opportunity for dealing with violence against women in politics, since the increased visibility of women participation often coincides with an increase in the number of cases of violence. This is most prominently presented in the guidelines of “UN Women” on prevention of violence against women in politics.¹² After parliamentary elections in Lebanon in 2018, in which a historical number of women run as candidates, “UN Women” published interviews with these women to document their experience. These interviews were comprised into a report with the title *Implementing Equality in Representation Rights: Experience of Women in Parliamentary Elections in Lebanon in 2018*. Through post-election interviews, “UN Women” collected data that show that a significant number of women candidates experienced violence in politics. To be more precise, the report revealed that about two thirds of interviewees, which is 87% out of 113 women who registered as candidates, reported that they experienced psychological violence. This form of violence included threats, verbal abuse and sexual harassment on the Internet.

Addressing violence against women in politics is crucial in the attempts to achieve gender equality in political representation and decision-making. Report of the Political Party Peer Network¹³ presents interventions that political parties can make to prevent and eliminate violence against women in politics with a view to increasing participation and representation of women in politics and decision-making processes. Political parties play an important role in political participation of women and protection from violence. In spite of the perception that political violence happens between competing parties, studies reveal that party colleagues are frequently the perpetrators. Loyalty and election dynamics frequently put pressure on women to conceal cases of violence, which hampers their full political participation. Recognizing violence against women politicians as violation of human rights is an imperative, which encourages efficient solutions. The document of the Political Party Peer

¹² UN Women. (2021) Guidance Note Preventing Violence against Women in Politics.

¹³ Political Party Peer Network. (2022). Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics. Benchmarks for Political Parties.

Network provides key recommendations for political parties to strengthen inclusive efforts and support participation of women. This includes increase of women participation in party structures, addressing violence against women in politics in party regulations and creating mechanisms for monitoring and support. During the elections, political parties are responsible for ensuring security of their candidates. Proactive measures before, during and after elections are of key importance for preventing and mitigating violence against women in politics. Pre-election actions include establishment of gender-based balanced pre-election teams, implementation of security planning and development of strategies for combating violence against women in politics. During the campaign, parties should support female candidates in public, sanction perpetrators of violence and provide legal and financial support. Post-election efforts should focus on condemning violence against women in politics, ensuring disciplinary measures for perpetrators and providing continuous support to female candidates.

In addition to this, this comparative overview goes deeper into the strategies adopted by several countries and international bodies for addressing and preventing harassment in parliamentary environment. Analysis of the initiatives from France, Costa Rica, Finland, Sweden, Republic of Korea, European Parliament, and Canada provides a rich range of approaches in dealing with this widespread issue.

French National Assembly shows a pro-active attitude by including a particular module on harassment into the initial training sessions for MPs and new assistants in the parliament, in the beginning of every term of office. This reflects the commitment to ensuring harassment-free workplaces through early training and awareness raising. Costa Rica, Finland, and Sweden are showing joint commitment to dealing with psychological and sexual harassment by including relevant trainings in the process of orientation for parliamentary staff after employment. This underlines the importance of embedding the culture of respect and professionalism from the very beginning of individual careers of MPs. In the Republic of Korea, People's Parliament has a comprehensive approach in organizing three-month trainings for MPs and staff. In addition to mandatory participation of staff and adapted structure based on categories of staff, this initiative ensures that all individuals within the parliamentary ecosystem can get a consistent, targeted training for combating harassment. European Parliament is adopting a multi-faceted strategy, organizing special courses for preventing inappropriate behaviour and harassment. These courses are intended for all members of staff, and they provide tools for recognizing, preventing, and combating psychological and sexual harassment. Managers get additional training for solving these problems within their teams, showing dedication to creating workplace environment of respect and professionalism. Furthermore, EP is developing tailored courses for MEPs on managing and recruiting staff, recognizing unique responsibilities and dynamics within the parliamentary offices.

This comparative research reveals a global puzzle of efforts in fighting harassment within parliaments. Various approaches, ranging from integrated training modules to online sessions, emphasize the joint commitment to cherishing honest, inclusive, and harassment-free parliamentary environment. As the countries keep learning from each other and from other experience and adapting the strategies to their unique contexts, this collective effort serves as a testimony of dedication of

international community to eradication of harassment from workplaces in the parliaments. This strategic approach does not only deal with direct problems, but also tries to transform parliamentary culture. Cherishing safe environment with respect aligns with broader efforts to promote gender equality and wellbeing in parliamentary environment. These steps provide a comprehensive roadmap for parliaments globally, encouraging cooperation, sharing experience, and spreading the best practices for wellbeing of women in politics.

Combating Violence against Women in Canadian Politics: Case Study

This case study tackles recommendations proposed on the basis of an analysis of the current state of affairs in the field of violence against women in Canadian politics.¹⁴ The report emphasizes the need for having systemic changes and cooperation between governments, legislative bodies, political parties, non-governmental organizations, companies, social media and Canadian public, to solve this deeply rooted problem. The study starts with identification of multiple factors that contribute to violence against women in politics including historical, social, and institutional norms. It emphasizes how androcentric, colonial, racist, homophobic, transphobic, sexist, competent and agism-oriented systems of belief reflect violence in political workplaces. The Report underlines the influence of expressly party legislative bodies dominated by men, emphasizing the need for change of culture and more diversity in political representation.

The first recommendation invites the Government of Canada to adopt UN resolution that affirms the efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls in politics. This includes incorporation of a new violation in the election legislation to prohibit intimidation, particularly threats by sexual violence. In addition to this, the report proposes research in how companies of social media can play a role in combating violence against women in politics on the Internet.

The study proposes explicit politics for combating sexual harassment in workplaces in the parliaments, monitored by an independent body to ensure impartiality. These politics should cover the entire parliamentary community, including staff, contractors, trainees, volunteers, and others. The Report also advocates a clear definition of violence against women in politics and revision of parliamentary rules that contribute to sexist culture.

Political parties are invited to adopt internal policies that prohibit sexual harassment, including clear provisions and procedures. The recommendations also invite the parties to take a public stand against violence, prohibit known harassers from running for office or take a function and to implement strategies for recruiting different candidates.

¹⁴ Raney, T., Collier, C. N., Lore, G., & Spender, A. (2023). Democracy during #MeToo: Taking Stock of Violence Against Women in Canadian Politics. <https://doi.org/10.32920/23992578>

The study emphasizes a need for strong, intersectional research on violence against women in politics that would deal with the lack of data and standard indicators. In order to follow the given recommendations and to understand if they have any influence on combating violence against women in politics, indicators have to be monitored. We encourage cooperation between communities of advocates, including public campaigns, promises of candidates and public opinion polls. This case study emphasizes an urgent need for a comprehensive and joint action in combating violence against women in Canadian politics. The recommendations provide a roadmap for systemic changes and collective efforts to create political environment that is safe, inclusive and free from gender based violence.

Specific Recommendations for the Case of Montenegro

Lately, the issue of violence against women in politics is increasingly recognized as a significant obstacle for the full and equal participation of women in political processes worldwide. In spite of steps towards gender equality, women keep facing various forms of violence, coercion and intimidation when they aspire to or take a political function. As many other countries, Montenegro fights with this omnipresent challenge that does not only undermine democratic principles of equality and representation, but also jeopardizes fundamental rights and security of women in politics. Recognizing urgency of addressing violence against women in politics, this report presents a comprehensive set of recommendations tailored specifically for Montenegro.

Relying on the best international practices and insights of experts, these recommendations offer strategic ways to combat violence against women in politics and create inclusive and more just political environment. From strengthening of legal framework to raising of awareness, capacity building and provision of support services, every recommendation is designed to deal with violence against women in politics in a comprehensive and systemic way. Implementation of these recommendations gives Montenegro an opportunity to improve participation and representation of women in politics, ensuring in that that their rights and dignity are preserved. Furthermore, addressing violence against women in politics is not only a question of justice and human rights, but also the key step towards building of a more democratic and more inclusive society. As such, the concerted efforts of political leaders, civil society organizations and other stakeholders are of essential importance for achieving significant changes and creating political landscape where all individuals, regardless of their sex, may fully exercise their rights and contribute to the progress of the nation.

Strengthening Legal and Political Framework

Adoption of comprehensive legislation specific for violence against women in politics is of key importance for providing clear legal means for victims and for ensuring accountability of perpetrators. Such laws should not only define various forms of violence but should also establish strict punishments and protection measures. In addition to this, strong policies within political parties and government institutions are of essential importance for setting clear guidelines for prevention and

solution of violence against women in politics, including the protocols for reporting incidents and mechanisms for investigation and sanctioning of perpetrators. These policies should be regularly revised and updated so that they reflect challenges and best development practices. These laws should reflect technological progress and include revisions for protection of women from violence on the web caused by AI technologies and use of “deepfakes” in images and/or videos. British MP Vicky Ford in her article¹⁵ deals with the concerning increase of violence against women in politics, deterioration in spread of abuse on the Internet and potential influences of artificial intelligence on democracy. Ford underlines an alarming trend in the Internet threats that target politicians, particularly women, which does not only discourage women from participating in politics, but also undermines democratic principles. She underlines the need for updating measures for addressing violence against women in politics, demands introduction of new protection measures in the United Kingdom and drafting of the law on security on the Internet. The law on security on the Internet, presented by the United Kingdom is the bill aimed at regulating internet platforms to ensure more secure online environment for the users, particularly when it comes to harmful contents and offensive behaviours. The law endeavours to invite social network companies to be responsible for the contents shared in their platforms and to impose stricter measures for combating harmful internet activities.

In Latin America, Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (1994) serves as a corner stone for protection of political rights of women, as defined in Article 5. After ratifying this convention, the countries in the region embarked on comprehensive legal reforms to address violence against women with some extended criminal laws that include special provisions about criminal offences of violence against women. In 2021 Bolivia, namely, adopted the first law in the world dedicated to the fight against violence against women in politics, known as the Law no. 243. This important law defines 17 different acts of violence against women in politics and imposes sanctions, establishing at the same time mechanisms for monitoring and supervising its implementation, like National Observatory for Gender Issues. Following the example of Bolivia, Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) published a model law and protocol for political parties in 2017, relying on regional experience. Although Argentina and Salvador recognize the phenomenon of political violence, it is not explicitly defined as harassment or gender-based violence in their laws. However, other countries like Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay have integrated political violence in their laws on gender-based violence, and Ecuador even classified violence against women in politics as an election violation in 2020, signalling thus the increasingly strong recognition of this problem worldwide.

Awareness and Education

All around the world, campaigns for raising awareness play a vital role in changing attitudes in societies towards violence against women in politics and in encouraging support to gender equality. These campaigns should target various stakeholders, including the political ones, as well as civil

¹⁵ Ai-4/5: On violence against women in politics, identify best practice ... (n.d.-a).
<https://www.ipu.org/news/voices/2023-11/ai-45-violence-against-women-in-politics-identify-best-practice-and-share-it>

society organizations, media and public, using various media like television, radio, and social networks for extending communities. Furthermore, integrating training on gender equality and violence against women in politics in school curricula helps embedding the values of respect, equality and no violence from a very young age, contributing to a long term cultural change.

Several countries have undertaken steps for raising awareness and solving the problems of harassment and political violence within their own parliaments. In Austria, MPs and staff may get confidential advice from independent experts, with the focus on prevention and building the environment with respect through raising awareness campaigns. Bolivia established special parliamentary committee against harassment and political violence, with the support of international organizations, contributing thus to raising awareness. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, municipality of Stari Grad, amended its code of ethics in order to prohibit sexual harassment, with a view to raising awareness about this issue among the selected officials and public. Canada adopted the Code of Conducts for the members of the House of Commons aimed at raising awareness about sexual harassment and promoting harassment-free environment through educational initiatives. In France, the Senate amended its Rules of Procedures and adopted the plan against harassment, emphasizing raising awareness campaigns to promote respectful behaviour and to prevent harassment. These initiatives underline the importance of raising awareness about creation of a more secure environment with more respect within the parliament institutions.

Building Capacities

Comprehensive training programmes are of essential importance for equipping members of political parties, election officials, law enforcement agencies and judicial staff with knowledge and skills required for addressing violence against women in politics in an efficient manner. These programmes should cover the topics like recognizing various forms of violence, victim-sensitive response, implementation of preventive measures and implementation of relevant laws and policies. Specialised training for women politicians should focus on strengthening their awareness about security, building resilience, and providing practical tools for moving safely in political spaces.

Findings of the National Democratic Institute (NDI)¹⁶ reveal that women in political parties are more frequently exposed to various forms of violence than men, particularly on the municipal level where psychological and economic violence prevail. As women progress within the party hierarchy, the cases of violence tend to grow. Male party colleagues and party leadership are identified as key perpetrators of violence against women. In spite of the fact that mechanisms for reporting exist within the parties, they are frequently perceived as difficult to access and inefficient, which leads to the situation that a significant part of violence remains unreported. Women usually report incidents internally to party authorities instead of requesting an external intervention by the police. Party leaderships are invited to take more responsibility and deal with these issues more efficiently.

¹⁶ "No Party to Violence: Analyzing Violence against Women in Political Parties". (2018). National Democratic Institute (NDI). Retrieved: https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/NDI_No_Party_to_Violence_ReportFinal.pdf

Green Party of Finland implemented comprehensive measures and tools for combating violence against women in politics, which strengthened the process of capacity building within this political party. These initiatives¹⁷ include prevention, protection, reporting and individual responses to violence. Through measures like contracts with candidates obliging them to non-discriminatory campaign, trainings on security and security for candidates, as well as through sessions on security on the Internet, the party increases capacity of its members to recognize, prevent and react to violence. Furthermore, establishing safe spaces within the party events and provision of online support additionally contribute to building of a supportive environment and inclusion within the party. In addition to this, certain points for reporting within the party, guidelines for reporting violence on the web and referring victims to external support services facilitate the reporting process and ensure that victims can get appropriate support. Adopting these measures, the Green Party of Finland shows its proactive approach to dealing with violence against women in politics and encourages capacity building within political parties to create more secure and more inclusive spaces for all members.

Data Collection and Research:

Comprehensive research and data collection are of essential importance for accurate understanding of the spread and dynamic of violence against women in politics in Montenegro. This includes polls, interviews and focus groups to collect qualitative and quantitative data about experiences that women have in politics. Establishing systemic mechanisms for monitoring and reporting ensures continuous monitoring of incidents and trends, information on evidence-based policy development and targeted interventions. In addition to this, findings of the research should be widely shared to raise awareness and mobilize support for dealing with violence against women in politics in an efficient manner.

Systematic collection of data ensures identification of patterns and trends related to violence against women in politics. Through surveys, interviews and other research methods, scientists may get and share insights into the frequency, types, perpetrators, and contexts of such violence. Analysing these data, stakeholders get a deeper understanding of the basic dynamics, enabling targeted interventions for dealing with specific forms of violence and their root causes. Findings of research serve as a critical basis for development of policies and laws aimed at dealing with violence against women in politics. Providing empirical evidence about the spread and influence of such violence, research provide information for articulation of legal frameworks and institutional responses. Research findings serve as a powerful tool for advocacy done by organizations and activists who work on combating violence against women in politics. Empirical evidence may support advocacy campaigns and lobbying efforts, as well as mobilise stakeholders to take actions. Presenting compelling evidence about the spread and consequences of violence, advocates may give a convincing argument for changes in politics, allocation of resources or institutional reform to solve this critical issue.

¹⁷ OSCE . (n.d.). (publication). Addressing Violence against Women in POLITICAL PARTIES . Retrieved from chrome-extension://efaidnbnmnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/d/532193_1.pdf.

Collecting data and research play fundamental role in combating violence against women in politics. As we keep coping with this multi-faceted challenge, the approaches based on information from research offer a path to better gender equality, democratic governance and respect for human rights in political spaces worldwide.

Conclusion

Violence against women in politics constitutes a global problem that is often just a consequence of deeply rooted gender inequality in the society and numerous structural barriers that hamper women's full political participation and leadership. This research elaborates in detail the various aspects and dynamics of this type of violence in Montenegro's political context, providing insights into its causes, manifestations, and consequences. Although there is a progress in terms of increasing the number of women in politics, the results show that this increase does not guarantee reduction in violence against women in politics. The practice shows that it is rather opposite frequently, and that more women in politics may mean more "targets" in public space.

Gender roles and stereotypes are firmly rooted in Montenegro, which has its impact on the perception of women's capacities to be political leaders. Attitudes that favour traditional role of women as mothers and housewives, and prejudice about the alleged lower competences of women for politics and leadership, contribute to development of a hostile environment for women in politics. These attitudes do not only marginalize women but expose them to a higher risk of violence and discrimination.

Online violence stands out as a particularly important challenge in the modern digitalized society, where social networks and media platforms become arenas for expressing aggression and spreading negative narratives about women in politics. This type of violence is not only a direct threat to security and well-being of individuals, but it also undermines the foundations of the democratic discourse, freedom of expression and equal political participation.

Media representation of women in politics plays a key role in shaping public opinion about their role in politics. Critical analysis of media coverage shows that media frequently contribute to sensationalism, stereotypes, and gender biased reporting, which can additionally normalize violence against women in politics.

Protection of women in politics from violence requires a multi-disciplinary approach that includes legislative reforms, building of institutional capacities, education programmes and campaigns for raising public awareness. It is necessary to create strong mechanisms for protection of and support to victims and to promote culture of zero tolerance to all forms of violence.

It is important to underline that combating violence against women in politics is not only a question of protection of individual women's rights, but an essential aspect of building a more democratic, more inclusive, and more just society. Increased political participation of women and their protection

from violence contributes not only to gender equality but also to strengthening of democratic institutions, improved quality of political decision-making and promotion of overall development of the society.

The abundance of data in this report invite to urgent and coordinated action of all sectors of the society – from government, political parties, judicial bodies, and media outlets to civil society and international community.

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