



Women's Participation in Political Decision-Making in Albania: Current Challenges and Expectations for the Future: The Case of Durrës and Tirana Regions

Belina Bedini

Elda Zotaj

Aleksandër Moisiu University

Received: 05 May 2022 / Accepted: 16 May 2023 / Published: 20 May 2023
© 2023 Belina Bedini and Elda Zotaj

Doi: 10.56345/ijrdv10n1s131

Abstract

The gender index of 2020, is showing that Albania is placed under the European average with 60.4 points. On the other hand, Albania has been implementing for nearly ten years, the law on gender equity, where the participation of women up to 30% in the decision-making and executive bodies, is assured through the female quota system elections. As a result, the country today has a considerable level of women's representation in political decision-making, like 30% in parliament, while in the government women mark the majority at 57%. In this paper, we aim to discover what are the challenges that women in politics are facing. Are they fulfilling the mission in terms of positive effects on the quality of democracy? What is missing? Hence, the study will focus, firstly on the steps taken on women's participation in politics and relevant decision-making. The analysis will follow with the exploitation of the documents, such as laws, normative acts, and strategies on women's contribution to decision-making. In addition, through the literature review, the study will focus on the reasons women should be equally represented in politics, and what is expected from them in terms of a qualitative democracy. Moreover, through the qualitative methodology, we have interviewed 12 women that are actively engaged in political decision-making, at the national and local levels, in Durrës and Tirana regions. With the interviews, we will try to explore the challenges, the contribution, the mission and the perceptions of women in politics. In the conclusion section, we will identify the good practices that helped the political career of women and some recommendations for future improvement.

Keywords: Albania, women's participation, decision-making, politics, gender-equity

1. Introduction

Albania published the first gender equality index in January 2020, where the country's score is 60.4 points, marking the country's position below the average value of the European Union-28 countries. Nevertheless, Albania has a high result in the field of power compared not only to the countries of the region but also to the average of the European Union. For instance, according to the index measuring the power of women in parliament, in minister's positions and municipal councils, Albania has 60.9 points which is higher than the European average of 51.9. Indeed, in the minister's position, there are 57% of women, while 35.9% of women are members of municipal councils, while in the parliament the result is lower as there is 30%.¹ These achievements are a result of legislation measurements, like the Electoral Code, where Article 4, defines the obligation of the political parties to include no less than 30% of unrepresented gender (women) in

¹INSTAT, *Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Albania, 2020*, pg. 20-21
https://www.instat.gov.al/media/6657/gender_equality_index_for_the_republic_of_albania_2020_alb.pdf

their candidates' lists for parliamentary and municipal council elections.² Therefore, statistics show that the representation of women in parliament has had a huge impact, considering that in 2000 there were only 7% of women and in 2021 there are 35.7% or 50 out of 140 members.³

Other positive results can be considered the fact that the second most important institutional position, the Head of Parliament is held by a woman, and a woman has directed one of the three most important political parties for 4 years, another woman is holding the position of deputy head at the second biggest party in the country, and a woman is pointed as head of negotiations for the European integration of the country.

Hence, the good results of the inclusion of women in the decision-making process pushed the Albanian government to establish as a strategic objective the reinforcement of social attitudes and behaviours that encourage the participation, representation and equal leadership of women and men, young women and young men, girls and boys from all groups in political and public decision-making at the local level.⁴

However, it is noted that Albania achieved the 30% of women representation in 2017, but this level didn't increase later, while other Western Balkan Countries are increasing women's participation constantly like Kosovo which passed the level of 32% in 2020, Serbia in 38% and North Macedonia in 40%.⁵ Indeed, the introduction of the rose quotas aimed to achieve the level of 50% of representation, and it seems like Albania is happy enough with the 30%. The same situation is shown in the municipal councils, where we see a representation of 35% or 555 women out of 1040 of a total number of members of 61 municipal councils, but still, none of them could be elected heads of municipal councils. On the other hand, results that all over the country there are only 15% of women Mayors, and the records haven't changed since 2015.⁶ Additionally, the last local elections of May 2013 show that the number of female mayors has decreased to 13%, while the percentage of women as members of the municipal councils in our study area (Durrës, Tirana) has reached approximately 50%.⁷ While, Kosovo, Serbia and North Macedonia are making progress, from the institutional point of view, by defining 40% of women quotas in the case of Serbia and 50% as a political initiative, in the case of North Macedonia.⁸

2. Theoretical Framework

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights defines in Article 21 that people have equal rights to participate in government, even though without specifying between genders.⁹ A significant step forward from the international community was the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW in 1979, which highlights the engagement of the states to fight the inequality between women and men in participation in public and political life, from the right to vote to representation to decision-making.¹⁰ In addition, the UN action, continued the effort for equity between women and men in political decision-making, finalizing the Declaration of Beijing in 1995 at the Fourth World Conference on Women, where was recommended to the states adopt initiatives of positive discrimination policies, like the quota system election and training for women in politics.¹¹ In the past twenty years more than 118 countries, including Albania have introduced the gender quota, to improve the presence of women in parliament and other decision-making bodies. Furthermore, the fifth goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development defines the equality achievement and empowerment of women and girls, specifically (point 5.5) in leadership levels of decision-making in

²Law 10019/29.12.2008, *Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania, Article 4*;
<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/7/477547.pdf>

³Law 9970/24.07.2008 *On Gender Equity in the Republic of Albania, Article 15*
https://www.mod.gov.al/images/PDF/barazia_gjinore_shoqeri.pdf

⁴ INSTAT, data 2021

⁵ Albanian National Strategy for Gender Equity 2021-2030, specific objective II.2, pg. 34-35

⁶ Kvinna Till Kvinna Foundation, *Të drejtat e grave në Ballkanin Perëndimor*,
https://kvinnaatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/KvinnaatillKvinna_WRinWB-2020-ALB.pdf, p. 12

⁷ https://kvinnaatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/KvinnaatillKvinna_WRinWB-2020-ALB.pdf, p. 15

⁸ Komisioni Qendror i Zgjedhjeve, KQZ www.kqz.al

⁹ https://kvinnaatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/KvinnaatillKvinna_WRinWB-2020-ALB.pdf, p. 18

¹⁰ UN, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, art. 21

<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

¹¹ Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW, art. 4.7, 8

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>

¹¹ UN: *Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, with particular emphasis on political participation and leadership*, Expert Group Meeting, 2005 <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/index.html>

political, economic and public life.¹² Nevertheless, women only in 46 (out of 195) countries hold 30% of the seats in parliament.

Likewise, gender equity between women and men in all fields of life is one of the fundamental rights of the European Union and it is emphasised in the Treaty of Rome in 1957 as a condition for justice.¹³ Throughout its history, the EU has focused continuously and consistently on gender equity. Hence, the gender equity index is the core document which analyses the situation of women in different fields where power is one of them and today's data shows that in the EU, only one in four parliament members is women. On the other hand, the EU Gender Equity Strategy 2020-2025 is strongly recommending to the states measure every progress based on gender equity progress.¹⁴ In addition, the Council of Europe in 2023 recommended the introduction of the zip system regarding women's representation in political decision-making, which means equal distribution of women and men in the candidates' lists.¹⁵

But why is important the equal participation of women and men in decision-making? What are the concrete effects that the participation of women can produce? First of all, scholars agree that the absence of women in decision-making and politics generates male-oriented politics which is dangerous, especially in traditional societies where women are seen only in the traditional roles of housekeepers.¹⁶ Theoretically speaking, the participation of women in the decision-making process is the key to a growing and more qualitative democracy. In addition, it would bring more creativity, diversification of talents, motivation and competencies. Moreover, societies will be more secure and economic prosperity would be stronger if more women are involved in political decision-making at all levels of government.¹⁷ The EU admits that the equal participation of women in every field of life, including politics will increase the GDP per capita.¹⁸ In other words, more women in political decision-making can increase the public level of effectiveness and accountability in the country.¹⁹ From a human perspective, women are natural managers, they are less corrupt and more responsible.²⁰

Concretely, in developing countries, more than in developed countries, the participation of women in politics has produced positive effects regarding the provisions of public goods, especially those focused on education and health. In developing countries, the increase in female political representation has caused a better provision of public goods, especially concerning education and health.²¹

Nevertheless, research in other developing countries is showing that the increase in the number of women in parliament is not the only step to take for the improvement of democracy. Therefore, the author Ojha claims that just the presence of women in parliament is not enough and will not produce the hoped outcomes if the internal discipline of political parties will not change. Moreover, he assumes that women should be motivated to make the change happens, especially in increasing the focus on public spending for instance on education, the violence against women, and child labour.²² Similarly, the author Piscopo, argues that quotas introduction are just the beginning, which should be enforced by other initiatives like the gender balance in other important bodies like high juridical courts etc.²³ In other words, the quotas per se, are not the aim, but just a tool that works, in case those are followed by some enforcement mechanism, as

12 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>)

13 Treaty of Rome, 1957, art. 2

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12002E/TXT>

14 EU: A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152>

15 Council of Europe, Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making, 12.03.2023

https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805e0848

16 Women's Participation in Decision-Making. (1991). *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26(48), 2736–2737. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4398359>

17 World Economic Forum 2017

18 Economic benefits of gender equity in EU, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/economic-and-financial-affairs/economic-benefits-gender-equality>

19 UN, Woman participation in decision-making: why it matters? 20.12.2020

<https://www.undp.org/ghana/news/women%E2%80%99s-participation-decision-making-why-it-matters>,

20 KOTVI, NARAYAN S. "The Myth Of Gender Equity: WHY ARE WOMEN MISSING FROM POLITICS?" *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 5, no. 3 (2001): 51–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45064777>.

21 Zohal Hessami, Mariana Lopes da Fonseca, Female political representation and substantive effects on policies: A literature review, *European Journal of Political Economy*, Volume 63, 2020, 101896, ISSN 0176-2680, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2020.101896>

22 Ojha, S. (2009). RESERVATION OF WOMEN IN THE INDIAN PARLIAMENT: Lessons from other countries. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 70(2), 471–479. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42743910>

23 Piscopo, J. M. (2015). States as Gender Equality Activists: The Evolution of Quota Laws in Latin America. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 57(3), 27–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24765974>

is suggesting the author Schwind Bayern in a comparative study on different countries around the world.²⁴ Even in Latin America where the gender quota was introduced in the late 90's the effect of women's participation is still under discussion.²⁵ Likewise, comparative studies on the gender quota in Asia is showing that including more women in politics is not an automatic mechanism, but it depends on other factors like the social-cultural ones, the competitiveness of the electoral system etc. ²⁶ For instance, Zetterberg suggests that to have a wider panorama on the effect of women in political decision-making a deeper analysis of political women is necessary, the action they make, the results they are expecting and the concept they have on the job they are supposed to do.

3. Methodology

Having into consideration the fact that Albania has marked distinguished results, like in the case of government and municipal councils, but is showing stagnation or even a decrease in terms of women as Meyers and head of municipal council, we would like to emphasise what the factors that help or obstacle women in decision-making processes. For this reason, we have decided to deeply explore the highly active women in politics. By using the qualitative methodology, during a period of 2 months, respectively February – March 2022 we have interviewed 12 women who are members of parliament, members of municipal councils or heads of administrative units in municipalities in the zone of Durrës and Tirana. The choice of the territory lies in the fact that these zones are including almost 1/3 of the population, and represent the most relevant social-economically zones of Albania. The semi-structured interviews are realised face-to-face, and most of the women didn't agree to reveal their names and the political force they represent in the framework of this paper and of additional publication.

4. Challenges of Women in the Albanian Political Arena

Having into consideration the fact that the participation of women in politics is a complex issue in all countries, we tried to identify specifically the challenges that women in politics are facing in Albania, a transition country where gender equity is still an under-construction concept. On the other hand, we wanted to explore how women themselves are looking at their role as politicians. For this reason, we conducted 12 interviews with women that are active parts of politics in the region of Durrës and Tirana to provide information on their goals and path towards politics, as well as their challenges and perspective on the future. Hence, our interviews were structured in 16 open questions divided into three categories as follows: (i) the first group of enquiries explore the history of their political career, the pushing factors of their political participation etc; (ii) the second group of questions aim to explore the women's mission in politic engagement and the challenges they are facing in everyday political activities; (iii) and the third group of questions is about exploring the relationships with the male colleagues in terms of political career progress.

The results of the first set of questions showed that almost all the interviewees started their political careers in the local political structures in their cities of residence. Initially, they contributed as supporters, and then as members or activists of political parties, and afterwards step by step, they managed to succeed in relevant decision-making structures such as Parliament or municipal councils. On the other hand, they revealed that their main support for political engagement has been the family, members of the community and friends.

Regarding the question of what were the pushing factors for starting a political career result are showing that 91% of the interviewees wanted to contribute to society, the love for the country specially to give hope to the young generations. Indeed, our champion showed a responsibility to represent the young generation's hope and to bring a new approach to the political process.

In addition, to the question on how to define politics today, about 80% of the interviewees showed disappointment as they don't see politics as constructive but indeed harmed by the propaganda. On the other hand, they believe that part of politicians are involved in hidden businesses, and their interests connected to business are overpassing the general

24 SCHWINDT-BAYER, L. A. (2009). *Making Quotas Work: The Effect of Gender Quota Laws On the Election of Women*. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 34(1), 5–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20680225>

25 Zetterberg, P. (2009). *Do Gender Quotas Foster Women's Political Engagement? Lessons from Latin America*. *Political Research Quarterly*, 62(4), 715–730. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25594442>

26 Tan, N. (2016). *INTRODUCTION: Gender Reforms, Electoral Quotas, and Women's Political Representation in Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore*. *Pacific Affairs*, 89(2), 309–323. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24779632>

values that politics should represent. Nevertheless, 20% of the surveyed political women choose to be politically correct, as to the same question the answer was: “*Politics is the art of the impossible, which makes the impossible possible*”²⁷ or like: “*The politic should lead the country toward the future and not to turn it in the past. The politic should have in focus young generation*”.

Moreover, when the interviewees were asked how they could define their mission in politics, the majority of them, 60% highlighted that being a woman is a strength and not a limitation or weakness. Around 20% believed that their mission is transforming the realities by developing the country. Others, around 10 % see their mission as a duty to mitigate the migration of young generations and to gain back the young people to their homeland. Only, 10 % linked their mission to inspiring women and girls or giving a voice to women in need. Regarding the question “What are the obstacles you face today?” most of the interviewees admit that the prejudice against women in politics is strong. Likewise, they lack financial support in political activities within the parties they adhere. However, 75 % of the interviewees admit that a political career is not based on honest values and meritocracy, therefore they see it as a challenge for future advancement.

To the question of what would you change today for a better future and a generous activation of women, the answer is the mentality of the population in general and of women at the same time. Nevertheless, they admit that new personalities are necessary in politics. One of the interviewees stated that: “I would invite every woman who is in our field to join us because there is a place for every woman”.²⁸

In terms of women’s contribution to politics, they agree that the role of women and girls in politics is necessary but at the same time underused until now. They agree that both genders offer different values and perspectives in politics, and women and men should be equally respected. Nevertheless, some of the interviewees claimed that women offer empathy and arguments, while men are tended to conflict and tensions. Moreover, they affirm that men are favoured by political leaders in career progress and financial support. Additionally, mass media is not an ally in women’s promotion, on the contrary, they are not giving enough space to them.

Regarding the balance between career and family, women agree that they are facing challenges. On the other hand, they show some ambiguity about their future role in politics, but nevertheless, they do not show regret for being part of politics.

5. Conclusions

The inclusion of women in political decision-making in Albania is on the right track, showing some relevant results in specific aspects, compared to the other Western Balkan countries. Indeed, the country has managed properly the involvement of women in national, local and even the structures of EU integration processes. Hence, both ministers for European Affairs and the national negotiator’s positions are held by women. On the other hand, compared with the other WB countries, the ‘rose’ positions are not used to reserve seats for the male politicians, marking the political will to enforce the women’s position in politics. However, until now the country has never had a woman prime minister as happened in Serbia or a woman as president, as happened twice in Kosovo. What is more concerning is the stagnation of level 30% of women in parliament for different years, and seems like there is no political willingness to increase such a level, without institutional intervention. Albania is showing some kind of satisfaction in reaching 30% of women’s representation, quitting additional efforts to go beyond this result. Nevertheless, the data of 50% of women municipal councils in Durrës and Tirana in the last election is a remarkable result, even though the number of women in the position of Meyers passed from 15% to 13%.

From this perspective, we can conclude that the “rose quotas” have not achieved the goal to motivate and to facilitate even the inclusion of women in decision-making processes. At the same time, the existing women in politics are supposed to have some enforcement measurements like promotion in media campaigns, capacity building training, and support from political structures and leadership, to give the chance to women to have visibility and to inspire the younger generation of women.

Our interviews result have shown that women and girls are still facing many challenges related to political participation in decision-making structures. Women have poor access to political and financial support and low media visibility compared to their male counterparts. On the other hand, they feel discriminated compared with their male colleagues, in terms of career progress and leadership relationships. It should also be emphasized that the use of general

²⁷ Interview conducted on 30.02.2023 with MB.

²⁸ Interview conducted on 22.02.2023 with AL.

affirmations in explaining their reason or purpose for being part of politics shows the lack of clear ideas and conviction about their role in politics. Women do not have a clear view of their position in political engagement and their future prospects regarding their role in political structures.

6. Recommendations

As the rose quotas have not achieved the expected results, would be a further step to follow the recommendation of the Council of Europe to introduce the zip system, where women and men are positioned equally in the candidate lists. Nevertheless, we do not believe that this institutional measurement would be sufficient. Studies have shown that women should have an internal devotion to contributing to the quality of democracy by focusing on educational, child care, and health policies. On the other hand, they should act as inspiration for other women. Hence, more training, more media visibility, and more support from political structures would be accompanying steps of such measurements.

Therefore, parties can establish a women's wing where are discussed relevant challenges to women's participation. In this way, the problem of women's participation can be softened. Such an initiative can be combined with schools of democracy where women can be trained to manage their political careers.

Finally, we believe that a modernized and competitive process for candidate selection in the parties would increase the overall quality of the candidates including women.

References

- Albanian National Strategy for Gender Equity 2021-2030
- Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women CEDAW <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/convention-elimination-all-forms-discrimination-against-women>
- Council of Europe, Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making, 12.03.2023
https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016805e0848
- Economic benefits of gender equity in EU, <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/policy-areas/economic-and-financial-affairs/economic-benefits-gender-equality>
- EU: A Union of Equality: Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0152>
- INSTAT, Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Albania, 2020,
https://www.instat.gov.al/media/6657/gender_equality_index_for_the_republic_of_albania_2020_alb.pdf
- INSTAT, data 2021
- Kvinna Till Kvinna Foundation, Të drejtat e grave në Ballkanin Perëndimor, https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/KvinnatillKvinna_WRinWB-2020-ALB.pdf
- Komisioni Qendror i Zgjedhjeve, KQZ www.kqz.al
- Kotvi, Narayan S. "The Myth Of Gender Equity: WHY ARE WOMEN MISSING FROM POLITICS?" *World Affairs: The Journal of International Issues* 5, no. 3 (2001): 51–60. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45064777>.
- Law 10019/29.12.2008, Electoral Code of the Republic of Albania, Article 4;
<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/5/7/477547.pdf>
- Law 9970/24.07.2008 On Gender Equity in the Republic of Albania, Article 15
https://www.mod.gov.al/images/PDF/barazia_gjinore_shoqeri.pdf
- Ojha, S. (2009). RESERVATION OF WOMEN IN THE INDIAN PARLIAMENT: Lessons from other countries. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 70(2), 471–479. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42743910>
- Piscopo, J. M. (2015). States as Gender Equality Activists: The Evolution of Quota Laws in Latin America. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 57(3), 27–49. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24765974>
- Schwindt-Bayer, L. A. (2009). Making Quotas Work: The Effect of Gender Quota Laws On the Election of Women. *Legislative Studies Quarterly*, 34(1), 5–28. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20680225>
- Tan, N. (2016). INTRODUCTION: Gender Reforms, Electoral Quotas, and Women's Political Representation in Taiwan, South Korea, and Singapore. *Pacific Affairs*, 89(2), 309–323. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24779632>
- Taylor A (04.05.2023) Albania grapples with gender equality at home, work, politics, Euractiv.
<https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/albania-grapples-with-gender-equality-at-home-work-politics/>
- Treaty of Rome, 1957, art. 2
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:12002E/TXT>
- UN, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art. 21
<https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

- UN: Equal participation of women and men in decision-making processes, with particular emphasis on political participation and leadership", Expert Group Meeting, 2005 <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/egm/eql-men/index.html>
- UN, Woman participation in decision-making: why it matters? 20.12.2020
<https://www.undp.org/ghana/news/women%E2%80%99s-participation-decision-making-why-it-matters>,
- Women's Participation in Decision-Making. (1991). *Economic and Political Weekly*, 26(48), 2736–2737.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4398359>
- World Bank, Toward Gender Equality in Albania: Shifting Mindsets through Institutional Reform, 19.06.2020
<https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2020/06/19/toward-gender-equality-in-albania-shifting-mindsets-through-institutional-reform>
- World Economic Forum 2017
- Zetterberg, P. (2009). Do Gender Quotas Foster Women's Political Engagement? Lessons from Latin America. *Political Research Quarterly*, 62(4), 715–730. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25594442>
- Zohal Hessami, Mariana Lopes da Fonseca, Female political representation and substantive effects on policies: A literature review, *European Journal of Political Economy*, Volume 63, 2020, 101896, ISSN 0176-2680, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2020.101896>
- 2030 Agenda for the Sustainable Development (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/>)