

FREEDOM OF VOTE and **FAMILY VOTING** in **ALBANIA**

**National Survey
2017**

DISCLAIMER

This report has been prepared with the technical support of UN Women, (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) in the framework of “Leadership and Political Participation” program. This program is funded by Swedish Government through the United Nations Coherence Fund, and it is part of the “Program of Cooperation for Sustainable Development of the Republic of Albania and United Nations 2017-2021”.

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Gender equality is not only a basic human right, but its achievement has enormous socio-economic ramifications. Empowering women fuels thriving economies, spurring productivity and growth.

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Civic Engagement

- Similar to the 2014 survey, political interest remains low among citizens, with over half stating to be either not too interested" or "not at all interested." The respondents who declared themselves as "very interested" decreased compared to the previous survey. Men appear more interested in politic matters than women are.
- Albanians located in the Northern regions seem to be more indifferent compared to respondents from other regions (45 percent state to be "not at all" interested).
- Interestingly, a large amount of respondents seems to be confused by the politics today: a total of 77 percent indicate, from both genders and from all age groups, that politics in Albania are difficult to comprehend. Women find politics more difficult than men (80% vs 74%).
- The low level of interest in politics might stem from the fact that many respondents feel politics in Albania are a topic that is too difficult to comprehend.
- Fewer men and women are being a member of an organization or political party, when compared to 2014. Whilst women were already less likely than men to be members of an organization during the last wave, now only 4 percent of female respondents declare to be currently a member of a political party. Overall, 87 percent of all respondents are not part of any organisation or group

1.2 Women Engagement in Politics

- The study results of 2017 indicate that fewer respondents compared to the previous wave "strongly support" women becoming involved in politics (49%, a decrease of 15%).

"Strong support", interestingly, dropped among both genders and can be observed in relation to several questions not only in this thematic section but as an overall finding of the study.

- However, general support for women taking political roles is still fairly high revolving on average around half of the respondents for each presented political role respondents were asked about. Slightly more women than men are in favor of women taking a political role.
- Similarly, to the previous wave, nearly half (45%) of the respondents would "strongly" or "somewhat" agree that men are better political leaders than women. Interestingly, a slight increase of women who agree with this statement can be observed, whereas fewer men "strongly" or "somewhat agreed".
- Comparable results can be observed in respondents' opinions of whether men are better business executives; however, more respondents believe that men are more suitable for the role of a business executive (54%).
- The study results of 2017 indicate that while the overall proportion of people expressing support of women becoming involved as political candidates has remained stable at 92 percent, the nuance of strong support has tough decreased. Less people strong support it.

1.3 Voting Behavior

- A vast majority of respondents (84 percent) declared that they voted during the 25th of June 2017 elections in Albania. However, compared to 2013 elections we notice a decrease of 4 percent. Fifteen percent declared that they did not vote and though the reasons vary, the most common reason given was "I deliberately abstained".

- As in the past, the overwhelming majority (96%) said that they felt “completely free to vote” for whomever they wanted.
- The nearly 2 percent (1.5%) who felt “pressured to vote in a certain way” were women. When asked who asked them to vote in a certain way, 23 percent claimed that the respective political party did.
- Accompaniment to the voting room appears to become a none-issue, only 2 percent of women stated that they were accompanied to the voting room (this displays a 5% decrease compared to the first wave).
- Respondents based in the South-West region felt most strongly that the election in their area were very free and fair (65%), more than other regions. Only 38% of respondents from the Central region felt the same. Generally, young respondents felt the least satisfied in this regard.
- Almost one in three respondents said that they are aware of cases in which votes were promised in return for a gift, money or other favors. Even though the overall topic seems to be still an issue in the Albanian society, nonetheless, when comparing to the previous wave, 15 percent less claimed to know about such cases, this portrays a significant drop (from 43% to 28%).
- On the other hand, significantly more respondents who are aware of such cases claimed that votes in exchange for money happen often (66%, increase of +38%).
- When being asked to agree or disagree with the statement of: People like you can have influence on decisions made by the government, less respondents agreed than before (only 34% either agreed or strongly agreed, in almost an equal percentage of both genders, which displays a decrease compared to the last wave).

- Results indicate that respondents, despite their gender, doubt that they can personally influence political decision making, even less than in 2014 which might make the more prone to exchange their vote for money or favors.

1.4 Gender Quotas

- Less than a quarter (20%) of the respondents were aware that the gender quota in political parties for female candidates is at least 30%. This is a significant decrease when compared to the level of knowledge in this regard when the study was conducted in 2014 and nearly half gave the correct answer (47%).
- The majority of respondents supported gender quotas in elected bodies of Albania (87%); this displays an increase of support of 4 percent compared to the last wave.
- However, the percentage of “strong support” dropped in several regards related to quotas among both men and women, whereas the numbers who “somewhat support it” has increased.
- The majority of respondents either agree (54%) that gender quotas are an artificial mean to increase the participation of women in politics. Only around one third of the respondents disagree with this statement (36%).
- While lower than during the previous wave, over 20 percent of respondents did not know how or if gender quotas are implemented in other countries

1.5 Gender Issues

- No significant change seems to have occurred in regard to how respondents view the issue of women being generally pressured by their family' men. It still seems to be a prominent problem in the Albanian society with over half of the respondents thinking that women are "sometimes" or "often" pressured by their family' men.
- Overall on the topic of women's feeling of freedom it can be observed that whilst many feel free to undertake certain activities, there seems to be a slight decrease in feeling "completely free" in some regards when comparing to the situation in 2014.
- One result which noticeable stands out in comparison to others in this segment is that only 32 percent of the women feel "completely free" in leaving the house without permission and 24 percent feel "somewhat free". Nearly a quarter feels "completely restricted" in this regard and another 16 percent feel "somewhat restricted". This displays an increase of women who feel restricted in this regard when compared to the past and overall represents the biggest regress in this thematic section.
- On a positive note, more women than last wave feel completely free when moving about in public areas without fear or pressure (59%, increase of +6%). Another 35 percent feel somewhat free. Less women feel restricted in this regard when compared to the last wave which may indicate that the overall situation of safety in public areas is improved in the places where the survey has been conducted.
- 1 in 3 women state that they are not able to support themselves financially the same amount as in 2014, however more women state that they are already supporting themselves or their family (15%, increase of +6%).

1.6 Media

- Only half of the respondents (51%) think that the media reporting of the 2017 elections was accurate.
- Residents of the South-West area thought most positively about the media reporting in regard to elections, while residents of Central Albania had the least-positive impression.
- An increase of social media usage can be observed when wanting to express (political) views by men and women alike.
- The usage of other media outlets such as radio or TV to express opinions has remained the same (low) three percent.
- More women than men claim to never use any channels to express their views. On the other hand, two percent more women than men claim to have used social media in the past year to express their view.
- Conclusively, these results are in line with the rest of the report portraying low interest in civic engagement. The fact that most commonly social media is used to express (political) opinions shows a rather passive involvement when comparing to other options such as taking part in protest or contacting a public official directly.

2. Introduction

2.1 Study Objectives

The overall objective of this study was to elicit citizen opinions on different practices that might intervene with the freedom of voting as well as understand and identify the current systemic flaws behind the high occurrence of such practices. The study also aimed at describing the practice of family voting¹ in Albania. Other objectives of the study were to inter alia to compare the progress (or regress) through a comparison baseline with the previous first wave of this study which was conducted in 2014.

Upon this analysis, the study provides concrete recommendations on future interventions to improve women access in the electoral processes and in the general field of politics as well as concrete recommendation to enhance gender quota awareness. This report therefore aims at presenting a multidimensional picture of the situation of women in Albania in regards to their voting behavior, their level of civic engagement in society, their involvement in the decision making process in important public positions, as well as the public support for participation of women in Albania in various areas.

3. Research Methodology

This study went through a series of implementation phases in terms of methodology:

1. **Baseline-** The process started with a baseline derived from the first wave of this study, conducted in 2014, which provided comparative statistics and information about freedom of voting, family voting and other voting malpractices in Albania.
2. **Quantitative research** - A national representative survey of adult population (18+ y.o.) was conducted. In total 1300 questionnaires were filled.
3. **Qualitative research** - Six (6) focus groups discussions were organized based on a structured moderation guide, with the purpose of studying in-depth certain aspects not fully explored through the questionnaires.

1300 Respondents in Albania

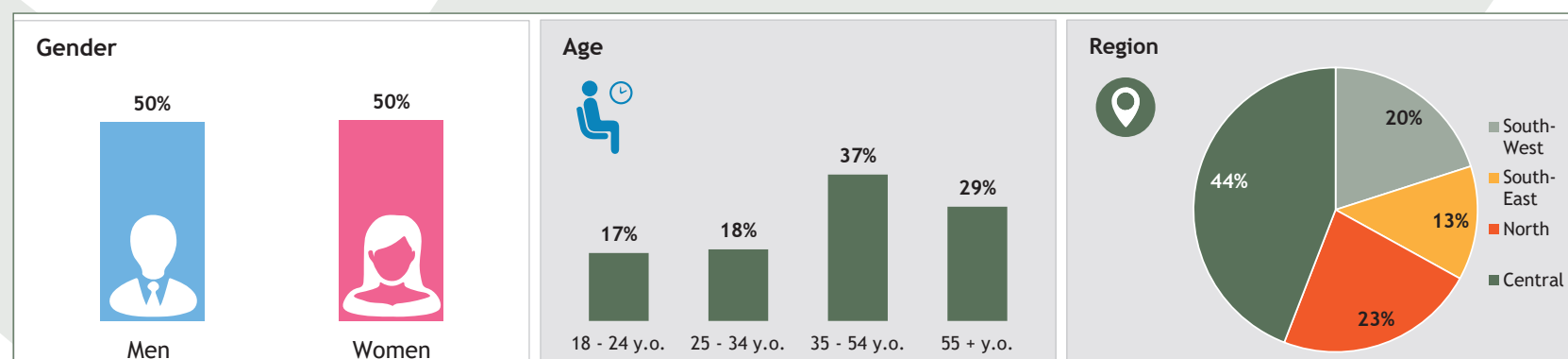


Figure 3.1. Respondents Data Profile

3.1 Quantitative Survey

1300 interviews (50% Women, 50% Men) in total were conducted in rural and urban areas through face to face interviews in the period of October to November 2017. The country was divided by regions as follows:

- North (including Dibër, Kukës, Lezhë, Shkodër)
- Central (including Durrës, Elbasan, Tirana)
- South-West (including Berat, Fier, Vlorë)
- South-East (including Gjirokastër, Korçë)

The study is of representative character of the population over 18 years old with an error margin of $\pm 2.8\%$ with a tolerance of 95%. The database was weighted by gender and age, in order to be more representative.

The general public survey was based on several phases. Only for study purposes, the Voting Centers serve as Primary Sampling Unit (NPK). Through a random probability method (PPS systematic), 131 NPKs were selected through a formula, which generates random numbers taking into account the number of voters per voting center based on urban / rural dimension.

This dimension is divided into 74 NPCs in urban areas and 57 NPKs in rural areas, while maintaining the representative ratio 57% of interviews in urban areas and 43% in rural areas. Within the geographic area defined by these units, respondents were selected on a random basis (every third door to the right when walking was chosen and a person over 18 who had their birthday last was interviewed).

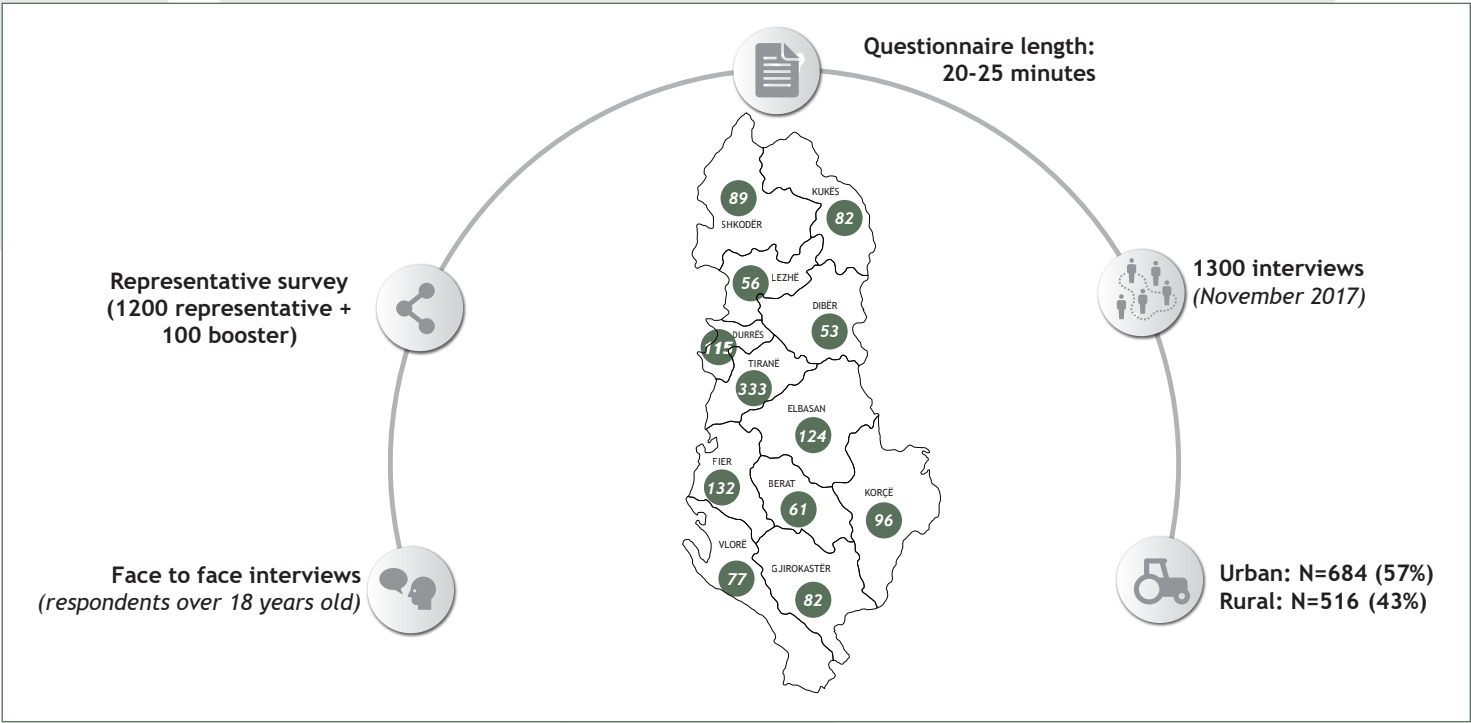


Figure 3.2. Interviews Facts and Country Distribution

3.2 Qualitative Component

While the quantitative component of the study gathered data on the occurrence of the family voting phenomenon, there was a need for a more in-depth exploration on the reasons, for the occurrence of family voting and perceptions on the freedom to vote.

To make such analysis possible and have the possibility to complement quantitative data with deeper qualitative insights, a series of six (6) focus groups were conducted with men and women of different age groups.

In order to be able and also account for regional nuances, besides Tirana, these discussion groups were also conducted in the Shkodër and Elbasan region (2 groups in each location).

It is important to highlight that focus groups were homogeneous in terms of the urbanity dimension since important differences and nuances were expected to arise from such comparison. Thus, participants living in both urban as well as rural areas were recruited and invited to take part in these discussions.

The focus group discussions followed the same structured moderation guide that was used during the previous wave of the “Family Voting and Freedom of Vote” 2014 study, with necessary updates, relevant to current socio-economic and political situation in Albania.

No.	Target Profile	Gender	Age Group	Location	Date
1	Mixed Urban & Rural Female Citizen Group	F	Mixed 18-65 y.o.	Tirana	07/02/2018
2	Mixed Urban & Rural Male Citizen Group	M	Mixed 18-65 y.o.	Tirana	07/02/2018
3	Mixed Urban & Rural Female Citizen Group	F	Mixed 18-34 y.o.	Shkodër	08/02/2018
4	Mixed Urban & Rural Male Citizen Group	M	Mixed 35-65 y.o.	Shkodër	08/02/2018
5	Mixed Urban & Rural Female Citizen Group	F	Mixed 35-65 y.o.	Elbasan	09/02/2018
6	Mixed Urban & Rural Male Citizen Group	M	Mixed 18-34 y.o.	Elbasan	09/02/2018

Figure 3.3. Composition and distribution of Focus Groups

4 Main Findings

The following thematic sections will present and analyze the main findings of this study.

4.1 Civic Engagement

The general interest in politics and government remains low, similar to the first wave of the study in 2014. The data shows that less than half or all respondents are somewhat or very interested in Politics. A slight shift within the group of respondents being “very interested” (-3%) toward being only “somewhat interested” (+2%) can be observed as well. Men remain more interested than women in political matters (54% of men are very or somewhat interested vs. 36% of women). Additionally, Women appear to be even less interested than in 2014. Correspondingly, men seem to have more information about certain political details, such as the distribution of seats in the parliament.

However, it should be noted that the number of men who claim to be “very interested” in politics, fell with eight percent compared to the 2014 study. At the other end of the spectrum, the amount of respondents not at all interested in politics remained steady (34%).

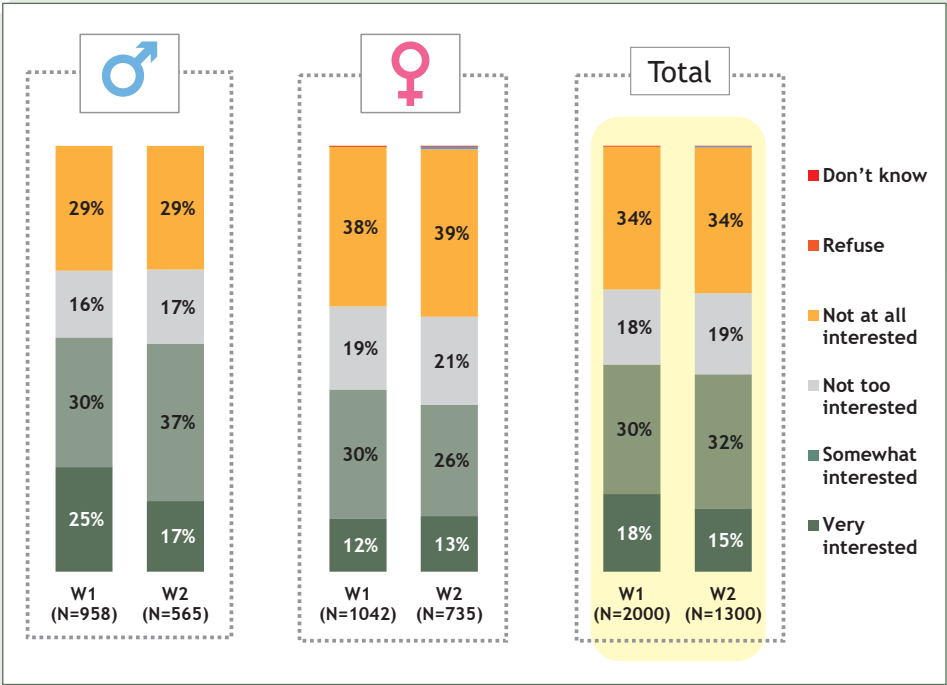


Figure 4.1. “How interested are you in matters of politics and government?”
Breakdown by gender

Women have too many responsibilities, they need to work to make money, they need to do the house-chores, they need to cook, they need to take care of the children, no wonder they have no time to deal with politics like men. - Man, Tirana

Older respondents clearly remain more interested compared to young respondents:

among participants who are 55 years and older, 56 percent of respondents are either very or somewhat interested, while only 36 percent of the 18-24 demographic express the same. This is an indication for a possible negative trend in interest in politics of the future generation.

Interest in matters of politics and government show a similar trend during the focus group discussions that followed the quantitative assessment. Although male participants seem to be more likely to follow latest developments, compared to female participants, there is a general decrease of interest, largely attributed to what participants refer to as a “failing political environment”.

Regarding political interest when comparing genders, both male and female participants state that women are less likely to follow politics and governmental matters. This is because of a rather busy and intense lifestyle that beside general working hours includes the stereotypical duties of housework and taking care of the children and elders as well.

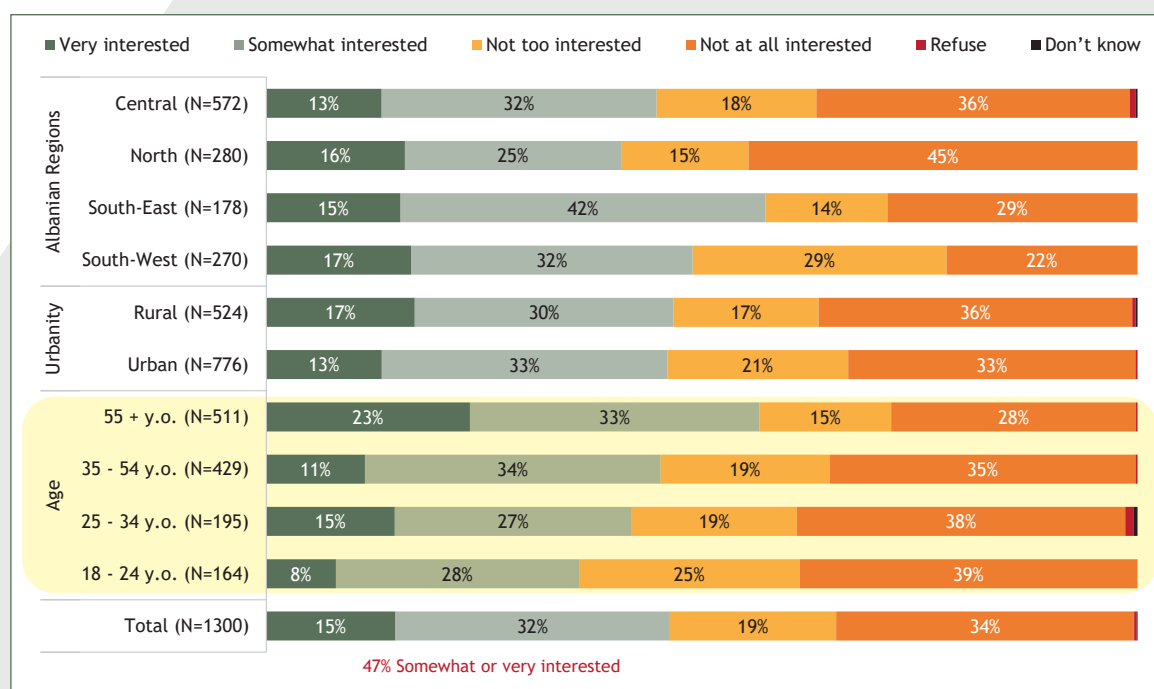


Figure 4.2. “How interested are you in matters of politics and government?”
Breakdown by gender & breakdown by age and region

Albanians from the North show less political engagement than respondents from other regions, with 45% stating to be not at all interested. Respondents in the South-East reported the highest levels of interest (57% either very or somewhat interested).

Meanwhile, economy, unemployment and poverty remain the most pressing problems Albania is facing today.

While a plurality of respondents in both study waves believed the economy to be the most difficult problem facing Albania, the current wave showed a five-percent increase (from 39% to 44%) in this response over the previous wave for both female and male respondents.

Unemployment remains the second-most common response, although with a significant (-10%) decline in respondents from the first wave. The number of female respondents considering poverty to be the most difficult problem increased from 10 to 14 per cent over the same four-year time span since the study was first conducted, maintaining its position as the third-place response.

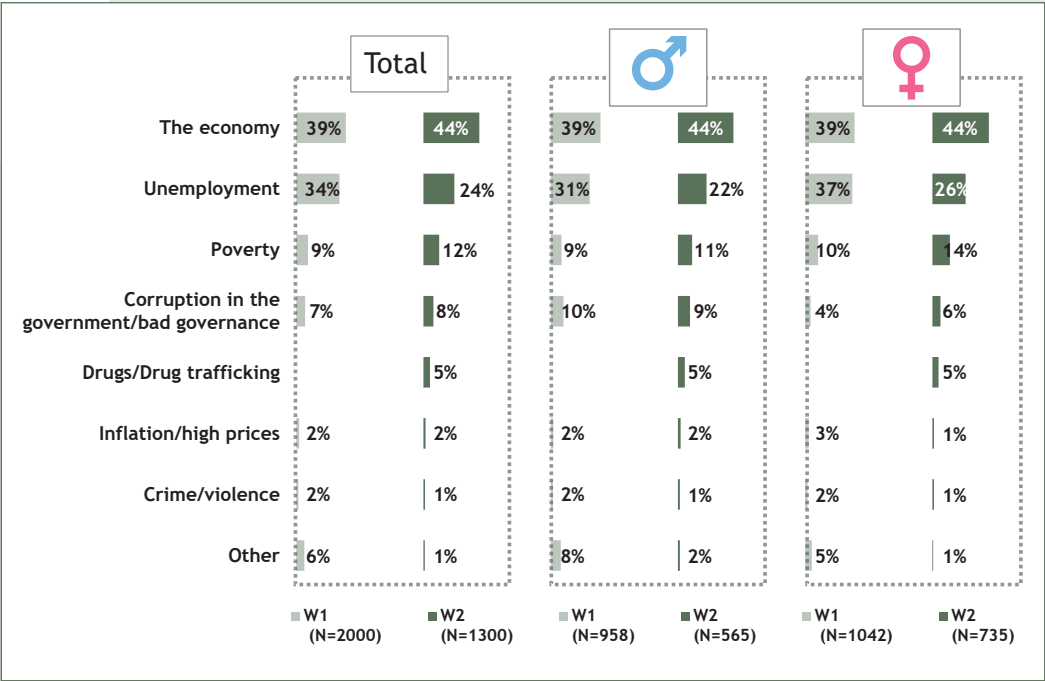


Figure 4.3. In your opinion, what is the most difficult problem that the country is facing?

Interestingly, 77 percent of respondents strongly agree or agree with the statement “Sometimes politics seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on.”

Henceforth, the low level of interest in politics might stem from the fact that many respondents feel politics in Albania are a topic that is too difficult to comprehend.

Women are slightly more likely to find politics difficult to understand than men (80% vs. 74%), as well as respondents from the South-Eastern area where half strongly agreed with the above statement

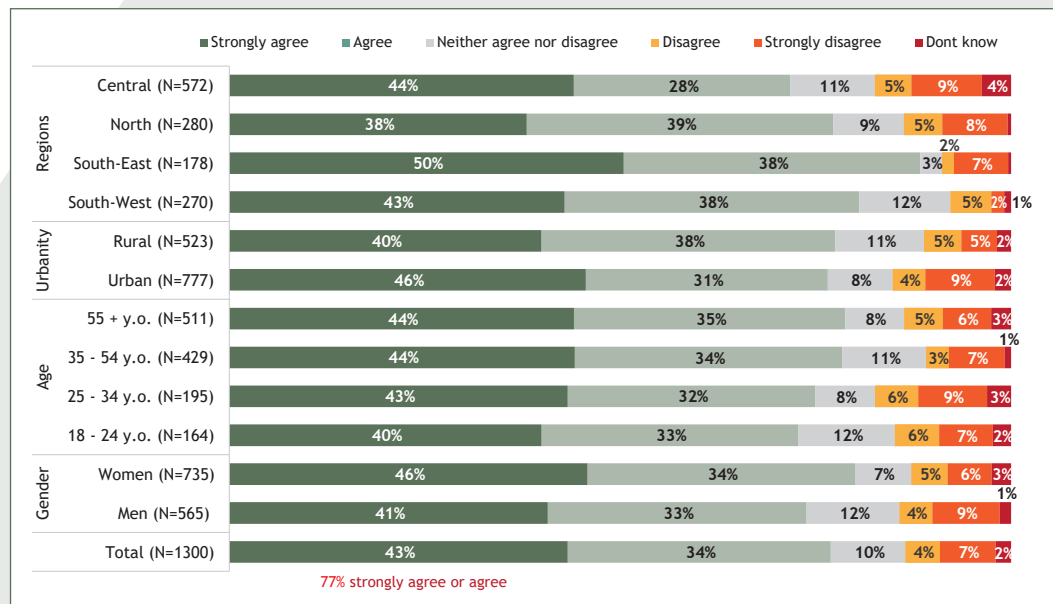


Figure 4.4. “Sometimes politics seem so complicated that a person like me cannot really understand what is going on”

In regards to political and social activities within the realms of being a member of an organization or party, even fewer respondents than in 2014 declare to be currently a member. This is visible across both genders, however, women remain less likely than men to be members of any type of organization.

Very few of the respondents are currently or have ever been a member of any other organization or group listed, indicating a low interest in being part of these social or political activities. Overall, 87 percent of all respondents are not part of any organisation or group.

The situation was quite similar during the focus group discussions in Tirana, as well as in Shkodër and Elbasan. Only very few participants claim to be (ex-)members of some political parties. Membership in political parties is closely associated with personal interest, mainly towards employment and is considered as active, mainly during political campaigns, prior to local or general elections. Participants believe that it is generally unlikely to benefit in any way from such an engagement.

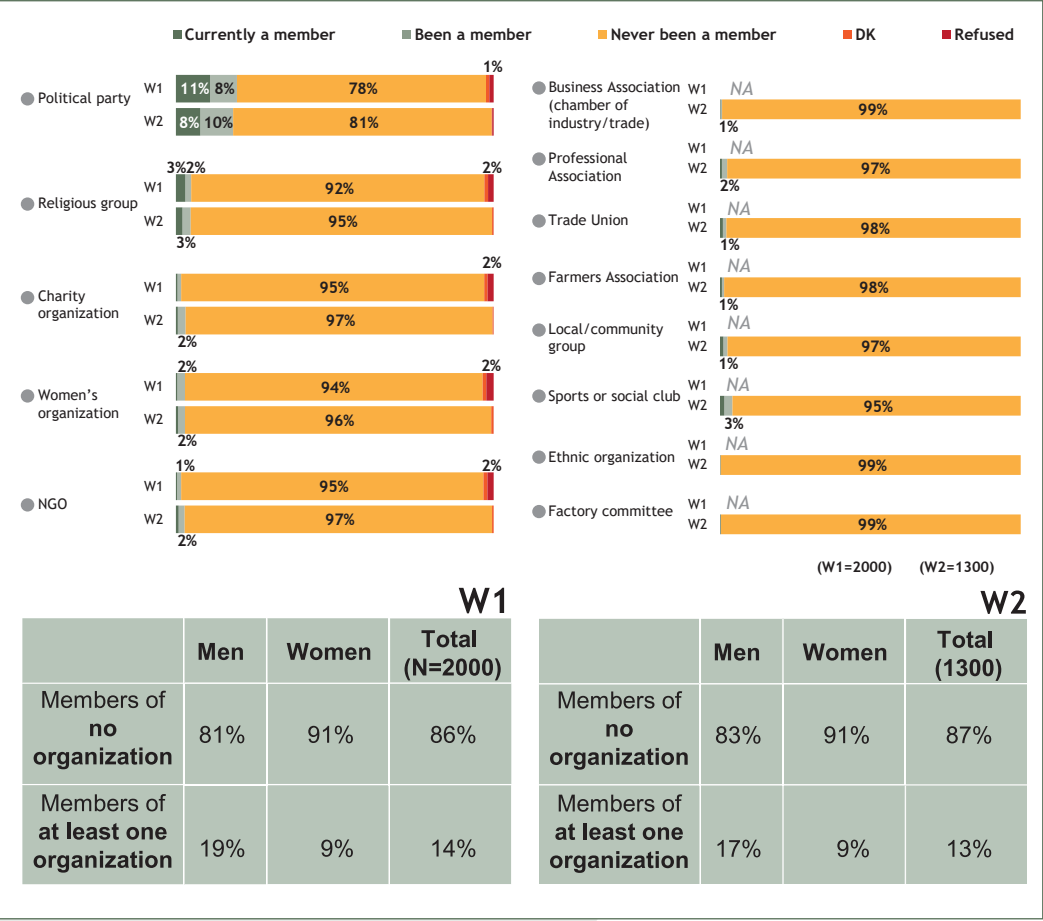


Figure 4.5. Can you tell me whether you are a member or have been a member of any of the different types of organizations?

It should be added that awareness of other, non-political organizations stands on a very low level, with what can be considered as a generally passive interest towards civic engagement. When it comes to expressing political views via different channels, data reveals that respondents most commonly make use of social media to do so. Details in this regard can be found in the media section below in this report.

When looking at data of only female participants, it can be observed that although women were already less likely than men to be members of an organization during the last wave, now only four percent of female respondents declare to be currently (decrease of 2%) or have been (7%) a member of a political party.

In total data shows that 91 percent of women are not active in any of the listed organizations, groups or parties.

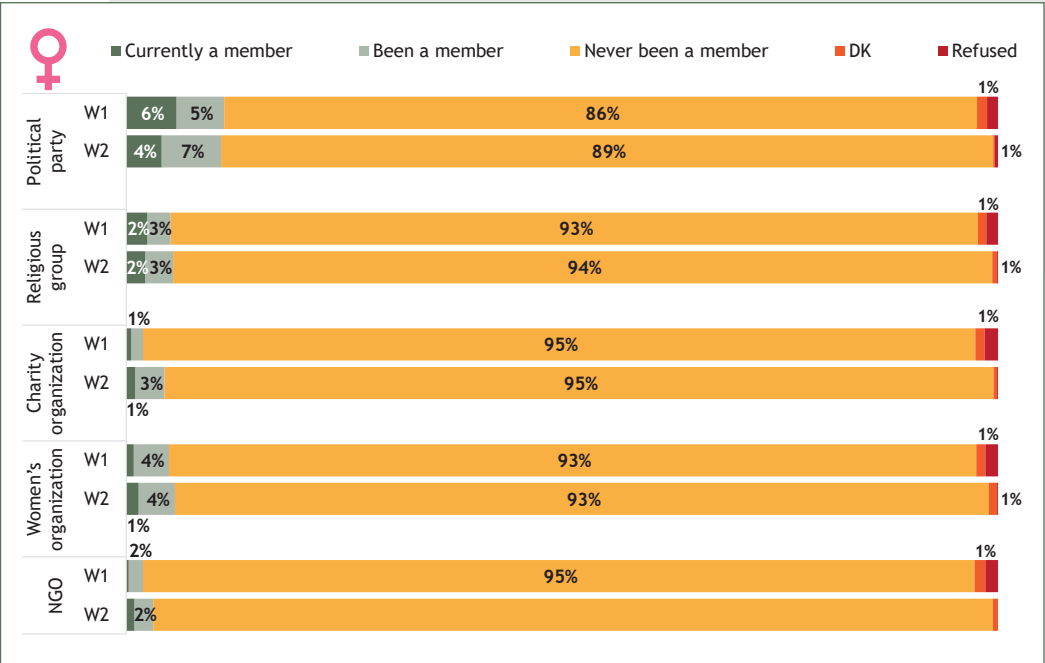


Figure 4.6. Can you tell me whether you are a member or have been a member of any of the different types of organizations?

They make you a member to benefit from your votes, but you never know if there is going to be any benefit for real.” – Female Participant, Shkodër

“We don’t know where to go to and they have never invited us to anything.” – Female Participant, Elbasan

4.2 Women Engagement in Politics

When presented with a series of statements regarding women in politics and society in general, respondents expressed the highest agreement with statements that “women/ young women have the required capacities to decide on political issues” (80%) and “women are able to make their own decisions on whom to vote for in elections” (84%). A low rate of agreement can be observed with the statement that “Men should make decisions on behalf of women when it comes to political issues” (23% agreed and just 3% strongly agreed). However, compared to the previous wave strong disagreement of male respondents dropped with 15 percent and with 5 percent in regard to female participant. A similar drop in regard to house and child care can be observed. This indicates that gender stereo type based thinking still remains a problem in the society. On a different topic, it is interesting to note that while both men and women generally agree that female politicians are less likely to be corrupt, significantly more men disagree with this statement (41% of men disagree vs only 27% of women).

Focus group participants believe that most Women are considered capable to make their own decisions, still though, with a slight tendency towards discrimination, starting with smaller cities in Albania and culminating in rural areas, where progress in this regard is considered to be very slow.

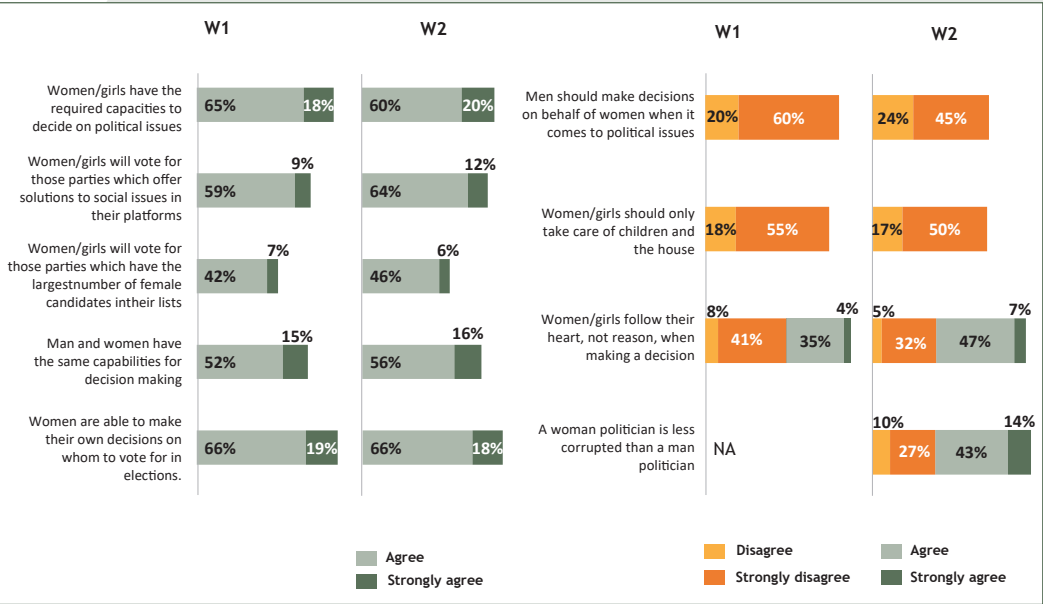


Figure 4.7. Do you agree with the following (male respondent)?

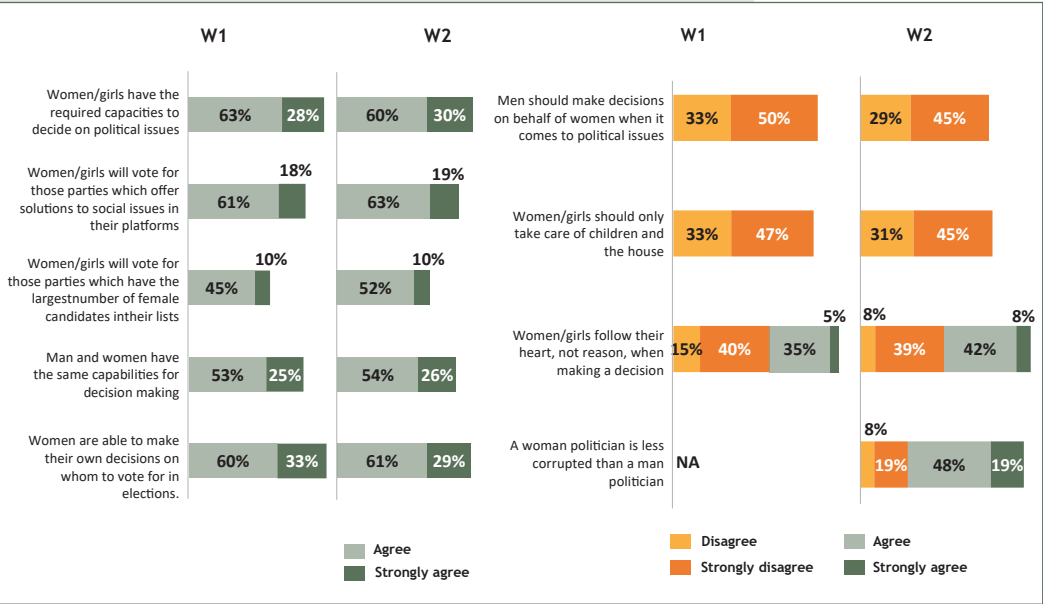


Figure 4.8. Do you agree with the following (female respondent)?

However, according to participants, discrimination in rural areas is of a more generalist nature, directly connected with the image of women and strongly based on outdated mentalities.

The study results of 2017 also indicate that while the overall proportion of people expressing support of women becoming involved as political candidates has remained stable at 92 percent, the nuance of strong support has decreased.

Only 49 percent of respondents in 2017 strongly supported women becoming involved, a decrease of 15 percent from 2014 that was accompanied by a corresponding rise in the number of respondents that somewhat support women's involvement (43% in 2017, compared to 28% in 2014).

Interestingly, strong support dropped among respondents of both genders, and can be observed in relation to several questions not only in this thematic section but as an overall finding of the study.

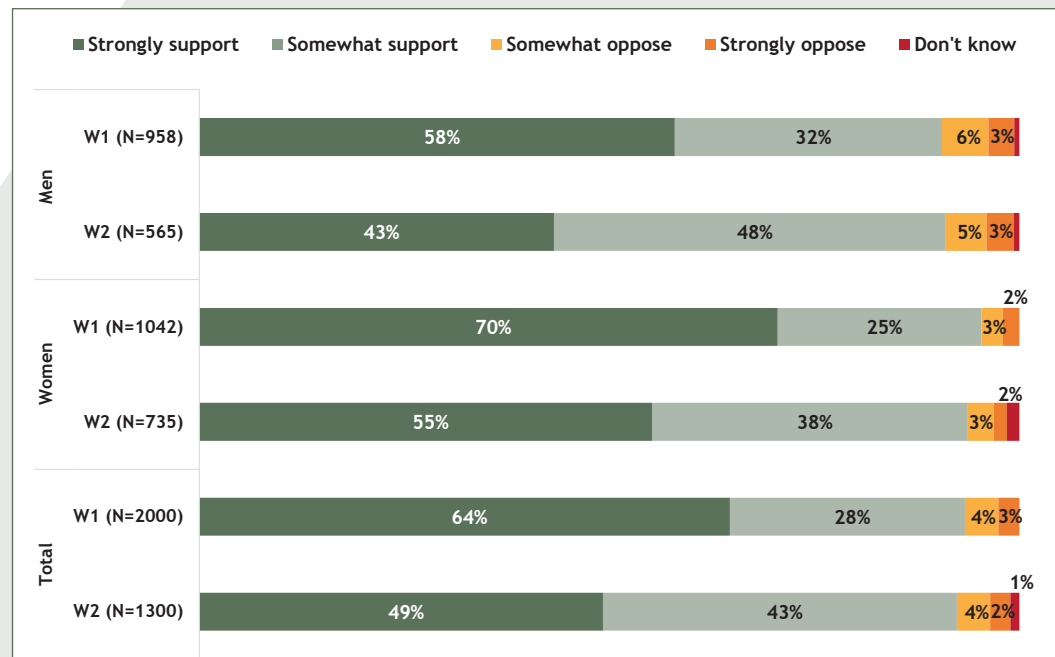


Figure 4.9. To what extent do you support or oppose women becoming involved in politics as candidates for office?

Still, 82 percent of the respondents would encourage their daughters to become involved in politics as a candidate in parliamentary elections. However, the same nuance shift, as above, can be observed here; strong encouragement decreased compared to 2014 in regard to both genders.

The number of respondents who would actively discourage their daughters from entering politics has increased, rising from 10% in 2014 to 14% in 2017. This pattern is consistent across both genders, including a rise from 8% to 12% of women who would either somewhat or strongly discourage their daughters, although generally women remain slightly more likely to be supportive than men.

When men were asked if they would encourage their wives to become involved in politics as candidates in either municipal or parliamentary elections, less than half would do so strongly. Around a third would somewhat encourage their wives. Moreover, it should be added that there are different views in regards to support for one’s female member of family engagement in politics, according to focus group participants. Although there exists a generally positive attitude towards such phenomenon, many participants claim there is also big discrimination regarding women who get involved in politics.

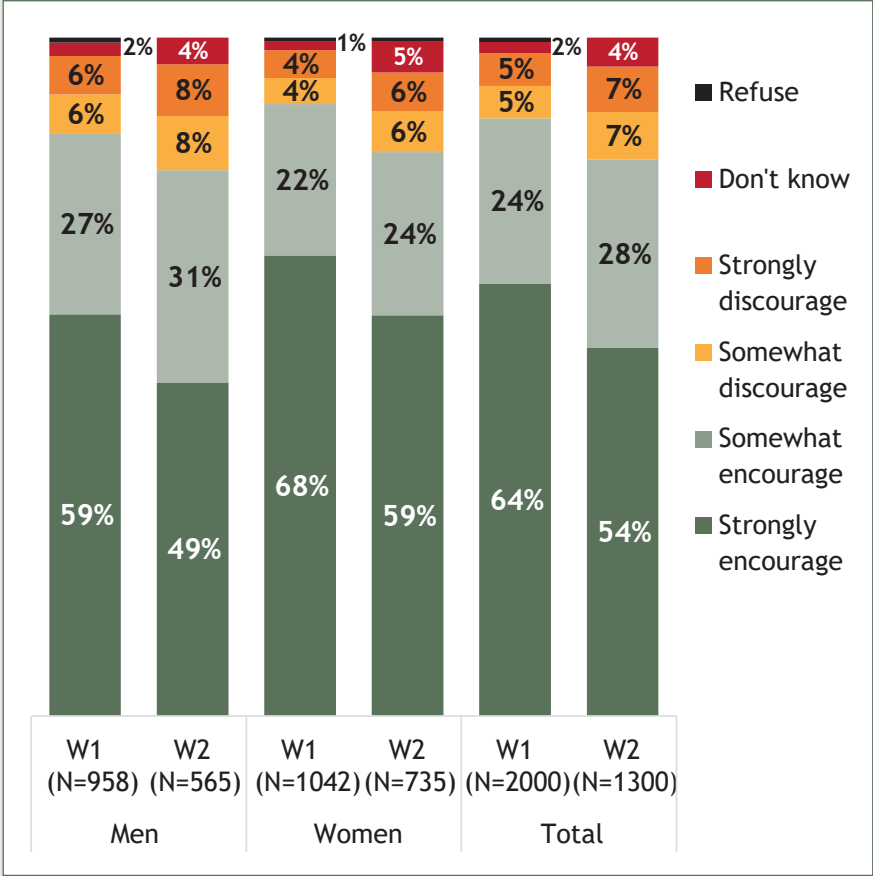


Figure 4.10. Would you encourage your own daughter (if you have one, or supposing you have one) to become involved in politics as candidate in parliament election, if she so chooses?

“We put women in the parliament, but there is a long road to go, in order to have their voices heard there.”
– Female Participant, Shkodër

This is especially noticeable in Albania’s smaller, as well as major cities (cases of Shkodër and Elbasan). This discrimination according to participants is based on local mentality and is directly related to concepts such as that of morale.

It is important to point out that, overall, study results show that general support for women in various political roles has slightly increased when compared to the previous wave.

However, the frequency of strong support has decreased in regard to all possible roles. This phenomenon can be observed in regard to both genders and is in line with other findings.

These changes in regard to nuances of support, of less ‘radical’ opinions, might stem from the overall low interest in political matter. Low interest in a matter does not facilitate strong opinions.

Moreover, focus group discussions revealed that stereo types in regard to gender still play a significant role and even women themselves do not always have a positive opinion about women taking part in political activities.

	Overall			
	Strongly support W1	Strongly support W2	Mostly support (strongly and somewhat support) W1	Mostly support (strongly and somewhat support) W2
Women being members of political party	57%	↓ 50%	92%	↑ 94%
Women serving as ministers	58%	↓ 52%	92%	↑ 93%
Women working for a candidate during a campaign	52%	↓ 48%	85%	↑ 92%
Women serving as members of parliament	59%	↓ 52%	91%	↑ 94%
Women participating in political protests	51%	↓ 49%	83%	↑ 89%
President	60%	↓ 57%	90%	↑ 93%
Speaker of Parliament	59%	↓ 57%	91%	↑ 93%
Prime-Minister	59%	↓ 57%	90%	↑ 92%
Head of Political Party	58%	↓ 54%	90%	↑ 92%
Mayor of Municipality	60%	↓ 56%	91%	↑ 92%

Figure 4.11. To what extent do you support or oppose such a role for women?

“You know how these women are...
You know the ones that get involved in politics.”
– Female Participant, Shkodër

Similar to the previous wave, nearly half (47%) of the respondents would strongly or somewhat agree that men are better political leaders than women. Comparable results can be observed regarding the statement that men are better business executives than women, with 54 percent of respondents believing that men are more suitable for executive roles.

Interestingly, 40 percent (statement one) and nearly half (statement two) of the women expressed agreement in this matter. Compared to 2014 the number of women who agree has increased whereas the number of men who show agreement has actually decreased.

Thus, whilst men seem to have started to progress on the idea of fixed (stereotypical) gender roles such as political leaders and business being more suitable for men, women seem to have slightly regressed on this matter and do not trust their own abilities enough to fill such leadership roles.

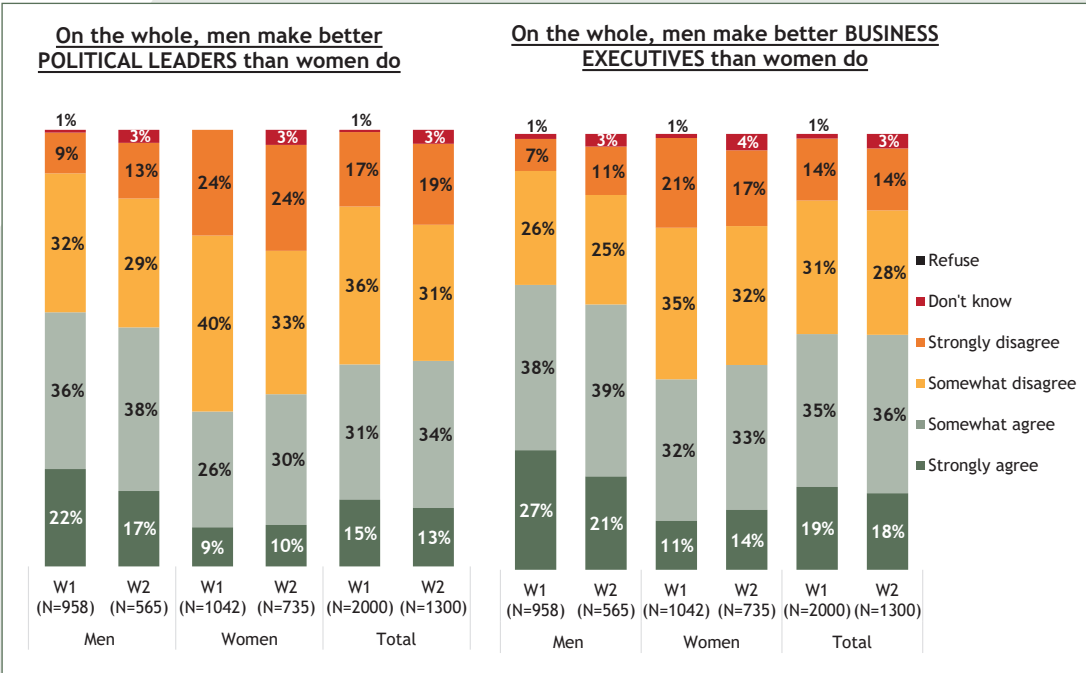


Figure 4.12. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

“Women can be very good managers, but for some leading positions where you need a tough voice and temperament, it is necessary to have a man.”
– Female Participant, Elbasan

4.3 Voting Behavior

About 84 percent of respondents declare that they voted during the 25th of June 2017 elections in Albania. 15 percent declared that they did not vote, a 4 percent decrease of voters compared to the elections in 2014.

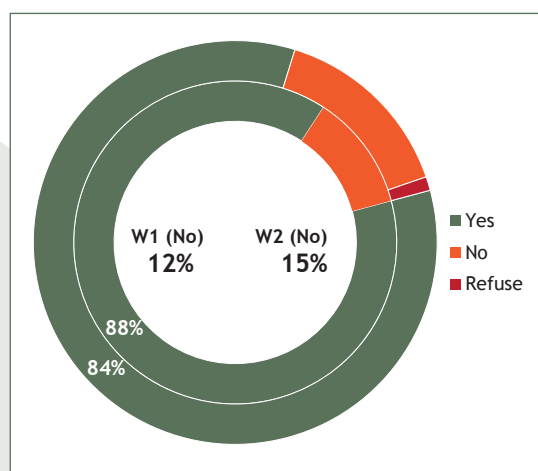


Figure 4.13 Voting Participation:
"Did you vote?"

Although general interest towards political and governance matters has slightly dropped over the years, according to focus group participants, all of them claim to have indeed voted during the latest elections.

		Wave 1			Wave 2		
		Total (N=213)	Men (N=107)	Women (N=124)	Total (N=183)	Men (N=73)	Women (N=110)
Attitude	I deliberately abstained	NA	NA	NA	23%	26%	19%
	Not interested	15%	15%	15%	11%	9%	12%
	My vote would not make a difference	6%	5%	6%	6%	5%	7%
	All politicians are corrupt	6%	4%	8%	6%	7%	6%
Objective	Was busy	5%	5%	6%	5%	4%	6%
	Was sick	6%	5%	7%	5%	4%	6%
	Was out of town	7%	8%	6%	5%	4%	5%
	Was not eligible to vote	10%	15%	6%	8%	10%	7%
	Was abroad	17%	22%	13%	18%	19%	16%
	Did not support any candidate/party	9%	6%	11%	3%	3%	4%
	Was not on the voter list	4%	3%	6%	1%	1%	1%
	The voting center was too far	5%	3%	6%	0%	0%	1%
	Other	4%	4%	5%	7%	7%	8%
	Refused	3%	5%	2%	1%	1%	1%

Figure 4.14. Non-Voting Participation, Reasons

The rationale for abstaining from voting remained largely the same compared to the previous wave. The 15 percent of citizens who declared that they did not vote in the parliamentary election most commonly mentioned the reasons "I deliberately abstained" (23%), followed by "was abroad" (18%) and being "not interested" in elections/politics (11%). The response option "not interested" is less frequently given than before; however, respondents who replied with "I deliberately abstained" – which was not a response option in the first wave – may also have done so out of low interest in voting and politics in general. Another reason could be the hope that deliberately abstaining may send a message to Politicians that a fairer and free process is desired. Therefore, an overall claim that fewer respondents show no interest cannot be fully substantiated at this point. When looking at the split between attitudinal and objective reasoning, it can be observed that, apart from not being able to vote due to being abroad, most commonly citizen choose not to vote.

An interesting observation can be made when comparing data on voting behavior with interest in political matters.

77 percent of respondents who claimed not to be interested in matters of politics did indeed vote during the last elections. This might indicate that citizens of Albania do not vote out of political affiliation, interest or attitude but rather because of other reasons.

A potential explanation could be the phenomena of exchanging votes for favors or money. This will be discussed in further below with the corresponding data.

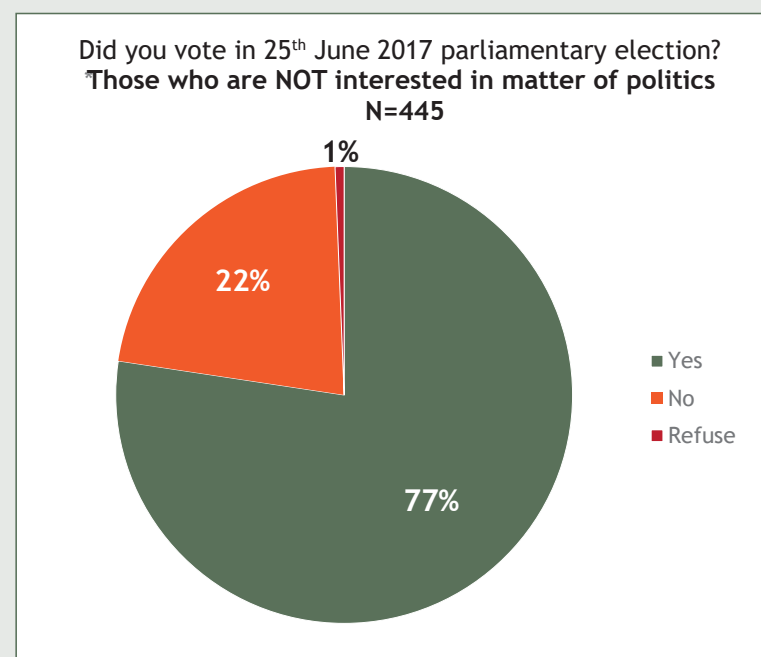


Figure 4.15. Voting participation vs interest in Politics

Overall, during the last wave, the platform of the political party and the personality of its leader were the most important factors that influenced the respondents' choices when voting (43% and 40% respectively). Now in 2017, the most mentioned factor was still the political party platform (44%) but the services offered by the political parties to the respondent's neighborhood appear to play a more important role (42%, increase of +13%).

The personality and charisma of the party leader is an important factor, as commonly as before (40%). Men and women report similar opinions in this regard. However, 5 percent more women than men considered the fact that their friends and family voted for the same party to be a significant factor.

Conclusively what stands out is; Political party leaders and platforms remain a big factor when making a voting decision. 1 in 3 respondents consider "Services offered to my family" as an important factor which influences their choice. Moreover, 1 in 6 women vote the same as their friends and family in 2017, compared to 11% in 2013. This might indicate that the phenomenon of family voting is a long-term product of learned mentality, though with no factual pressure over these women, that seems to be programmed by default, to follow their respective heads of household decisions.

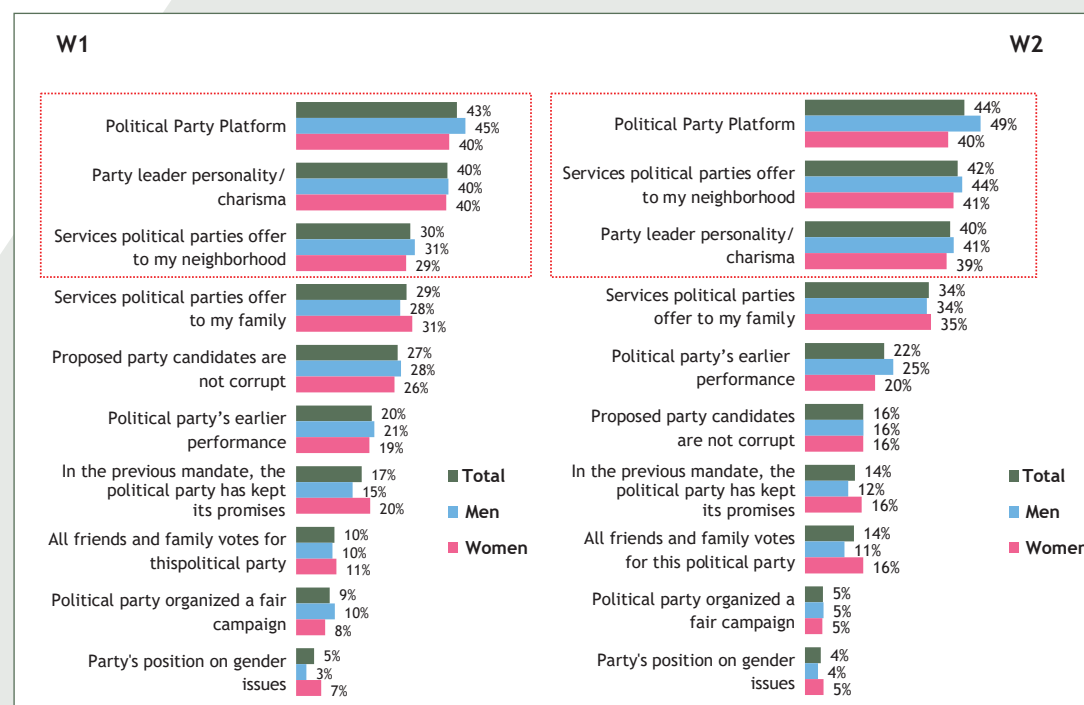


Figure 4.16. Which of the following are the most important factors that influence your choice when voting?

During the focus group discussions and while exploring the factors contributing to voting behavior and choice, there is a difference compared with the results of the quantitative assessment. The majority of focus group participants claim that their decision was mainly based upon the political party's earlier performance (case of the Socialist Party) and to some extent the party leader's personality and charisma, especially when compared with the leaders of the opposition. Group participants claim to have a small level of awareness over political party platforms, however some sectors of Albania (such as infrastructure) "have changed for the better" over the last four years.

"We have more roads and the cities have improved significantly. We really hope things can improve in healthcare, as well as education too, as these are two very problematic sectors in the country." – Female Participant, Tirana

As in the past, the overwhelming majority of respondents (96%) say that they felt completely **free to vote for whomever they wanted**.

The nearly 2 percent who felt pressured to vote in a certain way, were women. When asked who asked them to vote in a certain way, 23 percent claimed that the respective political party did.

Moreover, only two percent of women reported that they were accompanied to the voting room, a 5 percent decrease compared to the first wave. Of the 2 percent who were accompanied, they were most commonly accompanied by their husband or male partner (61%). Henceforth the survey results indicate that “Family Voting” does not appear to happen inside the Voting Center (VC) anymore.

Considering the high number of respondents who felt free to vote for whomever they wanted and the low percentages of men and women who were asked to vote in a certain way or were accompanied, it appears that there was a low level of direct pressure to vote in a certain way in the 2017 election.

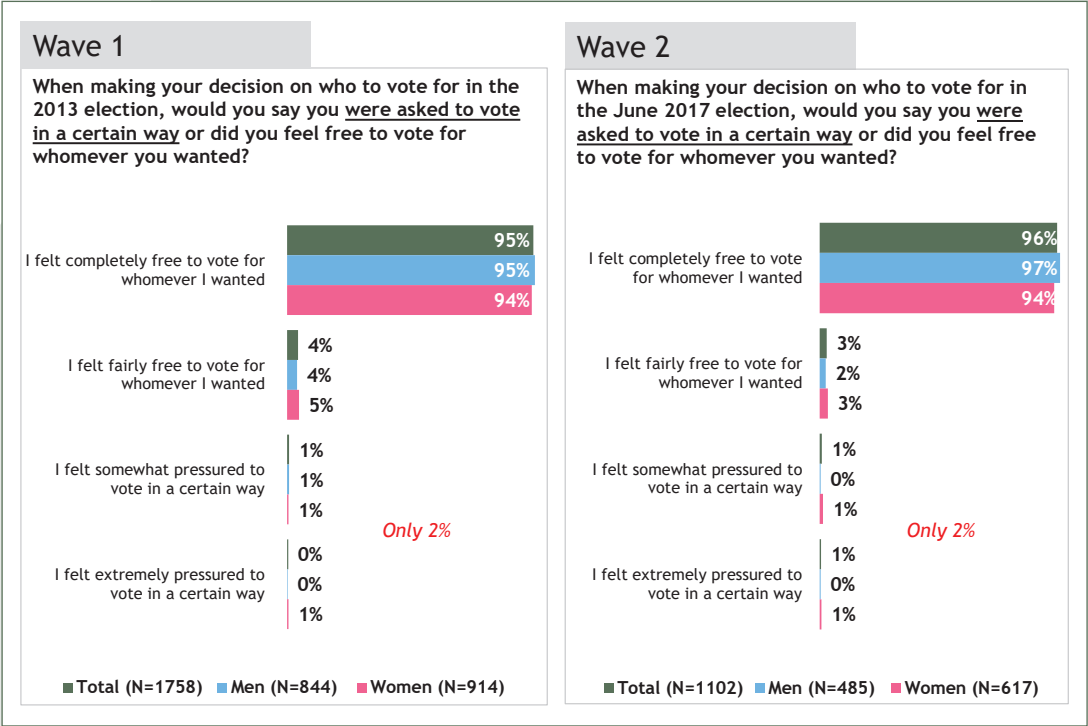


Figure 4.17. Pressure on Voting Choice

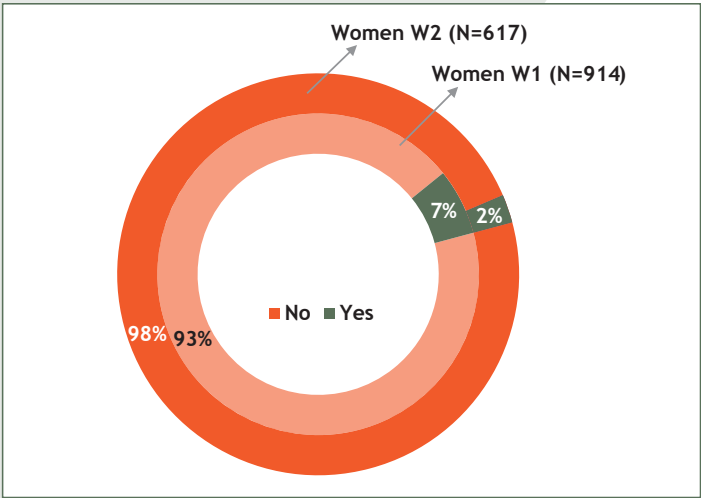


Figure 4.18. Did any of your family members accompany you to the voting room during the last elections?

The majority of respondents felt that the elections in their area were either very free and fair or somewhat free and fair (72%).

“These had to be about the best elections we had, because there were no real incidents.”

– Female Participant, Shkodër

Respondents from the South-West were the most likely to feel that the elections in their area were very free and fair (65%), whereas only 38% of respondents from the Central region felt the same. Over half of the respondents 55+ years old felt that they were very free and fair. Young respondents felt the least satisfied, with less than a third stating to have found the election very free and fair.

It is also worth mentioning that majority of focus group participants believe that previous elections were quiet and with a lack of any major incidents. However, these participants add that this is not an indicator that there were no manipulations.

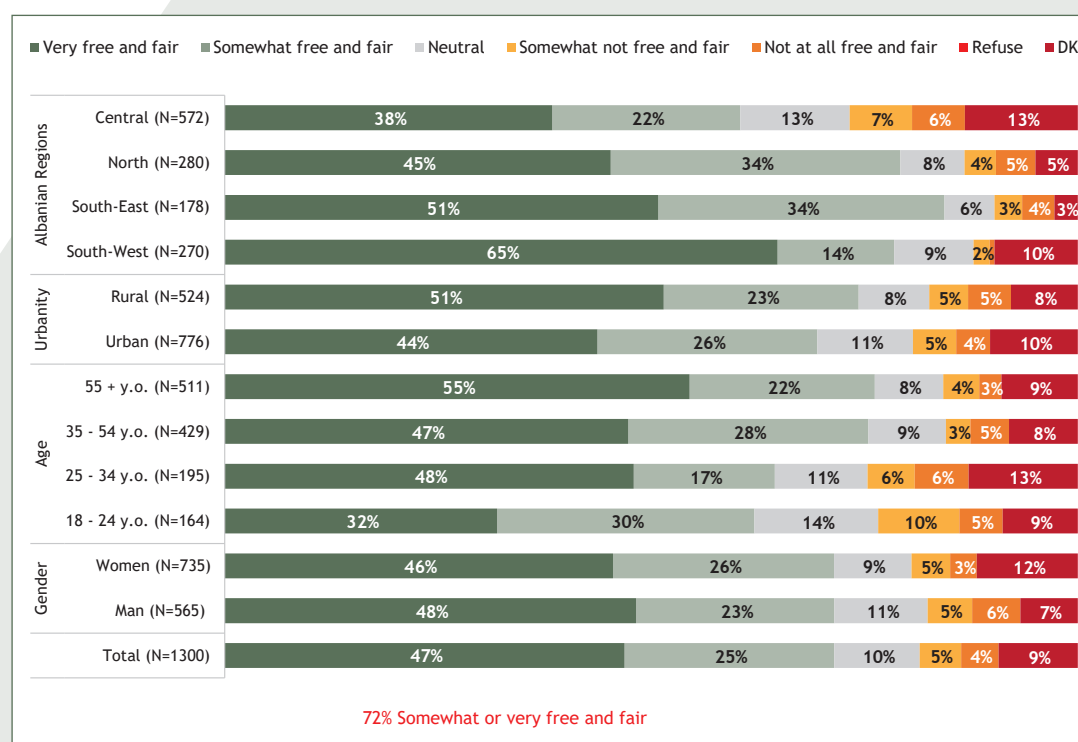


Figure 4.19. How free and fair would you say were the elections held in your area?

“Manipulations happen either before, or after the election day”, thus “there is really no need to for incidents during election day.” – Male Participant, Elbasan

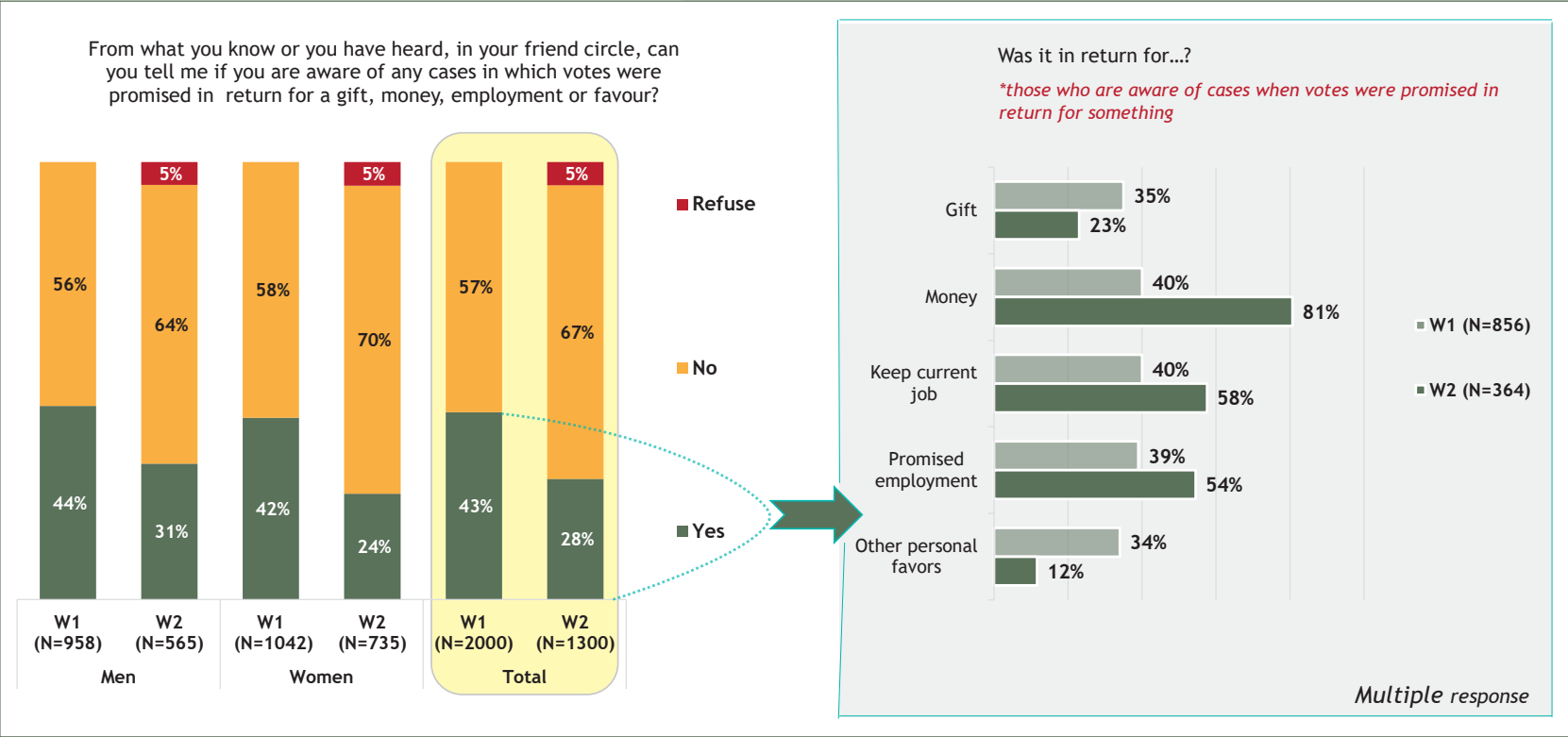


Figure 4.20. Votes for gifts, money or favor

Although few respondents reported that their votes were directly pressured, significantly more respondents knew of votes being influenced through other means. Nearly 1 in 3 of the respondents said that they were aware of cases in which votes were promised in return for a gift, money, or other favors. However, when comparing to the previous wave, 15 percent less claim to know about such cases, this portrays a significant drop from 43% to 28%. If such incidences have taken place, according to the respondents, most commonly votes are exchanged for money (81%) which shows an increase to before; in 2014 most commonly votes were exchanged

for money (40%) or in order to keep the current job (40%). The latter seems to also be an increasing occurrence with 58 percent stating this to have happened in 2017. Significantly more respondents who state that such vote exchange practices are happening, claim that votes in exchange for money happen often (66%, increase of +38%). Considering the low interest in politics among young respondents, in combination that they were the least likely to feel that elections were free and fair, this demographic group might be most prone to engage in exchanging their votes for money or favors.

More respondents also think that it happens often that people give their vote away in order to keep their current job. These two impressions can be observed in regard to both genders however more men than women believe that votes get exchanged for money.

Henceforth it can be overall said that even though this seems to be a general decreasing phenomenon, a large percentage believes that votes are still often exchanged.

Votes, gifts and especially favors (mainly regarding employment) according to focus group participants are the main reason why women are no longer pressured, but rather motivated towards a new and updated version of family voting.

When being asked to agree or disagree with the two statements about personal influence on decision making in the government or country, nearly half do not believe that they have the ability to influence such matters.

Hence results indicate that respondents doubt that they can personally affect political decision making, even less than in 2014. This might also make men and women alike, more prone to sell or exchange their votes in return for money or favors if the belief it strong that they do not in fact matter.

“One way or another, if not within the close family circle, there will always be a relative or close friend that will ask for your and your family’s vote, in order to retain his employment status by fulfilling some quotes requested by his party, or find employment. And you will give your vote to them as we live in very difficult times.” – Male Participant, Tirana

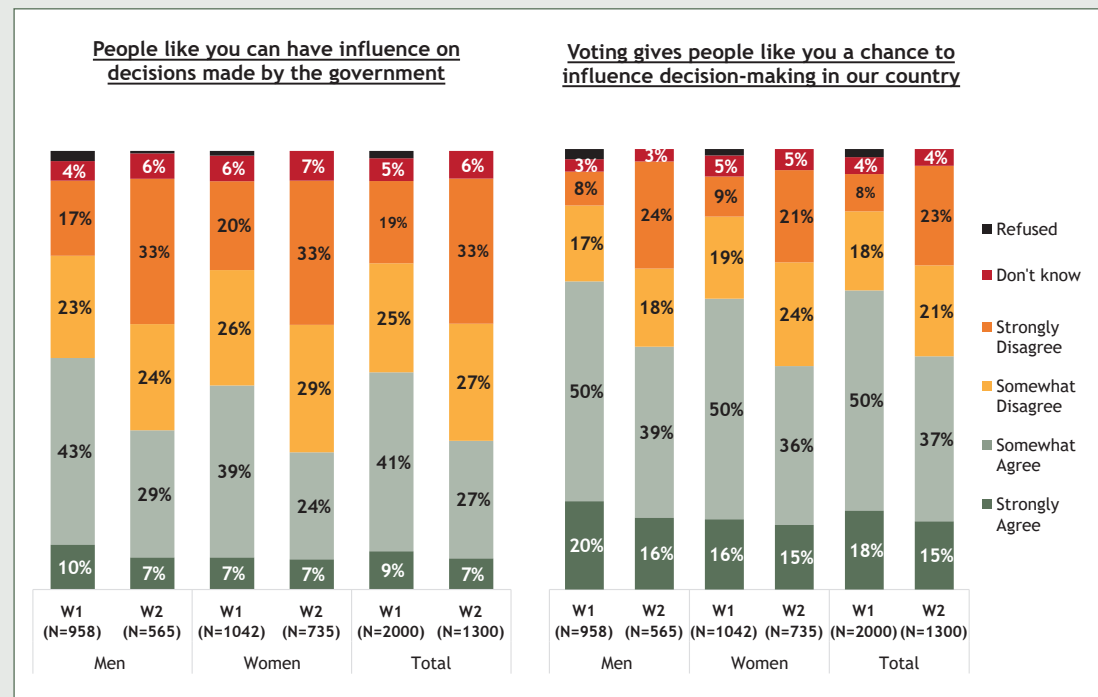


Figure 4.21. Please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with each of these statements

4.4 Gender Quotas

Less than a quarter (20%) of respondents were aware that the gender quota for female candidates is at least 30%. This is a significant decrease when compared to the level of knowledge when the study was conducted in 2014 and nearly half gave the correct answer (47%).

Interestingly, the most frequent answer given was that the current gender quota is 50%, while only 16% believed that no quota existed at all. (This might be due to the fact that the gender quota for Women Councilors has been raised to 50% in the frame of 2015 local elections). However, nearly a third of respondents either did not know or answered “none of these”, leaving the impression that overall awareness of this subject among the general population is lacking.

Nonetheless, the majority of respondents either strongly or somewhat support gender quotas for elected bodies of Albania (87%), there is noted an increase in support of 5% compared to the last wave. Figure 4.22. Based on the information you have, which of the following statements is true?

Overall, respondents appear to have a generally positive opinion of gender quotas. However, the intensity of this opinion has diminished somewhat since the previous wave, with fewer respondents of both genders expressing strong support for quotas. On the

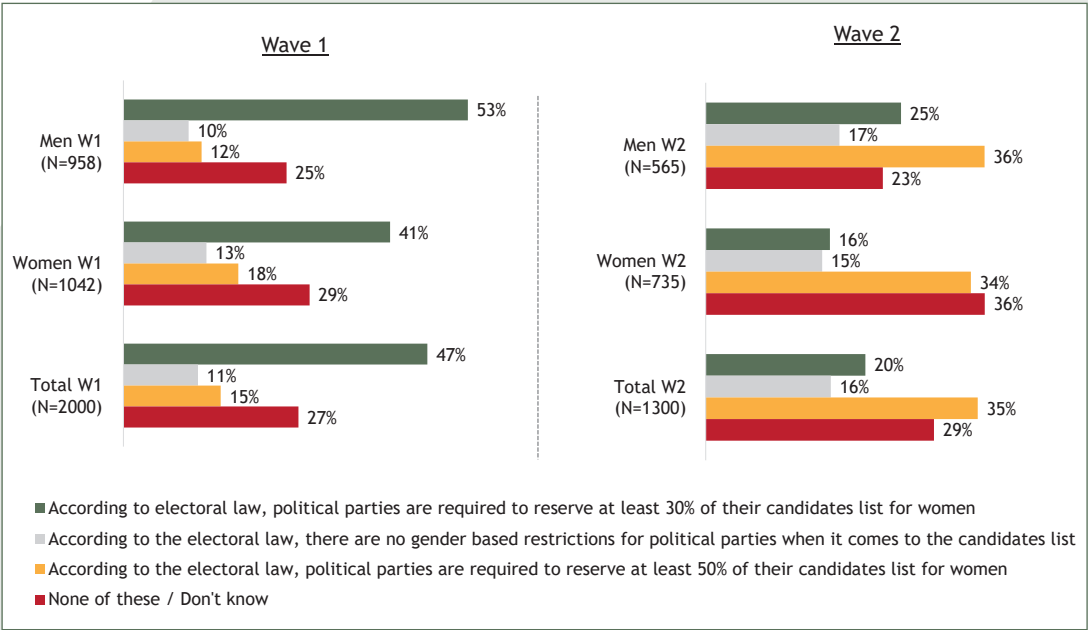


Figure 4.22. Based on the information you have, which of the following statements is true?

other hand, the number of those who somewhat support quotas rose even more among both genders. The net result is an overall 4% increase (to 87%) in general support despite a 4% decrease in strong support (to 41%). This underlines the general findings of this study wave of fewer respondents having strong opinions in either direction.

When asked if gender quotas imply that politicians get elected based on gender not qualification, more than half disagreed or strongly disagreed (53%).

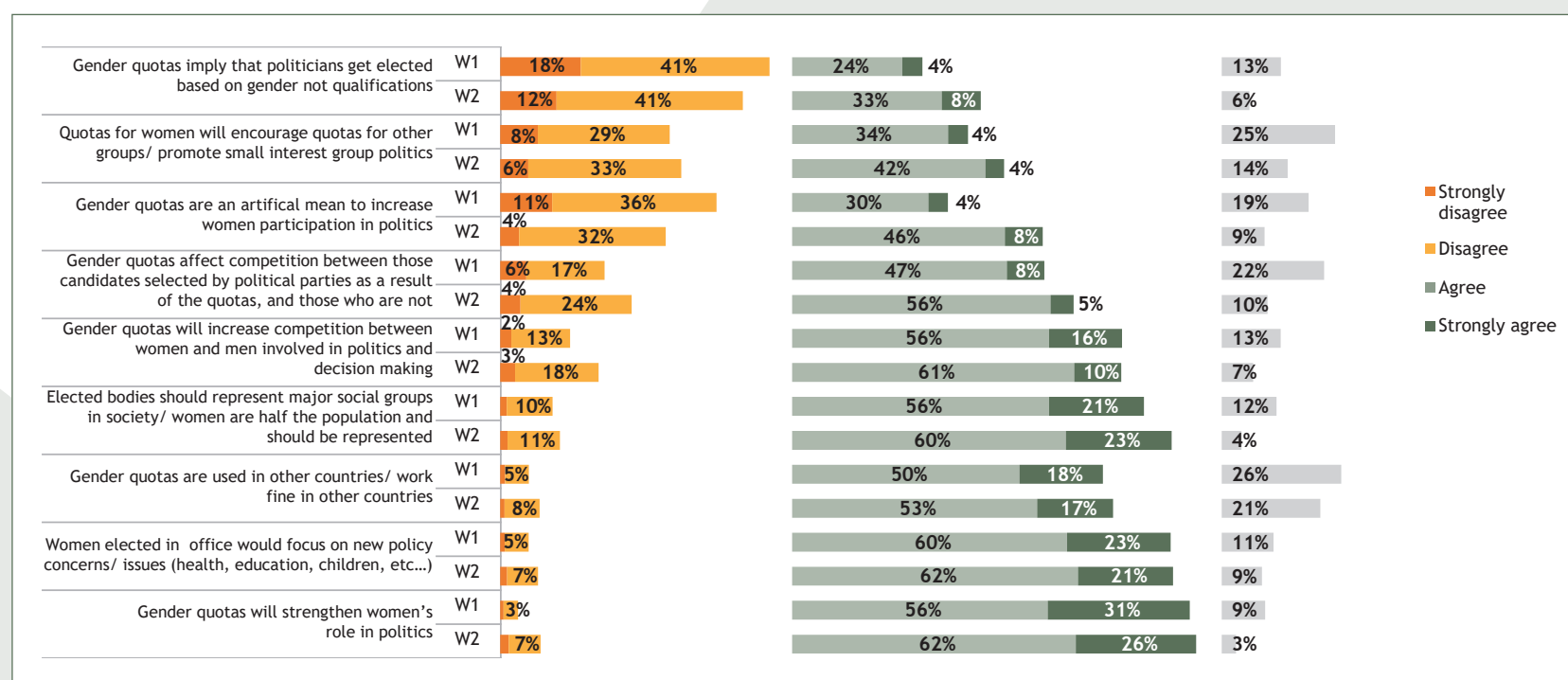


Figure 4.23. To what extent to you agree or disagree with the following statements about quotas?

A plurality of respondents believes that quotas for women will encourage additional quotas for other groups and promote small interest group politics (46%) and believe that gender quotas will strengthen women's role in politics (88% agree or strongly agree).

Respondents also agree or strongly agree that gender quotas are used in other countries and/or work fine in other countries (70%).

On the other hand, the majority of respondents also either somewhat or strongly agree (54%) that gender quotas are an artificial mean to increase the participation of women in politics.

Moreover, sixty-one percent of the respondents agree or strongly agree that gender quotas affect competition between those candidates selected by political parties as a result of the quotas. This displays an increase of 6 percent compared to the previous wave.

4.5 Gender Issues

No significant change seems to have occurred in regard to how respondents view the issue of women being pressured more generally by their male family.

It still appears to be a prominent problem in Albanian society, with over half of the respondents thinking that women are sometimes or often pressured by their family's men (28% and 23%, respectively).

One out of three women feel that women in general are often or very pressured, while nearly a third feel that they are sometimes pressured.

Although men generally agree that this issue is still a common phenomenon, fewer men than women believe that women are sometimes or often pressured.

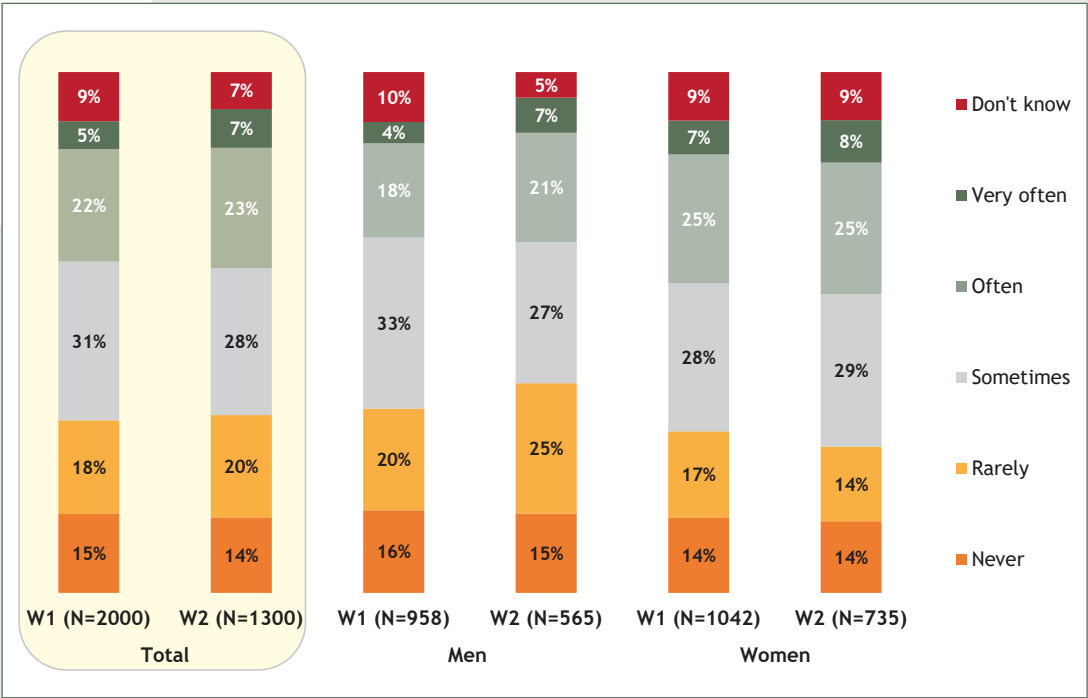


Figure 4.24. To the best of your knowledge, to what extent are women in Albania generally pressured by their male family?

Overall on the topic of women's feeling of freedom it can be observed that whilst many feel free to engage with certain activities, there seems to be a slight decrease in feeling completely free in some regards when comparing to the situation in 2014.

Almost two thirds of the women feel completely free to associate with persons of their own choosing (65%) one quarter feel somewhat free. This displays a slight decrease of four percent in women who feel completely free in this regard.

Two thirds of the women feel completely free to express their views on critical issues to family members, neighbors or friends (66%, a decrease of 3% compared to the last wave). More women than last wave feel somewhat free in this regard (27%, increase of +6%). As last wave, few women feel restricted.

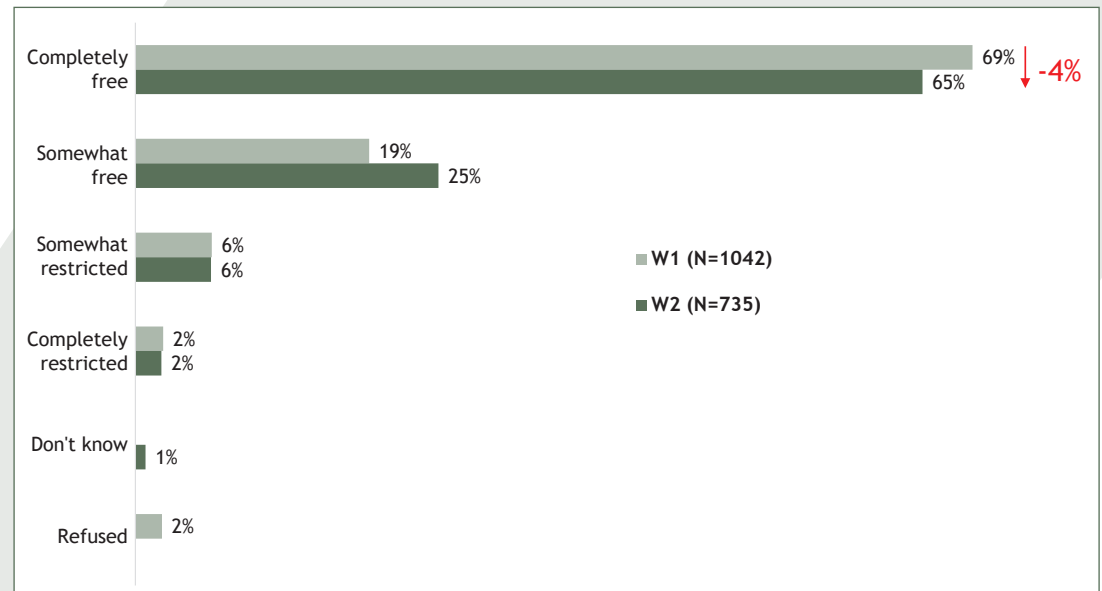


Figure 4.25. Associating with persons of your own choosing

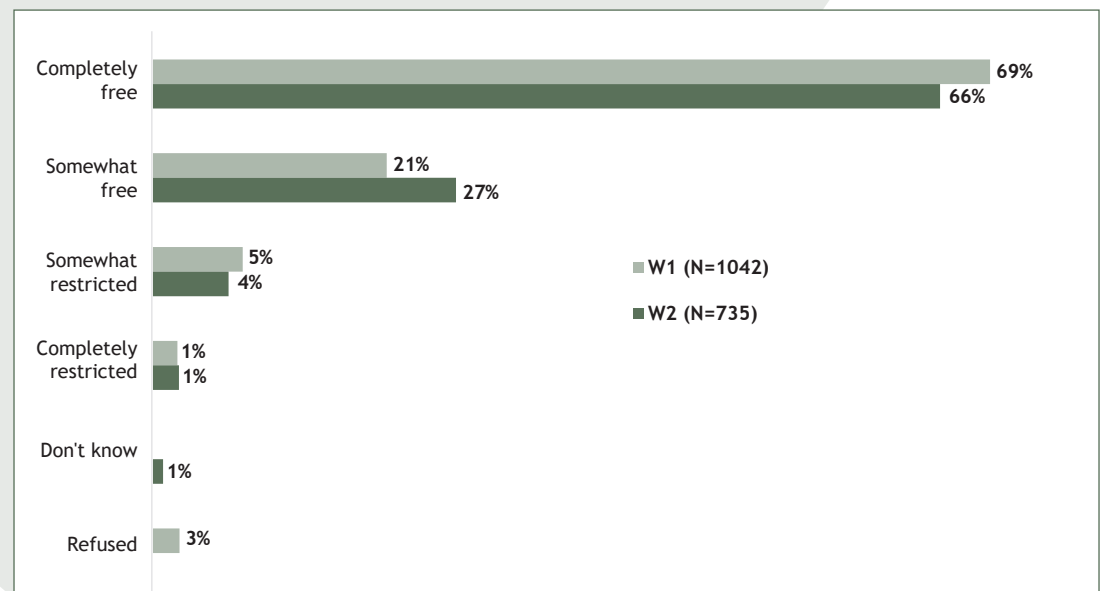


Figure 4.26. Expressing your views on critical issues to family members, neighbors or friends

Unlike on the previous two questions in this section, alarming results can be observed when it comes to the topic of leaving the house without permission.

Nearly a quarter feels completely restricted in this regard and another 16 percent feels somewhat restricted. This displays an increase of women who feel restricted in this regard when compared to 2014 and overall represents the biggest regress in this thematic section.

The data shows that only 32 percent of women feel completely free in leaving the house without permission and 24 percent feel somewhat free.

Looking closer at this phenomena, it can be observed that the quantitative data does not reveal much difference between rural/urban areas (unlike some indication from the Focus Groups) However, when looking at the data aggregated by age and specific region some more details can be found. Young women and women from the Northern region feel more restricted than others.

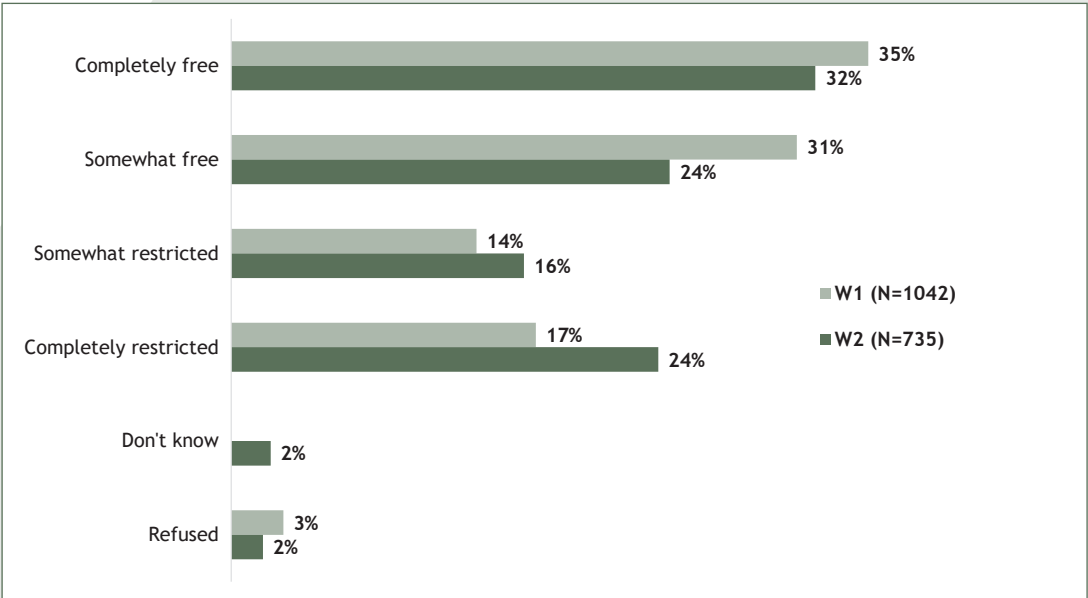


Figure 4.27. Leaving your house without permission

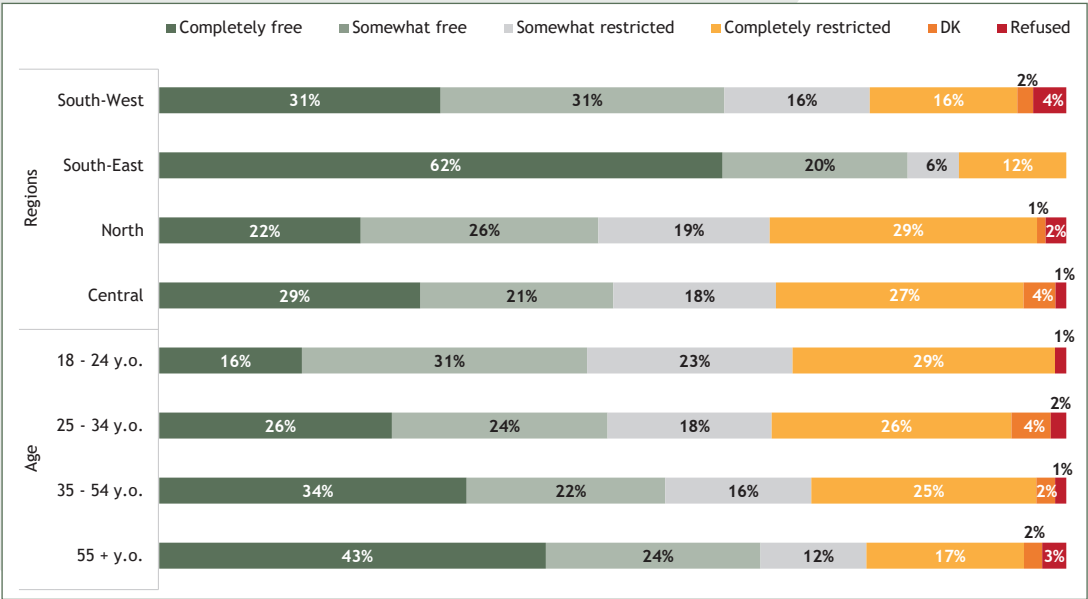


Figure 4.28. Leaving your house without permission *aggregated by region and age*

According to the focus groups discussions, participants add that the situation is quite different in rural areas, where women are not generally allowed to express their opinions, if such opinions contradict those of their husbands, or other heads of respective households.

"In the villages it is still very problematic. Women should always agree with their husbands, or in-laws."

– Female Participant, Tirana

On a positive note, unlike in other parts of this section, more women in general feel completely free when moving about in public areas without fear or pressure (59%, increase of +6%). Another 35 percent feel somewhat free. Fewer women feel restricted in this regard when compared to the last wave, which may indicate that the overall situation on public areas is improved in the places where the survey has been conducted.

Henceforth, when taking into consideration the regress in regard to expressing a critical opinion to the family and leaving the house without permission, and the improvement in regard to moving about in the public it appears that the problematic issues for women do not lay outside but inside the realms of the family.

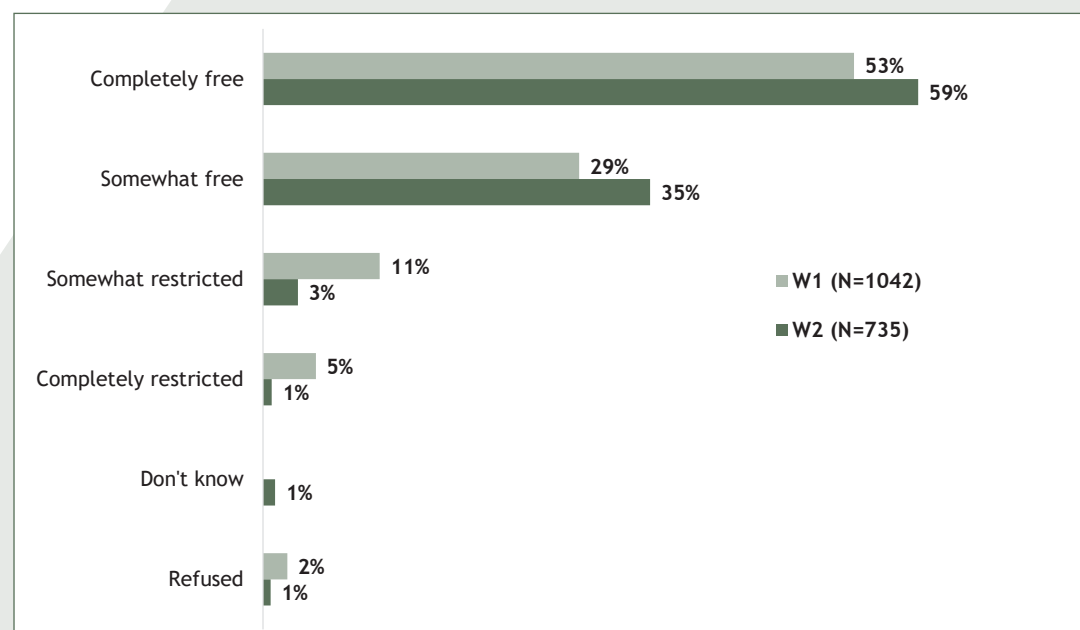


Figure 4.29. Moving about in public areas without fear or pressure

The same number of women when compared to the last wave state to be able to support themselves if they were no longer able to depend on their husband's or family's income (38%). However, one in three women state that they would not be able to do so.

An increase in regard to women who are already supporting themselves or their family can be observed (15%, increase of +6%).

According to focus group participants, economic independence is about the main factor that contributed towards the empowerment of women in the Albanian society. Participants claim that although there might be some discrimination in regards to various employment sectors, such discrimination can work both ways for men and women, thus

“women today are able to find employment, just as much as men are.”

Education plays a major factor in this regard and participants claim that just as the case of employment, women's access to education has majorly improvement, at least over the last 15 – 20 years.

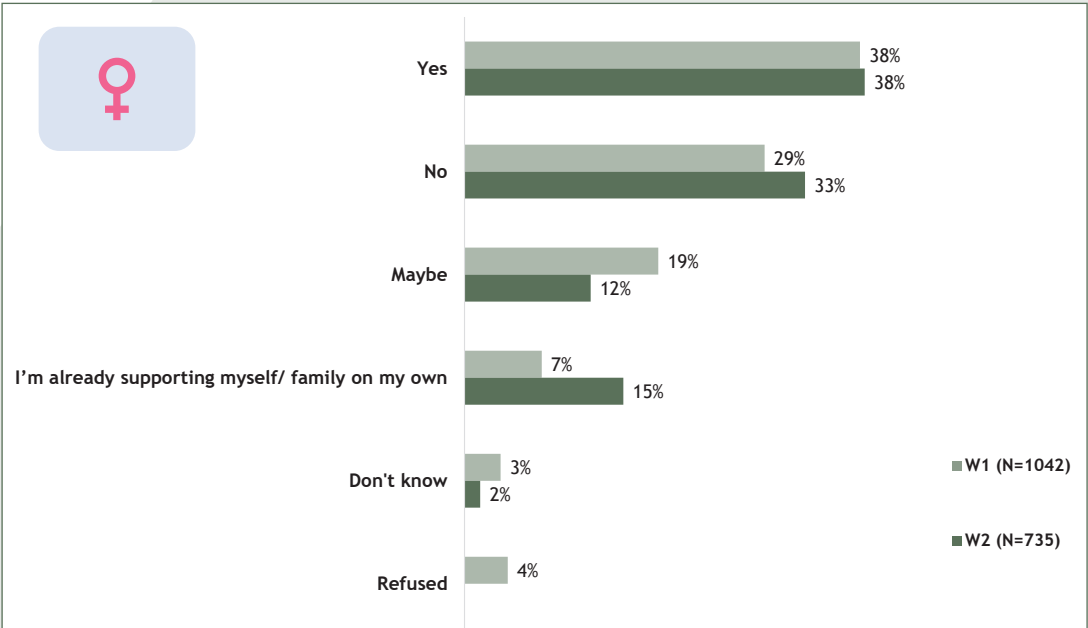


Figure 4.30. If you no longer were able to depend on your husband's or family's income, would you be able to support yourself/ family financially?

“There was a time that if a family had a couple of children, a larger emphasis was given to the education of the male children. This doesn't seem to be the case anymore, at least not in the urban areas.” – Female Participant, Shkodër

4.6 Media

Only half of the respondents (51%) think that the media reporting of the 2017 elections was accurate (41% “somewhat accurate” and 10% “very accurate”). Men and women responded similarly regarding this topic.

Rural residents were somewhat more positive in their assessment of the media compared to urban residents. Residents of the South-West area thought most positively about the media reporting in regard to elections, while residents of Central Albania had the least-positive impression. However, due to political differences between south (more residents who vote for the socialist party) and north (more residents who vote for the democratic party) these results may simply indicate the respondents projecting their expectations and hopes onto how the media is reporting on their preferred parties.

Opinion on the media and how the latest elections were portrayed is quite similar, in the case of the focus group discussions. Participants claim that these elections were generally quiet, with less incidents by comparison with the past. And this was accurately portrayed by the media according to them. However, participants also believe that each media in the country comes with political coloring.

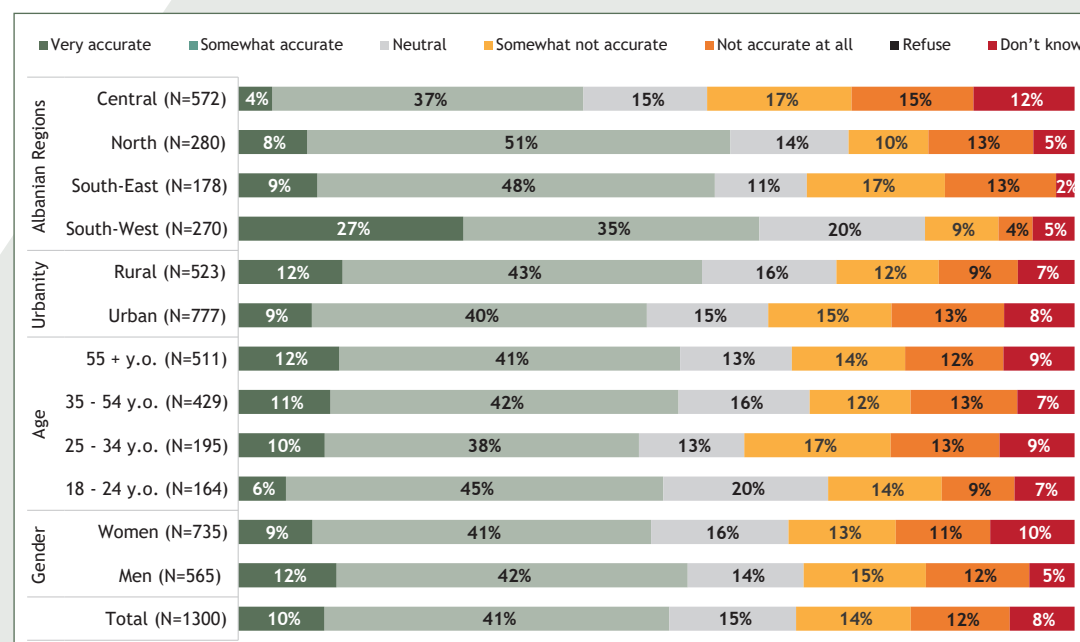


Figure 4.31. How accurate was the media in reporting the latest Parliamentary elections?
Breakdown by gender, region, age

"It is one thing to talk about accurate portrayal of the elections and quite another about trust towards the media." – Male Participant, Tirana

An increase of social media usage can be observed when wanting to express (political) views, by men and women alike.

In regard to other channels available to express views a decrease can be observed when participants were asked if they made used of them the throughout the past year. Only the usage of other media outlets such as radio or TV has remained the same (low) three per-cent.

Even though data shows a low frequency in expressing views, the barrier of doing so seems to have diminished. Apart from one category fewer respondents claimed that they would never made use of these channels to express their opinion.

The one channel listed which has been less used and at the same time more respondents would never make use of it, is directly contacting or visiting a public official.

	Over past 12 months		Would never do	
	Total W1	Total W2	Total W1	Total W2
Contacted or visited a public official at any level of government to express your opinion	26%	↓ 22%	34%	↑ 36%
Expressed your opinion on a political or social issue on social media sites like Facebook or Twitter	8%	↑ 10%	67%	↓ 58%
Called in to a radio or television talk show or written to a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on a political or social issue	3%	3%	61%	↓ 56%
Sent in an SMS vote to express your opinion on a political or social issue	5%	↓ 4%	61%	↓ 59%
Signed a written or email petition	6%	↓ 5%	62%	↓ 56%
Taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration	13%	↓ 11%	54%	↓ 51%

Figure 4.32. Please tell me if you have done any of these activities to express your views? *Total*

When looking at media usage and other channels to express views disaggregated by gender, data reveals that women are even less active than men and also less active than in 2014 in most regards. More women than men claim to never use any of the listed channels to express their views. On the other hand, two percent more women than men claim to have used social media in the past year to express their view.

Conclusively, these results are in line with the rest of the report portraying low interest in civic engagement. The fact that most commonly social media is used to express (political) opinions shows a rather passive involvement when comparing to other options such as taking part in protest or contacting a public official directly.

	Over past 12 months				Would never do			
	Men W1	Men W2	Women W1	Women W2	Men W1	Men W2	Women W1	Women W2
Contacted or visited a public official - at any level of government - to express your opinion	35%	31%	22%	10%	2%	29%	41%	43%
Expressed your opinion on a political or social issue on social media sites like Facebook or Twitter	9%	13%	11%	15%	62%	52%	71%	64%
Called in to a radio or television talk show or written to a newspaper or magazine to express your opinion on a political or social issue	3%	4%	3%	1%	56%	51%	65%	61%
Sent in an SMS vote to express your opinion on a political or social issue	6%	5%	5%	2%	56%	56%	65%	62%
Signed a written or email petition	8%	6%	5%	3%	55%	52%	69%	59%
Taken part in a protest, march, or demonstration	18%	15%	9%	4%	44%	45%	64%	56%

Figure 4.33. Please tell me if you have done any of these activities to express your views? *By Gender*

5. Conclusions & Recommendations

5.1 Women's Engagement in Politics & Gender Quota

- Women's participation in politics and establishment of gender quota are issues discussed at international and national level for many years. There are different opinions pro and con for gender quota, but when analyzing, mostly of them still seems to be based on gender stereotypes and prejudices of women's and men's positions and roles in family and society. The supporters of gender quota believe that the increased presence of women in political and decision making processes will have a positive impact within the political parties, will enhance accountability and transparency, strengthen local democracy, and promote gender equality. While opponents of gender quotas argue that women's numbers will not make a difference and their main concern is related to the quality of women elected by gender quotas. But this issue of the quality has never been discussed with the same concerns when it comes for the presence of men in politics. Although cases of unqualified men participating in political parties or even within high positions at political level are not missing in the political history, this issue continues to be a big concern only and in most of the debates focused on women's presence in decision-making. This is a clear indicator of the influence of gender stereotypes on such types of debates.
- The recent study "Gender Quotas and Women's Substantive Representation in the Local Councils of Albania" commissioned by United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in Albania, with the financial support of the Government of Sweden (January 2017) showed that "One of the commonly held assumptions is that women are less qualified than men. The findings of this study challenge this assumption. Many women have higher levels of education than men. Around 30 percent of women had a Master degree; meanwhile, the percentage for men was close to 21. Similarly, women have more training experience than men. 64.08 percent of women and 44.61 percent of men reported that they have participated in training sessions. Findings reveal a significant contribution of women in the following areas: First, women were more likely than men to propose draft decisions that focus on improving women's status. Women have proposed draft decisions that focus on parks, kindergartens, employment opportunities, economic aid, business support, support for women in rural areas, social housing, and leisure activities for women. Second, even though women were less likely than men to generally propose draft decisions, their draft decisions were more diverse. Women have been more responsive to health services, especially for women, business support for women, persons with disabilities, LGBTI, and youth. Meanwhile, men have been more responsive to disasters and emergencies, transportation, tourism, honorary titles, culture, sports, and animal protection. Third, women were more likely than men to identify domestic violence and poor access to health services as the main problems faced by women and girls. Fourth, in terms of public investments, women were more likely than men to demand the improvement of schools and kindergartens. Fifth, compared to men, women were more likely to report better relationships with councilors who shared the same gender and belonged to the opposition. Sixth, women were more likely than men to report that they have participated in collaborative initiatives addressing the problems faced by women and girls in the community. The focus of collaborative initiatives reported by women extends to, business support for women, women's organization, and gender budgeting."
- However, accepting gender quotas requires awareness from the population as a whole in terms of the importance of implementing such a practice, as well as on providing a clear explanation on what exactly they consist and on the recent changes (30% at central level – 50% at municipal' council). This issue needs support from both genders and it must be discussed on different levels and with different groups of population.

5.2 Voting

- There is still an evident necessity for the government to draft and implement a clear national strategy aimed at addressing the phenomenon of family voting at its roots. Although the strategy should be aimed at the national level, it should be more focused in locations where the phenomenon occurs more frequently, such as remote, rural areas.
- Priority should be given to the design and implementation of awareness campaigns aimed at reducing the phenomenon of family voting among all voters. However, awareness campaigns should take into consideration the fact that family voting as a phenomenon is mostly ignored in the rural areas in the country. To reduce the phenomenon of family voting, the campaigns should aim to combat the causes that support this practice, with a special focus on the still existing mentality that women and young women are less able to take political decisions. Study findings suggest that policies designed at national or local level to emphasize the capacities of women to make their own decisions, must be implemented. These policies that in principle target both men and women, need to be coordinated also with specific actions and policies which increase the transparency of election processes and reduce additional factors influencing in family voting phenomenon. On one hand, women need to trust their own ability to take decisions independently. On the other hand, men and women should not rely on stereotypical thinking but instead trust the decision-making capacities of their partners, sisters and daughters.
- Awareness campaigns with the aim of making politics more accessible and understood for the general public are also

needed. The data of this report has shown that a majority of men and women often struggle with understanding political and governmental matters.

- The awareness and interest needs to be raised especially among youth on the importance of free and fair elections, civic engagement and politics in general to ensure an informed and engaged future generation with a higher interest in political matters than it currently seems to be the case.

5.3 Other Recommendations

- There is a great need to push for the immediate and correct implementation of the strategic policy documents existing so far in Albania. I.e. in the National Strategy for Gender Equality 2016-2020 and its Action Plan¹, the strategic goal no. 2 is specifically focused on “Ensuring equal participation of women in political and public decision making” and one of the objective indicators clearly specifies that: “By the end of 2020 the number of women part of legislative power and policy making will be increased up to 40%”. But although concrete activities were planned which focused on gender quotas and their increase for the central elections of 2017, such planned actions were not implemented prior to 2017 elections. In addition, there are planned many specific actions related to the improvement of women’s participation at decision making processes at local level, and the time of their implementation is right now, prior to the next local elections. So when such policy documents exist and are approved², it is very important to push for their correct implementation.

1. http://www.qbz.gov.al/botime/fletore_zyrtare/2016/PDF-2016/201-2016.pdf

2. The National Strategy for Gender Equality 2016-2020 and its Action Plan is approved with Council of Minister’s Decision no 733, date 20.10.2016

- Since the local election process is fast approaching (supposed to happen in 2019), there is a great need to undertake concrete and urgent measures to: (i) increase knowledge on importance of women's participation in politics and decision making; (ii) introduce the clear aim and the updates related to gender quota; (iii) organize wide public awareness campaigns for increasing citizens participation in voting, with specific focus on women's and young women of different communities; (iv) promote women in leadership as positive models; (v) increase the awareness and knowledge of youths (both genders) on the importance of having a free and independent voting process, etc. The Alliance of Women's Councilors established in many municipalities (with support of UN Women) may play a significant role on increasing women's participation in local elections as well as in politics and decision-making processes in general.
- Referring to international means on increasing women's participation in local election can be supportive, too. "European Charter for Equality of women and men in local life"³ prepared from Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), is a concrete specific tool that can be very useful.

It is addressed to the local and regional governments of Europe, who are invited to sign it, to make a formal public commitment to the principle of equality of women and men, and to implement, within their territory, the commitments set out within the Charter. Supported from UN Women, even municipalities of Albania have started to sign this Charter and to follow the needed steps for its implementation. Five out of seven municipalities⁴ that have signed this Charter were also part of this study. These Municipalities are currently finalizing their Local Gender Action Plans in support of the public obligations on gender equality as undertaken by signing of this Charter. A specific objective in each of these Local Gender Action Plans is focused on increasing women's presence and participation in political and public life, under which there are foreseen concrete actions to empower women and youths (of both genders) from different groups being more visible in such processes, as well as actions against family voting. UN Women and other international organizations may provide additional support to at least these municipalities to implement these actions, in order to see the positive results deriving from such actions.

3. http://www.ccre.org/docs/charte_egalite_en.pdf

4. The Charter is signed from Municipalities of Gjirokastër, Korçë, Elbasan, Tiranë, Durrës, Shkodër and Permet, while so far only municipalities of Tiranë, Durrës, Shkodër, Elbasan and Korçë are proceeding with the drafting of the Local Gender Action Plan to support the implementation of the Charter.