

# Kosovo's Year of Elections 2025

## PERSISTENT BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Analysis of Parliamentary and  
Local Elections in Kosovo



MAY 2026

18%

37%

50%



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
Confédération suisse  
Confederazione Svizzera  
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Agency for Development  
and Cooperation SDC



NATIONAL  
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# **Kosovo's Year of Elections 2025: Persistent Barriers to Women's Political Participation**

## **May 2026**

### **Introduction**

Kosovo's 2025 electoral year stands out for its intensity and analytical insights as three major electoral processes were conducted within ten months, including parliamentary elections in February, local elections in October with runoffs in November, and early parliamentary elections in December. Across all elections, Kosovo demonstrated procedural integrity: voting was peaceful, legal frameworks were applied, complaint mechanisms were available, and results were ultimately certified.<sup>1</sup> Together, these electoral processes provided a rare test of Kosovo's democratic systems across both national and local levels, allowing an assessment of not only electoral procedures but also of deeper patterns of political competition, representation, and equality.

Despite some indicators of progress, including having had two women presidents and women being elected to parliament and as local councilors in numbers exceeding the legally mandated minimum levels of representation, women continue to face barriers to political participation. In 2025, these challenges were exacerbated by an election cycle marked by divisiveness and legislative paralysis. Funding cuts from European donors and the dissolution of USAID further disrupted the advancement of gender equality in politics.

Heightened polarization narrowed policy debate, deprioritizing representation and women's political participation. Efforts to promote women in leadership roles in political parties, government, and in the media were sidelined, a challenge likely to persist in 2026. National elections faced political and procedural challenges, including government formation failures and allegations of manipulation in December, highlighting institutional vulnerabilities. Observers cited limited resources and restricted media access.<sup>2</sup>

While political pluralism increased in the Kosovo Serb community, the Serbian List (SL) remained dominant, with its established networks contributing to an uneven environment for political competition.

Executive power remains heavily male-dominated. While quota mechanisms facilitate women's legislative presence, a persistent "executive ceiling" restricts women's access to senior leadership, especially mayoral positions.

The information space was challenged by gender-targeted online hostility. Sexualized insults and reputational discrediting rooted in social norms serve as systemic deterrents to women's political participation. The 2025 elections showed a procedurally functional democracy still facing structural barriers. Progress requires much stronger commitment from parties, the media, and society to accelerate women's equal participation and representation in political life.

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<sup>1</sup> [Preliminary Statement on the 2025 Parliamentary Elections](#), Democracy in Action, 2025.

<sup>2</sup> [Kosovo 2025 Parliamentary Elections: Final Report](#), European Union Election Observation Mission, 2025.

This report focuses on barriers to women's political participation as seen in the national election processes throughout 2025, as well as the local elections and the appointment of women in municipal leadership positions.

As Kosovo heads into another national election on June 7, 2026, citizens should pay close attention to the conditions of women and non-majority community candidates. This report offers recommendations for all sectors of society, in particular, political parties, the media, and the voters, to uphold electoral conditions that promote fairness, dignity, and equal opportunities for all candidates.

## Key Findings

Overall, the 2025 elections highlighted both continuing challenges and tangible progress in advancing women's political participation and representation.

### Areas of Progress:

- **Assembly presidency parity:** The presidency reached a 50/50 gender balance for the first time.
- **Direct election success:** A record 88% of women were elected without gender quota implementation in the December national elections, versus 84% in February.
- **List carriers increase:** Parties nominated 56 women as list carriers in local elections, representing 18% of all list carriers, up from 13% in 2021.
- **Candidate growth:** Women candidates for local councilors reached 37% and 20 candidates for mayor (up from 14 in 2021).

However, persistent barriers continue to hinder women's political participation.

### Women underrepresented in politics and government:

- **Uneven progress:** While 45 women were elected to the Assembly in February, only 41 were elected in December, a slight overall decline from 42 in the 2021 national elections.
- **Lack of parity commitment:** Party candidate lists were far from parity, with most political parties remaining close to the minimum representation thresholds in both elections.
- **Women face an executive ceiling.** Women remain underrepresented in executive positions at both the central and local levels. At the central level, women's representation in senior government positions decreased from 35% in the 2021 government to 25% in the 2026 government. While local level governments are still being formed, so far, the number of women in leadership positions overall has declined since the 2021 elections.

### Underrepresentation of women in the media and systematic online violence against women in politics:

- **Lack of access to media:** Media and public visibility patterns remain gendered; women's participation in televised debates was just 21%, while women appeared in only 16% of election chronicles.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> [\*Report from Media Monitoring During the Election Campaign: General Elections for the Assembly of Kosovo, 9 February 2025\*](#), Democracy in Action, 2025.

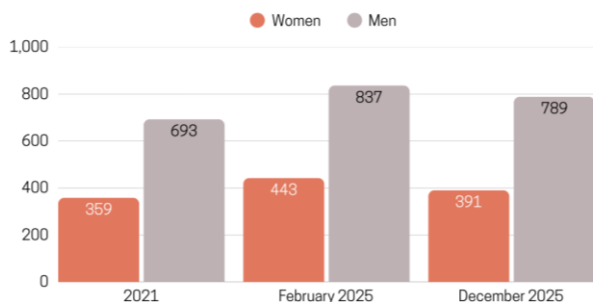
- **Online violence:** Men produced 97% of hateful comments, creating a systemic barrier to women’s participation.<sup>4</sup>
- **Gendered digital risks and online safety:** These patterns of online abuse and manipulation function as an exclusion mechanism, raising the personal and reputational cost of political participation for women, narrowing who is willing to run and weakening equality.

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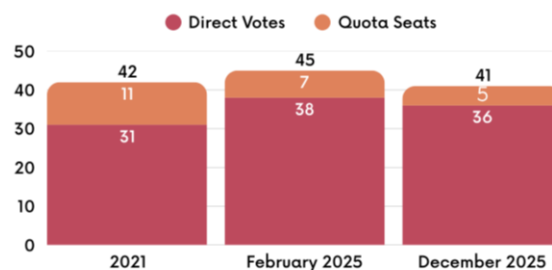
## 1. National Elections: Uneven Progress in Women’s Representation with Structural Limits 2021-2025

Overall, compared to the 2021 national and local elections, more women ran for office in 2025, but women’s representation decreased at all levels. In the February 2025 parliamentary elections, women’s representation reached an historic high, with 45 women elected to the Assembly, representing 37.5% of seats. However, following the December 2025 elections, the number of women elected decreased to 41 women, or 34%. In February 2025, 84% of elected women won their seats without relying on the gender quota. Although the total number of women elected was slightly lower in December 2025, the share of women elected without the quota increased to 87%, still marking a significant improvement compared to 73% in 2021. Voter turnout remained steady at 45%, with high diaspora engagement<sup>5</sup>.

**Parliamentary Elections Candidates Gender Breakdown**



**Elected Women in Parliamentary Elections**



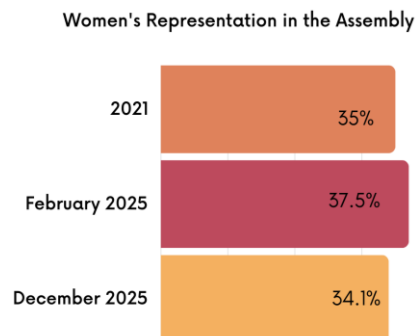
A key comparative insight from the two parliamentary elections is that women’s legislative presence appears to be stabilizing above one-third, indicating that women’s representation is becoming structurally anchored in Kosovo’s national politics, rather than remaining a purely quota-driven outcome. However, persistent constraints remain as major parties largely maintain approximately 30–35% women candidates, with no major political party exceeding 35% women in the national elections. This suggests quotas function as a floor but also practically as a ceiling

<sup>4</sup> [unSOCIAL Media II: Sensational Online Hate Against Women in Politics](#), Democracy for Development (D4D), 2025.

<sup>5</sup> According to CEC, the total number of diaspora votes for the December 2025 elections was 44,665. According to the Internal Affairs Ministry, 340,000 people entered Kosovo during the elections, many of whom likely voted.

in nomination practices. This nomination pattern can stabilize representation while preventing a transition to parity, particularly if women candidates are not systematically positioned in the most competitive segments of open lists.

A major milestone was the fact that the Assembly presidency reached gender parity in leadership positions for the first time following the December 2025 elections. Albulena Haxhiu was elected as the second woman Speaker of the Assembly, with Vlora Çitaku and Emilija Redžepi appointed as Deputy Speakers.<sup>6</sup> Kosovo reached a new high of 443 (34.6%) candidates in the February elections, which decreased to 391 (33.1%) in December. A record 36 women out of 41 (88%) were



elected in the December national elections, without application of the quota, versus 38 out of 45 (84%) in February. While women in the Assembly remain well below parity, the results indicate gradual progress in electoral support for women candidates beyond minimum representation requirements, pointing to a slow but continued strengthening of women's political representation in the legislative branch.

During the national campaign, most candidate lists were headed by men due to the near monopoly of men as major party leaders. The distribution of women in leading positions on major political parties' candidate lists for national elections falls far below parity, with none exceeding 35%. Throughout the campaign period, women were also underrepresented as speakers at public events, constituting only a small proportion of those addressing rallies, and, in a considerable number of campaign activities, no women were present in representative roles at all.<sup>7</sup> Representation is not only about the number of women on lists; it is also about placement, winnability, and the translation of representation into leadership roles. For instance, the Council of Europe Parliamentary Observation mission notes that, in meeting the quota, the parties can still position women in the lowest possible slot in each group of three candidates.<sup>8</sup> This suggests the need for reforms to ensure equal representation in the higher positions of party lists.<sup>9</sup>

The change in the electoral law allowing citizens to vote for ten rather than five candidates appears to have contributed to a disproportionate increase in votes for male candidates. Compared to the 2021 national elections, in the February 2025 elections, men candidates received 112% more votes while women candidates received 76% more votes. As a result, the gender distribution of candidate votes shifted from 32.8% for women and 67.2% for men in 2021 to 28.9% for women and 71.1%

<sup>6</sup> Redžepi represents the multi-ethnic caucus in the Presidency of the Assembly. The position rotates every six months; thus, this parity would most likely be temporary.

<sup>7</sup> *Preliminary Statement on the 2025 Parliamentary Elections*, Democracy in Action, 2025.

<sup>8</sup> *Observation of the Elections to the Assembly of Kosovo (9 February 2025): Election Observation Report (Doc. 16146 rev.)*, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2025.

<sup>9</sup> The purpose of this mechanism is not only to increase the number of women on party lists, but also to ensure that women are placed in electable positions rather than clustered at the bottom of lists, where their chances of securing a mandate are minimal. A zipper system is widely used in proportional representation systems with closed or semi-closed lists. It has been implemented, for example, in countries such as Sweden, Belgium, Spain, and France (for certain electoral levels). Empirical evidence from these contexts shows that zipper systems are among the most effective quota designs for increasing women's representation, particularly when combined with strong enforcement mechanisms and sanctions for non-compliance.

for men in 2025. Despite the disproportionate effect of the new law, more women were elected to parliament in February 2025—45 compared to 42 in 2021. However, by the December 2025 elections, women candidates received 28.3% of total candidate votes, and the number of women elected declined to 41. Overall, while the new voting system may have increased total candidate votes, it did not translate into stronger electoral gains for women to the extent many had expected.<sup>10</sup>

In 2023, the Assembly passed a law raising the salaries of municipal councilors but also prohibiting them from taking two public salaries while raising their salaries.<sup>11</sup> Although the impact on women councilors of this new law is not yet known, anecdotal stories indicate that the law may attract more women candidates with higher salaries but also may disproportionately push women to resign their councilor positions, as women tend to hold more jobs in the public sector than men do. Further research on the impact is needed.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Underrepresented Constituencies

The EU Observation Mission also identified shortcomings in the physical accessibility of polling stations and limitations in assistive voting tools, recommending improvements to ensure independent and secret voting for people with disabilities. These findings indicate that while legal frameworks provide for universal suffrage, practical barriers continue to affect equal access to electoral processes.<sup>13</sup> Among all certified candidates in the February parliamentary elections (1,280 in total), only two were people with disabilities, and neither secured a mandate. People with disabilities were largely absent from the campaign landscape, both in terms of representation and participation in public events, highlighting persistent gaps in inclusive political engagement.<sup>14</sup>

Representation of non-majority communities also remains a challenge. While the Constitution of Kosovo guarantees reserved seats for all non-majority communities in the Assembly of Kosovo, participation levels and broader political integration vary. Non-majority political engagement was sparse; for instance, no Roma candidates secured local council seats. The continued absence of Roma representation in municipal assemblies highlights the limits of descriptive representation at the local level, despite formal guarantees at the central level.

Council of Europe observers acknowledged the active role of civil society organizations in promoting representation across gender, disability, youth, and LGBTQIA+ constituencies. At the same time, it noted that political polarization and information disorders, particularly in contexts shaped by interethnic sensitivities, create an environment that can discourage participation and reinforce social fragmentation. Information ecosystem dynamics, therefore, intersect with

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<sup>10</sup> In 2021, women candidates received 1,214,816 votes, compared to 2,483,838 for men candidates. In February 2025, votes for women candidates rose to 2,142,647, while men's votes grew even more sharply to 5,260,380. In December 2025, women's votes slightly decreased to 2,108,826 while men's votes increased even further, to 5,338,624.

<sup>11</sup> Article 23(5) of the Law on Salaries in the Public Sector in Kosovo.

<sup>12</sup> [Law on Public Salaries](#), Kosovo.

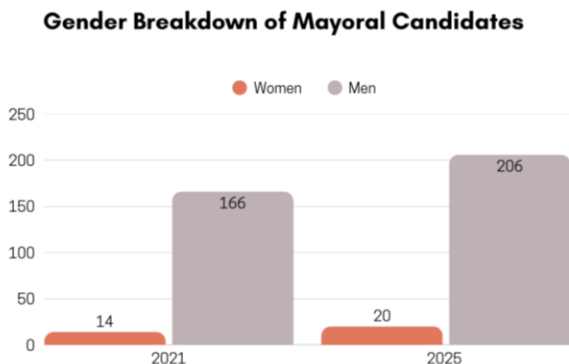
<sup>13</sup> [Kosovo 2025 Parliamentary Elections: Final Report](#), European Union Election Observation Mission, 2025.

<sup>14</sup> [Preliminary Statement on the 2025 Parliamentary Elections](#), Democracy in Action, 2025. No figures on people with disabilities are yet available for the December 2025 elections.

participation patterns, influencing trust, perceptions of fairness, and the willingness of marginalized groups to engage in political processes.<sup>15</sup>

### 3. Local Elections: More Candidates but Marginal Regression in Representation

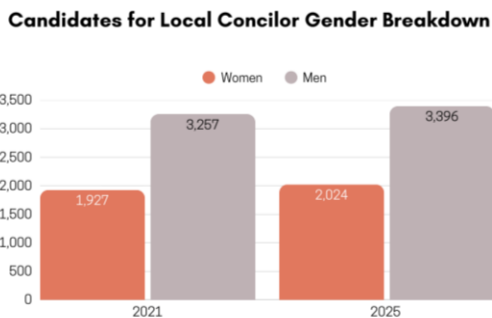
The recent population census in Kosovo led to a redistribution of seats in municipal assemblies, affecting the structure of local representation across the country. As a result of population changes,



15 municipalities experienced a reduction in the number of assembly seats, two municipalities, Fushë Kosovë and Shtërpcë, saw an increase, and the remaining municipalities maintained the same number of seats. The census resulted in 60 fewer seats overall (6%) reduction (from 1002 to 942 seats), disproportionately impacting women councilors, who lost 7.1% of seats, compared to men losing 5.3%.

following month resulted in new mayors in 11 municipalities, including one woman. In four municipalities, the winning mayor came from a different political party than the previous mayor. Compared to the 2021 elections, the Self-Determination Movement (LVV) gained three municipalities, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) lost two, and the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) lost one. All other parties saw no change. Kosovo Serb candidates regained the offices of mayor in all four northern Kosovo Serb-majority municipalities, following the 2023 resignations of Kosovo Serb mayors and the boycott of snap local elections, which had resulted in

The local elections in October 2025 across 38 municipalities and subsequent runoffs the following month resulted in new mayors in 11 municipalities, including one woman. In four municipalities, the winning mayor came from a different political party than the previous mayor. Compared to the 2021 elections, the Self-Determination Movement (LVV) gained three municipalities, the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) lost two, and the Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK) lost one. All other parties saw no change. Kosovo Serb candidates regained the offices of mayor in all four northern Kosovo Serb-majority municipalities, following the 2023 resignations of Kosovo Serb mayors and the boycott of snap local elections, which had resulted in the election of Kosovo Albanian mayors.<sup>16</sup>



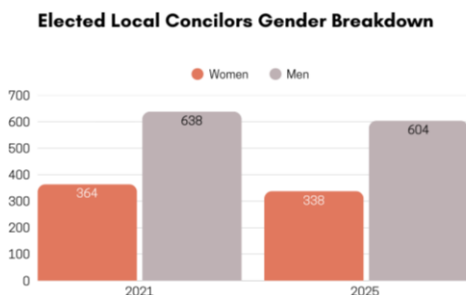
The number of women candidates for mayor increased to 20 across 15 municipalities, up from 14 candidates across 11 municipalities in 2021. However, only one woman was elected mayor, a reduction from two women mayors in 2021, both of whom were SL candidates in noncompetitive, Kosovo Serb-majority municipalities. In 23 municipalities, there were no women mayoral candidates, and, in each of the 17 municipalities

<sup>15</sup> [Observation of the Elections to the Assembly of Kosovo \(9 February 2025\): Election Observation Report \(Doc. 16146 rev.\)](#), Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2025.

<sup>16</sup> [Information Disorders in Kosovo 2023](#), National Democratic Institute, 2024. Tensions between Kosovo and Serbia during 2023, including the elections boycotted by Kosovo Serbs in April, the violent clashes between protesters against the Kosovo Police and KFOR peacekeepers in May, the detention of three Kosovo Police officers by the Serbian Police in June, as well as the armed attack against Kosovo Police in Banjska in September, were key events during which the information space in Kosovo was flooded with manipulated information. As a consequence, the interethnic tensions in Kosovo significantly escalated, exacerbating the already fragile relations among Kosovo's Albanian and Serbian communities.

that went to mayoral runoffs in November 2025, all the candidates were men.

In 2025, there was only a slight increase of 87 in the number of women candidates.<sup>17</sup> At the



municipal assembly level, women's representation marginally declined, with 35.88% of seats (338) won by women in 2025, compared to 36.3% (364) in 2021. This near-flatline change signals that quotas ensure a stable baseline but do not themselves generate sustained momentum toward parity. The quota secures "presence," but not necessarily influence, because assemblies and mayoral offices do not often offer women equal power.

In 2025, there was an increase in women carriers of the lists. Specifically, out of 308 list carriers, political parties nominated 56 women, representing 18% nationwide, an increase from 36 (13%) in 2021. However, women remain vastly underrepresented in this symbolically and practically important position.

The gender quota continues to function primarily as a static floor, rather than as a catalyst for further advancement. The percentage of women as municipal councilors varies substantially. For instance, four municipalities have over 40% women as municipal councilors, while four have just under 30%.<sup>18</sup>

#### 4. Invisible Women at the Top: Male Leader-Centered Campaigns

Across all elections in 2025, visibility and agenda-setting power remained concentrated at the top, where women were significantly underrepresented. The limited number of women in senior party leadership positions translated directly into a male-centered campaign environment. Women candidates were present in substantial numbers, yet rarely positioned as principal speakers, chief negotiators of party platforms, or defining public faces of their campaigns. As a result, electoral competition reinforced existing hierarchies rather than disrupting them. Visibility translates to political capital. In a leader-centered system, men benefit from being the party "faces," while women's policy expertise remains less visible. Runoffs further personalized races, relegating women to supportive rather than directive roles, highlighting structural exclusion from executive visibility.

A key factor impeding women candidates is the lack of access to funding networks. A study focused on the February 2025 parliamentary elections documents how campaigning often requires significant private resources, reliance on family networks, and informal support systems, with implications for inclusivity and fairness.<sup>19</sup> Importantly, the study emphasizes that women face

<sup>17</sup> The percentage of women candidates in both 2021 and 2025 remained roughly the same at 37% as the number of women candidates was 2,024 out of 5,419 (37.34%) in 2025, compared to 1,937 of the 5,198 candidates in 2021 (37.26%).

<sup>18</sup> Ranillug 53.3%, Pristina 43.13%, Gracanica 42.1%, Obiliq 42.8%. Four fell below the mandatory 30% per the quota: Skënderaj 29.6%, Shtërpcë 26.3%, Fushë Kosovë 29%, Drenas 29.6%. Municipalities tend to round down, not up, resulting in less women as local councilors.

<sup>19</sup> *The Cost of Politics in Kosovo*, Albert Krasniqi / Democracy Plus & Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2025.

distinctive barriers: unequal access to sponsorship, weaker party support, and prevailing gendered attitudes that shape “winnability” perceptions. It also highlights gendered patterns in access to business networks, where women may be viewed as less able to “return the investment,” and structural inequalities such as lower property ownership constrain women’s ability to mobilize capital (including access to loans). These findings suggest that even when women win their seats, they may do so through higher personal sacrifice and weaker institutional support.

As discussed further under section 4 below, the media dynamics reinforced these patterns, disadvantaging women seeking long-term political credibility and leadership recognition.

#### **4.1 Women Face Executive Ceiling**

Women face a persistent “executive ceiling” at all government levels. This exclusion prevents women’s perspectives—which represent half the population’s interests—from shaping policy priorities and undermines broader democratic legitimacy.

This is not simply a “pipeline” problem; it reflects party incentives and gatekeeping. Mayors, deputy mayors, speakers, and directors are high-stakes positions where parties often nominate candidates perceived as maximally competitive based on entrenched networks, resource access, and existing recognition. In many contexts, those inputs exclude women’s voices. Women may be present and active across party structures, but parties fail to nominate women for mayoral races, especially in competitive municipalities. The result is a system where women’s political presence expands in legislative bodies but remains constrained in executive positions that control budgets, appointments, and municipal governance agendas.

At the national level, the government formed in early 2026 saw a decrease in the number and percentage of women in leadership levels in government. For instance, in the 2021 government, women held 6 out of 17 government positions, including ministerial and deputy prime minister roles, representing 35.2%. While the number of ministers increased from 17 to 20 in early 2026, the number of women appointed as ministers and deputy prime ministers is 5 out of 20 (25%).

Women at the local level face the most entrenched structural barrier to their political advancement. The obstacles to women gaining executive positions are challenging in municipal executive roles of deputy mayors and directors. While not yet finalized in all municipalities, women as speakers, deputy mayors, and municipal directors remain remarkably few, as only four out of 27 speakers in Kosovo’s Albanian-majority municipalities are women.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, out of the 27 deputy mayors appointed so far, only four are women, meaning that 85% of these positions are held by men. Municipal directors are still being appointed, but most municipalities are appointing only 25% to 35% women, still well below parity.<sup>21</sup> This points to persistent systemic constraints limiting women’s access to executive leadership at the municipal level. In effect, Kosovo risks consolidating a model where women’s participation is normalized in municipal councils but remains exceptional in executive leadership.

Women at local levels in Kosovo continue to face significant structural barriers to executive political representation, particularly in smaller municipalities where political competition is shaped by tighter informal networks, traditional gender expectations, and more limited access to

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<sup>20</sup> To date, information on the ten Kosovo-Serb municipalities is not publicly available.

<sup>21</sup> One exception is Han i Elezit is at 55%, with five women directors out of nine.

campaign financing and political mentorship opportunities. These dynamics reinforce party gatekeeping and reduce women’s visibility as viable executive candidates at the local level. Although the 2025 local elections included 20 women mayoral candidates out of 226 total candidates (8.8%), this remains indicative of only modest progress since 2021 (7.7%, with 14 candidates) within a deeply unequal political environment. In the absence of binding gender parity mechanisms for executive positions, women’s participation in mayoral races continues to depend largely on party leadership decisions and internal nomination practices, resulting in persistently low levels of women’s executive representation.

## **5. Information Quality, Digital Safety, and Gendered Barriers to Participation**

Analysis of traditional media, online platforms, and social media during Kosovo’s 2025 elections reveals a media environment that systematically disadvantaged women candidates, both in terms of visibility and the quality of public discourse. Traditional media coverage remained heavily leader-centered and male-dominated, with women representing only 21% of participants in televised debates and news coverage, limiting their exposure and ability to communicate policy platforms.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, online and social media spaces amplified gender-based online harassment, sexualized insults, and attacks on women’s competence and legitimacy as political actors. The combined effect was a political communication environment that raised the psychological and professional costs of participation for women, reinforcing structural inequalities in political competition and undermining the inclusiveness of the electoral process.

### **5.1 The Chilling Impact of Gendered Online Abuse, Compounded in Non-Majority Communities.**

This report’s findings point to a persistent and deeply gendered pattern of online abuse. Women politicians were disproportionately targeted through sexualized insults, attacks on physical appearance, reputational discreditation rooted in social norms, and narratives questioning their competence or suitability for public office. In contrast to male candidates who are more frequently criticized for party affiliation, ideology, or policy positions, women were targeted based on gender identity. This distinction is critical: gender is weaponized as a political tool to discredit, trivialize, and exclude women from the sphere of legitimate political actors.<sup>23</sup>

Men produced 97% of the 91,525 hateful gendered comments observed, reflecting power relations embedded in political discourse.<sup>24</sup> From a fair representation perspective, online violence functions as a “soft exclusion mechanism.” It does not formally deny women the right to run for office, speak publicly, or campaign. However, it raises the psychological, reputational, and security costs of participation. The normalization of gendered abuse can deter women from entering politics, constrain their willingness to speak on controversial issues, and push them toward self-censorship. Over time, this creates a chilling effect: only those women with exceptional resilience, strong party

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<sup>22</sup> [Report from Media Monitoring During the Election Campaign: General Elections for the Assembly of Kosovo, 9 February 2025](#), Democracy in Action, 2025.

<sup>23</sup> [unSOCIAL Media II: Sensational Online Hate Against Women in Politics](#), Democracy for Development (D4D), 2025.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid* (9).

backing, or substantial personal support networks remain active, while others step down from politics.<sup>25</sup> The result is a political field that is formally open but substantively skewed.

The intersectional dimension of this hostility further deepens the exclusionary impact. Women from non-majority communities were subjected to compounded attacks that blended misogyny with ethnic rhetoric.<sup>26</sup> This dual targeting reinforces marginalization along multiple lines of gender and ethnicity and highlights that inclusion policies cannot treat “women” as a homogeneous group. Intersectional vulnerability must be addressed explicitly in both electoral oversight and digital governance frameworks.

The Council of Europe parliamentary delegation observation mission similarly warned that intentional narrative manipulation campaigns and intimidation, particularly in contexts marked by interethnic tensions, pose risks to democratic integrity and can disproportionately affect women’s political participation.<sup>27</sup> These observations also align with the European Union’s observation mission concerns that information disorders undermine not only electoral fairness but also democratic culture.<sup>28</sup>

In this context, analysis of the information space extends beyond factual accuracy and the regulation of political advertising. It concerns the broader question of whether the public sphere remains a secure, credible, and equitable space for democratic competition. Addressing online violence against women in politics therefore remains closely linked to protecting equal political citizenship and ensuring that gains in representation are not undermined by declining standards of safety and participation in public life.

## **5.2 Traditional Media Coverage, Political Visibility and Women’s Representation**

The analysis of traditional media during the 2025 election period highlights several important trends regarding the visibility, balance, and quality of political coverage in Kosovo’s traditional media. Overall, traditional media played a central role in shaping the electoral campaign, but coverage remained highly concentrated on major political actors and party leaders, with limited attention given to policy debates and programmatic issues.

Political coverage was highly personalized. Media reporting frequently focused on party leaders and prominent candidates rather than on party programs, policy proposals, or issue-based discussions. As a result, election coverage often revolved around political competition and campaign activities instead of substantive debate on public policies. As the larger parties received most of the coverage, smaller parties and independent candidates received considerably less coverage, which limited their ability to present their platforms to voters.

Women candidates were underrepresented in news and debates, and gender-related issues were rarely addressed in campaign reporting. In many cases, women candidates received coverage that focused more on personal background or party symbolism than on policy priorities or leadership credentials. The limited integration of gender-related issues into mainstream campaign reporting

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<sup>25</sup> [Tweets That Chill: Analyzing Online Violence Against Women in Politics](#), National Democratic Institute (NDI), 2019.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid (12).

<sup>27</sup> [Observation of the Elections to the Assembly of Kosovo \(9 February 2025\): Election Observation Report \(Doc. 16146 rev.\)](#), Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2025.

<sup>28</sup> [Kosovo 2025 Parliamentary Elections: Final Report](#), European Union Election Observation Mission, 2025.

also contributed to the marginalization of debates on women’s political participation, care policies, economic inclusion, and gender-based violence. These dynamics reproduce structural inequalities in political competition and constrain women’s ability to compete on equal footing during electoral campaigns.

## 6. Conclusions and Pathways Forward

This report’s findings point to a clear conclusion: Kosovo’s legal framework has helped institutionalize women’s representation in politics, but political commitment from party leadership and structural reforms are required to convert representation into sustained power-sharing, especially in executive roles and in the public political sphere.

Kosovo’s 2025 electoral year confirms that the country’s democratic system is procedurally stable and competitive, but equal participation remains a challenge in substantive power, visibility, and political safety. Kosovo appears to be consolidating women’s parliamentary representation above one-third across repeated national elections in 2025. This is meaningful and should be recognized as progress, with the recognition that the quota may be “locking in” an equilibrium much lower than parity. In addition, media coverage and public debate continue to show significant gender gaps in visibility, while online hostility creates an additional barrier to women’s political participation.

More women ran for office, but fewer ended up as MPs, deputy ministers, ministers, mayors, and local councilors. While in early 2026, the presidency of the Assembly reached parity for the first time, an executive ceiling remains the most significant structural barrier to women’s empowerment as it restricts their representation in leadership roles once elected at the local level.

The pathways below focus on reforms that can realistically shift incentives within the government, parties, election administration, campaign finances, and the media, especially combatting online violence against women in politics. While civil society actively monitors Kosovo’s political activities, the engagement of all sectors is essential to tackling the systemic obstacles to women achieving parity in political representation in Kosovo.

This year’s elections should serve as a wake-up call to Kosovo’s society to maintain commitment and focus on the goal of equal participation and representation. In the upcoming national elections on June 7, all sectors, in particular political parties, the media, and the voters, must help create the conditions for women to excel in politics. Therefore, the following recommendations should be put in place:

### 6.1 Party Reforms: Moving from Compliance to Equality-in-Practice

Political parties remain the primary gatekeepers of women’s political advancement. While parties comply with the quota framework for candidate lists, the recurring 30–35% nomination pattern suggests that women’s political participation remains primarily quota compliance-driven, rather than embedded as a political principle of achieving parity. Parties should adopt internal reforms that increase women’s access to winnable positions and leadership roles, including:

- **Party parity targets:** Implement 50/50 balance in nominations and equitable ranking systems.

- **Transparent nominations:** Document and make public criteria for mayoral and competitive races to reduce gatekeeping.
- **Leadership positioning:** Position and track women in visible positions as spokespersons and strategic planners within parties.

## 6.2. Executive Parity Pathways

Women mayoral candidacies remain under 10%, with placement only in unwinnable races. Kosovo’s political parties should treat executive parity as a targeted policy objective, addressing the mayoral “gap” directly as follows:

- **Mayoral commitments:** Expand women’s participation in mayoral races, including in municipalities where parties are electorally competitive.
- **Executive pipelines:** Intentionally develop "mayoral readiness" pathways for women councilors.
- **Electoral safeguards:** Strengthen transparency and accountability in counting centers to strengthen legitimacy.
- **Municipal targets:** Parties should commit to parity for speaker, deputy mayor, and director positions.

## 6.3 Evaluate the Impact of Legal Reforms Affecting Municipal Councilors

The impact on women candidates of the 2023 salary increase of municipal councilors and the new restriction on dual public salaries for municipal councilors is unclear and needs further study. To monitor impact, the following is needed:

- Systematic data on resignations, candidate profiles, and employment backgrounds of councilors to assess whether the reform ultimately expands or constrains women’s participation in municipal governance.

## 6.4 Campaign Finance: Closing the Resource Gap

Studies show that high campaign costs can distort electoral competition by shifting attention away from the electoral contest itself toward financial constraints and fundraising efforts.<sup>29</sup> For women, the study highlights distinctive barriers: unequal access to sponsorship, weaker party support, gendered attitudes about winnability, and structural financial inequality linked to property ownership and access to credit. These are not secondary issues; they are key determinants of women’s competitiveness in open-list elections. The following steps by the government and political parties are required to address these issues:

- **Enforcement of limits:** Inconsistent oversight of spending ceilings disproportionately affects women with fewer funding channels.
- **Targeted party support:** Establish internal budgeting and transparent resource distribution for women candidates.
- **Civic oversight:** Ensure finance data is accessible to CSOs to increase accountability.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid (21).

## 6.5 Online Violence Against Women in Politics: Protection, Accountability, and Political Normalization

Election analysis indicates that women politicians and candidates are disproportionately targeted by misogynistic language, sexualized insults, moral delegitimization, and identity-based attacks. This is not only a rights issue; it is a democratic participation issue. When online abuse becomes normalized, it functions as a deterrent and narrows who is willing to enter politics. To address these challenges, the following reforms by the government, political parties, and the media are needed:

- **Reporting mechanisms:** Establish clear channels for reporting threats with documented response procedures.
- **Platform engagement:** Cooperate to act on coordinated abuse during elections.
- **Codes of conduct:** Adopt clear standards to address gender-based harmful speech and promote accurate, responsible public communication.
- **Intersectional vulnerability:** Address the added vulnerability of women from non-majority communities explicitly in both electoral oversight and digital governance frameworks.

## 6.6 Addressing the Visibility Gaps

Addressing these pathways is essential because leadership, campaigns, and media visibility directly shape political legitimacy, voter recognition, and perceptions of viability. Without structural measures to ensure equitable coverage, formal gains in representation will continue to be undermined by unequal access to public exposure and narrative influence. While Kosovo's civil society monitors this challenge, several steps by the government, CSOs, media and political parties will improve women's visibility to remedy these issues:

- **Debate balance:** Establish binding guidelines for balanced representation in televised political programs.
- **Media monitoring:** Publicly report airtime and framing to create reputational incentives for outlets.
- **Funding links:** Condition public funds on compliance with standards promoting women's equal participation and representation.
- **Reform criteria:** Diversify debate formats to include list carriers and policy specialists.
- **Local capacity:** Provide training for local media to address gender bias and inclusive sourcing.
- **Party commitments:** Parties must ensure women candidates serve as principal spokespersons during campaigns.

## Methodology

This report is based on a mixed-methods approach combining online and social media analysis, desk research, and election observation. NDI conducted this analysis throughout Kosovo's 2025 electoral cycle, covering parliamentary elections, local elections, and runoff processes.

The analysis focused on both traditional and digital information environments. The analysis combined quantitative and qualitative approaches. Using online monitoring tools like Pikasa Analytics, NDI reviewed content with significant public engagement and visibility to identify

recurring narratives, representation patterns, online hostility, and public discourse trends affecting women's political participation and electoral integrity. Particular attention was given to media visibility of women candidates, campaign framing, and gender-targeted online attacks.

The report also draws on desk research and secondary sources, including official election data, legislation, previous studies, and reports by domestic and international election observation missions. In addition, findings were informed by direct election observation in the field and consultations of international observation reports to contextualize developments related to electoral administration, democratic standards, and inclusion.

NDI reviewed and interpreted all findings and conclusions to ensure contextual accuracy and analytical consistency.