Gender equality benchmarks for political parties

Electoral processes and campaigns

Gender equality election outcomes are affected by many factors that political parties do not directly control, such as prevailing social views about women’s roles, the type of electoral system, and the existence of legislated gender quotas, reserved seats, or other temporary special measures. Yet political parties can take many actions promoting gender equality in electoral processes.

Money is a major barrier for many women who might consider seeking office, since women on average have lower incomes, more limited less access to political finance networks, and face costs such as childcare that men often do not. In many places, patronage is a major ingredient in political campaigning, requiring money to spend and contacts in local power groups—often exclusively male. This reality puts women candidates at a disadvantage. Political parties can help level the playing field through dedicated funds for women’s campaigns, equitable distribution of party campaign spending, facilitating links to donors and encouraging party supporters to fund women, or covering costs such as childcare and transportation. Parties may also work with civil society groups and other parties for legislated campaign spending caps, and more transparency and tighter regulation for political finance. Fundraising and other finance-related skills should be included in capacity building for party women.

Gender quotas, targets, and similar measures have proven to be successful strategies for increasing the proportion of women elected to legislatures worldwide, but compliance remains a problem. Political parties must establish and respect their own rules for candidate gender balance, work with other parties and groups to lobby for the introduction, improvement, and enforcement of quota legislation, and be diligent about their own compliance. Demonstrating high-level commitment to quotas and targets sets the tone for the whole party, encourages other parties to do the same, and can offer electoral advantages voters see the party champion women’s political rights.

Parties should ensure visibility for women and gender equality issues during campaigns, running women candidates in high profile ridings or top party list spots, featuring them as speakers in campaign events, and ensuring their prominence in campaign ads, literature, and social media. Campaigns also offer a chance to advance public discourse on women’s issues. Parties can raise public awareness as well as attract new supporters with gender equality platforms and events such as debates on issues of concern to women.

Violence against women in politics may include physical assault and intimidation, slander and defamation of character, discriminatory treatment, and domestic violence, endangering women candidates during election periods as well as deterring them from entering political life. The threat of electoral violence may also deter women from participating in campaigns or voting. Zero tolerance by parties for violence perpetrated by members and supporters is essential. In addition, parties should address gender-based political violence in training for both male and female party

One way political parties can address gender barriers in political finance is by establishing dedicated funds for women running election campaigns. In Central America, examples include Panama’s Anulfista party, Liberación Nacional and Movimiento Libertad in Costa Rica, and the FMLN in El Salvador, all of which have statutes on their books that assign financial resources to women candidates.¹

Political parties in several West African countries are stakeholders in the Women’s Situation Room (WSR), an initiative that brings together women’s organizations, state institutions, researchers, police, and others to promote peaceful and fair elections. As leaders of the WSR, women engage in mobilization and advocacy against electoral violence. During electoral processes, its teams monitor procedures and the participation and treatment of women. Incidents are reported using cell phones and ICTs to allow a rapid response to victims.²
members and take measures, such as accompaniment, to ensure the safety of female candidates, party supporters, voters, and election monitors. Parties should consider working with other parties and civil society groups on education campaigns, monitoring, and legislative initiatives to eliminate political violence.


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<th>Benchmarks</th>
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| Party publicly establishes gender equality as a priority in its campaign  | • Number of campaign documents and public statements on gender equality or women's issues by party leaders [documents, press releases]  
• Number of media mentions of party gender equality or women's issues positions [media tracking]  
• Evidence of party outreach to both male and female voters on gender equality [media reports, party documents, interviews]  
• Evidence of public opinion about party's position on gender equality or women's issues [media tracking, polls, focus groups, interviews]  
• Party members’ perceptions of leaders’ commitment to gender equality and women's issues [surveys, interviews]  |
| Party provides visibility and support to women candidates                  | • Evidence of women candidates’ visibility in party ads, campaign events, social media, etc. [campaign materials, social media tracking, media reports]  
• Number of issues of concern to women highlighted by party leaders and candidates during campaign [campaign materials, media reports, interviews]  
• Women candidates’ views on support from party (e.g. access to media, campaign staff, logistical support, leaders’ support) [interviews, surveys]  
• Evidence of involvement of women’s wing/women in party platform development and campaign strategy [meeting minutes, interviews]  
• Public perceptions of party’s commitment to promoting female candidates and gender equality issues [surveys, focus groups, media reports]  |
| Party seeks electoral gender parity                                         | • Proportion of party candidates, and elected party candidates who are female (win rates by sex) [party records, electoral agency record]  
• Evidence of internal candidate gender quotas or targets and/or gender balanced list composition systems [party statutes, other documents]  
• Level of compliance with internal and/or legislated quotas or spacial measures [party records, interviews, electoral agency records]  
• Evidence of measures to monitor quota compliance (e.g. internal mechanism to approve candidates and lists includes ensuring quotas are met, leaders emphasize importance of meeting quotas, cooperation with civil society or research groups on monitoring, data collection efforts) [party records, interviews, electoral agency records]  
• Percentage of male vs female party candidates contesting “safe” seats or favourably placed on party lists (i.e. historically held often by the party, including recently) [party records, electoral agency records]  
• Factors women identify as positively or negatively affecting their campaigns (e.g. finances, family support or obligations, gender-based or other forms of discrimination, media access, party support) [surveys, interviews]  |
| Male and female candidates have equitable access to campaign financial resources | • Campaign spending/financial resources per candidate [party records, party budgets, candidate campaign spending records]  
• Value of party campaign funding received per candidate [party records, party budgets, candidate campaign spending records]  
• Women’s views on barriers to getting campaign financing [interviews, survey]  
• Number of actions by party to reduce financial barriers for female candidates (e.g. subsidies, direct funds, networking) [party records, interviews, surveys]  
• Sources of candidate funding [candidate financial records, interviews]  
• Candidates’ views on whether they had sufficient financial resources to run their campaigns [interviews, survey]  |
| Women have opportunities to strengthen the skills needed for successful campaigning | • Number/proportion of women who have taken part in campaign-related skills training (e.g. media training, public speaking, networking, leadership)  
[training attendance records, surveys]  
• Number of campaign-related training sessions or mentoring relationship for women [session documents, interviews]  
• Women candidate’s views on effectiveness of training or mentoring [post-training surveys, interviews]  
• Number of female party candidates reporting increased capacity to run effective campaigns [survey, interviews]  
• Value/source of funding for women’s capacity building and related training, as proportion of total budget/total training budget [budget and accounts] |
| Women voters, party activists, and candidates feel secure and free from the threat of violence or harassment | • Evidence of party policy against sexual and other forms of violence and harassment, linked to complaints protocols and sanctions [party documents]  
• Number/type of actions by party to guarantee security of women candidates (e.g. scheduling campaign events for safe times/places, providing security protection in high-risk situations) [party documents, interviews, media reports]  
• Number/proportion of party candidates reporting experiences of political violence or sexual or other forms of harassment during electoral processes, [survey, electoral agency records]  
• Number of actions by the party to eliminate political violence against women (e.g. public statements, monitoring to ensure party members do not engage in political violence, ensuring party candidates have no history of violence, lobbying for legislation) [party documents, media reports, interviews]  
• Number of reports of party members or supporters engaging in election-related violence or harassment, disaggregated by sex of perpetrators and victims [media reports, party records, interviews] |
| Female voters have equitable access to voting information, voting, and other opportunities for civic engagement during election campaigns | • Evidence of party outreach to women (e.g. events, materials, activities), with gender sensitive voting information, and oriented to reaching diverse groups (e.g. rural, minority, young, etc.) [party records, interviews]  
• Proportion of party polling station agents or election monitors who are women [party records, electoral agency records]  
• Number/type of events targeted to reaching women and dealing with issues of concern to women [party records, media reports, interviews]  
• Voter turnout, by sex and other relevant categories [electoral agency records]  
• Voters’ level of knowledge about election issues and voting procedures [surveys, electoral agency records, interviews, focus groups] |

* If an indicator refers to people, it should be disaggregated by sex and, where possible, other relevant categories such as party role/seniority, age, region, language, ethnicity, etc.