

**Respecting Women’s Political Rights:  
Violence against Women in Politics**

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**PART I. Respecting women’s political rights, understanding violence against women in politics**

Violence against women in politics (VAWP) occurs across different political contexts and it takes different forms according to these contexts (Rashida Manjoo, 2011, Report of the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women). According to UN Women, violence against women in general is a global pandemic, whether at home, on the streets or during war, violence against women takes place in public and private spheres (UN Women, November 2015).

Despite the progress in the existence of national legislation and global frameworks to promote women’s participation and representation in politics and public decision-making positions and international instruments for addressing gender based violence in both the private and public spheres, much more remains to be done to create an environment where women can live free from gender based violence<sup>1</sup>. This is due to the fact that women still face enormous resistance and barriers in exercising the right to participate in politics and to be represented in positions of power and decision making and violence against women in politics is one of these persistent barriers.

Violence against women in political and public life takes a toll on women’s willingness to exercise their right to political participation as voters, candidates and in other active civic roles. Violence against politically active women hinders the participation of half of the world’s population, thus undermining the democratic exercise and good governance and as such creates a democratic deficit. As women continue to seek the recognition of their rights in both the private and public spheres of life such as political leadership and public decision making positions, gender based violence, increasingly becomes a deterrent for women due to the fear for their personal security and their families.

Violence against women in politics is intrinsically linked to violence against women in general. Acknowledging the link between violence against women in politics and the level of women’s participation and representation can serve to show how it affects women’s most basic right to equal participation and representation in public positions of positions of power and decision making at all levels. It is evident that there is a growing global recognition that violence against women in politics is an act that prevents women’s participation and representation in politics *as women*, thereby making it a distinct form of violence, affecting not only the individual survivors, but seeking to

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<sup>1</sup> In-depth study on all forms of violence against women, Report of the Secretary General, UN General Assembly, July 2006

communicate to women individually, as a group and to society that women should not take part in politics and leadership in decision making.

The objective of this guide is twofold, firstly, it presents a global overview of violence against women in politics and its forms, and discusses the impact of VAWP on women's opportunities and ability to participate in politics and representation in public positions of power and decision making at all levels. Secondly, it provides guidance for political parties, their members, supporters and candidates, on prevention and responsive measures/actions to address violence against women in politics using examples from across the regions of the world.

#### **VAWP in West Africa: Stories from Sierra Leone and Liberia**

A report from Sierra Leone and Liberia notes that "Most female candidates and their supporters are routinely confronted with some form of gender-based intimidation, which persuades some women to abandon their campaigns. Aggression most commonly takes the form of verbal harassment during campaign meetings. It is aimed at embarrassing women by questioning their competency or insulting them with accusations of being prostitutes. ... In Sierra Leone, intimidation is more severe and sometimes involves threats of violence. Women candidates are warned that their husbands or supporters will be beaten or even killed if they do not withdraw from the race. One woman during the 2008 local election was threatened with rape unless she abandoned her campaign.... More extreme forms of traditional intimidation involve threats that women will be taken to the bush, beaten and left there. Some women have also reported physical violence being used to intimidate, most commonly stones being thrown, but in one instance a female candidate was locked in her house on the day of the election." (Kellow 2010)

### **1. Women's participation and political success**

Political inclusiveness is a basic component of development, peace and justice, as recognized by the Sustainable Development Goal 5, which seeks to "ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life." Gender equality in civic leadership can contribute to lower levels of state corruption (Swamy et al 2001, Dollar et al 2001) and greater emphasis on conflict resolution and on socio-economic policy improving the lives of women, children and other disadvantaged groups (Schwindt-Bayer 2006, Wängnerud 2009). Ultimately, increased political inclusion is a major contributing factor to creating more societies that are more just.

Worldwide, women's political participation is one of the most significant challenges in inclusive democracy. Although women's representation in world parliaments reached a historically high average of 23 percent in 2016, over three-quarters of parliamentary seats in the world are held by men, more than seventy countries have 15 percent or fewer women in their parliaments while only two have 50 percent or more (Rwanda and Bolivia) (IPU). Even in those countries where women have statistically greater representation, they often remain excluded from powerful parliamentary

committees, formally or informally silenced by elder male statesmen and bypassed for party funding opportunities and media coverage. One of the reasons for this is because political parties – the gatekeepers of politics – tend to hold deep-seated myths about the value and pertinence of women’s participation in political life and party politics. These myths obscure the real reasons that political parties should care about increasing women’s political participation:

### **Women and Political Parties: Myth and Fact**

*MYTH: Voters are less likely to vote for women candidates*

- Most studies find that voters not only vote for male and female candidates at equal rates → (Norris *et al.*, 1992; Studlar and McAllister, 1991), but may also vote in greater numbers for women than men (Black and Erickson, 2003). The most important influences on voter choice are political party and incumbency. Around the world, voters are equally likely to vote for a male or female candidate so long as the candidate is a member of their political party.

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*MYTH: Women are less likely to win an electoral competitions because they are generally less qualified than male candidates*

- There is no single set of qualifications for holding office, apart from national laws on age, nationality, etc. Qualified representatives are those that understand the challenges of their communities and have ideas to improve them.

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*MYTH: Promoting women in politics threatens incumbent men*

- Including women does not threaten incumbent politicians or male incumbents because of the “add-on” principle: political parties continually seek to extend their political influence by gaining new seats, new political offices and more resources (Cornwall 2005). Promoting women in politics is an effective way for parties to “add on” to their political power and influence, by expanding their reach and winning over new constituencies.

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*MYTH: Political parties often seek candidates with powerful networks. Women are therefore less desirable candidates because they tend to have less access to elite, moneyed networks that support political campaign finance*

- Gender-based income inequality is a major concern, however elite women’s wealth and influence is rapidly rising and political parties can benefit from tapping into this growth. Worldwide, women’s wealth is growing at a faster rate than overall global rates. Women controlled an estimated 30 percent of global private wealth in 2016 and by 2020 women will

control \$72.1 trillion globally. Women are expected to account for increasing proportions of affluent and high-net-worth individuals and become increasingly independent in their financial decisions (Beardsley et al 2016).<sup>2</sup>

## 2. What is VAWP? How is it connected to VAW?

Every citizen has a right to participate in public affairs, to vote and be elected (ICCPR Art 25), without discrimination or fear of harm. Political violence undermines this basic human right. **Political violence is a means of controlling and/or oppressing an individual or group's right to participation in political processes and institutions through the use of emotional, social or economic force, coercion or pressure, as well as physical and sexual harm.** It may take place in public or in private, including in the family, the general community, online and via media, or be perpetrated or condoned by the state (Bardall 2016: 109).

The United Nations defines **violence against women (VAW)** as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life" (WHO 2016).

Political violence affects men and women differently and is connected to violence against women. **Gender-based political violence exists where harm is committed that violates an individual or groups' political rights on the basis of their gender-identity.** Where GBPV specifically targets women in order to enforce patriarchal control of democratic institutions, it may be described as **Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP)**. VAWP affects women in all political and public positions, including voters, civic activists, elected officials, civil servants, candidates, journalists, electoral officials, etc. (Bardall 2016: 125)

## 3. The Causes of VAWP

Political violence exists for many reasons. Social injustice, weak institutions, failed peace agreements and demobilization programs and political strategy are just a few of the reasons that political violence can arise. Opposing or incompatible objectives can reflect disagreement over any number of issues, from boundaries and identity politics, to governance disputes and diverging economic development goals as well as from the militarization of society. State structural factors can also influence where or not political violence is likely, including state institutions and actors and the "rules of the game" such as the electoral system, party structures and other processes that govern electoral competition (Höglund 2009).

Gender-based violence (GBV) is quite different. In general, no single factor makes GBV more likely to occur, but rather there is a combination of factors (called an "ecological framework") at the individual, relationship, community and structural levels that are linked to increased likelihood of being either a victim

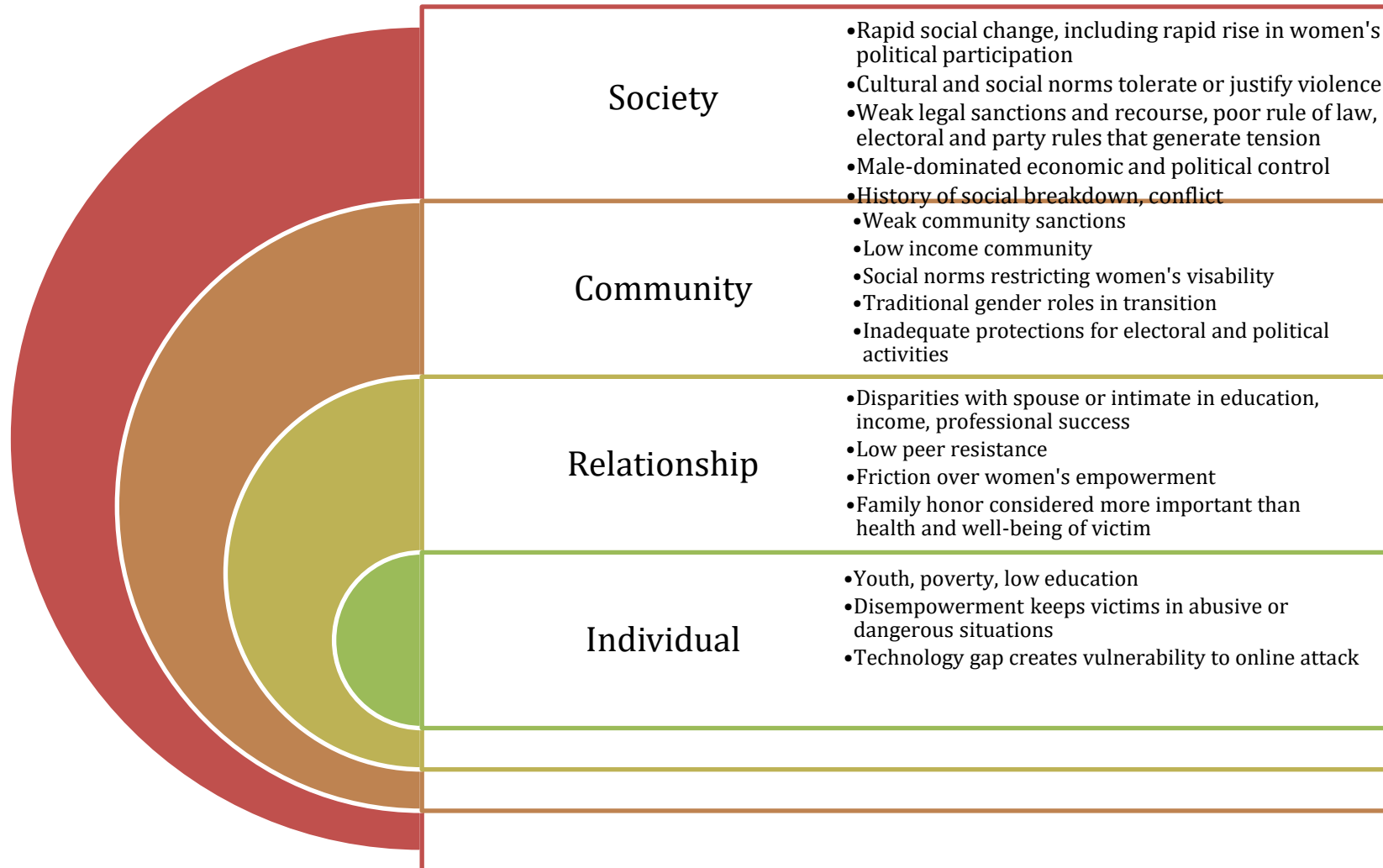
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<sup>2</sup> 6.6% over the last year, compared with global growth of 5.2%.

or a perpetrator (Heise 1998). An adaptation of Heise's ecological framework to VAWP is presented in the table ###.

# The Causes of Gender-Based Political Violence

(adapted from Heise 1998)



For VAWP, in some cases the causes of political and gender violence might overlap, for example where religious beliefs, access to education or cultural practices (such as genital mutilation) are connected to gender roles. For the most part, within this framework, there are two broad causes that lead women to become distinct victims of political violence: socio-economic inequalities and misogyny.

**Misogyny** can lead to VAWP when coercive force is used to control or oppress a woman's political participation as a means of maintaining patriarchal control. In these cases, women are targeted specifically because they are women. The perpetrators believe that women do not belong in public office or should not participate freely in political activities such as voting or civic education. Examples of this include physically harming a female politician or members of her family in retribution for seeking or holding office as a woman, dictating a female family member's vote choice or preventing them from voting through force or threat of force, or physically punishing a woman for being a poll worker or a journalist based on a belief that these are inappropriate roles for women to hold. This is called "gender-based political violence" (GBPV, Bardall 2016, see also Bardall, Bjarnegard and Piscopo, 2017).

**Socio-economic inequalities** also lead to VAWP, but in very different ways. When VAWP occurs because of socio-economic inequality it is usually a question of circumstance rather than misogynistic intent. Specifically, women find themselves in different circumstances because of the different roles they play in their societies. This is known as "gender-differentiated political violence" (GDPV) because different types of violence occur at different frequencies according to the sex of the victim (Bardall 2016).

To take a simple example, historically the victims of assassinations of political leaders have been almost entirely men because men occupied almost all the political leadership positions. Today, we recognize that this same effect also exists for women who are victims of political violence. For example, in countries where political bombings target public markets, the rate of female victims tends to be disproportionately high because (due to their socio-economic role in society) women may be principally responsible for buying and selling fruits and vegetables at market. The numbers of women running for office still lag far behind men in most parts of the world and accordingly, there are fewer attacks on female candidates, however in one study, the proportion of female voters victim of violence was nearly four times the same proportion for men voters (22:6) as was for female journalists or members of media (4:1) (Bardall 2011, 2016).

Gender differences also exist in the types of violence men and women experience. Women are much more likely to experience political violence through threats, intimidation and psychological harm, including sexual assault and harassment, while men are more likely to become victims of armed violence and physical harm. The reason for these differences can be found in the difference socio-economic positions occupied by men and women across societies.

#### **4. The Impact of VAWP**

**VAWP diminishes women's opportunities, creates serious barriers to entering politics and being represented in public positions of power and decision-making at all levels.** This affects

women as voters, as aspirants to political office, as candidates and in the exercise of elected office. It also impacts women in associated rolls, including as poll workers and EMB staff, political journalists, community organizers and activists, and as parliamentary staff.

- Women **voters** may be impeded from registering to vote and from accessing polls, under the perceived threat or direct existence of VAWP (Ballington et al 2015).
- Women **aspirants** may fear violent reactions, including from their own families and community leaders, as well as public trolling and sexualized character attacks (NDI 2015, Bardall 2013).
- Women **candidates** are targeted by physical attacks, sexual assault and intimidation from a range of actors, including opposition parties or even their own parties or family members that oppose their participation because they are women. This occurs throughout the course of the election cycle.
- Threats of violence force **elected women** to drop out of their office and turn their seats over to men. Harassment, assault and sexualized public shaming impede and detract from women's ability to focus on legislating and public management.
- Women **activists and journalists** face similar risks and are often even more vulnerable because they can lack institutional protections for these visible public positions.
- Women **EMB staff and parliamentary staff and interns** are also impacted by VAWP. Women have been murdered by family members for 'exposing' themselves in such public positions (Bardall 2016). Female parliamentary staff and interns report sexual harassment or abuse in their workplace in many countries (Wang 2016, Maltby 2014, Ivison 2014). They also find their ability to work or advance their careers is curtailed because sexualized roles in parliamentary offices exclude their access (Rampell 2015) or because the absence of recourse drives them out (Ivison 2014, Maltby 2014).

As a result, VAWP prevents and weakens women's ability to exercise their civil and political rights.

VAWP also has a serious, negative impact on the success of political parties, the quality of democracy and the status of human rights in the countries where it occurs.

#### ***VAWP creates barriers to entry – A story from Sierra Leone***

"There is little doubt that concerns over political violence and intimidation will be on women's minds ahead of the next election. Recent incidents of violence could serve to deter some women from participating in politics in general, and in the 2012 elections in particular. This is especially the case if they lack political knowledge and experience. The main reason given for this is that when such incidents have occurred in the past they see nothing being done about it – no police or judicial action against the perpetrators and no condemnation from the government – creating an environment conducive to further violence. ... Exaggerated fears of violence created by poor reporting that obscures the facts and is insensitive about past incidents can also serve as a barrier to women's political participation" (Kellow 2010).



**VAWP harms political parties' electoral success.** When parties or party members condone or engage in VAWP, they tarnish their image and drive away political talent, financial contributions and segments of their voting constituencies. Failing to restrain members from engaging in these practices can result in legal prosecution, fines, jail-time and disqualification from electoral contests. VAWP perpetrated by other actors (opposing political parties, rebel groups, state forces, etc.) can have a general chilling effect, resulting in lower voter turnout rates and decreased participation in public activities, which ultimately harm parties' political and electoral goals.

**VAWP has a negative impact on the quality of democracy and human rights.** All violence that undermines the free and peaceful exercise of democracy is destructive. VAWP is particularly harmful because it not only disturbs the free exercise of representative processes and institutions, but it also widens social inequality and discrimination. By aggressively discouraging the constructive input of half of the population, democracy suffers by losing the insight, ideas, experience and talent. Democratic institutions experience weakened legitimacy where violence results in the exclusion of segments of the population.

#### ***Negative impact on human rights and democracy***

Violence erodes the legitimacy and effectiveness of democracy institutions. Where “[d]emocracy fails to deliver its promise of replacing violence... citizens [react] by withdrawing from public spaces, accepting the authority of non-state actors, or supporting hard-line responses” (Pearce et al 2011).

This is true of all forms of violence including VAWP.

Voters turn away from parties associated with violence. Experience from Sierra Leone notes that “The high profile role of women’s groups in generating a sense of female solidarity in overcoming gender inequality and discrimination is expected to translate into women crossing party lines to support female candidates” (Kellow 2010). Parties that are associated with VAWP face censure from male and female voters who condemn such violence. In Sierra Leone and elsewhere, increased advocacy efforts result in voters crossing party lines based on gender issues such as VAWP. Indeed, in many countries, both gender issues and involvement in violence are common “wedge issues” – i.e., divisive issues that attract or alienate an opponent’s supporters. As awareness grows, VAWP may also become a “wedge” that influences voters’ choice.

Political parties also suffer where VAWP exists because fear of violence reduces voter turnout. Studies from Mexico to Nigeria to Afghanistan and beyond clearly recognize that intimidation and the fear of violence associated with elections has a consistent negative effect on voter turnout (Collier and Vicente 2014; Condra et al 2015; Carreras and Trelles 2012).

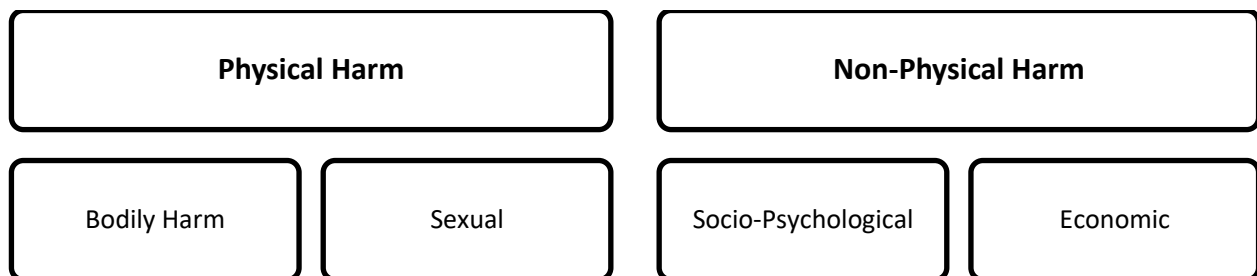
## **5. What forms does VAWP take?**

Many people think of political violence as assassinations or violent protests, however in reality political violence is much more complex. Political violence can involve both physical and non-

physical forms of harm. **Physical harm** includes the kinds of bodily injury that are widely recognized (assassinations, violent protests, etc.), but also sexual violence and domestic violence. Although they are often hidden, research shows that women (and sometimes men) do experience sexual assault and rape in connection with the political activities. Domestic violence (i.e., violence within the home, often perpetrated by a spouse or partner) can also be connected to differences in political ideas or a woman’s pursuit of political office.

There are two main kinds of **non-physical harm** that we recognize as forms of VAWP. **Socio-psychological violence** cause harm by inflicting fear on its subject as punishment for their behavior or to coerce their behavior. It can include psychological intimidation, social sanctions and punishment, family pressure and character assassination. It may be sexual in nature, including harassment (unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal harassment of a sexual nature) (Bardall 2016). In the context of VAWP, **economic violence** refers to preventing or influencing a woman’s political choice and participation through coercive, deceptive or unreasonable controls over her economic resources without the woman’s consent and in a way that denies her economic or financial autonomy.<sup>3</sup>

It is important to recognize all these forms of political violence because VAWP most commonly occurs as one of the less-familiar types of violence: sexual, socio-psychological or economic.



## 6. Who are the victims?

Each form of VAWP has multiple possible victims, defined in four categories:

- 1) Political: candidates, elected officials, political aspirants (i.e. seeking nomination), party members and supporters, parliamentary staffers and interns.
- 2) Institutional: electoral management body (EMB) permanent staff and poll workers, police and security forces, state administrators and civil servants.
- 3) Professional non-state/non-political: journalists, civic educators, civil activists, community leaders.

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<sup>3</sup> definition adapted from *Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act 2012* Australia. <https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/LEGISLTN/ACTS/2012/12AC005.pdf>

4) Private non-state/non-political: private citizens and voters. (Bardall 2016)

## **7. Who perpetrates VAWP?**

Perpetrators are likewise diverse and may be identified in three groups:

- 1) Institutional actors (state security, police, armed forces), government institutions (executive, judicial and legislative actors), electoral agents (poll workers, EMB staff, electoral security agents), and state proxies (militia, gangs, insurgents, mercenaries, private security);
- 2) Non-state political actors (candidates, party leaders, inter-party and intra-party members, paramilitary, party militia, non-state armed actors); and
- 3) Societal actors (journalists/media, voters, community members or groups, religious leaders, traditional leaders, employers, criminal actors, intimate partners/spouses, family members, electoral observers, youth groups). (Bardall 2016).

**VAWP exists in advanced democracies.** From Europe to North America to Australia, female MPs, candidates, staffers, journalists and activists have been targeted.

A document signed by 17 former and current ministers in France documents widespread sexual harassment and assault, including cases where male politicians are accused of “grabbing breasts, tweaking thong underwear” and “hitting a female aide in the face” (Wang 2016).

The CBC reports that a “growing chorus of Canadian women in public office ... are coming forward to shine a light on personally threatening and degrading email, Twitter or Facebook messages” (Sturino and O’Brian 2017). The attacks occur much more frequently for women MPs than for their male counterparts and express “hate-filled misogyny ...that really underscores a lack of comfort and an intolerance for the role that women are increasingly assuming in public life” (Nancy Peckford, quoted in Sturino and O’Brian 2017). One example of this, among thousands, is a Tweet directed at Alberta MLA Sandra Jansen stating: "Dead meat. Sandra should stay in the kitchen where she belongs. Fly with the crows and get shot."

A 2016 survey found that 28 of 32 female parliamentarians in Israel’s Parliament, the Knesset, reported being sexually harassed or assaulted, including two cases occurring in the Knesset itself (Bearak 2016).

Reports from Canada include a 22-year old Arab-Canadian Parliamentary staffer whose experience with workplace sexual harassment and assault resulted in a post-traumatic stress syndrome diagnosis, ongoing fears of repercussions for speaking out almost a decade after the situation and led to two suicide attempts. She reported being verbally and sexually assaulted by her manager, and subjected to humiliation, plagiarism, sabotage and threats for rejecting sexual advances. (Iverson 2014) In another Canadian case, a female provincial Minister reported being threatened and eventually raped by a male colleague in retribution for her promotion of violence against women laws (Bardall, confidential interview 2016).

Women MP across these countries report being trolled and threatened online, especially on Twitter and Facebook. In the UK, MP Tulip Siddiq received death threats and criticism for having her baby daughter while she was in her first term in parliament. MP Jess Phillips and Stella Creasy report receiving thousands of rape and death threats in the space of mere hours and days in relation to their political office. Many others have reported similar explicit and intense threats of violence across social media, including Tracy Brabin, who replaced MP Jo Cox after Cox was assassinated in 2016. MP Louise Haigh described “an individual [who] went through every one of my YouTube videos and said he would not rest until I was murdered.” (Pidd and Perraudin, 2016).

In the US, high profile female politicians such as Hillary Clinton and Sarah Palin have been victims of sexualized and pornographic media and internet representations (Bardall 2016). Female congressional staffers report deep cultural biases and exclusion (Rampell 2015), and in some cases victims of sexual harassment and assault.

## **8. Locations**

VAWP can take place in a broad variety of locations. Violence may occur in public spaces (streets, political party headquarters, churches, etc.) and in private space (private homes, offices, etc). In addition, VAWP also occurs in virtual and domestic locations. Non-material virtual spaces are comprised of public online spaces such as television, blogs, internet media, chatrooms, YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, etc. They also consist of private virtual spaces, such as personal email, Short Message Service (SMS) texting, Twitter and Facebook, cellular and landline telephone connections, etc (Bardall 2013). As mentioned above, sometimes domestic and political violence overlap; in these cases violence occurs in private spaces such as the family home.

## 9. What is the global prevalence/trends on violence against women in politics?

There are a number of emerging trends and information on VAWP in the world. Research shows that VAWP exists in all regions of the world, although its forms and frequencies vary significantly between geographic regions. No statistical data on global prevalence exists to date, however limited statistical studies show that the proportion of intimidation and psychological acts of violence experienced by women was nearly three times the same proportion among men while men experienced more than three times the levels of physical violence as did women in the study (Bardall 2011). Women are more likely than men to experience sexual or economic forms of political violence. Likewise, women appear to be especially vulnerable as voters and in rural locations.

There are also emerging trends in the responses to VAWP. The issue of VAWP is recognized as a distinct violation of human rights and become the subject of international human rights bodies' consideration. A number of countries have passed specific legislation to directly govern the issue, including Bolivia and Mexico. Civil society organizations, international groups and political actors are increasingly mobilizing to educate and advocate for the prevention of VAWP, by collecting better data, providing strategies and working to strengthen institutional protections and personal skills for secure political participation.

### ***Legislating VAWP***

Following a decade-long process involving civil society actors and women activists and officials, Bolivia passed and enacted Law 243 of 28 May 2012, the "Law against the Harassment of and Political Violence Against Women". The Law classifies acts of harassment and political violence, categorizing them as slight, serious and very serious, and establishes the sanctions for each category. It recognizes that violence may be physical, psychological or sexual in nature. It establishes gender-sensitive reporting procedures and creates channels to submit administrative, criminal or constitutional reports.<sup>1</sup>

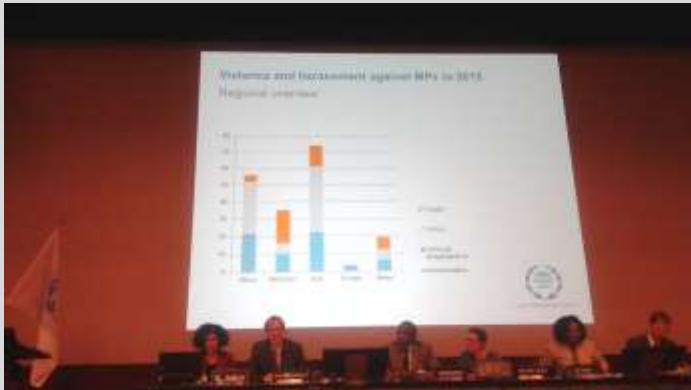
The Bolivian law has set a precedent for others in the region. Several countries have draft laws in progress at this time (Spring 2017) including Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru. The Bolivian law has also set a regional precedent for legal responses to VAWP. In October 2015 the Sixth Conference of the States Parties to the Convention of Belém do Pará adopted the Declaration on Violence and Political Harassment against Women. The Declaration is important because it represents a consensus among the States Party to the Convention on the assessment and definition of the problem, as well as the actions needed to prevent, punish and eradicate political violence against women. The states agree to "promote the adoption, where appropriate, of standards (...) for the prevention, care, protection, eradication of violence and political harassment against women, to allow adequate punishment and reparation of these acts, in the administrative, criminal, and electoral areas, among others." (OAS)<sup>1</sup>

## ***The Geography of VAWP***

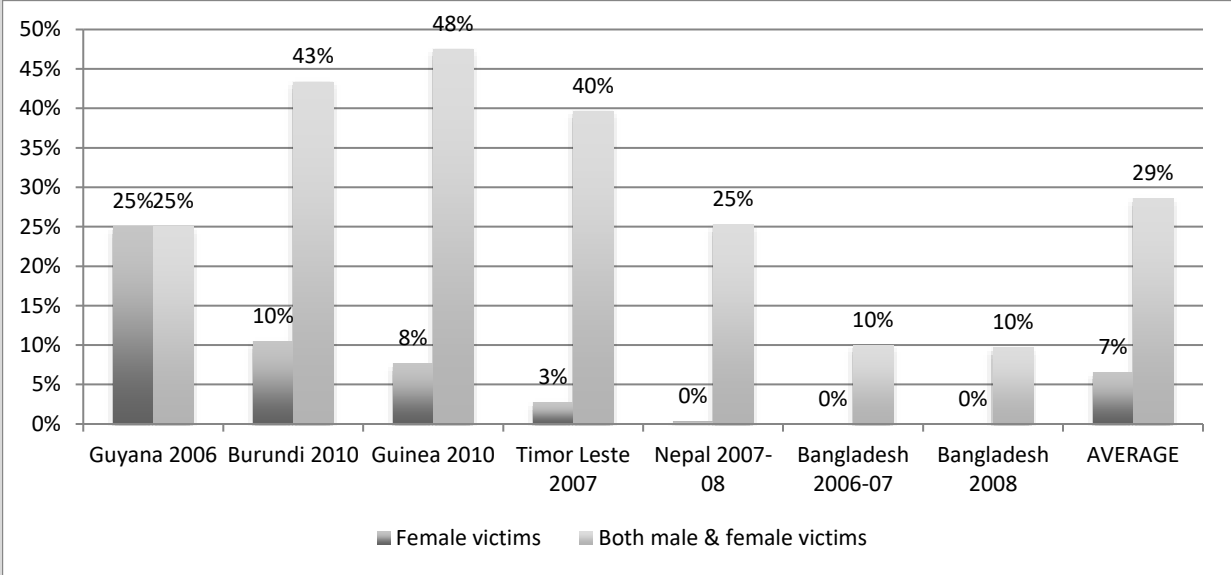
A worldwide study found that 81.8 percent of female parliamentarians surveyed had experienced psychological violence in connection to their political engagement. 44.4 percent of them said they had received threats of death, rape, beatings or abduction during their parliamentary term (IPU 2016).<sup>1</sup> The same study found that the women parliamentarians also experienced sexual violence (21.8 percent), physical violence (25.5 percent) and economic violence (32.7 percent).

This experience is shared by women in other areas of political engagement. An earlier study of election violence against men and women voters, party supporters, candidates and other roles confirms the fact that women in all political roles experience physical, sexual, economic and psychological forms of election violence. That study found that psychological violence was by far the most common form of election violence experienced by women participating in the electoral process of their countries (Bardall 2011).<sup>1</sup> The research also suggests that women voters, journalists covering elections or women in rural settings experience proportionally higher amounts of political violence than their male counterparts.

Although violence against women exists in all parts of the world, it varies in its forms and frequencies between geographic regions. The table below shows the differences in cases of political violence against female parliamentarians (IPU 2016).



The table below compares women victims from a cross-section of roles, including voters, candidates, political party supports, EMB staff and members of the media (taken from Bardall 2016). It shows the percent of all reported cases where a woman was the sole victim or was victim together with a male victim.



It is also important to note how culture and research methods impact what we know about the prevalence of VAWP. In the table above we see that the Southeast Asian countries reported no or nearly no cases of violence with uniquely female victims in contrast to the African states where women were victims of violence (singly or together with men) in more than half of all incidents of violence. Does that mean that there is more VAWP in Africa? Not necessarily. It means that women victims may not have been consistently recorded in the public sources that the study used to document incidents in Southeast Asia. This happens for many reasons, including because women victims may be ashamed of or prevented from reporting to the police by their families, or because of gendered media bias in coverage of political violence. We must be aware of cultural differences in strategies for documenting VAWP in different parts of the world.



## **PART II : What political actors can do to prevent and respond to VAWP**

Much can be done to prevent and respond to violence against women in politics by political parties/movements as well as by other national stakeholders and the international community. Actions to both prevent and respond to VAWP must be grounded at the structural level of political groups. Specific actions to directly prevent and respond to VAWP take place throughout the electoral cycle and during non-electoral periods (political cycle).

The causes and types of VAWP vary across and within countries, and responses must be adapted accordingly. The first step in any response strategy should be to assess the distinct nature of VAWP in the country context.

In each field of action, responders must be aware of proximate and embedded causes of violence. VAWP is rooted in patriarchal gender relations, therefore all responses must take into account the bigger picture of inequality. Indeed, VAWP is principally a gender issue, not a political one. Therefore, multi-partisan responses are of importance. Gender-based responses reflect working with both men and women in seeking to address the broader aims of political, social and economic inclusion and equality.

Proximate causes of violence vary widely and across countries. Countries that have high levels of general GBV may have an equally high occurrence of related VAWP. Responses in these cases may emphasize addressing VAWP within the broader GBV problem. In other cases, where violence occurs as a backlash to increasing participation of women in political life, responses may emphasize criminal law procedure and security sector work. In still other situations, women may experience violence because of generalized insecurity around elections and politics. In these cases, specific measures can be adapted to target the distinct forms of violence women experience in these contexts. A combination of all of these (and other) causes of VAWP may simultaneously exist in any state and should be identified at the outset of the strategy and response process.

While this paper focuses on the options available to political parties and actors, solutions to VAWP require multi-sectoral responses. Political parties and actors can directly initiate some actions, while they may play a supporting or coordinating role in others.

## **Parties join together, partner with communities to prevent violence and promote women in politics**

In locations where political violence is a clear and present threat, political actors cross partisan lines and engage with local partners to defend political participation of all citizens.

Following a series of bomb attacks in Vanimel panchayat (village council) in India, police and political parties decided to organize community-based, multi-partisan vigilance squads for nighttime neighborhood patrols. By banding together in across party lines, the squads were effective in ending the political violence. The opposing parties also joined together to hold a peace rally to raise awareness and demonstrate the commitment of all the parties to supporting peace in the region.

In Zambia, opposing political parties worked together with religious leaders following the escalation of political violence. Together, they issued a unified statement to discourage their partisans from engaging in violence ahead of the elections. Similar non-violence pacts between parties have taken place in all parts of the world including Nigeria, Ethiopia, Dominican Republic, Central African Republic, Ghana, East Timor.

In Honduras, political parties banded together to sign a joint “Political Parity and Alternation Pact” (*Pacto Político por la Paridad y la Alternancia*). The Pact commits aspiring presidential candidates to push their parties to place women in top positions of party lists and under take other identified measures to actively promote the election of women to public office. Similar inter-party pacts promoting women’s participation have been signed in Peru, Nigeria and elsewhere. Where pertinent, VAWP should be included in these types of agreements.

Initiating multi-party peace pacts, vigilance initiatives and rallies, as well as working with other stakeholders such as security forces or religious leaders are strategies that can be adapted to focus on women’s participation and to prevent VAWP. (Times of India 2016, Clotney 2016, NDI 2016)

### **a. Structural actions political parties can take to prevent and respond to VAWP**

These refer to the actions that a political party can take as an organization to ensure that its members neither engage in VAWP nor become victims of it, as well as to respond in cases of violations. Structural measures establish institutional cultural norms and rules guiding behavior and setting the values of the organization.

#### **Prevention**

All political parties establish a number of **governing documents** that set forth their mission, mandate and values. These may include mission statements, organizational charters, manifestos and pledges. Governing documents also include internal rules and procedures, such a codes of conduct for party members and candidates, and procedures for dealing with internal disputes, complaints and violations. These documents lay the foundation for political parties’ prevention of VAWP. Parties’ seeking to prevent VAWP will affirm their commitment to human and political rights in these

founding documents, emphasizing nondiscrimination and non-violence. For more on gender policies developing gender policies for political parties, refer to [International IDEA's framework](#).

### **Responding**

Such value-statements should be supported by clear and transparent guidelines for upholding these principles in practice. **Internal conduct guidelines** may set forth a zero-tolerance policy for party members who engage in or condone VAWP. Such guidelines may include explicit definitions of what constitutes VAWP, how offenses are to be identified and proven, and the sanctions associated with violations. Established sanctions should be applied swiftly, consistently and transparently when violations occur.

Parties may also use internal procedures to create **mechanisms for the confidential reporting** of incidents of VAWP. Party members should be made aware of these mechanisms and party leadership should seek to ensure that the organizational culture allows victims to access these mechanisms without stigma or informal discouragement, such as the perception of negative professional or social repercussions for victims that report incidents.

#### **Confront patriarchy and prevent political violence**

“Violence is like a virus, spreading to different generations. Since people do not understand each other on topics that happened in the past, they are transmitting their hate to their children...People need to construct a new vision for our society” (AOAV 2015a). Engaging with political youth groups is an important strategy to address the root causes of gender-based violence and provide young people with the tools to constructively manage potential conflict. Training youth for violence prevention has been effective in Burundi. In a country that has experienced significant political violence, one initiative with the United Nations Inter-Agency Network on Youth Development - Working Group on Youth and Peacebuilding, trained youths on how to prevent and manage political conflict, how to use non-violent communication and manage rumors and political manipulation. On a personal level, the training changed how the youth reacted to challenging situations and interacted with other youths in their communities. Whereas many young people initially held an adversarial position towards those from opposing political parties, this position changed to one of welcome, friendship, acceptance, and tolerance through the training (Paducel 2016).

### **b. Electoral period actions that political parties can take to prevent and respond to VAWP**

Elections are flashpoints for violence in many countries. The types and frequencies of violence during electoral periods are unique and must be responded to accordingly. The electoral cycle is composed of the pre-election period, electoral period and the post-electoral period. During each phase of the cycle, political actors can take specific measures to prevent and respond to violence against women candidates, voters, EMB staff and other stakeholders. VAWP that takes place in the context of an electoral cycle is known as “Violence Against Women in Elections” (VAWE).

## **Women's Situation Rooms**

Women Situation Rooms (WSR) are a pro-active response to ensuring safe electoral participation for women and youth. Adapted across different national contexts, the WSRs empower women to take an active role in ensuring peaceful and participative elections. In recent years, WSRs have been active during elections in Kenya, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Mali, Guinea Bissau and Nigeria. Common features of WSR include toll-free numbers for citizens to call to reach trained operators in order to report any hindrance to women's participation in the elections, coordinated responses with electoral management authorities and state security forces and deployment of trained monitors to hotspots to record and mitigate threats. Many WSRs also feature high-level, women-led diplomacy to mitigate and prevent violence. For example, the 2015 Uganda WSR united 10 eminent women from Uganda and a group of four elders and five women from African countries who conducted consultations and dialogue with stakeholders such as the Ugandan Inspector General of Police, candidates of political parties, the Electoral Commission, youth organizations and women's groups. UN Women has been a leading supporter of the WSR initiative. (UN Women 2015, 2016; Safir and Alam 2015).

## **Prevention**

**Multi-party solidarity against VAWE.** VAWP/VAWE is a human rights violation that transcends partisan lines. Multi-party initiatives to collectively ensure VAWE-free electoral campaigns can create mutually safer space for political competition.

**Documenting incidents of VAWE.** Documenting incidents and analyzing patterns of VAWE enables actors to identify the specific types of trends of VAWE in a given country context. This is a critical step in creating effective targeted responses. Individual political parties may document incidents that directly concern their members and constituents. Parties may also collaborate with other monitoring and reporting groups, including those from civil society and human rights monitoring issues, to ensure broad reach and coverage. Monitoring and documenting incidents can be enhanced by using technology that facilitates confidentiality, speed and detail of reports submitted.

## Documenting and Monitoring VAWP

There are many approaches to documenting and monitoring VAWP. One approach is to collect public information on all incidents of political or electoral violence taking place in a country and analyze the results according to gender. This reveals differences in prevalence and frequency between men and woman, but can also overlook hidden forms of VAWP that take place in domestic and other private locations. Targeted research approaches are used to privately interview women to ask about their experiences with VAWP. This often reveals experiences with harassment, sexual assault and domestic violence that otherwise go unreported and unnoticed. VAWP can be included as a topic in traditional election observation missions and human rights reporting. Targeted or gender-sensitive media monitoring can document cases where women are targeted by threats, sexually demeaning and aggressive verbal abuse as well as reveal inequalities in media coverage. Some of the violence on social media can also be monitored, for example using tools designed to monitor Twitter posts according to keywords. Political parties can contribute to these efforts directly, by documenting incidents internally. They can also contribute by coordinating with outside organization implementing monitoring activities.

**Electoral operations security planning:** Citizens are mobilized at various points during electoral processes, including during voter registration periods when they may have to visit a local office to register or pick-up voter-ID cards, as well as attending the polls on Election Day. Violence in these settings takes multiple forms and women voters may be disproportionately affected by polling station violence. Registration and polling stations may be targeted for intimidation or direct violence. Threats of violence before elections may discourage voters from turning out. Although most election violence is perpetrated by political partisans, in some countries, women voters or observers have even reported being sexually assaulted by polling station workers and security personnel.

Political parties have a vested interest in ensuring voters can register and vote without fear. Political parties can prevent VAWP during electoral mobilizations first and foremost by inculcating respect for citizen safety and strict non-violence ethics among their partisans. To ensure that their voters (and all voters) can participate in voter registration and polling without fear of violence, parties may advocate for enhanced security planning, especially gender-sensitive planning, with the EMB and security services. Parties operating in insecure environments may establish resources for voters to report and obtain referrals in case of violent incidents. Parties can work with their constituents to identify community-specific security concerns and facilitate solutions ahead of registration and polling events.

**Creating a safe space for Election Day volunteers:** Many political party supporters volunteer to observe or witness polling and counting during elections. Others engage in get-out-the-vote (GOTV) activities, legal aid, etc. These activities may expose volunteers to risk including VAWP such as sexual harassment and assault, or security concerns with working late into the night during a vote count, for example. Political parties can ensure their witnesses, poll observers and other Election Day volunteers stay safe through advance planning. Parties should identify potential risks to their volunteers and plan ahead by avoiding risks where possible and mitigating others through strategic

deployment of party volunteers, training in conflict diffusion and non-violent communication skills and security plans for volunteer deployment. Parties may establish security teams to oversee and coordinate security issues for their volunteers on Election Day.

**Candidates' security plans and financing:** Female candidates may face distinct threats and risks. To prevent VAWE against women candidates before it happens, political parties can take several actions. Actions will vary according to who is responsible for managing security in any given race or country (e.g., in some cases parties' will be responsible, in other cases the individual candidate is responsible for their own security, while in still other cases, the state may offer protection to specific candidates). Based on a security assessment, parties can offer tailored training to their female candidates on preparing for and dealing with risks and incidents. They can offer guidance and resources on security planning for local campaigns. It is very important for parties to ensure that women candidates have equitable access to party finance opportunities to ensure they can hire adequate staff and material resources necessary for security planning and management, as well as designated security agents where necessary.

## Candidate security

Women in Kenya face severe violence in the political sphere. During the post electoral violence in 2008, women reported being targeted by SMS messages threatening them with rape and death (Mäkinen 2008) and many women became victims of gang rape, sodomization and physical assault. In more recent elections, women politicians in Kenya have reported that their biggest fear in running for office is “being physically attacked or stripped naked in the street. One woman described being lifted up by her collar and shaken by a male politician right outside of the main assembly hall” (Berry 2016). Several female candidates who stood in recent general elections in Kenya say male rivals intimidated and discriminated against them, causing many to drop out of the race (Bii 2013). Barnabas Bii, of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, shares these testimonies:

Janet Chepkwony, candidate to a county assembly: “I was confronted with a situation where I received threats to my life, while my supporters were physically abused or intimidated. This made it difficult to access some of the areas and compete with my rivals on an equal footing.”

Alice Muthoni Wahome, sitting MP preparing to run for re-election: Rep. Wahome found that her name was printed on packs of condoms distributed among voters. “A gift from Alice Muthoni Wahome: Kandara, let us do family planning,” the message on the packs said. Police blamed male candidates standing against Wahome, who were clearly hoping to sink her chances of re-election.

Linah Kilimo, chair of the Kenya Women Parliamentary Association, KEWOP: “Most women candidates had to withdraw from seeking elective positions because of physical and psychological violence meted against them, resulting in less representation at the county and national assembly level.”

In an effort to address these serious concerns, Kenyan security actors employed special procedures for protecting women candidates during the 2013 elections. Special police teams were formed around the country to provide extra security for at-risk female candidates. Women candidates were invited to attend special meetings convened by Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission regional poll coordinators and police commanders to discuss election management in their areas. Special charges sheets were issued to fast-track offenders’ prosecution, including provisions for hate-speech. The police coordinated with other uniformed agencies including the National Youth Service, Kenya Forest Service and Kenya Wildlife Service to provide these services. Political parties can support this type of initiative by identifying need in their country and coordinating with security forces and electoral management bodies to develop appropriate responses. (Mutai 2013)

**Dealing with ICT-based VAWP:** VAWP/VAWE often takes place in online or through the use of other new information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as telephone calls and SMS messaging. These attacks can range from death and rape threats, intimidation, sexualized character defamation, electronically-manipulated photographs and video and other actions that are conveyed through mediums such as Twitter, Facebook, cellular messaging services, email and blogs. ICT-based VAWP can also include hacking, impersonation, cyber-stalking, aggressive “trolling”<sup>4</sup> and “swatting”<sup>5</sup>. Political parties can prevent hacks by ensuring both adequate security for organizational technology systems as well as adequate training for staff and for candidates on how to protect themselves from these attacks through good practices and preventative measures.

When ICT-based VAWP attacks do occur, party members and candidates should be prepared to respond. Threats that violate laws regarding criminal offences such as intimidation, defamation and stalking should be documented and referred to legal channels, including working with state internet crime departments where they exist. Parties have several options for dealing with non-criminal incidents, including encouraging targeted individuals to document and report them to the party leadership and other groups recording VAWP information. Parties may also address this issue by showing public solidarity with victims of VAWP and denouncing online attacks, establishing protocol to follow in cases of non-criminal online harassment and offering guidance on self-care during internet attacks as part of new candidate orientation training.

**Education and information:** VAWP/VAWE prevention can be advanced by raising awareness about its existence and the options available to combat it. Political parties may engage in educational campaigns directed at their constituents, their members and partisans and/or their slate of candidates. Messaging for each group will vary. Voter education campaigns may emphasize positive information to build confidence in electoral security and increase voter turnout (for example, underlining multipartite security pacts, innovations with national security providers, etc). Women candidates may be educated to recognize acts of VAWP and briefed on how to respond to prevent and mitigate violence they may encounter. Male partisans and candidates should also be educated to recognize VAWP, encouraged to denounce it where they encounter it and, most importantly, to avoid engaging in it themselves.

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<sup>4</sup> The definition of trolling is to make a deliberately offensive or provocative online post with the aim of upsetting someone or eliciting an angry response from them

<sup>5</sup> ‘Swatting’ is where a harasser calls law enforcement and reports a false claim of a hostage or other violent situation. In cases of VAWP, a “swatter” calls in a threat at the target woman’s home or work, to create disruption, fear and generate negative rumors.



## Tunisia: Moving Forward

In Tunisia, women's status and political participation has benefited from a series of legal protections progressive in the Arab world. Progress, awareness and dialogue are bolstered by over 700 civil society organizations working on gender issues as well as responsive political actors and a tradition of national commitment in this area across different periods of political leadership.

Women won the right to vote and run for office almost immediately after independence from France in the late 1950s. However, it took more than 20 years for a woman to hold elected political office. Voluntary gender quotas for party electoral lists have existed since 1999 and were formalized into mandatory quotas in 2011 following the Jasmine Revolution and furthered strengthened in subsequent years. In October 2014 women won more than 30% of parliamentary seats (more than France, the UK or the US) and a woman ran for president for the first time. Tunisian women also have legal rights to abortion and equal rights to marriage, divorce and property ownership, however marital roles and duties are still governed by custom and tradition. In 2016, new legislation was introduced to strengthen rules on violence against women. Championed by the conservative reformist party with Islamic roots, Ennahda and a clutch of dynamic female MPs and officials, the bill introduces sweeping definitions of gender-based violence, covering psychological and economic harm in both the public and domestic spheres. The bill outlaws marital rape and seeks to end to impunity for rapists if their victims are under 20 and they subsequently marry them. Penalties for sexual harassment at work would be increased and police officers and hospital staff trained in gender issues (Sherwood 2016).

Despite these protections and gains, Tunisia women still face challenges, including violence against women and sexual harassment especially in rural areas. In politics, women's substantive representation has yet to catch up with the descriptive representation assured by the quota. In other words, although there is a historic number of women elected to office, they still struggle to make their voices heard in policy for a number of reasons. One reason is limited access to political finance resources (Ohman 2016). Another reason has to do with structural barriers in the political parties. Amor Hamza reports that "[d]espite political parties' declarations that they adhere to equal rights and opportunities, the presence of women in their local sections is very limited, and no party has adopted measures in its internal regulations to empower female members. In addition to this, many agreements and decisions are finalized by the local leaders in informal meetings that occur in male spaces, such as cafés, to which women have no access." Women in parliament have also reported being the object of abuse on social media networks, where Photoshopped images of them are used to degrade or humiliate them (Bardall 2013).

Both national and international organizations are engaged in aiding women to overcome these barriers. The organization Aswat Nissa ("Voices of Women") is an effort to cut across Tunisia's political party lines to unite women in seeking equal political and government participation. Aswat Nissa trains female candidates to stand for election and organizes widespread programs around the country to encourage women to vote, reaching beyond activists to ordinary citizens. (Ganesan 2016). Numerous international organizations also engage in building on the strong civil society base and the new cohorts of women in parliament to offer skills and resources to overcome these barriers and enhance women's participation in political life.

## **Responding**

Political party responses to VAWE may be classified according to the actors involved:

**Within-party violators.** Parties that have established internal codes of conduct or codes of ethics may implement sanctions against party members who are found in violation of VAWP/VAWE rules. Sanctions penalize the individual concerned and to protect the public. Sanctions against VAWP ethics violations also serve as a mechanism to educate and rehabilitate offenders to avoid future occurrences, as well as to publically signal the party's commitment to ethics and good conduct. Sanctions may include private reprimands, public censure, temporary suspension from position, revocation of candidacy credentials or endorsement to offenders, or expelling offenders from the party. While some cases may be decided by mediation, mediated solutions should be prohibited in cases gender-based violence.<sup>6</sup>

**Within-party victims.** When a female party member, staff, candidate or supporter becomes victim of an act of VAWP/VAWE, parties may respond by working with pre-identified reporting channels, rapid response and solidarity with the victim including taking legal action where a criminal offense has occurred.

**Violators from other parties.** Parties that witness other parties engaging in VAWP may denounce it and demand accountability. Where multiparty pacts against VAWP have been formed, coalitions of anti-VAWP may take collective action.

**Victims from other parties.** VAWP/VAWE is a violation of human rights, not a political concern. Parties should stand in solidarity with victims of VAWP across party lines to denounce any use of violence in politics and to demand corrective measures.

**Citizen victims.** VAWP discourages citizen participation and turnout, decreasing confidence and trust in the system as a whole. It is therefore in the interest of political parties to respond to protect the public.

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<sup>6</sup> Mediation provisions in cases of domestic violence and violence against women have proven problematic and dangerous for victims. See the 2008 United Nations expert group report entitled "[Good practices in legislation on violence against women](http://www.stopvaw.org)", section 7.A on the prohibition of mediation. (<http://www.stopvaw.org>)

### **ICT-Based prevention and mitigation**

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) offer a vast range of opportunities for preventing VAWP. This example from China, India and Vietnam illustrates the use of ICTs to prevent VAW – an idea that can be adapted to address VAWP as well:

“To better understand the potential of social media to engage young people in efforts to prevent violence against women (VAW), the Partners for Prevention regional project, ‘Engaging Young Men Through Social Media for the Prevention of Violence against Women’ – which supported social media campaigns designed to raise awareness and motivate young people to take action to prevent VAW.” In China, India and Vietnam, Partners4Prevention implemented a range of innovative online activities that can be adapted by parties working to raise awareness, change attitudes and prevent VAWP. Examples include:

- Facebook and hashtag discussions around gendered roles and the importance of diversity in political leadership
- ‘Shoutbox’ conversations: A safe space was created, where people could share their opinions anonymously, called ‘Fearless Bo!’. Sensitive topics can be addressed in this way, such as sexual assault or harassment related to political participation
- Facebook events: To encourage users to change their Facebook status to ‘ViolenceFree’ on a specific date (for example International Women’s Day or Election Day)
- Using celebrity campaigns and online video to promote messages about gender-inclusive politics
- Online photo contest. Web users are encouraged to write down/draw/design what they think they could contribute to gender equality and stop VAW on a piece of paper and take a picture of themselves with the paper, and upload it to a website. Viewers can vote for winners and offer prizes. (Liou 2013)

### **c. Political cycle actions that political parties can take to prevent and respond to VAWP**

Political groups and actors can pursue sustained action to prevent and respond to VAWP during the regular political cycle through legislative work and party advocacy.

#### **Prevention**

Legislators can implement various measures to prevent VAWP. VAWP can be the focus of specific legislation or it may be built into related legislation, such as overarching gender-based violence. Legislators can strengthen complementary legislation, such as clarifying legal definitions of gender-related terminology (for example, defining rape and assault clearly and according to international standards). Legislators can advocate for funding for prevention and services, national strategies, special rapporteurs and partnerships with community and faith-based organizations. Beyond

national legislation, lawmakers can use the political cycle to join or promote regional and international partnerships or join conventions and agreements to address the issue.

Political parties can implement other actions outside of parliament to prevent violence beyond the electoral cycle. Election off-periods offer the opportunity to review data from the electoral period, review and improve strategies. During this period, parties may develop and activate domestic networks to prevent and response to VAWP. They may also use this time to address structural concerns of inequality and patriarchy within their organizational structures. Continuous monitoring of at-risk areas should continue throughout.

### **Responding**

Parties can respond to the presence of VAWP through political cycle, i.e., the period of regular activity occurring in between electoral events. Compiling and submitting verified incident reports of VAWP to UN human rights bodies is one step, ideally undertaken in partnership with non-partisan civil society organizations or multi-party alliances. As during the electoral cycle, parties may respond domestically according to the actor involved in individual incidents. They may pursue criminal legal procedures where appropriate.

#### **Colombia**

Violence against women in Colombia is so acute that the issue of “femicide” - the killing of a woman by a man because of her gender - is under the spotlight. Colombia and 15 other countries in Latin America have passed laws in recent years that define and punish femicide as a specific crime. In Colombia, an estimated average of one woman is killed every two days and 245 women are victims of other forms of violence every day. While little information exists on the impact of VAW (including femicide) on women in politics, violence against female leaders of social movements is common. A number of internationally-supported programs have sought to empower and secure women’s participation in politics in light of this dangerous situation. Since 2011, International IDEA, UNDP and NIMD have provided support for over 1500 women including supporting the nomination of candidates, the promotion of women in legislative benches and commissions, and the creation of meeting spaces for elected women and social organizations as well as providing technical support to political parties to assess and reform their internal rules and regulations. These programs help address and protect women as they increasingly step into public life, notably following the introduction of law 1475 which established a 30 percent quota of women candidates in all elections. The same percentage of women must occupy the highest level of the government’s public service (Maloney 2015).

## **PART III Going forward: What can your party do to prevent and mitigate VAWP?**

Through these pages, we have talked about what violence against women in politics is and how it negatively affects everyone it touches where ever it occurs. We've suggested a number of options to help political parties identify ways to prevent and mitigate it at a structural level, during elections and during regular political cycles. Transforming these principles into reality is a task that will begin within individual parties. Although VAWP occurs around the world, it is never the same in any two places. Political parties making a serious effort to combat this problem must begin by looking inward to identify how VAWP is expressed in their unique environment. What are the risks and who is most affected? What are your party's strengths in protecting against VAWP and what can you do better? What partnerships can you forge to strengthen efforts to prevent violence? The answers to these questions come from many voices within each party – from committed party leadership to party women's caucuses to region-specific wings and the grassroots partisans. It is a dialogue to continually revisit and adapt as dynamics of participation and power evolve over time.

Violence against women in politics is rooted in patriarchal relationships and institutions. It is a distinct form of political and gender-based violence that constitutes a human rights offense. VAWP is often hidden or left unrecognized because its victims feel shame or fear of further retribution, especially where sexual abuse is involved. The ongoing presence of VAWP is of importance to all political parties that seek to build their voter base, enrich their stable of candidates through diversity, and uphold human rights globally. They have a vital role to play in preventing VAWP and in ensuring that acts of VAWP do not go unaddressed. Beyond mitigation, parties will only eradicate VAWP by addressing the core barriers that stand in the way of overcoming patriarchy, starting with looking inwards to their own practices and customs. Supporting women's political participation more broadly by nominating more women and providing them the resources to win and fighting for gender equality from legislative positions are part of the larger struggle. By reforming and strengthening their intra-party democracy processes and practices, political parties may promote gender equality and women's participation and representation in politics and eliminate violence.

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