

# #NOT THE COST

STOPPING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS ♀

A Call to Action



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455 Massachusetts Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20002  
Telephone: 202-728-5500  
Website: [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org)

# #NotTheCost

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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The launch of *#NotTheCost: Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics* by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) is the culmination of the hard work and insight of many people around the globe. The Institute is grateful for all their efforts.

First, we would like to thank Dr. Mona Lena Krook of Rutgers University, for her work as the technical advisor to this initiative. From writing the initial background paper to drafting the call to action document, Mona Lena's input has been critical to developing a theoretically rigorous and politically convincing approach to the issue and the potential for change.

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## **ABOUT THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE**

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen democratic institutions and practices by strengthening political parties, civic organizations and parliaments, safeguarding elections and promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

NDI is a leading organization working to advance women's political participation around the world. The Institute empowers women to participate, compete and lead as equal and active partners in democratic change. Mobilizing its global networks and drawing on three decades of experience in 132 countries, NDI supports women's aspirations for gender equality, and for inclusive and responsive government. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies.

# FOREWORD

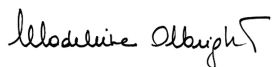
The unfortunate truth is that one in three women in the world will experience violence in their lives. That is unacceptable, and it must stop. Of the women affected, an uncounted number are targets of violence because they are exercising their civil and political rights. The largely hidden phenomenon of violence against politically active women, as with other forms of violence against women, sends a message to women in general about their role in society and is a fundamental breach of a woman's right to dignity.

Whether psychological or physical, this violence is real, and it undermines democracy. Women are often told "it's the cost of doing politics", but we cannot let it be. Violence against women as political actors actually *costs* politics the benefits of achieving sustainable and resilient democracies built on inclusion and equality.

The National Democratic Institute, along with key partners, has worked to develop this global Call to Action, which invites *you* to join the campaign to stop this endemic problem. From the global to the local, as a civic activist or member of a political institution, whether you are a domestic violence service provider, a member of the police or judiciary or the media, you can have a direct influence on women's ability to participate in politics, without fear of violence or the threat of reprisal.

Thank you for taking the first step.

**Madeleine K. Albright**



Chairman, The National Democratic Institute

# AVANT-PROPOS

La triste vérité est que 1 femme sur 3 dans le monde sera victime de violences au cours de sa vie. Cela est inacceptable et doit cesser. Parmi les femmes touchées, un nombre incalculable sont des cibles de violence parce qu'elles exercent leurs droits civils et politiques. Le phénomène largement caché de la violence contre les femmes politiquement actives, tout comme d'autres formes de violence contre les femmes, est caché dans la sphère privée et dans les espaces publics protégés ; ceci envoie un message aux femmes en général sur leur rôle au sein de la société et c'est une violation fondamentale du droit à la dignité d'une femme.

Que ce soit de nature psychologique ou physique cette violence est réelle, et elle mine la démocratie. Les femmes sont souvent dites qu'il s'agit du « coût associé à faire de la politique », mais nous ne pouvons pas rester les bras croisés. Les avantages d'établir des démocraties durables et robustes construites sur l'inclusion et l'égalité coûtent à la politique lorsque la violence contre les femmes en tant qu'actrices politiques a lieu.

Le National Democratic Institute, conjointement avec ses partenaires clés, a travaillé sur l'élaboration du présent Appel mondial à l'Action, qui *vous* invite à participer à la campagne afin d'arrêter ce qui est en train de devenir un problème endémique. Du niveau global au local, en tant que militant/e ou membre d'une institution politique, que vous soyez un fournisseur de services œuvrant contre la violence domestique, un membre de la police ou des services judiciaires ou des médias, vous pouvez avoir une influence directe sur la capacité des femmes à participer à la politique de leur propre voix et conscience, sans crainte de la violence ou la menace de représailles.

Je vous remercie d'avoir pris le premier pas.

**Madeleine K. Albright**

Présidente du Conseil d'Administration, Le National Democratic Institute

# PREÁMBULO

La triste verdad es que 1 de cada 3 mujeres en el mundo experimentarán violencia en sus vidas. Esto es inaceptable, y debe detenerse. De las mujeres afectadas, un número incontable son blanco de violencia porque están ejerciendo sus derechos civiles y políticos. El extenso y oculto fenómeno de violencia en contra de mujeres activas en la política, como otras formas de violencia en contra de las mujeres, envía en general un mensaje a las mujeres sobre su papel en la sociedad y fundamentalmente vulnera el derecho de la mujer a la dignidad.

Ya sea abuso psicológico o físico, esta violencia es real, y debilita la democracia. Generalmente se le dice a las mujeres que ese es “el precio de hacer política”, pero no podemos dejar que sea así. La violencia en contra de las mujeres como actores políticos, en realidad le cuesta a los políticos el beneficio de alcanzar democracias sustentables y resistentes construidas sobre la inclusión y la igualdad.

El Instituto Nacional Demócrata, junto con socios claves, ha trabajado para desarrollar este Llamado a la Acción global, y le invita a unirse a la campaña para detener este problema endémico. Desde el nivel global al local, como activista cívico o miembro de una institución política, ya sea ofreciendo servicios a víctimas de violencia doméstica, como miembro de la policía o del cuerpo judicial, o como parte de los medios de comunicación, Usted puede influenciar directamente la habilidad de las mujeres de participar en la política, sin temor de violencia o la amenaza de represalias.

Gracias por tomar el primer paso.

**Madeleine K. Albright**

Directora del Consejo, Instituto Nacional Demócrata

## مدعوة

الحقيقة المؤسفة هي أن هنالك امرأة من كل ثلاث نساء حول العالم تتعرض لأعمال عنف في حياتها. هذا أمر غير مقبول، ويجب أن يتوقف. من بين النساء المتضررات بشكل عام: هناك نساء على وجه التحديد يتعرضن للعنف بسبب ممارستهن للحقوق المدنية والسياسية. العنف ضد النساء الناشطات سياسياً هو ظاهرة كبيرة، وكما هو الحال مع غيرها من أشكال العنف ضد المرأة، فإنه يعمل على إرسال رسالة للنساء بشكل عام حول دورهن في المجتمع، وينزع حق المرأة في الكرامة.

هذا العنف حقيقي ويعتدي على الديمقراطية، سواء كان ذلك في شكل من أشكال الإيذاء النفسي أو الاعتداء الجسدي. يُقال للنساء في كثير من الأحيان إن هذه العنف يمثل “تكلفة ممارسة السياسة”، ولكن لا يمكننا السماح لذلك. العنف ضد المرأة في العمل السياسي يكلف السياسة فوائد تحقيق الديمقراطية المستدامة والمرنة والمبنية على الاندماج والمساواة.

عمل المعهد الديمقراطي الوطني جنباً إلى جنب مع شركائه الرئيسيين لوضع هذا النداء العالمي الذي يدعوك للانضمام لحملة وقف هذه المشكلة المتوطنة. على المستوى العالمي والمحلي، كنا نطوّر مدني أو عضو في مؤسسة سياسية، سواء كنت عضواً في مؤسسات الخدمات الاجتماعية لمكافحة العنف المنزلي، أو عضواً في الشرطة أو القضاء أو وسائل الإعلام فيمكنك إحداث تأثير مباشر على قدرة النساء في المشاركة في الحياة السياسية والتعبير عن أنفسهن دون خوف من العنف أو التهديد.

شكراً جزيلاً لاتخاذك الخطوة الأولى.

مادلين أولبرايت

رئيسة مجلس إدارة المعهد الديمقراطي الوطني

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*Ene Ede, adviser to the NDI-supported “Stop Violence Against Women in Elections” campaign in Nigeria, discusses strategies to stop violence against women in politics with a group of international experts at NDI in December, 2015. (Photo credit: Ezra Gregg.)*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As women have advanced toward equality, they have made historic gains in political life. In the last 20 years, the percentage of women in parliaments globally has nearly doubled, and women are increasingly taking on positions of power as civil society activists, political party leaders, local councillors and mayors, cabinet ministers, prime ministers and presidents. It is their right to do so—and their full and equal political participation benefits their communities and their countries, resulting in real gains for democracy. These include greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and more sustainable peace.

Yet a growing number of reports from around the world—from activists, politicians, journalists and academics—indicate that as women step forward to claim their right to participate in politics, they are met by acts that encompass psychological abuse, and physical or sexual assault. This backlash is occurring for a number of reasons—maybe indeed because women have stepped forward—and it describes the phenomenon of **violence against women in politics**. Consistent with the definition in a growing body of national law and international conventions governing violence against women more broadly, this form of violence happens in private and in protected public spaces, and is not restricted to acts of physical harm. In fact, it encompasses a spectrum of acts committed in person and, increasingly, online, that are designed to control, limit or prevent women’s full and equal political participation.

All violence against women is unacceptable and must stop. Although gendered violence in the political sphere has historically been invisible and gone uncounted, it is not a new phenomenon: November 25th, which is the day globally dedicated to the elimination of violence against women, commemorates the 1960 assassination of the Mirabal Sisters for their political activism by the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic. This violence poses grave challenges for the global community, and for governments and societies. It is not limited to one country, region or creed but rather appears in all parts of the world. Depending on their contexts and backgrounds, women are differently affected by this violence, but the body of evidences showing its impact continues to grow. It should be a concern for everyone dedicated to promoting strong, inclusive democratic societies—and it must be stopped.

Too often, women are told that abuse, harassment and even assault are part of the political arena and are “the cost of doing politics,” but it should not be so. They are cautioned against speaking out in case they are seen as liabilities rather than assets; they stay silent rather than risk being labelled unreliable colleagues. Such acts would not be tolerated in other contexts, and are explicitly prohibited under many legal frameworks and workplace codes of conduct. The same scrutiny should be applied to women’s experience of engaging in the political sector, which should lead by example in defending democracy, gender equality and the human rights of all citizens.

While the nature and impact of this violence will vary with different political and socio-cultural contexts, there are three major effects of this violence. First and foremost, as with all violence against women, it is a human rights abuse, and consistent with internationally accepted definitions of violence against women encompassing physical and sexual assault, as well as psychological abuse through persistent harassment and discrimination. Secondly, such acts which intimidate, delegitimize or exclude women as political actors do not only affect the targeted women: they send a message to society that *women as a group* should not participate in politics. They serve to silence not only the women who are victims, but also to stifle the aspirations of other women who are interested in engaging in politics, particularly young women. In this way, by preventing women *as women* from participating in the governance of their countries, directly or through their chosen representatives, violence enables a further denial of women’s civil and political rights. Thirdly, violence against politically active women challenges the integrity of democratic practice and culture. The voices of all citizens are not heard, voters cannot select candidates representing the whole community and citizens can be denied the effective representation that they voted for, thereby *costing politics* the benefits of the

sustainable and responsive democratic governance that an inclusive political space can create.

As awareness of this shared phenomenon has increased, a growing number of actors around the world are developing strategies to combat this violence. The Call to Action presented here builds on that momentum, unifying these efforts in a common platform to start a broader global conversation about what this phenomenon looks like, why it deserves global attention and what solutions are emerging.

The opportunities for action laid out in the second part of this document outline steps that might be taken to combat this problem by different actors at the global, national, and local levels. The aim is to help foster political environments that encourage women's participation in *all* aspects of democratic politics—as civic leaders, voters, political party members, candidates, elected representatives and appointed officials—in their own voices and conscience, without fear of violence or the threat of reprisals, to the benefit of all of us.



*Violence against women in politics takes many forms, but shares a common intent to restrict and control women's political participation, preventing them from taking their equal places alongside men. (Photo credit: NDI, Pakistan.)*

## FRAMING THE CHALLENGE

### What is 'violence against women in politics'?

Political violence can be experienced by both men and women. However, the specific issue of violence against women in politics has three distinct characteristics:

- it targets women *because* of their gender;
- in its very *form* it can be gendered, as exemplified by sexist threats and sexual violence; and
- its impact is to discourage *women in particular* from being or becoming politically active.

It encompasses all forms of aggression, coercion and intimidation against women as political actors simply because they are women. These acts—whether directed at women as civic leaders, voters, political party members, candidates, elected representatives or appointed officials—are designed to restrict the political participation of *women as a group*. This violence reinforces traditional stereotypes and roles given to women, using domination and control to exclude women from politics.

While acts of violence against women in politics are directed at individual women, they have a meaning beyond their specific target: to frighten other women who are already politically active, deter women who might consider engaging in politics, and to communicate to society that women should not participate in public life in any capacity. Therefore, the *motive* behind the violence is as important as the intended target.

In some cases, attacks on politically active women are couched as “non-violent” acts, relying instead on a narrative that reaffirms conservative ideas of women’s “place” in society. Opponents may focus on women’s bodies and their traditional social roles—primarily as mothers and wives—to deny or undercut their suitability or competence in the political sphere. But because motive is an important defining element, using gendered



*Women who aspire to office, such as these mayoral candidates at an NDI leadership academy in Mexico, must be able to pursue those aspirations free from the fear of violence. (Photo credit: NDI)*

imagery or stereotypes to attack female opponents can be described as a case of violence against women in politics: as the message communicated through these tropes is that women do not belong in the political realm. In undermining the idea of women’s competence, these portrayals reinforce the status quo that shuts women out of positions where they would be able to access and exert power as equals with men.

At the same time, experiences that both men and women have that are often dismissed as “the cost of doing politics”, can qualify as forms of violence against women in politics. For example, the exchange of material goods for positions of power within parties or elected bodies is often accepted as common even though it is corrupt behavior. However, because for women, unlike men, the predominant demands are for sex or sexual favors instead of money, this extortion can fall into the category of violence against women. This type of extortion further pollutes a system’s democratic culture: women learn that only by providing such “favors” can they move up the political ladder, and citizens’

perceptions of women in politics are colored by the belief that any woman who advances must have performed such favors.

When women do not feel safe voicing their opinion without fear of threat or reprisal, their full and equal political participation is impossible. Robust discourse is an important part of politics and political contest. Certainly, an attack on a woman's political views alone does not necessarily signify a case of gender-based violence. It may fit well within the scope of healthy criticism or political debate, in some instances protected by guarantees of free speech or parliamentary privilege. Nevertheless, there is often a repetitive or persistent pattern to the attacks that women face in politics, which gives an intensity to acts that might go unnoticed or be dismissed as unimportant. One sexist insult might be discounted as bad behavior, however, when women attempting to engage in political discourse face a constant stream of harassment and abuse, this becomes violence. Significantly, when this forms part of the backdrop of women's experience of political engagement, it undermines their sense of safety in being able to exercise their political rights. Digital technology and online platforms have served to reinforce this sense of anonymous and lurking threat. The psychological abuse caused by the production and distribution of highly sexualized and derogatory images of women online is also a form of violence. The distribution of such images fundamentally subverts respect for women's dignity and the way in which the public views them. Further, it may or may not incite accompanying physical assaults. In these circumstances, women judge that the costs and danger in participating outweigh the benefits, and withdraw from or choose not to enter the political arena at all.

## Whom does it affect?

Women are diverse as individuals, with backgrounds, access to resources, and national, cultural or religious contexts that run the full spectrum of human experience. Women in politics around the world report the same range of experiences, but the nature, intensity and impact of the violence they encounter differs depending on the political and socio-cultural contexts in which they are politically engaged. For example, there have been notable attacks on politically active women in environments with high levels of internet and social media activity, which will have affected the targeted women. However, when directed at women with fewer resources or who lack support systems or the knowledge of coping strategies, this violence has a greater impact on stifling their voice and participation. Those in even more disadvantaged circumstances due to

extreme marginalization or physical or geographic isolation, are vulnerable to all the kinds of abuse and harm discussed above, and also to actions that may not seem, to an outside perspective, to be violent.

Acknowledgment of violence against women in politics as a particular problem has been hampered by three things: the conventional wisdom that unless it has a physical manifestation it is not violence; the perception that there are no specific gender dimensions to violence in politics; and the fact that the vast majority of women who have experienced sexualized attacks are likely to remain silent about them. All three have contributed to the hidden nature of the problem.

Women may not recognize what has happened to them as a specific form of violence, and women seeking to participate or who are already engaged in politics may even deny the problem in an effort to deflect charges that they are “hysterical” or “not coping” with the demands of the job. Many are afraid of being viewed as victims or being accused of “playing the victim,” for fear of justifying claims that women do not belong in political life. Yet evidence suggests in unambiguous terms that women in politics around the world have indeed experienced such violence—whether or not they speak out directly about these issues—and that their experiences have implications for their ability and willingness to participate actively in public life.

During the 2010 elections in Afghanistan, nearly all female candidates received threatening phone calls.<sup>[1]</sup> In Tanzania’s 2015 elections, women voters reported that their husbands had divorced them and left them to support their children alone because they had not voted for their husbands’ favored candidates.<sup>[2]</sup> In Peru, 39 percent of women leaders in regional and local governments reported that they suffered acts of political harassment related to their political positions.<sup>[3]</sup> Women politicians from Hungary to India have endured persistent sexist insults focused on their appearance.<sup>[4]</sup> Incidents of violence have left female politicians in Asia and Latin America demoralized, making them less likely to stand for reelection and to leave after fewer terms served.<sup>[5]</sup> One-third of female local politicians in Sweden said they considered giving up their positions as a result of these incidents,<sup>[6]</sup> while 48 percent of the women leaving office in Bolivia in 2010 reported being victims of such violence.<sup>[7]</sup>

The impact of violence, moreover, reaches beyond the women directly affected. In Australia, 60 percent of women aged 18 to 21 and 80 percent of women over 31 said they were less likely to run for office after seeing how negatively female politicians were treated by the media.<sup>[8]</sup> Nearly all participants in a



British program for aspiring women leaders had witnessed sexist abuse of female politicians online, leading more than 75 percent of them to say it was a point of concern when considering whether to pursue a role in public life. <sup>[9]</sup> As these examples show, the scope of violence that targets politically active women extends beyond formal political spaces such as parliaments and political parties: it affects not only candidates and officials but also any woman attempting to exercise her political rights or participate in any aspect of the political arena, from elections to policy-making to activism, at local, national and regional levels alike.

As candidates, women may confront negative reactions from their families and spouses, including the threat of ostracism or divorce. They may also face vandalism of their campaign materials and character assassination from opponents both outside and inside their political parties, and rape threats—all with the aim of curbing their political ambition. As elected and appointed officials, they may face hostile working conditions within legislatures or council chambers, including sexual harassment, sexualized or unequal media coverage and sexist abuse on social media intended to marginalize them and render them less effective.

As voters, women may be the targets of violence in efforts to prevent them from voting or to coerce them to vote in a particular way. Women electoral

*Women from all walks of life can be targeted by violence for their political participation—not only candidates and elected officials, but activists and those who are merely exercising their right to vote, like this woman in Nigeria's 2015 national election. (Photo credit: NDI.)*





officials or party poll agents are also vulnerable to threats, coercion or assaults. As activists, women may face negative or outright hostile reactions from their families, communities or governments, especially if they are in isolated communities and challenging established networks of patronage or resource allocation. Many women report that their causes are ignored or dismissed as “women’s issues,” and that they may face gendered insults (for example, that they are “too loud” or “too shrill,”) intended to silence them.

Once elected, women who become parliamentarians also continue to be under threat of violence. In 1976, the Inter-Parliamentary Union established a Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians to investigate cases where the human rights of elected officials have been violated. Over the years, the committee has examined complaints in more than 100 states; in 2015, the cases of 320 parliamentarians from 42 countries were examined, of which 37 were women.<sup>[10]</sup> Cases included undue exclusion from political office, arbitrary arrest, restriction of speech, murder, torture and kidnapping. Each of these acts is consistent with the experience of women around the world to prevent their political participation, and in the case of elected officials to deny voters the effective representation of the candidate that they chose.

## What forms does violence take?

Violence intended to control or stop women’s participation in politics takes a variety of forms, and is present in both private and public spaces. Through these acts women as individuals and as a group are prevented from exercising their voice and agency in a free and unfettered manner. Unlike other forms of electoral or political violence usually carried out by political opponents, in these cases perpetrators may include a woman’s family and friends, members of her political party, community and religious leaders, state security forces and the police, among others. Media outlets can also play an influential role in perpetrating violence, either through their own reports, or through disseminating violent messages about politically active women from other sources.

Different contexts and different cultures give rise to a range of methods to intimidate, delegitimize or exclude women from political life. However, politically active women have complained of types of violence that fall into several commonly applicable categories: psychological, physical, sexual and economic.

**Psychological violence** involves hostile behavior and abuse intended to cause fear and/or emotional damage. In politics, this may comprise threats of physical violence and acts intending to harm a woman's social status. For example, the limited research on violence against women in elections indicates that psychological violence may be particularly directed at female voters, candidates and party workers.<sup>[11]</sup> Death and rape threats, character assassination, social boycotts and stalking are all examples of this type of violence. Husbands may threaten divorce as a way to force their wives to vote for a particular candidate or avoid any political activity at all.

Patterns of abuse and harassment that become psychological violence can seek to delegitimize women as political actors by undermining their competence and visibility in the political sphere, negatively affecting the way they are portrayed and, therefore, perceived. Women may have their microphones cut off so they are actively silenced in parliaments or party meetings or be constantly interrupted by sexist heckling, or male family members may seek to cast votes on women's behalf. All these acts are intended to demonstrate in a literal way that women are not competent enough to participate in democratic processes in their own voice and conscience. This disempowerment seeks to put women in their "place," caricaturing them in the symbolic or traditional roles they are expected to fill because of their gender.

**Physical violence** involves injuries inflicted on women's bodies, as well as acts of bodily harm carried out against family members. Examples include assassination, kidnapping, beating and domestic abuse, either of the woman or her family members, in order to prevent women's political participation.

**Sexual violence** entails sexual acts and attempts at sexual acts by coercion, including unwelcome sexual comments or advances. Examples include sexual harassment, rape and sexual exploitation, such as forcing women to perform sexual favors in order to win a party nomination. Women's sexuality is often a potent symbol, with rape threats and questions about a woman's morality or sexual identity being very common. Sexually explicit or sexually graphic representations of women online are a growing manifestation of this type of coercion or threat, which reduces women to their gender, denying their basic human dignity.

**Economic violence** involves coercive behavior through the control of a person's access to economic resources. Women may be denied funds or other support from their families, hampering or preventing them entirely from political activities as simple as voting. They may be systematically denied access to

financial and economic resources that they are entitled to by law or are otherwise available to politically active male counterparts, and which are necessary, for example, for campaigning or routine political organizing. The aim is to frustrate women so that they withdraw, or to reduce the chances that they can do their jobs effectively, thus affecting their standing in the eyes of citizens and voters, and damaging their political careers.

Digital media outlets and digital technology, in particular the huge reach of social media platforms, also magnify the effects of psychological abuse by making them anonymous, borderless, sustained and permanent. Overall, the tools and platforms available online make it much easier to attack someone, as it can be done at a distance and, in many cases, “crowdsourced” to amplify the number of violent messages and their effects. These attacks are difficult to stop or divert, and can have profound effects on the victim’s whole life not just their political activism. Online privacy violations such as “revenge porn” do not only have a traumatic impact on the individual woman victimized, but by their very public nature have a dramatic impact on other women in or considering public life. Moreover, the example of “revenge porn” and other digital attacks are linked to a secondary violence that often follows an initial attack where women are blamed for their own victimization, instead of their attacker or attackers being held culpable. The perception of impunity emboldens perpetrators, and raises women’s sense of insecurity and violation, driving many away from political participation.

While campaigns in several parts of the world have felt compelled to introduce alternate terms like ‘political harassment’ and ‘discrimination’ to describe non-physical attacks, all of these cases describe violence against politically active women. The case for considering these various acts as part of the same phenomenon is strengthened by the fact that many cases of violence against women in politics fall into several categories, or that multiple acts may be perpetrated simultaneously or in an escalating fashion.



*As with other forms of violence against women, violence against women in politics violates human rights. Moreover, it has additional impacts on democracy itself. (Photo credit: NDI, Honduras)*

## WHY IS THIS VIOLENCE PROBLEMATIC?

### It is a form of violence against women

The 1993 United Nations International Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women notes that the ability of women to achieve political equality, amongst other things, is limited by violence. The Declaration goes on to explicitly define “violence against women” as a range of gender-based harm which can occur in the private or public space and is “one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men.”<sup>[12]</sup> Violent acts against politically active women encompass all the aspects of these gendered power relations, and should be included in discussions and strategies to eliminate violence against women more broadly.

Violence against women in politics, in fact, has played a prominent role in raising awareness and promoting action on the issue of violence against women on the global stage. The International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (November 25), for example, was created to commemorate the day in 1960 that the three Mirabal sisters were assassinated for their political activism against the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic.

## It violates human rights

Violence against women in politics presents a fundamental challenge to the idea of “equal rights of men and women” as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Individual civil and political rights are enshrined in international commitments and national legislation. Article 21 of the Declaration, for example, states that (1) everyone has the right to take part in the government of his or her country, directly or through freely chosen representatives; (2) everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his or her country; and (3) the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government...expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage.

<sup>[13]</sup> Attacks on women who actively pursue their right to participate in the political sphere are therefore in direct contradiction to the human rights of women as individuals.



*Taking action to promote an inclusive democracy, means women being involved in every level and aspect of political life, like this presiding officer during the 2015 Nigeria elections. (Photo credit: NDI.)*

Women’s individual rights are also protected under United Nations’ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which has been signed by 189 states. Article 1 defines ‘discrimination’ as “any distinction, exclusion, or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women...on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field.”<sup>[14]</sup> Article 7, meanwhile, states that countries should ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right (a) to vote in elections and be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) to participate in the formulation of government policy and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all

levels of government; and (c) to participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.<sup>[15]</sup>

## **It undermines democracy**

Democracy without the equal and active participation of the half of the population who are women is impossible, and violence poses a direct threat to women's ability to participate in politics freely and without fear. There is a growing body of evidence which shows that women's political participation results in real gains for democracy and for society, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and more sustainable peace. On the other hand, the exclusion of women undermines every democratic process. The integrity of elections is called into question when women voters are prevented from accessing polling stations whether by family-based coercion, deliberate targeting by political opponents, or by terrorist threats. The same is true when women are pressured to resign after they have been legitimately elected to political office, or when others make it overly difficult or impossible for them to do the job for which they were elected. Further, these constitute a violation of the people's right to be represented by the candidate of their choice.





*Women must be able to speak out in their own voice and conscience, like this woman in Pakistan, without fear of violence or the threat of reprisal. (Photo credit: NDI.)*

## HOW CAN WE STOP IT ?

### A call to action

This is a serious issue that affects the development of strong, inclusive and democratic societies, and global progress toward gender equality. As the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals make clear, achieving both these outcomes is fundamentally connected, and requires action to ensure that women and girls are able to claim full and equal opportunities and rights—including their right to participate meaningfully in all aspects of political life free from the fear or threat of violence. Politically active women’s experience of violence should *not* be “the cost of politics.” In fact it *costs* politics the benefits of the sustainable and responsive democratic governance that an inclusive political space can create.

The problem of violence against women in politics needs to be exposed in all its forms. It must be acknowledged globally, validating the realities that many women face, and empowering them to speak frankly about their experience. Action must be taken to mitigate and prevent this violence, to record and count it when it does occur, and to increase accountability for perpetrators.

In some countries, grassroots activists, legislators and media-watchers have begun to develop strategies to address and prevent violence against women in politics. There are also emerging initiatives from a growing number of international organizations focused on addressing the issue at a regional and

global level. Best practices and strategies are being developed and implemented at every level by changemakers around the world. But isolated actions have limited impact. These efforts must mobilize a host of different actors from a range of social groups to combat this problem—including, for example, those working to combat domestic violence against women, or to stop cyber harassment, or to promote women's rights. Each of these actors brings a set of comparative strengths and capacities that will be essential to stopping violence against women and removing an important barrier to their full participation.

This Call to Action reflects the need to take steps today to make violence against politically active women as unacceptable as any other form of violence against women. Action is needed in each of three phases: to educate and raise awareness creating new norms and standards against this behaviour; to create processes at the institutional and national level for registering and responding to complaints; and to provide services for assisting women who are victims, as well as to punish the perpetrators of such violence. If we commit to taking effective action together, democratic culture and practice will be strengthened, and more inclusive, prosperous and resilient societies achieved.



# **OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION**

# OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

The opportunities for action that follow have been organized for quick reference, with the tools that are most useful or relevant for members of specific institutions or sectors of society collected together in sections. These actions may be used singly, joined in varying combinations or modified to fit each particular political situation, institution or context. A varied host of different actors can and should be engaged in pursuing actions to stop violence against women in politics: as the different forms of violence are often overlapping in nature, single strategies are likely to have only a partial impact. Instead, multidimensional approaches applied and monitored over time, appear to be necessary to address and reverse ongoing resistance to women's equal political inclusion.

Some actions can and should be taken by all of these individuals and organizations, as well as others not explicitly named here. These include:

- ***Develop and disseminate the concept of “violence against women in politics”*** to give a name to these acts and raise awareness at the global, national and local levels. Emphasize that these behaviors should not be “the cost of doing politics,” but that they actively seek to prevent women's political participation as women. This constitutes a serious violation of international norms and national laws regarding democracy, human rights and gender equality.
- ***Raise awareness of the global nature of these debates*** to emphasize that violence against women in politics is not a phenomenon restricted to one area of the world. Although specific acts of violence may take different forms across countries and world regions, they are the same in terms of their intentions to restrict and control women's political participation.
- ***Develop indicators and collect data*** on the prevalence, form and impact of violence against women in politics. The lack of data contributes to the denial of this problem, but statistics and qualitative case studies can support efforts to combat this phenomenon—as well as illustrate its broader meanings for women, politics and society. One approach would be to incorporate data on political violence within existing international studies and databases of violence against women. Those working at a regional, national or local level may add indicators on the issue to existing regional indicators or surveys. Measured over time, these data will permit evaluation of strategies to see where progress has been made and what

further interventions may be needed.

- ***Support networking among female politicians and civil society organizations*** interested in tackling this issue, whether on a formal or informal basis, by providing opportunities to connect during organizational or regional gatherings—or to connect virtually through organization platforms. Regardless of the platform or forum, care should be taken to ensure that the women participating are protected from any backlash or breach of confidentiality.
- ***Provide training programs*** for women on how to respond to and mitigate acts of violence against women in politics, including how to decrease vulnerability and respond effectively to both in-person and online attacks. Provide training for men as well to raise awareness about the roles they can play in stopping or responding to violence.

# GLOBAL INSTITUTIONS

Intergovernmental organizations, international associations and international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), can contribute to efforts to combat violence against women in politics by establishing new international standards and leveraging their global reach to raise awareness and provide technical assistance on this issue across world regions. Some institutions have begun to take steps to raise the visibility of the problem at a global level—but more could be done.

## Actions for global institutions:

- ***Integrate violence against women in politics into existing international instruments*** on violence against women, human rights, peace and conflict, and women's rights, among other possibilities. The issue can be read into various articles in CEDAW as well as the International Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. Indeed, an implicit precedent for recognizing violence against women in politics within these frameworks is the fact that the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (November 25) commemorates the anniversary of the day in 1960 when the Mirabal sisters were assassinated in the Dominican Republic for their political activism against the Trujillo dictatorship.
- ***Facilitate information sharing*** on data and strategies for combating violence against women in politics between governments and/or region-based civil society groups, in particular those who are members of the institution or association. Global gatherings and requests for technical assistance—including electoral observation missions—provide an opportunity to place this issue on the agenda, as well as to enable and encourage the exchange of good practices.
- ***Place the issue on the agenda of international meetings*** addressing topics such as citizen participation, elections, governance, or violence against women. Such gatherings provide an opportunity to sensitize experts and stakeholders on the need to attend to the problem of violence against women in politics, extending or deepening existing mandates of concern.

- ***Collaborate with global and regional organizations*** to exchange data, documents, experiences and challenges related to work to combat violence against women in politics—with the goal of building on and learning from the work of these organizations, thus magnifying the impact of this collective work.
- ***Engage global institutions*** to incorporate a focus on violence against women in politics into their work, especially when the organization's remit deals with questions related to democratic governance, civil society, political parties, electoral integrity or the human rights of parliamentarians.

### **RAISING AWARENESS THROUGH DATA: ACTION BY UN SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS**

The Special Rapporteurs designated by the United Nations to report on violence against women and girls have worked over the decades to bring strong evidence-based reporting and normative progression on critical aspects of women's experience of violence into the UN system, thereby prompting action on it. Violence against women and girls has become a key policy issue, and the accepted scope of the issue has widened to include, for example, domestic violence as well as sexual violence during conflict and war. The scope could be widened further, to include violence against politically active women, through an expansion of the topics covered by the Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women in its thematic annual reports. This kind of action would be a global example of the ways in which existing mechanisms can be used to address and include new knowledge, making them more effective and current.

# REGIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Regional organizations and NGOs can supplement, complement or extend the efforts of organizations operating at the global level by bringing attention to the issue at the regional level and using region-based mechanisms to draw attention to and share regional solutions and experiences.

Some regions have advanced more than others in developing a regional conversation, but regardless of their progress, actors at this level can add important value to these debates, given commonalities and historical connections among countries in the same region. Regional mechanisms and initiatives can thus play a crucial role in supporting local and national efforts to prevent, respond to and sanction violence against women in politics.

## Actions for regional institutions:

- ***Incorporate violence against women in politics into existing regional frameworks***, like conventions and declarations on violence against women, human rights, peace and conflict, and women's rights. Advocate for regional bodies and offices—such as commissions on women and human rights courts—to recognize and commit to tackling the problem of violence against women in politics, including holding perpetrators to account whenever possible.

### USING EXISTING CONVENTIONS: ACTION BY THE ORGANISATION OF AMERICAN STATES

Several regional institutions have already taken action to call violence against women in politics to light and condemn it. Often, these institutions find it easiest to work within existing frameworks that call for action to end violence against women more broadly. One example of this can be found in the Organization for American States (OAS), which in 1994 adopted its Belém do Pará Convention calling for mechanisms to protect women from violence. In October, 2015, the OAS adopted a follow-on declaration to the Convention that specifically condemned political harassment and violence against women. This declaration urges its member states to take action to protect women in politics from violence, and serves an important purpose in raising awareness about the issue in the region.

- ***Draft a separate regional accord or declaration on ending violence against women in politics*** to define violence against women in politics and declare it unacceptable, providing support to activists on the ground seeking to insert the issue into national and regional agendas.
- ***Create procedures for registering complaints and issuing punishments*** to the extent possible through regional mechanisms. Regional courts—especially human rights courts—offer one possible mechanism for lodging complaints and securing justice for victims of violence against women in politics.
- ***Establish regional protocols or model guidelines*** offering guidance to political parties and/or national parliaments in tackling the problem, for example by developing a sample “code of conduct” or legislation to codify offenses and specify punishments for perpetrators.
- ***Facilitate information sharing*** on data and strategies for combating violence against women in politics among governments and/or civil society groups at the regional level. Utilize regional meetings and requests for technical assistance—including election observation missions—as an opportunity to place the issue on the agenda, as well as to enable and encourage the exchange of good practices.
- ***Place the issue on the agenda of regional meetings*** addressing topics such as elections, governance, civil society or violence against women. Such gatherings provide an opportunity to sensitize experts and stakeholders on the need to attend to the problem.
- ***Engage other regional institutions*** to incorporate a focus on violence against women in politics into their work, especially when the organization’s remit deals with questions related to democratic governance, civil society, political parties, electoral integrity or the human rights of parliamentarians. Explore opportunities for collaboration drawing on each body’s respective mandate for a greater combined impact, for example by bringing together gender and election experts.
- ***Collaborate with other global and regional organizations*** to exchange data, documents, experiences and challenges with the goal of building on and learning from the work of other organizations, thus magnifying the impact of this collective work. Engaging with actors based in other regions may be especially fruitful for thinking in new ways about the problem and potential solutions.

# GOVERNMENTS

National and local governments, as agents of the state, have a responsibility to promote the human and democratic rights of all citizens and protect them, as well as ensure treatment and justice for victims of various forms of violence. Governments can address this problem by taking a public stand against violence against women in politics and developing mechanisms to support victims and hold perpetrators to account.

Governments around the world have thus far been slow to take up the issue of violence against women in politics, although some countries have considered legislation on the issue and some former heads of government and cabinet ministers have been vocal about problems with sexism and misogyny directed toward women as political actors.

National and local governments, in light of their responsibility to protect citizens' rights who are empowered to make and implement state policies and programs, should be mobilized to use their authority to prevent, treat and punish violence against women in politics.

## Actions for governments:

- ***Conduct awareness-raising campaigns directed at political parties and voters*** to highlight the problem through posters, websites, tweets, on-line videos and television spots. Raise citizen awareness of the issue through speeches and campaigns highlighting and condemning this behavior. Content should focus on illustrating what violence against women in politics is and explaining why it is unacceptable in light of laws and societal values regarding democracy, human rights, inclusion and equality.
- ***Incorporate actions against violence against women in politics into existing laws and frameworks***, connecting the issue to laws related to violence against women and/or political participation. Designate the issue as a priority area for state agencies working in associated areas, such as violence against women, electoral integrity, human rights, party oversight or media standards.
- ***Create procedures for registering and handling complaints*** through new or existing state agencies, including police stations, electoral authorities or gender equality offices. Given that acts of violence might target women as voters, activists, party members, candidates or public officials, the



government might need to designate multiple agencies to process claims and provide services for victims and survivors.

- **Ensure that service providers that respond to victims of violence against women fully recognize this type of violence** as well as its perpetrators, and are equipped to support its victims.
- **Designate a state agency or office to serve as a primary point of contact** for victims of violence against women in politics, including members of their families, and for civil society organizations working on the issue. This may involve creating a new office or position to handle these issues, such as a national ombudsperson, or it might entail adjusting the mandate of an existing body, such as a state women's office.
- **Provide training to law enforcement officials** to enable them to recognize acts of violence against women in politics and to take these acts seriously as violations of core human and democratic rights. Encourage them to report and prosecute these crimes to the fullest extent of the law.
- **Participate in regional and global discussions** on violence against women in politics to share experiences and learn about good practices developed elsewhere in an effort to develop additional strategies to tackle the problem.

*Working together to achieve political parity and equality can often be a place of strength for women, like these women during the municipal elections in Kaya, Burkina Faso. (Photo credit: NDI.)*



# PARLIAMENTS

Parliaments, as representatives of the people, have a duty to safeguard citizens' human and democratic rights. Members of parliament, collectively and individually, can take steps to end violence against women in politics by raising the issue in parliamentary debates and by passing legislation to penalize perpetrators.

Parliamentary action on this issue is complicated by the fact that parliamentarians themselves may be victims or perpetrators of violence against women in politics—requiring them to examine and condemn acts of violence occurring in society as well as within parliament. Steps to prevent, treat and punish violence against women in politics must thus be designed with this dual perspective in mind.

## Actions for parliaments:

- **Conduct awareness-raising campaigns directed at political parties and voters** to highlight the problem through posters, websites, tweets, on-line videos and television spots. Content should focus on illustrating what violence against women in politics is and explaining why it is unacceptable in light of laws and societal values regarding democracy, human rights and equality, including its influence on corruption and under-functioning governments.
- **Organize a national forum in parliament** on violence against women in politics across the country, inviting the participation of locally elected women as well as women in political parties and women's civil society organizations. This forum could raise awareness among women themselves, as well as generate momentum for parliament to take up the issue.
- **Introduce a resolution** condemning violence against women in politics in all its forms, inviting members of parliament to signal their support for combatting this problem. The resolution might be timed to coincide with events like a national or International Women's Day, or the announcement of upcoming elections, to attract greater levels of support from colleagues in parliament.
- **Incorporate violence against women in politics into existing state laws and frameworks**, connecting the issue to laws related to violence against



*Women parliamentarians, such as this member of parliament from Kyrgyzstan, must be able to execute their office and functions without fear or threat of violence—something parliaments themselves can take action to ensure. (Photo credit: NDI.)*

women and/or political participation. Designate the issue as a priority for state agencies working in associated areas, such as violence against women, electoral integrity or human rights.

- **Consider legislative reforms** to sanction violence against women in politics, with the dual purpose of defining the issue in national legislation and specifying penalties for perpetrators, including fines, prison sentences, loss of political position and/or a ban on standing as a candidate in the future. The law should be clear as to what constitutes an act of violence against women in politics, as well as who can make claims and which bodies are responsible for receiving complaints.
- **Conduct a confidential survey** of parliamentarians' experiences with electoral and political violence, including incidents occurring within parliament itself. Publish this study to raise awareness of the issue and identify specific forms that such violence might take, especially in the parliamentary workplace.
- **Establish or revise parliamentary codes of conduct** to address aspects of institutional culture that create a hostile work environment, especially for female parliamentarians and staff. This might include drafting and

establishing an explicit policy on sexual harassment, as well as creating a new office or designating an existing one to receive complaints and offer confidential advice. It could also involve introducing a zero tolerance policy for members who commit acts of violence against women in politics, whether on the floor of parliament or elsewhere in their capacity as an elected representative, including reconsidering traditional protections of parliamentary immunity to ensure that parliamentarians who violate such codes of conduct can be held to account

- **Provide training for parliamentarians** to raise awareness about their own conduct, which they may not realize is discriminatory toward women. Such training could involve enhancing the gender sensitivity and awareness of parliamentarians, as well as providing parliamentarians with knowledge about the resources available for responding to acts of violence against women in politics.
- **Participate in regional and global discussions** with parliamentarians from other countries on violence against women in politics to share experiences and learn about good practices developed elsewhere in an effort to develop new strategies to tackle the problem at the national and local levels.

*Women's voices advocating for their right to be represented in politics need to be heard, as in this constituency dialogue in Cambodia. (Photo credit: NDI.)*





## **TAKING A LEGISLATIVE ROUTE: ACTION BY LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES**

Following 12 years of activism by civil society, and the murder of two high-profile women politicians, Bolivia was the first country in the world to pass legislation outlawing harassment and violence against women in politics in 2012. The Bolivian law not only presents an extensive list of examples of violence against politically active women, but also specifies that acts of political violence and harassment might be committed by one or more people, directly or through third parties, against female candidates and public officials as well as members of their families. It stipulates that violations can be reported by the victim, her relatives, or any other person, in verbal or written form. The law imposes penalties of two to five years in prison for political harassment; three to eight years for physical or psychological violence; and for sexual assault the prevailing sanction according to the criminal code applies. Similar legislation has been considered in Mexico, Peru, Ecuador and Costa Rica.

Implementation and enforcement of any such law also has to be assured. For example, Bolivia's law names the parties responsible for implementing the law: the ministry of justice, the electoral authorities and leaders at different levels of government. Other jurisdictions have taken a novel approach to the punishment of perpetrators. Costa Rica's bill, introduced in March 2013, specifies that anyone convicted of acts of political violence or harassment against women would be required to stand down from any elected or appointed positions, and would be disqualified from running for public office in the future.

# POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties, serving as the connection between civil society and parliament, play a central role in political life by selecting candidates and developing policy priorities through their platforms. In their interactions with voters and candidates, parties can and should address this issue by refusing to engage in acts of violence against women in politics and punishing those within their ranks who perpetrate such acts.

Acts of electoral and political violence are often conceptualized as being committed by supporters of one political party against those in another party in an effort to influence electoral outcomes. Acts of violence against women in politics may also take this form. However, acts of violence against women in politics may also be perpetrated by members of a woman's own party, especially when a woman is selected as a candidate ahead of her male rivals. Like parliaments, therefore, parties should apply a dual focus when developing interventions to prevent and punish violence against women in politics.

## Actions for political parties:

- ***Organize sessions at annual party assemblies*** to explain what violence against women in politics is and raise awareness among party members regarding their conduct toward female colleagues and women in opposition parties. Such sessions could enhance the gender sensitivity of party members, who may not be aware that their behaviors are discriminatory. While the message might focus on the democracy, human rights and gender equality dimensions of the problem, it may be equally—if not more—important to stress that such conduct may be harmful to the party's electoral prospects.
- ***Raise the awareness of party members*** regarding this issue through materials distributed to party members, including posters, websites, tweets and online videos. Content should focus on illustrating what violence against women in politics is, especially as it relates to parties or party members, and explaining why it is unacceptable. Materials should stress that acts of violence against women in politics reflect negatively upon the party, sending a message about the party that might alienate voters and the public at large.



*Women can and should be part of the public sphere as elected leaders, officials, voters, and activists as seen here in a campaign march in Benin. (Photo credit: NDI.)*

- **Approve a party-level resolution** condemning violence against women in politics in all its forms. To ensure the greatest reach, this resolution might be incorporated into party statutes, published in newspapers, placed on the party's website, tweeted to followers and used in campaign materials.
- **Develop a party code of conduct** for executive and rank-and-file members to prohibit sexism or bullying in meetings, as well as sexual harassment in all contexts of party work—which women from around the world report as a pervasive problem, and which drives women away from aspiring to or assuming leadership roles within parties.
- **Change party statutes or policies** to impose sanctions on party members who commit acts of violence against women in politics. Penalties might include loss of an appointed, elected or party leadership position, or revoking party membership.
- **Establish a party-level body** or committee responsible for working on this issue, receiving complaints from victims of violence against women in politics and recommending sanctions against perpetrators. These proceedings should be objective and remain confidential to avoid increasing vulnerability on the part of women to acts of violence.

- ***Make a public pledge***, either independently or with other political parties, to ensure the safety and security of female voters, election workers and candidates so women are free to participate in all aspects of the electoral process.
- ***Sign a cross-party declaration*** with other parties to define violence against women in politics as unacceptable as a fundamental violation of democracy, human rights and gender equality.
- ***Participate in regional and global discussions*** on violence against women in politics to share experiences and learn about good practices developed elsewhere in an effort to develop new strategies to tackle this problem at the party level.

## **ACTING ACROSS PARTY LINES: ACTION BY POLITICAL PARTIES IN SIERRA LEONE**

Political parties can pass or revise their internal bylaws in order to protect their women members and women leaders from violence. Externally, they can adopt codes of conduct and make public pledges to ensure women's safety during political events and processes. In Sierra Leone, where women can face specific threats from secret male societies, eight parties signed an "open and safe" election pledge that opposed all forms of violence and intimidation against women.



# CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society groups, especially women's organizations and those already working to address violence against women, can contribute to efforts to combat violence against women in politics by raising awareness, advocating for policy changes and providing services to victims of violence. Existing efforts aimed at prevention, punishment and treatment of violence against women need to be leveraged to address this newly illuminated category of violence.

Civil society organizations can thus complement the steps taken by other actors—or fill the void left by their inaction. Operating at the level of citizens, they can play a powerful role in seeking to help prevent and treat violence against women in politics, as well as punish perpetrators by exposing their behavior.

## Actions for civil society:

- **Organize consciousness-raising efforts** with female voters, activists and candidates to introduce them to the concept of violence against women in politics. This can enhance their awareness and give them a vocabulary to speak about their experiences—as well as motivate them to take action.
- **Build alliances** with elected women at the national and local levels, developing a network of women across the country to raise awareness and build pressure for reform. Partner with international NGOs for technical assistance and possible financial support.



*Civil society organizations can act to ensure women are able to exercise their full and equal political and civic rights, such as the right to vote. (Photo credit: NDI, Nigeria)*

## WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP: ACTION BY CIVIL SOCIETY ADVOCATES

Civil society groups have historically served an important role in calling attention to issues and creating pressure to change legal or cultural norms. In 2014 in Tanzania, a group of women's rights organizations joined together to launch a "Coalition Against Sextortion" and accompanying campaign to raise awareness about the pervasive presence of the sexual extortion of women, including in politics. In particular, the coalition aimed to break the silence surrounding the issue with public outreach about its impact as well as training women politicians to recognize and avoid "sextortion."

Civil society organizations have historically formed partnerships and networks across national borders to monitor, document and address issues of violence against women in politics. In 2006 and 2007, for example, one such network, called SAP International, worked in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India with the support of Oxfam to facilitate dialogues among women politicians about the issue, work towards greater public awareness, lobby for legal change and build alliances among advocacy groups.

- ***Provide services to victims*** of violence against women in politics, for example, by establishing call centers for survivors to report violence and receive confidential advice and referrals for counseling and medical services. These services would ideally serve women at both the national and local levels, but might also be set up in a single village or region.
- ***Create score cards for political parties*** rating them on the degree to which they respect the rights of women to participate as party members and leaders, as well as in elections, without fear of violence.

# ELECTED AND APPOINTED LEADERS

Individual politicians, especially female leaders, can help break the silence around the issue of violence against women in politics by telling their stories and creating networks of politicians to generate momentum for change. In addition, male politicians can take a stand by publicly supporting campaigns to end violence against women in politics, as well by naming and shaming their colleagues who engage in such acts.

Leaders can thus take important steps as individuals—not only as members of parliament, government officials or party members—to prevent and punish violence against women in politics.

## Actions for elected and appointed leaders:

- ***Respectfully share personal stories*** of violence against women in politics, perpetrated against oneself, close friends or colleagues. This can involve sharing candid reactions to these experiences, as well as personal coping mechanisms, in speeches, television programs, autobiographies and interviews posted online and in print newspapers.
- ***Use social media*** as a platform for exposing acts of violence against women in politics, for example by posting photos of defaced offices or screenshots of rape threats, to draw attention to the problem and its various manifestations, while also calling out perpetrators for their unacceptable behavior.
- ***Confront perpetrators with evidence of their acts*** in public forums, asking them to explain themselves. This strategy can render these acts visible to the public and have the potential to lead perpetrators to change their behavior for fear of being exposed.
- ***Participate in training and mentoring programs for women candidates*** to share insights and coping strategies on how to respond to and mitigate acts of violence against women in politics, including how to decrease vulnerability and respond effectively to both in-person and online attacks. Participate in training programs for men, as well, to raise awareness of the roles they can play to stop violence and engage them in further efforts.



*This traditional Mayan ceremony in Guatemala celebrates an observation effort to reduce violence in elections, a form of political violence that affects women's ability to participate in democracy. (Photo credit: NDI.)*

- **Establish or participate in local, national, regional or global networks** of politicians to develop shared concepts of violence against women in politics and work toward greater public awareness. This could include advocating for legal change, including expanding the scope and understanding of international documents to include the issue of violence against women in politics.

# JUSTICE AND SECURITY SECTORS

Members of the justice and security sectors serve as the primary point of contact for victims of crime, providing a mechanism for citizens to report incidents and, ideally, gain protection or compensation from the state and/or prosecution of the perpetrator. They have a key role to play in changing the environment for any violence from impunity to accountability.

## Actions for the justice and security sectors:

- **Create protocols for responding to victims of violence against women in politics**, establishing which actors are responsible for responding to reports, treating victims, and holding perpetrators to account. Depending on the legal system in a given country, this will require coordinating among several state and civil society agencies. How successful the system is will to a great extent depend on state capacity. At a minimum, such an alliance might include the police, the criminal justice system, and victims' services groups.
- **Develop procedures for registering and handling complaints** through new or existing offices within the police and judiciary. Sensitize staff as to the nature of violence against women in politics as a threat to human rights, gender equality and democracy.
- **Raise awareness across the justice and security sectors regarding the existence of legislation** on violence against women where this exists, as well as other legal tools that might be mobilized to tackle violence in the



*When women can enter into the political sphere unfettered and without the fear of violence, their voices can add to the democratic outcome and values of their country, like this woman in Uganda. (Photo credit: NDI.)*

political realm. These legislative resources might be included in a protocol (see above) or be published in hard copy or online as a guide for justice and security personnel.

- ***Provide training to police officers to help them recognize and respond to complaints*** from victims of violence against women in politics. As with other forms of violence against women, police officers should not 're-victimize' victims by ignoring or belittling their claims, or by attributing it to a general level of political violence. Importantly, police services must be better trained on the manifestation of psychological abuse in particular in online and cyber platforms.

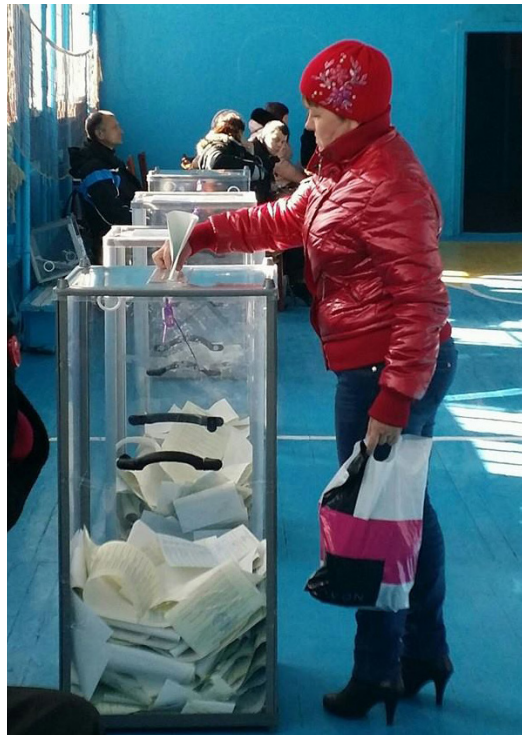


## ELECTORAL OBSERVERS AND AUTHORITIES

Election observers, electoral management bodies and party poll watchers work together to monitor and evaluate the fairness of elections. These actors, both separately and as a group, can assist with efforts to combat violence against women in politics by observing and reporting incidents of violence and taking these acts into account when assessing electoral integrity. Their work can thus form part of efforts to prevent and punish violence against women in politics.

### Actions for electoral observers and authorities:

- **Revise electoral management body rules and regulations** to define acts of violence against women in politics, requiring such acts to be reported and specifying that they will not be tolerated. Ensure that rules and regulations demand fair conduct and a safe campaign environment.
- **Mobilize civil society actors to assist in election monitoring**, for example through telephone hotlines, text messaging systems, and web-based applications to enhance reporting on acts of violence against women in politics before, during and after elections.
- **Create procedures for registering and handling complaints** through new or existing offices within electoral management bodies. Sensitize staff to recognize acts of violence against women in politics and recognize claims as grave violations of the electoral process.



*Elections are an essential component of democracy, and women must be able not only to compete but also to vote free from fear or threat of violence (Photo credit: NDI.)*

## ADDRESSING VIOLENCE IN ELECTIONS: ACTION BY DOMESTIC OBSERVER GROUPS

Election observers and electoral management authorities around the world already work to make elections safer and more accountable, and some have begun to incorporate a specific focus on violence against women in their mandates. In 2015, in elections in Guatemala, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Burma and Tanzania for example, NDI's "Votes Without Violence" program supported citizen observer groups in each country to implement new methodologies for election monitoring that integrated a close attention to the ways women were being specifically targeted for violence. In one example of success, Guatemala's Acción Ciudadana was able to collect data to support previous anecdotal evidence that social benefit programs were being used to target and politically coerce women disproportionately to men.

- ***Incorporate a gender perspective in electoral observation guidelines*** to ensure that members of international election observation missions are trained to look for acts targeting women—as voters, party members or candidates—to deter their participation in the electoral process. These data can be published in reports of electoral observation missions presented publicly to governments and the international community.



# MEDIA AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

The media and technology sectors play a powerful role in political communication. They can help alleviate the prevalence and effects of violence by recognizing and correcting themselves as platforms and perpetrators, and offering a platform to raise awareness and gain justice for victims and survivors. In this way, they can help prevent and respond to violence against women in politics.

## Actions for media and technology:

- ***Provide training for journalists*** to enhance gender-sensitivity in media coverage, including better recognition of and attention to acts of violence against women politicians, as well as better understanding of what discriminatory coverage looks like.
- ***Partner with civil society organizations*** to develop mechanisms to deal with online abuse, including working with technology companies to learn how to remove abusive behavior from online platforms—especially social media platforms—and report it.
- ***Harness social media as a tool to publicize and condemn*** acts of violence against women in politics—for example by posting photos of defaced offices or screenshots of rape threats, to draw attention to the problem and its manifestations—while also calling out perpetrators for their unacceptable behavior. Use hashtags to coordinate and publicize commentary to draw attention to the issue.
- ***Mobilize social media networks*** to bring pressure to bear on perpetrators of violence against women in politics, raising awareness of the issue and using public scrutiny to condemn such behavior.
- ***Implement and enforce clear global policies*** on the part of technology companies to protect the safety and privacy of data from women users who are active in politics: stripping identifying location data off of photos as they are uploaded, for example, to protect women activists who may be targets of violence.

## CHANGING THE RULES TO PROTECT WOMEN ONLINE: ACTION BY THE DIGITAL COMMUNITY

Violence is increasingly perpetrated online against women, in the form of threats, harassment, stalking and nonconsensual posting of private photographs or information. However, contrary to the conventional wisdom, technology platforms can be changed to protect all women, including those who are politically active, without interrupting the freedom of speech and dialogue that global connectivity has fostered. Some social media platforms such as Twitter, for example, have implemented a policy that strips location data from uploaded photographs, to protect women (and others) from those who might use that information to find or harm them.

Activists have also campaigned successfully for platforms such as Google and Reddit, as well as Facebook and Twitter, to institute “take-down” policies and remove so-called “non-consensual pornography” from their sites. These campaigns found success not with an appeal framing the problem as a gender issue or as a form of sexual violence. Instead, campaigners found traction when they changed tactics to make the non-consensual posting of intimate photos an issue of privacy and the protection of sensitive data—for *everyone*.

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