



# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS (VAW-E)

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# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS TOPICS

- Key definitions
- Gender based VAW-E versus other electoral violence
- Root causes, triggers, categories and indicators (incidence) of VAW-E
- Understanding the phenomenon in Burma and the role of observers



# Key Definitions

- Violence Against Women + Electoral Violence = Violence Against Women in Elections (VAW-E)





# Key Definitions

*UN defines 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, in public or in private life.*

# Key Definitions

*Electoral violence can be defined as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced “protection,” blackmail, destruction of property or assassination.*

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS (VAW-E)

*VAW-E is any act of gender based election violence that is directed primarily at women as a result of their aspirations to seek political office, their link to political activities or simply their commitment to vote as well as any random or organized act that seeks to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process through threat, verbal intimidation, hate speech, disinformation, physical assault, forced protection, blackmail, destruction of property, or assassination*

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN Elections (VAW-E)

- VAW-E is used as a targeted and destructive tool in various ways throughout the electoral cycle to dissuade women from participating as *election administrators, voters, and candidates*, as well as from fulfilling their mandate
- Critical implications for the integrity of the electoral process-when women are prevented from voting, campaigning, or fulfilling their mandate, democratic processes are effectively nullified

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS VERSUS OTHER ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

- Although men and women may be victims of electoral violence, like murder, harassment, and coercion, traditional definitions do not capture additional acts and threats perpetrated against women as *women*
- **Gender** norms shape *how* and *why* women are subject to electoral violence, as well as what types of acts are pursued to curtail or influence their participation



# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS VERSUS OTHER ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

***Gender*** refers to the socially determined differences between women and men that are learned, changeable over time and have wide variations both within and between cultures.

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS VERSUS OTHER ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

Non-gender motivated electoral violence can still have a disproportionately high impact on women because of their subordinate status in society and their increased vulnerability



# WHAT WE LEARNED FROM BANGLADESH IN 2014

- Minority groups in Bangladesh's 2014 elections were targets of post-election violence resulting from political party fighting. People were murdered and property destroyed.
- Threats that women would be raped were common, and many families in Hindu villages sent women away to stay with relatives. In one village, **300** women were sent away for fear of further attacks.
- Women's overall vulnerability and likelihood of experiencing sexual violence forced them to leave their homes and lives-school, jobs etc. Life interrupted.

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS VERSUS OTHER ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

*“...I was coming home from demonstration with other women, they stopped us...Some ran away but since I had a child, they caught me...We were a group but because of my daughter I could not run...They threw my child, tore my clothes...”*

Testimony of a 23 year old Woman in Cote d'Ivoire-OFACI, 2010/2011



# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS VERSUS OTHER ELECTORAL VIOLENCE

- Unlike men, women can experience **familial** or social intimidation in the **private sphere** and violence and intimidation from members and leaders of their **own political party**
- The goal of such violence is directly **aimed at upholding gender norms** and traditional female roles-dissuading women from participating
- Women are far **more likely to be victims** than perpetrators of electoral violence during the electoral period

# GENERAL ROOT CAUSES OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS

- Opponents of women's leadership
- Discriminatory and patriarchal structures and attitudes
- Culture of violence-political or other
- Absence of supportive administrative and judicial structures-inadequate rule of law and governance institutions
- Non-criminalization of VAW/Culture of Impunity
- Subordinate status and increased vulnerability of women

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS: CATEGORIES

- VAW-E can occur in a variety of ways, by different types of actors and it is context specific-throughout elections
- Instances range from harassment to murder
- It targets **activists, voters, candidates, election administrators** and **elected women**
- It falls into 6 categories: **Physical, sexual, psychological, threats & coercion and Economic Violence**

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS: CATEGORIES

- Important to note ahead of examples of the different categories, perpetrators and victims, that it is important to identify what violence against women in elections is in Burma
- Some types of violence won't be relevant/occur here. Some that do won't be in my examples





# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS: **PHYSICAL**

- **What:** Murder and Assault
- **Where:** Private and Public
- **Victims:** Women activists, voters, candidates, election administrators, elected women
- **Perpetrators:** Family, own/opposition party, security forces, religious groups, organized crime
- **Aim:** Win inter-party conflict, maintain status quo for women's role in society, satisfy patriarchal insecurities-maintain power
- **Most visible form of violence**

# AN EXAMPLE FROM INDIA

- In April 2011, Hasina Begum, a woman candidate for the 2011 local elections in Kashmir, was shot dead after the polls got underway
- Armed militants attacked her while she was home. Later she died in the hospital
- Her son later said the perpetrators were angry that she had filed her nomination for the local elections

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS: **PHYSICAL**

- In the post-election context following the 2012 election in **Libya**, a woman was killed by suspected Islamists opposing women's political participation
- The woman was mistakenly killed because she bore resemblance to her cousin, a newly elected woman member of parliament (MP)

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS: **SEXUAL**

- **What:** Rape, sexual assault, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment
- **Where:** Private and Public
- **Perpetrators:** Family, security forces, warring factions, male politicians, party, religious groups, organized crime
- **Aim:** Deter *women's* mobilization and participation, force vote preference, express anger with process, prevent women from seeking nomination/getting elected



# EXAMPLE FROM PAKISTAN

- An elected district councilor and her family were attacked after the election by her defeated opponent
- She was dragged from her car, raped and tortured. The assailants filmed the attack, threatening that they would publicize the tape if she told anyone who they were
- Her husband and son were also beaten

# EXAMPLE OF VIOLENCE

## UNFOLDING-CONFLICT BURUNDI

- March-reports that political parties were using threats of rape to influence women's political choices
- Brigitte, 36: "The Imbonerakure (party) had said that they would rape us if we would not support the party...They had put it in practice and we saw it"
- April-reports came in that women who were fleeing increasing political violence were being required to provide sexual favors to border guards in exchange for getting out
- May-report of a police officer who used his role managing protesters, as a cover to enter into a home where a young girl child was home alone and raped her

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS: **PSYCHOLOGICAL**

- **What:** Slander, character attacks, harassment by media, & insults equating WPP with immoral practices
- **Victims:** Women candidates
- **Where:** Private and public
- **Perpetrators:** Opposition party/own party, male politicians, media, social media, family
- **Most pervasive form of VAW-E but least Visible**

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS: **PSYCHOLOGICAL**

- **Aim:** Prevent women's election, stop women from taking on active leadership role once elected, maintain and increase male dominated power structure
- **Impact on Process:** Stop women from implementing campaigns when candidates should have equal opportunities to campaign and from fulfilling mandate once elected. Violates democratic rights of voters and candidates

# Media: Example of Psychological VAW-E

**“Hillary Clinton: Stop Running  
for President and Make me a  
Sandwich”**



One of the most popular on line campaigns against Hillary Clinton with 41,000 followers-2008



# AN EXAMPLE FROM MALAYSIA

- Just before Dyana Sofya Mohd Daud was named a candidate in the 2014 parliamentary election, a picture of a woman in a bikini that that was said to be her went viral
- She subsequently faced questions about her moral character, wolf whistles at political party events, and was called “cheap candy” by an extremist group



Photo: Saw Siow Feng

# Media: Example of Psychological VAW-E

- Costa Rica 2010
- PAC party released a television ad portraying presidential candidate Laura Chinchilla as a marionette operated by then-president Oscar Arias
- Conveying message that a woman candidate could only rise to power in the service of others



Photo: nacion.com

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS: THREATS & COERCION

- **What:** Threats, false accusations, intimidation, false gauge of environment, blackmail and pressure
- **Victims:** Voters and candidates
- **Where:** Private and public
- **Perpetrators:** Family, police, colleagues, party leaders/members, religious groups
- **Perception of environment can be equally devastating-Nigeria**

# THREATS & COERCION

- **In Pakistan:** In May 2015, traditional local authorities struck deals barring women from voting in district council elections. Mosques broadcast warnings (threats) to women, and women who did go to the polling station were blocked by “baton-wielding men”.





# THREATS & COERCION

- **Afghanistan 2010 Election:** Fauzia Gilani received threatening phone calls telling her to withdraw her candidacy. When she did not, 10 members of her staff were abducted; she was told they would be released only if she withdrew from the race.





# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS: THREATS & COERCION

- In recent interviews NDI conducted with civil society and political party members in Tunisia, Nigeria and Cote d'Ivoire, it was revealed that women faced threats and coercion inside their homes by male head of household to prevent them from participating as voters or to persuade them to vote for a specific party and/or candidates
- Less visible and few examples documented

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS: THREATS & COERCION

## Aim:

- To stop women from contesting elections, joining political office and carrying out mandate
- Deter or coerce voting
- Belittle or deter women's participation in election administrations (party poll watcher/observer)
- Deter women from expressing political viewpoint/priorities

# VAWIE: ECONOMIC

- **What:** Economic control, denial or delay in providing financial resources, property damage
- **Where:** Private and Public
- **Victims:** Women candidates, voters, activists, election administrators, elected women
- **Perpetrators:** Family, own/opposition party members and leaders, officials
- **Aim:** Block/restrict women's access to resources available to men to prevent their expression of political viewpoints/priorities, prevent competition

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS: ECONOMIC

- **PAKISTAN**-Reported that in past elections posters containing female candidates' photos were destroyed, while posters with male candidates' photos were left undisturbed.
- Targeted property damage further reduces the economic resources available to women candidates, which impacts their electability directly



# Role of Election Observers





# Role of Election Observers

## Raise Awareness

- It is critical that law enforcement, election officials, political parties and public know this is an issue and that it impacts the **democratic quality of elections-violation of democracy**
- Through domestic observation, we can collect data on how it impacts **elections-types of violence used, who the perpetrators and victims are, where it occurs, and why**

# Role of Election Observers

## Increase Data Collection

- Better understanding of the issue will help observers-you- to collect better information on the phenomenon in the future
- This will in turn increase understanding of its impact on women's participation & help create context-specific strategies for addressing it
- Lack of data helps hide the problem, whereas more data will make it visible

# How Does This Look in Practice?

## Example from Guatemala

- Engage non-traditional stakeholders, such as civil society and government organizations working directly on the broader issue of violence against women, as well as women's rights groups to understand what to look for
- In Guatemala there were visible past examples of female candidates being murdered but there are also less visible forms- psychological, threats, & economic-revealed via research
- When interviewed, women report being forced through threats of violence to vote in line with their husbands

# How Does This Look in Practice?

## Example from Guatemala

- **Use information to create indicators of violence:**
  - Physical and sexual assault of female party supporters
  - Political party uses threats to prevent women being nominated
  - Verbal attacks of female candidates
  - Physical violence by male family members to influence voting
- **Prioritize indicators:** Feasibility to observe, likelihood of occurring, frequency, **impact\***

# How Does This Look in Practice?

## Example from Guatemala

- **Impact:** One-dimensional assessment of the incident's impact on the electoral process overall, to a two dimensional assessment of the impact on the ability of specific groups of people -- particularly women -- to participate as voters, candidates and election workers
- **Develop Questions and variables:**
  - Perpetrator
  - Victim
  - Type of violence: Category and/or specific act
  - Effect: not voting, withdrawing candidacy, death etc.



# How Does This Look in Practice?

## Example from Guatemala

- In the last month has a political party supporter or candidate made sexually derogatory remarks about a:
  - Woman candidate from same party
  - Woman candidate from different party
  - Women activists from same party
  - Women activists from same party
- In the last month have political candidates or supporters destroyed the private property of a female candidate?

# THANK YOU: Questions?

