

# VOTES WITHOUT VIOLENCE

## GENDER-AWARE ELECTION OBSERVATION RECRUITMENT STRATEGY



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for NDI's Votes Without Violence program and toolkit.

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## Why is it Important to Have a Gender-Aware Recruitment Strategy?

Since a domestic election observation initiative is intended to speak for all citizens, its own composition should visibly reflect the composition of all the people of a given country, including both men and women. Many factors regarding observer recruitment depend on the type of observation being conducted. However, in all election observations, it is essential to have a gender balance in the composition of the observers. Because men and women can face different barriers and opportunities to becoming an election observer, and women often face significantly greater challenges, these differences should be considered when developing a recruitment strategy. In particular, violence against female election observers, either while observing or as a strategy to prevent them from volunteering, is a key barrier that recruitment plans must address.

## Gender-Aware Recruitment Guidance

This tool provides guidance on the potential differences to consider between men and women in regards to their ability to observe an election. It lists recommendations for steps observer groups can take to ensure their recruitment strategy addresses these differences and achieves a balance of male and female observers.<sup>1</sup>

## Potential Differences Between Men and Women

- » Women are less likely to have their own cell phone than men
- » Women are less likely to have identifying documents than men
- » Election observers are volunteers or minimally paid; this money may not be enough to enable women to give up their other duties and jobs in situations where their families depend on their earnings as the primary source of income
- » Women are often responsible for the majority of childcare and housekeeping and thus have less freedom to volunteer their time, or have different times of availability than men
- » Women are more likely to require childcare in order to participate or be able to convince their male family members to watch the children
- » Women often have limited freedom of movement and need permission from a male family member to volunteer and observe an election. It is then not only necessary to convince the woman herself to participate, but her male family member as well why she should be able to. It must be taken into consideration why this would be considered unacceptable, such as it being perceived as too dangerous, or perceived as going against rules regarding women's purity
- » Women may feel or in fact be less safe observing an election on their own, and may want to be partnered with someone else
- » Women may face barriers to leaving their community or the area near their house, or face stricter travel restrictions overall
- » Women may have had less access to education, and in some cases may face additional barriers to their participation related to literacy
- » Women may face threats of divorce, physical and sexual harm or other types of violence from family members or members of their community if they choose to participate

- » Women often view politics as irrelevant to their daily lives and therefore not of interest to them
- » Women's participation as an election observer may be viewed as contradicting socially acceptable norms for women

## Strategies for Ensuring Gender Balance in Recruitment Effort: How, Who, Where

### How to Recruit

- » Identify potential barriers that an observation effort is likely to face when recruiting women, and brainstorm solutions to overcome them ahead of time. For example, an election observation group may consider different or additional recruitment locations or points of contact such as community leaders to reach and convince women to join an observation.
- » Develop a short and meaningful message to attract volunteers that includes targeted points addressing potential barriers to women's participation, including:
  - Information about the safety of participating in observation, with a particular focus on steps taken to mitigate threat of violence for women. This might include assurance that observers will always be paired with another observer while working, and/or that observations would only take place during daylight.
  - Information aimed at overcoming socio-cultural norms regarding women's participation in public life, such as why it is critical to the democratic quality of the election that women participate not only as voters and candidates, but as observers.
  - Explanation that election monitoring is a way that both men and women can individually participate directly in democratic politics and government.
  - Address concerns regarding the time needed to participate and how this would impact women's ability to fulfill their family and housework duties.
- » Take into consideration the required technology and identification documents needed and whether or not they present an additional burden for women to participate.

### Who to Target with Messages

- » In many contexts, women do not see election observation as safe, socially acceptable, or relevant to their daily lives. Messages crafted to address these concerns should be used to target women volunteers.
- » Recruitment officers may need to target male community or religious leaders as well to get their acceptance and support before engaging with women and/or their male family members.
- » Recruitment officers should be prepared to speak with male family members in order to build support for allowing their female family members to participate. Providing information regarding the time requirement and the safety of female observers will be critical in these discussions.

### Where to Recruit

- » Observer recruitment might focus on pre-existing organizations or on the general public. If recruiting from the general public, it will be key to hold recruitment drives in locations where women are more likely to be present in order to ensure a larger pool of potential female volunteers. This may include:
  - Pre-existing women's rights focused, women's issues focused or women-run organizations
  - Clinics, hospitals, or pre- and post-natal care providers
  - Marketplaces
  - Schools
- » If the observation effort is being led by an existing coalition of various organizations whose members are working together, it will be important to assess whether or not the existing entity includes adequate membership from women's rights, women's issues and/or women run organizations. If not, it will be necessary to identify and add them to the existing structure.

## Who to Recruit

- » It is key to consider the barriers women might face in terms of freedom of movement and time, as well as access to education, transportation, political experience, computers, cell phones and identification when determining the criteria for observers
- » Have a mandatory gender quota for observer recruitment, so supervisors are required to bring in a balance of men and women
  - Potential challenges to meeting a gender quota should be discussed when identifying the necessary skills and expertise required for observers, when determining where to look for people to join the observation effort and how the effort will be described during recruitment outreach. Once potential challenges have been identified, solutions to overcome or avoid them should be brainstormed.

## NOTES

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1. For more information, see also: [How Domestic Organizations Monitor Elections: an A to Z Guide](#), NDI.