

VOTES WITHOUT VIOLENCE

MONITORING MEDIA



This tool was developed by Caroline Hubbard and Claire DeSoi for NDI's Votes Without Violence program and toolkit.

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What is Media Monitoring:¹

Media, from traditional print, television or radio sources to online content and social media, provide important information to help citizens make free and informed choices about their governments and representatives. Because that information is so important, attention must be paid to its quality, and whether it is accurate, fair and comprehensive. Monitoring the media can involve measuring the amount of coverage given to individual candidates and topics, the presence of bias, the levels of candidates' media access, and direct political or voting education messages. Monitoring is conducted through data collection and analysis of election-related content provided by newspapers, radio or television, as well as by online and social media, which are emerging as important information sources.²

Why Monitor the Media for Violence against Women in Elections:

VAW-E is often manifested in or perpetrated by the media

Women and men around the world are often treated differently in media election coverage, and this differential can contribute significantly to the violence women face during elections. VAW-E, as defined, includes not only physical, sexual and economic violence, but also threats, coercion and psychological violence against women voters, candidates and election administrators, which are easily and often perpetrated through the media. A woman running for office, for example, is more often subject to discussions in the media about her appearance, marital status or personality than her male counterparts—a focus that sometimes replaces any serious analysis of her campaign platform. In Malaysia's 2014 elections, one woman parliamentary candidate faced a barrage of questions about her moral character, wolf whistles at party events and was called “cheap candy” following the publication and viral circulation of a photo of a woman in a bikini that was falsely claimed to be her.

This bias in coverage affects a woman's chance of being elected: studies have shown that candidates (men or women) who receive this kind of trivializing press coverage are seen as less electable and weaker by voters.³ Additionally, biased media coverage can play into cultural stereotypes that minimize women's abilities: in Costa Rica's 2010 presidential election, one party's advertisement characterized a woman candidate as a marionette operated by the president, visually reinforcing the idea that women could rise to power only under the control of men. The absence of women from election coverage can also have a compounding effect on other obstacles they face in the electoral process.⁴ More dangerously, media—including the largely anonymous environment of social media—can incite hatred and even violence by providing biased information or contributing to sexist or degrading stereotypes.

Monitoring media for VAW-E can complement and strengthen observation data

Media monitoring with a focus on gender and VAW-E can be complementary to or coordinated with other media monitoring efforts. While media monitoring—particularly for online and social media—is a fairly recent addition to the election observation toolkit, it is growing in importance and is fast becoming standard practice around the world. As with other standard observation practices, its focus and scope vary among countries, depending on local or national contexts and the priorities identified by observation organizations or election management bodies. However, media monitoring that is conducted without a gender lens, or without any analysis of the media's impact or interaction with VAW-E, is incomplete and does not accurately reflect the full picture of the election.

As part of a large election observation effort, media monitoring can be an important supplement to the collection of other data, including long-term observations of the pre-election period or election day observations such as parallel vote tabulations. Media monitoring provides important context, as well as another dimension: how the violence is being portrayed.

It can also illustrate, especially with social media, the use of violence in the media by certain political parties, religious leaders, community leaders or other perpetrators that are not part of traditional media outlets. Increasingly, media monitors are considering or using sentiment analysis tools within or alongside their observations. These tools, such as Crimson Hexagon, for example, can track thousands or sometimes hundreds of thousands of conversations about women candidates, and by analyzing keywords can help observers measure whether the discussions are positive, negative—or suggesting violence.

Media monitoring can provide key information about whether violence is being instigated by the media, and by which media outlets in particular, at the local and national levels. The monitoring can also include an analysis of the legal and regulatory framework governing the media, examining whether rules exist to prevent unequal treatment, airtime or coverage of women and calling attention to their absence if none exist.

Monitoring local media can capture information that would otherwise not be recorded. Local monitors can, for example, gather data from local radio and television, campaign or voter education posters, flyers and advertisements that are visible and important to local voters. A national media monitoring effort can examine countrywide broadcasting agencies, and importantly, show a wider picture of violence that is occurring, particularly if media coverage includes areas that are not part of any observation effort and thus out of sight of election observers. This becomes a particularly important complement to election-day observations, when monitors can be assigned to specific polling stations, which limits the questions and variables on which they are able to collect data.

Examples of Monitoring the Media for VAW-E:

Media monitoring must be tailored to the local context. This is particularly important in monitoring VAW-E, which can manifest itself in different ways in different parts of the world, influenced by cultural and historical trends. Still, there are common questions that can focus and inform media monitoring on the issue. Examples include:

- » *Are media outlets required to adhere to a code of conduct or regulations governing fair and equal coverage of men and women candidates?*
- » *Are there incidents of media reports providing biased information against women candidates?*
- » *Do the media use gender stereotypes or sexist language when describing or discussing women candidates, voters or election officials?*
 - Do the media focus disproportionately on women candidates' appearance, personality or family in comparison to male candidates?⁵
 - Do the media use derogatory language or subject matter when discussing women candidates, voters or election officials?
 - Do media outlets publish, disseminate or otherwise promote threats against or harassment of women candidates, voters or election officials?
- » *Are there instances of hate speech, threats or derogatory language on social media when talking about female candidates, voters or election officials?*
 - *Are there incidents of social media being used to threaten or incite violence against women candidates, voters or election officials?⁶*
 - *Are there incidents of cyber harassment of women candidates, voters or election officials?*

NOTES

1. For more information on media monitoring, please refer to the guide *Media Monitoring to Promote Democratic Elections*.
2. Media Monitoring to Promote Democratic Elections. 2002.
3. Media Coverage of Women Candidates - Political Parity. Retrieved April, 2016, from <https://www.politicalparity.org/research-inventory/media-coverage-of-women-candidates/>.
4. Election Coverage from a *Gender Perspective: A Media Monitoring Manual*. International IDEA. 2011.
5. Bardall, Gabrielle. Gender-Specific Election Violence: The Role of Information and Communication Technologies. (2013). *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 2(3), 60. doi:10.5334/sta.cs
6. Bardall, Gabrielle. Gender-Specific Election Violence: The Role of Information and Communication Technologies. (2013). *Stability: International Journal of Security & Development*, 2(3), 60. doi:10.5334/sta.cs