

VOTES WITHOUT VIOLENCE

INDICATORS AND ROOT CAUSES OF VIOLENCE



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

INDICATORS AND ROOT CAUSES OF VIOLENCE¹

Overview:

This tool provides illustrative examples of early warning signs and indicators of violence against women in elections, and provides brief information on the wider the categories of violence they may fit into or indicate. Citizen observation groups can use this tool to guide them in developing and prioritizing the early warning signs and indicators they wish to focus their monitoring efforts on. As groups identify these early warning signs, they should also consider the root causes of violence during their discussion and prioritization process.

Citizen observer groups should note that not all of these examples may exist in their country; additionally, they may identify root causes or indicators of violence that do not appear in this tool. Some root causes or indicators of violence may fit in more than one category—observer groups will be best placed to determine root causes, triggers and indicators of violence following a full assessment of the electoral environment, risks and overall context for an election.

Key Concepts:

- » **Root causes** are underlying issues external to elections that **could** cause electoral violence. These causes are often rooted in gender norms, or in social, political and historical inequalities or tensions. While it can be difficult to identify root causes of violence against women, it is important to consider structural inequalities that lead to women's marginalized status, because they can increase the likelihood that women will experience violence.²
- » **Incidents** are actual acts or events of violence. They can fall into any one of the categories of VAW-E. It can be difficult to differentiate between an indicator that an environment is becoming increasingly inhospitable to women's participation, and an actual incident resulting from an environment that is already hostile. But in fact, violence against women in elections can be a signal of potential, impending or ongoing violence against women more generally.
- » **Gender-sensitive indicators** are signs that—when taken together or individually—indicate the existence of violence against women in elections, or the potential for such violence. An indicator of existing violence, which could be an incident such as the murder of a female candidate, can also simultaneously be an early warning sign indicator of the potential for greater violence against women.

General Illustrative Root Causes of Violence against Women in Elections:

- » *Culture of violence*
- » *Opposition to women's leadership*
- » *Discriminatory social and cultural attitudes towards women*
- » *Low to non-existent presence of women in elected office at the national and/or local level*
- » *Lack of female headed political parties*
- » *Impunity for perpetrators of violence against women (e.g. low number of cases reported, investigated, prosecuted and resulting in convictions)*
- » *Absence and quality of legislation on gender-based violence, including gender-based political/electoral violence*
- » *Unequal protection of men and women under the law*
- » *Low female suffrage levels relative to men (if available)*

- » *Absence of supportive administrative and judicial structures including inadequate rule of law and governance institutions*
- » *Absence of any rules or formal structures addressing violence against women in elections within political institutions, such as parties and election management bodies (EMBs)*

General Illustrative Indicators and Other Early Warning Signs of Violence:

- » *Sudden decrease in number of women and girls at marketplaces, school or other traditional destinations*
- » *Late hours for voter registration and/or polling stations*
- » *Long distances to travel to register to vote and/or cast a vote*
- » *Increase in number of security personnel on election day to secure polling stations*
- » *Incidents of women dropping out of the electoral race after winning the nomination but before the election*
- » *Avoidance of large political gatherings or rallies by women*
- » *Unusual movement of all male groups, including male party members, armed individuals or groups used by political parties, and male gang members*
- » *Unusual displacement of all female groups or large groups of women—this is often an indication of an increasingly unsafe environment for female voters*

Categories of Violence

Physical Violence:

Physical violence includes any violent act that results in bodily harm. It is the intentional use of physical force with the potential to cause physical harm.

Incidents:

- » *Murder, assault, aggression*

Early warning signs or indicators of potential VAW-E:

- » *Increase in reports or knowledge of physical assault against a female family member*
- » *Reports of physical assault by security forces*
- » *Reports of physical assault by political party members or leaders*

Root causes:

- » *Culture of physical violence*
- » *Prevalence of social norms that condone violence against women*
- » *An environment recently emerging or still emerging from a conflict*
- » *History of gang violence and ongoing prominence of gangs*
- » *Prevalence of domestic violence*
- » *Gender awareness of the security sector and response to violence against women, including in past elections or women in politics generally*

Sexual Violence:

Sexual violence includes any sexual act or attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or attempts to sexually exploit a person by force or coercion.

Incidents:

- » Rape, sexual exploitation, harassment

Early warning signs or indicators of potential VAW-E:

- » Increase in reports or knowledge of sexual assault against a female family member
- » Reports of sexual abuse by security forces
- » Reports of sexual abuse by law enforcement agencies
- » Threats made by political party leaders to sexually assault or rape women who do not vote along party lines

Root causes:

- » An environment recently emerging or still emerging from a conflict
- » History of gang violence and ongoing prominence of gangs
- » Prevalence of sexual violence (including rape)
- » Prevalence of domestic violence
- » Prevalence of social norms that condone violence against women
- » Myths or traditions linking sex with a virgin to gaining power

Psychological Violence:

Psychological violence includes any kind of pressure or discrimination that puts mental pressure or stress on a person, making them feel fearful, self-loathing, incapably, guilty or helpless.

Incidents:

- » Defamation, slander, character attacks, harassment by media, insults equating women's participation with immoral practices, hate speech

Early warning signs or indicators of potential VAW-E:

- » Use of sexist or derogatory rhetoric by political leaders when referring to women's participation in public life, in the election or a current female candidate or leader
- » Portrayals of women in public life as pawns controlled by or beholden to men

Root causes:

- » Culture of violence
- » Prevalence of social norms that condone violence against women
- » Prevalence of domestic violence
- » Discriminatory social and cultural attitudes towards women
- » Opposition to women's leadership
- » Absence of supportive administrative and judicial structures including inadequate rule of law and governance institutions

Threats and Coercion:

Threats can be verbal or physical indications of the intent to cause harm or commit violence. Coercion is the practice of persuading or forcing a person to do something through the use of threats or violence.

Incidents:

- » Threats, false accusations, intimidations, false assessment of the environment (e.g. leading women to believe falsely that it is dangerous for them to vote or otherwise participate in an election), blackmail, pressure



Early warning signs or indicators of potential VAW-E:

- » *Threats to politically active women and their children*
- » *Rhetoric blaming women for political or cultural upheaval, or scapegoating women or their behavior*
- » *Threats made by political party leaders to physically assault women who do not vote correctly*

Root causes:

- » *Prevalence of domestic violence*
- » *Prevalence of social norms that condone violence against women*
- » *Absence of supportive administrative and judicial structures including inadequate rule of law and governance institutions*
- » *Absence of any rules or formal structures addressing violence against women in elections within political institutions, such as parties and election management bodies (EMBs)*

Economic Violence:

Economic violence includes the systematic denial of resources to women for election activities, or restricting women's access to resources that are available to men.³

Incidents:

- » *Using the promise of economic benefits or the threat of removing those benefits to control women's political participation, denial or delay in providing women with financial resources that are available to men, property damage committed against women candidates*
- » *Early warning signs or indicators of potential VAW-E:*
- » *Disruption of women's cross-border trade activity*
- » *Very high fees and costs to candidates in order to qualify to be on the ballot*

Root causes:

- » *Economic dependency of women*
- » *Illiteracy/lack of education of female population*
- » *Prevalence of domestic violence*
- » *Discriminatory social and cultural attitudes towards women*
- » *Opposition to women's leadership*

NOTES

1. Definitions adapted from *Violence Against Women in Politics: Defining Terminologies and Concepts*, 2010.

2. OSCE/ODIHR. (2004). Handbook for monitoring women's participation in elections.

3. Krook & Restrepo, 2014.