

Written Submission by the National Democratic
Institute for International Affairs to the
**UN Committee on the Elimination
of Discrimination Against Women**

**GENERAL DAY OF DISCUSSION
ON THE EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE
REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN
IN DECISION-MAKING SYSTEMS**

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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. 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.

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INTRODUCTION

This submission is presented by the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI), a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization dedicated to supporting the development of democracy and governance globally, including by promoting and strengthening inclusive political processes, state-civil society engagement, open and responsive governance institutions, and commitment to international frameworks. As a leading organization in the field of advancing women's political participation around the world, NDI's submission draws on four decades of experience in 132 countries supporting women's aspirations for gender equality and inclusive and responsive government.

The participation of *women in all their diversity*¹ is an essential prerequisite to the realization of gender equality, sustainable development, prosperity, security and lasting peace. Inclusive and equal representation of women - rooted in effective access, genuine influence, and robust accountability - is necessary to realizing core provisions of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and to addressing our world's interlinked crises. As emphasized in the CEDAW Committee Concept Note on the Future General Recommendation, "women's equal and inclusive representation in decision-making systems is a right deriving from the duties of States of ensuring the implementation of the Convention."²

This submission aims to highlight current critical elements and update gaps in CEDAW General Recommendation 23 on Political and Public Life upon which this future recommendation will be based. Drawing on NDI's longstanding theory of change for women's political empowerment which focuses on barriers at three levels - namely individual, institutional and socio-cultural - that must be addressed to achieve gender-equal and inclusive political participation and leadership, the submission will primarily spotlight **violence against women in elections and politics, including tech-facilitated abuse** as foundational barriers in need of urgent policy reforms and normative changes. In addition, it will propose **promising interventions to accelerate the pace of women's representation in political life**, with a focus on state agencies, election bodies, and political parties. Finally, it will highlight a need to focus on **tackling harmful gender norms and political masculinities** that reinforce women's exclusion and male elites' hold over power, political systems and structures.

CRITICAL BENEFITS OF GENDER EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE REPRESENTATION

Evidence shows that equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making and governance systems leads to a wider and more responsive range of equitable policy options, increases cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and results in more sustainable peace.³ Women's public and political inclusion – where all segments of society freely participate and influence political outcomes without discrimination or violence – is a prerequisite for resilient democracy-building, political stability, sustainable development, and economic progress.⁴

Democratic systems – in which diverse voices shape policies and governance - lead to higher levels of egalitarian gender attitudes and tighter social cohesion making communities more likely to cooperate for common goods.⁵ Yet, women's leadership and political participation in governance, from the local to the global level, remain constrained with women typically under-represented on decision-making bodies. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap report, it would take more than a century and a half to close this gender gap.⁶ Worldwide, women hold about a quarter (26%) of parliamentary seats – a figure that has not wavered much in the last decade despite the introduction of quotas that have transformed the landscape for women's formal representation in a large number of countries.⁷ Only 14 countries have reached gender parity in their national cabinet; women head only 28 of 193 nations, and constitute less than about 15% of mayors and only about 34% of elected local deliberative bodies.⁸

As democracies worldwide backslide - about 70% of the world population now live in autocracies, up from 49% a decade ago⁹ - so have hard-earned gains in gender equality, sustainable development, economic growth, and security. Spikes in political instability and armed conflict, a lingering global pandemic, and looming climate catastrophes and food insecurity, require complex, multidimensional, cross-sectoral, inclusive and sustained effort behind solutions. As such, women's role in shaping the decisions, policies, laws, systems and structures that govern their lives, communities, and the planet are more urgent and critical than ever. States grappling with moments of instability or transition could draw on those as potential points for progress – by ensuring inclusive and equal representation of their populations, especially women – or risk further regression by excluding them.¹⁰

EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE REPRESENTATION MUST GO BEYOND PARTICIPATION

Initial waves of reforms focused primarily on numeric representation or participation by more women, aiming for a 30% tipping point in gender-balanced decision-making bodies. While significant numeric gains have been made over the past few decades and continuing emphasis on numbers remains essential, including through enforceable, multi-level quotas, the needed paradigm shift must focus on both representation and influence; the twin requirements of access and power. This means women must have access to decision-making platforms or fora and the power to influence their structures, processes, and substantive outcomes.

Institutional exclusion, socio-cultural bias and cycles of discrimination against women, particularly those from marginalized communities, occur across the spectrum of public and political representation. Equal and inclusive representation of women in political life requires attention along an inter-connected **continuum of entry points** ranging from their access and influence as voters, members and leaders of political parties, activists, aspirants, candidates, elected and appointed representatives, to election workers and observers. Effective representation requires legal frameworks and interventions that ensure access to registering to vote (e.g., addressing women's lack of identification cards or equal nationality status); voting without interference, undue influence, or threat of violence from kin, politicians and their proxies; safe and accessible voting access; partaking in political mobilization for candidates, protests and signing petitions; civic society activism and community service; equal access to resources for running for office; fair and transparent appointment processes; and a work environment for elected and appointed officials free of gender-based violence, threats or attacks.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL BARRIERS IMPEDE WOMEN'S EQUAL AND INCLUSIVE REPRESENTATION

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Democratic systems – in which diverse voices shape policies and governance - lead to higher levels of egalitarian gender attitudes and tighter social cohesion making communities more likely to cooperate for common goods. Yet, women's leadership and political participation in governance, from the local to the global level, remain constrained with women typically under-represented on decision-making bodies. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap report, it would take more than a century and a half to close this gender gap. Worldwide, women hold about a quarter (26%) of parliamentary seats – a figure that has not wavered much in the last decade despite the introduction of quotas that have transformed the landscape for women's formal representation in a large number of countries. Only 14 countries have reached gender parity in their national cabinet; women head only 28 of 193 nations, and constitute less than about 15% of mayors and only about 34% of elected local deliberative bodies.

Violence Against Women in Politics Prevents Equal and Inclusive Representation

The most fundamental and corrosive barrier to women's representation is the pervasive, and growing violence against women in elections and politics. Women who wish to access their civil and political rights to be politically active face active resistance, threats, and violence – including mis- and disinformation, in person and online – forcing them to step down or self-censor and delegitimizing their leadership. The continued socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, surges in armed conflict and rising authoritarianism have fueled historic jumps in reported levels of gender-based violence and harassment aimed at women who are visibly engaged in politics and political activism. Such violence attacks them as individuals and because of their gender, lacking in institutional response and encouraged by socio-cultural norms.

However, these actions are intended to and are successful in chilling the ambitions of all women, particularly young women, girls and new entrants to politics who desire to participate in political and public life. For example, young women aged 18 to 24 are more likely than other groups to experience online harassment, and within that some of the more severe forms of harassment.¹¹

NDI's #NotTheCost global campaign to raise awareness and end the phenomenon,¹² defined violence against women in politics as various forms of psychological, physical and sexual violence, aggression, coercion, and intimidation - in person, online or otherwise facilitated by technology - that specifically target women in order to influence their political activism or engagement. This conceptualization of the issue draws on definitions articulated by the CEDAW Committee (Articles 1-2, 5 per General Recommendation 35 on gender-based violence against women)¹³ and the 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.¹⁴

Defining 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.

Source: NDI, #Not the Cost: A Call to Action to End Violence Against Women in Politics (2016) at <https://www.ndi.org/publications/notthecost-global-call-action-stop-violence-against-women-politics>.

Such violence affects women in all sectors of politics, and critically, “undermine[s] democracy in all its key elements... with negative effects on the ambition of young women and new entrants to politics.”¹⁵ It hinders women’s political engagement, deters and pressures women to leave politics or to resign as candidates or political officials, to withdraw from their membership in political parties or other political institutions, or to otherwise remain silent on the political issues they care about. Violence against women in politics (VAW-P) occurs across the private to public sphere continuum, and one form often serves as a gateway to others: as when online misogyny and harassment turns to in-person assaults and murder, rendering as unsafe what should be open, public spaces for discourse and decision-making.

Pervasive VAW-P as Political Deterrent

The current trend of democratic backsliding and increased authoritarian action encompasses a rollback of women’s and girls’ rights fueled by a patriarchal backlash. This is often part of a deliberate political strategy that relies on violence against politically-active women to silence and exclude them from engaging in political discourse and public life. A recent piece on “Why Autocrats Fear Women?” by Harvard professors Erica Chenoweth and Zoe Marks contrasted the gains for gender equality of the last century, with this century “demonstrating that misogyny and authoritarianism are not just common comorbidities but mutually reinforcing ills.”¹⁶

Recent scholarship cited by UN Women painted a distinctly gendered picture of harm from violence against persons engaged in politics: “women receive higher rates of threats of physical harm. This includes rape and death threats directed towards them and their children, families, and supporters” and “attacks against women also tend to ‘go viral’ more often than attacks against men because when women break traditional norms around gender roles (or are accused of doing so), the ‘shock-factor’ is greater and triggers a viral effect.”¹⁷

Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) studies found that 80% of surveyed women parliamentarians in 50 African countries experienced psychological violence in parliament; 67% encountered sexist behavior or remarks; 42% faced threats of death, rape, beating or abduction, usually online; 40% have been sexually harassed and 23% have endured physical violence.¹⁸ Similarly, 85% of female MPs in 45 European countries suffered psychological violence in the course of their term of office; 47% had received threats of death, rape or beating; 58% had been the target of online sexist attacks on social networks, leading many to consider leaving politics altogether.¹⁹ Women MPs living with disabilities, women under 40, unmarried women and women from minority groups face a disproportionately higher incidence of violence.²⁰ Overall, the majority of abuse came from male parliamentarians, fellow party members, party leadership and rival parties. Notably, most parliaments still lack adequate reporting and redress mechanisms for harassment and violence.

A related deterrent is gendered disinformation which aims to influence or shift support away from women already participating in politics and their advocacy or policy priorities. Perpetrators - some of whom are state-based - can leverage entrenched gender norms regarding women’s ‘proper’ feminine identity and, in certain instances, religious ideals. Similar to other types of disinformation, the explicit motivation for this type of disinformation is to manipulate deeply held social norms and pollute the information environment in order to sway voters away from particular candidates.²¹

EFFECTIVE MEASURES AND PROMISING INTERVENTIONS

As requested by the CEDAW Concept Note on the Future General Recommendation,²² this section showcases exemplary good practices to increase women’s representation based on NDI’s decades of global and comparative experience elevating women’s equal participation and leadership in public and political life as an indispensable pillar of democracy.

A. Accelerating the Pace of Equal and Inclusive Representation

Evidence-based interventions and reforms from the democracy and governance sector provide promising and exemplary good practices to increase women’s inclusive and equal representation in the public decision-making spheres. Achieving this requires strategic and concerted action on the individual, institutional and socio-cultural levels.

Effective **individual-level** interventions include:

- **Safety and security planning** which helps to identify and mitigate potential risks for women in politics. Given that the level and extent of risk varies greatly across contexts, NDI developed ‘think10’, an individualized safety planning tool that combines scores from a self-assessment questionnaire and the country score from NDI’s Women’s Political Participation Risk Index²³ to develop a safety plan relevant to the individual woman’s personal and professional profile in her political reality. The think10 (think10.demcloud.org) safety planning tool for politically-active women is currently available in six languages, and in paper, online and app versions.²⁴
- **Fostering political peer networks** helps to overcome the historic exclusion of women from powerful political fraternities which have consistently supported the under-resourcing and under-representation of women in political positions. While such networking is critical across all geographies, given that by 2030 more than 75% of the world’s population will likely live in cities, urbanization presents new potential for new forms of women’s political inclusion. While women make up the majority of migrants to cities where they can access

better education, decent work and less restrictive socio-cultural norms, women's perspectives and voices are significantly under-represented in urban planning and leadership. While women's access to local or urban government information, resources, and services is severely restricted, worldwide, women make up only about 15% of mayors, and 25% of capital city mayors.²⁵ In 2016, NDI helped launch the Women Mayors' Network (WoMN), a non-partisan, peer network of women leading nationally-significant urban centers across the world. Its focus on the capacity and experience of women mayors sets it apart from other cities-based associations, offering a platform for networking, policy forums, innovation, cross-regional collaboration, and technical expertise sharing to deepen members' effectiveness as executive officers.²⁶

- **Supporting the reality of young women's leadership** dispels notions of so-called youth disengagement and equips and prevents the cycle of exclusion from decision-making that girls and young women experience from becoming a permanent condition in their lives – often passed down through generations. Research shows that socio-economic leadership skills for adolescent girls and young women are necessary but not sufficient to guard against the reversal of gains made in these areas. Young women must be able to grow their political capacity, voice and agency to influence the decision-making that affects their lives. With stagnating rates of women's representation worldwide, more focus is needed to grow the pipeline of young women with civic leadership skills that are critical for achieving higher levels of women's political leadership. An emerging NDI product, the DISRUPTHER program, has been carefully curated based on the expertise of leading organizations already focused on girls' empowerment²⁷ who recognize the need also to build adolescent girls' political ambitions and opportunities for political leadership. Addressing this gap and nurturing these capabilities by adolescent girls and young women as they transition into adulthood, can fundamentally alter the course of their individual lives, the dynamic of their communities and the talent pool ready for political office, thereby creating more inclusive, sustainable and resilient democratic governance structures.

While individual-level interventions are critical and necessary, the onus for accelerating the pace of women's equal and inclusive representation in decision-making systems, including politics, requires **institutional and structural level reforms** in tandem with **changes to adverse socio-cultural norms**. A critical aspect of such reforms has been the mobilization of women's movements alongside elected women and the women's rights-mandated public sector, resulting in effectively and positively impacting women's access to political rights and progressive policy change.²⁸

B. Ending Violence against Women in Elections and Politics

The most foundational barrier to women's representation is the **violence they risk and face** upon stepping into the public arena, across the range of their engagement for example, as activists, voters and elected officials. State Parties legislators and judicial actors, political parties, election monitoring bodies and citizen observers must link efforts to eliminate on- and offline violence against women in politics.

Collecting Systematic Data on Violence against Women Engaging in Political Processes

Under-reported and poorly documented, violence and harassment against women in elections and politics, online or in-person, must be prioritized in government and political party efforts to root out this critical driver of women's exclusion from public life. Efforts to track violence against women in politics and during elections must be built upon and institutionalized. In addition, political parties, election bodies and relevant state agencies must systematically collect and disseminate such information. Systematic reporting of incidence and responses on national, regional and global levels are critical to inform effective prevention and remedial policies, laws, and accountability mechanisms.

The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, its Causes and Consequences in the mandate's first and only report on Violence against Women in Politics highlighted that the need to "strengthen monitoring roles to address the shortcomings of States in eliminating violence against women in politics" and "in particular, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women should systematically integrate violence against women in politics into its reporting process

and guidelines, ...and should use their communications procedures... including that provided for under the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, to address violence against women in politics.”²⁹ Incorporating specific guidance to states to report on violence against women in elections and politics and measures taken to deter and address it would be a critical addition of this future general recommendation.

Early Warning Systems and Response to Violence against Women in Elections

Around the world, women are targeted by violence because of their commitment to vote, their jobs as electoral officials and their aspirations to hold political office. Such “violence against women in elections” (VAW-E) is defined as any act of violence -- threats, hate speech, assault, blackmail or assassination -- that is unduly directed at someone because of her gender, and that seeks to determine, delay or otherwise influence her engagement in an electoral process. VAW-E can take many forms and occur throughout the electoral cycle, from pre-election through election day and the post-election period. It aims to prevent women from participating in the electoral process, directed primarily either at their aspirations to seek political office, their link to electoral activities (such as working as election officials or attending campaign rallies) or simply their commitment to vote.³⁰

Data on the incidence and impact of violence against women in pre- through the post-election periods, unlike other electoral process indicators, has not been systematically collected and disseminated for most countries.³¹ If tracked early enough, VAW-E can be worked into responsive early warning-systems and rapid-response mechanisms that would stop such violence and uphold the integrity of the electoral process.³² In 2016, NDI launched Votes Without Violence³³ to provide guidance to citizen observer groups on how to tackle the issue of elections-related violence against women (i.e. voters, candidates, party agents, electoral officials). This guidance aims to respond to the demand for systematic data collection on violence against women in elections at the global and country level; build on the ability of international and domestic election observers to identify, prevent and record violence as it occurs so that it can be mitigated instead of escalated during an electoral cycle; and to increase the availability of baseline data of the phenomenon. Such data helps capture prevalence and impact trends to inform strategies for mitigation and prevention in elections. Integrating a more systematic approach into existing observation efforts of Nigeria’s 2019 elections included producing a lexicon of words and phrases that manifest as harassing language against women to better monitor online hate speech and harassment of women in politics as part of broader hate speech monitoring methodology.³⁴ NDI was also instrumental in working with partners to develop Guidelines on Gender Considerations in International Election Observations, including Violence against Women to supplement the The Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.³⁵

C. Reforming for Inclusive Representation

This section outlines two critical electoral reforms shown to accelerate women’s political participation, as voters and as candidates.

Voter Registration as Prerequisite for Representation

While women have attained the right to vote in almost every country in the world, significant physical, logistical, legal, and socio-cultural barriers, including threats and violence, prevent them from exercising their right to do so. Exclusion from the voters’ register not only prevents women from voting, but precludes them from running for elected office, as being registered to vote is typically a prerequisite for candidate qualification.

Globally women are under-represented on voter registers. For example, twelve million more men than women registered to vote in Pakistan in 2018.³⁶ Despite election law reforms intended to increase women voting by requiring they make up at least 10% of voters in each constituency, the Election Commission of Pakistan has had to reject at least one local elections results because not even one woman voted in that district.³⁷

For Burkina Faso’s presidential poll in 2010, difficult and confusing

requirements resulted in only three million of the country's six million eligible citizens being registered to vote. Women, in particular, faced formidable obstacles because of a requirement that citizens obtain a birth certificate before they can register. Further logistical, cost and legal obstacles lay in their path to receiving a birth certificate.

Therefore, NDI worked with the national electoral commission, the Ministry of Interior, as well as political parties and civil society organizations on a mobile birth certificate operation traveling to the five regions of the country with the lowest registration rates to bring women to a central location where they could obtain birth certificates. Thirteen radio stations aired announcements in six local languages, and eight theater groups gave a total of 26 public performances about including women in the electoral process and the upcoming visits by the mobile registration center. As a result, about 16,000 women were issued with birth certificates and able to register to vote.³⁸ Unfortunately, as no systemic reform was undertaken, NDI was asked to support the same exercise again in 2015.

Public Funding for Women Candidates

Having been historically and traditionally excluded from influential networks and wealth, women aspirants and candidates must often compete against unbeatable odds with limited resources. Public funding and political party allocation or resources for candidates are critical for evening out the political playing field. For example, in Mexico, the law states that political parties should designate 2% of the federal political party funding they receive towards women's political leadership training. Many parties had been ignoring the spirit of the requirement which was to support women's political aspirations, and instead using the earmarked funds for things like paying women for cleaning services or for providing food for party events or to wear T-shirts at party rallies. Working with a national coalition comprised of women from all of Mexico's major political parties, civic activists, the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES), and academics, NDI co-created the "2% and More Women in Politics" campaign. NDI supported the coalition in developing a media strategy and online petition calling for reforms that would require political parties to submit a plan annually to the Federal Electoral Institute, detailing how they intended to spend the money on programs to empower women as political leaders. These reforms, unanimously approved in July 2011, led to a 5.4% increase in the number of seats women won in the subsequent, 2012 national legislative elections.³⁹ Today, women hold 50% of seats in both the House of Representatives and the National Assembly⁴⁰ and 44% of presidential cabinet posts in Mexico.⁴¹

D. Political Parties Unblocking Women's Path to Representation

Political parties increasingly recognize that to win, they must win with women, as candidates and as constituencies. Women's participation benefits parties directly and can lead to improvements in their performance in elections and overall strength.⁴² For example, following the implementation of a quota for women candidates at the local level in Spain, all political parties increased the number of women running under their banner.⁴³ The parties that made larger increases in the number of women candidates also had a much stronger showing than other parties in the same locations.⁴⁴ Increasing the number of women candidates and having a stronger stance on reflecting women's perspectives on policy issues can make parties more competitive and more effective organizations. Women's full and equal participation in parties can also play a key role in efforts to fight corruption and increase political stability, as well as in enhancing the credibility and continuity of political parties.⁴⁵

**"What happens in the political party is a repetition of what happens in society."
- Elected woman official in Honduras**

However, political parties are the gatekeepers of women’s political participation and representation at all levels,⁴⁶ and party leadership remains predominantly male, while party colleagues are among the most common perpetrators of violence against their female counterparts.⁴⁷ To encourage political parties to become more inclusive and representative, NDI developed and in 2019 updated its Win With Women Political Party Assessment.⁴⁸ This tool is designed to help political parties become more inclusive and representative through providing a platform for dialogue by women and men party leaders on internal reform. This dialogue is based on an assessment that gauges men and women’s perceptions of women in leadership; the formal and informal rules, culture and practice of the party;

the types of social norms held by party members; and the incentives for change.⁴⁹ One of the outcomes of such an assessment can be the development of an action plan that charts the commitments to the reform or creation of new rules and codes of conduct governing behaviors of political party members, including in the areas of equitable party resource allocation and positive list placement (where relevant), as well in addressing gender-based harassment and violence against political party members by peer party colleagues and/or of their political rivals. For example, as part of that revision, NDI convened meetings with the six major Côte d’Ivoire political parties to develop such action plans. Some parties decided they needed to change the standing orders for meeting times to traditional working hours, when travel is safer, so that more women are able to attend. Party members also produced a cross-party action agenda and country level agenda to mitigate violence against politically active women, raising awareness of the issue of violence and illustrating non-partisan political will to eliminate violence as a barrier to women’s membership. A broader multi-sectoral coalition served as an accountability mechanism monitoring the implementation of parties’ action plans.⁵⁰

E. Deconstructing Harmful Masculinity and Exclusionary Gender Norms

To change the face of politics, the focus must shift from being exclusively on women as the sole agents in their own empowerment and instead engaging male political leaders as transformative agents of change for gender equality. Some of the greatest, most persistent obstacles facing women in politics are gendered social expectations, attitudes and behaviors. In many societies, power – especially, political power – is associated with men and masculinity. Such patriarchal gender norms and beliefs that politics is “men’s work” have led to the continued marginalization of women from political life, as well as their exclusion from organizations that are engaged in democratic politics. Because women’s political empowerment is typically seen as a zero-sum game, political masculinities are often intentionally used to undermine women’s leadership and to maintain power in the hands of networked male political elites.

Despite their numerical dominance in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), women and young people in particular are underserved by centralized political parties that restrict their access to decision-making functions and marginalize their roles. Women who speak out are often met with ostracism and violence. In July 2019, NDI worked with a local masculinities organization, COMEN, in a program to engage male elite political party leaders from five of the country’s political parties. The goal was to explore the patriarchal norms that enforce gender inequality within their organizations by exposing them to the greater power and privilege that they innately held as men in their families and communities, relative to women. This work and a pilot in Lebanon became foundational to NDI’s development of its Men, Power and Politics approach to addressing political masculinities and transforming male leaders into allies for gender equality.⁵¹

RECOMMENDATIONS

Inclusive and equal representation of women in politics - rooted in effective access, genuine influence, and robust accountability - is key to realizing core CEDAW provisions and fundamental to achieving gender equality. We encourage the Committee to consider the following suggestions in its future General Recommendation on this topic.

Ending Violence against Women in Elections and Politics

- The CEDAW Committee to lead and contribute to **consolidated reporting on violence against women in elections and politics** through periodic state parties reporting, individual complaints, and inquiry procedures.

Urge State parties to:

- Adopt and ensure the implementation of new, standalone-laws to prohibit or criminalize VAW-P. All enforceable legal penalties for perpetrators should be consistent with regional and international human rights standards. Other sites for legal redress would include integrating adequate provisions on VAW-P into existing laws on: eliminating VAWG; strengthening electoral integrity; online safety, online VAWG, gendered disinformation and tech-facilitated gender-based violence.⁵²
- Pass or update legislation addressing social media transparency to specify reporting requirements on online VAW against women in politics and gendered disinformation; push social media companies to develop and implement automated techniques to identify and take down intimidatory content posted on their platform and further enable users to report potentially illegal online activity to the police;⁵³
- Reform or expand electoral codes or penal codes to address violence against women in elections, including online VAW and abuse, perpetrated by any elected or appointed public official, electoral candidate or member of their staff; establish security mandates that cover this form of violence for election monitoring bodies;
- Raise awareness of violence against women in elections amongst election observers and authorities; train observers in how to monitor and report these incidents; and set up systems to ensure incidents are addressed in a timely matter through established procedures for registering and handling complaints;
- Institute systematic gender-informed monitoring and data collection systems to document incidents of violence against women before, during, and after election periods; integrate this data into existing early warning systems and rapid response mechanisms to ensure that these mechanisms are appropriately comprehensive and response to threat or incidence of acute and rising violence;
- Ensure that protected public spaces, such as political parties, parliaments and electoral management bodies, have robust workplace gender-based harassment protections; and that they are governed by zero-tolerance policies for gendered, sexualized, racist, and other forms of hate speech and abuse on legislative pages, profiles, and platforms, as well as those of candidates;⁵⁴
- Collaborate with civil society and tech companies to establish national and global initiatives and bodies to tackle the threat of online and tech-facilitated gender-based violence against politically-active women;
- Contribute and reinforce efforts to connect civil society, especially women's rights groups with women in elected, appointed and administrative positions to jointly advocate for measures to increase women's representation;
- Monitor political parties for compliance with provisions of this Convention, including on participation in public and political life (Articles 7 and 8) and freedom from violence and stereotypes and prejudices which "condone or promote gender-based violence against women and underpin the structural inequality of women with men" (Articles 1-2, 5 per General Recommendation 35 on gender-based violence against women).

Instruct State parties to ensure:

- **Political parties** develop and implement rules and codes of conduct that prohibit, prevent and redress VAW-P; establish independent mechanisms to receive and address complaints; hold accountable party members who engage in such conduct and support women members who are subjected to it; accompany internal codes of ethics with training and political education of all persons in the party on aspects related to human rights, equality, non-discrimination and violence against political women; identify and implement VAW-P indicators to capture and disseminate data on the scope and breadth of the phenomena and measures taken to mitigate and eliminate it.

- **Election Monitoring Bodies** integrate the monitoring, prevention and penalties for violence against women during elections into electoral codes of conduct to guide political parties, independent candidates, and the media on an electoral process governed by integrity, safety and equality.
- **Election Observation missions** should integrate a gender perspective in electoral observation guidelines to ensure that members of international election observation missions are trained to look for signs of violence that might deter women - whether as voters, candidates, election officials or elected representatives (at any level) — from participating in the electoral process. This data can be published in reports of electoral observation missions presented publicly to the voters, governments and the international community.⁵⁵ Guidance is provided in the Guidelines on Gender Considerations in International Election Observations, including Violence against Women to supplement the The Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation.⁵⁶

Reforms to Accelerate Women’s Inclusive and Equal Representation

Urge State parties to:

- Put in place national legislative measures that enforce and institutionalize mechanisms for gender quotas and gender-targeted funding for political campaigns;
- Require political parties wishing to register for elections to demonstrate their internal rules and codes of conduct uphold a zero-tolerance policy on VAW-P, contain concrete measures to promote, support and resource women aspirants and candidates, including, where appropriate, provide for winnable placement on party lists, noting that parliamentary systems with zipper lists that alternate men and women candidates have yielded better outcomes for gender parity in elections;
- Ensure public funding for candidates is known by and utilized by women aspirants and candidates, provide for effective complaint and dispute resolution mechanisms if inaccessible;
- Institute training programs for members of parliament, political parties, and state organs on the issue of male privilege and power, how masculinities impact individual men, their families and communities, and on the benefits of women’s empowerment and gender equality in all aspects of public and political life.

ENDNOTES

1 The phrase “women in all their diversity” aims to encompass all women of all ages and to acknowledge their diverse and multiple intersecting identities and contexts, including social, ethnic and religious minorities, women with disabilities, and members of the LGBTQI+ community.

2 CEDAW Committee, Concept Note on the Future General Recommendation on Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making Systems, p. 20, at <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/cedaw/general-discussion/2023/2022-11-11/Concept-note-GR-40.docx> (last visited Feb. 3, 2023).

3 See e.g., recent United States Institute for Peace (USIP) research reveals that movements featuring women’s participation are perceived by observers to be more likely to succeed and more deserving of popular support, and that women’s participation is historically associated with nonviolent campaign success. Matthew D. Cebul, Women Help Nonviolent Campaigns Succeed, But Nonviolent Discipline Remains Crucial, USIP, (Nov. 9, 2022), at https://www.usip.org/publications/2022/11/women-help-nonviolent-campaigns-succeed-nonviolent-discipline-remains-crucial?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery.

4 “Decades of evidence confirm that women’s civil and political participation and leadership promote equality, social welfare

- policies like education and health care, political stability and security.” White House, United States National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality (2021), p. 35, at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/National-Strategy-on-Gender-Equity-and-Equality.pdf>.
- 5 V-Dem Institute Policy Brief, The Case for Democracy: Are Democracies Better for Social Protection of the Poor, Gender Equality, and Social Cohesion? (May 11, 2021) at https://www.v-dem.net/media/publications/pb_28.pdf.
- 6 Based on data from 102 countries, at the current rates of progress, it will take 155 years to close the political empowerment gender gap. World Economic Forum, [Global Gender Gap Report 2022 \(July 13, 2022\)](#).
- 7 Inter-Parliamentary Union, Gender Equality, Data retrieved Dec. 1, 2022, at <https://www.ipu.org/our-impact/gender-equality#:~:text=With%20a%20global%20average%20of%2025%20per%20cent,between%20strong%20democracies%20and%20gender%20equality%20in%20parliaments>.
- 8 UN Women, Facts and figures: Women’s leadership and political participation, at https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation/facts-and-figures#_edn14(last visited Dec. 1, 2022); The City Mayors Foundation, Women Mayors, data as of 2021, at http://citymayors.com/women_mayors/women-mayors-capitals.html.
- 9 V-Dem Institute, 2022 Democracy Report, at <https://www.v-dem.net/publications/democracy-reports/>.
- 10 As the CEDAW Concept Note on the Future General Recommendation states “Today, the immediate, effective and comprehensive implementation of the CEDAW Convention through the equal and inclusive representation of women in political and public life is the best way to overcome some of the most pressing challenges of our time.” At p. 4.
- 11 Submission by the National Democratic Institute to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, #NOTTHECOST: Stopping violence against women in politics (June 2018), para. 32.
- 12 National Democratic Institute launched the global #NotTheCost Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics campaign in 2016. See at <https://www.ndi.org/not-the-cost>.
- 13 CEDAW Committee, General Recommendation 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, CEDAW/C/GC/35 (26 July 2019).
- 14 Notably, the existing CEDAW General Recommendation on Political and Public Life (1997) contains no reference to violence against women in politics.
- 15 NDI, Tweets that Chill: Analyzing Online Violence Against Women in Politics (2019), p. 12.
- 16 Erica Chenoweth and Zoe Marks, Revenge of the Patriarchs: Why Autocrats Fear Women, Foreign Affairs, March/April 2022 issue, at <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2022-02-08/women-rights-revenge-patriarchs>.
- 17 UN WOMEN, Leadership and Governance Section, Guidance Note: Preventing Violence against Women in Politics, (July 2021), p. 17, at <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/Guidance-note-Preventing-violence-against-women-in-politics-en.pdf>.
- 18 Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and African Parliamentary Union, Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Africa (2021) at <https://www.ipu.org/news/press-releases/2021-11/widespread-sexism-and-violence-against-women-in-african-parliaments-according-new-ipu-report>.
- 19 IPU and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe (2018) at <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>.
- 20 Ibid. notes 18-19; See also, Amnesty International UK, <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/online-violence-women-mps> (Sept. 5, 2017).
- 21 Demo Finland, International IDEA, Oslo Center & NDI, Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics – Benchmarks for Political Parties (2022), at <https://demofinland.org/en/preventing-violence-against-women-in-politics-benchmarks-for-political-parties-2/>.
- 22 CEDAW Committee, Concept Note on the Future General Recommendation on Equal and Inclusive Representation of Women in Decision-Making Systems, p. 4.

- 23 Each country's ranking in the Women's Political Participation Risk Index is built from three indicators: the level of women's political participation at the national level; the state of democracy in each country; and the likelihood of violence that women in that country face. NDI, NDI Launches #think10 - A Groundbreaking Safety Planning Tool Designed to Safeguard Women in Politics, at <https://www.ndi.org/publications/ndi-launches-think10-groundbreaking-safety-planning-tool-designed-safeguard-women>
- 24 Think10 is available in Arabic, English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and Ukrainian at <https://think10.demcloud.org>.
- 25 The City Mayors Foundation, Women Mayors, data as of 2021, at http://citymayors.com/women_mayors/women-mayors-capitals.html.
- 26 Growing this network of worldwide mayor members leading a rapidly urbanizing global population could position it to become a global political force working to build democratic resilience through inclusive and accountable urban government. NDI, Introducing NDI's Work on Gender, Women and Democracy (February 2021).
- 27 Current partners in this effort include Running Start and WomenWin.
- 28 A landmark study of social movements and violence against women policies in 70 countries over four decades demonstrated the centrality of feminist mobilization in civil society, over and in tandem with women in government to progressive social policy change. Htun, M., & Weldon, S. (2012). The Civic Origins of Progressive Policy Change: Combating Violence against Women in Global Perspective, 1975–2005. *American Political Science Review*, 106(3), 548-569. A 2020 literature review concluded that "In sum, the studies reviewed show that women's movements have had an impact on women's access to formal political rights, though this political change was also influenced by other national political and social characteristics. Women's groups working together in coalitions have been able to exert an influence on governments to adopt gender quotas in parliaments." Mama Cash, Feminist Activism Works! [A review of select literature on the impact of feminist activism in achieving women's rights](#) (July 2020).
- 29 UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, its Causes and Consequences, Violence against Women in Politics – note by the Secretary-General, A/73/301, para. 87(c), (Aug. 6, 2018) at <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a73301-violence-against-women-politics-note-secretary-general>.
- 30 For example, in Kenya, during the 2017 election primaries, 31% of election observers reported witnessing or hearing about the use of threatening, abusive or insulting language against women candidates or their families in their constituencies. National Democratic Institute, Votes Without Violence: Kenya, (2018) at <http://www.voteswithoutviolence.org/election/kenya/national/2017>.
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- 32 NDI, Violence against Women in Elections, at <https://www.ndi.org/VAW-E>. Due to the threat of violence leading up to the 2018 election day in Bangladesh, NDI and Dhaka-based research Institute of Informatics and Development set up early warning and response components, including identifying the hot spot locations across the country most at risk for violence to monitor and capture incidents and perceptions of such violence by women candidates and by male officials. NDI, Toolkit for Tackling Online Violence Against Women in Politics (August 2020).
- 33 See NDI, Violence against Women in Elections, at <https://www.ndi.org/VAW-E>.
- 34 NDI, Toolkit for Tackling Online Violence Against Women in Politics (August 2020), p. 28.
- 35 Guidelines on Gender Considerations in International Election Observations, including Violence against Women in Elections (2019), a available at: https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/ACFrOgCOeYyMoi8uw5xL8BeRJcAJJOtpKzdDrwst48Kkz09DgvNDpdWMJdofN0_TWkWnBGpglFJmX1trv91KXtvvGUuDnZ9lwdlXJ65AEn_6mOyu6bu2edqQPAHTnQXflq1POOWZV3PQcP7SrFT-.pdf.
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- 38 NDI, Introducing NDI's Work on Gender, Women and Democracy (February 2021).
- 39 Ibid.

- 40 IPU, Data on women in national parliament: Mexico, at https://data.ipu.org/node/110/data-on-women?chamber_id=13464.
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- 42 NDI, Win With Women: Building Inclusive 21st Century Parties (2018), p. 3, at <https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/WWW%20Methodology%20NDI%20LINKS%20%281%29.pdf>.
- 43 Ibid.
- 44 Werber, Cassie, *Forcing Spanish political parties to nominate more women is helping them win votes*, Quartz (April 7, 2015) at <https://qz.com/378064/forcing-spanish-political-parties-to-nominate-more-women-is-helping-them-win-votes/>.
- 45 Chandan Kumar Jha, Sudipta Sarangi, Women and corruption: *What positions must they hold to make a difference?* Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization, Vol. 151, 2018, Pp. 219-233, at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jebo.2018.03.021>.
- 46 Demo Finland, International IDEA, Oslo Center & National Democratic Institute, Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics – Benchmarks for Political Parties (2022), at <https://demofinland.org/en/preventing-violence-against-women-in-politics-benchmarks-for-political-parties-2/>.
- 47 “While political violence is often thought to occur between competing parties, studies by NDI and UN Women have found that party colleagues are among the most common perpetrators of violence. Party loyalty and dynamics of electoral competition create pressure upon women to not reveal behavior that might cast the party in an unfavorable light. The aim of this kind of violence is to control, limit or prevent women’s full and equal right to political participation.” Ibid. at 5.
- 48 NDI, Win With Women: Building Inclusive 21st Century Parties Assessment Toolkit (2019) at <https://www.ndi.org/publications/2019-win-women-assessment-toolkit>.
- 49 Ibid.
- 50 Coalition members included representatives from parties, civil society, the women’s legislative caucus and the women’s ministry led by the Coordinating Committee for Women’s Political Participation (2C2PF). NDI, Win With Women: Building Inclusive 21st Century Parties, p. 42.
- 51 NDI, Men, Power and Politics Program Guidance (2020) at https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/Men%2C%20Power%20and%20Politics%20Program%20Guidance%2011_20_2020%206.pdf. In Lebanon in 2020, NDI worked with ABAAD (Zero tolerance to Sexual Exploitation & Abuse) in the context of a Youth Activism for Lebanese Accountability (YALA!) program which focused on young people more effectively holding their government accountable. The aim was to prepare Lebanese young men and young women to identify, develop and advocate for priorities in a gender sensitive way that was accountable to the women’s rights agenda in Lebanon, by addressing conscious and unconscious attitudes and beliefs rooted in patriarchal gender norms and masculinities in the Lebanese context. This included the way in which the all-encompassing religious and sectarian identities influence gender roles. Themes of the Men, Power and Politics approach were also later reflected in all aspects of the YALA! civic education curriculum. Ibid.
- 52 NDI, Interventions for Ending Online Violence Against Women in Politics (Oct. 2022) at <https://www.ndi.org/publications/interventions-end-online-violence-against-women-politics>.
- 53 Ibid.
- 54 Ibid.
- 55 Submission by the National Democratic Institute to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, #NOTTHECOST: Stopping violence against women in politics (June 2018), pp. 9-11.
- 56 Guidelines on Gender Considerations in International Election Observations, including Violence against Women in Elections (2019), available at https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/ACFrOgCOeYyMoi8uw5xL8BeRJcAJJOTpKzdDrwst48Kkz09DgvNDpdWMJdofN0_TWkWnBGpglFJmX1trv91KXtvvGUuDnZ9lwdlXJ65AEn_6mOyu6bu2edqQPAHTnQXflq1POOWZV3PQcP7SrFT-.pdf.