

VOTES WITHOUT VIOLENCE

TALKING POINTS AND KEY CONCEPTS



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

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Talking Points Guidance

These are suggested talking points that citizen observation groups can use to review important concepts related to violence against women in elections (VAW-E). These talking points can help observation groups prepare for conversations or formal dialogues with traditional or nontraditional stakeholders as part of their context analysis and relationship-building. They can also guide the observation group as it designs its methodology and approach.

The talking points are designed to help observation groups understand and illustrate concisely what VAW-E is, and why monitoring and/or mitigating it is important. Additionally, they underscore the critical importance of considering VAW-E in election preparations, including the impact VAW-E can have on the democratic process and women's participation.

Elections

An election is not in compliance with international obligations and standards unless it includes the opportunity for full and equal participation by women and men as voters, candidates, election officials, observers and pollwatchers.^{1,2}

However, a variety of political, legal, social, economic and cultural barriers stand in the way of women being able to exercise equally the fundamental right to participate in elections.^{3,4}

As the goal of domestic election observation is to help advance democratic progress,⁵ it is key for observers to consider the obstacles and discrimination that keep women from access to full participation in elections.

Not incorporating a gender perspective in the planning, implementation and assessment of election observations could potentially reinforce inequalities and counter efforts to promote inclusive democratic practices.

Election Observation:

Election observation initiatives should incorporate a gender assessment into all aspects of the observation process. These should include election day check-lists and assessments throughout the electoral period of the political context, electoral framework, voter registration process, the composition and effectiveness of the election administration, candidate registration, the election campaign, media coverage and the election complaints system.⁶

By integrating a gender perspective into observation efforts, stakeholders will be able to assess the opportunities and obstacles faced by women and use this information to make recommendations for carrying out more inclusive and democratic elections.⁷

Election Management Bodies:

The degree to which women are able to participate in elections can be impacted by the policies and programs of an election management body (EMB). Thus, it is critical that EMBs take gender into account in the analysis, planning and implementation of all their activities, as well in their interactions with other stakeholders involved in electoral processes.⁸

To the extent that observers have access to EMBs, they should incorporate a consideration of gender into their discussions and recommendations.

Election observers should take note of the number of women represented in the election administration at the central, regional and polling station levels, as well as the number who are in leadership and decision-making roles. Election observers should also assess the EMBs' awareness of gender issues and gauge the responsiveness of those bodies to related issues.

Composition of Observer Teams:

The composition of observer teams, including their leadership, has a critical impact on the integration of gender in the observation methodology and process. At a minimum, it is important that teams reflect gender balance.

Election efforts can benefit from the inclusion of a gender expert to work with the observer group to ensure attention to the different constraints and opportunities that men and women face, that the data collected is gender disaggregated,⁹ and to provide a detailed analysis of women's participation in all aspects of the election.

If it is not possible to include a gender expert, then a qualified and trained member of the leadership may be designated as the gender focal point and take responsibility for ensuring a gender perspective in all stages of the observation efforts.

The terms of reference and codes of conduct for observers, as well as any training materials or workshops, should integrate gender issues throughout.

Violence against Women in Elections Overview:

In the last several years, there has been growing international attention to acts of violence and harassment against women in politics and an increasing demand to better understand the link between violence and the rate at which women participate in public life.¹⁰

VAW-E is defined as 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 the use or threat of force to harm women or their property with the intention of influencing the conduct of electoral stakeholders and/or to affect the electoral process.

Research on this phenomenon highlights the significant use of violence as a method to dissuade women from participating in elections as voters, candidates or elected officials:¹¹

In Guatemala, election observers in 2015 recorded that women faced higher levels of coercion and clientelism from political parties pressuring them to vote for certain candidates or risk losing access to social benefit programs.¹²

In Nigeria before the 2015 gubernatorial elections, women reported the institutionalization of sexual violence against women aspirants to political office who were expected by “king-makers” to provide sexual services in return for political favors; this unwritten code reinforced the rationale used by families and society at large to deter women from participating in politics.¹³

In the historic 2012 elections in Libya, actions against women in politics ranged from women candidates' posters being defaced or torn down to a woman being killed by suspected Islamists opposing women's political participation.¹⁴

In Zimbabwe, an estimated 2,000 women and girls were targeted and raped, because of their or their husbands' political affiliation, by state-sanctioned groups seeking to intimidate women and keep them from voting or influence their voting behavior in the three months surrounding the 2008 presidential election and run-off.¹⁵

This violence has implications for democracy because when women are prevented from voting for their chosen candidates, carrying out their campaigns, or fulfilling their mandate, democratic processes are effectively nullified.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of reporting by victims of violence and no systematic data collection, VAW-E and its impact on democratic processes, including elections and institutions, remains invisible in most countries and globally.¹⁶

Through election observation, citizens have the ability to heighten the visibility of this violence so solutions can be devised to increase electoral integrity and the prospects for democratic elections.

NOTES

1. UN Women. (2005). *Women & Elections: Guide to Promoting the Participation of Women in Elections*. Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/publication/Chapter7.htm/>
2. International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (2014). *Gender Equality & Election Management Bodies: A Best Practices Guide*. Retrieved from http://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/gender_equality_and_emb_best_practices_guide_final_2.pdf.
3. http://www.oas.org/es/sap/deco/pubs/manuales/Manual_gender_e.pdf
4. International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (2014). *Gender Equality & Election Management Bodies: A Best Practices Guide*.
5. For more information, see: <https://www.ndi.org/elections>
6. For more information, see the Gender & Election Observation module in NDI's *Votes Without Violence* toolkit
7. http://www.oas.org/es/sap/deco/pubs/manuales/Manual_gender_e.pdf
8. International Foundation for Electoral Systems. (2014). *Gender Equality & Election Management Bodies: A Best Practices Guide*. Retrieved from http://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/gender_equality_and_emb_best_practices_guide_final_2.pdf.
9. Gender disaggregated data is gathered and broken down according to gender, in order to aid analysis of any underlying influences (such as gender relations) that may be reflected in the data.
10. For more information, see the Violence Against Women in Elections module in NDI's *Votes Without Violence* toolkit
11. Krook and Restrepo. (2014). *Gender and Electoral Integrity: Combating Violence Against Women in Politics*. Unpublished.
12. Acción Ciudadana. (2015). Personal interviews.
13. Information gathered during the 2015 pre-election period through NDI-sponsored focus groups in Kogi and Bayelsa state.
14. <http://www.visionews.net/libya-elections-a-double-edged-sword-for-women/>
15. <http://worldwithouttorture.org/2012/07/17/tracking-politically-motivated-violence-against-women-in-zimbabwe/>
16. Krook and Restrepo. (2014). *Gender and Electoral Integrity: Combating Violence Against Women in Politics*. Unpublished