



Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics

Benchmarks for Political Parties

Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics

 By Political Party Peer Network



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Table of Contents

Situational Overview.....	3
Inclusion of Women in Politics.....	5
Female Aspirants.....	7
Female Members of Political Parties.....	8
Female Candidates.....	9
Elected Women.....	10
Individual Challenges.....	12

Situational Overview

This paper presents interventions for political parties on how to prevent and address any form of violence against women in politics (VAWIP) in order to strengthen women's participation and representation in politics and political decision-making. This entails guidance on interventions and concrete recommendations on how to prevent VAWIP across the electoral cycle, including female aspirants, candidates, party members, elected representatives and officials.

Across all the regions of the world, women remain underrepresented in politics. There are several barriers that women encounter when aspiring for elective positions of power and decision-making at all levels. However, over the last decades, more women have been demanding and making progress in claiming their rightful place in political decision-making. Though there has been a notable increase in women's representation in decision-making, especially at the parliamentary level, there has simultaneously been an increase in VAWIP.¹ Gender-based discrimination and other forms of violence against women often precede VAWIP and deter women from engaging in politics. Rigid gender norms, roles, structures, inefficient law enforcement, patriarchal mindsets, and lack of relevant regulation to prevent and deal with gender-based violence in politics restrict women's inclusion and legitimacy in the political sphere.

Violence against women in politics encompasses all forms of aggression, coercion, and intimidation that aims to exclude women—whether serving as civic leaders, voters, political party members, candidates, elected representatives, appointed officials, or election administrators.² Power holders can use violence to keep women out of politics, to maintain power and control, to exclude women from decision-making, and to silence female voices from being heard and represented in the political and socio-economic sphere.³

It is important that political parties are able to identify the different types of violence that might occur in VAWIP in order to take appropriate action:

- **Physical violence** can include physical intimidation and harassment, kidnapping, beating, or assassination.
- **Psychological and emotional violence** include, among others, threats, blackmail, stalking, and slander.
- **Sexual violence** includes sexual harassment, objectification, unwanted sexual advances, and sexual assault such as rape.⁴ and character assassination
- **Economic and symbolic violence**, such as restricted access to resources or education, and use of harmful stereotypes such as depicting women as weaker.
- **Online violence**, for example cyber harassment and character assassination.

¹ UN Women (2021) 'Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics', Guidance Note by Leadership and Governance Section. New York, US. Available [online](#) [accessed 15/11/2022].

² National Democratic Institute (2021) '#NotTheCost Stopping Violence against Women in Politics: A Renewed Call to Action', Washington, US. Available [online](#) [accessed 15/11/2022].

³ Bardall, G., Bjarnegård, E., & Piscopo, J. M. (2019) 'How is Political Violence Gendered? Disentanglung Motives, Forms, and Impacts', *Political Studies* 68(4): 916-935. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0032321719881812>

⁴ UN Women (2021) 'Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics', Guidance Note by Leadership and Governance Section. New York, US. Available [online](#) [accessed 15/11/2022].



Inclusion of Women in Politics

Political parties are the gatekeepers of women's political participation and representation at all levels.⁵ They hold a significant position not only in the inclusion of women in politics, but also in preventing and protecting women from violence. 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.⁶ The aim of this kind of violence is to control, limit or prevent women's full and equal right to political participation.⁷

Recognizing the violence targeting female politicians as a breach of human, civil, and political rights, rather than considering it the "cost of politics" – is crucial.⁸ Acknowledging the existence of the problem, naming it, and breaking the silence around it, opens the way for effective solutions.⁹ This paper provides fundamental recommendations to assist political parties in strengthening their inclusive efforts and supporting women's participation.

Recommendations:

- Legal and policy reforms and code of conduct:
 - Include anti-discrimination procedures in party statutes, together with procedures for reporting violence and mechanisms of victim protection.
 - Develop a party code of conduct for leaders and members to prohibit sexism, bullying, and harassment in all contexts of party work. Ensure that these regulations are implemented at all levels.
 - Impose sanctions on party members as well as elected and appointed representatives who perpetrate violence against women in politics.
- Build capacities and raise awareness:
 - Engage in gender sensitivity and VAWIP training – consider making it compulsory, especially for party leaders, elected and appointed representatives, and staff responsible for anti-discrimination procedures, VAWIP reporting and victim protection mechanisms.
 - Provide gender sensitivity and sexual harassment training to all party members.
 - Raise awareness in domestic and international party confederations.
 - Make a public pledge.
 - Support women within and across political parties.

⁵ International IDEA (2021) 'The Role of Political Parties on Women's Participation and Representation', International IDEA Technical Paper 1/2021, Stockholm, Sweden. Available [online](#) [accessed 15/11/2022].

⁶ National Democratic Institute (2021) '#NotTheCost Stopping Violence against Women in Politics: A Renewed Call to Action', Washington, US. Available [online](#) [accessed 15/11/2022].

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ National Democratic Institute (2021) '#NotTheCost Stopping Violence against Women in Politics: A Renewed Call to Action', Washington, US. Available [online](#) [accessed 15/11/2022].

⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union (2016) 'Sexism, Harassment and Violence against Women Parliamentarians', Issue Brief. Geneva, Switzerland. Available [online](#) [accessed 11/15/2022].

- Provide legal and psychological support and designate contact points inside political parties for contacting law enforcement agencies on behalf of women who have experienced violence in politics.
- If assessed necessary, consider protection for women politicians who hold public positions.
- Find allies among politicians and build cross-party coalitions to increase pressure on policy reforms and to share best practices.
- Monitoring measures:
 - Provide information and data that can be used for improving internal party systems, and in legal and policy reforms to prevent gender-based violence.
 - Collect data on different forms of violence faced by women in politics and build internal party capacity to mitigate their impact. Report incidents to the appropriate authorities and hold perpetrators to account.



Female Aspirants

Due to the multifaceted nature and different forms of VAWIP, there is a critical need to reinforce systematic strategies at national, regional, and global levels. These measures are fundamental in creating a socio-cultural and political environment that enables political participation for women. To enable a safe environment for women's participation and to empower women to engage in the political sphere, the broader socio-cultural norms, practices, attitudes, and stereotypes that drive violence need to be addressed. Even though this is necessary in all processes of political participation, it is of particular importance to allow women who are at the beginning of their potential political career to be able to safely engage in politics without the fear of violence. Sustainable goals and effective results can be reached with shared responsibility across genders where also men and boys engage in advocating for gender equality. Men and boys' engagement in challenging and questioning rigid gender norms, roles, practices, and unequal power relations that contribute to gender-based inequalities and discrimination is needed to prevent violence.

Recommendations:

- Shared responsibility
 - Political parties should facilitate active engagement of men and boys in the advocacy for women's empowerment by challenging and questioning the gender norms and unequal power relations between different genders, for example, by jointly promoting and respecting the rights and strategic interests of women and girls.
 - Political parties should initiate awareness-raising campaigns and training programs to prevent VAWIP and enhance members' capacity and knowledge on the topic. Members should show their commitment to take responsibility by reporting violence and supporting victims of VAWIP.
- Institutionalizing mechanisms and measures:
 - It is essential to put in place national legislative measures that enforce and institutionalize mechanisms such as gender quotas and gender-targeted funding for political campaigning.
 - Political parties should develop and implement laws that prevent and combat VAWIP to address the broader barriers that women encounter in accessing politics and entering into political leadership.
 - Political parties should identify, implement and expand on VAWIP indicators.

Female Members of Political Parties

When transitioning from aspirants to active political party members, women are more likely to be victims of violence, to witness violence against others in the party, and to perceive a climate of violence than men.¹⁰ There are various ways in which political parties can tackle VAWIP within their party and publicly condemn gender-based violence by pushing for policy and legal reforms. They can enhance women's political participation within their structures, address VAWIP in their own rules and regulations, create monitoring, complaint, dispute, and support mechanisms, and raise awareness on the issue both inside and outside the party. Political parties also need to ensure that these mechanisms – when in place – include meaningful consequences for the perpetrators at all levels of party functions. It is of utmost importance that there is a cultural shift in addition to a change in formal rules, regulations, and complaint mechanisms. A cultural change is vital in ensuring that the change in regulations is effective and political parties are safe spaces for women's meaningful participation, including for politically marginalized groups. It is important that political parties take into account intersecting structures of oppression to mitigate VAWIP.¹¹

Recommendations:

- Establish monitoring mechanisms and collect data:
 - Create internal mechanisms for reporting acts of violence within the party, such as a dedicated team or an independent office within the political party to deal with complaints and gender-based violence disputes. Make sure female politicians are included and participate in the monitoring of gender-based violence.
 - Conduct a confidential survey for party members to better understand their experiences with different forms of violence and review the internal decision-making processes at all levels of party work, especially in processes involving the selection of candidates and the distribution of funds.
- Safer party activities and spaces:
 - Use Safer Space Principles in all party activities and meetings.
 - Nominate and train contact persons for harassment.
 - Monitor the party's social media platforms and take down posts and remove users that engage in VAWIP.
 - Create safe spaces within party structures for female members to share experiences and receive peer support.

¹⁰ National Democratic Institute (2018) 'No Party to Violence: Analyzing Violence Against Women in Political Parties'. Available [online](#) [accessed: 15/11/2022].

¹¹ Kuperberg, R.(2018) 'Intersectional Violence against Women in Politics', *Politics & Gender*, 14(4): 685-690.

Female Candidates

During elections, the party has a major responsibility to protect the safety of its candidates – women and men. Thereby, it is essential for political parties to counteract the challenges of VAWIP and commit to facilitating a safe electoral environment for women. Political parties can be more active and pro-active before, during and after elections in order to prevent and mitigate issues related to violence against women in elections (VAWIE). The pre-election phase is a crucial moment for political parties to build the foundations that provide protection. Such structures can increase awareness and create a culture that opposes VAWIE. During the election campaign period, physical violence might intensify, particularly around polling stations. In the post-election period, lack of legitimacy constitutes as a major structural challenge that disincentivizes other women from engaging in politics. Logistics and planning by political parties are especially important in this phase.

Recommendations:

- For the pre-election period:
 - Political parties should form campaign teams consisting of both men and women. It is vital that these teams discuss in advance the challenges that female candidates can face during the election period – including security planning, campaign logistics and communication. The campaign team should also do mapping of potential election hotspots. Further, they should develop a plan to prevent and mitigate all forms of VAWIP during elections. The teams should also propose a gender-sensitive campaign budget and fundraising strategies for female candidates.
- For the election campaign period:
 - Party leaders should endorse and publicly promote female candidates and support party communication to ensure respectful representation of female candidates in the media.
 - Parties should sanction members that directly or indirectly contribute to violence against female candidates and facilitate an internal disciplinary system that includes procedures on how to deal with breaches of electoral conduct.
 - Parties should publicly denounce any candidates that contributed to VAWIP.
 - Parties should provide free legal support to candidates and engage with law enforcement agencies to prepare security measures.
 - Parties should ensure financial and communication support to female candidates.
- For the immediate post-election period:
 - Parties should assist with legal aid to challenge unfair election outcomes to provide legitimacy.
 - Parties should collect information and data from female candidates on violence.

Elected Female Politicians

After elections, women who are elected, and especially women who challenge traditional positions, often face VAWIP that aims to prevent them from pursuing a political career and participating in the political space. Collectively and individually, elected female and male representatives at national, regional, and local levels can take steps to address and end VAWIP by raising the issue in parliamentary debates, passing legislation to penalize perpetrators, and introducing reforms to make parliaments and councils a safer workplace for all women - whether they are elected representatives, clerks, officers, staff of representatives, or other support staff. To create a safe environment where accountability is at the core and where the legitimacy of the election results is safeguarded, it is essential for political parties to ensure the following:

Recommendations:

- Raise awareness:
 - Raise awareness of in-person and online violence against women in politics through internal conversations among elected representatives. These conversations could include testimonies, as well as more formal reviews of the state of violence against women in the party/legislature and recommendations on how these issues might be addressed.
- Legal frameworks:
 - Implement legal reforms to prohibit violence against women in elections.
 - Legal framework should be reviewed and adjusted when needed. This process should be based on the most up-to-date studies and information.
- Monitoring, complaint and dispute mechanisms:
 - Establish independent mechanisms within the party/legislature for receiving and dealing with complaints and disputes related to violence against women.
 - Identify gaps within the legal framework and monitoring, complaint, and dispute mechanisms both during and after elections, and improve where needed.
- Support:
 - Political parties need to support and safeguard elected women representatives in their functions and roles through strong internal structures and processes.
 - It is crucial that political parties ensure that no elected woman is pushed out or forced to resign from their position. This can be done by measures such as well-functioning women departments within political parties and gender quotas for leadership positions.



Individual Support

It is important that political parties facilitate a safe space for women when an individual faces challenges related to VAWIP. Political parties should have support systems to help women identify and mitigate challenges. Addressing challenges faced by individuals will strengthen the individuals' ability and confidence to take action, and in turn engage the party and society in creating a safe space.

Raising awareness and fostering the ability to identify what violence in the political environment entails is a crucial step in mitigating and counteracting VAWIP. It is therefore vital that political parties support and create an environment within their structures that facilitates information on VAWIP, breaks barriers by raising and addressing issues, and establishes a standard for action.

It is crucial that women who experience violence know where to get help. The role of political parties in creating safe spaces is therefore essential. Small groups can create an environment where women can open up and raise concerns. These groups also have the ability to increase awareness and to create a space where women can be heard, advised, and protected. This way women who experience intimidation, threats, bullying, harassment, and assaults during political participation will have the support needed to handle these situations individually and with their party peers.

Recommendations:

- It is important that women in politics are familiar with support systems provided by political parties and know where to get help if they encounter violence. This might entail the use of tools such as #ThinkTen to assess their personal security.
- Develop support teams with women from other political parties and include legal and security advisors.
- Identify civil society organizations that provide support for victims of VAWIP.
- Political parties need to ensure that women in politics are familiar with reporting mechanisms in the case of incidents, and that they are supported throughout the entire process.
- Reporting and sharing experiences on social media, as well as supporting online campaigns will enhance individual and societal awareness.
- During elections, an active network within the political party should be provided for women candidates to seek party support and protection.