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Network of Women in Politics

Summary of the e-Discussion on

The Role of Political Parties in Promoting Women in Politics

December 2019

LAUNCHING MESSAGE

Background
In most countries, political parties are the primary and most effective structure through which women become politically engaged and get elected. Political parties' practices, policies, and values can have a deep impact on women's political participation and representation. Indeed, political parties nominate candidates in local and national elections, provide campaign funding, rally voters, set policy and governance priorities, and form governments.[1]

In January 2019, globally women held just 24.3 per cent of all parliamentary seats and 20.7 per cent of ministerial positions.[2] Although women's political participation and representation increased in recent years, progress is very slow. The unequal representation of women in decision-making bodies is an obstacle to achieving gender equality in society and the fulfillment of the Sustainable Development Goals by the 2030 target.

A study by International IDEA on political parties' commitments in 33 African countries found a significant gap between parties' written general commitments to achieving gender equality and specific measures to enforce and implement these commitments.[3] Another study focused on Latin America revealed that 30 per cent of political parties barely refer to gender equality in their internal governance documents at all.[4]

For efforts to promote women's equal and full political participation to be effective, they must include strategies for political parties to ensure their constitution, structures, processes, and financing are gender-responsive and inclusive of all women. It is crucial that political parties encourage women's participation and integrate gender equality issues in their policies and programmes to ensure diversity of views and no one is left behind.

Objective
iKNOW Politics and its partners convened this e-Discussion to exchange knowledge on the role of political parties in promoting women's political participation and representation and good practices on ways to increase and strengthen their contribution to achieving gender equality in politics and the wider society. Political party leaders and members, politicians, experts, practitioners, and researchers were invited to join the e-Discussion from 13 August to 3 September 2019. The submissions contributed to the elaboration of the below summary to augment the knowledge base available on this topic.

Questions
1. Do political parties in your country publicly express commitment to gender equality? If so, is this commitment reflected in their actions (e.g. leadership structure, candidate nominations, campaign financing, and policies)?

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[1] Ballington, J., Davis. R., Reith, M., Mitchell, L., Njoki, C., Kozma, A., Powley, E., 'Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties: A Guidebook to Promote Women's Political Participation', 2011 (NDI and UNDP): iknowpolitics.org/en/learn/knowledge-resources/empowering-women-stronger-political-parties-guidebook-promote-womens

[2] UN Women and Inter-parliamentary Union, 'Women in Politics: 2019': iknowpolitics.org/en/learn/knowledge-resources/women-politics-map-2019

[3] International IDEA, 'Review of political parties' commitments to gender equality: a study of 33 African countries', 2012 (unpublished)

[4] Rosas, V., Llanos, B. and Garzón de la Roza, G., 'Gender and Political Parties: Far from Parity', 2011 (Stockholm and New York: Inter-American Development Bank and International IDEA)

2. What can political parties do to promote women's political participation and representation within their organizations and in politics in general? What can they do to better include young women, women with disabilities, and indigenous women?
3. Do you know of instances where political parties gained greater electoral success following the implementation of gender affirmative action measures?
4. Violence against women in politics is a widespread phenomenon. What can political parties do to stop it?

CONTRIBUTORS

The following participants joined the e-Discussion from 13 August to 3 September 2019:

1. Akua Dansua, former Minister of youth and sports and former Ambassador of Ghana to Germany, **Ghana**
2. Alexis Wesula, Student, **Kenya**
3. Armando Ribón Avilán, Sociologist, **Colombia**
4. Azouka Crepin, Program Manager, **Central African Republic**
5. Carolina Muñoz, Political Analyst, **Argentina**
6. Daryl Ann Glenney, Public Affairs Consultant, Writer and Advocate for women's rights, **United States**
7. Dr. Ameena Al-Rasheed, iKNOW Politics Expert, Consultant, former Assistant Professor and UN Regional Advisor, **United Kingdom**
8. Mariam Najdi, **Morocco**
9. Noa Balf, Legislative Affairs Fellow at the National Council of Jewish Women, **Israel**
10. Paloma Román Marugán, Director of Escuela de Gobierno, **Spain**
11. Saad Al Rawi, Electoral Adviser to political entities, former Vice President of the Council of the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq, **Iraq**
12. Sekar Panuluh, In-Country Program Coordinator at Conservatives-WFD, **Indonesia**
13. Susana Campari, Co-founder and President of the Civil Association Women and Government, **Argentina**
14. Tayo Agunbiade, **Nigeria**
15. UPLA – Latin American Women's Network, **Latin America**
16. Valerie Mengue Ango, Program Manager at UN Women, **Cameroun**

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

iKNOW Politics and its partners thank their followers for taking the time to participate in this e-Discussion and share experiences, practices, and recommendations. The contributions are summarized below.

1. **Do political parties in your country publicly express commitment to gender equality? If so, is this commitment reflected in their actions (e.g. leadership structure, candidate nominations, campaign financing, and policies)?**

Most participants agree that there is often a gap between political parties' commitments and their actions when it comes to gender equality and women's empowerment. It is argued that while political parties typically position themselves along gender equality and inclusion values, showing commitment to international human rights standards and norms, these stances are "mostly expressed for courtesy and end[ed] up paying lip service to the cause" of women's political empowerment and gender equality, says Dr. Ameena Al-Rasheed.

Contributors report that political parties - the main gatekeepers to women's equal and full political participation, representation, and leadership - rarely "walk the talk." In **Cameroun** and **Morocco,** for example, parties often include gender equality and women's empowerment issues in their meetings and talking points, but no action follows. In practice, women are still denied access and confronted with many strong barriers at the national and local structures of political parties, such as sexist stereotypes, discriminatory socio-cultural norms, and economic and financial dependence.

[Tayo Agunbiade](#) shares that all political parties in **Nigeria** express commitment to gender equality and women's empowerment. At the same time, none of the major political parties follow the 2008 recommendations of the Electoral Reform Committee tasked to review and ensure the quality and standard of general elections, which call for 30 per cent of the local representatives of the parties' registration and regulatory commissions, as well as 20 per cent of the governing bodies of all political associations to be women.[5] While political parties' women's wings are typically in charge of mobilization, event-management and entertainment for campaigns, they tend to be excluded from decision-making bodies and processes.

Similarly, [Akua Dansua](#) reports that in **Ghana** all political parties display a commitment to more gender equality in politics but fail to put it to practice. She argues that party leadership positions are almost exclusively held by men, and when women have such positions, they tend to be *protégées* of powerful men and serve as tokens. In Ghana, there were many instances where party leadership rejected highly qualified women for leadership positions in favor of less-qualified men.

Participants also argue that the lack of women's representation in party leadership positions and candidate lists is linked to political parties' and campaign funding structures. Political parties need money to compete and win elections. In countries with no or limited public electoral funding, parties typically rely on their membership and leadership to finance electoral campaigns. Given women generally have limited access to financial resources and to supportive social networks and donors, men with higher direct and indirect income potential for parties are usually favored.[6]

2. **What can political parties do to promote women's political participation and representation within their organizations and in politics in general? What can they do to better include young women, women with disabilities, and indigenous women?**

Contributors are generally not optimistic and claim that political parties typically include a critical mass of women only when they are legally required to do so and face penalties if they do not comply. They are even more pessimistic about the spontaneous inclusion of young women, women with disabilities, and indigenous women. Furthermore, [Daryl Ann Glenney](#) calls the major political parties in the **United States** "roadblocks rather than gateways for women candidates." To many participants, political parties are exclusive 'boys clubs' that depend on women as workers and placeholders for unwinnable seats in elections.

They argue that well-designed electoral quota laws are essential in increasing women's representation in politics and that they are the most effective way to incite political parties to significantly include women. Electoral quota laws can be found in many countries, such as **Argentina**, **Bolivia**, **Chile, Costa Rica**, **El Salvador**, **Panama,** and **Peru,** according to the input of the [Women's Network of the Union of Latin American Parties](#) (UPLA). While participants acknowledge that well-designed electoral quota laws can have a great and fast effect on women's political participation and representation, they argue that they

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[5] A Irene Pogoson, 'Gender, Political Parties and the Reproduction of Patriarchy in Nigeria: A Reflection on the Democratization Process, 1999-2011', 2011 (Journal of African Elections): [eisa.org.za/pdf/JAE11.1Pogoson.pdf](#)

[6] For more information, read the summary of our most recent e-Discussion on Funding for Women Candidates, 2018: [iknowpolitics.org/en/learn/knowledge-resources/discussion-summaries/summary-e-discussion-funding-women-candidates](#)

are not enough as they rarely influence internal political party structures, unless they specifically target them.

In **Iraq** for example, political parties are legally required to allocate 25 per cent of the seats in their leadership bodies to women, reports Saad Alrawi. There are parity laws in **Argentina**, **Chile**, **Costa Rica** and **Panama** that also govern political parties' internal bodies and structures. Moreover, some of these laws also prescribe allocating financial resources to help promote women's leadership within parties. For example, the most recent Argentinian law on financing for political parties requires parties that receive public funds for training to direct at least 30 per cent of them towards leadership training for women. The need to allocate funds to train women leaders within parties and fund their campaigns has been highlighted by many participants.

Quotas are not enough. Some parties have established Women's Wings or Women's Secretariats specifically funded to build leadership capacities of women party members. In some cases, parties do it voluntarily, and in some others, it is required by law. For instance, all parties in **Costa Rica** have a Women's Secretariat responsible for leadership training. In **Chile**, the Electoral Law says that political parties should allocate at least 10 per cent of their total funding to promote women's political participation and financially rewards parties based on the number of women they get elected.

While contributors admit that quotas and targeted funding mechanisms are effective tools in getting more women to leadership positions, they generally argue that political will is key. Political will within parties is essential for the genuine promotion of women's participation, representation, and leadership in politics. Working with male allies "will go a long way" says Tayo Agunbiade. They are needed to champion women's leadership and lead by example. This will contribute to the change in culture that participants call for. To them, gender equality advocates, the media, and the international community need to continue advocating for women's political empowerment and affirmative action measures until gender parity is the norm and no longer an exception.

3. **Do you know of instances where political parties gained greater electoral success following the implementation of gender affirmative action measures?**

Valerie Mengue Ango argues that political parties that have established quota systems within their structures have had bigger electoral successes in **Cameroun**. Akua Dansua gives examples of political parties in the **Netherlands**, **Norway**, **Rwanda**, and **Sweden** that were able to gain greater electoral success after affirmative action measures were implemented. UPLA's Women's Network reports that political parties in **Argentina**, **Bolivia**, **Chile**, **Colombia**, **Costa Rica**, **Dominican Republic**, **El Salvador**, **Honduras**, **Panama**, and **Peru**, experienced bigger electoral successes after implementing affirmative action measures.

Although the relationship between the implementation of affirmative action measures and the active promotion of women's participation by political parties and their electoral success has not been extensively documented, case studies conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the National Democratic Institute (NDI) suggest that "political parties have increased their support base and gained electorally after adopting reforms to promote women's empowerment."[7] The findings show that political parties that promote women's participation and empowerment have stronger links with their voters and access to new ones, as well as a vibrant and energized image. It is argued that "some

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[7] Ballington, J., Davis. R., Reith, M., Mitchell, L., Njoki, C., Kozma, A., Powley, E., 'Empowering Women for Stronger Political Parties: A Guidebook to Promote Women's Political Participation', 2011 (NDI and UNDP), page 11:
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results are dramatic, some are subtle, and some are achieved progressively, but the overall outcome for political parties is a net gain in every case."[8]

4. Violence against women in politics is a widespread phenomenon. What can political parties do to stop it?

Participants in our most recent e-Discussion on [violence against women in politics](#) (VAWP) established that women in politics face relentless violence, both online and offline. Because women in politics challenge the *status quo*, they often face harassment and abuse from men, who attempt to reinforce their masculinity by maintaining power and control. It was argued that VAWP is the most radical form of violence against women, because aside from being a blatant manifestation of inequality, it institutionalizes women's subordinate position in society by systematically denying them their rights and excluding them from public decision-making.

Indeed, in **El Salvador** for example, many women gave up politics to escape harassment, public humiliation, and violence, reports [UPLA's Women's Network](#). VAWP is used as a political tactic by the ruling party in El Salvador to suppress women in the opposition, says Claudia Alas de Avila. In **Nigeria**, VAWP occurs with impunity, argues [Tayo Agunbiade](#). Many female politicians faced sexual harassment in the recent Nigerian election cycle. One candidate was even asked for sexual favors by men in return for votes.

In 2012, a law specifically criminalizing VAWP was passed in **Bolivia**. [UPLA's Women's Network](#) reports that there have been 180 reports by women who have suffered harassment by members of their political parties, but that perpetrators have yet to be brought to justice. More generally, there is a law in **Peru** that sanctions political harassment. While harassment is widespread in electoral campaigns and internal party elections in Peru, it is reported that party leaders do not support their female colleagues with their harassment claims.

Here again, participants call for laws to criminalize VAWP and make perpetrators accountable for their actions, while also arguing that political will within political parties' leadership is essential in making politics a safe space for women. It is recommended to propose nation-wide laws criminalizing VAWP and introduce internal mechanisms to effectively deal with VAWP within political parties. Participants urge political parties to establish codes of ethics and zero-tolerance accountability mechanisms with clear, fast, confidential, and independent reporting and sanction processes. It is important that the sanctions are automatically applied for everyone within the party, regardless of hierarchy, so that women feel safe enough to report instances of VAWP. In a self-reinforcing dynamic, such measures would encourage more women to report VAWP incidents, and as more incidents are reported, the process can be improved.

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[8] Ibid, page III.