

# VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS IN TÜRKİYE

A QUALITATIVE STUDY



TERRA  
DEVELOPMENT  
COOPERATIVE



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# ABBREVIATIONS

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<b>CEDAW</b>	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
<b>ÇİMER</b>	Presidential Communication Center
<b>EOC</b>	Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye
<b>GDWS</b>	General Directorate on the Status of Women
<b>IPU</b>	Inter-Parliamentary Union
<b>KA.DER</b>	Association for Supporting Women Candidates
<b>KDK</b>	Ombudsman Institution
<b>TCK</b>	Turkish Penal Code
<b>TMK</b>	Turkish Civil Code
<b>TIHEK</b>	The Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye
<b>LGBTIQ+</b>	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex or Queer
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental Organization
<b>ŞÖNİM</b>	Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UN Women</b>	The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
<b>VAW</b>	Violence Against Women
<b>VAWP</b>	Violence Against Women in Politics
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization

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# INTRODUCTION

**Gender inequality and sociocultural norms create the conditions for women to be disproportionately affected by violence, including violence against women in politics (VAWP). VAWP is defined as any act or threat of physical, sexual and/or psychological violence that prevents women from exercising their political and other human rights, including during and after elections (UN Women, 2021a). VAWP is associated with many actions such as obstructing women's rights to vote, hold public office, vote in secret, campaign freely, form associations, assemble, and enjoy the freedom of thought and expression. Perpetrators of these acts of violence can be individuals, including family members, or institutions (UN Women and UNDP, 2017).**

In parallel with the increase in women's participation in politics, the number of studies focusing on VAWP has also recently increased.<sup>1</sup> These studies reveal the acts of violence to which women in politics are subjected as well as their causes and effects, and quantitative research provides information on the extent and prevalence of this violence. While the world average for women's political participation is 36% in local governments and 26% in national parliaments, Türkiye lags behind, with 10% women's participation in local governments and 20% in Parliament (UN Women, 2023a; Turkish Grand National Assembly, 2023). Although a great deal of research has focused on the barriers that women face in politics and on domestic violence against women (VAW) in Türkiye, there are no studies on VAWP (Altınay and Arat, 2008; Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, 2009 and 2015).<sup>2,3</sup> The purpose of this study is to contribute to the visibility and elimination of VAWP in Türkiye, including through the provision of qualitative research.

This study, which brings the new concept of VAWP to the agenda, summarizes women's political participation in Türkiye and examines international legislation as well as examples from different countries of good practices to combat VAWP. National legislation and policies are evaluated against international norms, and qualitative

research is presented on experiences, perceptions, opinions and recommendations on the subject.

The qualitative research phase of the study was designed with recognition of the complex and broad definition of politics. The interviews within the scope of the research were limited to women who exercised the right to be elected; women who exercised the right to vote and to engage in other political activities were not included in the qualitative research. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with women who were or are actively involved in Parliament and local governments as well as representatives from public institutions related to politics and VAW, civil society organizations, political parties' women and youth organizations, and youths from youth networks. In this research report, details on the political party to which the interviewees belong, the organization they work for, the province they live in, and their age and occupation are not shared; only the positions they hold are included.

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<sup>1</sup>For some of these studies, see: UN Women and Centre for Social Research, 2014; Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2018; Ballington, 2018; UNDP, PA, CPD and Government of Sweden, 2021. Among these, research conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union in 45 European countries reported that 85% of women parliamentary officials and MPs had been subjected to psychological violence.

<sup>2</sup>The studies of Tekeli (1989; 1992; 1996), Çakır (2019), Sumbas (2020), and Drechselova (2020) provide important information on the position of women in politics since the 1980s.

<sup>3</sup>Altınay & Arat, 2008; Hacettepe University Institute of Population Studies, 2009 and 2015.

The first part of the report provides a summary of women's political participation in Türkiye, which is followed by a discussion of the international normative framework on VAWP and an assessment of the national legislative and policy framework. The third part summarizes selected examples of good practices in different countries. The qualitative research methodology is described in the fourth part, and in the fifth part, acts of violence perpetrated by different actors against women in politics are presented according to the stages of nomination, campaigning and the period during which they hold office. The sixth part presents the causes and effects of VAWP, and the seventh part presents recommendations for combating it. The final part of the report is devoted to the evaluation and discussion of the research results.

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# WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION IN TÜRKİYE

Although the struggle for women's political rights in Türkiye dates back to the Tanzimat period of the mid-19th Century, women gained the right to elect and to be elected for the first time at the municipal level with the Municipality Law (1930), at the mukhtar level with the Village Law (1933) and at the parliamentary level with the constitutional amendments in 1934. The authoritarian political regime of the Republican era created a serious barrier to women's participation in political life until the 1980s, but some progress on women's rights was achieved in the 1990s and 2000s with the momentum of the feminist movement (Tekeli, 1992; Ayata, 1995; Bora, 2002; Arat, 2005, 2010; Ayata and Tütüncü, 2008; Kancı et. al, 2010; Sancar, 2017; Keysan 2019; Gonzalez, 2021; KA.DER, 2022). For example, important developments included: (a) the establishment of the Association for Supporting Women Candidates (KA.DER<sup>4</sup>) in 1997, (b) the harmonization of the Constitution (2001 and 2010), (c) the Civil Code (2002) and (d) the Turkish Penal Code (Turkish Penal Code, 2004), (e) signing and ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), (f) the establishment of the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (EOC) within the Turkish Grand National Assembly, (g) the signing of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), and (h) the enactment of Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence against Women. However, Türkiye unfortunately withdrew from the Istanbul Convention with the Presidential Decree signed by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on March 20, 2021.

Despite these achievements, challenges in politics and bureaucracy have not been overcome for women – the current rates of women's participation in local and national politics (11.8% and 17.4%, respectively) and the male-dominated structure of the public sphere have not changed. According to the “Women in Politics 2023” map prepared by UN Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the proportion of women deputies and ministers in parliaments worldwide is 26.5% and 22.8%, respectively. Türkiye is ranked 131 out of 186 countries according to the percentage of women in the parliament and 173 out of 182 countries for the percentage of women in ministerial positions (UN Women and IPU, 2023).

The barriers to women's political participation in Türkiye and their low levels of participation have been discussed in detail in the literature, particularly the problematic relationship between democracy and gender equality (Tekeli, 1989, 1992; Acar-Savran, 2002; Sancar-Üşür, 2008, Sancar, 2017). Sancar-Üşür (2000) stated that the unequal participation of women in politics reinforces inequalities and that inequalities cause the underrepresentation of women to become structural. Pınarcıoğlu emphasises that the concept of “absence syndrome,” borrowed from Tekeli, is not only limited to the numerical underrepresentation of women but is also related to the neglect of women's presence in the political sphere and the disregard of their political participation. In other words, it means keeping women away from the political sphere, preventing them from participating in politics and having a say in political processes (Yıldırım, 2019).

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<sup>4</sup> KA.DER is a women's organization advocating equal representation, effective roles, and prevention of discrimination against women in politics and decision-making processes. Opposed to the dominance of men in the political sphere, it strives to raise the political consciousness of women and sensitivity to women.

In the literature on Türkiye, the barriers and discrimination that pave the way for these conditions are generally addressed within the framework of structural, cultural and institutional barriers that are intertwined and defined in a cause-and-effect relationship (Alkan, 2004, 2009; Sancar, 2018; Çakır, 2019; Sumbas, 2020; İstanPol, 2021). Structural barriers are those that women face due to their economic status, marital status and age, which are mostly related to an unequal distribution of the domestic labor burden (Kalaycıoğlu, 1984; Soylu, 2017; Çakır, 2019; Arslan, 2019; Sumbas, 2020; İstanPol, 2021). Cultural barriers are related to the impact of the patriarchal gender regime on the political sphere. Together with religious codes, the patriarchal gender regime supports the idea that women are responsible for the private sphere and men for the public sphere (Tekeli, 1996; KA-DER, 2007; Sancar-Üşür, 2008; Deniz, 2009; Pınarcıoğlu, 2017; Sancar, 2018; Tali, 2019; İstanPol, 2021). Institutional barriers are related to institutional structures that do not adequately support women's participation in politics, such as the electoral system in Türkiye being based on the "single-member district system,"<sup>5</sup> men in relationships of clientelism making decisions within political parties' nomination processes, the lack of affirmative action strategies such as mandatory quotas or easing nomination fees, and the inadequacy of institutions tasked with realizing gender equality (Türk, 2006; Deniz, 2009; KONDA, 2011; Çağlar, 2011; UNDP, 2012; Sallan Gül & Altındal, 2015; Demir, 2015; Yıldırım & Kocapınar, 2019; Tali, 2019; Sumbas, 2020; İstanPol, 2021).

The literature also mentions additional barriers including mainstream political culture and norms such as women's low participation in civil society, a lack of role models, women's spatial exclusion, high expectations of women, the use of women for token representation, and political actors' unwillingness to include women in this field because they view it as a way to gain money or reputational power without effort—practices of personal and political gain rooted in corruption known as "rent-seeking"<sup>6</sup>—and do not want women to interfere.

The proposed solutions to the problem of low women's political participation in Türkiye include defining affirmative action policies at the level of the constitution and other laws that are based on gender equality such as the principle of equal rights, positive discrimination, priority of opportunity, quotas, trainings, campaign support, legal regulations that

provide protection against discrimination and the "zipper system"—which requires parties to alternate men and women on their candidate lists. In particular, the need for Türkiye to implement mandatory quotas and temporary and special measures as defined under articles 3 and 4 of CEDAW is emphasized (Alkan, 2004; KA-DER, 2007; Sallan Gül, 2007; Sancar-Üşür, 2008; Deniz, 2009; Yaraman, 2015; Tali, 2019; Sumbas, 2020; TÜSEV, 2022).

The recent studies indicate that women are trying to participate in the political sphere despite the violence to which they are subjected, and that this is noticed specifically by young people and civil society. According to a survey conducted by KONDA,<sup>7</sup> the majority of society (74%) thinks that women should be more involved in politics. The findings also reveal a belief that an increase in the number of women politicians will have positive effects, especially on issues such as domestic violence, childcare, maternity leave and education (KONDA, 2022). Although the qualitative research carried out by İstanPol was not concentrated on violence faced by women politicians, its findings indicate that traditional roles and expectations hinder women politicians and that male politicians ignore women or use verbal violence against those women who oppose them as political rivals (İstanPol, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> A single-member district is an electoral district electing only one representative to office, whereby the one candidate obtaining the most votes in one district is elected, even if he or she has not obtained an absolute majority of the votes. In contrast, a multi-member district is an electoral district electing more than one representative to office. While plurality and majority systems usually employ single-member districts, proportional representation systems use multi-member districts.

<sup>6</sup> The term "rent-seeking" is used to describe taking advantage of one's position and power to gain unfair income, status, benefits, etc.

<sup>7</sup> KONDA Research Company conducted this survey for the "Ben Seçirim Association" in 2022.



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# NORMATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK

## *International Normative Framework*

International conventions that support the struggle for the elimination of discrimination, inequalities, VAW and the effective exercise of democratic rights constitute essential foundations for combating VAWP.<sup>8</sup> CEDAW—the most fundamental convention in preventing discrimination and inequalities faced by women in many areas of life—and its General Recommendations<sup>9</sup> have been reminding states of their obligations to ensure women’s equal participation in all areas of life and to prevent, prosecute and punish violence since 1981. The agenda of the Beijing Action Plan in 1995 also included concrete steps to identify and resist the barriers that create discrimination against women in many areas and to combat violence.

The issue of VAWP was first specifically raised by the United Nations General Assembly resolution on women’s political participation in 2012.<sup>10</sup> This resolution defines the responsibilities of States to prevent violence against women exercising their political rights, eliminate discriminatory laws, regulations and practices that impede women’s participation in political life, and eliminate discriminatory attitudes. It also asserts that States have an obligation to take all necessary steps to ensure that allegations of violence, assault and harassment against women elected and/or running for governing bodies are investigated, to create conditions in which there is no tolerance for such criminal acts, and to prosecute the perpetrators of such acts. The resolution also emphasizes the need for preventive

work to combat all the factors that prevent women from participating in politics, including violence. The 2018 United Nations Violence against Women in Politics report also addressed the causes, consequences and prevention mechanisms of VAWP and called for measures through investigations, prosecutions and concrete actions.<sup>11</sup> In the European context, recommendations from the Council of Europe provide States with a comprehensive road map for the prevention of VAWP and suggest taking necessary measures against sexist attitudes in parliaments.<sup>12</sup>

A review of international conventions and policy documents related to VAWP (Annex 1) identified norms of “equality,” “prohibition of discrimination,” “respect for human dignity,” “non-violence,” “women’s empowerment,” “due diligence,” “State responsibilities in preventing discrimination,” and “gender equality.” In the identification of the international norms, the previous mapping and monitoring reports on gender equality and women’s political participation and VAW were used (Sancar, 2018; Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu, 2018).

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<sup>8</sup> UN Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952), UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966).

<sup>9</sup> While the CEDAW Committee’s General Recommendations 12, 19 and 35 focus on violence, 23 and 25 emphasize equal participation in politics, support for women candidates, the introduction of gender quotas, the transformation of institutions and systems, etc.

<sup>10</sup> United Nations General Assembly resolution A/RES/66/130 on Women and Political Participation (2012).

<sup>11</sup> United Nations General Assembly report A/73/301 on Violence against Women in Politics (2018). <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/thematic-reports/a73301-violence-against-women-politics-note-secretary-general>.

<sup>12</sup> Recommendation 2274 on Parliaments Free of Sexism and Sexual Harassment (Council of Europe, 2019a), Recommendation 2157 towards an Ambitious Council of Europe Agenda for Gender Equality (Council of Europe, 2019b).

» The norm of “equality” in human rights and policy documents is generally conceptualized as “equality before the law” or “legal equality”. Equal rights of women and men are defined as the right to participate in political life, to participate in public life/services and to be protected equally before the law.

» The norm of “prohibition of discrimination” emphasizes that everyone is equal before the law and should enjoy rights without discrimination. It is a fundamental principle of many conventions and policy documents and started to come to the agenda with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Having historically referred to national minorities, the prohibition of discrimination has changed over time to include different sexual identities and multiple discrimination in a broader scope.

» “Respect for human dignity” is a norm enshrined in many conventions and policy documents and asserts that people are equal by virtue of their inherent dignity. As a norm that draws attention to the value of the human person, respect for human dignity is among those accepted worldwide by international legal principles. In such documents, the concept of dignity is used without differentiating between men and women, and in CEDAW, “respect for the integrity and dignity of women” is specifically emphasized.

» The norm of “non-violence” has historically developed in opposition to many acts of oppression, especially physical and sexual violence, which take different forms such as “torture, ill-treatment, cruel and inhuman and degrading treatment, slavery, forced labor.” It is largely used in international instruments without differentiating between women and men and has been criticized for this reason. Different forms of violence such as domestic violence and VAW are not included in documents and policies. On the other hand, policy documents that put gender equality on the agenda specifically emphasize women and gender.

» The concept of “women’s empowerment” comes to the fore in challenging the patriarchal social structure that limits and prevents women’s participation in all areas of social life, exploits their labor, and oppresses them. The norm of women’s empowerment, which is increasingly appearing in international instruments, has also become the subject of national legislation with a law in Bolivia criminalizing VAWP.

» The norm of “due diligence” is one that the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on violence against women has particularly raised. This norm imposes on States the responsibility to prevent violence regardless of the perpetrator, to compensate for the damage it causes, and to not transfer this obligation to other institutions (Ertürk, 2006; 2015). This norm is also included in the Istanbul Convention. Yakın Ertürk emphasized the importance of using the norm of due diligence to evaluate future studies on prevention, protection, prosecution and punishment for combating VAW (Ertürk, 2015).

» The norm of the “responsibility of States to prevent discrimination” underlines the responsibilities and commitments of States to ensure gender equality. It is included in conventions and documents such as CEDAW, the Beijing Action Plan and the Istanbul Convention, which bring discrimination against women to the agenda.

» The norm of “gender equality” draws attention to the fact that the norm of equality alone is not enough. CEDAW mentions de facto equality beyond equality before the law, considering that equality does not mean the same thing for all people and that the legal system is organized based on equality between women and men. CEDAW notes that equality before the law (de jure) is not enough, and that real (de facto) equality cannot be achieved if the underlying causes of the inequalities women face are not addressed. In addition to CEDAW, gender equality is specifically mentioned in the Beijing Action Plan, with both emphasizing equality of sameness and equality of difference. It has since been increasingly brought to the agenda in conventions and policy documents

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## National Legislative and Policy Framework

In this report, Türkiye's legislation and relevant policy documents (Annex 2) have been assessed based on identified international norms. Although Türkiye's national legislation on combating VAW has existed since 1998, there is no legal regulation directly addressing VAWP as in many other countries. Legislation regulating political rights is not gender sensitive and does not define the barriers women face in exercising their political rights or outline detailed steps to combat those barriers.

Recent amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Türkiye can be considered important steps towards compliance with international conventions. In 2004, article 10 of the Constitution regulating equality before the law was amended to read: "Women and men have equal rights. The State is obliged to ensure that this equality is realized," and article 90 was revised to add: "In case of disputes that may arise due to the fact that international treaties on fundamental rights and freedoms duly put into effect and laws contain different provisions on the same subject, the provisions of the international treaty shall prevail." In 2010, a provision relating to equal rights for women and men was added to article 10, which read: "Measures to be taken for this purpose cannot be interpreted as contrary to the principle of equality." The Constitution contains the norms of "equality," "prohibition of discrimination," "respect for human dignity," "non-violence," "state responsibilities in preventing discrimination," and "gender equality."

Following the entry into force of CEDAW in Türkiye in 1986, several important items came to the agenda including the amendment of provisions contrary to equality between women and men in national legislation, a focus on policies for the realization of equality between women and men, and institutional restructuring. The General Directorate on the Status and Problems of Women was established in 1990 as a national mechanism for promoting gender equality. Now named the General Directorate on the Status of Women (GDSW), this institution currently serves under the Ministry of Family and Social Services. While the action plans on domestic VAW and gender equality prepared by GDSW to date have not explicitly addressed VAWP, the first National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2008-2013) and the Strategy Paper and Action Plan on Women's Empowerment (2018-2023) mention women's

participation in politics and decision-making processes as essential conditions of democracy. The main strategies of these action plans for promoting women's political participation are: providing necessary legal regulations, regulating public policies, collaborating with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), raising awareness via media campaigns and adding relevant content to formal and non-formal education curricula. The three national action plans that specifically aim to combat VAW include strategies such as strengthening access to justice, reviewing national legislation and policies, ensuring necessary legal regulations, increasing organizational capacity and coordination, providing preventive and protective services, raising awareness on VAW, and collecting systematic, reliable and comparable data about VAW. There has been no national action plan on gender equality since 2013.

Gender equality was emphasized in the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Development Plans prepared by the Republic of Türkiye for five-year periods. The most recent, the Eleventh Development Plan (2019-2023), includes a target to increase the proportion of women in parliament in 2018 from 17.3% to 20% in 2023 as well as targets to prevent VAW, early and forced marriages, and all forms of abuse.

The primary laws regulating political life, political decision-making and political participation processes and principles in Türkiye are: the Law on Political Parties, the Law on the Organization and Duties of the Supreme Electoral Council, the Law on Elections of Administrations and Neighbourhood *Mukhtars* and Community Council Boards, the Law on Metropolitan Municipalities, the Law on Municipalities, and the Law on the Administrative Organization of the Presidency of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye. These regulations largely lack measures to support women's participation in political life and norms to guide the fight against barriers, discrimination and VAWP.

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<sup>13</sup> National Action Plans on Combating Domestic Violence against Women (2007-2010; 2016-2020; 2021-2025); National Action Plan on Gender Equality (2008-2013; 2014-2018 unpublished); The Strategy Paper and Action Plan on Women's Empowerment 2018-2023.

The Law on the Basic Provisions of Elections and Electoral Rolls regulates the principles of elections, electoral districts, constituencies, voters, persons who cannot vote, duties and powers of electoral boards, election offenses, and affairs before, during and after elections.<sup>14</sup> There is a Supreme Electoral Council in the capital, Ankara, and election boards in the provinces and districts. Election committees are responsible for ensuring the orderly conduct of elections and for supervising election affairs. As the law ensures the right to vote for every citizen and includes measures for security during the electoral process, it is in line with the norms of equality and non-violence. However, it does not include any provisions that ensure the safety of women politicians or women voters during campaigns or elections.

The Law on Political Parties<sup>15</sup> “covers provisions on the establishment, organization, activities, duties, powers and responsibilities, acquisition of property, income and expenditures, auditing, closure and dissolution of political parties.” This law regulates the principles regarding the conditions for becoming a member of political parties, disciplinary offenses and penalties, and regulations on the establishment of subsidiary units such as women’s or youth branches. While it is in line with norms of equality and non-discrimination, the law does not include principles and actions to increase women’s participation in political parties—such as compulsory gender quotas or the zipper system—or the representativeness of women’s organizations within parties, nor does it include measures to address VAWP.

The Law on Parliamentary Election<sup>16</sup> regulates issues such as parliamentary election system procedures, the number and distribution of deputies and electoral districts, principles regarding the election period and times, and the nomination of candidates. According to the law, any Turkish citizen over the age of 18 can be elected as a Member of Parliament (MP), and not being a member of a political party does not preclude someone from running for Parliament. The law does not include the aforementioned international norms of equality, prohibition of discrimination, respect for human dignity, non-violence, women’s empowerment, due diligence, State responsibilities in preventing discrimination, and gender equality.

According to the Bylaw of the Parliament, an MP is to be punished with a warning if he/she interrupts in the councils and meetings, breaches peace and working order or teases someone; the perpetrator receives a reprimand if he/she utters rude and hurtful words or insults; and the perpetrator is temporarily removed from Parliament if he/she attacks someone.

The Law on Elections of Administrations and Neighbourhood Mukhtars and Community Council Boards<sup>17</sup> regulates the principles and procedures regarding the elections of local government bodies. The law includes information about the electoral system such as the rules and principles during elections, election periods and times, and issues such as candidacy and eligibility for election for members of the provincial general assembly, mayor and municipal council members, village and neighbourhood mukhtars, and members of community council board. This law refers to the norm of equality.

Election security is the responsibility of the law enforcement agencies under the governorships. Law No. 3152 on the Organization and Duties of the Ministry of Interior, dated 1985, does not include a specific article on elections and electoral security, but the Ministry of Interior has the duty to “protect internal security and public security, public order and public morality, and the rights and freedoms enshrined in the Constitution” by managing the internal security institutions under it. The law does not include any of the international norms mentioned.

Law No. 5216 on Metropolitan Municipalities, dated 2004, regulates the legal status, duties, powers and responsibilities of the metropolitan municipality administration, the metropolitan mayor, and the metropolitan municipal council, as well as the principles regarding the work, duties and powers of metropolitan municipal bodies and specialized commissions. Municipal Law No. 5393, dated 2005, includes a provision for the opening of guesthouses for women and children in municipalities with a population of over 50,000. However, the population limit was raised with an amendment in 2012, and it became compulsory for metropolitan municipalities and municipalities with a population of more than 100,000 to open guesthouses for women and children subjected to violence. The Municipal Law meets the norm of non-violence.

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<sup>14</sup> Law No. 298 dated 1961

<sup>15</sup> Law No. 2820 dated 1983

<sup>16</sup> Law No. 2839 dated 1983.

<sup>17</sup> Law No. 2972 dated 1984.

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The Law on the Administrative Organization of the Presidency<sup>18</sup> of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye<sup>19</sup>, the Bylaw of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, the Law on the Establishment and Rules of Procedures of the Constitutional Court,<sup>20</sup> the Law on the Election of the President of the Republic<sup>21</sup> and the Law on the Organization and Duties of the Supreme Electoral Council do not include international norms.<sup>22</sup>

Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence against Women, dated 2012, aims to combat violence and to overcome the limitations of Law No. 4320, dated 1998, on the Protection of the Family. The law is in line with the international conventions that Türkiye has signed, especially the Istanbul Convention. It defines domestic violence and VAW and addresses the physical, sexual, psychological and economic dimensions of violence. It defines the measures to be taken for victims of violence and those in danger of being subjected to violence, as well as measures against perpetrators of violence. The law also includes the establishment of Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers (ŞÖNİM), which are responsible for support services related to the prevention of violence, the implementation of protective measures, and for monitoring violence, and operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The law is in line with international norms on VAW as it references international human rights conventions, particularly the Istanbul Convention, defines VAW as a violation of women's human rights, underscores sensitivity to gender equality, defines the measures to be taken by the State to combat VAW, and emphasizes the fulfillment of these measures in a manner befitting human dignity. The law includes norms of equality, respect for human dignity, non-discrimination and gender equality. The Implementing Regulation on the law also includes norms of non-violence, women's empowerment and gender equality.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, the Regulation on ŞÖNİM and the Regulation on the Opening and Operation of Women's Guesthouses contain all norms except the norm of due diligence.

As a result of the determined efforts of women's organizations, amendments were made to both the Turkish Civil Code (TMK) and the Turkish Penal Code (TCK) to legal provisions that violate equality between women

and men. As the latest example of these regulations, the 2022 amendment to the TCK determined the penalty for the crime of intentional homicide committed against a woman to be aggravated life imprisonment. In addition, the lower limits of the penalties to be imposed for crimes of intentional injury, torture, cruelty and threats against women were also determined, and stalking was defined as a criminal act. As such, the TCK includes norms of non-violence, respect for human dignity, due diligence, equality and non-discrimination.

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<sup>18</sup> Law No. 6253 dated 2011.

<sup>19</sup> It has been in force since 1973.

<sup>20</sup> Law No. 6216 dated 2011.

<sup>21</sup> Law No. 6271 dated 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Law No. 7062 dated 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Entered into force in 2013.

## Human Rights Institutions

The mechanisms that can be used to address VAWP include EOC, the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (TİHEK) and the Ombudsman Institution (KDK).<sup>24</sup> EOC was established to work within the Parliament in line with gender equality and non-discrimination norms. It examines the complaints it receives regarding gender inequalities and gender-based discrimination and communicates with the relevant authorities to achieve their resolution. Sub-commissions established under EOC operate temporarily during the legislative year and work on specially designated areas of gender inequalities and gender-based discrimination. It shares information and conducts study visits with experts from public institutions, universities and NGOs within these areas. Sub-commissions report on their work and submit policy recommendations to the relevant public institutions. Among the reports prepared by EOC to date is the ‘Gender-Responsive Parliament Needs Analysis Workshop and Self-Assessment Implementation Report,’ which addresses women’s participation in political life. The 2012 report was prepared in partnership with UN Women and IPU within the framework of “UN Joint Program on Fostering an Enabling Environment for Gender Equality in Turkey” implemented with the financial support of the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) between 2011 and 2014. While the report sets targets to increase women’s participation in parliaments, it does not include concrete steps to combat the discrimination and violence that prevent women from exercising their political rights.

TİHEK<sup>25</sup> was established to address the protection and promotion of human rights and the prevention of rights violations. The institution is responsible for examining, investigating and evaluating allegations of rights violations—either upon complaint or on its own initiative— notifying the relevant institutions and organizations of its assessments, following up, and taking legal action against those responsible. It also works to prevent torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment, follows developments in the human rights field, and carries out training activities on the implementation of human rights conventions to which Türkiye is a party. The founding law of TİHEK (2016) refers to the norm of equality by emphasizing that “everyone is equal in the enjoyment of rights and freedoms recognized by law.” The institution’s emphasis

on “acting in line with the prevention of discrimination in the enjoyment of rights and freedoms based on human dignity” refers to both respect for human dignity and the norm of non-discrimination. Including torture and ill-treatment among the institution’s duties also incorporates the norm of non-violence.

KDK<sup>26</sup> operates as an independent complaint mechanism for the functioning of public services. Upon receiving complaints from individuals or entities regarding the functioning of public administrations, it fulfills its responsibility to examine, investigate and make recommendations on the administration’s transactions, actions, attitudes and behaviours in terms of compliance with the law and within the framework of the understanding of justice based on human rights. The institution’s founding law emphasizes the norm of prohibition of discrimination.

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<sup>24</sup> It was established in 2009 by Law No. 5840.

<sup>25</sup> It was established in 2012 by Law No. 6701.

<sup>26</sup> It was established in 2012 by Law No. 6328.

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## ***Political Parties***

In their statutes, political parties operating in Türkiye often adopt the principle of contributing to the fight against gender-based violence by committing to act against the discrimination and violence faced by women in politics. By defining VAW in the private or public sphere as a party crime in the statutes of political parties, parties can punish members who commit acts of violence by removing them permanently or temporarily. They can also prioritize discussion of crimes against children, women and LGBTIQ+ people in disciplinary boards. Some political parties also make commitments in their statutes to adopt positive actions like the zipper system, gender quotas or extending the power of women's organization within the party. However, since the Law on Political Parties, with which parties are obliged to comply, does not include any provisions on violence and discrimination against women or positive actions like compulsory quotas, it is up to parties to decide whether to include a commitment to combatting gender-based violence or adopt any positive actions in their statutes. It should be noted that the women's branches of many political parties are defined as subsidiary organizations in line with the Law on Political Parties, often without their own budgets and without voting rights even if they participate in committees. On the other hand, "the women's assembly model" in some parties is an empowering model as it enables women members to address women's issues. In sum, political parties' practices around VAWP differ immensely.

Even though national legislation for combating VAW exists, there are significant regulatory gaps in terms of access to political decision-making and leadership positions.

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# SELECTED COUNTRY EXAMPLES OF ADDRESSING VAWP

The problem of VAWP is difficult to articulate, both because violence is seen as a natural part of politics in many countries and because of a predominance of expectations around maintaining the traditional social and political structure. While VAWP is a new concept in politics, important steps are starting to be taken at the country level in parallel with international organizations' efforts around the issue. Although they are limited in number, knowledge and dissemination of good practices in this area are important as they help raise awareness and advance the fight against VAWP. UN Women and the IPU provide important support to countries in this area, ranging from legislation and training to diverse ways of combating the problem. This section provides a brief overview of examples from different countries, drawing on UN Women and IPU publications (UN Women, 2021a; 2018a; 2018b; IPU, 2016).

## ***Good Practices on Legal Regulations: Laws and Protocols***

In 2012, Bolivia became the first country to enact a special law on VAWP with Law No. 243 on Combating Political Violence and Harassment against Women, which defines 17 different acts of violence and related penalties. This law aims to guarantee the full exercise of women's political rights by establishing prevention, monitoring and sanctioning mechanisms against any physical, psychological or sexual aggression or any act of oppression, persecution, harassment or intimidation against women who are elected to or hold any political or public position and their family members, and includes online VAWP. A decree was issued in 2016 to establish the responsibilities of the State, which include ensuring the Supreme Electoral Court's compliance with the law, supporting women plaintiffs, and designing and implementing strategies for verbal and written communication through social networks to prevent gender-based harassment and/or political violence. The Ministry of Justice has banned people with a history of VAW from running for political office. In 2017, the Supreme Electoral Court adopted specific regulations for processing complaints and resignations for VAWP cases and in 2018, the Bolivian Parliament established an investigative committee on harassment and political violence. The

committee, made up of women members of political parties, is reviewing the code of ethics for parliamentarians to ensure that harassment complaints and the fight against VAWP are fully harmonized with national laws (IPU, 2019). In addition, Law No. 1096 on Political Organizations, which is an equality law and includes a section on VAWP, was amended to include provisions on allocating special budgets to support women candidates' campaigns, ensuring gender equality in institutional structures and policy agendas and protecting women's rights (A/73/301; UN Women, 2018b).

In Mexico, the Protocol on Gender-Based Political Violence against Women, ratified in 2016, defines VAWP and sets out responsibilities for the implementation of the protocol as well as the responsibilities of authorities and those who collect and analyse data on VAWP. It also empowers local public election bodies to sanction party members who commit acts of violence. The protocol, applied in over 20 elections, was updated in 2017 (A/73/301). Mexico also amended eight national laws in 2020 to include provisions to prevent and prosecute VAWP. In the same year, a directive was adopted to revoke the candidacy of any person found guilty of gender-based violence, and a National Registry of Sanctioned Persons for Violence against Women in Politics was created (UN Women, 2021b).

In Kenya, the Electoral Offences Act of 2016 prohibits the use of violence in elections, including sexual violence. Based on this law, the National Commission for Gender Equality prepares annual reports to the national parliament on the fulfillment of obligations under international and domestic standards regarding the status of women in political life. As a result of these efforts, the Commission of Inquiry into Post-Election Violence was established to investigate VAWP, which in turn raised the proposal to establish an Office of the Rapporteur on Sexual Violence (A/73/301; UN Women, 2020). In addition to legislative measures, training manuals were developed, workshops were organized, and efforts were made to ensure women's safety during elections and support women who were subjected to violence in politics (UN Women, 2021a).

Legal regulations have been drafted by the Legislative Assembly in Costa Rica to combat sexual harassment. In 2011, the Legislative Assembly adopted Rules of Procedure



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in combating sexual harassment, the purpose of which is “to take steps to prevent, investigate and punish sexual harassment” in the Legislative Assembly (IPU, 2019). In 2013, it adopted a second internal standard-setting instrument, the Protocol on workplace harassment (IPU, 2019). The Rules of Procedure in combating sexual harassment and the Protocol on workplace harassment apply only to staff of the Legislative Assembly of Costa Rica. These legal regulations provide for complaints being handled by an interdisciplinary committee coordinated by the human resources director and including a doctor or psychologist from the health services department and a lawyer (IPU, 2019).

In Tunisia, which unlike many other countries adopted legislation on combating VAW in 2017, article 3 of Law No. 58 defines political violence as an “act or conduct that has the purpose or results in depriving or impeding women; partisan, political or associative activities, or any woman’s fundamental rights or freedoms.” Article 18 of the law stipulates that “the perpetrator of political violence shall be fined one thousand dinars and imprisoned for six months if the offense is repeated” (UN Women, 2021a).

### **Good Practices on Monitoring: Observatories**

In addition to legal regulations, another model in the fight against VAWP is the establishment of observatories. Observatories in Bolivia, Mexico, Zimbabwe and Tunisia monitor complaints and cases of VAWP, provide support to survivors of violence and generate relevant data (UN Women, 2021a).

The Observatory in Mexico, which was established in 2014, is considered the most institutionalized in Latin America. It monitors and evaluates progress in women’s political participation, generates and publishes data for government and civil society, aggregates best practices on strategies to strengthen women’s political participation, and promotes alliances for the implementation of international normative frameworks on women’s political participation (UN Women, 2021a).

The Gender Observatory in Zimbabwe, established in 2017, developed a training manual designed to help ensure women’s safety in elections that includes the causes of VAWP, violence reduction and the role of police in response. Security forces’ awareness of and capacities around VAWP were increased through these trainings, and VAWP reduction was included in their responsibilities during elections (UN Women, 2021a).

The National Observatory for the Prevention of Violence against Women in Tunisia was established in 2020. In addition to the national observatory, a local observatory has been established specifically to report cases of VAWP and support survivors of violence (UN Women, 2021a).

In Tanzania, the Cross-Party Women’s Platform monitored cases of physical, sexual and psychological VAW during the 2015 elections, with trained observers in 14 regions surveying more than 1,500 respondents (A/73/301).

### **Good Practices on Reporting, Data Collection, Guideline Preparation and Trainings**

In many countries, various efforts are being undertaken to combat VAWP such as reporting cases of violence, collecting data, and reviewing rules, codes of ethics and articles of law that prevent combating VAWP within the existing system. This has been followed by the development and implementation of training for public officials working in different fields, including Members of Parliament and law enforcement officials (UN Women, 2021a).

In 2015, a committee of representatives of all relevant parties in Canada’s House of Commons published a report summarizing the process for handling sexual harassment complaints (Krook & Restrepo Sanin, 2016). Subsequently, a policy to prevent sexual harassment was introduced and a Code of Conduct for Members of the House of Commons was developed. In addition to establishing complaint procedures, training on the sexual harassment policy has been organized for members of the House of Commons and staff, and all members are expected to sign a document committing to keeping the workplace free from sexual harassment and respecting the code of conduct (IPU, 2019).

In Zimbabwe, the Electoral Commission organized training for its members. As a result of the training, commissioners adopted a number of gender-sensitive electoral regulations, including affirmative action practices for breastfeeding mothers, persons with disabilities and pregnant women, voter education, increasing the number of women registered to vote and who are polling agents, and adopting a political party code of conduct that includes commitments to prevent VAWP (UN Women, 2021a).

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In Tanzania, a training manual<sup>27</sup> for police on gender, human rights and the role of police in elections was developed ahead of the 2015 elections. In addition, the Tanzania Police Force has developed an incident reporting and response system that facilitates rapid response to incidents of violence during elections (UN Women, 2021a).

In Tunisia, during the 2019 elections, guidelines encouraging reporting and action on incidents of VAWP were prepared and distributed to observers (UN Women, 2021a).

In Sweden, Parliament reviewed its policy and guidelines on abusive behaviour in 2017 to better tackle sexism, bullying and sexual harassment targeting parliamentary staff. Issues of psychological violence and sexual harassment are included in the training provided to parliamentary staff upon their employment (IPU, 2018; 2019).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the code of ethics was amended in 2018 to introduce a prohibition of sexual harassment, classifying a violation of the prohibition of sexual harassment as the most serious breach of the code of ethics and prohibiting any action against an elected official who reports sexual harassment (UN Women, 2021a).

In Finland, a zero-tolerance policy against harassment for parliamentarians, parliamentary staff, and parliamentary assistants was revised in 2017 to define unacceptable behaviour and prevent harassment. A Parliamentary Workplace Guideline that includes information on what to do in the event of harassment was prepared, and all parliamentarians and parliamentary staff receive training when they start work on the topics covered in the guidelines (IPU, 2019).

Similar to Finland, France's training for parliamentarians and new parliamentary assistants at the beginning of the legislative year includes a module on harassment. National Assembly employees receive training on sexual harassment and sign a commitment to respect the Criminal Code. In addition, the Senate Rules of Procedure were amended in 2017 to include specific disciplinary sanctions for perpetrators of psychological or sexual harassment

commensurate with the seriousness of the offense, including dismissal from office. Interpretative provisions were also adopted, which set out disciplinary sanctions for senators and staff who engage in psychological or sexual harassment. In the Senate, a temporary protective measure was introduced in 2018 for cases of alleged harassment between a senator/employer and a parliamentary assistant. Given the subordinate position of the assistant, in cases where she or he is forced to take sick leave or resign, the recruitment allowance is suspended to prevent the accused senator from hiring a new assistant. Depending on the seriousness of the case, the President of the Senate may decide to refer the matter to the Public Prosecutor (IPU, 2019).

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<sup>27</sup> The guide was produced in partnership with the Network of Women Police Officers from the Tanzania Police Force as part of the Democratic Empowerment Project (DEP) with support from UNESCO, UN Women and UNDP.

# QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this qualitative research is to understand VAWP within the context of the experiences, feelings, perceptions and opinions of women in politics, experts working in this field, NGOs and young people concerned with the issue. In the fieldwork, the research was conducted under the safe name “Barriers and Discrimination against Women in Politics.” Ethical approval for the study was obtained from Hacettepe University Ethics Commission. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted as part of the fieldwork undertaken between 13 May and 2 September 2022. As can be seen in Table 1, 30 in-depth interviews were conducted with women politicians who were or are actively involved in national and local politics,

and 24 interviews were conducted with key informants from different institutions in the relevant fields. Of the in-depth interviews, 19 were conducted face-to-face and 11 online, and of the key informant interviews, six were conducted face-to-face and 18 online. In addition, six focus group discussions (4 heterogeneous and 2 homogenous) comprised of various genders, political parties, and institutions were conducted online on the position of youth and women in politics and recommendations. Most of the interviews were conducted with people from Ankara, Adana, Antalya, Diyarbakır, Kars, Trabzon, Muğla, İzmir, Tunceli, Elâzığ, Kütahya and Konya.

**Table 1. Number of interviews by characteristics**

IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS (A)	NUMBER	KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS (B)	NUMBER
Member of Parliament (active or former)	10	Public institution representatives (Ministries and other public institutions)	8
Mayor/vice mayor	6	Representatives of women’s units of parties	3
Member of provincial general assembly/city council	8	Representatives of the youth units of parties	3
Mukhtar	6	Academics	4
		Representatives from Non-governmental Organizations	6
<b>Total number of in-depth interviews</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>Total key informant interviews</b>	<b>24</b>
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS		NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS	
FG1- Young women from youth networks (only women)		5	
FG2- Young people from youth networks (mixed gender)		6	
FG3- Representatives of women’s NGOs (only women)		7	
FG4- Representatives of NGOs, trade unions and professional organizations (mixed gender)		4	
FG5- Representatives of women’s units of political parties (only women, different parties)		4	
FG6- Representatives of youth units from political parties (mixed gender)		4	
<b>Total Focus Group discussions</b>		<b>6</b>	<b>30</b>

The first contact with MPs and participants in official institutions and organizations was largely made by the UN Women team through official letters, phone calls and e-mails. Contacts for the other interviews were made by the field coordinator and project coordinator, with the support of the participant team, via e-mail, telephone and internet searches as well as through contributions from the research team and its circle.

The ethical and safety guidelines developed and updated by the World Health Organization (WHO) for use in research on VAW were adapted to all stages of this study. The purpose of using a safe name in the research was to enable participants to explain their participation in this research more easily to their close circles and to prevent them from rejecting the research from the beginning with discourse such as “there is no violence against women in politics.” While the use of a safe name had a positive impact on the participation of most participants and political party representatives, the use of the term “politics” in the research title caused hesitation and concern, especially among representatives of public institutions. However, it was observed that without the use of a safe name, it would have been more difficult for public officials, in particular, to volunteer for the research. The safe name contributed to participants’ comfort around participating in in-depth interviews.

Difficulties arose during the course of the research such as challenges in accessing participants’ contact information at the initial access stage and refusal to participate in interviews as research on politics was not welcome within the political atmosphere of the country. Young women politicians, in particular, declined to be interviewed due to “not being able to get permission from the political authority of their party to take the day off and take part in the research,”<sup>28</sup> while those working in public institutions declined to be interviewed on the grounds that they

were “politically neutral” or “civil servants.” Mukhtars were also concerned that they might “fall out” with the institutions with which they cooperate and commented that they were “not politicians.” The fact that some of the participants who agreed to be interviewed demanded that the audio recording be stopped while talking about negative events during the interview indicates a degree of uneasiness experienced by some. During the focus group discussions, there were occasional tensions among participants from different political parties, with the main challenges being participants interrupting each other, wanting to leave early due to time constraints, and having difficulties in conducting a nonpartisan discussion. All but two of the research interviews were audio-recorded and all focus groups were video-recorded. Audio and video recordings of the interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and qualitative data were analysed both manually and using NVivo software. The direct quotations included in the report have largely been cited without change but in some cases, there are minor edits to ensure clarity. At the end of the quotations, the abbreviations A (for in-depth interviews), B (for key informant interviews) and FG (for focus group discussions) and the numbers belonging to the interview/focus group discussions in the order they were conducted were used as codes in accordance with the format of the interview.

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<sup>28</sup> Since no permission is required to participate in our research and participation was on a voluntary basis, some participants refused to be interviewed. This suggests that they feel pressure and fear due to the political climate.

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# ACTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

During the qualitative research, generally negative views on Türkiye's political atmosphere emerged. Politics was defined as a field where "people shout at each other, lie and slander," "pursue unearned income," "people are authoritarian," and "bribery and nepotism are at the forefront." Participants described a political party structure that is centralized, does not allow for change, is structured around the authority of a strong leader, and in which decisions are "ordered" from the top down through anti-democratic methods. The majority of interviewees stated that in Türkiye's political atmosphere, not having economic and social capital is unacceptable, as is having an identity outside those that society considers "acceptable." The research, which was conducted in the months prior to the 2023 national elections, illustrates a political environment in which barriers, discrimination and violence are expected risks for women, youth and disadvantaged groups entering politics. "You are at risk, I mean you can be slandered at any time, and it is a risky area," said one MP.

Through the views expressed in the interviews, this research—which focuses in part on women's right to be elected—seeks to reveal how women are excluded from all public spaces related to politics, be it the mukhtar's office, the municipality or Parliament. Women politicians, public servants, youth and women from relevant groups, and representatives of political parties and civil society organizations shared their experiences and views on the process of women's "presence" and "survival" in politics. Even before the questions on VAWP were posed, most interviewees noted that women face many forms of discrimination when they formally seek to enter politics. There are many examples of VAW that women accept as "normal" within politics, whether or not they are named. For example, MP A14 outlined various forms of violence and discrimination:

"... Psychological violence comes first.... Physical violence is happening.... 'I'm a man, I'm stronger than you, know your place! Do not argue with me like an equal.' This also exists within the party. It also exists within the parliament. I think this is the biggest problem. Instinctively, women also feel like... He's trying to get you to cower... Apart from that, there are also more major incidents of violence. He tries to hit you in your femininity [he tries to use your femininity as a weapon against you]... Traps you in a space [he relegates you to the domestic sphere]... There really is economic violence. There are so few women with economic means, and for those who have none, it's like, well, we will offer you some opportunities from the party, but only if you listen to us..."

The different forms of violence that women are subjected to in the field of politics can sometimes overlap and occur simultaneously. In Box 1, the acts of violence mentioned in the research are presented under headings that indicate forms of violence without differentiating them according to various stages of politics. These headings are grouped as "psychological, sexual and physical forms of violence" in line with the guidelines of UN Women (UN Women, 2021a).

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### Box 1: Forms/Acts of Violence against Women in Politics in Türkiye

#### PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

- **Reminding of traditional roles** (reminding women of obligations or care responsibilities perceived to arise from motherhood and being a wife, discrimination based on age, refusal of permission)
- **Underestimation** (not considering women competent, ignoring them, not taking them seriously, not paying attention to them, demanding that they be better equipped, expecting them to constantly prove themselves)
- **Token representation** (using as a showcase, shadowing, using as a symbol, using as a pawn)
- Not including women in candidate lists (excluding them from the list or placing them at the bottom of the list)
- **Discrediting** (engaging in actions and discourses that are corrosive and discrediting to women's personality, slandering them based on honor, gossiping, accusing them of not deserving their position in politics and that the position is a favor to them)
- **Interference** (not giving women the floor, interrupting, limiting what women say, silencing, devaluing what they say)
- **Exclusion from meetings and events** (preventing participation, organizing meetings or events in places inaccessible or unsafe for women)
- **Limiting the spheres of politics** (limiting women's political activity to areas associated with women's traditional roles, such as children, elderly, and family, and considering these areas as secondary or unimportant)
- **Threatening** (using offensive language)
- **Threatening through media and social media** (false accusations, "fake news," "lynching,"<sup>29</sup> targeting)
- **Insulting/swearing/calling them derogatory nicknames/ridicule** (based on physical characteristics and clothing)
- **Using sexist language** (sexist discourses)

#### ECONOMIC VIOLENCE

- High nomination fees
- Making labor invisible (exploitation of women's labor, not giving them what they deserve)
- Not allocating sufficient budget for women-related activities in their own political party
- Questioning the budget for women's activities, criticizing the allocated resources in their own political party
- Damaging personal property

#### SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- Sending sexually explicit/obscene text messages, emails, voice messages, videos or photos
- Taking secret sexual or obscene photographs
- Making "adult" jokes
- Sexist insults/swearing
- Spreading rumors about their sex life
- Making sexual comments and accusations (e.g., "if she is promoted, she must be having a relationship")

#### PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

- Attacking/physically intimidating/cornering
- Throwing objects to cause damage
- Attacking with guns and sharp objects

In this section, the acts of violence that women face at various stages of politics are described, including during the periods of nomination, campaigning and holding

office, and the perpetrators are highlighted. In addition, the differences between national and local politics are also presented.

<sup>29</sup> The term "lynching" is commonplace in the context of Turkish social media and is used to describe a targeted campaign through which a group publicly attacks someone.

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# NOMINATION PROCESS

In most of the interviews conducted during the research, politics was described directly or indirectly as a “male dominant sphere” and “men’s club,”<sup>30</sup> and it was mentioned that it is difficult for women to even conceive of being included in this sphere. While this perception needs to change, it was also emphasized that this political approach, which has long been dominant, has successfully kept women out of politics through different methods. Those responsible for the exclusion of women in politics include a wide range of social groups that do not support their political participation for various reasons, including family, friends and relatives, political parties of which women are members, the media,<sup>31</sup> and voters. Among the acts of violence that these groups perpetrate to prevent women from participating in politics, psychological and economic violence are most prominent.

## Perpetrators of VAWP During the Nomination Process: Family Members

The interviews revealed that many family members use deterrent control methods such as “protection” or “reminding women of traditional roles” to prevent women from participating in politics, which is defined as a “dirty” field. The approval required for women who want to participate in mainstream politics entails “getting permission” from their fathers or husbands. In the context of this “dirty politics” discourse used to exclude women, B1, who has more than 15 years of experience in local governments and still holds a managerial position, highlights an important point:

*“Those who keep women out of politics, who supposedly protect women by keeping them out, who protect them in their own way, who protect them from politics, they think this way. Because they protect from ‘dirty’ politics. But men are always involved in this. So if dirty politics is created, it is created by men. For example, he does not think that something alternative can be done.” B1*

B1’s statement suggests that the mentality that fosters “dirty” politics does not indicate that men want this situation to change. On the other hand, the political views of the family in which women were raised or those of their newly established family are quite influential in women’s decisions to participate in politics. In addition to factors such as women’s family relations, the family’s relationship with politics, and the presence of politicians in the family, many factors undoubtedly affect women’s candidacy in positive or negative ways, such as women’s political experience, desire/motivation, the constituency, the region where they plan to run for office, and the harmony between their family’s views and those of the party they want to run for.

Regardless of all these factors, respondents also expressed concerns about women’s decisions to take an active role in national and local politics as “stepping outside traditional roles of womanhood.” Control over women and the traditional roles women are expected to play were also mentioned by young people. B13, who is the head of the youth unit/structure of a political party, explained spouses’ impact on married women’s low participation in politics by comparing women and men who enter politics: “It is because men do not want their wives to participate in politics. So while we do not see this in society, we do not see women pushing men away from politics or putting pressure on them, unfortunately, we see this among men.”

Women’s economic power—one of the primary factors that influence whether women enter politics—also reveals the importance of family support, especially in terms of national elections. However, defining politics as a “dirty” or “negative” field and supporting the view that women should be protected from it affects women’s active participation in politics and can be used as an argument against women who do participate.

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<sup>30</sup> “Men’s club” is also the title of Serpil Çakır’s book in which she published the results of her years-long research with women MPs.

<sup>31</sup> Media includes traditional media as well as new media.

## Perpetrators of VAWP During the Nomination Process: Close Relatives and Friends

Similar to the “protective” mechanism of families, women’s close circle of relatives and friends may also cause women to distance themselves from politics. The desire to take part in politics is sometimes met with scorn and sarcasm by friends and close relatives. A2, one of the young women who participated in establishing the municipal youth assembly’s activities, stated that her friends made fun of her being a woman politician by saying, “...You were the only one missing in politics...” She expressed her feelings about discrimination by noting, “If I were a man, everyone would definitely say ‘Wow, well done, you did well, you had good courage,’ [laughs] and they would definitely make more supportive statements.” A2 explains that her friends reminded her that her career would prevent her from getting married:

*“For example, they see me as marginal... They say, ‘You cannot be happy if you go on like this, men, people are afraid of you. That’s why you postpone your future marriage, you focus too much on that career part.... because men like to be heroes. You do not give them the opportunity to be heroes because you stand very strong.’” A2*

## Perpetrators of VAWP During the Nomination Process: Members of Their Political Party

For women who are determined to run for political office with or without the support of their family and close relatives, the support of their political party is very influential for their presence in politics. However, women can also be subjected to various acts of violence by colleagues and superiors in their political parties. Women’s political background and their relationship with the party for which they are running plays a significant role in this respect. For example, women with a longstanding history within a political party are more likely to be accepted by the party than those who are fairly new. Although the nomination processes of political parties vary, women in the interviews mentioned the forms of violence they were subjected to as a woman throughout the process, from acceptance as a party member to candidacy. Among the forms of violence perpetrated by both men and women members of political parties against women candidates,

psychological and economic forms of violence stand out.

The approach of political parties to women’s participation in politics has been described with words such as “showcase,” “ornament” and “symbol,” and it has been expressed that parties perceive women’s representation at a token level. MPs, public institution officials and young people all mentioned that candidate lists were characterized by the approach of “let’s have one woman MP” or “there are too many men here, let’s have two women.” One of the young women who participated in the focus group discussions mentioned that among the many criticisms of political parties, she did not find the quota practice of political parties sincere:

*“...First of all, of course, the judgment against women is present both within parties and in society! Especially the perspective towards single women; if they are not married and often do not have children, the meeting times are not adjusted for them, or they face harassment and accusations if they are single or if they enter politics as a single woman. These are hitting below the belt... I do not know whether I’m going to do politics with these hitting below the belt or fight against them... Apart from that, of course, there is the issue of quotas, and since the parties that apply quotas mostly apply it for show, women do not actually find it sincere...” (Participant from FG1)*

As an extension of the “token representation” approach of political parties, women’s place in the candidate lists can easily be changed in favor of men even if the women were nominated as candidates. This situation, which can also apply to male candidates, operates in different ways for women candidates, who are already fewer in number. A5, a counselor in the district municipality, said that although her candidacy for the district chairperson position was finalized, she received a call from the district office a week after the announcement of her candidacy that said, “Sis, I’m sorry, we have chosen one candidate. No hard feelings! This is our candidate. We support this.” The fact that women politicians were removed from lists at the last minute is also illustrated in the narrative of B4, who works in the municipality:

*“We listened to the very difficult journey of all women councillors from their experiences. None of them easily become women councillors. That the nomination process was especially very difficult, even if they were candidates for nomination, they were withdrawn from the lists at the last minute... (for example) my friend was a*



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*candidate... she had no money; she sold her house during that election process to run campaigns... she spent a huge budget, she put a lot of effort, she had been in the women's movement for many years, and she had worked very hard in her party... on the morning of her nomination, her name was deleted and the name of the daughter-in-law of someone from the party was written, it was a huge devastation for her..." B4*

Although last-minute changes in the lists vary according to the internal dynamics of the parties, it occurs in almost all of them. In addition to women's names being deleted from the lists and replaced with men's names, the fact that the portion allocated to women is very small has also come to the fore as a form of psychological violence. A17 mentions that in this example, which expresses the dirty but familiar face of political competition, elections are transformed into "a race between rival women who are pitted against each other":

*"...A cake, you know, a round cake, we divided it. First, we divided it into quarters, twenty-five percent. Women are told that at the point of governance, even at the first step, before they reach the nomination, they say, "You deal with this twenty," that is, among yourselves, and this has now become so chronic that women are at the point of competing with women in politics. Actually, you don't make the cake, you do not slice it, they give you something, and this slice gets smaller and smaller in the candidacy. Well, let's say there is a potential of thirty-three percent when we look at the female representation, i.e., membership rates within the parties because there is usually one-third of female members on average. That third is directed to representation by one percent. So instead of women having to deal with the other side to be in that one percent... For example, a woman is elected, and everyone talks about her. Ninety-nine men were elected on the other side, why don't you talk about them? Therefore, there is a certain place for women. Jealousy and rivalry between women can become so fierce in that space that it can never be resolved." A17*

In accordance with the patriarchal norms of politics, the spaces and times in which political decisions are made can be determined in a way that excludes women. The experience of one of the female friends of B16, a representative of civil society organizations, during the nomination process is a good example of this in play in

the formation of nomination lists:

*"A woman is a nomination candidate from [party name]. So, she says she was a candidate, but so what? In the meetings we had in the afternoon until the evening, my candidacy was finalized, but when I went to the party the next morning, everything had changed. Because at night [name of the place] they went to [name of the place] and decided, she says. I can go to [name of the place] if I need to, but I have a lot of work at home, I have a lot of things going on at the same time." B16*

MP A17 also mentioned that if the visibility and power of a woman politician exceeds expectations, it can be met with attitudes that may cause her to be disqualified and out of the race, and that the method of disqualifying women from candidacy sends the message that women should know how to stay within the limits set for them.

Mentioning that being an MP is perceived as a profession for "old, rich and male" people, MP A14 states that women are "allowed" to exist in politics only in the areas designated for them and that they face serious resistance. A14 defines the role of women politicians as "pawns" in token politics:

*"...There is a staff of old rich men. Let them produce everything, support them... If you have an idea, then you are no longer acceptable. So they produce, they tell you, you do what they say. Do not do anything more, do not do anything less; then your second term is guaranteed, your third term is guaranteed. But if you go back to the party and say there is a mistake here. There is patriarchy and they say, 'You have become feminist, you do not know how to be a party member.' Pawns. Not to approve, but a pawn role has been assigned.... Don't interfere in big politics... They openly say that women are the reason for the existence of such a thing as women's branches, women are imprisoned at home. We cannot reach them, our women should go home during the election period so that they can reach women voters. This is the expectation." A14*

Politicians, civil society organizations and public institution employees also stated that women are expected to have more qualifications to secure a place in the "men's club" where many men are easily accepted. A12, who is a member of the city council and has also gone through the

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process of running for Parliament, expressed the high expectations of female candidates' qualifications as follows:

*"When a woman is elected, you know, 'Oh, how many universities did she graduate from?' 'What did she do in her professional life, does she know how to ride a horse? Does she play the violin too?' As if you're going to play the piano in the parliament every day, or you're going to play the violin! There is no such thing. The qualifications required for women are not the same as the qualifications required for men in politics." A12*

B22, who works as an expert in a public institution, said, "...when it comes to women, they want a woman profile that is close to perfection. They want her to be like a man, to be strong, and at the same time not to bring those characteristics of femininity," pointing out that the characteristics expected from women also have masculine qualities. Municipal council member A10 noted that despite the high level of qualifications expected from women, it is very easy to focus on the inadequacy of women candidates. She gave an example from her own situation and mentioned that this expectation is also internalized by women:

*"...Someone says to them from behind 'go for it' and they go. A woman, for example, me, my English, my foreign language is not very good. I always challenge myself on that. I feel like I have to do it. For example, tomorrow or the day after tomorrow, when my resume reaches them... I studied in college, for example... two years of engineering, I did it in the pandemic... I want to study law. But then I realized why I always have to put something on top of something else, to realize this dream of mine. Good mother, good wife, good president, good, good, good, but I look at the other side and men have no such efforts. He goes, if he has money ... he lives it up etc. Of course, I exempt my other companions, there are others who are not like that. But unfortunately, the majority is like this." A10*

Women politicians state that women candidates are not treated equally with male candidates and that women are expected to "prove themselves," but they are approached with the assumption that no matter how good women's resumes may be, men, who are seen as the owners of the political sphere, will have the final say. Female candidates are not seen as competent regardless of their level of education.

Even when women have better qualifications for a place in the "men's club," accusations that women do not deserve their political position persist. Such accusations are accompanied by the myth that women can only get where they do because they are supported, loved and pitied by a "strong man." It is often said that for women who become MPs as a result of hard work, the experience is too harsh, and men use this as an excuse not to take women seriously.

Words discrediting women through slander, defamation or "fake news" are also commonly targeted at women. This was mostly voiced by women politicians who were invited to the party by the leaders based on their experience in the private sector or academia. For example, A24 stated that she was accused of being "immoral" by party members, which she learned was based on training she had previously given to different parties. A24 said that this phrase was coined by party members who did not look favorably on those outside of the party organization and that it was related to the perception of newcomers as "free riders." Even though this prejudice sometimes applies to men as well, for women politicians, it can come up in relation to "honor" and can be used as a justification for party members' intimidating behaviours. Even many of the women with "good resumes" and strong backgrounds stated that they found these discouraging behaviours overwhelming.

B2, who works in the municipality, stated that men, who draw strength from male solidarity, do not see women as equal in politics, and mentioned that women are prevented from participating in politics for many reasons. Among these is the understanding that the only way for women to gain a foothold in politics is with a masculine figure supporting them. This perspective reinforces the assumption that men are "powerful" in politics.

The nomination fees required to become an MP have been cited as economic violence against women in politics. Across Türkiye, where women's participation in economic life—and their incomes—are lower than men's, the fact that many women are unable to afford these fees was mentioned in many interviews with politicians as well as representatives of public institutions and NGOs. B10, a public institution representative, stated that the number of women is higher in parties with no nomination fees.

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Similarly, A5, one of the party assembly members, states that “You need to have huge sums of money to be a candidate for Parliament,” and that “if you have good financial power and you are nominated from a good ranking, you have a better chance of becoming an MP.” She points out that women do not have enough financial power and that being an MP “...depends on financial power... So, those who do not have financial power cannot become MPs. Women do not become MPs because they do not have that kind of economic capital.” B16, a representative of a civil society organization, says of women who want to become parliamentary candidates: “... ‘I went to the party with a hundred million,’ she says, ‘but no one looked at my face.’ I wonder how much money is involved there. She says, ‘This is the most I can give.’” B16 emphasized that this issue should be specifically examined: “Transparency in the financing of politics is important in terms of transforming it into a process that will pave the way for women.” A13, who served as an MP, explained that she was not included in the list of MPs for the next term, and that another MP candidate confessed to her that he was included in the list due to his financial power:

*“I had other deputies with me. They were sitting next to me, we were chatting. ‘Mrs. A13, have you looked at the lists?’ ‘No,’ I said, ‘I know it’s not clear yet.’ ‘No, no, it’s clear,’ he said. ‘Is it?’ I said, ‘Is it clear?’ ‘Yes,’ he said... ‘I guess you’re not on it?’ he said. I said, ‘I’m probably not.’ He said, ‘But I am. But,’ he said, ‘you know what? Some people’s money, some people’s reputation. Not the one with a reputation, the one with money,’ he said. He is supposedly complimenting me, that it is my reputation... (Laughs).” A13*

## **Perpetrators of VAWP During the Nomination Process:** **Media and Social Media**

It was reported that women politicians were rendered invisible by the media and social media during the nomination process and subjected to sexist discourse and slander. B12, from the youth organization of a political party, made a connection with the media coverage of women in general, stating that women candidates do not find a place in national and local media either, noting: “Femicides are talked about, women’s rights are talked about, five men talk about them.”

In addition, examples were given of the unequal competition women candidates face at the very beginning of their struggle to get into politics and of the false news spread about women candidates during primary elections. A9 recalled, “Why did they say that about me.... why are these things being written.... I do not think there is anyone [among women politicians] who has not experienced it.” This form of violence is widespread and has the intention of forcing women to withdraw from a race.

The language used in the media and social media and its negative impact on women candidates have also come to the fore. For example, B1, who has been active in civil society and bureaucracy for many years, draws attention to the following issues regarding the language of the media:

*“The language used is very important. I think there is already a negative language about women. That’s what I think. The language of social media is also a very male-dominated language, so I don’t think it is a language where women are very visible. I think social media is also very effective. Whether it’s the TV series where this female profile is portrayed, or the things that flow on social media, the news... I think these are important because they affect the perspective about women in society... even more seriously. Because I think about it, I have two children, a twenty-one-year-old and an eighteen-year-old, and they both get information from social media.”*  
B1

The use of “male-dominated” and “sexist” language was defined in most of the interviews as a strategy to exclude women from politics both during and after their entry into politics, and is established through mainstream media and social media. This language, which mostly starts with “lynching,” “discrediting” and “defamation” at the nomination stage, has the potential to continue with intensified violence for women who have passed the nomination stage and entered politics. While there was less emphasis on violence through the media and social media during the nomination phase, it was noted that violence increased after becoming involved in politics.

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# CAMPAIGNING PERIOD

Some of the women politicians who completed the nomination and candidacy stages also spoke of the pressure that various actors such as family, friends, their political party, media and voters exerted on them during the period of campaigning and election preparations.

## **Perpetrators of VAWP in the Campaigning Period:** **Families, Close Relatives and Friends**

Women's presence in the public sphere is a stance against the unequal gender norms that define women in terms of household work and caregiving responsibilities and generally associate them with the private sphere. When family, close relatives and friends maintain a preservationist approach and remind women of traditional roles, it seems to have more influence on politicians living in small settlements, although this varies according to social, cultural and economic factors such as the characteristics of the place where the election will be held. On the other hand, during both national and local elections, women politicians may be confronted with various pressures regardless of where they are. For example, A23, the first female mukhtar of a conservative district of the city, mentioned that when she was engaged in election work she encountered lectures from her husband and his family that she was neglecting her responsibilities at home due to the intensity of her election work, and thus disrupting the order in the family:

*"One day he said, 'you do not even make soup, do you realize that?' During election time, I am always running around outside. Because at that time I was working at school, going to school. I come home at 6 o'clock in the evening, I try to distribute leaflets after 6 o'clock... Then his family says 'look, your family order is being disrupted.' That's when my husband says, 'You do not even make soup, have you done the laundry?' Normally, these things are never talked about in our house... It's a policy of intimidation..." A23*

## **Perpetrators of VAWP in the Campaigning Period:** **Members of Their Political Party**

Most of the women politicians who talked about their experiences during the election process stated that political parties' expectations of women were limited to reaching out to women voters. It was also mentioned that in this limited political space, women are often seen as a means of reaching women voters. A10, one of the female politicians who served as a member of the municipal council as well as a provincial party chairperson and who is considering becoming an MP, described the boundaries drawn for her during election campaigns as follows:

*"...Election work starts, you go to the districts. All the candidates are in the same car. You are going to come out and talk. He says to me, for example, 'Why don't you go to women? We are going to a coffeehouse meeting.' Why? Because they are male candidates. The provincial chair sometimes says, 'You,' he says, 'go to women.' I say, 'I can both go to the coffeehouses and women. So I also go to houses. I say, 'Why don't you visit houses with me?'" A10*

Despite the active role of women in the electoral process, it was stated that women's labor was not visible in this process and that democracy remained only in the discourse and not in practice. A1, who has been actively involved in electoral work for many years, made a connection between "representation for tokenism" and economic violence while expressing the invisibility and exploitation of the labor of women knocking on doors during election work:

*"I have always said at the party point that you do the work. Even here, when I experienced some things at the municipality, I said this. They talk about democracy, they talk about equality, you cannot knock on the door without a woman because in election work there are two people, and you cannot send that man without a woman.... It is the woman who will knock on the door. It is the woman who will say 'Hello.' It is the woman who will talk.... Can you knock on that door without a woman?"*

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*No. But you talk about equality. Where is equality? But unfortunately, it is women who do the work, while [there are men] at the top levels, in positions of authority or management, mayors... Why? Because the list is formed. There is a list of eleven or twelve people, but very few women are placed where they can be elected. Down at the bottom, where they cannot be elected. You work, promote the man, the man on top, and he's elected!" A1*

In many interviews, the election campaign period was described as a time when political party members intervened in women's attire. Women politicians stated that they were especially aware of the conservative social structure and that they faced various warnings from political party members even though they adjusted their attire according to the sensitivities of society. For example, A24, a former MP, mentioned that she was surprised when a female member warned her at the party congress she attended for the first time:

*"Do not come to our congress wearing such bright colours again, they do not like it, that kind of thing.' I was surprised, I mean, I'm someone who always likes bright colours, I always wear bright colours. When a woman friend says something like that I thought that there is something that controls women's clothes, there is a mechanism that controls women's clothes... And of course, these things are not talked about much..." A24*

In this process, political parties tend to intervene in women's choices, from where to campaign to their discourse and how they dress when they come to the party. These actions can be carried out by women as well as men in political parties. Although acts of sexual and physical violence were less frequently mentioned in the research, both are present and are commonly perpetrated through social media. Although acts of psychological violence were mostly mentioned, the existence of physical and sexual violence between party members in rally areas was also mentioned. For example, A12, a member of the city council, described a scuffle in the public meeting areas by drawing attention to the relationship between making women invisible and the physical power of men: "I never finished the march in the front line although I started in the front line. Because he elbows her... the other one gets ahead.... It has to be done in certain ways and in certain procedures, (because) who will be visible is a very valuable thing (in politics)." The lack of economic support from political parties for women's campaign work was also cited as a problem.

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## **Perpetrators of VAWP in the Campaigning Period:** **Other Political Parties, Voters and Media**

Women politicians, who become more visible during the election process, may be subjected to different forms of violence by other political party members, voters or the media. A25, a candidate for mayor, stated that a person who had previously committed acts of violence against her that endangered her life had sent threatening messages on social media during the election period. She said that the perpetrator posted statements on his social media accounts that said, "I will complete the work I left unfinished."

Mukhtar A11 reported that she was sexually harassed by another mukhtar in the same province for a year and a half when she was running for her second term: "Except for violent words, beatings, stabbing, things like that, which I could not tell my family, I kept it hidden for a year and a half. May was the last straw (...) the mukhtar sent me a video of him masturbating."

# WHILE HOLDING OFFICE

The initial attitudes of family, close relatives and friends who discourage women from participating in politics can change after winning elections. Even if they did not support women's participation in politics before the elections, a solidarity accompanied by the pride of winning the elections can emerge. Following elections, women are confronted with more people and institutions as they have more contact with members of their political parties and others, and their visibility in the media/social media increases.

## **Perpetrators of VAWP While Holding Office:** *Members of Their Political Party*

Women who were elected shared examples of how difficult it was for “women to be accepted” in a political environment that had for many years been dominated by men. Women politicians in the parliament or municipality mostly mentioned being subjected to different acts of psychological violence by colleagues in their own political parties. Ignoring women, belittling them and devaluing what they say were identified as common actions. For example, MP A27 states that women's opinions are considered wrong, and that women are told “actually you do not know.” According to her, actions such as women's voices being devalued should be defined as violence:

*“...interrupting or, for example, one of the most invisible ones [as an act of violence act] – pretending to listen while the woman is talking and then not paying any attention to her... only referring to men, evaluating what men talk about but not what women talk about, or evaluating what women talk about from a negative point of view... For example, in the field of politics, I think it involves a form of violence... They do not say this explicitly, but through indirect methods...” A27*

Some women politicians shared examples of how they were disregarded even in positions that they deserved and were elected to by working in all stages of the political process. Although younger and older women MPs experienced this disregard in different ways, women are generally disregarded, with politics remaining a male-dominated field. A14, one of the young MPs, states that she does not feel the impact of being married or single in politics and says, “The young women are in much more difficulty than older women. Because when you are an old woman, you deserve a bit of respect on behalf of your mother, your sister. Not because you are a woman, but because you are old. If you are young and female, you are toast,” she says, pointing out that young women in politics are at the bottom of the hierarchy in patriarchal societies.

Similarly, A17, a member of the municipal council, noted the existence of a structure that was not accustomed to women when she recounted her experience of parking in the parking lot reserved for municipal council members on her first day at the municipality and having to convince the attendant that she was a council member. Later, when they had to move to another building due to the earthquake, women were forgotten, as recounted by A17: “They built a building, but they didn't put the door to the women's restroom! We said, ‘Why isn't it there?’ [he asked:] ‘Is there a woman councillor?’ But here she is.” As a metaphor, the “women's restroom without a door” in A17's narrative reveals a great deal about the acceptance of women's presence in politics. The expectations of women can be defined as pretending to be in the political arena but not really being there and not standing in men's way.

Another form of condescension can be seen in the attitudes men display when women speak up. In this context, B7 described her experience as follows: “Because women, you know, to a large extent, have a very difficult time while speaking. I mean, no matter how much of a ‘monster’ woman you are... you know, very cynical looks, mockery, sarcastic smiles, I mean, this is something I have seen in my experience, even if it is limited.”

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A10, who has politicians in her family, has been actively involved in politics for a long time and is currently planning to become a candidate for parliament, mentioned that women are marginalized in politics and that it is difficult for them to be visible because they are implicitly marginalized. A10 described this “silent violence,” which she notes is the worst form of violence, as: “...he says leave it, you do not have a say when we are around... he does not say it but makes you feel it with his behaviour.” She noted: “The biggest violence is marginalization. Silent violence. That’s what I call it. Your spirit is killed. Your emotional world is reset, I’m nothing to him. I’m being treated like nothing. That’s the most important thing for me, so it’s not necessarily brute force, a slap or something... But here you die every day! You’re dying inch by inch, inch by inch, inch by inch! This is how it is in the political world...”

These actions, which we can define as “character assassination” or disregard for women’s dignity, have been observed at all stages of politics but have been mentioned more frequently in relation to the period when women are holding office. Women’s relegation to a single area is also seen in the way men try to shape the positions that women will hold after they are elected, the areas in which they will speak and what they will and will not do. The perception of “women’s branches” as secondary or unimportant areas of politics was also mentioned, particularly in interviews with women who are active in national politics. A19, who is a provincial chairperson, criticized women’s branches: “In political structuring, there is a structure called women’s branches in political parties, and I find this to be a very bad thing, that is, I think that the female gender is defined as a secondary gender. I honestly think that this has no place in democratic politics.” Although “women’s branches” are the standard organization model in many political parties, new models known as “women’s assemblies” or “women’s work” were also mentioned, and considered empowering and promising organizations for women in terms of language, content, and function.

The practice of being confined to certain areas of politics also applies to those areas in which elected MPs will work. It was also mentioned in MP interviews that the party leader makes the decisions about which parliamentary committee MPs will work on. A17, who has worked as a deputy district chairperson in local governments, mentioned that male politicians generally show their discomfort on issues related to women in a “condescending” manner by saying, “are we always going to talk about women.” Similarly, A6, one of the MPs,

stated that the approval of men is generally considered within the party and that women’s work is not given much importance:

*“... I mean, there will be an event, today the party has this and that, you know, women should postpone the date [of their event]... there are approaches like women should think again, reconsider once more... Now they see everything related to the women’s field as secondary. You know, in the end, whatever role your mother plays at home, whatever role women play in society, even if you are in politics, women’s work within those bodies is secondary work compared to them. What if it happens in a week, what if it happens in two days, that’s how they do it. Everything is very important, everything is very crucial, everything is a matter of revolution, but women can stop a little.” A6*

In the context of discrediting women in politics, young women felt particularly disadvantaged. In politics, where middle-aged, professional, business-owning or retired men dominate, young women mentioned that they are called “cuties” or “little girls” in local governments or in Parliament. For example, A2, a member of the youth assembly, said that the senior management sometimes “patted her on the head.” She added that they treated her this way because she was young, and that it was challenging for her to maintain a balance in this situation. Young politicians gave examples of being underestimated within their own parties, mostly because assumptions are made that their level of knowledge is associated with their young age. B14, who is a member of the youth organization of her party and has served as its president, mentioned that she has often encountered the phrase “you do not know.”

B13, a member of a political party’s youth organization, also stated that what men have to say within the party is considered important while what women have to say is met with the mentality of, “Go on, tell us what you have to say, then let those who know talk, you don’t know anyway.” She also stated that she received comments on social media such as, “How old are you, what have you experienced, what do you know.” All this is based on the judgment/belief that “young women cannot speak politically correctly.”

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### YOUNG WOMEN CANNOT SPEAK CORRECTLY!

“We were holding district rallies, I took the floor at the most crowded district rally, I mean all the deputy candidates were there, but they said, ‘Let this deputy speak in this district’... The speeches were very long. That’s why every deputy used to speak in a district. For example, I spoke in the most populous district, in the district with the highest participation. Then I heard that a male deputy, a parliamentary candidate, was a bit uncomfortable with this situation... Like this: ‘Why did I speak where the crowd was the smallest?’ In other words, he did not directly say, ‘Why did she speak in the most crowded place,’ but, ‘Why did I speak in the least crowded place.’ You know, because if he directly says to a person, for example, ‘Why [B14] spoke there,’ he knows that he will be opposed, he knows that there will be a reaction... Because I am a young woman, because I am very young, because I am inexperienced, in such a crowded audience, I will not be able to speak correctly - in fact, I will not reflect that policy, that politics to the audience, I will not be able to say that word, probably he must have this thought.” B14

It was also mentioned in the interviews that women’s achievements are devalued and are not easily accepted by party members. On this issue, which is not only voiced by women politicians, a young woman from one of the focus group discussions shared her observations:

*“I would also say that women’s achievements are never attributed to women. I encounter this a lot. (...) because there is always the thought that there must be an invisible, hidden reason, a secret behind your success (laughs), but when they succeed, they always deserve it and even if it’s not purely a matter of merit, they are so smart and they find the right ways and they are wily and cunning that they got there but you always have an explanation, and I think this is a very common form of violence.” (Participant from FGI)*

The expectation that women should behave in accordance with traditional gender roles is seen in almost all parties. B5, one of the representatives of NGOs, mentioned that during their visits to the provinces, women were directed

to a service role by other men, even if they were youth leaders. She noted, “The head of the youth provincial branches is a woman, a young woman, he made her bring tea and so on. Head. The provincial, the provincial head... She was the only woman among them, he made her bring tea, he made her do things. She got used to that task...”

B13, the head of the youth organization of a political party, gave an example of how childcare is traditionally seen as a woman’s duty, saying, “...we are very often confronted with the words ‘I have a child, I am taking care of the child, that’s why I cannot take office, I will not be able to take office.’ There are women who take office before marriage but leave office after marriage and move away from politics,” she said. A similar situation can be seen in the case of B1, who has experience in local governments, public and civil society:

*“For example, I remember that when we travel abroad, we go to... (name of country). I think I was one of two or three women, and I was in charge of the organization. Almost all the members of the committee first wondered if I was married. They wondered if I had a child and they wondered what I was doing here. I mean, what are you doing? Don’t you have kids? I mean, what’s the need for all this?’ I received a lot of comments like ‘Relax, go and be comfortable at home.’ Municipalities have prejudices like this.” B1*

This expectation that women look after their children when they are young was illustrated by the suggestion that Meral Akşener<sup>32</sup> “take care of her grandchildren instead of returning to politics” when she wanted to re-enter the political arena. On the other hand, the “co-presidency” system, which was mentioned as an important model for equality between women and men, was characterized as a step towards improvement. One of the politicians interviewed, A27, recounted an incident that took place in the early days of the co-presidency system and explained how women within the party fought for the continuity of this model:

*“...But when they win the mayor’s office and come to work, you know there is only one seat... The state mind is like that, it is equal, because it does not accept equality... For example, the man immediately said: ‘OK, you have been elected. Now you can go home and do your work, I will be the president’...”*

<sup>32</sup> Meral Akşener is the first female interior minister in Turkish history and the leader of the Good Party (İYİ Party) founded by the group of opposition within the Nationalist Movement Party after the 2015 general election.



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*Now imagine, you struggle so much, you get elected and a man can say that... This is the first experience. Of course, the woman friend said, 'There is no such thing. We are co-presidents. We have equal rights, in fact, in accordance with the principles of positive discrimination, I have more rights than you. So, we will do this task together and I am not going anywhere. I do not go to the kitchen; I do not go home.' ...After that, for example, you have to experience, struggle. Because it's not enough to name it. Sometimes there are so many interesting points. For example, there is only one chair, a man comes and sits on the big chair. For example, the small armchair, one chair is left to women... It's not enough to be a co-president, especially in municipalities... men take the jobs that are seen as the main issues; the jobs that look like women's work, that look like the continuation of women's work, for example, are given to women..." A27*

The fact that important decisions are made in a way that excludes women, in meetings scheduled at places and times that men deem appropriate, and that women are not invited to these meetings is prominent during the nomination and election process as well as after the elections. It can be argued that the use of sexist language, especially among men, plays a significant role in the exclusion of women. Women are less likely to be heard and to be silenced by their own party members in a supposedly "protective" manner. A13, a former MP, stated that although she was generally treated with respect within her own party due to her profession and age, she was denied the right to speak:

*"...A13 sister, you stay back!' or something like that. We have experienced this a lot, when something happens, 'You are a woman, stay back!' There is a discussion, there is something like that. If you have something to say, he even blocks your right to speak. I cannot punch but I will say something... They say, 'You stay back!' etc. I have been through this too... Yes... 'Let us do the talking and you do not talk. Do not say it, let us say it.' And then there is something like, 'It is not suitable for your language' or something like that. They need language training." A13*

A27, one of the MPs, stated that women were silenced and excluded because politics is seen as "a game played between men":

*"...For example, trying to interrupt the conversation, intervention happens more for*

*women because they look at it like this: 'Well, you are already a woman, what are you doing? Why are you talking? How dare you?'... If the government and the opposition can criticize each other, it is between men, women have no place there. The fact that you are a woman makes them angrier with you. It makes it easier to speak out, to make comments, to try to silence." A27*

Another topic mentioned is that political parties do not want strong women, especially women who demand equality between men and women, and that party managers tend to exclude feminist women from the party. The field of politics was defined by the women we interviewed as a field in which women are subordinate and underestimated. The words of A9, and MP, draw attention to the fact that women are criticized in every situation and are belittled when they are successful:

*"...When you are a woman, recklessness increases. Isn't it always the same in politics, women are underestimated, compared to others. I can beat her, I can handle her. When there are people like us in between, they say, "Well, then, let's stop like this. In this case, they can say that it happened because she is a woman, they can minimize your success, and many candidates can be put up against you." A9*

That women MPs were not given the opportunity to participate in politics for consecutive terms was considered as an indicator of the challenges around women's presence in politics and solidarity among women. Former MP A24 stated that it was only after her third term that she was able to gain more power in politics and support women candidates more effectively. In this context, A24 expressed her views on the importance of women's ability to maintain their positions in terms of solidarity among women as follows:

*"Look at men, look at women. How many of these women have selected for one term, how many for two terms, and how many for three terms... There are already few women MPs. If there are nine hundred male MPs, there are three hundred, four hundred, maybe five hundred female MPs. And out of these five hundred, maybe ten or five of them have served two or three terms. Being long-term... I think that making women MP for one term and then cutting them off is also violence against women.*

*Because you learn in the first term, you continue in the second... If she is not successful it is okay... but for example, when I look from my point of view, I was the female MP who submitted the most parliamentary questions, I was the female MP who spoke the most. I was the female MP who had the best dialogue with non-governmental organizations. I had a lot of 'mosts' like that. And yet you cut me off. Then you cut me off even though I was successful, just when I was getting stronger in the party and supporting other women..." A24*

As an example of not allowing women the space to do what they want or to maximize their potential, B16, one of the representatives of NGOs, mentioned that women in the women's councils of city councils work to get the approval of male mayors. B16 likens the persuasion of the mayor by elected women in politics to "...an ordinary woman asking her husband for money to buy a new pair of shoes at home and having to persuade him."

Forms of economic violence against women in politics were also identified in terms of the budget allocated for women's work after they were elected. The remarks of MP A27 draw attention to both the budget allocated for women's work and the autonomy of women within the party to decide which activities this budget is allocated to:

*"... Not allocating a budget for women, not allocating enough budget, or if you are conducting women's activities, let's say when women ask for money from the budget, 'What are you going to spend it on? What will you do? Encountering with discourses like 'Can't you spend less than this much?' for example. You know, our decision-making mechanism is actually women organizing the budget for the work they will do themselves, but despite this, we can sometimes come across this. Do not come and ask, 'But ... what will it be spent on?' You cannot ask. You cannot ask, you cannot decide it! 'I can decide whether it is a need or not, you cannot,' for example. This is also a form of economic violence. You know, because after all, politics is also about women's economic empowerment in one way or another. In other words, if resources are not transferred... I mean your living conditions, women have fewer economic opportunities. If the principles of positive discrimination cannot be implemented and prioritized in terms of all these, women are subjected to violence and great violence in this sense." A27*

In addition to economic violence, acts of physical and sexual violence can also be directed at women by members of their own political party. A10, one of the woman politicians, cited an example where her legs were photographed under the table at her party meeting and sent to her via direct message. From the narrative of the woman politician municipal council member, it is clear that she not only has to cope with the sexual harassment she experienced, but also with her anxiety about this situation being heard:

*"For example, one day... My husband still does not know this, I was sitting somewhere, wearing a skirt, my feet were open to the sides, and they took a photo of me under the table, of my legs. They sent it to me that night. At first I thought it was not me. Then I realized the outfit and realized that it was me. I went to him and said to the press prosecutor, 'Look, Mr. Prosecutor, this,' I said, 'I brought it to you, but,' I said, 'look, this is a small place. My husband, my siblings, my children, no one knows, I am giving this file to you as a criminal document, as evidence.'" He took it, thank God. There are many other things that I cannot even begin to tell you. That is why we hear about harassment cases from the party, I believe them all, you know? I believe all of them." A10*

In another example of physical violence, the former mayor described an incident of threats and assaults in which a drunken person showed up at her door with a machete swearing at her. She stated that when she called the police chief about the person who attacked her house, she was told that the teams were in practice and could not come. Describing this situation as a "collective evil," the mayor stated that the police chief also supported the assaults.

## **Perpetrators of VAWP While Holding Office: Members of Other Political Parties**

The forms of violence women are subjected to by other political party members are similar to those perpetrated by members of their own political party. The most common acts of psychological violence include women politicians not being allowed to speak because their words are not considered valuable and being told to "shut up as a woman." For example, MP A7 described how another party member treated her during a protest at a parliamentary meeting following a martyr's funeral: "He told me: ... 'do not snap at me.' He said, 'blah, blah, blah, she's snapping at me.'

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So I was yacking all the time and snapping at them as a woman.” MP A7 said that she was angry and noted that this was inequality in practice. “How can you say that to me? What do you mean, as a woman? I have my own opinion, I have the same vote as you. Isn’t that so? You and I have the same vote in the parliament,” she said.

Many MPs said that they frequently heard the phrase “shut up as a woman” in Parliament. As A9 stated:

*“You’re a woman, shut up,’ you know, whatever. But these are the same things, the same things with a different version or a different expression, but the same things. ‘You are a woman, shut up,’ and that is it... ‘Do as much politics as we allow you.’ Because if he deems it acceptable, as much as he tolerates, as much as he allows... I mean, there is such a thing in society, and this is also the case in politics...I mean, that is how politics is shaped.” A9*

In the context of women’s advancement, acts of both psychological and sexual violence include other political party members making sexual accusations against women and spreading rumors. Sexual insinuations are based on judgmental accusations, especially against women who rise and succeed in political life, such as, “If she is rising, she must be having an affair with someone.” B20, one of the representatives of an NGO, explained the following in this regard:

*“How did you become deputy chair at your age?’ someone asked me. This is what he is implying: ‘I mean, are you having an affair with someone?’ Or, ‘You are so pretty at work and did someone pull strings?’ It’s not like, ‘You have worked hard, and you have been involved in the women’s movement or something like that.’ I wonder if you know someone [with power]. They actually sexually harass you there... They do a lot of implied violence in political parties when they see that you have risen a little bit.” B20*

Additionally, physical actions such as walking up to women MPs during parliamentary speeches also come to the fore. In a violation of women’s political rights, other political party members use discourse about women politicians’ bodies to intimidate, devalue and belittle them. Former MP A26 noted that MPs in the parliament talked behind her back about the way she dressed and that these conversations could sometimes reach the level of insulting her physique: “I know that I was laughed at behind my back... I know that things were said about me, but I didn’t

care about that. They said to me, ‘What kind of a deputy is that? Is that how you dress?’ They said, ‘What kind of purse is that?’” A6 mentioned that when she made a speech in the parliament, her body was emphasized in the insults directed at her but not at those directed at male MPs:

*“...I’ve never seen them comment on their [men’s] physique, but they tell us, ‘Look at the ugly one, how ugly she is, look at her hair, look at her jacket, I swear to God, they’ve come out of an ugliness contest, there’s no light on her face... Get a plastic surgery, whatever.’ They write these things to women, for example, they do not have an intellectual discussion with us... They do not say to men, for example, look at his appearance, look how ugly he is or look at his clothes... They give a political answer to that. But he answers you by targeting your physical appearance.” A6*

Another example of physical violence is the reaction to female politicians protesting in Parliament. A28, one of the MPs, described how women MPs of the same party were transformed into perpetrators of violence with the guidance of male MPs of the rival party:

*“...First the male MPs wanted me to end my protest... but...when they realized that I would not, they used the female MPs. I say this with sadness and shame. Male MP.. He went on top of the platform and placed the women deputies of [name of the party] to fill the gaps around the rostrum, saying, ‘You go there, you go there,’ and then an environment of violence that would not be befitting of Parliament emerged. But I would like to say that while those [name of the party] women MPs, or as I call them, ‘people disguised as women,’ unfortunately, were attacking me, on the other hand, some women MPs, especially... I would like to say how some female MPs came to my aid.” A28*

Efforts to isolate, marginalize and target women politicians through sexist discourses often involve acts that are defined as psychological violence as well as sexual violence. The perpetrators of these acts against women politicians can include MPs of rival parties.

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## Perpetrators of VAWP While Holding Office: Media and Social Media

Women politicians who become more visible after elections face discriminatory acts of oppression and violence in the media and social media. In addition to political party members' intervention in women's clothing, the media has adopted this as an agenda item, drawing criticism from MPs involved in national politics. MP A28 expresses her discomfort in the following words:

*"...While we do not talk about men's clothes, women's clothes have become a big topic. This includes the hijab and ranking the most stylish female MP in Parliament. As if we were in a beauty contest or in a fashion show... I found it very humiliating and classist. The media tried to evaluate women MPs on the basis of their appearance rather than the ideological and political issues they stood for..." A28*

In one of the focus group discussions with young women, it was noted that commenting on women's clothes is a problem that goes beyond parties and that women from all groups are subjected to it:

*"...There's also this... For example... [person's name]'s daughter stopped wearing hijab and now a horrible discourse of violence against her is circulating all over Twitter. There is also the issue of violence based on the hijab that conservative women face, you know, if you wear a hijab you cannot be in favor of one side, if you do not wear a hijab you cannot be in favor of the other... You know, there is an experience of violence that comes from living in such an endless state of not being oneself. (...) We can have bizarre experiences and we experience this from a non-partisan point of view, that is, it does not matter which group you belong to and which belief you adopt, that patriarchy..." (Participant from FG1)*

Along the lines of considering violence as "normal" in politics, online violence perpetrated against female politicians, artists, activists and even ordinary people has also become commonplace. One of the consequences of this may be that being "lynched" on social media is also considered "normal." B19 referred to the forms of oppression and violence directed against women in their relationships or marriages to explain why women are more

frequently targeted by online violence than men and how this type of violence, spread usually through social media, impacts women:

*"... The definition of violence has changed a lot now, you know... Women in politics are not exempt from this and because they are at the forefront of society and more visible, physical violence is very rare, sporadic, and perhaps less than among other women. But other types of violence, such as psychological violence and "lynching campaigns" on social media, are the types of violence that women in politics face more often. In fact, there are types of violence that sometimes affect women to the extent that they cannot go out in public life. We have experienced this very recently... Because of cultural codes, because we feel entitled to have a say, and because we have made a habit of almost, how can I say it, stereotyping, we are able to beat those people to the ground. This is of course a result of the visibility of women in politics to the detriment of women." B19*

How female MPs are covered in the press, from the colour of the jacket or mask they wear to the length of their hair and the lipstick they use, was reported as a situation that many MPs were uncomfortable with. MP A9 explained how the media and social media tabloidize women politicians on the basis of how fashionably they dress:

*"... Right now, just as the media is sexist in everything, so it is with us. The colour of your [COVID-19] mask, the length of your hair, then the most fashionable one. That's how it is with us, you know, that's the point of view (laughs). So there is really serious discrimination and sexism there too. They do not talk about the colour of a man's hair or whatever, but they do when it comes to us. So it is being talked about, you know, the most beautiful deputy, this deputy, that deputy. It's always the same over women. We also have our share of discrimination in Parliament." A9*

A14 and A7 also stated that there is a "troll army," noting that this group divvies up MPs, judges, and prosecutors amongst itself, executes premeditated attacks, and is used as a tool for managing perception. Women mentioned that various forms of violence they experienced after entering politics—visible in the forms of being degraded, regarded as unqualified for politics, humiliated and targeted with smear campaigns—were carried out through the media, and thus they faced a faster and more widespread "discrediting."

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B11 drew attention to the fact that media language, which she described as “very horrible and despicable language” and “very sexist language,” is used to make women step back from politics and described the relationship between language and physical violence:

*“In the end, we are called sluts and slops. No, anyway, swearing in Türkiye has [inherently] been constructed against women. Anyway, humiliation through that language, that harsh, violent language - well, it already pulls women back... You know, beyond language there is also [physical] violence... They beat people here in politics... So of course you step back. So you never know if someone will punch you in the face. There are many examples of insulting and lynching on social media. I will not give the details right now, but the things that they did to Mr. Demirtaş’s wife,<sup>33</sup> or Meral Akşener, or Emine Erdoğan.”<sup>34</sup> B11*

A2, a young woman, also mentioned that since she began participating in local politics, she had to be “much more careful” and no longer shared private posts on social media as she was afraid that she might be discredited:

*“For example, even taking a selfie and sharing it right now seems ridiculous to me. I started using a public account after I became a little more active in politics... It changed the way I use social media tremendously. I started to use my account as a public account so that people can see who this woman is... what she is doing... I refrain... I am more careful with my poses, more corporate poses. I don’t know, even taking a selfie feels like something to me now, I hesitate, I mean, my logic has changed in that regard.” A2*

B3 stated that “smear campaigns” and “stigmatizations” carried out through social media quickly gain traction in social life and are used as a tool to remove women from politics:

*“I mean, maybe the stigmatization can be faster [referring to an incident]... The tweets she tweeted in the past, you know, reading them can be done through such an individual, but there is also a very sexist approach... Bot accounts, then defamation*

*campaigns or, I don’t know, interfering with her private life, women’s private life, making such a thing there, insulting or exposing situations... It has quite an effect on women politicians, you know, since the audience that social media reaches is very large, social media can be a very effective tool for them when it is used with ulterior motives and when it is turned into a policy of attrition.” B3*

Sexist discourses in the media and social media, accompanied by images of women’s bodies or sexual content, were cited as important factors keeping women out of politics. A young participant in the women-only focus group with political parties’ youth organizations emphasized this situation, describing it with anger:

*“... There is also the other thing, I can’t pass without mentioning; there are also studies on the language of violence in the news about election violence. You know, when there is a news item about a male candidate, what kind of headline, what kind of visual, what kind of content, I don’t know, if it is a printed material, on which page, in which corner, again, in a corner that will be read or in a corner that will not be read? If this is done through a digital platform, in the same way, you know, those women - I see such horrible, horrible things in the field of psychology! She’ll write something about depression, she’ll write about a woman in her underwear, with her head in her hands, and she’ll talk about depression, I mean, something ridiculous like that! (Laughs nervously) Now, when there is a news story, especially on Instagram, there is also the issue of tabloidization. When there is a news story about a woman candidate, for example, it will write, ‘What came out from underneath!’ Okay, such a stupid thing, and with a visual of a skirt, probably a woman! With ridiculous visuals. This is also a form of violence and women have to struggle with it more than men.” (Participant from FG1)*

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<sup>33</sup> Selahattin Demirtaş is a politician and former MP in Türkiye. He was the co-leader of Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP), serving alongside Figen Yüksekdağ from 2014 to 2018. Demirtaş was a presidential candidate of the HDP in the 2014 presidential election, coming in third place.

<sup>34</sup> First Lady of the Republic of Türkiye.

## Perpetrators of VAWP While Holding Office: Voters and Members of Society

Since elected women are more visible than others, they are exposed to different forms of violence in their daily lives as well as through social media. Young MPs state that when they meet with voters, as a disadvantage of being both young and a woman, they are sometimes confronted with expressions of surprise such as “is this girl our MP?” or “this is a very cute girl.” In this way, voters exert pressure on women politicians by reminding them of the burden of proving themselves. In addition, being a woman and being young can reinforce the feeling of being under constant surveillance. Municipal council member A18 mentioned this scrutiny: “if you were a man, we would not have to talk for so many hours.” A18 stated that people were very curious about her marital status and therefore she was often asked, “What does your spouse do?” She explained that, as a single woman, every man she was seen with was perceived as a good match for her and that she had a constant obligation to account for herself:

*“... either you will be married, actually, you know, you will have a man with you... You know, being a woman and being single is unfortunately a disadvantage in politics... There is such a need for accountability in people, either ‘he is my friend’ or ‘he came from Ankara, he is our guest,’ or something like that, you know ‘he is not my lover’... Unfortunately, people have a need to hear this. Even if you don’t make this statement, your name can be defined very quickly as either a flirt or ‘Oh, you never know who she hangs out with.’ Unfortunately, we all feel this pressure!” A18*

In an environment where the private lives of women politicians are a matter of curiosity, the spouses of women politicians can also be targeted. Politicians’ acts on social media can be used by male spouses as a justification for not supporting women’s participation in politics. A23, who works as a mukhtar in a conservative neighbourhood, spoke of harassment she received through the mukhtar office’s social media account and stated that she was lucky in terms of her husband who supports her. A23 stated that being in the public eye in politics and having to deal with many people they do not know makes women vulnerable to harassment, which causes many women to stay away from politics. In fact, B13, a young woman politician who is active in a political party, defines insults directed at her, especially on social media, as “sexual violence”:

*“So Twitter, social media, Instagram; as a society... When we go on social media, we see this. When I started using Twitter, we are subjected to such heavy insults, so much sexual violence, emotional insults... I mean, what we call violence is not only a bruise on the body, etc., we as women are also subjected to such emotional violence in addition to physical violence. And again, I know that such insults are considered sexual violence. I mean, unfortunately, we are exposed to sexual violence, and we cannot do anything about it.” B13*

Women MPs mentioned that the accusations against women on social media are different from the accusations against men, noting that while male MPs are called “dishonorable,” “enemy of the state” or “traitor,” women MPs are labeled with messages such as “bi...,” “I will f\*\*\* you...,” “I will f\*\*\* your mother...,” “who knows how many people you \*\*\*\* with...” Social media was described as a place where the heaviest swearing and the most insulting epithets are directed at women. A14 stated that they were exposed to sexist discourse in abundance, and that “all insults were made on the basis of gender, even if they were members of the opposite political party.” Sexually explicit messages on social media affect not only MPs but also mukhtars. In the mukhtar interviews, it was stated that sexually explicit messages mostly come through social platforms, such as Facebook or Instagram, where mukhtar services are provided.

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# CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

In the male-dominated field of politics, the factors that contribute to normalizing and justifying VAWP are fed by patriarchal norms and are intertwined. A primary reason for this centres around the traditional gender roles that prevent women from participating in social and economic life and the responsibilities imposed on women as a result. Municipal employee B4 pointed out that doing politics under the pressure of gender roles was not a “dream that started in childhood” for women and that they did not start competing in politics on equal terms. For example, B13, who is the head of the youth organization of one of the political parties, stated that young women are faced with lectures from both their family and friends that refer to traditional gender roles such as “you are a young girl, what are you doing, politics is a man’s job.” In addition, B4 pointed out that having “leadership qualities” and an “idealistic character,” which are considered necessary to exist within the structure of politics, contradict these roles and responsibilities attributed to women.

A representative of the women’s branch of a party, B9, described women’s reason for engaging in politics as “to give something back, to fix things, to leave better things for our children, for the future,” and noted that this process is difficult even after marriage. The contradictory nature of women’s presence in politics, which destroys the conditions of equal competition, was expressed by B3, a representative of a civil society organization active in the field of politics: “On the one hand, [the woman] has to be married, she has to have children... But on the other hand... she has to take care of the child, she has to keep this in balance.”

Similarly, A26, a mukhtar with three children, spoke about why women enter politics when they are older: “My children are university students. They had somehow saved themselves. I needed to do something too. I decided to do this and I became a mukhtar.” Women who do not come from affluent families can be discouraged from entering politics due to the conditions and time commitment

required. For example, A18, who is the child of a civil servant and now works in an office of her own, stated that upon receiving an offer, she decided that she did not want to be a candidate if she could not be in the first two places on the list: “...I said I don’t want to be on the list if it can’t be the first two. Because my financial means are not suitable to handle such a thing. I am someone who lives by working...”

This situation is also reinforced by the common political practices that women in politics may face during the nomination process—such as disqualification from candidacy—which are not based on merit, are centralized in hierarchical relations, and are dependent on the decision of a single person. Therefore, unequal gender relations continue to be an important problem not only for young women politicians who are new to politics but also for experienced women politicians. Under these conditions, women can only consider getting involved in politics if they are supported by politicians in the family, act despite their families, engage with politics when their care responsibilities are relieved, or engage with the women’s movement. Men’s concerns include “being replaced by a woman who does this job very well” as noted by municipal servant B6, and “neglecting domestic work by women” as mentioned by B13, a representative of a youth branch.

Discriminatory practices and assumptions that foster the idea that “women are not fit for politics,” and that “politics is a man’s business” legitimize the violence perpetrated against women on the assumption that their presence in politics should be limited and that they should stay behind. MP A16’s remarks highlight how women are marginalized:

*‘It’s not a woman’s world, it’s a man’s world... You are only thirty-two or thirty-three years old. You are not married, you have no children. You’re wasting your life. I mean, these things still happen. ‘Oh, you still do not have a child.’ You have become an MP, and you are making waves in Türkiye, but you are still incomplete and half. (Laughs.)*

*Because you couldn't have a child... You know, there are still relatives like that. 'This girl was a beautiful girl, a smart girl, but she ruined herself.'*  
A16

Both within political parties and among voters, the idea that women candidates would lose elections can be easily normalized with the use of patriarchal justifications. Examples such as “women not being able to accompany the lifting of the coffin at a funeral,” mentioned by A10, “women walking in front of men being considered strange,” mentioned by A6, or “rumors that a woman candidate would not be accepted in small or conservative provinces, districts or regions,” mentioned by A9 illuminate the diversity of practices around ignoring and degrading women in politics.

Emphasizing that the “rules of the game” are set by men, a representative of an NGO, B16 said, “politics is seen as men’s playground and women are seen as ‘unable to play men’s game.’” A10, who has been working in the municipal council for 14 years, reminds us that to protect the order they have established, men can become aggressive and violent against women’s interventions. For young women such as A14 who later became MPs, these conditions sometimes even caused them to renounce their party membership.

In addition, inadequacies and inequalities in legal regulations and political functioning were identified as another reason that women are excluded from politics. Although it is stated that quotas—not included in the Law on Political Parties but which some parties have put into practice by specifying them in their statutes—have made a significant contribution to increasing women’s participation, important criticisms include the fact that the implementation is left to the “mercy of political parties.” The narratives on this issue point to the influence of the patriarchal feudal structure and its subsequent practices of rent-seeking as an explanation for why temporary special measures such as quotas have not been successful:

*“...First of all, of course, the judgment against women is present both within parties and in society! Especially the perspective towards single women; if they are not married and often do not have children, the meeting times are not adjusted for them, or they may face harassment and accusations if they are single or if they enter politics as a single woman. These are low blows... Apart from that, of course, there is the issue of quotas, and since the parties that apply quotas mostly apply them for tokenism, women do not*

*actually find them sincere...” (Participant from FG1)*

*“In a male-dominated culture, there is this thing, I mean, the mayor [has] a team and there is a rent [seeking] relationship among them in general... It is more difficult to conduct rent-seeking with a woman.” A25*

The political structure that excludes women then paves the way for VAWP. Additionally, the inadequacy of legislation that defines special measures to ensure equality, such as quotas and parity laws, and the lack of national mechanisms to protect women from violence allow it to go unpunished. In fact, women who have been subjected to violence in politics share that they avoid applying to institutional mechanisms for reporting with the assumption that the outcome will remain unchanged. This situation shows that both legal regulations and existing institutional mechanisms such as the Presidency’s Communication Center (CIMER), EOC, Petition Commission of Grand National Assembly of Türkiye, TIHEK and KDK are insufficient in combating VAWP.

Due to the existence of a strong feminist movement in Türkiye, one of the reasons for VAWP that was mentioned, especially by participants involved in civil society, is the lack of women’s solidarity among parties. Describing the recent political atmosphere as “hostile” and “polarizing,” MP A27, who identifies as a feminist, drew attention to the fact that solidarity among women has become more difficult as authoritarianism has increased:

*“...We are experiencing such stories. There is a very, very hostile approach in this period, unfortunately... It is not possible to come side by side with women from other... parties. In the past, friends say that they were able to have a little more contact; at least they were able to talk and discuss some issues, but in this period, especially after a political understanding that completely ignores, marginalizes the opposition, and is based on destroying the women’s movement and the feminist movement to such an extent, it is not possible to be side by side. However, we care about this; no matter which party you belong to, being a woman is our common denominator, and we are all oppressed in this sense. Whatever happens, I mean, whatever your ideological ground is, at least there are some grounds that we can approach, and we say that we should take a stance from here...” A27*



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Similarly, A12, who has been active in a political party for many years and has served as the head of the city council, spoke of the relationship between politics and the “duty of loyalty,” and emphasized the importance of “women being supported by women in the field of politics,” which is dominated by men:

*“... A former Member of Parliament whom I like very much... She was a Member of Parliament for one term... She had a lot of support from a male friend of ours who was a provincial chair. Then at one of our friend's, our traveling companion's, things, I said, 'Why do you support him? He is wrong.' She said, 'He supported me a lot in the past, I owe him loyalty.' She supports him out of a duty of loyalty, you know, she can't support a woman...” A12*

On this point, A15, a former mayor, stated that women's solidarity cannot be achieved without organized struggle:

*“...This is legal, in the city, in the neighbourhood, on the street, in the household, that is, if we cannot reach the woman in that household if she is being subjected to violence in that street, we are not organized, we are not. If you can reach her, if you can intervene, if you can touch her, if you can dress her wound, her bleeding wound, if you can hold her hand, if you can call her 'sister,' then this is what I call fighting. Otherwise, it is not what is done in conference halls, at the gates of Parliament, in the halls of so-and-so. So that is the real one. That's how I see it. That is why the women's movement in Türkiye took a late step into local governance.” A15*

The interviews reveal the view that the divisive nature of politics and the gender inequalities in Türkiye, together with discriminatory practices, contribute to normalizing violence in politics. “In these circumstances, many women such as B11 describe entering politics as a vital decision that requires courage.” In this environment, the withdrawal of Türkiye's signature from the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (known also as the Istanbul Convention) in 2021 by Presidential Decree was described as a significant step backward in terms of combating violence in all areas, including politics.

Therefore, in Türkiye, where anti-gender equality discourses have recently become stronger, gender inequality has become a cause of VAWP. The fact that violence is the

basis for the political environment—in which the use of the concept of gender is prohibited, hate speech against different sexual identities escalates, and ethnocultural discrimination and age hierarchy are intense—was expressed more dominantly and clearly in focus group interviews with young people than in others. For example, one participant in the focus group interview with young women discussed the causes of discrimination and VAWP as follows: “...You know, there are many reasons, of course, there are many parameters, but I think that the most intense of these parameters and the reason that actually leads to all of them can be attributed to gender inequality as usual.” The fact that the violence women are subjected to in politics may vary according to different identities was also brought up in the focus group discussions with the following statements:

*“... For example, the difficulties faced by a transgender, lesbian or bisexual woman and a cis-gender woman when participating in politics are probably different from each other, or the difficulties faced by a Kurdish woman when participating in politics are different... Apart from that, in general, for example, while a cis-heterosexual woman is isolated in that private sphere, within the family, and is removed from politics in this way, a trans woman or a lesbian, or bisexual woman is directly excluded from society, she is not even isolated within the family.” (Participant from FG2)*

*“... For example, you may have a dialect, you may have an educational background, and you may have religious practices. Do you wear a hijab, etc., all of these are elements that can transform the effectiveness of your words from the perspective of the other side independently of your words...” (Participant from FG1)*

This discrimination, which leads to the de facto non-application of political rights defined for everyone at the legal level, makes “getting on election lists” or “being nominated as a candidate” difficult for these groups and prevents them from entering into politics. This draws attention to the political structure that excludes pluralism and favors a divisive structure. VAWP in Türkiye, which is generally explained in terms of the above-mentioned reasons, causes the political sphere to remain inaccessible for women and affects them negatively in different ways. The first of these negative effects is that young people, especially women, are hesitant to enter politics due to its nature. B14, who engaged in politics at a very young age,

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<sup>35</sup> Although the term “Eviçi- domestic” corresponds to “domestic violence,” the term “Aile İçi-in the family” refers to “violence within family” and is used in the name of the Convention in the text, in line with the official translation of the Convention.

stated that her family and others around her made her feel that she could not participate in politics because she was both young and a woman.

Young people, whose lives are shaped by mainstream politics but who cannot find a place in them, may turn to alternative forms of politics. They are developing alternative tools to influence politics, as described by B17:

*“...Language within mainstream politics inevitably prevents women and queer identities from having a voice within politics. You are expected to fit into those molds, and if your own identity and political discourse is not compatible with these existing molds, you are automatically removed from those public political spaces. Therefore, you have to create alternative spaces, areas and platforms where you can have your say.” B17*

Young people who cannot participate in mainstream politics and cannot relate to it like previous generations are labeled as “apolitical.” Academic B17 evaluates the stance of young people who are defined as apolitical and who “do not conduct their interest in politics [through] those representation mechanisms because they no longer believe in political representation in the sense that older generations understand it,” as a form of resistance. A2, who is a member of the city council and youth assembly, also thinks that young people’s concerns such as “will I be labeled or stained” lead them to form a group that does not belong to any political party.

Another negative impact of VAWP is that women try to behave like men in politics. This situation, which appears as a new strategy that women use to combat violence in politics, was defined as “acting like a man” in the words of A7:

*“In other words, politicians do not do politics like women, that is, with a woman’s identity. I mean, they think that a woman cannot do politics without hardening, without acting like a man, without becoming a man, and after a while, women really evolve... Otherwise, you cannot be in the same environment, you cannot talk about the same things. The struggle of a male politician seems bigger and more numerous. He says ‘he slammed his fist,’ he says ‘he did this and that.’ We are living in such a world of blood and guts, a good Member of Parliament is someone who slams his fist on the table, and a good Member of Parliament is someone whose voice is loud. Insulting, swearing, shouting, gesticulating... it’s*

*weird. This is how it is. The way you dress, the way you talk, when this is expected of you wherever you go, you want to transform society, you want to be one of them, for example.” A7*

B14 emphasized that women who want to have an effective voice in politics can only do so within the framework of the roles assigned to them by society and underlined the importance of “women having a voice in their own way” as well as the necessity of women’s solidarity. Former MP A28, who stated that male politicians expect women to behave like them, said that following a plenary session in the parliament, a male MP walked in front of her by stepping on her foot, that she gave him a stern warning in a way that everyone could hear, and that when she reminded him that he had violated the most basic rule of courtesy, he was embarrassed and gave way to her. She continued, “At first he wanted to say, ‘Since we are equals, you get rough, you step on my foot, you get in front of me, and you show physical strength. If you cannot do this, it means you are incapable, you are weak.’”

Women can also voluntarily attempt to “act like them” in order to advance more easily in the predominantly male field of politics. As MP A7 summarized, very few women in politics remain in politics without acting like a man, noting: “You move faster on the path you walk with men.” Public official B22, who stated that it is not important for a man to have exceptional qualifications, to speak very well, or to have competence in politics, summarized the expectations of a female politician as follows:

*“...When it comes to women, they want a woman profile that is a bit close to perfect. They want her to be like a man, to be strong, but at the same time, they want her to have those female characteristics. Because, yes, very tough characteristics can be adopted, but they also want them to have soft features, to be close to perfection, to have the profile of the woman they dream of in politics.” B22*

Aware of the difficulties of women’s active participation and presence in politics, women note that negative effects of VAWP include a necessity to “face the negativity” and that existing in this field requires an intense struggle. The majority of women who hold a position in national or local parliaments have gotten there based on a belief that they are “powerful” and believe that all women should be “encouraged” to find that power. As a former MP, A24, says, politics is a place where there is “a burden to be carried” and “a price to be paid,” and where “you don’t become offended and defeated by what they say.” In other words,

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there are preconditions for engaging in politics, and women who do are “brave,” “resilient” and “don’t give up.” The fact that women who persevere in the “male dominant,” “dirty,” and “rent-seeking” field of politics are not considered “suitable” for politics even by their fellow women, combined with the discourses that politics is not “women’s work,” cause women to define their relationship with politics from a “limited” place and to see VAWP as a “natural situation” inherent in this field. Thus, one of the effects of different forms of VAWP on women is that they perceive violence as a part of politics and believe they should not be intimidated by acts of violence and should stand strong. This may lead women to take the burden of responsibility for the violence upon themselves, or criticize another woman for not standing strong against acts of violence.

We see women’s internalized acceptance that the obstacles, discrimination and acts of violence that they face are a natural part of political life through women’s own discourses such as, “not to be bothered by these acts,” “to always be strong” and “not to give up.” The statement of A19, the provincial chair, reflects the emphasis on being strong:

*“When you say, ‘I want to work, I want to put effort into something,’ people don’t reject you. So you will find a place in politics. And do not give up. I mean, do not think that you have lost. Today you have lost, tomorrow you have to get up again and continue. You should never accept where you have fallen. Because they want to intimidate. You know, ‘Let’s send you away, let’s do this or that, let’s make you fed up and make you go.’ But you get up with a handful of soil from every place you fall. That’s how it is, for women. Maybe not so much for men, but for women. They think they can crush you. That’s why they see it as easy meat. So... I mean, you have to welcome it with a smile and move on.” A19*

Mukhtar A26, who said that she had endured “separatist” and “terrorist” remarks made about her by the male candidate for Mukhtar during the elections, explains that if “it is not happening,” that is, if women cannot enter politics or cannot stay there permanently, it is due to women’s lack of courage. According to her, “once a woman says ‘I stand here,’ no power can stand in her way or prevent her.” Women who have internalized violence, do not back down in the face of violence, and whose political existence is instrumentalized are asked to act in accordance with the role assigned to them. In particular, young MPs talk about how politics forces women to “pretend to be someone they are not.”

VAWP can also cause physiological and psychological problems for women and those closest to them. A11, who has served as a mukhtar in a low socio-economic area, stated that after the aforementioned sexually explicit video was sent to her, her psychology deteriorated and she experienced serious physical health problems: “I had eye haemorrhages [subconjunctival hemorrhage] for a week because of that.” Similarly, Councillor A1, who defines politics as “her way of life” but says that she must be much more careful due to the dirty face of politics, also stated that the stress and distress she experienced made her psoriasis relapse. All forms of violence to which women are subjected can cause deterioration, not only in their health but also in the health of those closest to them. Former mayor A25 stated that her father suffered from health problems after multiple incidents of violence, and that both the violence and the fact that “perpetrators of violence are not fully punished at the legal level” were very difficult for her father, who felt obliged to remain silent.

All these negative influences can have a discouraging and deterrent effect on women’s participation in politics, causing them to step back from their decision to actively participate. This leads to a lack of pluralism and democratization in politics. Emphasizing that women’s voices are not heard due to their lack of political participation, B11, who has civil society experience and is a member of a political party, summarized this relationship as follows:

*“... [Women’s] participation in politics actually means the democratization of society. Democracy—what democracy actually is—comes from representation, so you need to be represented, you need to have a voice so that you can sit there in that chair. We can’t even sit in that chair now. First, you have to sit in the chair, then your voice has to be heard—but that is not enough, sitting here is not enough alone—you have to change the law, you have to change the decision, you have to have a day of influence, you have to do that, right? Then you will govern.” B11*

In addition to civil society representative B3, who stated that women’s inability to take an active part in politics is a significant “gap,” the following narrative of B13 is an indication that VAW and the obstacles women face cause them to remain in the minority or not to have a presence in the political arena at all:

*“In fact, we see the consequences of this very clearly. Women are moving away from politics. I mean today, I don’t know, but for example, when*

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*I evaluate our party, there are very few women politicians compared to male politicians. As a consequence of all these problems, yes, women are moving away from politics, they don't want to participate in politics, they don't want to be psychologically abused, and they can't handle it, I mean we can't handle it all together. Because I really can't imagine such an environment. You want to engage in politics, but your spouse does not support you, and your environment or your family does not support you, well, politics has its own difficulties, you carry these difficulties. And you need to work alongside these because you have financial concerns. It is unbearable. In such an environment, women cannot be expected to do politics anyway, it would be unreasonable to expect them to do so." B3*

The scarcity of women in politics is one of the reasons preventing women's issues from being made visible and the number of women in decision-making mechanisms from increasing. Municipal employee B4 underlined that when women are excluded from decision-making mechanisms, such as the municipal council, local services of the municipality are planned with gender-insensitive methods. She stated that in municipalities with equal female council members, public resources are distributed more equally, settlements are "women-friendly cities," and gender responsive budgeting is practiced.

Violence, especially within social media, increases in direct proportion to the position and power of women politicians. Such violence, especially against more visible women politicians, can discourage other women's participation in politics. In this sense, the violence experienced by a woman politician may indirectly create an obstacle to another woman's political participation. B13, a member of the women's and youth organizations of a political party, stated that a criticism made by a man—one of the prominent figures in Turkish politics—about a woman party leader was related to the gender of the leader in question. She underscored that such a sexist criticism is "something that can come to one's mind as a question mark, something that can be stuck in one's mind even when becoming a candidate."

Thus, VAWP leads to fewer women engaging in politics, which in turn leads to fewer women who can serve as role models in politics. This not only dampens girls' and young women's hopes for politics but also has a negative impact on democratization and pluralism as a whole. It is obvious that women's quantitative and qualitative high participation in political institutions and decision-making mechanisms will set an example for other women.

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# RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMBATING VAWP

The research shows that the VAWP is as striking as the inadequacy of institutional mechanisms through which women can report violence to which they have been subjected. In a small number of interviews, TIHEK, KDK and EOC were mentioned among the institutions that can be applied to in addition to pursuing the legal process. Moreover, in cases of reported acts of violence within political parties, the perpetrator may face penalties such as a warning, reprimand or temporary or definitive expulsion from membership following party disciplinary proceedings. However, the narratives show that women who have been subjected to violence in politics avoid seeking justice or using institutional mechanisms of application for reasons such as a fear of being associated with an incident such as violence or harassment in their political lives and their belief that the perpetrators of acts of violence will not be punished. The words of A29, a municipal council member in a small district, illustrate the concern of women politicians that if they report the violence they have been subjected to, they may face more negative consequences as the violence will be heard by wider circles:

*"...These are horrible things. Imagine the nervous breakdown, you are in the public eye in a moral sense, you know if you experience violence in your home and you tell the police, only they know. But you are a person who belongs to this district, as a council member, and when such a thing happens, the woman's life is in trouble. My solution, if I had experienced such a thing, would have been to resign." A29*

A19, who is the provincial chair of one of the political parties, stated that women who are subjected to violence and harassment believe, "I think my name will fall into disrepute like this," and that they prefer not to use the party's application mechanisms. In the interview, she mentioned an example where the perpetrator was forced to sever his relationship with the party after an incident of sexual harassment within the party as a result of the efforts of party women, even though there was no formal complaint.

Although it is possible to expel perpetrators of violence from the party as part of disciplinary sanctions within the

party, it is not always meaningful. Examples such as the one mentioned by A10, in which a perpetrator of physical violence was first expelled from the party but was then reinstated as a member after a certain period of time and included in the Central Executive Committee, diminish faith in recourse within the party. B7, who has been involved in the women's movement for a long time and has experience as a public servant, trade union, and civil society organization representative as well as a parliamentary candidate, states that women in politics cannot bring up violence they are subjected to because they think it will negatively affect their presence in politics. She explains that there must be effective mechanisms to combat VAW within political parties:

*"...As you move away from metropolitan cities, that [not speaking up about violence] becomes much more evident! Women in those small places come to the parties risking many things. Therefore, the incidents of violence against women within this party can be verbal, physical, or in the form of harassment, and what we call 'cyberbullying' is also already widespread. For example, it is very important that stalking is included in the Istanbul Convention. You know, these are things that are very common in political parties... If you make a complaint, it's not something to complain about as well... That's why women's work is still essential within these parties. You know, women being aware of a place that they can go. For example, in all institutions, disciplinary regulations, disciplinary sanctions and disciplinary offenses need to be regulated in a way that does not stand against women, that is, taking into account women and LGBTI+ people. This requires a separate mechanism, an effective mechanism." B7*

The experiences of the few women politicians who have resorted to legal recourse following acts of violence and harassment show that the protection measures issued by the courts are insufficient and that sanctions imposed on the perpetrator are far from deterrent. For example, during her mayoral candidacy, A25 filed a criminal complaint against people who showed up at the door of her house

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and insulted and threatened her and she then took out a protection order in response. However, A25 stated that she was not sufficiently protected during this process and that she was also subjected to a defamation lawsuit on the grounds that she insulted the person who knocked on her door:

*“Some drunk is shouting. Later, it is understood that he was someone’s pawn. The police did not take any action against the man. I got the footage. He says, ‘Look, she is still not home at this hour.’ He says, ‘She has the police waiting at her door.’ He says, ‘Who are you?’ I opened the bedroom window and said: ‘I am here and you are disturbing me. Now get the hell out!’ I said, ‘Drunkard.’ That’s all. So he sued me for defamation. Then of course the case was dismissed. The prosecutor found it insulting. The whole problem was this: to put me on trial in the last six months... Of course, the lawsuit was filed, and the person was arrested. Then for some reason, very shortly before the election, a week before the election, they released that person. On the day of the election, the person posted on social media saying, ‘I will complete the work I left unfinished.’ And the police asked me to leave the district! Because they may be right there because most of the opponents are after the security of the ballot box, I had two bodyguards, close bodyguards, both on duty that day.” A25*

A11 was subjected to harassing messages during the mukhtar election process and “did not mention” the harassment to her fiancé, family and friends in order not to cause problems because she thought that the harassment would end once the election was over. Knowing that the sender of these messages was another mukhtar, she appealed to the prosecutor’s office, but explained that she did not find the punishment given at the end of this process deterrent:

*“I said to my lawyer friends, ‘this is the situation,’ I said, ‘I am getting threats, what can I do?’ He said, ‘Just listen, listen... Listen, and make people listen. Listen to the phone and have a witness,’ he said. This went on for a year and a half, and finally, I said, ‘It is over, the elections are over, it will probably stop.’ It’s May, it is still going on... It was a bit of an advantage because we also worked at the courthouse. I remember that on Friday morning at work after that video came out, I said [to her lawyer friend] ‘I am coming to you,’ and left in tears. Fortunately, I had a prosecutor*

*friend. We found who did it, but what happened? Nothing. Then he was only fined three thousand Turkish Liras.” A11*

A14, a lawyer and MP, stated that she legally fights insults against her on social media by stating “I am filing a criminal complaint,” although said she did not do so in the early stages of her parliamentary term.

When it comes to sexual harassment on social media, women may hesitate to take legal action. A23, who has been a mukhtar for two and a half years, stated that she was afraid that if she took legal action, the people who sent harassing messages would take it seriously or would even think that “she asks for it.” She said that she was able to “prevent possible misunderstandings” by blocking these people on her social media account. A23 noted: “I can file a complaint when I take legal action. We have rights, of course we do. But it’s easier to block because when you try the other way, the dialogue increases. As the dialogue increases, and if society has a tendency to perceive this as, ‘She prolongs it, seems like she is asking for it,’ the situation changes.”

Within the scope of the research, various suggestions for eliminating VAWP were mentioned, ranging from ending violence in all areas to concrete steps to ensure women’s greater participation in politics. In many interviews, it was stated that if women’s political participation increased, it would transform the dynamics that cause the violence and bolster the fight against VAW.

*“Well, I think the number of women should be increased, first physically, then spiritually. It is also important to increase the number physically because as soon as you enter here, let me take you to the General Assembly and you will understand immediately. It’s like a village coffee house. I mean everyone inside is man, those sitting at the door are men, there are twenty men there, twelve men over here, eight men there, men, men, men, men, men. The moment you enter here, this place says to you: ‘You are in a men’s club’ (laughs). Increasing in numbers... Even just increasing in numbers is very important. Because at least it would be a bit more equal environment. A place where I can at least feel like I belong and feel more comfortable. Would it be enough? Of course not. I mean, if there were three hundred more women like the current women MPs, the women who come here would feel a little more comfortable, but that alone will not work. Women with women’s consciousness need to be here.*

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A person who knows what the women's struggle is, knows how to look at it from this perspective, who can develop an egalitarian approach, should be here, but that doesn't work for the party." A14

## Recommendations On Legal Arrangements

In the recommendations offered for the elimination of VAWP, making normative arrangements emerged as the priority. The main drawback in preventing violence against women in the exercise of their political rights was identified as the absence of provisions in the Electoral Law and the Law on Political Parties to ensure gender equality and women's equal participation in political life. B20, who has experience in both politics and civil society, reported that undemocratic legal arrangements lead to VAW in parties:

*"Corruption starts at the top in this country. There are institutional deficiencies, there are many legal deficiencies. It is normal for political parties to work in this way because neither the Law on Political Parties nor the Electoral Law provides for a democratic structure. This is what will happen, of course, women in political parties will also be subjected to violence, and they will sigh about it and keep silent. What do you think will happen? Everyone's concern is 'this is my seat.' This is the situation." B20*

Ensuring women's equal political participation was frequently emphasized in the interviews as one of the preconditions for the acknowledgement of violence in politics, and special practices such as parity laws and quotas were mentioned, especially in terms of equal representation and participation:

*"Something compelling is needed in this country for political parties to realize women's political participation compulsorily, de facto. Otherwise it is not possible. The parity laws are laws that prevent political violence against women, ensure women's political participation and that policies regarding women in many areas are made concrete. The parity laws address, 'It is not thirty percent, what is important for us is fifty-fifty perfect equality.' But more importantly, it emphasizes placement. It's not like I arbitrarily put men in the first six and then 'I put six women.' Most importantly, sanctions. It is an extremely important solution, and we need to implement it." A7*

Practices such as not charging nomination fees for women candidates and adopting the zipper system were also mentioned as concrete steps to transform the structure

of politics and make the political system more equal for women and men:

*"In the Electoral Law, the briefest proposals were that women should not be charged a nomination fee to be effective in terms of women's participation, that the membership and dues to be paid by women from membership should be reduced to symbolic figures compared to men, that the provincial and district organizations should act with the target of equality for women... Even if it cannot be implemented at the local level in the first stage, a quota of at least forty percent should be introduced, and the zipper system should be applied in the elections. But of course this was not enacted." B16*

The inclusion of VAW in the provisions on membership registration, expulsion and disciplinary matters of the Law on Political Parties was identified as one of the steps that should be taken to prevent VAWP. Even if political parties include provisions in their statutes to combat violence and harassment against women, this remains entirely at the discretion of the parties. Legal academic B21 emphasizes that the Law on Political Parties should be amended so that acts of VAWP do not go unpunished, saying, "Since it is not in the law, it is left to the whim of the political party. Therefore, if the nature of the political party is not suitable for this, this cannot be introduced as a mechanism to compel the political party in any way."

*"... Kanunda olmadığı için de bu siyasi partinin zaten bir keyfine kalıyor. Dolayısıyla siyasi partinin fitratı buna müsait değilse zaten bu hiçbir şekilde siyasi partiyi zorlayacak bir mekanizma olarak getirilemiyor". A21*

Among the proposals put forward to eliminate VAWP, those that fall under the heading of "legal arrangements" are not limited to the political sphere but range from the legislation of public institutions to the regulation of bylaws within political parties. Recommendations include establishing a women's ministry, ensuring gender equality, reviewing the problems in practice in combating VAW, reactivating the signature to the Istanbul Convention and implementing international conventions to support the fight in this field.

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## **Empowering/supporting women's organizations within the party**

The need for strong women's solidarity, both within and across parties, was identified as a crucial dimension of preventing VAWP. Enabling parties' women's organizations to determine party policies for women's empowerment and establishing a budget for these organizations are also among the recommendations. B3, one of the civil society organization representatives, mentions that strong women's solidarity enables women to take decision-making positions and to transform party policies to be more egalitarian and inclusive: "... It makes a difference in terms of representation, I mean really, it allows women to have more of a place in decision-making mechanisms and so on. Their visibility increases, and women's problems and issues become more visible and more relevant. That representation is something that transforms men too..."

A19, one of the provincial chairs, said that women working in the party told her that, "We are very comfortable in the party because we feel safe with your presence here. We are working with you, you are giving us space." In a similar vein, former MP A24 shared her own experience that violence and discrimination against women in politics cannot be combated without "solidarity" and "resisting together."

Although the forms of women's organizations in political parties vary, the most common model is "women's branches." Women's branches, as defined in the Law on Political Parties, are organizations created as subsidiary organizations of parties, often without budgets of their own, and without voting rights even if they participate in committees. Former MP A24 states that even the current structure of women's branches is a discriminatory practice:

*"... They [women] come, they work in the women's branches of the political party. They work, they do not have anything in the end. Let's say she worked in the women's branch for ten years. Then you have to take her to a main position. I mean, she should be in a position in the main body of the party. Now the chair of the women's branches is a member of the Central Executive Committee (MYK), but she has no voting rights in the MYK. Now if you don't have a right to vote, you don't have a say. So you just talk, listen, get information. Votes are important in politics. Therefore, I think that this is also violence against women. I think there is discrimination. We also need to change this." A24*



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## **Supporting nonpartisan women's solidarity**

The need to recognize VAWP as a nonpartisan issue and to take a clear stance against violence was expressed especially by young people, experts associated with women's organizations, and women politicians. Politician B14, who has experience both as an MP and in the youth organization, stated that VAWP can be solved with a nonpartisan perspective and that "an explicit attitude" should be taken against violence:

"I mean, it doesn't matter which party she is from, if this [violence, barrier, discrimination] is exposed to a woman MP, we need to intervene immediately. We need to protect women's organizations, we need to protect women's consciousness, and women's perspective. And that can only happen through women's organization. In other words, it is realized through the organized struggle of all women in politics as a whole, not just in the political party. All women in all NGOs and political parties, in fact, all women need to come together on a common platform, they need to endeavor for a common struggle. In other words, there needs to be a common struggle of women's voices against the male mentality, and especially women politicians need to play a very active role in this... If there is violence against women... I mean, it is not, 'She is our MP,' or 'She is my colleague, let me protect her.' Especially if a male politician does this against a woman, this should definitely be exposed because he stands in a position that shapes society and carries out politics, and if we normalize that, we are normalizing all kinds of violence in society... Women politicians, regardless of which party they belong to... Ultimately, we are also waging a struggle against the male mentality. We need to unite on this front." B14

It was also suggested in some interviews that EOC should take more responsibility for ensuring solidarity with women in parliament. EOC, which was established within the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye to help ensure equal opportunities for women and men and combat gender-based discrimination on a parliamentary basis, has the objective of "establishing an effective parliamentary oversight by ensuring that the problems related to ensuring gender equality are improved both at the legal level and in practice." However, MP A7, who is also a member of the EOC, explains that while the commission should make

nonpartisan efforts, it has failed to do so in practice:

"...For example, when we were working on introducing equal representation and the zipper system in the Law on Political Parties, we went to the EOC and said, 'Look, this is a women's assembly, a commission that includes all parties. Let it start here. Let this commission go down in history for its achievements on women. Let's demand it together, every MP from every party. Let's enact the introduction of equal representation and the zipper system in this political parties law together, let's carry it out together.' This proposal did not come to life. In fact, we know that many of my women friends there also want it. But everyone is political within their own group, within their own framework. We are aware of how much our friends there want this, but unfortunately, there is a culture of subservience. They behave according to whatever their political standards are. It is sad, of course, sad for women." A7

The critical importance of women's organizations in the realization of gender equality and the fight against violence in Türkiye was also emphasized in the interviews as was the need for more support for civil society organizations such as KA.DER, which has been working to increase the participation of women in politics for many years. Former MP A13 noted, "I think both NGOs and the public sector should play a special role. But I think we have to explain the same thing to men as well," emphasizing that awareness-raising activities involving both women and men are crucial and that the public and NGOs should take responsibility for this. Similarly, A24, who ended her political career after serving as an MP for two terms, underlines that discrimination against women in politics cannot be prevented without teaching that participation in politics is a democratic right for everyone:

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*“Now, women need to be empowered as a whole. The whole thing needs to change, that is, the idea that politics is a man’s job needs to change. It needs to be explained to everyone that this is a democratic right, that this democratic right can be exercised by everyone, that women can also exercise this right, and that they can do it very well. Maybe, starting with education models. You know, gender equality, that is, equal individuals, equal citizens... The more we participate equally in the exercise of our democratic rights, the better this democracy will be for all of us, this is the first thing we will do, this is what we will say, and secondly, of course, parties need to take positive measures. So, this is still very important. For example, one of the most important things I have seen is that when becoming a member, when paying membership fees, the women who come to the party, for them to be able to move comfortably in the party – I go to a training in any city, there is no women’s toilet, there is a men’s toilet and no women’s toilet... It should be explained that women can also use this democratic right.” A24*

## New forms of politics

The interviews emphasized the importance of new forms of politics that will transform the mainstream politics that currently exclude women, youth and LGBTIQ+ people. B3, who actively works in one of the civil society organizations in the field of politics, pointed out that politics is changing and stated that political parties should adapt to this change by moving away from their traditional approaches:

*“...There are women who come from rights-based organizations, or who have worked in those areas, or who have connections, who are aware. We should not think that they are too closed, too party oriented. Because especially political parties transfer civil society-based, activist-based people to provincial party organizations... That traditional party structure and political structure definitely need to be broken. Those traditional things are not something that keep up with the present, with the age we are in. Unfortunately, many political parties in Türkiye are still very traditionalist. But social media has another transformative power. After that, there are many examples in Europe regarding civic engagement, and citizen participation. Politics is changing, transforming, and digitalizing, participation mechanisms are changing a lot. There are not many political parties that investigate this and put it on their agenda. There is still a traditional political structure that is based on relations over general, local balances, interests, unlawfully gained profit but I think this will not last long. The new parties are also a little bit aware of this, they are shifting a lot toward civil society.” B3*

City council member A12 stated that as pioneers of transformation in all areas of society, women also transform politics and will play a pioneering role in new ways of policymaking:

*“In other words, a criterion between women and*

*men in terms of being elected in politics, in terms of reaching a position, you know, women supported by women, for example in the last elections in the US, there are a lot of women supported by women and they won, you know, they won. It has happened in every party, it has come up in every political party, and it has come up at the state level in both political parties. In other words, it is very important to support women who are in the race... Teams have formed to make these women deputies and senators. Young women were found... Their election campaign propaganda was supported... These are important, I mean, what you expect from that woman, what that woman will do in politics is something very relevant in the past, the other is an individual trajectory. When there is no such support, whoever you team up with in politics, you end up walking based on what they say.” A12*

The need for new forms of politics was also raised in the focus group discussions. From the perspective of young people who actively participated in the interviews, the current political environment and ways of doing politics have long expired. Focus group participant youth reject the dominant political understanding that is not based on gender equality, does not recognize different sexual orientations, and does not sincerely accommodate diversity such as language, religion, ethnicity, class and bodily integrity. They also state that political parties and bodies that are not willing to confront the mistakes of the past will not be sincere in their attempts to address these diversities. In a focus group discussion with both young men and women from various youth networks, it was strongly emphasized that when young people create an alternative form and environment of politics that includes those previously excluded, existing political actors will be drawn into this new system, even for rent seeking reasons:

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*“(…) The increase in our solidarity will also improve this. Because political parties, as we have been talking about from the beginning, are more interest-oriented. When our solidarity, visibility and power increase, they will actually want to get a share of this power, that is, they will start to keep up with us, not because they have changed much. But rather because they will feel that ‘a power has emerged there, I can gain new interests for myself from that power, so I need to be included there too.’ (…) But I think there is something critical here. I mean, I was addressing this issue of safe space. There are issues such as the lack of policies of these parties, but for me, for example, it is not enough for various political parties to come out and say ‘we have produced such and such policy texts. We will now do such and such things, and these are our plans for the next century.’ Again, for me, even though those statements are very good statements... I’m not saying it in the sense that they are good in writing but bad in practice. Even if they are perfect and will be implemented, there is still something insufficient for me, and that is the issue of confrontation! I mean, all of them have very bad records, all of them, especially in terms of LGBTI+ people, there are things that they need to face in terms of the past. It is a hundred percent necessary step for me to have those confrontations about the past, and I think this is an important reason why many people hesitate to do politics. Because when they join that party, it is as if they are complicit in the crimes of that party. People are really hesitant to be there. That is why I think that parties should confront these first. (…)” (First participant from FG3)*

*“I mean, I will say similar things. Actually, I think it is important; doing politics within a party, the state of being complicit in the crimes of that party, or I do not know, you do politics in a leftist party, another segment is disturbed, etc. There are a lot of handicaps, but I think the struggle to be waged on this issue should not be carried out from a single front. People should struggle on many fronts, within the party, maybe in social media, on the street, etc. I think it is important to be fighting on all fronts and to be able to establish an alliance*

*and solidarity between these fronts. Apart from that, I think it is important that all groups that have been excluded from traditional politics or pushed out of the political sphere are able to weave a political alliance from the grass roots, organize themselves, and perhaps institutionalize these democratic politics within a party. Also, as FGP 1 said, when you create an alternative political space and make it visible and strong, the actors of traditional politics will also want to get a share from you. So I think this is the only way to do this, these are the steps that will transform those dirty rent [seeking] relationships. That is it.” (Second participant from FG3)*

*“(…) I was going to note that this quota should be evaluated not only in terms of gender but also in terms of other identities. I mean, some of them still implement it like this. I mean, it should also be applied in terms of race, maybe in terms of political traditions. For example, there is an issue that we constantly discuss within the movement – let’s say we will have a gay, white, male parliamentary candidate, but it is not something that we are comfortable with. I mean, if that trans woman can also be an MP, if that lesbian woman can also be an MP, we are fine with it. Otherwise, we are not fine with it, there is a stance like that, this issue is also important. We also do not have just one identity! (Laughs) You know, when a woman engages in politics, she does not only enter as a woman, there are many other identities and various experiences. It is important for them to be visible because that is one of the handicaps because when she is an LGBTI+ individual, everyone acts as if this is her only qualification and what she can do, and it goes to, ‘Let’s give her a microphone only on that subject.’” (First Participant from FG3)*

*“(…) The only place where I feel hopeful is as [FGP 2] and [FGP 1] said, you know, this place will get stronger. They will come here, we will overcome those rent-seeking relationships, structures, blah blah blah; well, there is no structure, there is no justice, there is no expression. I mean there is no right to vote for everyone in the country right now! That is why I also find confrontation critical (…)” (Third Participant from FG3)*

*On the other hand, the need for safe environments—where those directly affected by the issue have a say, can speak freely and without hesitation, and can be sure that their safety will be ensured even after they have spoken—was also put forward as an indispensable element for alternative forms of politics during the course of a focus group discussion with young women from various youth networks:*

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*“Working without being the subject of the issue, and developing a campaign, this has to stop! For example, a lot of work is being done, but the subjects of the issue are not present at that planning stage! Or grants are being distributed, projects are being developed, in other words, something is always being done (...) While planning, designing, and then monitoring these activities, we should always look at one thing: is it planned with the subjects of the issue, do the subjects of the issue have a say in the process? (...)” (First Participant from FG1)*

*“I very much agree with what [FGP 1] said, I also think that the solutions produced for the processes without the involvement of the women and youth remain very idle. It is just that, unfortunately, their involvement is very superficial and tokenistic in many areas of Türkiye. Therefore, I think that creating really safe spaces where*

*they can express themselves freely, where they can bring up the agendas that are fundamentally needed in the field while determining the needs and policies should also be part of the solution. On the other hand, it is a fact that we are not in a political atmosphere where we can ensure the inclusion of some identities. In other words, it is not a very realistic expectation to expect a queer person to go and participate in politics and produce policies directly with an open identity, but as long as we do not ensure this, we cannot ensure their representation, or to expect an Alevi person, an Alevi woman, a Kurdish woman going directly and conducting politics with an open identity means threatening their security, and some situations that actually put the right to life at risk should also be taken into consideration, these should be prevented, and work should be carried out by taking into account that discrimination against them.” (Second Participant from FG1)*

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# SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Today in Türkiye, the “absence syndrome” that Şirin Tekeli referred to in the 1980s regarding the status of women in politics has changed. However, women are still struggling “to be present” in politics. One of the reasons that this struggle is challenging is the violence that women face in the political realm. Since the 2010s, VAWP has gradually become a more prominent issue in the global arena. Many studies have been carried out and have helped raise awareness of VAWP, and international and national legal instruments have been created to combat it.

This study aims to generate knowledge on VAWP in Türkiye by reviewing the international conventions, analysing national legislation within the framework of international norms, and conducting qualitative research. We carried out 54 interviews with women politicians and key informants as well as six focus group discussions with the representatives of youth and women’s organizations.

The results of the study highlighted the following topics:

**The qualitative research indicates that women in politics have been subjected to different types of violence from various perpetrators during the nomination process, campaigning process, and while holding office.**

- Women politicians are exposed to psychological violence. Examples of the psychological violence that women have faced include not trusting women’s expertise, not seeing women as competent, not taking them seriously, ignoring, insulting/swearing, threatening, mocking, calling them derogatory nicknames, devaluing, intimidating, discrediting, preventing their political participation under the guise of “protection” and forcing them to seek permission. The development and dissemination of corrosive discourses against women, especially rumors about honor, fall within this scope. The fact that women are controlled and excluded based on the way they dress, that they are only allowed to be present in certain—insignificant—areas of politics, and the expectation that women should prove their resilience despite all of this, all exert significant pressure on women. Acts of VAWP include viewing women’s candidacy as “token representation,” using sexist language, downgrading women’s candidacy in favor of men, and making decisions without women’s participation and intentionally excluding them by doing so at times and places inappropriate for women.
  - The candidacy fees of the political parties in Türkiye, where women’s employment participation rates are lower than men’s, are identified as economic violence. Moreover, the invisibility of women’s efforts in politics, the lack of budget allocation for women’s work in the political parties, and the questioning of expenditures for events regarding women’s issues are also economic dimensions of VAWP.
  - Sending sexually explicit/harassing videos, photos, and messages, taking photos without permission, and making judgmental accusations are identified as acts of sexual violence. Social media is widely used for these actions.
  - The forms of physical violence that women experience include physical attacks, having objects thrown at them, armed attacks, and raids and attacks of their home.
  - Family, friends, close circles, political party members and voters can all be perpetrators of VAWP during the **nomination process**. While the inner circle mainly uses psychological violence to “protect” women from dirty politics and prevent them from entering into politics, political parties’ managers and colleagues use psychological and economic violence by exploiting them for the party’s gain. Additionally, women candidates are slandered and their reputation is damaged through sexist discourse using media and social media.
  - Women who want to become candidates in local politics are subjected to more social pressure from family, close relatives and society. Especially in cities or districts outside metropolitan cities, the lives of women candidates who decide to enter politics is often closely scrutinized.
  - During the **campaigning process**, the actions of women’s family, friends and close circles are often in the form of reminders of traditional roles. Women who enter politics are warned about many things by members of their political party, such as how they should dress and how they should behave. In addition, the media and social media are frequently used to spread fake news and misinformation, including to disparage a woman’s honor. It can be said that psychological violence against women candidates during the campaigning process mostly comes from their political party members.
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- **While holding office**, it is observed that the role of the family in particular changes. The attitudes of friends and family who tried to prevent women from entering the “dirty” political environment seem to evolve into “support” when women are elected. However, friends and relatives continue to remind women of traditional roles and cause women to question their existence in politics even after they are elected.
- Perpetrators of VAWP in the period when they are holding office predominantly include members of women’s political party and other parties. Even after being elected, members within their party continue to disregard, belittle and devalue what women have to say; confine them to certain political areas which are of secondary importance, thus limiting the domains where women can be effective; and dictating when and how they can speak, with men—especially within their own political parties—frequently interrupting women.
- Members of other political parties—mostly men—engage in negative behaviours such as ignoring, ridiculing and silencing women, reminding them of their traditional roles, commenting on their body and looks, and threatening them.
- As women politicians’ visibility increases on social media and in the media after elections, they may start to be judged on their bodies and clothes instead of their work.
- Women politicians have often cited what is called in the Turkish mediascape “lynching campaigns,” which are also extensively observed in social media, as a type of violence. Another type of online violence subjects women to sexually explicit harassment. In addition, following their election, women even occasionally face online violence from their constituencies. The examples uncovered in this research include but are not limited to young women being belittled as “young” and “cute,” being questioned about their marital status and relationships, often being reminded that they acquired their current status thanks to the constituency’s votes, and last but not least, being harassed with abusive language during and outside of working hours.
- In addition to women politicians who hold the positions of MP, mayor, city council member, municipal council member or mukhtar, representatives of youth and women’s organizations of political parties, youth networks and civil society organizations interviewed in the qualitative research stated that there are significant levels of VAWP, especially in the period when women hold office.

**This qualitative research indicates that women in politics generally do not bring the issue of VAWP to the agenda, and do not apply to the institutional reporting mechanisms for many reasons.**

- Women who have been subjected to violence do not want to file a complaint due to the fear of stigmatization. They think that they will be remembered for this incident throughout their political lives, and often believe that the only solution is resigning from their position and quitting politics.
- The experiences of those women who have resorted to legal recourse illustrate that the protection measures issued by the courts are insufficient and that sanctions imposed on the perpetrators are far from deterrent. VAWP often goes unpunished.

**The analysis of the national legislation and the qualitative research provide suggestions and recommendations to combat VAWP.**

- There is no legal regulation directly addressing VAWP. The Law on Political Parties, with which parties are obliged to comply, does not include any provisions on violence and discrimination against women in politics. Amendments defining prevention, monitoring and protection mechanisms of VAWP must be made.
- Different stakeholders of civil society including professional organizations, rights-based organizations and women’s organizations can also contribute to the issue of VAWP, primarily by raising awareness around the issue and providing support mechanisms for women. They can monitor cases of VAWP, collect data and support survivors of violence.
- To make violence visible, data-generating institutions and organizations, especially public institutions, civil society and universities, should produce quantitative and qualitative data, repeat data collection at regular intervals and share the results. For lawmakers, data-driven policy making should be a top priority.
- National legislation on political rights is not gender sensitive. The absence of provisions in the Electoral Law and the Law on Political Parties to ensure gender equality and women’s equal participation in politics is a serious deficiency. Therefore, legislators should introduce a parity law that will be effective in eliminating VAWP and improve quota practices.

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- Political parties need to create safe environments for their women members and include “becoming a gender responsive political party” as one of their political goals. This will enable them to take important measures, ranging from reducing women’s nomination fees to re-evaluating the structure and function of women’s organizations within the party or nominating women as candidates for elective office. Changing the approaches of “token representation” and “token equality” will contribute to reducing VAW within the party and sanctioning perpetrators of violence.
  - There is a strong need to empower women’s organizations within parties. Political parties should be equipped with the ability to determine party politics from a broader perspective including different identities and needs.
  - VAWP must be recognized as a nonpartisan issue and all parties must take a clear stance against it. EOC can take an active role in combating VAWP and gender-based discrimination.
  - Political parties, public institutions and civil society can collaborate to raise awareness of VAWP, organize training programs and prepare guidelines.
  - Among young people, the traditional way of doing politics is criticized for “representing Muslim, Turkish, Sunni, heterosexual, rich and advantaged groups.” The lack of inclusiveness and pluralism, and the exclusion of women from the construction of democracy and Parliament were noted. Additionally, it was mentioned that young people are unable to find a place for themselves within this framework. Therefore, politics should be more inclusive and conducted in a way that accounts for differences.

**The study acknowledges that preconditions for combating VAWP include uncovering the acts of violence that women are subjected to by various individuals due to their political roles and “naming violence in politics.” Moreover, these results also highlight the importance of enhancing democracy in the country to combat VAW and ensure gender equality and a violence-free society.**

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## Annex Table 1. International Conventions and Other Policy Documents on Combating Violence against Women in Politics

### INTERNATIONAL CONVENTIONS

UN - Universal Declaration of Human Rights

Council of Europe - Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms

UN - Convention on the Political Rights of Women

UN - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights

UN - Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)

UN - Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women

Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará Convention)

UN - International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance

UN - Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

EC - European Urban Charter and European Declaration on the Rights of the European Citizen (1)

Council of European Municipalities and Regions - (CEMR) Europe Charter for Equality of Men and Women in Local Life

EC - Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence

UN Economic and Social Council - Resolution 1990/15

UN - Beijing Declaration and Action Plan

UN Security Council - Resolution 1325

UN Millennium Development Goals

UN Commission on the Status of Women Resolutions

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

EC - Recommendation on the Protection of Women against Violence

EC Recommendation 1706 on Increasing Women's Political Representation through the Electoral System

EC Recommendation 288 on the Sustainability of GE in Local and Regional Political Life

Paris Global Agenda for Gender Equality in Local Life

UN General Assembly (A/RES/66/130) - Women and Political Participation

UN Policy Directive on Principles and Types of Electoral Assistance

UN General Assembly (A/HRC/23/50) Report of the Working Group on Discrimination against Women in Law and in Practice

CEDAW Committee (CEDAW/C/GC/30) - General Recommendation No. 30 on Women in Conflict Prevention, Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations

UN Policy Directive on Promoting Women's Electoral and Political Participation through Electoral Assistance

UN Policy Directive on Preventing and Mitigating Election-related Violence



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UN General Assembly (A/RES/71/170) - Intensifying Efforts to Prevent and Eliminate All Forms of Violence against Women and Girls: Resolution on Domestic Violence

UN General Assembly (A/RES/73/148) - Intensifying Efforts to Prevent and Eliminate All Forms of Violence against Women and Girls: Sexual Harassment Resolution

UN General Assembly (A/73/301) Report on Violence against Women in Politics

UN General Assembly (A/HRC/38/47/Add.2) - Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, on her mission to the Bahamas

Council of Europe Recommendation 2274 - Making Parliaments Free from Sexism and Sexual Harassment

Council of Europe Recommendation 2157 - Towards an Ambitious Council of Europe Agenda for Gender Equality

UN General Assembly (A/HRC/44/52) - Combating Violence against Women Journalists

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## Annex Table 2. National Legislation Analysed in the Context of Combating Violence against Women in Politics in Türkiye

Law No. 298 on Basic Provisions of Elections and Voter Registers (1961)
Law No. 657 on Civil Servants (1965)
Turkish Constitution No. 2709 (1982)
Law No. 2820 on Political Parties (1983)
Law No. 2839 on Parliamentary Elections (1983)
Law No. 2972 on the Law on Elections of Local Administrations and Neighbourhood Mukhtars and Boards of Alderman (1984)
Law No. 3152 on the Organization and Duties of the Ministry of Interior (1985)
Law No. 5251 on the Organization and Duties of the General Directorate on the Status of Women (2004)
Regulation on Principles of Ethical Behavior of the Public Officials and Application Procedures and Essentials (2004)
Turkish Penal Code (2004)
Municipal Law No. 5393 (2005)
Law No. 5840 on Equal Opportunities Commission for Women and Men (2009)
Law No. 6253 on the Administrative Organization of the Presidency of the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye (2011)
Law No. 6216 on the Establishment and Trial Procedures of the Constitutional Court (2011)
Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence against Women (2012)
Law No. 6271 on Presidential Election (2012)
Law No. 6701 on the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye (2012)
Regulation on Principles and Procedures for the Implementation of the Law on the Human Rights and Equality Institution of Türkiye
Law No. 6328 on the Ombudsman Institution (2012)
Implementing Regulation on Law No. 6284 on the Protection of the Family and Prevention of Violence against Women (2013)
Regulation on Violence Prevention and Monitoring Centers (2013)
Regulation on the Opening and Operation of Women's Guesthouses (2016)
Law No. 7062 on the Organization and Duties of the Supreme Electoral Council (2017)

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