

Violence ≠ the Cost of Politics

→ The Problem:

Over the last few decades, the focus on gender equality in political life and public offices has grown substantially, bringing with it a host of positive effects for women, democracy and society. However, as more women have emerged as elected leaders, activists, officials and voters, they have encountered increasing levels of violence, including harassment, and intimidation, as well as physical and sexual assaults. This violence is used as a weapon to prevent or control women's participation—as well as to keep them from speaking out about it. It is far from “politics as usual:” it specifically targets women *because they are* women, pressuring them to leave politics or discouraging them from participating at all.

→ Why it's Important:

Women's full and equal political participation is a human right, a measure of democratic integrity, and results in real gains for society, including greater governmental responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines and more sustainable peace. But violence against women in politics is a major barrier to women's political participation, and threatens to undo many of the gains that have been made toward political equality. This year alone, women politicians in countries as disparate as Germany, Mexico and Uganda have been attacked or murdered for their political involvement; women have been prevented from voting in Pakistan; the Inter-Parliamentary Union has 37 women on its list of parliamentarians under threat; and women in Tanzania report widespread sexual harassment and abuse within parties towards those who wish to run for office. Additionally, research shows that attacks on high-profile women politicians negatively affect the political aspirations of other women and girls, while high levels of impunity mean that attackers rarely face charges.

→ What we Know:

This violence is pervasive and can fundamentally damage democratic integrity. Despite the complexity of national and local contexts, it is a global problem. It is not the cost of doing politics. In fact, it costs politics the sustainable and responsive democratic governance that an inclusive political space can create. Recognizing this cost, activists have begun to expose and document violence against women in politics, and a small number of national legislatures have even considered (and in Bolivia's case, adopted) laws to criminalize and prosecute it. However, while the problem of violence against politically active women is gaining prominence, it has yet to be addressed in a comprehensive way.



Photograph by Ezra Gregg

“Violence against women in politics is a major issue. We must really put our backs behind it, and make it number one on the agenda.”
- Farahnaz Ispahani, former MP, Pakistan

Photograph by Ezra Gregg



Ene Ede, gender advisor to NDI's STOP VAWIE campaign to end electoral violence against women in Nigeria, speaks about the project in DC in December, 2015.

→ **What NDI is Doing:**

To date, the majority of work that has been done on this issue has been limited, undermined by regional silos and missing the benefits of a broader global discussion. To move forward, the different groups concerned with the issue needed to be brought together, and that is what NDI has set out to do with this campaign. Building on the shared analysis of a group of international experts, NDI will move the disparate discussions toward a consensus on an action plan to counter—and eliminate—violence against women in politics. At a global

conference to be held in March 2016 in the margins of the Commission on the Status of Women in New York, a set of best practices and strategies drawn together through NDI's convening power will be presented and adopted. These can then be used effectively by activists, politicians and policy-makers in their own countries to raise awareness, mitigate violence and increase the accountability of perpetrators.

→ **What You Can Do:**

NDI is committed to bringing the issue of violence against women in politics to light, and to enhancing the efforts to combat it. Your contribution to this campaign is invaluable. Violence against women in politics is one of the gravest barriers to women's full and equal political participation today. By supporting efforts to eliminate that barrier, you can have a remarkable influence on women's ability to participate in politics in their own voice and conscience, without fear of violence or the threat of reprisal.



Photograph by Ezra Gregg

*"If I brought it up, I would look like a whiny woman. I wouldn't look strong. People would say 'this is how politics is -- you need to have a thick skin.' So I kept my mouth shut."
- Meryl Frank, former Ambassador and Mayor, USA*

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