

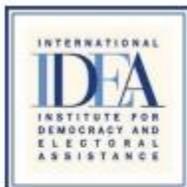


CONSOLIDATED REPLY

Of the e-Discussion on:

Violence Against Women in Politics

December 2016



*Empowered lives.
Resilient nations.*



United Nations Entity for Gender Equality
and the Empowerment of Women

LAUNCHING MESSAGE [Spanish](#) [French](#) [Arabic](#)

Background

Recently, elected women from [France](#), [Canada](#), [Scotland](#) and [Israel](#), to name a few examples, publicly condemned misogynist and violent political cultures. Not only did they expose acts of harassment and violence in politics, they made the case that violence should [not be the price](#) of participating in politics.

Violence against women in politics (VAWP) limits women's political opportunities and discourages or prevents them from exercising their political rights, including their rights as voters, candidates, party supporters or public officials¹. VAWP can occur during electoral campaigns, but not only: as women assume various political positions, they may, for example, be pressured to resign from their posts on the basis of gender, or verbally threatened or intimidated because they are women in politics; and VAWP may take many other forms, including in sexist stereotypes and images portrayed in the media, which, particularly in the digital age, focus on women's bodies, sexuality and traditional social roles, rather than their competence, capacity and contributions as leaders.

International actors are increasingly raising awareness and responding to the issue of VAWP. [UN Women](#) is driving the global process to define and measure the phenomenon. [UNDP](#) and UN Women are jointly developing a guidebook on violence against women in elections. The [International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance](#) (IDEA) addresses violence against women in initiatives that focus on strengthening political parties, conducting trends analysis on VAWP and ensuring that the topic is addressed in regional and global interventions. The [Inter-Parliamentary Union](#) (IPU) is preparing an Issue Brief and a resolution on the subject. Other organizations are taking up the issue, such as the [National Democratic Institute](#) (NDI), which recently launched the Global Call to Action [#NotTheCost](#), and academics are working to further define this field.

Objective of the e-Discussion

This e-Discussion seeks to bring the experiences of the iKNOW Politics community into this growing dialogue on VAWP. Please join us in the e-Discussion from **22 August to 30 September 2016**.

Questions

1. What is violence against women in politics, and what forms does it take? What are its key drivers? Is VAWP particular to specific countries, regions, cultures, or institutions?
2. Who are the perpetrators of VAWP, and what are their motives?
3. What are the consequences of VAWP on women, society and democracy?
4. Are there any successful mechanisms/instruments to expose acts of VAWP (e.g. reporting, services for victims, rules of conduct)?
5. Who has responsibility to address VAWP, and what types of partnerships are necessary to do so successfully?

¹ Report of the Secretary-General at the Sixty-eight session (2013), Item 28 of the provisional agenda, Advancement of women, Measures taken and progress achieved in the promotion of women and political participation http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/68/184&Lang=E

6. Can you identify any specific legislation, programs, trainings, studies, and awareness-raising campaigns, which help prevent punish and sanction political violence against women?

CONTRIBUTIONS

From 19 August to 16 October 2016, iKNOW Politics hosted an e-Discussion on [Violence Against Women in Politics](#). Thirteen experts from the Americas, North Africa and the Middle East, Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, joined the online debate and submitted contributions. Participants agree that cultural stereotypes are still playing a role hindering the normal participation of women in politics.

DISCUSSION SUMMARY

The iKNOW Politics team thanks all iKNOW Politics members and experts who took the time to answer the questions of this e-Discussion and share experiences, practices and recommendations, which are summarized below.

What is violence against women in politics, and what forms does it take? What are its key drivers? Is VAWP particular to specific countries, regions, cultures, or institutions?

Violence against women in politics (VAWP) is a global phenomenon taking various forms and intensity, depending on legal systems, institutions, culture, tradition, and political contexts. Many women in politics around the world have reported VAWP experiences, ranging from psychological, sexual, and physical, and, more recently, online acts of violence. Assassinations, physical violence, including rape and sexual harassment, sexist remarks, verbal abuse, and threats of reprisal are used as tools to intimate, humiliate and, worse, put an end to a woman's political career.

According to the conceptual work done by the international campaign [#NotTheCost](#) - Stopping Violence against Women in Politics - three characteristics distinguish VAWP:

- It targets women because of their gender
- In its very form it can be gendered, as exemplified by sexist threats and sexual violence
- Its impact is to discourage women – in particular from being or becoming active in politics

In **Morocco**, women parliamentarians defined VAWP as follows: "Physical, psychological or sexual actions, conduct and aggression committed by one person or a group of persons, directly or through third parties against women who are candidates, elected, designated, or exercising public or political roles. These actions have the objective to prevent or restrict women's political functions." ([Khadija El Atri](#))

A phenomenon, alarmingly on the rise, is online harassment, or cyber-violence against women in politics. For example, a recent [study](#) by the Inter-Parliamentary Union has shown that social media has become the number one place in which psychological violence – particularly in the form of sexist and misogynistic remarks, humiliating images, mobbing, intimidation and threats – is perpetrated against women parliamentarians. One [analysis](#) found that US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton and former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard received twice as many abusive tweets as opponents Bernie Sanders and Kevin Rudd, respectively. In the UK, the MP for Birmingham Yardley, Jess Phillips, has received more than 600 threats of rape.

The cycle of violence has been attributed by some respondents to institutionalized gender discrimination and current power structures. They pinpointed persisting gendered stereotypes as powerful drivers of VAWP.

Who are the perpetrators of VAWP, and what are their motives?

VAWP is usually perpetrated by a woman's family or friends, members of her political party, community and religious leaders, state security forces and the police, among others. Media outlets can also play an influential role in perpetrating violence - either through their own reports, or through disseminating violent messages about politically active women from other sources. The main motives behind such acts as cited by the e-discussion respondents were: to exclude women from practicing their citizenship rights and to create a hostile atmosphere discouraging women from political engagement.

Contexts which tolerate misogyny in public and political spaces, often promoted by conservative political or religious leaders, can stimulate VAWP as a means to preserve the status quo of male dominated political processes and institutions, including, as noted by a respondent from Morocco, political dynasties.

What are the consequences of VAWP on women, society and democracy?

Democracies are weakened when VAWP is applied to discourage women from the political arena and violates women's human rights, including their civil and political rights. Alienating women from political processes thus undermines democratic processes at large. The underlying assumptions of representative democracy can be therefore called into question.

VAWP perpetuates the systemic under-representation of women in politics. Low numbers of women in politics can negatively impact political institutions' commitment to women's issues and gender equality. Societies where VAWP is widespread rarely address women's issues within political institutions such as unions, parties and legislative bodies.

A [study](#) conducted by the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment (UN Women) in **India, Nepal and Pakistan** has shown that intimidation of women in politics dampen the political aspirations of other women and girls to become politically active. It analyzed incidents of violence against women that occurred from 2003 to 2013. The study found that more than 60 per cent of women do not participate in politics due to fear of violence. Rebecca Reichmann Tavares, Representative for UN Women's Office for India, Bhutan, Maldives and Sri Lanka explained: "Almost 90 per cent of women in these countries feel that violence breaks their resolve to join politics. From our comprehensive review of laws on violence against women, it is clear that none of the three countries has legislation that deals strictly with offenders to prevent violence against women in politics. We know that where laws are in place, prevalence tends to be lower and fewer people think that violence against women is justifiable."

Increased numbers of women in politics can result in the promotion of gender-sensitive legislation, particularly that address violence against women. For example, in **Spain**, "Women's participation in decision-making and within parliament accounts for more than 30 percent, which has resulted not only in a comprehensive legislative approach to violence against women but they also created a sub-committee of the Equality Committee charged with monitoring the enforcement of 2004 Organic Act on Integrated Protection measures against Gender Violence".

Are there any successful mechanisms/instruments to expose acts of VAWP (e.g. reporting, services for victims, rules of conduct)?

Mechanisms and strategies to expose and document VAWP are being developed around the world. Several regional institutions have already taken action to call VAWP to light and condemn it. One example is the Inter-American Commission of Women's [Declaration on Political Harassment and Violence against Women](#), adopted in 2015 as a follow-Up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI). The declaration promotes "the adoption, where appropriate, of regulations, programs and measures for the prevention, attention, protection, eradication of political violence and/or harassment against women, that allow the proper punishment and reparation of these acts, in the administrative, criminal, electoral norms spheres, taking into account the applicable international instruments" and calls on various institutions to play their part in denouncing and putting an end to VAWP. Prior to that, in 2007, the 10th Regional Conference on Women in **Latin America and the Caribbean** signed the [Quito Consensus](#) acknowledging the issue on a broader scale for the first time. Legal reform has been prominent in Latin American countries. In **Bolivia** for example, the law stipulates that violations can be denounced by the victim, her relatives, or any other person, in verbal or written form. The law imposes penalties of two to five years of prison for political harassment, three to eight years for physical or psychological violence, and the prevailing sanction for sexual assault according to the criminal code.

Political parties can also take action against VAWP, including signing codes of conduct or implementing internal mechanisms. In **Sierra Leone**, for example, eight parties signed an "open and safe" election pledge that opposed all forms of violence and intimidation against women.

Other specific measures can be implemented, including:

- Establishment of interest groups among women to address issues of VAWP
- Data collection and analysis on VAWP
- Lobbying for legislation to protect women.
- Lobbying and training to have the media provide balanced reporting on women in politics and any acts of VAWP
- Promote stories of survivors of VAWP, successful response mechanisms and other success stories on women who have overcome VAWP
- In **Pakistan**, a hotline services to provide access to medical, legal and security assistance and expose acts of VAWP were established.
- Use social media to expose and organize against VAWP. In the **United States**, for example, EMILY's List – an American political action committee -- mobilized its online network to collect signatures to [demand](#) that political groups suspend funding to groups advocating violence against women.

Civil society and political parties can implement joint strategies, creating pressures for reform. By connecting to international organizations, and other women peace and human rights' NGOs from across regions, they can use global campaigns, such as NDI's Call to Action [#NotTheCost](#), to encourage more activists and leaders to expose and end VAWP.

Who has responsibility to address VAWP, and what types of partnerships are necessary to do so successfully?

Societies at large must assume responsibility to fight practices of VAWP. The State (with its different bodies), civil society, political institutions (such as parties, unions and student clubs), women's human rights groups, feminist movements, women's national machineries and academics can mobilize, and partner up to address VAWP. The legislative, executive, and judiciary branches of governments all have a prevailing role. They can ensure that legislation is in place to address the issue, finances and implementation of the legislation is effected, and that enforcement is equally effected. In addition, international actors (international NGOs and donors) have an important role in mobilizing resources and support to those working on the ground to address VAWP. Civil society and the media play a pivotal role in relaying incidents of VAWP cases, as well as awareness-raising.

In **Egypt**, CSO networks, such as '[Nazra for Feminist Studies](#)' support women in politics and expose acts of VAWP to society at large. Another example from Egypt is the Women and Memory Forum's Oral History Archive that documents and disseminates women's experiences in the public sphere. It provides data and insights on VAWP and its implications on women's future contribution to politics in Egypt.

Internationally, VAWP contravenes the Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations' Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). The latter convention's Article 7, clearly outlines the responsibility of member states to uphold the following rights of women:

- Vote in elections and be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies
- Participate in the formulation of government policy, uphold public office and perform all public functions at all levels, taking actions to promote an inclusive democracy
- Participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country

Civil society and political parties can use such international frameworks and instruments to mobilize for the adoption of regulations and measures for prevention, eradication and punishment of acts of VAWP.

Can you identify any specific legislation, programmes, trainings, studies, and awareness-raising campaigns, which help prevent punish and sanction political violence against women?

From this online discussion, it becomes evident that VAWP requires intensified global and national efforts, including measurement and data collection, as well as testimonials, and targeted projects and trainings. The Inter-Parliamentary Union's recent [Issue Brief](#) 'Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians' is one such advancement. It exposes the experiences of 55 women members of 39 national parliaments with VAWP. The Group of Women Parliamentarians of the network ParlAmericas -- the network of the national legislatures of member states of the Organization of American States (OAS) -- published in 2016 a [report](#) 'Gender-based Political Harassment: Building Awareness in Parliaments' following a regional meeting in St. Lucia. Such meetings foster exchanges and allow Parliaments to report on gender-related legislative work, including VAWP. The group developed a concrete Action Plan targeting VAWP, the '[Plan of Action to Prevent Harassment and Political Violence against Women](#)'.

In the framework of gender-sensitive laws, **Rwanda** introduced in 2006 a law to combat gender-based violence. For the first time, rape was defined and recognized in Rwandan law. In the **Democratic Republic**

of the Congo, mechanisms to expose acts of VAWP include the Law on the Implementation of Gender of 2015 and the 2011 Electoral Act as well as the Steering Committee of UNSCR 1325. On 17 May, **Bolivia** passed the [Law Against Political Violence and Harassment Against Women](#). The law provides a two to five year prison sentence for anyone who pressurizes, persecutes, harasses or threatens an elected woman or those exercising public functions. **Kenya** has ratified the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, which also addresses the topic of VAWP. In 2011, **Morocco** revised its Constitution and guarantees women's rights and political participation, including their protection. However, as one respondent from Morocco revealed, VAWP has not yet been taken up as a stand-alone issue by political institutions.

International organizations, such as the iKNOW Politics partners (International IDEA, IPU, UN Women, UNDP) are partnering up to implement projects to support countries in addressing VAWP.

This online discussion revealed that visibility, exposure and partnerships are key to advance solutions, including legal reforms, and also recognized that the perpetuation of VAWP undermines democracy and inclusive political processes.