

*Summary*

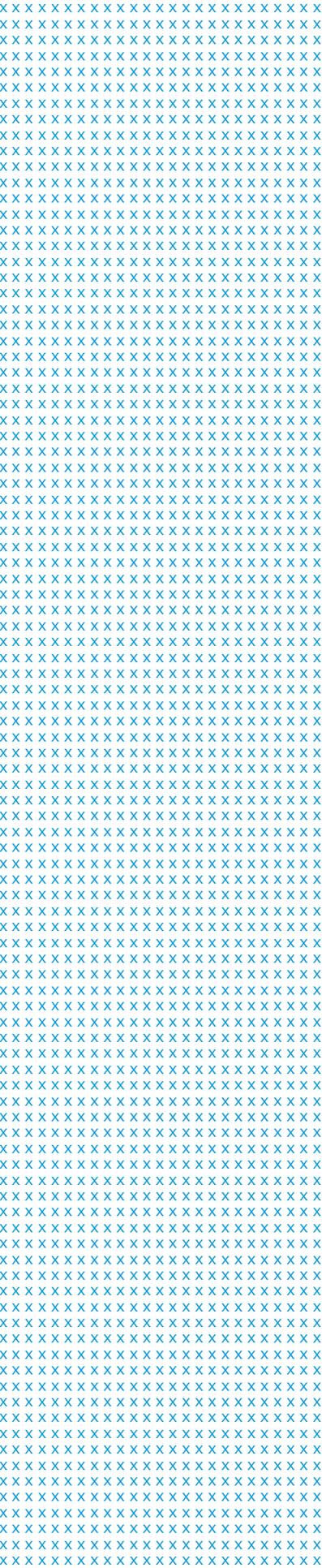
# PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS:

*A Programming Guide*



Empowered lives.  
Resilient nations.





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## Summary

# PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS: A PROGRAMMING GUIDE

Women's participation in politics, as voters or candidates, has never been as high as it is today: over 10,000 women serve as national parliamentarians; millions of women politicians serve at sub-national levels; and increasing numbers of women vote, run for office and actively participate in electoral management around the world.

These achievements, however, are still far below the target of gender balance in decision-making set in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action. Women remain under-represented in all levels of government: few are elected as governors, mayors or to other decision-making positions at local level, and they serve as head of state or government in less than 20 countries.

Women face myriad challenges when they are exercising their political rights, the most alarming of which is the perceived increase in violence against women in politics (VAWP), including violence against women in elections (VAWE). Gender-based violence in politics and elections is increasingly visible, ranging from the escalation of harassment, intimidation, sexual and physical violence against women in public life and gender-biased scrutiny by the public and the media, to forced resignations and assassinations of women politicians in the most extreme cases. As elections are the main event by which formal political power is established and voting rights are realized, VAWE remains the highest barrier to women realizing their political rights.

"Preventing violence against women in elections: a programming guide" was developed by UN Women and UNDP through researching, collecting and analyzing experiences from more than 40 countries over several years. The Programming Guide defines VAWE and its victims and perpetrators, outlines available tools and offers a programming framework for prevention and response. It is intended for use by policy makers, practitioners and a range of electoral stakeholders, such as human rights defenders, civil society organizations (CSOs), women's groups and gender equality advocates, electoral management bodies (EMBs), political parties and international organizations. The experiences and examples contained within the Guide reveal that VAWE – and VAWP more broadly – is a global phenomenon, constituting a violation of women's fundamental human rights and freedoms. The Guide also makes clear that action can be taken to eliminate VAWE.

This Summary was developed as a companion to the Programming Guide. It provides an overview of the Guide's main points, country examples and programming framework. It can be used to raise awareness about VAWE, engage new stakeholders or refresh concepts detailed in the full-length Programming Guide.\*

## Violence against women in elections, its causes and consequences

VAWE prevents women from exercising and realizing their political rights, both in public or private spaces. It is driven by gender-specific motivations and discrimination, especially

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\* The content of this summary, prepared by UN Women, is extracted from the joint UN Women and UNDP Publication Preventing Violence Against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide (December 2017).

as women challenge traditional roles and engage in politics. The most obvious motivation behind the violence is to discourage women from pursuing a political career or prevent their independent political participation. The practice of VAWE is driven by gender-specific motivations and discrimination. Perpetrators of violence are reacting to women’s deviation from traditional gender roles, which may be perceived as threatening male-dominated power structures. VAWE may prevent women from standing as candidates or winning competitive races for political office, discourage women from voting or punish them for being active in the electoral process. The acts of violence can be psychological, physical and sexual in nature, and include the loss of livelihood, intimidation, physical or sexual assault, residential displacement and murder. Acts of VAWE may take place in the context of the family, community, or state, in public or private spheres. Acts of violence against women become acts of electoral violence when they negatively impact women’s participation in an electoral process and the realization of women’s political rights.

### Challenges of addressing VAWE

Despite its importance, VAWE has remained in the margins of study and policy due to the lack of reporting and data, limited understanding about the issue and stigma attached to gender-based violence in many societies.

Efforts to develop a framework for VAWE analysis and prevention are confronted with several obstacles, including:

- Lack of standard indicators
- Lack of data to measure prevalence and incidence
- Exclusion of political and gender dimensions from standard violence against women (VAW) and electoral violence definitions, respectively
- Underreporting by victims
- Biases in media coverage
- Lack of political will to address violence

### Who is targeted? <sup>1</sup>

- Political campaigners, activists, organizers, community grassroots leaders
- Elected officials
- Voters
- Election staff
- Electoral candidates
- Ministers, public servants, members of commissions, unions and other public officials
- Political party members

### Types of VAWE

The typology of VAWE follows the internationally agreed types of violence against women:

- **Psychological violence is frequently perpetrated against women in elections.** It is intended to intimidate, persecute and humiliate.<sup>3</sup> Of all the forms of VAWE, psychological violence is the most diverse and subtle. It

### WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS?

‘Violence against women in political life, including in and beyond elections, is any act of, or threat of, gender-based violence, resulting in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, that prevents them from exercising and realizing their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including the right to vote and hold public office, to vote in secret and to freely campaign, to associate and assemble, and to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression. Such violence can be perpetrated by a family member, community member and/or by the State.’

## PERPETRATORS OF VAWE<sup>2</sup>

Political Actors	Societal Actors	State Actors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Political party leaders</li> <li>• Election candidates</li> <li>• Political party members</li> <li>• Campaign workers</li> <li>• Party militia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Voters</li> <li>• Family members</li> <li>• Intimate partners, spouses</li> <li>• Community members</li> <li>• Religious leaders</li> <li>• Media</li> <li>• Employers and colleagues</li> <li>• Criminal elements</li> <li>• Youth groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Police, armed forces</li> <li>• Government institutions</li> <li>• Election officials</li> <li>• State proxies (e.g. militia)</li> </ul>

includes overt threats of physical harm and harassment of all groups, including candidates, party supporters, voters and elections officials. Implicit and explicit threats of social exclusion, divorce, and rejection can deter women from considering seeking office, voting in general or voting against a clan/family's preferred candidate. Psychological harm degrades, demoralizes or shames the victim. Threats often precede physical violence. As with other forms of violence against women, psychological violence can happen in the home, the community and in public, including online.

- **Physical violence includes intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death, injury or harm.** It includes, but is not limited to, pushing, shoving, throwing, grabbing, choking, shaking, slapping, punching, hitting, burning, the use of restraints or one's body size or strength against another person, and the use of or threat to use, a weapon or object. It may also include kidnapping and arbitrary detention, beating, stoning, and physical abandonment or displacement. Physical violence happens at all levels, including the home, the community and in public, but it is most visible in public settings: e.g. campaign rallies, meetings, trainings, and when candidates embark on door-to-door campaigning. It can also take place in institutional settings, such as political party offices, EMBs, in polling stations and other civic spaces.

- **Sexual violence is explicitly deployed to perpetrate VAWE.** It encompasses any non-consensual sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, including sexual assault, abuse, harassment and rape. Sexual threats and assault may occur both in public and private settings. In private space, sexual abuse may occur when a woman differs in political opinion from her husband or clan, or when she attempts to break traditional roles by seeking public office. In some contexts of extreme gender inequality and significant GBV, the tensions of an electoral period in general may trigger more sexual violence, independent of the woman's political opinions or participation. Rape and other manifestations of sexual violence by intimate partners almost always take place in the home as a means of controlling women's political choice or participation. Sexual violence by strangers (militia, police, etc.), on the other hand, often occurs in public.

## EXAMPLES OF VAWE

<p><i>In Australia, the experiences of former Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, symbolize the sexist abuse that women in public life suffer. In her speech on “sexism and misogyny” in the parliament in 2012, Gillard warns that they women “may expect” threats of violence or rape “almost daily.” In 2016, Gillard reflected that, “I do think that this issue about sexism – and, particularly, sexism as it confronts women leaders – is now one of the issues in global conversations of our time. I don’t over-claim the role of my speech in that – I think it’s a small, little bit.”<sup>4</sup></i></p>	<p><i>In Bolivia, in 2010, Juana Quispe was elected Councilor and as she assumed her position, suffered ill-treatment by members of her council. She filed several appeals denouncing physical and verbal abuse, which stated they did not allow her to exercise her political rights and she was removed from office. 32 days after recovering her political right as Councilor, she was murdered. This case, along with many other complaints of women in public office, gave rise to the adoption of the Law against Harassment and Political Violence towards Women (No. 243) in 2012.<sup>5</sup></i></p>
<p><i>In Canada, in 2016, a woman parliamentarian, Michelle Rempel, spoke out about every instance of sexism she had experienced. Rempel noted that the biased treatment included being talked down by male colleagues, being described as emotional and receiving unwanted sexual advances and comments.<sup>6</sup></i></p>	<p><i>In France, in 2016, 17 female former French government ministers issued a joint statement to say that they would no longer remain silent about sexual harassment in French politics and vowed to publicize “all sexist remarks,” as well as “inappropriate gestures and behavior” from contemporaries in the halls of French political power. Other women politicians have spoken out against “the everyday groping, harassment, sexist comments and sexual assault that women are still subjected to in parliament by male politicians.”<sup>7</sup></i></p>
<p><i>In Kenya, a woman MP noted that “the greatest expense for women running for parliament in Kenya is around-the-clock security, which is necessary because of the danger of rape, a common intimidation tactic.”<sup>8</sup> Another woman candidate noted that she was beaten up when she stood for election, and that women “routinely carried concealed knives and wore two sets of tights under their dresses in order to buy more time to scream during an attempted rape,” and that “for womenpolitical aspirants the violence also includes foul verbal abuse, beatings, abduction, and death threats.”<sup>9</sup></i></p>	<p><i>In Mexico during 2015 elections, civil society organizations documented cases of rape, blackmail, sexual harassment and assault, murder, beatings and torture of women candidates. This led to a Senate call for action, urging the National Electoral Institute (INE) and National Council for the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination (CONAPRED) to intervene. An appeal for urgent action was launched and the INE and CONAPRED developed a “Guide for public action: Elections without discrimination.”<sup>10</sup></i></p>
<p><i>In Pakistan, women elected officials and candidates after the 2013 elections reported intimidation, defamation, character assassination, and false announcements that a woman candidate had withdrawn from the election in favour of a male candidate. Male members of the family of the woman candidate were threatened or offered money for the woman to withdraw. One of the most widespread forms of violence against women candidates and politicians seemed to be the expectation of sexual service, threats of physical violence and death.<sup>11</sup></i></p>	<p><i>In Paraguay, a woman member of an opposition party noted that she had to resign from the party because of insults she received from fellow party members when she did not accept placement on the electoral list as an alternate candidate. When joining a different faction of her party to pursue a place on the candidate list, she was called a traitor by her former colleagues, and prevented from becoming a candidate.<sup>12</sup></i></p>
<p><i>In Peru, two out of five elected women were politically harassed in municipalities and regional governments by male mayors, councillors and regional presidents. Several cases included incidents of physical attacks, death threats, loss of economic livelihood, and verbal and psychological abuse.<sup>13</sup></i></p>	<p><i>In Tunisia, several women MPs have experienced harassment: “While deputies describe their relationships as generally respectful, both female and male MPs report negative stereotyping and comments, verbal harassment, and aggressive behaviour toward women deputies. In addition, women MPs of all political backgrounds report that their clothing choices or style of dress are openly disparaged. Other members have commented that media have posted doctored photos of them and published other criticisms.”<sup>14</sup></i></p>

## Available data

Standard datasets on electoral violence are largely gender-blind, and therefore unable to provide much data on VAWE. This means that a large portion of the election-related violence that women experience is undocumented, and there is no systematic data collection on a national, regional or global scale.

Despite the limitations in data, research suggests that VAWE is widespread across countries and regions of the world. Sex-disaggregated findings from one cross-country study, which compared over 2,000 acts of election violence in six countries between 2006 and 2010, estimated that women were victims in almost 40 percent of all acts of election violence. However, prevalence is presumed to be substantially higher because the study did not collect data on the full range of forms of violence that women experience, including in the private sphere.<sup>15</sup>

A 2016 study on the related topic of violence against women parliamentarians found psychological violence, the most widespread form, was affecting 81.8 percent of the survey respondents from all countries and regions. Of the psychological violence reported, 44.4 percent of those surveyed said they had received threats of death, rape, beatings or abduction during their parliamentary terms.<sup>16</sup>

Women experience election violence differently from men in terms of type and frequency. In addition to physical violence, most often violence against women in elections is psychological or sexual in nature. Women are more likely to face insidious violence based on fear for their personal security and that of their loved ones, fear of social ostracism and of attacks on their moral character and self-confidence. They are more likely than men to face sexual harassment within their own political parties or be demeaned in a sexualized way. To fully grasp the extent of VAWE, one must look beyond public reports and consider unreported incidents that occur within the home and community.

## The impact of violence<sup>17</sup>

Apart from the possible psychological and physical short and long-term consequences of VAWE on victims, their families and communities, the most immediate impacts may include the following:

- Reduction in the number of women contesting elections and aspiring for political office
- Prevention of political campaigns
- Limited visibility of women in political parties

- Women run for reserved seats instead of elected ones
- Reduction in the number of elected women
- Difficulty in recruiting female election or polling staff
- Reduced number of women registered to vote compared to men
- The closure of polling stations
- Suspension of political party campaign rallies
- Reduced voter turnout
- Postponement of elections

## Ending violence against women in elections: A collective responsibility

VAWE occurs at the family, community and state level. It is the duty of the State to prevent and appropriately and effectively respond to all forms of violence against women in political life, regardless of who perpetrates it.

Targeted attacks on women candidates play a significant role in deterring women from running for office or encouraging them to withdraw from their campaigns or resign from their positions after being elected. In countries with already low rates of women's political participation, VAWE may discourage women from entering politics. Violence at polling stations and against electoral staff may also discourage women from engaging in these vital areas of electoral administration, which in turn may further reduce women's turnout and ease with the election process. Violence at the community and family level results in coercing women's political choices and violating civil liberties.

## VAWE Prevention and Elimination Matrix

A VAWE Prevention and Elimination Matrix presents a diverse menu of programming options to draw from in identifying VAWE and taking context-appropriate action to prevent it.

1. Mapping and measuring VAWE
2. Integrating VAWE into election observation and violence monitoring
3. Legal and policy reform to prevent and respond to VAWE
4. Preventing and mitigating VAWE through electoral arrangements
5. Working with political parties to prevent and reduce VAWE
6. Raising awareness and changing norms

# MATRIX:

## Action Points for Mitigating and Preventing

ACTION POINT	PRE-ELECTION PHASE
<p><b>1. Mapping and Measuring VAWE</b> <i>(e.g. international and regional organizations, CSOs, national programmes, violence monitoring programmes)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct country-level and regional-level mapping of VAWE</li> <li>• Include VAWE in EMB and electoral security assessments</li> <li>• Develop and define indicators</li> <li>• Adjust or build upon existing VAW indicators and measurement tools</li> <li>• Consider including VAWE in relevant SDGs monitoring</li> <li>• Consider using crowd-sourcing and data visualization tools</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Integrating VAWE into Election Observation and Violence Monitoring</b> <i>(e.g. international and regional organizations, CSOs, election observers, Women's Situation Room partners)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapt and integrate VAWE into international and domestic election observation</li> <li>• Integrate VAWE into electoral violence early warning systems</li> <li>• Integrate a gender perspective into existing election violence monitoring tools</li> <li>• Identify indicators to be measured</li> <li>• Include gender sensitivity in observer trainings</li> <li>• Ensure VAWE is monitored and reported in Women's Situation Rooms and other civil society monitoring programmes (i.e. election and human rights)</li> <li>• Develop harmonized data collection and reporting tools</li> </ul>
<p><b>3. Legal and Policy Reform to Prevent and Respond to VAWE</b> <i>(e.g. legislatures and lawmakers, electoral management bodies, international and regional organizations, courts, political parties)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adoption of laws and policies which define and protect against VAWE</li> <li>• Adapt existing Eliminating VAW (EVAW) legislation to explicitly provide measures on protecting against VAWE</li> <li>• Protocols and regulations adopted by EMBs to prevent VAWE in the electoral process</li> <li>• Election and political party codes of conduct address VAWE</li> <li>• Provide gender-sensitivity training to the police, adjudicators, judges, lawyers, CSOs etc. who may handle reported cases of VAWE</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Preventing and Mitigating VAWE through Electoral Arrangements</b> <i>(e.g. EMBs, relevant line ministries, security sector/police)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EMBs ensure any violence monitoring or risk assessments include consideration of VAWE</li> <li>• Train EMB staff on VAWE and responses</li> <li>• Adopt measures to reduce family voting as needed</li> <li>• Integrate VAWE into voter education, including raising awareness about ballot secrecy and family voting</li> <li>• Relevant unit within EMB tasked with addressing VAWE and gender concerns</li> <li>• Provide protection for women candidates</li> <li>• Training of police and security forces on VAWE</li> <li>• Increase numbers of women in police forces, including in leadership positions</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Working with Political Parties to Prevent and Reduce VAWE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reach out to all political parties to carry out advocacy work</li> <li>• Comply with legislated codes of conduct and sensitize party members</li> <li>• Adopt own code of conduct as needed</li> <li>• Update party regulations and statutes to address VAWE</li> <li>• Monitoring and enforcement of party policy and practices on VAWE</li> <li>• Ensure transparent candidate selection rules and access to political finance</li> <li>• Introduce issue of VAWE to trainings and voter outreach materials and efforts</li> <li>• Encourage adoption of a public joint statement by political parties committing to comply with codes of conduct and human rights</li> <li>• Train party agents/observers to monitor VAWE</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Raising Awareness and Changing Norms</b> <i>(e.g. legislators and parliamentary networks, CSOs, media, men, international and regional organizations)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awareness raising campaigns to prevent VAWE</li> <li>• Adapt training programmes to introduce VAWE</li> <li>• Civic outreach materials are adapted to the issues of VAWE</li> <li>• Commitment to report on VAWE in the media</li> <li>• Capacity building for media on VAWE</li> </ul>

# VAWE

## ELECTION PHASE

- Data collection and verification
- Adapt and integrate VAWE into monitoring tools

- Adapt and integrate VAWE into observation tools
- Aim for gender balance in election observer teams
- Streamline reporting across Electoral Observation Mission (EOM) groups

- Access to electoral justice for women, and pursue justice for victims
- Establish methods to safely/confidentially report cases of VAWE

- Consider arrangements for ballot secrecy for voters
- Election day logistics planning sensitive to VAWE (gender segregated polling stations, female security guards/sensitized police forces in high risk areas, poll workers sensitized to VAWE)
- Gender-segregated polling stations if required to reduce violence or family voting pressures
- Deploy female police officers at women-only polling stations
- Ensure protection of election workers

- Recruit and deploy more women as political party agents

- Capacity building for media on VAWE
- Media monitoring for gender bias
- Engage with men as allies and influential advocates

## POST-ELECTION PHASE

- Analyse results of collection efforts
- Ensure data aggregation and reporting
- Identify gaps and refine indicators as needed
- Include VAWE in post-election reports and findings

- Ensure aggregation and reporting
- Identify gaps and make recommendations
- Include gender dimension and human rights-based approach in observation report and findings

- Ensure implementation of laws and policies on VAWE
- Review laws and policies and make adjustments as needed
- Adjudication of electoral disputes involving VAWE
- Ensure investigation and prosecution of human rights violations and abuses against women in politics
- Adapt and integrate new victim resources into existing services for VAW

- Post-election review includes gender dimension
- Enforcement of violations of gender-related offences

- Ensure women elected representatives are supported in their functions
- Ensure no women forced to resign seats in favour of men

- Identification of lessons learned
- Adopt civic education to inform the public and opinion-makers about VAWE
- Penalties and sanctions for media violations
- Engage with legislators and parliamentary networks

# ACTION POINT 1: MAPPING AND MEASURING VAWE

VAWE has been invisible due to poor documentation, making it difficult to define and measure, but there is growing recognition that VAWE needs to be named, monitored and addressed. Mapping and collecting data is the critical first step in mitigating and preventing VAWE. Data enables a better understanding of its magnitude, patterns and associations, and informs relevant responses.

VAWE mapping and monitoring initiatives include:

- **Conducting country and regional-level mappings of VAWE to enable a better understanding of its scope in each context, identify hotspots and provide a foundation for evidence-informed interventions.** Mappings can be done, e.g., by including VAWE in EMB and electoral security assessments. Issues to be considered include: types of violence, the context in which violence occurs (family, community, political party, state), perpetrators,

motivations, victims, actions taken, the legal/policy framework in place, entities monitoring VAWE, the predominance of violence against specific women actors, and the existence of commonly agreed indicators.

- **Establishing VAWE measurements by developing indicators to cover the electoral process and enable both quantitative and qualitative data collection.** This can also be done by adjusting or building upon existing VAW indicators and measurement tools and considering including VAWE in relevant SDGs monitoring. These indicators may be adopted by VAWE measurement mechanisms, including those that measure political or electoral violence or VAW.
- **Data collection exercises, such as those through multi-partner initiatives, CSO coalitions or crowdsourcing and data visualization tools on sexual harassment, provide telling starting points for establishing VAWE**



UN Photo/Hien MacLine

Woman in a polling station with her identity card before voting, Cote d'Ivoire.

**monitoring systems.** EMBs provide additional opportunities for data collection through their existing data collection systems or general security assessments. Among others, the Programming Guide provides examples of all these initiatives from Pakistan, India, Nepal, the Dominican Republic, and Tanzania.<sup>18</sup>

- **Analysing post-election results of data collection efforts to better understand the scope of VAWE,** ensuring data aggregation and reporting and identifying gaps and refining indicators as needed.

## SAMPLE DATA POINTS AND INDICATORS TO MEASURE AND MONITOR VAWE

### PRE-ELECTORAL PERIOD

- # incidents of physical violence/abuse
- # women prevented from registering
- # attempted murders of women candidates, voters etc.
- # women candidates, voters etc. murdered
- # incidents of verbal intimidation, harassment or bullying
- # women raped, sexually assaulted or harassed
- # women targeted by slanderous rumors/character assassination
- # women candidates forced to withdraw from the election
- # women arbitrarily detained, and how long
- # women kidnapped
- # posts of online harassment targeting women
- # media articles and reports negatively portraying women
- # incidents of women candidates' family members killed or physically attacked
- # incidents of women candidates' campaign/support staff physically attacked

### ELECTORAL PERIOD

- # incidents of family voting/coerced voting
- # women prevented from voting
- # decrees issued by traditional or religious leaders to prevent women from voting
- # women harassed or assaulted on Election Day
- # women intimidated or threatened

### POST-ELECTORAL PERIOD

- # women forced to resign their seats
- # women facing sexual harassment
- # women facing gender-based attacks and abuse
- # media articles and reports negatively portraying women leaders
- # postings with online harassment and bullying against women elected officials
- # elected women pressured or coerced by their own party into a subordinate political role

# ACTION POINT 2

## ELECTION OBSERVATION AND VIOLENCE MONITORING<sup>19</sup>

Election observation and violence monitoring programmes provide opportunities for collecting information on VAWE.

The Programming Guide provides information on and analysis of a range of existing tools which can be adopted by both international and domestic election observation missions, or early warning systems, and adapted to specific contexts. Examples from Guatemala, Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Tanzania and Mali are included.<sup>20</sup>

Election observation and violence monitoring initiatives for VAWE include:

- **Adapting and integrating VAWE into international and domestic election observation missions**, which could provide a source of information on VAWE.
- **Integrating VAWE into electoral violence early warning systems** to mitigate VAWE through rapid response mechanisms.
- **Integrating a gender perspective into existing election violence monitoring and observation tools** so that better data on VAWE is collected and made available.

- **Developing harmonized data collection and reporting tools** to enable data comparisons across and within countries.

- **Making observation missions more gender sensitive** through gender sensitive observer trainings and by aiming for gender balance in election observer teams.

- **Including a gender dimension and information on VAWE in observation reports and findings**; this includes ensuring aggregation of VAWE data, identifying gaps in the process and making specific recommendations.

By integrating gender dimensions into election observation methodologies, data on VAWE can be systematically collected and included in published election reports. There are several advantages of monitoring VAWE through election observation: extensive outreach and links to diverse communities throughout the country, facilitating a wide reach on VAWE monitoring; standardized data collection methods, documentation and reports, enabling systematic data collection; availability of trained monitors on elections and data collection, who may be trained in gender-sensitive data collection methods; and the possibility of comparing VAWE trends across regions and between countries.

In order to contribute to filling the VAWE data gap, it would be useful to consider common indicators or approaches in collection methodologies and questions used in [observer] report forms. Consistent standards of reporting across areas of deployment and election phases will significantly aid in providing incident reports and evidence on types and forms of VAWE.

# ACTION POINT 3

## LEGAL AND POLICY REFORM TO PREVENT AND RESPOND TO VAWE

Relevant entry points for preventing and responding to VAWE are provided in many international declarations, covenants and conventions, regional treaties and other policy instruments, which establish women's right to live a life free from violence. On various occasions, regional declarations and *communiqués* have successfully pushed issues of VAWE/VAWP onto the policy agenda by expressing commitments by participating states to eliminate VAWP, e.g. the 2007 Kathmandu Declaration.<sup>21</sup>

Analysis of specific examples of legal and policy responses to prevent and respond to VAWE and their advantages is provided in the Programming Guide.<sup>22</sup>

Legislative initiatives that can mitigate VAWE include:

- **Adopting standalone laws and policies** that define and protect against VAWE; so far, the Plurinational State of Bolivia is the only country with a specific law against VAWP. Other draft laws are in different stages of development and/or approval in Mexico, Ecuador, Costa Rica, Peru and Honduras.
- **Adapting existing legislation, electoral laws or amending penal codes** to explicitly delineate and provide measures on protecting against VAWE, e.g. Mexico's 2007 General Law on Women's Life Free from Violence prohibits "community" and other forms and acts of violence which violate women's rights and leads to their discrimination in the public sphere.
- **EMBs can adopt protocols and regulations** using their authority over party practices and electoral processes to prevent and respond to VAWE by defining VAWE/VAWP under international norms and standards and national legal frameworks, laying out victims' rights, establishing specific responsibilities for different state institutions, issuing guidelines to regional or local EMBs and establishing procedures for reporting and handling of complaints made to electoral institutions.
- **Legislated codes of conduct for elections and political parties** can directly address VAWE and prohibit behaviours contributing to violence.
- **Gender-sensitivity training** can be provided to adjudicators, judges, lawyers, etc. who may handle reported cases of VAWE.
- **Improving access to electoral justice for women** and pursuing justice for victims as well as prosecution of perpetrators.
- **Establishing safe and confidential reporting methods** so victims can report cases of VAWE.
- **Ensuring implementation of laws and policies on VAWE** through gender-responsive justice programming and clear national action plans and other implementation tools.
- **Using the international normative framework** to review international laws and policies and adjust as needed.
- **Ensuring access to justice and services** by adjudicating electoral disputes involving VAWE, prosecuting human rights abuses against women in politics, and adapting and integrating new victim resources into existing services for VAW.

# ACTION POINT 4

## ELECTORAL ARRANGEMENTS

Electoral administration, policies and procedures can affect the mitigation of VAWE.

**The Electoral Management Body (EMB)** is the principal actor in electoral administration. Its decisions determine the credibility and security of elections and hence, the extent of women's political participation. Examples of areas where EMBs may have an impact on VAWE include:<sup>23</sup>

- **Risk assessment and VAWE mapping may identify hotspots and can be useful for designing appropriate mitigation and monitoring mechanisms.** VAWE considerations may also be included into general electoral security assessments. Specific VAWE assessments may also be conducted. In Afghanistan, for example, the EMB undertook monitoring and reporting on VAWE through their regional branches; local EMB offices were called upon to identify and report on VAWE trends in their respective areas so appropriate measures could be adopted.<sup>24</sup>
- **Analyzing voter and candidate registration procedures may help identify how they create potential for VAWE** or pose barriers to women's participation generally and reveal options for measures to ensure women's security.
- **EMBs can identify measures for preventing and responding to violence during the political campaign period,** including violence perpetrated within political parties.
- **Integrating VAWE into voter education programmes or adopting codes of conduct for elections and political parties,** are examples of additional preventative measures EMBs can take.
- **Information about VAWE and respective mitigation measures can be integrated into training programmes for electoral administrators and other election stakeholders.** This information should also reach women at the grassroots, to ensure they are aware of the response mechanisms.



UN Photo/Logan Abassi

*Residents of Ile de la Gonave, Haiti, look for their names on the eligible electors list at the Community Electoral Office.*

- **Election day may be particularly prone to VAWE, so polling arrangements should be analyzed to ensure appropriate, context-specific measures are implemented to prevent and respond to incidents**, e.g. the Election Commission of India has conducted a Vulnerability Mapping to identify vulnerable households/families and individuals/groups that have been identified as intimidating/ misleading voters or instigating vulnerabilities, which can increase EMB knowledge on women at risk of experiencing VAWE.<sup>25</sup>
- Police and security forces** may play key roles in ensuring public safety throughout the electoral cycle and thus play a crucial role in VAWE prevention and response. They can institute effective response and prevention regarding VAWE, including by:
- **Adopting and providing training on new operating practices and evaluation methods that sensitive police and security forces to VAWE and take VAWE into account.**
  - **Recruiting more women security personnel and establishing gender desks to encourage more women to report incidents of VAWE including those perpetrated by police.**
  - **Ensuring that VAWE cases are acted upon promptly and thoroughly with an independent investigation and that identified perpetrators (including, where applicable, defense and security forces) are prosecuted and adequately sanctioned.**
  - **Raising awareness among women of complaint mechanisms.**

*In Tanzania, in partnership with the Network of Female Police Officers from the Tanzanian Police Force, and as part of the Democratic Empowerment Project – a UNDP programme implemented jointly with UN Women and UNESCO – UN Women and UNDP developed a training manual on “Gender, Human Rights and the Role of the Police during Elections” ahead of the country’s 2015 elections. The curriculum included components on the different forms of violence that may occur during electoral campaigns and how these affect men and women, and social groups differently. Training for police and security forces reinforced their legal obligation to take VAWE seriously and provided guidance on how to appropriately respond. A training-of-trainers approach equipped 103 police officers who in turn trained another 6,000 police officers throughout the country. The programme also supported the Tanzania Police Force in integrating VAW and vulnerable groups into the its Incidence Reporting and Response System, an existing IT system that facilitates rapid responses to incidences of violence during the elections, based on VAWE typology and GBV checklists developed in partnership with the Network of Female Police Officers.<sup>26</sup>*



# ACTION POINT 5

## WORKING WITH POLITICAL PARTIES

Political parties are the most common perpetrators of VAWE. The threats and violence women may face when becoming candidates and campaigning for election constitute one of the biggest challenges to women’s political participation in many countries. Addressing VAWE must start with an internal party commitment at the core level of the party’s founding documents, and among party leadership through public rejection of any form of VAWE. Violations should be sanctioned in a timely manner.

The most critical areas in which political parties can engage to prevent VAWE include:<sup>27</sup>

- **Ensuring candidates and supporters comply with legislated codes of conduct**, e.g. through public demonstrations of political party leaders’ commitment to comply with the codes of conduct and ensure that those who violate the code are sanctioned.

- **Addressing VAWE in internal party regulations and monitoring implementation of political parties**, such as by amending party rules to ensure a strong and clear statement of their intent to mitigate and address VAWE, including for party candidates and supporters. While the adoption of a statement on VAWE in the parties’ regulations is an important first step, it is essential that compliance by party members and candidates is monitored, and incidents of VAWE recorded.
- **Prohibiting VAWE during candidate nomination processes and ensuring transparency of nomination processes through written rules**, which enhance accountability of and accessibility to inner circles of power.
- **Ensuring women candidates have access to political finance** by setting clear rules for candidate nomination and selection, publicly financing women aspirants and candidates through party coffers and publicly available

*In Liberia, the National Election Commission worked with several political parties to prepare a Code of Conduct. One of the aims was to avoid “the marginalisation of women through violence, intimidation and fraud.” Parties agreed to “the principle of non-discrimination, not to use abusive language, and not to agitate on the basis of sex and gender.”<sup>28</sup>*

*In Macedonia, political parties agreed to a Code of Conduct in 2006 stating that parties would: “facilitate the full participation of citizens including women and other minority groups during elections; ensure free access of citizens including women and other minority groups to all campaign events; generally, refrain from forcing citizens to support a particular political party or candidate or to engage in, or refrain from engaging in, any political activity otherwise than in accordance with their free choice; support the universal concept of one-person-one-vote and discourage proxy voting.”<sup>29</sup>*

funds, and ensuring women are fully aware of the costs and financing options for their campaigns.

- **Providing VAWE training and sensitization to party members** so they are fully aware and understand that violence will not be tolerated by the political party. Additionally, women candidates' training should integrate aspects of VAWE, so that women are aware of its different manifestations and where and how they can seek help.
- **Incorporating VAWE in party monitoring activities during polling day.** This may include training party

monitors in polling stations on how to identify VAWE and/or ensuring that women-only polling stations are monitored by women party poll agents, as women may feel intimidated by being monitored by men in specific contexts.

- **Supporting women in elected mandates and preventing resignations of women due to VAWE.** Support might include providing women experiencing violence with information about their rights as well as available national and local support resources and services, including from health, psychosocial, security/police and legal sectors.



Marcosdel Mazo/Pacific Press/LightRocket via Getty Images

A woman casts her vote during Spanish general elections.

# ACTION POINT 6

## RAISING AWARENESS AND CHANGING NORMS

VAVE cannot be eliminated unless the public and individuals understand how it impacts communities, diminishes women's human rights and disrupts the democratic process. Various actors play a part in raising awareness on VAVE, reinforcing the objectives of the previous action points by contributing to a common and comprehensive understanding of VAVE forms and means of prevention.

Awareness-raising must therefore be accompanied by other interventions aimed at addressing the gender stereotypes, social norms, attitudes, behaviors and practices that tolerate and condone such violence, and which are rooted in gender inequalities and unbalanced power relations between men and women. Effective interventions to prevent VAVE employ multiple, complementary methods, including media campaigns combined with training on gender equality and women's economic empowerment initiatives, at multiple levels.

Awareness-raising approaches may include, but are not limited to:<sup>30</sup>

- **Raising awareness through campaigns** targeting aspirants and candidates, party members, elected leaders, and those involved in administering elections, among others. CSOs have been instrumental in implementing campaigns to prevent VAVE; one example is the National Democratic Institute's #NotTheCost campaign, aimed at building a common platform to start a global conversation about stopping VAVE/VAWP.
- **Adapting civic outreach materials to cover issues of VAVE.**
- **Working with and providing capacity building to the media on VAVE**, especially to raise awareness. This may include training journalists and editors on VAVE and reporting on women in a fair and respectful manner without sexist stereotypes. Because of the rise of VAWP online, this may also be expanded to social media companies and platforms.
- **Engaging legislators and parliamentary networks** to sensitize their constituents and fellow lawmakers, advocating for solutions and appropriate legislative responses. The Inter-Parliamentary Union, for example, has been influential in engaging legislators in discussions around VAVE/VAWP.
- **Including men and boys** in the efforts to prevent and respond to VAVE, such as through peace initiatives. Male politicians can be powerful advocates against VAWP. The 'HeforShe' campaign, for example, is a solidarity movement for gender equality developed by UN Women to engage men and boys as advocates and agents of change for gender equality and women's rights, and which has been leveraged in campaigns against VAVE/VAWP in different countries.

# ENDNOTES

- 1 For detailed information and concrete examples featuring different types of victims of VAWE, please consult pages 31 to 35 of the Programming Guide, available online here: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/11/preventing-violence-against-women-in-elections>.
- 2 For detailed information and concrete examples of perpetrators of VAWE, please consult pages 36 to 40 of the Programming Guide.
- 3 UN Women. "Glossary of Terms from Programming Essentials and Monitoring and Evaluation Sections, *Virtual Knowledge Center to End Violence Against Women and Girls*. <http://www.endvavnow.org/en/articles/347-glossary-of-terms-from-programming-essentials-and-monitoring-and-evaluation-sections.html>.
- 4 John Morgan, 2016. "Julia Gillard on tackling sexism against female leaders." *Times Higher Education*. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/julia-gillard-on-tackling-sexism-against-female-leaders>.
- 5 Franz Chavez, 2009. "BOLIVIA: Politics, a Risky Business for Women," *Inter Press Service*, 27 October. For more information, please consult page 35 of the Programming Guide.
- 6 Michelle Rempel, 2016. "Confront your Sexism." *National Post*, 18 April. <http://news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/michelle-rempe-confront-your-sexism>.
- 7 Angélique Chrisafis, 2016. "'We can no longer stay silent': Fury erupts over sexism in French politics." *The Guardian*, 13 May. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/13/we-can-no-longer-stay-silent-fury-erupts-over-sexism-in-french-politics>.
- 8 According to Kenyan MP, Phoebe Asiyo, Quoted in Swanee Hunt, 2017. "Let Women Rule," *Politics and Society*, May/June. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2007-05-01/let-women-rule>.
- 9 According to May Okumu. Quoted in Hunt, 2017.
- 10 For more information, see INE et al., 2016 "Protocolo para Atender la Violencia Política Contra las Mujeres." Ciudad de México; and SEGOB/ CONAPRED, 2016. *Guía para la Acción Pública : Elecciones sin discriminación. Ciudad de México*.
- 11 UN Women Pakistan, 2016. Creating an Enabling Environment for Women's Political Participation: Ending violence against women in political and electoral processes. Unpublished.
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- 13 Iora Tristan/Centro de la Mujer Peruana, 2015. "Las Mujeres Rurales Dijeron NO a la Violencia de Género." 27 November. [http://www.flora.org.pe/web2/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=685:mujeres-rurales&catid=55:desarrollo-rural&Itemid=70](http://www.flora.org.pe/web2/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=685:mujeres-rurales&catid=55:desarrollo-rural&Itemid=70).
- 14 NDI, 2012. *Tunisia's National Constituent Assembly Gender Assessment*. P. 9. <https://www.ndi.org/files/Tunisia-Gender-Assessment-National-Constituent-Assembly-ENG.pdf>.
- 15 Gabrielle Bardall/IFES, 2011. *Breaking the Mold: Understanding Gender and Electoral Violence* Washington, D.C., IFES.
- 16 IPU, 2016. Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians. <http://www.ipu.org/pdf/publications/issuesbrief-e.pdf>.
- 17 For further information on the causes and consequences of VAWE, please consult pages 41 to 43 of the Programming Guide.
- 18 For detailed information and concrete examples on monitoring and mapping VAWE, please consult pages 50 to 61 of the Programming Guide.
- 19 UN Women does not conduct electoral observation; however, it can provide technical assistance to ensuring gender dimensions are considered within electoral observation.
- 20 For further information, analysis of available tools for monitoring VAWE through Electoral Observation missions and concrete examples, please consult pages 62 to 68 of the Programming Guide.
- 21 Further details on the 2007 Kathmandu Declaration can be found on page 69 of the Programming Guide.
- 22 For details and concrete examples on legal reforms, please consult pages 73 to 84 of the Programming Guide.
- 23 For further details, please consult pages 85 to 93 of the Programming Guide.
- 24 For further details on this and other examples, please consult page 86 of the Programming Guide.
- 25 UNDP and UN Women, 2015. *Inclusive Electoral Processes: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Participation*. New York.
- 26 Sara Negrao, 2017. "Monitoring, Mitigating and Responding to Violence Against Women during Elections (VAWE) Experience of UN Women Tanzania in the 2015 General Elections." Presented at the Rutgers University Eagleton Institute conference on Resisting Women's Political Leadership: Theories, Data, Solutions, New Brunswick, New Jersey, USA, 22-26 May 2017.
- 27 For further details and examples, please consult pages 94 to 99 of the Programming Guide.
- 28 DPKO/DFS-DPA, 2007. *Joint guidelines on enhancing the role of women in post-conflict electoral processes*. [http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/electoral\\_systemsandprocesses/dpko-dfs---dpa-joint-guidelines-on-enhancing-the-role-of-women-i.html](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/electoral_systemsandprocesses/dpko-dfs---dpa-joint-guidelines-on-enhancing-the-role-of-women-i.html).
- 29 NDI, (n.d.). "Republic of Macedonia: Code of Conduct of Political Parties for Free and Fair Parliamentary Elections." [https://www.ndi.org/files/2031\\_mk\\_CoC\\_071006.pdf](https://www.ndi.org/files/2031_mk_CoC_071006.pdf).
- 30 For further details and examples, please consult pages 100 to 105 of the Programming Guide.

*“ This Guide focuses on the scourge of violence against women in elections. It presents different programming actions to mitigate it, and ensure that women are able to exercise their political rights. ”*