

#NOT THE COST

STOPPING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS ♀

Submission by the National Democratic Institute
to the United Nations Special Rapporteur
on Violence Against Women

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June 2018



PREFACE

In 2016, the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) launched the #NotTheCost campaign - a global call to action to raise awareness to stop violence against women in politics. The campaign's title reflects the fact that many women are told that harassment, threats, psychological abuse (in person and online), physical and sexual assault are "the cost of doing politics." For the last two years, NDI has been working to challenge this claim by raising awareness of the violence that politically-active women face, collecting data on it, and building capacity among our partners to mitigate its impact and hold perpetrators to account.

One of the key asks made by NDI's Chairman, former Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, at the launch of the campaign in 2016, was for the United Nations to begin to examine violence against women in politics in its annual thematic reports. In May 2018, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, H.E. Dubravka Šimonović called for submissions on violence against women in politics for a thematic report to be presented to the 73rd Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), in October 2018. This is the first report on the issue of violence against politically-active women to be tabled before the UNGA.

In June 2018, NDI submitted a paper detailing its understanding of the nature, causes and impact of violence against women in politics. In it, the Institute responded to the Special Rapporteur's request that the evidence be rights-based, action-oriented, and driven by the testimonies of women who are politically-active - as activists, voters, candidates, elected or appointed officials, and electoral workers. This booklet provides you with a complete copy of NDI's paper.

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)
Washington DC, USA

5 October 2018

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The development of the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) submission to the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women's thematic report on Violence Against Women in Politics is the culmination of the hard work and insight of many people. The Institute is grateful for their efforts. NDI's submission was developed by NDI's Gender, Women and Democracy (GWD) team under the leadership of Sandra Pepera, Director. Special thanks are owed to Caroline Hubbard and Jessica Roland for their support.

NDI's submission would not be possible without the foundational work leveraged under the #NotTheCost program. We would like to thank the many people involved in the #NotTheCost initiative, including Dr. Mona Lena Krook of Rutgers University, for her work as the initiative's technical advisor, and all those individuals and institutions who have continued to collaborate and to provide guidance and feedback throughout the program.

Finally, the Institute gratefully acknowledges the support of the National Endowment for Democracy for providing the funding for this project.

ABOUT THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTE

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen democratic institutions and practices by strengthening political parties, civic organizations and parliaments; safeguarding elections; and promoting citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

NDI is a leading organization working to advance women's political participation around the world. The Institute empowers women to participate, compete and lead as equal and active partners in democratic change. Mobilizing its global networks and drawing on three decades of experience in 132 countries, NDI supports women's aspirations for gender equality, and for inclusive and responsive government. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies.

INTRODUCTION

1. This submission is presented on behalf of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI). NDI is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that supports the development of democracy and governance globally, including promoting and strengthening inclusive political processes, state-civil society engagement, open and responsive governance institutions, and commitment to international frameworks. NDI's work focuses on creating resilient democratic systems with the capacity to manage diverse and complex social, economic and political demands effectively. Democratic resilience requires that systems and processes take account of all populations, including women.

2. NDI is a leading organization in the field of advancing women's political participation around the world, empowering them to participate, compete and lead as equal and active partners in democratic change. Mobilizing its global networks and drawing on three decades of experience in 132 countries, NDI supports women's aspirations for gender equality, and for inclusive and responsive government. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies.

3. In 2016, NDI launched the #NotTheCost campaign^[1] - a global call to action to raise awareness to stop violence against women in politics. Violence against women in politics is defined as various forms of psychological, physical and sexual violence, intimidation and coercion that specifically target women as women, either pressuring them to leave politics or to resign as candidates or political officials, to withdraw from their membership in political parties or other political institutions, or to otherwise remain silent on the political issues they care about.^[2] This definition also fits within the existing framework of the 1993 United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.^[3]

4. The #NotTheCost campaign aims to do three things. First, the campaign responds to a global need to raise awareness, collect information, and augment capacity among partners on violence against women in politics. Second, the campaign builds consensus and collaboration across stakeholders to define the issue clearly, improve data collection for better advocacy, and present "opportunities for action" to stop it. Third, the campaign increases recognition of violence against women in politics as not only a human rights violation, but also a civic and political rights violation with negative consequences for individual women, democratic societies and global progress toward gender equality.

5. During the #NotTheCost campaign launch event in New York, several politically active women from around the world each gave their testimony of violence perpetrated against them. The Chairperson of NDI's Board, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright,

made a direct ask to the UN to monitor and report on this violence at a global level. In June 2016, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Dr. Dubravka Šimonović, took up this call and will now deliver a thematic report to the UN General Assembly on this topic. In response to the UN Special Rapporteur's response, NDI developed an incident form for reporting violence against women in politics, allowing individuals worldwide to safely report incidents against politically active women to prepare for this timely report.^[4] This evidence is included throughout NDI's submission.

6. Since the launch of the campaign, the Institute has been a forefront thought leader on addressing violence against women in politics. On the global and regional levels, NDI has partnered with several leading organizations, including: UN Women, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Organization of American States, and Liberal International, to facilitate information sharing through disseminating its Call to Action^[5] and Program Guidance.^[6] Through NDI's partnerships, the issue has been placed in global and regional meetings. For example, NDI jointly with Liberal international has submitted three resolutions on violence against women in politics to the UN Human Rights Committee; NDI also engaged with the Organization of American States, on the development of a pan-continental model law for political harassment and violence against women in the framework of the Belem Do Para Convention;^[7] and NDI's work was cited as the founding framework for the Westminster Foundation for Democracy's February 2018 International Summit on Violence Against Women in Politics. At the national level, through the distribution of its Program Guidance, the Institute has made it easier for practitioners to understand and address the issue in programs and contexts around the world, leading to a number of self-initiated #NotTheCost campaigns: in Mexico, a partnership with the National Institute of Women and the Mexican government launched the #NoEsElCosto campaign,^[8] an initiative soon to be repeated in Argentina. In 2017, NDI submitted evidence to the United Kingdom's Committee on Standards in Public Life's review into the Intimidation of Parliamentary Candidates.^[9] NDI has also continued to collect testimonies of violence from politically-active women during its programs, and outreach activities.

"I was a victim of rape from someone in my political party. That made me move away from the political space." (Nicaragua)

FRAMING THE CHALLENGE OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

7. We have chosen to highlight some of the most important points emerging from our recent work and understanding of the issue in this submission. A full elaboration of NDI's

framing of the issue of violence against women in politics, is set out in our 2016 Call to Action document.

8. A growing number of reports from around the world—from activists, politicians, journalists and academics—indicate that as women step forward to claim their right to participate in politics, they are met by acts that range from harassment, intimidation, and psychological abuse – all increasingly online - and physical or sexual assault. The definition of these acts as violence against women is in line with the UN Declaration on Violence Against Women. As with all violence against women these harms can be experienced in both the private and public spheres. They are an abuse of human rights, a denial of women's civil and political rights and, because they have the impact of deterring women's equal and active participation in politics, they undermine the quality of democratic culture and practice. Political violence can be experienced by both men and women, however, the specific issue of violence against women in politics has three distinct characteristics: it targets women because of their gender; its very form can be gendered, as exemplified by sexist threats and sexual violence; and its impact is to discourage women in particular from being or becoming politically active. In Bolivia, for example, which ranks third in the world for levels of women in its parliament,^[10] harassment and violence against women involved in politics have been identified as the main barrier against women's political participation, and led to the introduction of legislation to criminalize such violence. These acts—whether directed at women as civic leaders, voters, political party members, candidates, elected representatives or appointed officials—are designed to influence, restrict, or prevent the political participation of women as a group. This violence reinforces traditional stereotypes and roles given to women, using domination and control to exclude women from politics. While acts of violence against women in politics are directed at individual women, they have a meaning beyond their specific target: to frighten other women who are already politically active, to deter women who might consider engaging in politics, and to communicate to society that women should not participate in public life in any capacity.

“On the central street where I was elected as a deputy of Odessa city council were glued posters. The posters defamed my honor and dignity for the purpose of political pressure on me as a deputy.” (Ukraine)

RAISING AWARENESS OF THE ISSUE

9. The testimonies we have received and research we have conducted, clearly indicate that there has been a 'normalization' of the acts of harassment, coercion, abuse and assault that women in politics face. However, NDI has found that one of the biggest challenges to tackling the issue, is the lack of awareness of this violence from politically active women

themselves. Acknowledgment of the problem has been hampered by three things: first, the conventional wisdom that, unless there is a physical manifestation it is not violence; the perception that there are no specific gender dimensions to violence in politics; and the fact that the vast majority of women who have experienced attacks are likely to remain silent about them. All three have contributed to the hidden nature of the problem. As with violence against women generally, many victims do not even recognize what has happened to them as a form of violence, or may deny the problem altogether in an effort to deflect charges that they are “hysterical” or “not coping” with the demands of being a political actor. Others are afraid of being viewed as unreliable colleagues or disloyal party members potentially providing ammunition for political opponents. Still others put up with this negative behavior for fear of justifying claims that women do not belong in political life.

10. Therefore, NDI has invested a lot of time in developing tools and approaches to raise awareness of the violence that women in politics face, its various manifestations, and the range of perpetrators that can be involved. To be able to work towards solving this problem, women and men must first be made aware that these behaviors and harms are indeed violence, and that it is not the “cost” of doing politics – rather it costs societies the benefits of the sustainable and responsive democratic governance than an inclusive political space can create.

“Going into politics in Pakistan brings with it many risks, especially for women. For me, I have faced death threats from the Taliban and other extremist groups. I have received online abuse, both sexual, as well as threats to my life to this day.” (Pakistan)

A MULTI-SECTORAL THEORY OF CHANGE

11. Based on what NDI has learned from its program experience in approximately 60 countries, the Institute has developed a theory of change that hypothesizes that in order to achieve women’s meaningful political participation as a necessary step towards empowerment, barriers need to be addressed at three distinct levels: the individual level, the institutional level, and the socio-cultural level. Violence is a cross-cutting issue impacting women’s abilities and experience of politics at all three levels, with different drivers and solutions in each political sector (e.g. elections, parties, parliaments). Given the range of organizational and contextual issues in each political sector, and as the different forms of violence are often overlapping in nature, single strategies are likely to have only a partial impact. Therefore, multi-dimensional approaches applied and monitored over time, appear to be necessary to address and reverse ongoing resistance to women’s equal political inclusion.

“I was the Vice Governor of Upper Lomami. When I had activities in public, someone planted a group of people to come and throw stones at me so that they could disrupt my activity. They would also film the incident with the goal of discrediting me.” (Democratic Republic of the Congo)

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

12. Many women face a range of personal capacity disadvantages which prevent them from participating in public life. Programming focused on women at the individual level can usefully address the nexus of confidence, capacity and connections: building women's confidence in their ability to lead; enhancing their capacity to run effective advocacy and electoral campaigns and to serve effectively once in office; and building connections with women and men within political networks.

13. To provide women with the capacity to address violence at this level, NDI is developing an individual risk assessment tool that individual women in politics will be able to use across all sectors. Women at the grassroots level have fewer resources and lack support systems and coping strategies, which has a greater impact on stifling their voice and participation. Individual women activists—especially young women, those who represent marginalized groups or are geographically isolated—are amongst the most vulnerable to violence because of their political engagement. Honduran environmental activist Berta Cáceres, assassinated in 2016, is one of the 185 environmental activists that Global Witness reports are killed each year⁽¹¹⁾ - many of these will be women. NDI's tool consists of a risk assessment survey and a consequent safety plan. It will provide women who are or who aspire to become politically active, with a means to reflect on their own personal, professional and political circumstances; take action to mitigate the identified risks; and to document and report any incidents to the relevant body - this could be an internal party grievance mechanism, the local police, or to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. This form of “self-assessment” is particularly critical for women because it will not only allow them to assess public forms of risk and violence, but to assess the risk they might face in their private and domestic lives, and to review these vulnerabilities in light of their specific political context. The final tool will be available in four languages, and four versions: paper, SMS, online, and a mobile app.

14. NDI has developed this tool based on the best practice from those working in the domestic/intimate partner violence (IPV) sector. Through our piloting of the tool in five partner countries, and a series of expert review workshops, NDI learned important lessons that should inform approaches to stopping violence at the individual level. For example,

politically-active women need to have access to any in-country shelter, legal and psycho-social resources that are available to other women. NDI has heard too often that political women do not believe those resources are for them, and those providing the resources saying they did not think that politically-active women needed support. Thought needs to be given to the feasibility of developing regional or international hotlines for politically-active women to turn to for support in cases of violence against them.

15. Further measures can be taken by actors from a variety of backgrounds to address violence against women in politics on the individual level. First, more organizations and companies can lend their expertise to combatting this problem. For example, security firms can offer their services and expertise to local women's rights organizations to enhance women's capacity to protect themselves. Domestic violence organizations can also pro-actively extend their support services to politically active women. Police officers need to be trained to recognize and respond to complaints from political women who are victims of violence, ensuring that their claims are not ignored or belittled because of a general prejudice against women in politics, or by attributing the complaint to a general - and equal opportunity - level of political violence also experienced by women. Building an informed and empowered alliance - at a minimum, including the police, the criminal justice system, and victims' services groups - that will respond to attacks and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable should also be considered.

“I have faced violence because of my political views because my family is from Tripoli and from a different sect. I have had to change my job and move to a different school to teach; however I always fight for my views no matter what.” (Lebanon)

INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

16. At the institutional level, gender-based structural barriers exist that limit opportunities for women to participate in politics. These barriers including violence, are often multifaceted, interconnected and compound each other. Institutional spaces where women can face violence against their political activity, include: during elections, within political parties and within parliaments. The Inter-Parliamentary Union is a partner in the #NotTheCost campaign, and given its global mandate and responsibility for parliamentary institutions,^[12] NDI will not be developing any tools for use within legislatures.

“As a Gubernatorial candidate in Lagos State, on arrival at the campaign rally, I was stopped by some thugs from coming out of my car. They started shooting sporadically. Two of my team members were wounded. My security detail held and dragged me into the car to avoid being attacked. I was a first time political aspirant. Out of eight contestants, I was the only woman. Ever since, I have suffered several forms of violence at different times. I still remain in politics, undeterred.” (Nigeria)

17. **Elections.** Violence against women during the electoral cycle is directed primarily either at their aspirations to seek political office, their link to electoral activities (such as working as election officials or attending campaign rallies) or simply their commitment to vote. This violence is simultaneously a symptom and an indicator of more generalized electoral violence in the community. If tracked early enough, it can be worked into responsive early warning-systems to the benefit of the integrity of the whole electoral exercise.

18. In 2016, NDI launched its “Votes Without Violence” program to provide guidance to citizen observer groups on how to tackle the issue of elections-related violence against women (i.e. voters, candidates, party agents, electoral officials).^[13] NDI’s focus on citizen observer groups stems from the fact that observer groups in particular can have extensive reach across their respective countries. Many maintain an established non-partisan profile and are trusted by the public as independent and neutral stakeholders. This is critically important for women for two reasons: they may deploy long-term observers with increasingly systematic methodologies, resulting in robust and accurate assessments of election processes; and as umbrella organizations they often link diverse communities, including women’s rights organizations and referral services, ensuring that response and treatment is also provided as needed.

19. The Votes Without Violence program is designed to accomplish three goals. First, the program responds to the demand for systematic data collection on violence against women in elections at the global and country level. Second, the program builds on the ability of international and domestic election observers to identify, prevent and record violence as it occurs so that it can be mitigated instead of escalated during an electoral cycle. Third, the program increases the availability of baseline data of the phenomenon through the Votes Without Violence website,^[14] which stores, collects, visualizes, and tracks country-specific data on violence against women in elections as they occur. The data displayed on the site helps to create a longitudinal picture of the trend over time through demonstrating its prevalence and effect, while also supporting the creation of strategies for mitigation and prevention in elections. To date, this website has collected data on over ten country elections.

“I was told that I should be smart, step down and sign a resignation letter, and I would be left as a women’s delegate. I said I would not step down, as I had the same opportunities as the men; however they rejected this saying that I was a women and therefore I would always be at a disadvantage. I was also told that they did not need a women to lead the party because a women would not know how to handle things and that the party only made pacts between men. I was later threatened that if I ran as a candidate something could happen to my family or to my loved ones.” (Mexico)

20. Through this program, both the Institute’s and the broader democracy and governance community’s understanding of the phenomenon of violence against women in elections has increased. In turn this has allowed for better understanding of the impact that violence targeting women is having on their participation in the broader political sphere. NDI has learned that gathering data on violence against women in elections is an important part of taking action against it. Collecting, analyzing and presenting systematic data helps make the case that violence is a real and present problem. For example, in Kenya, during the 2017 election primaries, NDI’s election observation partner ELOG^[15] found that 31 percent of election observers reported that they had witnessed or heard of the use of threatening, abusive or insulting language against women candidates or their families in their constituencies.^[16]

21. The key challenges in addressing violence against women in elections, include: raising awareness of the issue amongst election observers and authorities; training observers in how to monitor and report these incidents; and ensuring that incidents are addressed in a timely matter through established procedures for registering and handling complaints. If perpetrators are not held accountable for their actions, others will feel emboldened to commit further crimes.

“We were performing a symbolic act in the public library of Bucaramanga, donating books. When we returned to one of my volunteers’ car, we found that the car had been broken into and inside were flyers with threats and what seemed to be a fake bomb.”
(Colombia)

22. A number of measures can be taken to address violence against women in elections. These include revising electoral management body rules and regulations specifically to define acts of violence against women during the elections, requiring such acts to be reported and assigning clear sanctions for perpetrators. Procedures for registering and handling complaints should be created through new or existing offices within electoral management bodies, including sensitizing staff to recognize acts of violence against women during the elections, because they influence the way women would choose to participate, as undermining the integrity of the electoral process. Finally, a gender perspective should be incorporated in electoral observation guidelines to ensure that members of international election observation missions are trained to look for signs of violence that might deter women - whether as voters, candidates, election officials or elected representatives (at any level) — from participating in the electoral process. This data can be published in reports of electoral observation missions presented publicly to the voters, governments and the international community.

23. **Political Parties.** Political parties are an important cornerstone of democracy, and provide critical pathways for women to enter and participate in the political process. They are instrumental in mobilizing citizens behind ideologies and policies, select candidates for representative posts, lead electoral campaigns, form legislative blocs in parliaments and, if elected, implement a program of government. Their role in defining key political institutions - policy formation, elections and parliaments - mean they are an important gateway through which women can enter and participate in the political process. However, because of history, gender norms, and the codification of formal and informal rules and practices, political parties tend to be ‘protected’ public spaces, allowing and enabling violence against women within their ranks to take place. This particular form of violence - perpetrated by colleagues who are members of the same institution, bound together as peers by ties of loyalty, a sense of a common cause and identity - is particularly distressing to politically-active women.

24. Further, while the corrupt exchange of material goods for positions of power within parties or elected bodies is often commonplace, for women - unlike the vast majority of men - the predominant currency of these demands is sex or “sextortion”, a practice which clearly

falls into the category of violence against women.^[17] The impact of this behavior is a further pollution of a system's democratic culture: women (whether aspiring or already participating party members) learn that only by providing such "favors" can they move up the political ladder, and citizens' perceptions of women in politics are colored by the belief that any woman who advance must have performed such favors. Parties have both an internal and external role to play in the achievement of gender equality and women's empowerment. By having "collective intelligence" gender-diverse teams can be more than the sum of the individual intelligence of each member.^[18] This is something that some political parties are beginning to see as a key advantage.

"What happens in the political party is a repetition of what happens in society." (Honduras)

25. During the past year, NDI has been examining the violence that women party members face within their political parties. Building upon its long-standing Win With Women Political Party Assessment Tool,^[19] NDI has created the No Party to Violence Assessment. This assessment includes survey, focus group and in-depth interview tools to be used with women and men in the leadership and membership of parties in order to develop action plans to root out the violence targeting women within their own political party.^[20] The No Party to Violence assessment tools and methodology are designed to identify perpetrators, incidents, victims and impact of violence on women in their own political parties; raise awareness of the issue and its impact through gathered quantitative and qualitative data to raise awareness of the issue and its impact; and provides evidence-based opportunities for action to assess and counter violence against women in political parties through international and country-level political party stakeholders.

26. NDI has piloted this new approach with a number of the larger political parties and civil society groups in Côte d'Ivoire, Honduras, Tanzania and Tunisia. In total, 64 women party members and 76 men party members from 26 different political parties undertook the survey. Among other things, the study found that approximately 55 percent of women respondents indicated that they had personally experienced violence while carrying out political party functions, with 48% of these respondents saying that they had experienced psychological violence—the most widely reported type of violence against women in politics.^[21] The outcomes from this piloting represent the first assessment of women party members' experiences of violence within political parties, thus providing important new insights on the current understandings and perceptions of men and women party members around the types, levels, and impact of violence against women within these institutions. This is the first time that these issues have been systematically studied.

“My case is particularly humiliating. The Secretary told me, ‘If you want to be in charge of the wing, you must sleep with me...I replied, ‘So you want me to sleep with you?’ and he said, ‘Yes, do you want to be in politics or not?!’” (Cote D’Ivoire)

27. NDI’s analysis confirms that gender-based violence within political parties continues to impede women’s ability to be equal and active participants in the political realm. While 68 percent of women respondents in NDI’s survey said they disclosed a violent incident to a family member or colleague but not necessarily to party authorities or to the police, suggests a distrust in formal reporting mechanisms whether within or outside the party.^[22] The important information gathered from these assessments is now being used to create party and country-specific recommendations to improve awareness, action and accountability to end violence against women within political parties, thereby strengthening women’s membership and their roles on a basis of enhanced equality.

28. There are two key challenges to addressing violence against women within political parties. First, in many national jurisdictions political parties are treated almost as private members’ clubs with little or no oversight from external agencies – even law enforcement. Therefore, there has to be the political will from the leadership of the political parties to commit to changing the behavior of its party members, in order to strengthen women’s participation and enhance the party’s attractiveness to voters and responsiveness to citizens. Second, violence or discrimination discourages women from advancing, participating in or even joining a party to begin with. NDI is beginning to pick up a trend for women and new entrants to politics whether women or men, opting to stand as independents. This is a symptom of the failure of political parties to embrace diversity and provide equal support to candidates from different demographic groups. While independent candidacies can increase the range of political options presented to voters, in many political systems where power has been shared between historical party blocs for many years, funding and running campaigns without party support severely constrains the likelihood of success of these efforts.

“The event occurred at the Senate hall. I was going up the stairs when I ran into another Senator. During that time there was a referendum for the passing of a departmental autonomous charter. I was campaigning for the null vote. The Senator had a contrary stance to mine regarding the referendum campaign. Yelling, he told me that my stance on the null vote was because “I like it from behind.” (Bolivia)

29. There are several measures that can be further taken to address violence against women in political parties. First, internal codes of ethics with zero-tolerance for sexual violence should be introduced. This also includes the training and political education of women and men in the party – in aspects related to human rights, equality, non-discrimination and political violence against women. Second, internal dispute resolution mechanisms with enforced sanctions for perpetrators should be strengthened. This can be the creation of a disciplinary, ethical or honorary tribunal that works to strengthen the modernization of the party and to eradicate impunity that may lead to the absence of mechanisms or insufficient action. Third, party social media accounts should be consistently monitored for abuse or hate speech and ensuring the privacy and security of members' databases. All of these initiatives require the commitment by party leaders to promote the openness of party members and leaders to lobby for and oversee internal party reforms.

SOCIO-CULTURAL LEVEL

30. Gender norms shape how and why women are subject to violence in politics, as well as what types of acts are used against them. The gender-based social norms that impact and impede the ability of women to participate in politics are rooted in inequality driven by the imbalance of power between the genders, and they show a worrying “universality and resilience” to change. They include son bias, perceptions that a woman’s role should be restricted to the private domain (home and caretaking), the notion that politics are not relevant to the daily lives and needs of women, that women are incapable and ineffective leaders, or that politics are corrupt or dirty, perpetuating negative perceptions of women who participate.

“Who taught you to climb up a tree while wearing a skirt?” (Male elder to campaigning woman Senator, Zimbabwe)

31. **Online.** Online platforms are an increasing space for citizens to gather information and voice their opinions and can be particularly important in helping women overcome barriers to becoming politically active. Digital technology and social media are also providing new mechanisms for the anti-democratic impact of psychological abuse and other forms of violence against women in politics. Increasingly, attacks against politically-active women are channeled online with the aim of shaming, intimidating or degrading women. Online harassment can be anonymized, develop a mob dynamic (sometimes transnationally) and undermine a woman’s sense of personal security in ways not experienced by men. In turn, online abuse and harassment can lead to women’s self-censorship and withdrawal from public discourse, undermining democracy in all its key elements, with a chilling effect on the ambitions of young, new women.

“Hate speech that targets women is different than that which targets men: it is more violent in tone and/or makes explicitly sexual references. Its aim is to frighten women into silencing their own voices in society..... I experienced this kind of attack. Someone created a Facebook group inciting people to commit violence against me, and the threats and harassment poured in.” (Finland)

32. There are deep socio-cultural rooted challenges in addressing online violence against women in politics. Men and women are equally likely to face harassment, but women experience a wider variety of online abuse, including more serious violations. Many perpetrators online will focus on women’s bodies or traditional social roles to deny or undercut their suitability or competence in the political sphere. Using gendered imagery or stereotypes to attack female opponents has been difficult to stop, and can have profound effects on the victim’s whole life not just their political activism. Online harassment is also especially pronounced at the intersection of gender and youth. Women of the ages 18 to 24 are more likely than others to experience some of the more severe forms of harassment. This in turn has a negative impact on the ambitions of young women who aspire to work in politics.

33. The huge reach of social media and digital technology magnify the effects of psychological abuse by making them anonymous, borderless, sustained and permanent. In many cases, these attacks are “crowdsourced” to amplify the number of violent messages and their effects. The perception of impunity emboldens perpetrators, and raises women’s sense of insecurity and violation, driving many away from political participation. In fact, there is a clear link to be drawn between persistent and aggressive trolling online, and the actual physical assaults that some women face – the gateway effect. The most high-profile and tragic example of this, was the murder of British Parliamentarian Jo Cox by Thomas Mair, a right-wing terrorist with transnational links to white supremacist movements in the United States. Mair had stalked Cox online for many months prior to murdering her while Cox was visiting her constituency.^[23]

34. The Institute is currently implementing a program that undertakes case study data analysis of political discourse on Twitter among student populations in Indonesia, Colombia, and Kenya, in order to understand whether and when young women disengage from political discourse as a result of experiencing online violence. The goal is to understand and raise awareness about the nature and impact of online violence on women’s political engagement and ambition, in order to promote changes to social media platform policies, and in national and global legal and political frameworks. There are three topline initial findings from NDI’s

pilot in Indonesia. First, 47 percent of active Twitter users in the survey had been harassed online. Second, ignoring the harassment they saw or experienced was the most common tactic employed among survey respondents. Third, there was a high prevalence of reputational harassment, and threats of physical violence were linked to religion. Comparatively, a low level of sexual-based online violence was detected. At the end of the program, the full and aggregated findings from this research will be used to advocate for a common set of norms and standards for a free, open and inclusive internet, and for changes to the policies of the social media platforms.

“I totally understand, in the legal framework, the need to categorize and box things; and so things that are in the offline space need the laws there, and what is online - there are required laws there. But when you're a victim of online abuse, you're not in those categories - you're forever jumping between those two because when the abuse was happening online it affected my offline world.” (United Kingdom)

35. NDI will also be exploring a new program on state enabled online violence against women in politics. State enabled online disinformation campaigns seek to control the space for and nature of political discourse. Given their access to resources and reach, governments have the potential to manipulate entrenched gender norms to do one or all of three things: 1) cause some portion of half of the population - women activists, voters, party members, candidates, elected officials and members of government - to withdraw from politics or participate in ways directed by fear or threats; 2) sway popular support away from visible politically-active women (elected and in civil society) undermining a significant political demographic; and 3) influence how male and female voters view particular parties, issues/policies and behaviors. Findings from this program are expected to be made available in 2019.

36. While legislating for the transnational aspects of online violence against politically-active women is a complex issue, there are several actions that can be taken to help combat its use and its impact. First, social media companies need to develop and implement automated techniques to identify intimidatory content posted on their platforms. They should use this technology to ensure intimidatory content is taken down as soon as possible. Social media companies must also urgently revise their tools for users to escalate any reports of potential illegal online activity to the police. Second, to ensure that social media companies take these actions, governments should bring forward legislation to shift the liability of illegal content online towards social media companies. Third, concerted efforts must be made to raise awareness of gender inequality and the ways in which gender

stereotypes and tropes are used to control women's political activity and to change political narratives. Strengthening the ability of the public to identify and resist these manipulations must increasingly feature as part of our civic education. The process of changing gender and cultural norms is glacial, but these must shift if an enabling environment where women can participate equally in society and political life is to be established. The public's perception that women and men are equally capable and deserving of opportunities for political leadership is critical.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

37. The opportunities for action that follow build upon those presented in our 2016 Call to Action.^[24] These are new items that actors can additionally do to help end violence against women in politics.

Global Institutions

38.

- Sustain and consolidate UN reporting on the issue of violence against women in politics through national mechanisms, regional mechanisms and relevant mandate holders. For example, NDI could work with countries who are committed to submitting a CEDAW report each year to integrate a specific focus on VAW-P into the reports, during the pre-sessional and State Parties Reports stages.
- Formulate a global urgent action and support network for politically active women who are at imminent risk. This network should monitor and respond to violence perpetrated against women in politics.
- Raise awareness of the global nature of this problem to relevant UN Offices and Missions, including the Department of Political Affairs (DPA) and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO), who have particular responsibility for ensuring the implementation of the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, which includes the participation of women in transitional political and peace processes.
- Ensure that members of international election observation missions are trained to look for signs of violence that might deter women - whether as voters, candidates, election officials or elected representatives from participating in the electoral process.

Regional Institutions

39.

- Continue to incorporate mechanisms for the reporting and investigation of violence against women in politics into existing regional frameworks, conventions and declarations on violence against women. The most recent example of this is the publication by the Organization of American States of the model law for political

harassment and violence against women in the framework of the Belem Do Para Convention.

National Level Institutions

40.

- Legislate for and enforce legal penalties for perpetrators of violence against women in politics to ensure there is no impunity.
- Ensure that protected public spaces, such as political parties and parliaments, have the same legal standards for workplace harassment as other organizations and institutions in the same jurisdiction. Introducing internal codes of ethics should include the training and political education of women and men in the party or organization – in aspects related to human rights, equality, non-discrimination and violence against political women.
- Push social media companies to develop and implement automated techniques to identify and take down intimidatory content posted on their platform and further enable users to report potential illegal online activity to the police.
- Build an informed and empowered alliance incorporating the police, the criminal justice system, and victims' services groups that will respond to attacks and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable.
- Work to bridge global institutions and local actors to support the formulation of a global urgent action network for politically active women who are at imminent risk.

Civil Society

41.

- Raise awareness that non-physical acts of harassment, coercion or psychological abuse, are indeed violence, and that it is not the “cost” of doing politics – rather it costs societies and democracies the potential and multiple benefits that an inclusive political space can create.
- Develop national or local roadmaps for documenting cases and encouraging action from appropriate institutions.
- Help support the formulation of a global urgent action network for politically active women who are at imminent risk at the local level.

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(submitted) 13 June 2018

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