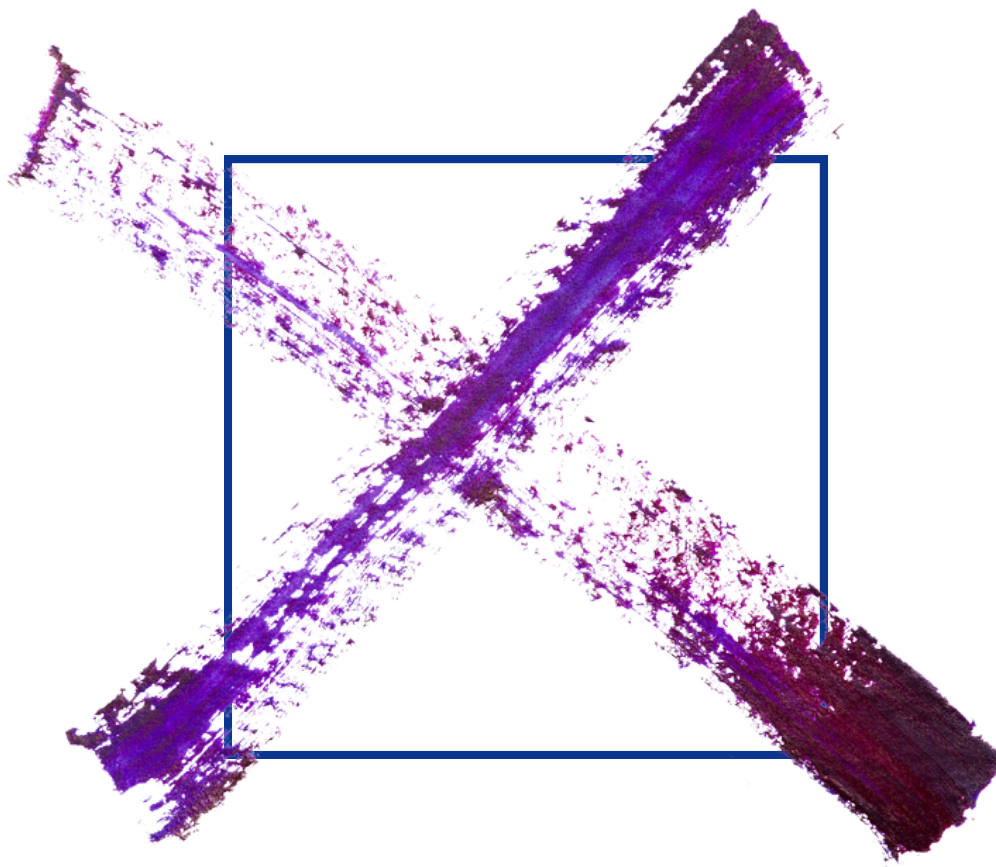




Violence Against Women in Elections



**A Framework for
Assessment,
Monitoring, and Response**

MAY 2026

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Violence Against Women in Elections

A Framework for Assessment, Monitoring, and Response

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International Foundation
for Electoral Systems

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Introduction

In 2016, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) was proud to release [Violence Against Women in Elections: A Framework for Assessment, Monitoring, and Response](#). With that resource, IFES established a robust and comprehensive definition for the types of harm women face in the context of the electoral process. The framework helped guide assessments of violence against women in elections (VAWE) in countries around the world, documenting and classifying the range of harms and challenges that women experience when seeking to exercise their political and electoral rights as voters, candidates, political party members, leaders of civil society organizations, government officials and elections workers.¹ The findings from these assessments also shaped recommendations to a range of electoral stakeholders for preventing, mitigating and better responding to VAWE.

This update builds on knowledge gained from implementing the original VAWE framework, streamlines the data collection process for the VAWE assessment and adds a focus on the increased role that online violence and gendered disinformation – including violence and gendered disinformation facilitated and exacerbated by artificial intelligence (AI) – play in the electoral context. To facilitate practical and immediate application of assessment findings, we include, as an annex, a tip sheet to help election management bodies (EMBs) think through and develop more robust strategies for addressing VAWE. Finally, while continuing to focus on violence against women (in all their diversity), this update encourages the reader to consider other forms of gender-based violence (GBV) in elections, including gendered violence that targets members of the LGBTQI+ community.

For more than a decade, advocates and researchers have highlighted the issue of violence against women in politics and its deep and negative impacts on women’s electoral participation. Despite this body of literature and knowledge, action to address VAWE – including by political parties, EMBs and law enforcement – remains wholly insufficient. The dearth of attention to this issue was even more clear in 2024, the “mega year of elections.”

Recognizing this reality, IFES’ updated framework begins with a discussion of what constitutes VAWE, updating IFES’ definition both to better account for shifts in how technology influences women’s experiences in public life and to encompass the experiences of people from diverse sexual orientations and gender identities. We explore the failure of broader election observation reports – and other attempts to document the 2024 elections globally – to capture the full range of violence against women and the need for continued focus on VAWE. We also provide a brief discussion of technology-facilitated GBV (TFGBV) and the increasing role that this form of GBV is playing in electoral processes. Finally, we move to the VAWE assessment methodology, including the factors that should be examined (now inclusive of a more robust exploration of women’s experiences online during the electoral process), a recommended process for conducting a VAWE assessment and a suggested outline for a VAWE assessment report. Annex I provides a data collection guide, followed by the EMB tip sheet in Annex II.

¹ IFES has conducted VAWE assessments in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Fiji, Kenya, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka, Ukraine, Zimbabwe and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (available at ifes.org).

What Is Violence Against Women in Elections?

This update expands IFES' original definition of VAWE to include specific attention to online spaces, where technology can be used and abused to target women and gender-diverse people with hate speech, threats, violence and disinformation. While online violence causes very real fear and damage, including driving women out of the public sphere, it also can lead to physical harm offline.

Therefore, IFES now defines VAWE as follows:

Violence against women in elections – Any harm or threat of harm committed against women with the intent to and/or impact of interfering with their free and equal participation in the electoral process. It includes harassment, intimidation, physical harm or coercion, threats and financial pressures; it may be committed in the home or other private spaces or in public spaces; **and it can occur online or offline**. These acts may be directed at women, **in all their diversity**,² and in any of their roles as electoral stakeholders (e.g., voters, media, political actors, state actors, community leaders or electoral officials).

Why Focus on VAWE?

The last decade has seen more focus on the incidence and impact of violence against women in politics, with researchers, women's rights activists and international organizations documenting increased violence as women become more active and visible in the political sphere.³ While this focus is both welcome and needed, discussions of violence against women in politics often remain confined to the experiences of women candidates and elected

² We acknowledge that GBV affects people of all gender identities – and that many of the social and cultural influences at the root of GBV also drive violence specifically directed at women. The focus of this framework continues to be women's experiences, given that most gender-based laws and policies, including temporary special measures, focus on a gender binary. However, women are not a homogenous group, and women from different backgrounds and identities might have different experiences and needs with respect to VAWE. In particular, women who belong to other marginalized groups – such as women with disabilities, women who are members of the LGBTQI+ community, women from rural areas, Indigenous women, women from ethnic and religious minorities, young women and older women – might face compounding discrimination and violence because of these identities and the intersections of these identities.

³ See, e.g., Krook, M.L. (2017). Violence Against Women in Politics. *Journal of Democracy* 28(1), 74–s88, <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jod.2017.0007>; efforts by the Inter-Parliamentary Union to document [violence against women in parliament](#) (n.d.); the OSCE's toolkit on [Addressing Violence Against Women in Parliaments](#) (2022); and publications such as Political Party Network's [Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics](#) (2022).

officials, and are less likely to be included in broader evaluations of electoral operations and election observation reports.

IFES recognizes that VAWE is a threat to the integrity of the electoral process. It can affect women's participation as voters, candidates, election officials, activists and political party leaders, and it undermines the free, fair and inclusive democratic process. Importantly, as we have learned through applying the original VAWE framework and assessing electoral violence through a broader lens, electoral violence affects women in distinct ways in public, private and online spaces. This includes family and domestic violence associated with women exercising their political and electoral rights – including making independent choices about whom and what to vote for – and violence that women are more likely to experience in the context of increased political tension and overall electoral violence.⁴ For example, as IFES documented in its VAWE assessment of the 2022 elections in Papua New Guinea, where elections triggered intercommunal violence on a large scale, “[i]nternal displacement disproportionately impacted women and children; 70 women and girls were reported as raped, kidnapped, or victims of SARV [sexual assault and relationship violence].”⁵

At the same time, traditional notions of political and electoral violence, with their focus on acts of violence that take place in public, continue to privilege the experiences of men because men are – in most countries – more present and visible in the public sphere.⁶ This speaks to both the cause and the consequence of VAWE and why continuing to devote attention, resources and political will to addressing VAWE is so critical.

In most cultures, patriarchal structures and beliefs exclude, discourage or discount women inhabiting the public sphere or taking on public roles. Therefore, while women may be less likely to be victims of the high-profile acts of physical political violence that capture our attention,⁷ they face high levels of threats, shaming and other forms of psychological violence when they defy cultural and familial expectations and seek roles in that sphere, all of which further undermine their participation.⁸ In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, “the prominence of misogynistic language and the volume of gender-specific attacks and threats in public discourse discourage women from becoming politically active or prompted them to leave politics.”⁹ Women are also more likely to experience physical,

⁴ “In times of conflict and crises it is indeed often women who step into roles previously held by men. This often leads to ‘**aggrieved entitlement**’: a perceived hurt and loss of a previously privileged position (or at least possibility to attain it) and therefore a feeling that their masculinity is thwarted. In turn this can trigger opposition by men to gender equality and programs of women's empowerment and can increase gender-based violence, in particular violence against women and girls, because this is one of the last spaces to assert some last part of their supposed superiority. This happens both in the domestic sphere but also against public and politically active women” (Bias, L., & Janah, Y., 2022, *Scoping Study: Masculinities, Violence, and Peace*, swisspeace, 7; https://www.swisspeace.ch/assets/publications/Reports/Final_Scoping-Study_EN.pdf).

⁵ Sauer, L. (2023). *Violence Against Women in Elections in Papua New Guinea: An IFES Assessment*. International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES).

⁶ Mertus, J., De Alwais, M., & Tazreena, S. (2012). *Women and Peace Processes*. In Cohn, C. (ed), *Women and Wars: Contested Histories, Uncertain Futures* (pp. 169–93). Polity.

⁷ For example, as noted by Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo, “of the 132 politicians killed in the nine-month period before Mexico's 2018 elections, only about 20 were women.” *How is political violence gendered? Disentangling motives, forms, and impacts*. G Bardall, E Bjarnegård, JM Piscopo. *Political Studies* 68 (4), 916-935, 2020.

⁸ See, for example, findings from IFES' [VAWE assessment in Bangladesh](#) (2021): “Perpetrators of online psychosocial violence often engage in character assassination and defamation. Within the Bangladesh context, such rhetoric can deeply harm a woman's reputation and deter other women from running for office.”

⁹ ODIHR/OSCE (2025). *ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Local Elections*, 6 October 2024.

psychological, economic and sexual violence in private spaces when attempting to exercise their political and electoral rights, including their right to vote for a candidate of their choosing.¹⁰

As a result of these phenomena and other barriers, women continue to be underrepresented in positions of power and continue to experience specific challenges when seeking to participate in elections, including as voters. Coming out of the “mega year of elections” in 2024, there are still only 27 countries where women serve as heads of state or government.¹¹ Women hold 50 percent or more of cabinet positions in only nine countries, and only six countries have 50 percent or more women in single or lower houses of parliament.¹² In 2025, three countries (Oman, Tuvalu and Yemen) had no women in their parliaments.¹³ Globally, just over 27 percent of parliamentarians in single or lower houses are women. Although this is an increase from 11 percent in 1995 (the same year as the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action), the World Economic Forum reports that the gender gap in political empowerment continues to be the largest of the four indices measured (barely 23 percent closed).¹⁴ If progress toward parity continues at the current rate, it will be at least 2065 before women achieve equal representation in parliaments.

The impacts of VAWE are not limited to political figures. A study of senior election officials found that although men and women reported being targeted by disinformation campaigns and malign online content, the attacks targeting women in those positions disproportionately “centered on their personal lives” and exploited gender stereotypes.¹⁵ Women also received threats of sexual violence, and the attacks on women election officials had more serious consequences. Although men in these positions did not consider resignation in the face of such attacks, “[s]everal female chairs of EMBs not only considered renouncing their leading roles within the electoral administration, but several quit their positions or chose not to pursue new mandates.”¹⁶

Coverage of VAWE in the 2024 Elections

In 2024, 104 national executive and legislative bodies were elected in 119 elections across 78 countries and 110 election days. The alignment of electoral calendars for some of the world's most populous countries – Bangladesh,

¹⁰ See, for example, findings from IFES’ VAWE assessment in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville: “Violence against women in elections (VAWE) in Bougainville manifests in two main ways: physical, often in the form of domestic violence stemming from conflict over the election or other political pressures, and socio-psychological, in the form of gossip, harassment and threats. Women who seek to engage in electoral processes as voters, candidates and election officials still face distinct challenges to their free and fair participation. Female voters experience pressure from family and clan leadership about for whom to vote and may face physical violence if they do not toe the family line.”

¹¹ UN Women. (2026, March 11). Facts and figures: Women’s leadership and political participation, note 1 (“UN Women calculation based on information provided by Permanent Missions to the United Nations. Countries with monarchy-based systems are excluded from the count of Heads of State”). https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-womens-leadership-and-political-participation#_edn1

¹² UN Women. (2026, March 11). Facts and figures: Women’s leadership and political participation.

¹³ IPU. (2025). *Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments*. <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking/>

¹⁴ Piaget, K., & Yanjun, G. (2025, updated June 16). *Progress despite uncertainty: Key findings from the Global Gender Gap Report 2025*. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/06/global-gender-gap-report-2025-key-findings/>

¹⁵ Bicu, I. (2024, January 31). Challenges for electoral officials in the information environment around elections. International IDEA. <https://www.idea.int/theme/information-communication-and-technology-electoral-processes/election-officials-challenges-information-environment-around-elections>

¹⁶ Ibid.

India, Indonesia, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia, the United States and the European Union (EU, with its 27 contingent member countries) – meant that more people were both affected by and eligible to participate in elections than ever before in a single year. The combined population of countries holding elections in 2024 was approximately 4.16 billion, more than half the world’s population.¹⁷

According to V-Dem, almost a quarter of all elections held in 2024 were marred by increasing political violence.¹⁸ Many election observation reports filed by entities such as the EU, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and the Organization of American States (OAS) also noted violence during the 2024 elections.

The OAS defines election-related violence as “any form of intimidation or physical violence directed against the stakeholders in the electoral process, its disruption, or damage to election-related materials, which affect holding free and transparent elections and/or influence their results.”¹⁹ Distinct from other international observation reports, most OAS reports include a specific discussion of violence committed against women candidates. This is likely because many countries in Latin America have laws prohibiting political violence against women on the basis of gender, not only indicating a robust legal framework, but also providing a benchmark for election observers to track. For example, the OAS report regarding the 2024 Mexican elections, while extensively documenting high levels of electoral violence, also includes reports from “various stakeholders that certain attacks have a gender profile, for example, that women are attacked through their family members to a greater extent than men, which could affect their participation.”²⁰

Although it is a marked improvement to attend specifically to violence against women, even the OAS reports (which are limited to Latin America and the Caribbean) lack the comprehensive data collection needed to inform substantive responses and findings. For example, although the observers’ report of the municipal elections in Brazil provides detail on the number and types of incidents of political violence during the electoral period, it does not disaggregate that violence by the gender of either the victim or the perpetrator.²¹

¹⁷ Galvez-Arango, E., & Emmons, C. (2024). The “Year of Elections” and Beyond. International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). <https://www.ifes.org/news/year-elections-and-beyond>

¹⁸ V-Dem Institute. (2025). Increasing political violence and pro-democracy mobilization are the most visible trends of the 2024 year of elections. https://www.v-dem.net/documents/61/v-dem-dr_2025_lowres_v2.pdf

¹⁹ See, e.g., Organization of American States (2024). *Preliminary Report of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission in El Salvador*. <https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/PRELIMINARY-REPORT---Preliminary-Report-OAS-Electoral-Observation-Mission-in-El-Salvador.pdf>

²⁰ Organization of American States (June 2024). *Preliminary Report of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission in Mexico*. <https://www.oas.org/fpdb/press/PRELIMINARY-REPORT---Preliminary-Report-of-the-OAS-Electoral-Observation-Mission-in-Mexico.pdf>

²¹ “For this electoral process, a total of 228 recorded incidents were directed against candidates officially registered for the election. These events occurred in 24 of Brazil’s 27 federal units. Only the states of Tocantins, Rondônia, and the Federal District did not record incidents against candidates. Regarding the types of violent incidents, 12 candidates were killed during the election campaign between August and September. Of these, 10 were running for mayoral offices and 2 for council seats. The most frequent form of violence against candidates was threats (25 percent), followed by physical attacks (23.7 percent). Furthermore, the observatories have noted a rise in incidents of political violence during the third quarter of the election year, which coincides with the campaign period and is very close to Election Day.” Brazil OAS Report. Organization of American States (October 2024). *Preliminary Report of the OAS Electoral Observation Mission in Brazil*.

Globally, many of the incidents of violence and harassment reported by election observers in 2024 included an online element, and the increased attention to TFGBV was one area where election observers did tend to note VAWE. In a report on the European parliamentary elections, for example, OSCE observers note:

Cases of harmful rhetoric, including elements of racism, misogyny, xenophobia, islamophobia, intimidation and violence persisted throughout the campaign and increasingly online. According to political parties, **incidents often targeted women candidates, particularly those with migrant backgrounds and from LGBTI communities**, and in some cases led to the filing of police reports or the need to hire private security” [emphasis added].²²

The reporting from these elections underscores an important element of VAWE – the abuse that women from other marginalized communities (including religious and ethnic minorities, women with disabilities and women from the LGBTQI+ community) face due to the intersection of their identities.²³ Data collection around this topic does not seem to be institutionalized in the OSCE framework, as it does not routinely appear in other reports.

Intersectionality (n.) — the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. —Oxford Dictionary

Outright International, a global advocacy organization, conducted groundbreaking research regarding LGBTQI+ people’s experiences during the 2024 elections. Outright’s research focused on the experiences of the LGBTQI+ community writ large; however, the violence that many members of the community face is gendered and based on the same constructs and traditions that affect women in politics. That is, LGBTQI+ people are targeted for hate and abuse because they behave in a way that runs counter to gender-based expectations and conventions. Although this is true for men, women and nonbinary people in the LGBTQI+ community, LBTQ women experience specific types of threats and violence, underscoring the intersectional nature of the attacks. As one Brazilian activist notes in the Outright report,

LGBT+ politicians ... face some of the most extreme forms of political violence. Many endure continuous death threats, while lesbians, in particular, are frequently subjected to corrective rape threats ... This level of targeted aggression not only endangers individual lives but also threatens

²² ODIHR/OSCE (28 November 2024). *European Parliament Elections, 6-9 June 2024: Final Report*. <https://odhr.osce.org/odhr/elections/eu/581764>

²³ This was also noted in other reports; for example, Bulgaria observers report that “certain stereotypes about women in politics persist and they are often verbally attacked and stigmatized, particularly women from minority communities.” ODIHR/OSCE (5 September 2024). *Bulgaria, Early Parliamentary Elections, 9 June 2024: Final Report*. <https://odhr.osce.org/odhr/elections/bulgaria/575719>

the broader participation of LGBT+ people in democratic processes, reinforcing a climate of fear and exclusion.²⁴

This statement, and many other testimonies collected in the report, point to both the gendered nature of the threats that LGBTQ women in particular experience, the pervasive nature of the violence against the community as a whole and the consequences of that violence.

Coverage of electoral violence varied during the 2024 elections, both generally and specifically as regards violence against women and LGBTQI+ people. In general, the type of violence affecting women beyond women candidates in the context of elections is largely absent from mainstream international election observation reports, aside from rare mentions of vote buying, voter intimidation and/or family voting. There were some exceptions, including a report from the EU Mission to Jordan that noted, “Women often experience coercion from their families and tribes regarding voting and contesting. In several districts, women reported to the EU EOM [Election Observation Mission] that they were pressured to withdraw their candidacy or, in one instance, not to join a party list.”²⁵ Therefore, a focus on all of the ways violence women experience in seeking to participate in elections remains needed. This framework seeks to drive and then capture learning about this issue, including through election observation efforts, and help cultivate improved efforts to mitigate and respond to VAWE.

Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence

VAWE is intensifying through TFGBV. Indeed, the violence, harassment and abuse that women voters, candidates, journalists and election officials face in the online space is a theme in many of the reports analyzing women’s experiences in the 2024 elections, consistent with growing evidence documenting TFGBV targeting women in political and public life.²⁶ For example, “a study conducted with 123 women parliamentarians across 45 European countries has shown that 85% experienced psychological violence (including via technology-facilitated means) during their term and 58% became targets of online sexist attacks on social networks, prompting many to consider withdrawing from politics.”²⁷

TFGBV is “any act that is committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified by the use of information communication technologies or other digital tools, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, psychological, social, political, or economic harm, or other infringements of rights and freedoms.”²⁸ This form of GBV includes gendered

²⁴ Outright International (2025). *Queering Democracy: The Global Elections in 2024 and How LGBTIQ People Fared*. https://outrightinternational.org/sites/default/files/2025-09/092625_Outright_Elections2024_online.pdf

²⁵ The OSCE final report on the Uzbekistan parliamentary elections was another exception, noting, “Family or group voting, which often negatively impacts women’s participation, was noted in 3 per cent (35 cases) of observations.” ODIHR/OSCE (26 February 2025). *Uzbekistan: Parliamentary Elections, 27 October 2024- Final Report*. <https://odih.osce.org/odih/elections/uzbekistan/586212>

²⁶ See e.g., Baekgaard, K. (2023). Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence: An Emerging Issue in Women, Peace and Security. Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security. <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Technology-Facilitated-Gender-Based-Violence.pdf>

²⁷ OECD: *Mapping policy responses to TFGBV in the G7 countries*

²⁸ UN Women and World Health Organization. *Technology-facilitated Violence against Women: Towards a common definition: Report of the meeting of the Expert Group 15-16 November 2022, New York, USA*.

disinformation – “false or misleading gender and sex-based narratives [deployed] against women, often with some degree of coordination, aimed at deterring women from participating in the public sphere”²⁹ – and other forms of online violence and harassment, including doxxing, stalking, hate speech, impersonation, cyber surveillance and the distribution of AI-generated images and video, including non-consensual intimate images and deepfake pornography. Like other forms of VAWE, TFGBV can be perpetrated by people known to the target or by strangers, and can begin as attacks from an individual that are then amplified through social networks or coordinated from the outset through formal or informal networks within national borders and beyond.

TFGBV begins online but, as experts note,

... digital experiences will inevitably impact the physical experiences of those targeted, causing mental distress, impacting their general feelings of safety and, in some cases, leading to physical violence. Conversely, negative experiences in the physical world will be shared and reflected in digital spaces and impact how people engage in these spaces.³⁰

Although men and women are both subjected to online attacks during the electoral process, the volume, intensity and impact of these attacks is often more intense for women and LGBTQI+ people. For example, IFES’ VAWE assessment in Ukraine found that “women and men in public life are regularly targeted by intense and aggressive abuse in online spaces. Social media content directed against women is largely socio-psychological and physical and registers higher levels of negative sentiment, including direct threats of bodily harm or injury and murder.”³¹ The nature of the attacks is also gendered, with women “regularly accused of exhibiting immoral or unfeminine behavior or of having limited intellectual ability,” while attacks against men often claim that they “are engaged in homosexuality or feminized behaviors to ... reinforce the standards of heteronormativity and hyper masculinity that dominate Ukrainian politics.”³²

Although attacks against men reinforce an environment of intolerance and exacerbate social cleavages along lines of sexual orientation and gender identity, social media posts targeting women “aim to degrade and humiliate them and to delegitimize their ability to serve as political or civil servants.”³³ IFES’ VAWE assessments in Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka all found similar patterns of online harassment being disproportionately used against women to humiliate, delegitimize and discourage them. The assessment in Pakistan underscored instances of women

<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Expert-Group-Meeting-report-Technology-facilitated-violence-against-women-en.pdf>

²⁹ Centre for Information Resilience. (2024). Holding Our Digital Ground: A Playbook to Mitigate Gendered Disinformation During Elections and Beyond. <https://www.info-res.org/app/uploads/2024/11/CIR-Gender-Disinformation-Playbook.pdf>. Gendered disinformation can also include a broader definition of targets, including gender non-conforming people and other LGBTQI+ people who “are disproportionately targeted and harassed by spreading deceptive or inaccurate content about them” (EU Disinfo Lab, 2022, Gender-based disinformation 101: Theory, examples, and need for regulation. <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/monitoring-disinformation-around-elections-key-takeaways-from-the-german-federal-elections-in-2021-2/>).

³⁰ Dunn, S., Vaillancourt, T., & Brittain, H. (2023). Special Report: Supporting Safer Digital Spaces. Centre for International Governance Innovation. https://www.cigionline.org/static/documents/SaferInternet_Special_Report.pdf

³¹ IFES (2019). *Online Violence Against Women in Politics in Ukraine: An IFES Assessment*. <https://ifesukraine.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/IFES-Ukraine-Manifestations-of-violence-against-women-online-during-elections-v1-2019-11-25-Eng.pdf>

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

candidates' children being attacked more than men's, with threats posted online challenging the morality of the women candidates' daughters.

At the same time, online engagement is an increasingly vital part of both personal and public communications and is particularly important in the electoral context. Voters use technology to access information that helps them make informed decisions about whom to vote for. EMBs use technology to share critical information about voter registration and education. Journalists use web stories and social media to share their work. Candidates, of course, use technology to communicate with their constituents. Digital engagement is both enabling and risky, as highlighted by the prevalence of TF-GBV in online spaces.

Access to the internet can support women to have a voice in spaces where this was previously denied, challenge gender norms, use information, participate in political and associational networks, and increase their economic independence. —World Wide Web Foundation³⁴

Women also are less likely to have access to online platforms and connected devices and face higher levels of surveillance when trying to access the internet.³⁵ The Centre for International Governance Innovation surveyed more than 18,000 people across 18 countries and found that even when women do have access to information and communications technology (ICT), “it is common for their use to be monitored by male family members” and that “public spaces for accessing the internet, such as internet cafés, are male dominated in certain countries and can be less welcoming to women.”³⁶ This type of surveillance and monitoring by family members, and the inability to use ICT independently, prevents women from accessing information, expressing themselves online and communicating how, when and with whom they choose – all critical elements of exercising their political and electoral rights.

Such barriers may not rise to the level of electoral violence, but they help complete the picture of the challenges women face when seeking to participate in elections. Users of this VAWE framework should consider the impact of other barriers to participation to further assess the root causes of gender equality and discrimination. A barrier is an identifiable circumstance, omission or action that discourages women's participation in some part of the electoral process, whether as a voter, candidate or party activist – or any other role. In Kenya, for example, some political parties scheduled meetings only in the evening, making it difficult or impossible for women members to attend and,

³⁴ World Wide Web Foundation. (2015). *Women's Rights Online: Translating Access into Empowerment*. This research documents how access to the internet can expand women's voice and civic participation, challenge restrictive gender norms, improve access to information, facilitate participation in political and associational networks, and strengthen women's economic opportunities and independence.

<https://www.genderit.org/resources/womens-rights-online-translating-access-empowerment>

³⁵ Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). (2021). *Human Rights and the Digital Divide*. OHCHR reports that women and girls constitute the majority of the 3.7 billion people who remain unconnected to the internet worldwide, reflecting persistent global gender discrimination.

International Telecommunication Union (ITU). (2020; 2022). *Measuring Digital Development: Facts and Figures and Facts and Figures 2022*. ITU data show significant gender gaps in internet use, including lower connectivity rates for women in least developed countries and persistent global disparities in internet access between women and men.

³⁶ Dunn, Vaillancourt, & Brittain. (2023).

therefore, more difficult for them to be involved in party activities, including as candidates.³⁷ Although this was not a clear act of violence, it resulted in interfering with women's participation in political processes and should be included in findings from a VAWE assessment, particularly if such examples are raised frequently.

The next section of this framework provides an updated set of factors to consider when assessing VAWE. These assessment factors can be combined with active monitoring of VAWE during electoral cycles or used to review the impact of VAWE on past elections to support reforms and preparations for the next election cycle.

Methodology

The VAWE assessment tool recognizes that to effectively address this form of violence against women, practitioners must understand a country's historical trends of VAWE and the factors that precipitate the violence. They should also appreciate the cultural and sociopolitical norms that affect women's status in any given society, the scope and pattern of their participation in the electoral process and societal and institutional responses to address violence. To facilitate this examination, the assessment tool is organized around the analysis of five key factors:³⁸

- **Status of women:** Address broad concerns related to the status of women in their local and national communities and identify the root causes of violence against women in general and in elections.
- **Women's access to the electoral process:** Examine gender dynamics related to political and electoral processes as well as broader democracy, rights and governance issues. Categories of this analysis explore gender dynamics related to the electoral legal framework; election administration; voter registration; women's political participation as voters, candidates and activists; and the role of political parties.
- **Trends in VAWE:** Identify incidents and trends of violence against women that occur in the context of the electoral cycle. Examine triggers for GBV against women in elections.
- **TFGBV:** Identify rates and incidents of TFGBV that occur during the electoral cycle, including gendered disinformation and other attempts to limit women's participation.
- **Responses to VAWE:** Explore responses by official actors and civil society, including political parties and the media. Identify strategies to reduce or prevent violence against women during the electoral cycle.

The assessment tool outlines key questions to guide data collection and analysis of challenges and opportunities that each factor presents in addressing VAWE, including suggested secondary sources to guide desk research and

³⁷ Catholic Relief Services Training Institute (CRTI), Hekima Institute of Peace Studies and International Relations. (2022). *Women Political Leadership in Kenya: A Needs Assessment Survey on Mentorship Program*. Nairobi: Hekima Institute.

<https://crtp.hekima.ac.ke/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Women-Leadership-Survey-Report-Body-09-03-2022.pdf>

³⁸ The original VAWE framework included four key factors. This update adds TF-GBV as a distinct line of inquiry because although online violence is part of the broader VAWE phenomenon, its growing prominence and the anonymity with which it can be spread necessitates its status as a stand-alone assessment factor.

questions that can be used to develop protocols for key informant interviews. Practitioners should adapt the data collection tool in Annex I to the specific country context, the stakeholders involved and the project's overall goals.

The next section details assessment factors and key questions, followed by a suggested process for conducting a VAWE assessment and a sample outline for a VAWE assessment report.

Assessment Factors

Status of Women

Address broad concerns related women's status in their local and national communities and identify root the causes of violence against women in general and in elections, such as the following (among other causes):

- women's access to property, income, childcare, security and justice
- needs and barriers women face at the national and local levels
- levels of freedom of movement for women compared to men
- types of leadership roles men and women play in their society
- attitudes around violence against women, legally and culturally
- prevalence of harassment of women in public
- legal framework in place around violence against women, including online violence

Women's Access to the Electoral Process

Examine gender dynamics specifically related to political and electoral processes as well as broader democracy, rights and governance issues. Categories of this analysis explore the gender dynamics related to the following:

- the electoral legal and regulatory framework
- the election administration
- voter registration
- women's political participation as voters, candidates and activists
- the role of political parties

Trends in VAWE

Identify incidents and trends of violence against women that occur in the electoral cycle, including the following:

- triggers for GBV against women in elections
- root causes for VAWE, including gender inequality and discrimination
- impacts of violence on women running for office or women who want to register to vote
- past incidents of election violence and the impact on women's participation

TFGBV

Explore how women engage online and the risks and opportunities that accompany that engagement. This analysis includes elements such as the following:

- the primary platforms and ICT in use in the country and any gender-based differences in access and use
- rates of online violence, including violence and harassment targeting prominent women, noting spikes in incidents throughout the election cycle
- the ways AI is being used to manipulate online discourse, including through cheapfakes, deepfakes, deepnudes and gendered disinformation
- responses to TFGBV by political figures of all genders and any differentiated impacts of online violence against women and people of diverse gender identities

Responses to VAWE

Explore responses to VAWE implemented by official actors and civil society, including political parties and the media.

This analysis includes identifying and documenting the following:

- existing services available to survivors of VAWE, awareness of those services, uptake and any gaps
- accountability mechanisms available to survivors, including through informal justice mechanisms, administrative processes and formal justice mechanisms – noting any barriers to access and use
- strategies to reduce or prevent violence against women during the electoral cycle

The VAWE Assessment Process

1. Develop the Data Collection Plan

The assessment team determines the key questions for each assessment factor and conducts initial desk research to gather preliminary information on women's status in the country, the legal framework, historic trends with respect to VAWE, ICT penetration and TF-GBV. Based on the findings from the desk research, the assessment team develops a list of stakeholders to interview, adapts the VAWE assessment questions to the country context and creates key informant interview and focus group discussion protocols customized for each stakeholder group.

2. Prepare for Deployment

The assessment team communicates with the local country team to further hone the assessment methodology and interview protocols, ensuring that the data collected will meet local partners' needs. In addition, the assessment team initiates communication with VAWE stakeholders to ensure buy-in and transparency regarding the objectives of the assessment.

3. Conduct In-Country Data Collection

During interviews and focus groups, assessment team members use the final interview protocols and discussion guides, ensuring sufficient flexibility to ask probing or clarifying questions as discussions progress while enabling team members to gather the necessary information from each stakeholder. Some assessment data may be captured in a pre-deployment desk study, but most of the data will need to be collected through field research. Note and request any quantitative data, including local and national statistics on voting rates (disaggregated by gender) and data on GBV.

4. Analyze the Data

Analyze the data collected through desk research and field research (quantitative data obtained from in-country stakeholders and qualitative data from interviews and focus groups) to identify findings and develop recommendations. Ensure that findings cover key aspects of gender, violence and elections as covered by the questions across the five assessment factors. Target the recommendations to support relevant stakeholders in addressing VAWE and reducing barriers to women's political and electoral participation.

5. Draft the Assessment Report

The assessment team drafts the assessment report, tailoring the VAWE report template as appropriate. The draft should be peer reviewed by technical and country experts and then finalized by the assessment team.

VAWE Assessment Report Template

I. Context for the VAWE assessment

- a. Purpose of the VAWE assessment
- b. Methods used and stakeholders consulted
- c. How the results of the assessment will be used

II. Overview of the status of women/gender equality in [Country]

- a. Women's status in the home/community
- b. Women's status in the economy
- c. Women's status in politics
- d. Women's status in elections

III. History of GBV/VAWE in the country

- a. Public violence
- b. Private violence
- c. TFGBV/gendered disinformation

IV. Legislative and regulatory framework

- a. Election legislation
- b. Laws governing GBV and/or VAWE, including TFGBV
- c. History of enforcement

V. Analysis and findings according to the five assessment factors

- a. Status of women
- b. Women's access to the electoral process
- c. Trends in VAWE
- d. TFGBV
- e. Responses to VAWE
- f. Any other relevant findings

VI. Recommendations

- a. Speak to all five assessment factors, as relevant
- b. Identify specific stakeholders as targets of each recommendation
- c. Note the priority (high, medium, low) for each recommendation

Annex I: VAWE Assessment Data Collection Resources

Key Informant Interviews

In many cases, desk research can help provide context necessary to shape the development and tailoring of interview protocols for a variety of stakeholders. Some of the sample questions in this annex are flagged as being particularly important for initial desk research, while others are noted as likely to be best answered in interviews. The assessment team should use their best judgment and adjust accordingly. Interview time is precious, and it is important to maximize conversations to both elaborate on and better understand the desk research and gather information that will not be available from written sources.

The sample questions in this annex are meant as a starting point. They should be tailored to the country context and the specific interlocutors. Feel free to add or skip questions, but make sure to document the questions you ask and the answers interlocutors give in each interview. This can be done through notetaking during the conversation and/or by recording the discussion, provided you have asked for and received permission to record. If you record the conversation, you should reassure the respondent that the recording will only be used to ensure the accuracy of your notes and that the recording will be stored safely and deleted once the report is finished. There is a sample script below that you can use to help introduce the interview.

Stakeholders

A variety of stakeholder perspectives should inform this VAWE assessment. This could include, for example, election officials (EMB staff), elected officials, candidates or former candidates, representatives of political parties, representatives of civil society organizations serving women and/or victims of GBV, LGBTQI+-serving organizations, government officials such as those from the women's ministry (if relevant), security forces (providing election-day security) and community leaders/elders.

Do No Harm³⁹

When speaking with survivors of violence, it is essential to be mindful of your word choice and tone. It is important to talk to survivors in a safe environment, create trust, use respect and avoid making judgments or assumptions.⁴⁰ For interviews with survivors of violence, there should be an experienced counselor available for referral, if not onsite, who can support the interviewee if they are re-traumatized or need any psychosocial support during or following the discussion.

³⁹ Excerpted from the CEPPS Online Violence Against Women Monitoring Tool.

⁴⁰ Take Back the Tech! (N.d.). How to Talk to Survivors. <https://www.takebackthetech.net/be-safe/how-talk-survivors>

When speaking to survivors of violence:⁴¹

- Understand that the survivor may be dealing with trauma, which can cause them to act in unanticipated ways or exhibit physical distress.
- Recognize that violence is never the fault of the survivor.
- Use sensitivity and focus on the survivor's needs during the conversation.
- Respect any steps the survivor has already taken to handle the impact or harm of the abuse.

Given the nature of the topic, the conversation could include vulgar and offensive language. Before the interview, participants should be notified that they will be discussing instances of violence. This content can be traumatizing or act as a trigger for the people (of all genders) who experience this type of violence. Ensure interviewees' well-being by offering opportunities to address emotional reactions and respecting their right to withdraw.

Some recommended phrases to use when talking with survivors of violence:⁴²

- **"I believe you." / "It took a lot of courage to tell me about this."** It can be extremely difficult for survivors to share their story. They may feel ashamed, concerned that they will not be believed, or worried they will be blamed. Be careful not to interpret calmness as a sign that the event did not occur; everyone responds to traumatic events differently. The best thing you can do is to believe the person.
- **"It's not your fault." / "You didn't do anything to deserve this."** Survivors may blame themselves, especially if they know the perpetrator personally. Remind the survivor, maybe even more than once, that they are not to blame.
- **"I'm sorry this happened." / "This shouldn't have happened to you."** Acknowledge that the experience has affected their life. Phrases like "This must be really tough for you" and "I'm so glad you are sharing this with me" help communicate empathy.

You should also prepare a resource list for each interviewee in case they want to seek help or support after the interview concludes. This list can include local women's organizations and health centers or information on how to seek justice or accountability, based on what is appropriate for the country and the local context. Confirm in advance that the service providers' contact details are accurate and actively working.

Sample Introduction for Interviews

Include language from the "Do No Harm" section, as appropriate.

"Thank you so much for agreeing to speak with us today. My name is _____ and I work for _____. *[If needed: "This is our translator, _____.]*

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² RAINN. (updated August 28, 2025). How to TALK With Survivors of Sexual Violence. <https://rainn.org/show-up-speak-out-step-in/how-to-talk-with-survivors-of-sexual-violence/>

“We are trying to understand more about the role that gender-based violence or violence against women has played in the elections in [COUNTRY]. This includes physical violence, sexual violence and psychological violence, including violence such as hate speech, threats or disinformation that may occur online. This also includes violence that happens both in public and in private spaces, including at home. The information gathered during this assessment will be used to identify actions and recommendations that practitioners can take to address violence against women in elections and support women’s political participation.

“Your input is invaluable, and so we would like you to be as open, honest and accurate in your comments as you can. We are interested in your experiences and opinions in response to these questions. If you don’t know an answer, please feel free to say so. If you don’t feel comfortable answering a question, it is fine to skip it.

“Everything you say in this discussion will remain anonymous. We will not identify anyone by name in our assessment report. The notes from the discussion will contain no information that would allow you to be linked to specific statements. Is it OK with you if we record this interview so that we can be sure to capture your responses correctly? The recording will, of course, be kept completely private, and nothing you say, or your name, will be made public. We will only keep the recording as long as we need to it complete our report and then it will be erased.

“Before we begin, do you have any questions for us?”

Sample Interview Questions

STATUS OF WOMEN

1. What types of roles do women and men play within the family?
 - a. Who makes financial decisions in the family?
 - b. Who controls resources/wages?
2. What types of roles do women and men play in the community?
3. Are women able to move freely within and beyond their communities alone?
 - a. Are women safe in public spaces alone?
4. What happens to women who are active in public spaces? Are there consequences?
5. Women in the economy *[Recommend starting with desk research and following up in interviews.]*
 - a. Do women work outside the home?
 - b. Do they work in the formal economy?
 - c. Is there a gender wage gap?
 - d. Is there a formal education gap?

WOMEN AND THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

6. Women in politics *[Recommend starting with desk research and following up in interviews.]*

- a. How are women represented in formal governance bodies (at local, state and national levels)?
 - b. As elected officials?
 - c. Within political parties?
 - d. What challenges do women face in running for office?
 - e. What challenges do women face in serving in elected/appointed roles?
 - f. How many women ran in the last election? How many were successful? *[Start with desk research, if possible, and confirm in interviews.]*
 - i. Why do you think that was?
 - g. What do you think would be most helpful to encourage more women to run for office and/or increase their success as candidates?
7. Are there any laws in places that specifically support women's representation in politics? *[Start with desk research and follow up in interviews.]*
- a. Are those laws effectively implemented/enforced?
 - b. Do political parties take any additional steps to encourage women's participation?

WOMEN AS VOTERS

8. Are women registered to vote at the same levels as men?
- a. Do women face any particular barriers in registering to vote? *(Examples: access to identity documents, challenges with re-registering once they marry and change their name, challenges traveling to register to vote.)*
 - b. Are women able to vote freely and without influence (pressure from family/spouse)?
 - c. Is secrecy of the vote respected generally and for women specifically?
 - d. Do women vote at equal rates as men?
 - e. Are there some groups of women who are more or less likely to vote? *(Examples: women from certain ethnic/religious groups, women with disabilities, rural women, young/old women.)*
[Request official data from the EMB on both registration and voting rates, disaggregated.]

WOMEN AS ELECTION WORKERS

9. Are women represented at all levels as employees across the EMB?
- a. What proportion of poll workers (including temporary employees) are women?
10. Do EMB personnel, including poll workers, receive training on how to respond to incidents of violence against women in the context of the election?
11. Have election workers/EMB employees been targeted for violence, including online violence?
- a. If yes, do women and men face different rates/forms of violence?
 - b. Do election workers receive support/information on what to do if they are targets of violence?

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE/VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS

12. Gender-based violence/violence against women and/or gender-diverse/LGBTQI+ people⁴³
 - a. What are rates of GBV? *[Consult secondary sources for official statistics; follow up with interviews.]*
 - b. Do incidents of GBV in the home/in private spaces increase during certain parts of the election season?
 - c. What kinds of services and supports are available to women and/or gender-diverse/LGBTQI+ people who experience violence?
 - i. Do you think most people are aware of these services?
 - ii. Do people use these services?
 - iii. Are they sufficient to meet the need?
 - d. What entities have been or could be particularly effective to combat GBV?

13. Do women face violence in public?
 - a. If yes, why types of violence do they face?
 - b. Who are the perpetrators of this violence?
 - c. Are certain types of women particularly targeted?
 - d. Do women in public roles/women in politics face violence?
 - i. Is this violence different than for other women?
 - ii. Is this violence different than what men in politics experience?
 - iii. What about members of the LGBTQI+ community?

14. What protections exist against GBV in the legal framework?
 - a. Does this include online violence and harassment?
 - b. Have there been any efforts to address online violence and harassment?
 - c. What about gendered disinformation?

15. How is violence against women or GBV handled?
 - a. What is the community reaction to violence against women or GBV?
 - b. Are laws combating violence against women/GBV enforced?
 - c. If there are community justice/alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, how do those treat incidents of violence against women (public or private)?
 - d. Do you know of any cases where a woman has brought a formal complaint to authorities about an act of violence in the context of the election? *[If yes, please get details.]*
 - i. What happened?
 - ii. How did the authorities respond?
 - iii. Were the perpetrators punished?

⁴³ When asking about violence, be sure to note the specific types of violence reported and to ask for information about perpetrators.

TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GBV

16. Do women have equal access to technology? (*Hardware [smart phones, computers], platforms [internet, social media], and so on.*)
 - a. Are women able to go online without permission/surveillance from their family/husband?

17. What about online violence/harassment/hate speech?
 - a. Are men and women treated differently in online spaces?
 - b. Do women/girls experience gendered disinformation online?
 - c. Do women/girls experience technology-facilitated GBV?
 - d. Is this different for women who are political/public figures?
 - e. Is this different for women who advocate for women's rights?

18. Can you tell me about a situation where you've seen men in politics experience online violence? Do you think men experience online violence differently than how women experience it? How?
 - a. Are comments/words/phrases used differently?
 - b. Do men and women both experience attacks on their character (as opposed to those related to their political or policy positions or their credentials and qualification)?
 - c. Are women more likely to be impugned (accused) on the basis of sexual behavior/reputation?
 - d. Are attacks against women more or less likely to include threats or attacks against their children?

If the person indicates they have directly experienced online violence/harassment:

19. Can you describe a situation where you experienced online harassment or violence personally? [*Follow up with the questions below for more detail, as necessary.*]
 - a. Did you experience it in a public space (such as via tweets, public Facebook posts) or in a closed space (such as private messages on social media apps, WhatsApp, closed Facebook groups)?
 - b. On what platform did the incident initially take place (Facebook, X, other)? Did it spread to different platforms? Which ones?
 - c. Who were the perpetrators?
 - d. Did you observe any coordination of the perpetrators or those sharing abuse?
 - e. Why do you think you were targeted? Do you think you were targeted due to your political participation or activism? Why or why not?
 - f. Was this the first time it happened? Has it happened more than once?
 - g. How did you respond? Did you report the activity to your organization (political party or civil society organization), to platforms or to law enforcement?
 - h. For about how long would you say the incident lasted (a few hours, days, weeks)? How long after the initial incident did you continue to receive harmful messages?
 - i. Did attacks migrate from social media to other online communications platforms (such as private text messages, calls, WhatsApp)? Did violence/threats spread offline (were there any physical or real-world consequences)?

Helpful Secondary Sources

Relevance will depend on country coverage. These are good places to start with desk research.

Overall Status of Women

- World Economic Forum: [Global Gender Gap Report](#) (covers about 145 countries; dimensions on political empowerment, economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment and health and survival)
- United Nations Development Programme: [Gender Inequality Index](#)
- Georgetown University: [Women, Peace, and Security Index](#)
- World Bank: [Women, Business and the Law Project](#)
- United Nations: [Sustainable Development Goals Gender Snapshot](#)

Women in Politics

Women in parliament/women in executive positions:

- Inter-Parliamentary Union: [Monthly ranking of women in national parliaments](#)
- UN Women: [Women in politics](#)

Women in local government (latest is 2024):

- UN Women: [Women in local government](#)

Election observation reports from past elections can also be good sources:

- Americas: [OAS Electoral Observation Missions and Recommendations Database](#)
- Africa: [African Election Observers Network](#) and [African Union Election Reports](#)
- Asia: [ANFREL Election Observation](#)
- Europe/OSCE member states: [OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights](#)
- Global: [European Union Election Missions](#) and [Carter Center](#)

Legal Framework (Country Specific)

International law:

- Country-specific ratification of key human rights/gender treaties, including the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- The United Nations [Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights](#) has a database of countries' ratification status for 18 human rights treaties.

Regional treaties:

- Africa – “Maputo Protocol”: [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa](#)
- Americas – Convention of Belém do Pará: [Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women](#)
- Europe – Charter of Fundamental Rights: [Gender Equality](#)
- Middle East and North Africa: [Arab Charter on Human Rights](#)
- Asia – Association of Southeast Asian Nations: [ASEAN Human Rights Declaration](#)

National Constitution

Election law – look for the following:

- [Gender quotas database](#) (for a helpful start)
- Specific provisions on political violence against women
- Specific provisions on TF-GBV, disinformation and/or hate speech
- Laws on GBV and/or violence against women (might be part of the criminal code)

Annex II: EMB Tip Sheet

How EMBs Can Address Gender-Based Violence in Elections

Develop and enforce relevant regulations and policies to:

- Support the implementation of quotas and other temporary special measures to increase women's representation in politics by, for example, ensuring that party candidate lists meet existing quota requirements (e.g., number of women nominated, relative position on the list) when certifying party lists.
- Prevent family voting by ensuring that every voter casts their ballot independently – unless special circumstances, such as disabilities, dictate the presence of an attendant in the voting booth – and in secret. One person should not be permitted to submit ballots for their entire family.
- Anticipate and mitigate violence and threats at polling places by, where appropriate, facilitating women-only polling stations or lines, ensuring any security personnel are trained to identify the specific threats women face when serving as poll workers or voters, and situating polling places based on an assessment of past patterns of election-related violence and to facilitate access by those who may face challenges moving independently or traveling long distances.

Model good practice by:

- Establishing a sexual harassment policy that prohibits all forms of violence against women, sets clear penalties and procedures for violations and provides confidential reporting channels for both public-facing interactions and internal workplace conduct.
- Updating EMB codes of conduct and developing a model code of conduct for political parties to explicitly reference that prohibits electoral violence against women.
- Integrating a focus on countering electoral violence against women into poll worker manuals and training.

Provide training for all staff on:

- What to do if they witness violence.
- What to do if violence is reported to them.
- What to do if they are targeted with violence (online or offline).

Collaborate with:

- Civil society on messaging, education and support for survivors of violence against women in elections.
- Local religious and traditional leadership to engage them as allies in promoting women's ability to participate in electoral processes free of violence and harassment.

- Law enforcement and justice officials to ensure appropriate responses to VAWE.
- Political parties to develop codes of conduct that prohibit violence, harassment and disinformation – including online – and promote inclusive policies, including voluntary quotas to increase the number of women candidates.

Support public engagement, education and messaging on:

- The importance of inclusive elections and the steps the EMB is taking to ensure all people can participate safely in elections.
- The dangers of TFGBV and gendered disinformation, including education campaigns to help people understand the prevalence of deepfakes and other AI-generated content, the importance of verifying information before sharing it and the very real harm that can result from online harassment, trolling and doxxing.
- What to do if you see violence against women in the context of elections, including information about where to report such violence and any services available to survivors of violence.
- What to do if you experience violence in the context of the elections, including support services available to survivors of violence and law enforcement contacts. Some EMBs launch hotlines to report electoral violations during the election period and that information can be included in educational materials.

Improve data collection and analysis by:

- Collecting data, disaggregated by gender, on registration, voting and incidents of election-related violence.
- Analyzing data after the election, noting any gender-based disparities.
- Consulting with candidates, newly elected officials and women's rights activists to understand women's experiences with violence during the election.
- Using findings to drive action plans and changes to policies and processes to better address GBV in the context of elections.

EMB Examples

Promising Practices

EMB STRUCTURES/POLICIES TO SUPPORT WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION AND ADDRESS VAWE

Following a legal reform process in 2022, **Jordan's Independent Election Commission (IEC)** created new units dedicated to the political participation of women and youth. The women's empowerment unit reports directly to the IEC chairperson, works to increase women's roles within the IEC and promotes women's participation as voters and

candidates. The IEC also established a definition of electoral violence against women⁴⁴ and a new committee to address this form of violence.

SEPARATE POLLING ENTRANCES/POLLING PLACES

In some countries, EMBs have set up separate entrances to polling places for men and women – or gender-specific polling places – to help ensure that women are able to vote without interference from men, including male family members.

PUBLIC MESSAGING TO ADDRESS VAWE

In response to high levels of violence against women in elections, IFES worked with **Kenya’s Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission** to increase visibility of the narratives of women experiencing election-related violence in their homes, political arenas and public spaces. The [#BetterThanThis](#) campaign reiterated that Kenya could do better than the current state of violence against women in the electoral process, releasing [videos](#), inspirational images and posters to encourage women’s participation in the electoral process. To ensure survivors of violence could access critical services, the program also implemented Kenya’s first-ever nationwide, 24-hour GBV helpline.

Practices to Avoid

FAMILY VOTING/REGISTRATION

As one advocacy organization documented during the 2024 elections, voter registration in one country was organized at the family level, where the “chief occupant” was responsible for registering every member of the household on the voter’s list. This practice risks excluding family members with relatively less power or visibility within the household – often women, persons with disabilities and/or LGBTQI+ family members – from the voter rolls; it also limits the free flow of information to all eligible voters within the household. **A better option** would be for the EMB to enlist staff, trained volunteers and civil society partners from diverse backgrounds and communities to engage in widespread voter registration and engagement, reaching out directly through a variety of mechanisms – social media, radio, and market and home visits – to women voters and members of other under-represented groups to ensure they understand the process for voter registration and are able to register.

NARROWLY DEFINING VAWE

Reports of VAWE are sometimes dismissed unless or until physical violence occurs, making it difficult for women – who disproportionately experience verbal harassment, threats and other forms of psychological violence – to seek protection and accountability. **A better option** is to expand the legal definition of electoral violence to include verbal abuse and threats. For example, Mexico’s law on gender-based political violence against women provides an expansive definition, covering “any action or omission, including tolerance, based on gender elements and exercised

⁴⁴ Violence must occur during the election period and aim to affect the election; the violence is perpetrated because the victim is a woman; and the victim suffers from physical, psychological, economic or electronic harm. Independent Election Commission of Jordan, as cited in Solidarity Is Global Institute (SIGI). (2025). *Digital Electoral Violence Against Female Candidates During the 2024 Parliamentary Election Campaigns*. <https://sigi-jordan.org/en/article/dr-s-noa>

within the public or private sphere, which has the purpose or result of limiting, annulling or undermining the effective exercise of electoral political rights” of women.⁴⁵

NOT LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Globally, women are underrepresented in EMB leadership. As of 2022, only 22 percent of EMBs were chaired by women.⁴⁶ Additionally, women are often concentrated in lower-level positions. EMBs do not always have internal policies to encourage women’s equal representation in their own organizations, reducing their credibility when encouraging other election stakeholders to improve policies and practices. **A better option** is the example provided by EMBs such as the Electoral Commission of Zambia (ECZ), which is chaired by a woman and has launched the ECZ Gender and Social Inclusion Policy.⁴⁷ The policy mainstreams internal policies and practices related to gender – including a zero-tolerance policy for sexual harassment – and provides guidance for a variety of stakeholders to implement more equitable elections.

⁴⁵ Government of Mexico. (2020). *Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia*, Reform Decree No. 12 (Article 20 Bis), adopted 13 April 2020. The reform defines political violence against women as any action or omission, including tolerance, based on gender elements and occurring in the public or private sphere, with the purpose or result of limiting, annulling, or undermining women’s political and electoral rights.
<https://www.betterpolitics.foundation/safety-in-office-law-repository/mex>

⁴⁶ Bicu, I. (2022, March 7). Few women at the top of electoral management bodies worldwide. International IDEA.
<https://www.idea.int/news/few-women-top-electoral-management-bodies-worldwide>

⁴⁷ ECZ launches Gender and Social inclusion policy. (2025, December 23). *Lusaka Times*.
<https://www.lusakatimes.com/2025/12/23/ecz-launches-gender-and-social-inclusion-policy/>



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