

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS:

Global Perspectives of a Global Issue

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FOREWORD



2018 marks the 100th anniversary of the first time when any woman was allowed to vote in UK elections. This landmark event was the result of years of campaigning by indomitable, courageous women. They rejected, struggled against and ultimately overturned their society's assumption that half of humanity was unequipped with the physical, intellectual and moral strength to engage in politics.

The women who fought back against those attitudes were ridiculed and physically attacked for daring to suggest that their opinions on matters of significance were equal to those of men. "You set of sickening fools" was the message on a postcard sent to suffragette Emmeline Pankhurst. "Why don't you drown yourselves out of the way?"

The fight for the right to vote was won a hundred years ago, but the societal attitudes, the gender conditioning and the abuse that surrounded the campaign for women's suffrage are still with us in the 21st century.

What happened historically to women is writ large in the political sphere today across all parts of the world. Threats of violence; insults based on appearance, weight or race; belittling comments based on gender stereotypes; or references to a woman's sexual attractiveness. The imagery used against the Suffragettes compares to the imagery used on social media to attack, belittle, silence, shame and undermine female politicians.

It is up to us to remould society and bring about the reality of equality. We cannot simply expect deep-rooted power imbalances to crumble and fall at the utterance of worthy but empty rhetoric, to submit to well-intentioned but unenforced laws.

It is up to us as politicians, our respective parties, our institutions, the police, legislature, media and civic society as a whole to challenge abusive behaviour and to tackle the issue at its root. In some cases it will

involve legislating, in others it will involve implementing existing legislation (and securing the budget to do this effectively), but in all cases it will involve culture change. Such change must challenge objectification of women as mere biological objects whose value is assessed on their physical appearance and sexual currency. It must call out and condemn the casual use of aggression and threat of physical violence to silence women's voices in the digital arena.

“We cannot simply expect deep-rooted power imbalances to crumble and fall at the utterance of worthy but empty rhetoric, to submit to well-intentioned but unenforced laws.”

This conference paper brings together narratives from eight different countries around the world, of what politicians and those involved in politics experience; what national governments, political parties and civic society are doing about it and should do about it; and how we can all learn from each other, and, together, consign violence against women in politics to a chapter in the history books.

It is the result of an unprecedented initiative to bring together all political parties represented in the UK Parliament, along with their international partners and civil society organisations (CSOs) from across the world to work together with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) to stop violence against women in politics.

What started as a WFD-Plaid Cymru project between Wales and Argentina has grown into an international collaboration of major significance involving over 20 different countries. It has drawn on the resources, commitment and dedication of all seven parties represented in the UK Parliament, to whom this report is deeply indebted.

A hundred years ago, our predecessors gave us the right to participate in the democratic process. We must now show that we are worthy of their legacy, and ensure that women not only participate in elections, but take up their full role as leaders, law-makers, and power-brokers in our respective countries as equals – with respect and authority, and free from abuse.

Liz Saville Roberts MP

DEFINING THE PROBLEM

More women than ever before are participating in politics worldwide. Higher numbers of women are being elected to public office and, in many countries, more women are attending political events, engaging with government bodies and registering as voters. More than 10,500 women served as national parliamentarians

23%

Of parliamentarians worldwide are women

in 2017, accounting for over 23 percent of total parliamentarians worldwide.¹ There are millions of women politicians serving at sub-national levels, and many more women candidates who vie for political office in each election.²

Despite gains in women's political activity, women remain significantly under-represented in politics worldwide. Women continue to face multiple challenges in taking up positions in political and public life. Few women are elected as governors, mayors or other decision-making positions at the local level. Less than 20 countries worldwide in 2017 had women as their Head of State and/or Government.³

However, as women's political activity has grown, so has the frequency and degree of violent responses to their presence in politics. Globally, politically-active women – voters, candidates, local councillors, members of parliament (MPs), community activists, bloggers and so on – regularly find themselves on the receiving end of acts or threats of violence. Growing acts of violence against women (VAW) serve as a strong barrier to women accessing their right to participate fully and equally in politics and public life. There is no denying that over the past decade, the increase in women's political representation has been accompanied by a rise in violence against women in politics (VAWP).

According to the National Democratic Institute (NDI), violence against women in politics encompasses all forms of aggression, coercion and intimidation against women as political actors simply because

they are women.⁴ These acts – whether directed at women as civil society leaders, voters, political party members, candidates, elected representatives or appointed officials – are designed to restrict 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.

This definition aims to broaden conventional understandings of political and electoral violence and harassment, which are often conceived as attempts to suppress a particular perspective through force and bring with them well-documented democratic costs.

This paper expands on global discussions to counter efforts to exclude and silence *women specifically* – sometimes due to their political affiliation, but also, more often, because of their gender – from politics. These forms of violence and harassment are largely obscured from public attention, either because they take place in private spaces or because, due to prevailing gender norms, they are accepted.

As a result, in addition to facing similar challenges as their male colleagues in terms of fulfilling their electoral responsibilities, female politicians often must also confront resistance and dangers, even in the physical spaces that should be accessible and safe for them, including political assemblies, party meetings, their offices, and their homes.⁵

Manifestations of violence towards politically active women are classified in several common categories – psychological, physical, sexual and economic – that present distinctive features when applied to political life:

PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

Psychological violence refers to verbal and emotional abuse and acts intended to undermine a person's sense of worth and/or personal safety and security. This includes bullying behaviours such as belittling a person's abilities and competency, name-calling,

¹ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). 2016. PARLINE Database; IPU and UN Women. 2017. Map on Women in Politics.

² UN Women. 2017. "Preventing Violence Against Women in Elections: A Programme Guide."

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ NDI. 2017. "#NotTheCost Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics: Program Guidance."

⁵ Mona Lena Krook. "Violence Against Women in Politics is Rising – and it's a clear threat to democracy" <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2017/08/12/violence-against-women-in-politics-is-rising-and-its-a-clear-threat-to-democracy/> (accessed on 09/02/18)

insults, put-downs, constant criticism and/or focus on physical appearance. Psychological violence may also include acts aimed at instilling fear or creating isolation, such as threats of physical or sexual assault and forms of stalking.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Physical violence involves injuries inflicted directly on women, as well as acts of bodily harm against their relatives, such as assault, murder, kidnapping, beatings and even domestic abuse, intended to prevent or undermine their political participation.

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

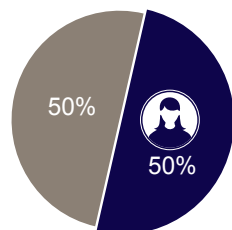
Sexual violence includes sexual acts and attempts of sexual acts by coercion or force, as well as unwanted sexual comments or innuendo, and sexual harassment. Examples include attempts to force women into sexual acts in exchange for a political outcome, such as securing a nomination, funding or an electoral result.

ECONOMIC VIOLENCE

Economic violence involves coercive or forceful behaviour to control access to economic resources. For example, women voters may be denied funds or other resources to coerce their vote or prevent them from voting. In other instances, women politicians may be denied access to financial, material or other economic resources to which they are entitled by law, often for either electoral or constituency purposes, and which are available to their male counterparts.

Women's equal representation and participation in politics and public life is not simply desirable for fully-functioning democratic systems; it is essential. Women's political leadership results in better outcomes for women and girls, as well as for society as a whole. The argument for women's political participation is irrefutable – democracy cannot be said to exist if half of the population is not wholly and equally engaged in decision-making.

Unlike many political discussions that start with disagreement and discord, this conversation opens with consensus: violence against women in politics must end.



What does violence against women in politics mean?

Violence against women in politics encompasses all forms of aggression, coercion and intimidation against women as political actors simply because they are women.

National Democratic Institute

“**Democracy cannot be said to exist if half of the population is not wholly and equally engaged in decision-making.**”

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE



Photo: Garry Knight. Crowds gather in Trafalgar Square, London to remember British MP Jo Cox.

The murder of British MP Jo Cox in her constituency in 2016 drew belated public attention to the problem the United Kingdom (UK) faces in stopping violence against women in politics. Quantifying how prevalent VAWP is remains challenging, due to underreporting (the information is not collected centrally), as well as the sheer volume of abuse directed at women in public life. But, as one UK MP explained in an interview, “Everyone knows it happens; it happens to all women [in politics].”

Yet, while its salience has only recently been recognised, the issue of violence against women in politics has been as pervasive as it has persistent. A recent survey of female parliamentarians by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) underscores the global dimensions of a troubling trend: across 39 countries, 44 percent of surveyed women reported having received threats of death, rape, assault, or abduction. One fifth said they had been subjected to sexual violence.⁶

44%

Of surveyed women across 39 countries reported death, rape, assault or abduction threats

To contribute to the growing literature on the global nature of VAWP, the seven UK political parties represented in Westminster⁷, in partnership with the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD), commissioned case studies, drawing on primary interviews with women politicians and civil society actors in eight countries around the world: Argentina, Ghana, Jamaica, Lebanon, Malawi, Sri Lanka, Ukraine and the UK. These are narrative explorations of women’s experiences and they offer a unique perspective on this global problem, providing statistics and anecdotes that illustrate the universality of VAWP.

The eight case studies that contributed to this paper are indebted to the parliamentarians and activists who agreed to be interviewed about their own experiences – some of whom have asked to remain anonymous to protect their identities. These stories reveal several common themes that cut across borders and political ideologies. The women featured in these studies have experienced or witnessed electoral violence against women; various forms of violence being normalised; online abuse; and the use of violence to dissuade young women entering politics.

This paper provides a global perspective from the eight countries to contextualise the discussions to be held on 19-20 March 2018 in London – when legislators, activists and experts from over 20 countries gather for a two-day summit on VAWP – and concludes with recommendations for what political parties and parliaments can do to stop violence against women in politics.

⁶ IPU. 2016. “Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians.” Accessed at <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/reports/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>

⁷ Conservative Party, Democratic Unionist Party, Green Party of England and Wales, Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, Plaid Cymru (Party of Wales) and Scottish National Party

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN ELECTIONS

Political violence can emerge in many contexts, but it has unique and adverse impacts on women during an electoral period. Political tensions and fierce competition during elections can create vulnerabilities for women's political participation, which in many cases is already disadvantaged compared to men and can result in women's exclusion from the process.

Violence against women in elections (VAWE) impacts on the realisation of women's political rights in an electoral context. Tactics such as physical assault and intimidation affect both men and women, but have a different impact depending on the gender of those involved, and some gender-based forms of violence are specific to women. Responses to prevent and mitigate political violence during elections must reflect these important gender dimensions.

Evidence from the case studies suggest that in addition to being the most recognised form of VAWP, physical violence during elections is also the form that has been most successfully addressed through legislation and shifting norms. Interviews from Argentina, Lebanon, and Ukraine all noted that violence, particularly physical, during campaigns was relatively rare. The same could not be said for Sri Lanka and Ghana, where disturbing examples of violence during campaigns and elections were noted.

Sri Lanka

Politics has always been a rough game for Sri Lankan women. Violence against women is a major deterrent for women's participation in decision-making at local and national levels. One of the most well-known incidents was the bomb attack at the campaign rally of the country's sole female president, Chandrika Kumaranathunga, in December 1999.

There have been other recent instances where female candidates have faced grievous hurt, assault, death threats and damage to property. In the February 2018

local elections, violence against women candidates and their family members was reported in regions throughout the country and across political affiliations.

The Centre for Monitoring Election Violence (CMEV), a Sri Lankan CSO, claimed to have received 34 complaints relating to violence against women candidates contesting local government elections. A CSO operating mainly in the northern region reported the abduction of a female candidate and several incidents in which female candidates were threatened over telephone.



Photo: Vikalpa. Chandrika Kumaratunga participates in a rally in support of constitutional reform in Sri Lanka, Colombo, 27 April 2015. 16 years after the bomb attack that threatened her life.

There were additional incidents of severe violence in the northern region, including media reports of a woman candidate's house being set on fire in Arayampathy. In Puthukkudiyiruppu, a female candidate was reportedly detained in an attempt to coerce her to withdraw a complaint she made to police regarding an earlier incident of violence. In Anuradhapura (North Central Province), two men allegedly assaulted and attempted to rape a Sinhalese female candidate and damaged her vehicle and house.

Such trends suggest that violence against women contesting the recent local elections was prevalent,

particularly in Anuradhapura, Puttlan, Kandy and Gampaha, but it is difficult to produce precise information on the level and location of VAWP in these elections, as a large number of such incidents was not reported through official channels due to fear of reprisals.

Ghana

Regarded by many as a democratic success story with its history of peaceful elections and transitions of power between the two main political parties, the country nevertheless has a poor record in women's political participation. Although Ghana has fairly progressive gender equality legislation and policies, there is a big gap between policy and practice in Ghana's journey towards increasing women's political participation and representation. In 2016-17, only 13.5 percent of parliamentarians were women and 21 out of 110 (19.9 percent) were ministers. No woman was appointed as a regional minister to head any of the 10 regions of the country.

Observers suggest that the patriarchal nature of Ghanaian society dictated those eligible to participate in the democratic process, at what level and the extent to which they could participate. This social structure sometimes manifests itself through violence against women when they enter politics and launch campaigns for public office. As far back as 2005, Madam Frances Essiam, the then out-going Women's Organiser of the National Democratic Congress (NDC), was subjected to verbal and physical abuse during the NDC congress where horsewhips were used to beat her.⁸ During the 2012 elections, there was documented violence against women candidates, including the physical assault of Ursula Owusu, New Patriotic Party (NPP) candidate for Ablekuma West. Also, Hajia Gariba Boyo, the NDC candidate in Tamale, was manhandled by the supporters of another minister during the primaries of the NDC. The 2016 elections also recorded pockets of violence including the vandalism and destruction of personal properties.

Respondents to the survey conducted for the Ghana case study believed that political violence negatively impacted on the political fortunes of women in politics both at the national and local levels. A large majority of respondents said it affected their chances of winning the elections. Even those who managed to win the election still had their confidence eroded. Others claimed that it nearly caused their withdrawal; as one MP put it, "The intimidation put fear and panic such that one is discouraged and feels threatened."

While the other country case studies pointed to less physical violence against women during elections, they illustrated a disproportionate rise in other forms of violence during these periods, most prevalently psychological and emotional abuse directed at candidates solely based on their gender. These are discussed in the sections that follow.

⁸ <https://www.modernghana.com/news/92371/frances-essiam-comes-under-attack.html>

COST OF DOING POLITICS FOR WOMEN

Normalising the abuse of public figures – and dismissing sexism and misogyny in the political world – as simply the ‘cost of doing politics’ has devastating consequences for the quality of democracy. A crucial first step in preventing this form of exclusion is to resist dismissing violence and harassment as simply ‘politics as usual.’ In 2016, NDI launched the #NotTheCost campaign to stop violence against women in politics, arguing that violence is not the cost of doing politics: women should be able to be politically active without experiencing discrimination, harassment or assault.

These costs take many forms, from economic loss to emotional abuse to family and community ostracism. Evidence from the literature and the case studies suggest that these impacts are disproportionately borne by women and often are directed at them principally because they are women. Women’s testimonies suggest that a wide range of perpetrators may be involved: while some abuse can be attributed to members of other political parties, a great deal also comes from women’s own parties, their own communities and their own families.

Personal dignity as fair game

Women are more likely to be subjected to abuse and harassment intended to undermine their sense of worth. This includes bullying behaviours calling into question their abilities, competency and morality, as well as a relentless focus on physical appearance.

In Jamaica, former Prime Minister, Portia Simpson-Miller, admits to having faced ridicule from her entry into politics. Simpson-Miller was often called illiterate and other disparaging names. Her supporters argued that she was judged more harshly and held to higher standards than her male counterparts. She was often the subject of offensive cartoons that labelled her as loud, aggressive and likened her behaviour to that of a ‘higgler’⁹ or peddler.



Cartoon depictions of former Prime Minister, Portia Simpson-Miller by Las May in the Jamaica Gleaner newspaper

Women politicians in the UK cited similar costs of engaging in politics. Many noted that the ways in which women in politics are presented in the press has a long lasting impact on public attitudes. Both broadcast and print journalists help to shape the terms of democratic debate. Many will note the inconsistency in the ways in which women politicians are described as compared

⁹ <http://jamaicans.com/dictionary/dictionary/dictionary/higglerhiggla/>

with their male counterparts; whilst entire columns are dedicated to describing what women politicians wear (the *Daily Mail* came under criticism in 2014 for reporting on new appointees to the Cabinet with the headline 'The Downing Street Catwalk'),¹⁰ the same tone of coverage would never be used to describe male politicians.¹¹ Such treatment arguably trivialises women politicians in the view of the public and opens the door to gendered and sexualised abuse.

Higher barriers of entry to politics

Women politicians interviewed for the Malawi case study cited limited access to productive resources as a significant problem because it puts them in a vulnerable and less competitive position compared to their male counterparts. One respondent illustrated this by pointing out that while her male counterpart can easily access loans from banks because he is able to produce collateral, she faces difficulties due to lack of collateral. Respondents also cited high expectations and demands from constituency members for services from MPs, which in turn puts a lot of pressure on politicians, bordering on economic violence. This is compounded for women politicians because of their generally lower levels of economic empowerment and financial stability.

In Ukraine, these barriers to entry manifest in the creation of party lists. This is related both to sexism and to financial incentives. Particularly at the local level, it is not unusual for party lists to be exclusively men. The case study attributes this to men having more access to money and therefore more access to power within political parties. Coupled with a pervasive belief that a woman's place is "in the kitchen" or "milking cows", this creates a higher cost of competing for female politicians.

Threats of social and community exclusion

In Lebanon, family opposition to women standing for elected office can result in various forms of violence. One of the main reasons behind family opposition to women's candidacy in recent municipal elections (2016) lies in the dominant patriarchal culture. Representation of a family by a woman, regardless of her position, competence, and achievements can be taken as an insult to the family and its men. Reports of this type of response to women candidates was not restricted to a specific region, sect or social class.

Besides depriving women candidates of their political party's support, family opposition to a woman's candidacy may also lead to other forms of violence against her, especially if she is running against those supported by her family. Interviews with women in such a position revealed that this violence can include

boycotts and ostracism by family members, which may continue even after the elections are over; threats of divorce, and in some cases, carrying out this threat; and even threats of murder. An incident of the latter was reported by a candidate in the Biqaa region who, besides having all of her posters torn down by members of her own family, received murder threats from her brothers for not abiding by the family order not to run.

¹⁰ The Guardian. Daily Mail's 'Downing Street Catwalk' condemned by MPs (16 July 2014)

¹¹ The very notion of reporting on the sartorial choices of politician's wives was satirised by a number of publications in 2016, following Theresa May's election to Prime Minister. Satirical columns focused on her husband Philip May's choice of suit: <http://metro.co.uk/2016/07/13/theresa-mays-husband-steals-the-show-in-sexy-navy-suit-as-he-starts-new-life-as-first-man-6005294/>

ONLINE ABUSE

Social media has undeniably revolutionised the way in which politicians interact with their constituents, as well as members of the wider public. Facebook and Twitter, at their best, engender frank political debate and remove the barrier of distance. However, some of the very aspects of social media which are designed to 'bring the world closer together' bring about abuse. Both distance and the option of anonymity mean that some individuals feel emboldened to send malicious messages, and even take part in mass 'spamming' of individual accounts.

Pervasive online abuse and harassment pressure women and girls into censoring themselves on social media and fuel gender-based discrimination and violence. Approximately one in four women in the UK, the United States (US) and six other countries said they had experienced online abuse or harassment, according to a study by Amnesty International.¹² Around one third stopped expressing their opinions online or withdrew from public conversations as a result. Amnesty researcher Azmina Dhrodia notes "It's no secret that misogyny and abuse are thriving on social media platforms, but this poll shows just how damaging the consequences of online abuse are."

While online abuse is certainly not limited to women in the public eye, women politicians face a disproportionate amount of abuse on social media. This is particularly true in the European Union (EU), US and Australia, where social media platforms are more popular. In Australia, for instance, it was reported that Julia Gillard received about twice as much abuse on Twitter as Kevin Rudd, who she deposed as Prime Minister.¹³

Unsurprisingly, across the case studies conducted, the UK featured the role of online abuse most prominently. Argentina, Sri Lanka, Ukraine and others all pointed to online abuse as a rising concern, but its prevalence had not yet reached the level that it has in American and European election campaigns. As these online platforms continue to expand, the ways in which countries like the UK deal with online abuse will have repercussions for other countries looking to stem VAWP.

Evidence from the Amnesty International report cited above and case study interviews for this paper make clear that women politicians from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities receive a disproportionate amount of abuse online. For example, of the thousands of abusive messages sent to women MPs tracked by Amnesty International over a six week period leading up to the 2017 UK general election, nearly half were sent to Diane Abbott MP. Ms Abbott received ten times more abuse than any other woman MP during this period.

Another unpalatable aspect of online abuse in the context of VAWP is how common it has become to receive rape threats. A number of the women interviewed for the UK case study drew attention to the fact that commentators and members of the public online feel entitled to comment on how women look. "I get comments calling me an ugly bint, saying I deserve a good raping", noted one MP. Rape threats and comments about a person's looks are overwhelmingly aspects of abuse perpetrated against women in public life.

While male politicians do undoubtedly face violence of other forms (including death threats), the abuse they face is not perpetrated against them simply on account

“**Women in public life are at a greater risk of being objectified.**”

of their gender. That difference is fundamental. A male MP also interviewed for the UK case study remarked, "Nobody would tweet me saying how terrible my suit was, or to tell me that I'm looking fat,

or that I should dye my hair. It just wouldn't happen." The same MP recognised that "women in public life are at a greater risk of being objectified." Psychologists observe that threatening to rape a woman is seldom about sexual desire, and more about power. This can hardly lessen the psychological trauma of receiving threats of this nature on a sometimes daily basis.

¹² <https://medium.com/@AmnestyInsights/unsocial-media-tracking-twitter-abuse-against-women-mps-fc28aeca498a>

¹³ <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/datablog/ng-interactive/2016/jun/27/from-julia-gillard-to-hillary-clinton-online-abuse-of-politicians-around-the-world>

In the UK, the lack of sanctions for online abuse from both social media companies and the Crown Prosecution Service is a cause of frustration for many MPs. As an example, Cat Smith MP recently received a rape threat in a private Facebook group, and reported it to the social media company. She was told that the message was not in “breach of Facebook’s community standards”. The MP took a screen shot of this response and posted it on Twitter, where it received a great deal of attention. Shortly afterwards, a Facebook employee got in touch, and the threat was removed from the website. Ms Smith acknowledges the irony implicit in the fact that she had to use the public platform which prompted the threat in order to have it removed.

Liz Saville Roberts MP draws attention to the fact that, instead of going after the perpetrators, “Twitter tells you how to hide [what you don’t want to see]. Women have to regulate [their] behaviour”, not the perpetrator. Another parliamentarian said that she has had to install high filters to control who can contact her on Facebook because of the level of abuse she receives. Harry Fletcher, a prominent campaigner for victims’ rights, observed that “the whole system is at a crisis point when – I hope – the government will have to take proactive measures to regulate social media.”

PREVENTING WOMEN FROM PARTICIPATING

Beyond the kinds of violence that affect the women who have already entered politics, there is a danger that certain forms of psychological, emotional and sexual abuse become so common for female politicians that they deter women from running for office around the world. This is particularly true for younger women who may have an interest in engaging politically but find the environment too toxic or too risky. Their identity as a young woman becomes a handicap in wanting to participate in political processes.

Anecdotally, women in politics often report being expected to meet higher and more exacting standards in their efforts to achieve elected office. This is frequently combined with cultural norms around being a wife and mother, as well as opinions around whether they are 'likeable'.

For instance, interviews and analysis of media reports for the Argentina case study highlighted regular misogynistic comments in public debates, political meetings and social networks. VAWP also appeared through:

- explicit disregard for the opinions or contributions to debates and meetings of elected women;
- the invisibility of women's proposals or projects;
- unequal distribution of time to speak in legislative proceedings;
- unequal distribution of power, authority and workload (e.g. the lack of women on candidate lists and in powerful budget and finance committees); and
- the use of personal attacks or traditional images of women as wife, mother and housewife to discredit or undermine the political career of a woman candidate or elected official.

These forms of harassment, intimidation, misogyny and 'micro-machismos' are inherent practices in Argentina's political culture that serve to discourage the political participation of women.

In Lebanon, these same dynamics take the form of characteristics and requirements that a woman should meet in order to be considered for political office. As is true in many political environments, women are held to more exacting, and frequently higher, standards than their male competitors by voters, community leaders and political opinion leaders.

“Women are held to more exacting, and frequently higher, standards than their male competitors by voters, community leaders and political opinion leaders.”

In Ukraine, there is a tradition among some male politicians to call the leader of one of the parliamentary factions simply a 'girl' and to assign 'pet names' to women politicians. One respondent to the Ukraine survey reported that paid campaigns to attack young women politicians are often mounted by their male counterparts or others in society who would prefer women not to enter politics.

Women politicians in Jamaica face similar challenges. Lisa Hanna, former Minister of Youth and Culture in the People's National Party (PNP), has been the victim of numerous threats and verbal assault. On separate occasions, she was called a 'Jezebel' by Everaldo Warmington MP, a fellow parliamentarian; chastised for being a 'heathen' after being photographed wearing a bathing suit; threatened for suggesting that an incarcerated artist not be allowed to record music; and lambasted for wearing a sleeveless dress into parliament. Mr Warmington faced significant backlash but refused to retract the statement. He later wrote to the daily paper justifying his use of the term, stating that "I did not invent the word jezebel. It came from the Bible and it aptly describes her behaviour."¹⁴

Ghanaian politics suffers from a low level of women's political participation, often ascribed to the patriarchal form of politics practiced in the country. The country case study brought out several examples where male candidates attempted to shame their younger, female opponents for contesting elections. In one case, an NPP parliamentary candidate challenged his female opponent to introduce her husband to the constituents, prompting her party to reject his statement as chauvinist and an insult to unmarried women seeking political office.¹⁵

In another instance, a female NPP parliamentary candidate was singled out by a government deputy minister who claimed that if going to parliament was all about fashion and hairdressing, he would step aside for his female opponent. He said she was not good enough to be a MP due to her background as a hairdresser, as opposed to his background as a professional politician and a lawyer.¹⁶

¹⁴ Full article with Warmington's statement defending his use of the term Jezebel: <http://jamaica-gleaner.com/article/news/20160122/full-statement-lisa-hanna-was-rude-jezebel-aptly-describes-her-says-warmington>

¹⁵ <http://citifmonline.com/2016/11/06/andahs-attack-on-hanna-tettehs-marital-status-primitive-ndc/6> November 2016 (accessed on 02/02/18)

¹⁶ <http://www.ghnews360.com/NPP-s-hairdresser-not-needed-in-parliament-Baba-Jamal-15465> 27 June 2016 (accessed on 02/02/18)

THE ROLE OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND PARLIAMENTS IN STOPPING VAWP

The vast majority of the case studies focused, perhaps understandably, on the legal frameworks around VAWP and the deficiencies they perceived to be contributing to the perpetuation of this issue in their countries. Improved application of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) received several mentions, as did some suggestions for country-specific legislation to address particular factors deemed paramount in their particular context.

A recent piece by Saskia Brechenmacher, however, highlights the limitations of legal reform in combatting an issue as complex as VAWP. Legal reform relies on a certain degree of security and rule of law; it requires adequate enforcement mechanisms; and it is also inevitably narrow, covering only elements of women's lived experience of violence.¹⁷

The multi-dimensional nature of VAWP means that combating violence against women in politics cannot and should not be completely exclusive from efforts for curbing generic societal violence against women, particularly the structural and systemic driving factors. Stopping VAWP also means engaging politically with the institutions that can unfortunately often be complicit in its existence – political parties and parliaments.

Among the women interviewed for the eight global case studies, most described incidents in which violence was perpetrated by supporters of other political parties or movements, but this was not always the case. For some, attacks came from within a woman's own political party.

Overwhelmingly, political parties and some parliaments have resisted more formalised regulations that would mandate a response to claims of harassment, intimidation, bullying or other forms of violence. This commissioned research and the international summit for which it was generated have taken this specific focus, with an eye towards developing applicable recommendations for political parties and parliaments to contribute to stopping VAWP.

Political parties

- Political parties should work together to agree and adopt a joint code of conduct for candidates, officials, members and politicians (as recommended by the UK Committee on Standards in Public Life), and sanctions should be brought to bear for any persons who fall foul of that code.
- Political parties must take steps to institute zero-tolerance policies with strong sanctions on harassment, including sexual harassment, and gender-based violence. Party loyalty should never be prized more highly than uncovering the truth or supporting those who bring allegations.
- Political parties should review and reassess internal decision-making processes, particularly those involving candidate selection or where resources (money) go. Those processes that are 'informal' – e.g. there are no established rules of procedure; no clear criteria for choices made; decisions are taken during closed gatherings or in meetings for which no minutes are taken; there is no regular schedule and/or there is no oversight or evaluation process – are more likely to foster a significant gender imbalance within the party and advance a hostile environment for women.
- Parties should also assess their internal and organisational culture for indications of violence or hostility towards women. This includes identifying internal processes and traditions that are highly confrontational, involve debates without rules, contain an unnecessarily high level of antagonism, or even include rhetorical insults or physical intimidation. These are major contributors to keeping women out of politics.
- Institutional protocols should be developed to encourage women MPs to officially report offences to the political leadership and to the police if a violation of the legislation related to sexual offences, domestic violence and offences against the person occurs. These measures would send a strong message to the party membership that such behaviours are unacceptable and would promote an enabling environment for women members.

¹⁷ Saskia Brechenmacher. 2017. "Fighting Violence Against Women in Politics: The Limits of Legal Reform". Accessed at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/10/05/fighting-violence-against-women-in-politics-limits-of-legal-reform-pub-73339>

Parliaments

- While most parliaments have codes of conduct, these are almost exclusively gender-neutral and have no provision for dealing with the specific kinds of behaviour and issues related to VAWP. Parliaments could take steps to introduce language that is more pointedly designed to address the causes and impacts of VAWP.
- All MPs should be encouraged to review 'walk-in' policies pertaining to their constituency offices.
- Greater cooperation with CSOs should be encouraged, especially those with long experience in combating VAW. Their daily work on the ground provides insights that an outside observer may not have.
- Construct and enforce systems for the protection of victims of violence, assault, harassment and bullying, similar to those recently proposed by the UK Parliament's Working Group on an Independent Complaints and Grievance Policy, including:
 - o those reporting sexual harassment or sexual assault will go to an Independent Sexual Violence Advisor – a special advocate who understands the particular dynamics of sexual violence and can support complainants whether or not they pursue any criminal or further charge;
 - o the handling of complaints from workers in parliament will be independent of the political parties; and
 - o perpetrators of abuse who are parliamentarians may end up suspended and even expelled from parliament.



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