Request for quotes: Research on violence against women in politics (VAWP) in The Gambia

1. Overview of WFD

Since 1992, the primary aim of Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) has been to assist, support and encourage the peaceable establishment and development of pluralistic democratic practice and political institutions. We continue to believe that stronger democracy is the best way of safeguarding human rights and ensuring sustained prosperity and stability.

WFD is the UK's leading democracy assistance agency, working in partnership with political parties, parliaments and civil society organisations around the world to create more inclusive, accountable and transparent democratic systems. WFD strengthens the capacity of these key democratic institutions, helping ensure they have the systems, knowledge and skills to perform effectively. WFD also fosters improved democratic processes, bringing together individuals and institutions and encouraging them to work together to solve concrete problems, applying democratic values and principles.

WFD's work on women's political leadership considers the social, cultural, economic, and political factors that stop women from fully participating in politics and governance. We work with partners to develop systems and strategies that challenge and transform them. Our programmes help to embed gender analysis throughout all aspects of parliamentary business, support women's political leadership and end violence against women in politics.

2. Context

Violence against women in politics (VAWP) globally remains 'a strong barrier to women accessing their right to participate fully and equally in politics and public life'[1]. Paralleling the positive trends of an increase of women's representation in politics, there has been an increase in the rise of violence against women in political spaces. A 2021 IPU study revealed 80% of women parliamentarians interviewed stated they experienced some sort of psychological

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[1] violence-against-women-in-politics-global-perspectives-of-a-global-issue.pdf

violence in Parliament, with 40% being sexually harassed and 23% enduring physical violence[2]. Specifically, to West Africa, a 2022 OECD report stated that violence targeting women has 'become increasingly common, with this trend accelerating even more drastically in recent years'[3].

Democracy is important not just as a concept, but as a practical defence against the abuse of power. Citizens that are excluded from the political process cannot live up to their potential. The evidence is clear that a commitment to accountability, inclusion, representation, openness, and tolerance helps to protect individual rights, reduces the risk of conflict, and increases the likelihood of sustainable economic growth and effective social policies. Thus VAWP is a backsliding of democracy for which all stakeholders need to be wary of, with VAWP being not just a women's issue, but a threat to all, and to democracy. It does not only silence marginalised groups, but excludes them from political and public life. If women leaders and influencers suffer attacks in political institutions, all females feel unsafe in the political environment.

Women who are selected or supported are often from elite backgrounds or are chosen to uphold the status quo, rather than to disrupt or reform existing power structures. Meanwhile, legislation intended to support women's political participation, such as quota systems, has failed to pass, often derailed by partisan politics, patriarchy, and gender bias. Notably, a private member's bill on women's quotas championed by civil society was rejected, not because of the substance of the bill but because it was presented by a woman, highlighting the gendered dynamics that stifle reform efforts.

Despite efforts promoting gender equality, women in politics in The Gambia continue to face severe structural and systemic barriers that hinder their full participation in political life. These barriers go beyond mere underrepresentation; they include deeply entrenched forms of discrimination, harassment, and violence, both visible and hidden, that actively discourage and exclude women from political spaces. The widespread normalisation and tolerance for threats and attacks on women in politics can also indicate a deep-rooted failure to protect women from violence across wider society, giving women and men the message that gender-based violence goes unpunished.

The political environment in The Gambia remains largely unwelcoming to women, with widespread political violence often manifesting in gender-specific forms. Violence against women in politics (VAWP) remains a largely hidden and underreported issue, with women facing

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[2] [Widespread sexism and violence against women in African parliaments according to new IPU report | Inter-Parliamentary Union](#)

[3] [Political violence targeting women in West Africa | OECD](#)

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threats, intimidation, bullying, and targeted acts of disenfranchisement. These forms of violence not only deter women from running for office but also impact their ability to effectively serve and lead once elected.

3. Objective

The objective of this research is to explore and document the nature, prevalence, and impact of VAWP in The Gambia, looking more broadly at the issue of anti-gender trends, gendered disinformation and the violence that is felt by voters and activists, with then a specific focus on the experiences of women political leaders, both candidates and officials. It will investigate the various forms of VAWP, ranging from physical threats and sexual harassment, verbal abuse and structural exclusion, as well as technology facilitated GBV, and assess how these experiences shape women's engagement in the political process.

Of particular interest is the way in which political parties, as gatekeepers to formal political participation, often construct internal processes and cultures that marginalise women. The research will draw on qualitative data from former and current women Members of Parliament, political party officials, members of the Inter-Party Committee, and the Gender Committee of the National Assembly, as well as aspiring women candidates. It will seek to identify patterns of violence, document personal and institutional experiences of VAWP, and assess the effectiveness of current prevention and protection mechanisms. Importantly, the study will also examine the strategies women have employed to navigate and resist violence in the political sphere.

Some specific research questions and lines of inquiry which should be considered through this research piece are:

1. What forms of violence do politically active women in The Gambia experience, and in which settings (e.g., political parties, online platforms, public spaces)?

2. What actions are currently taken by political parties, electoral institutions, the police, security services, the judiciary, and other relevant actors to prevent and respond to VAWP?

3. How political party norms and internal hierarchies either enable or discourage responses to VAWP?

4. What informal mechanisms women rely on when formal systems fail, and what that reveals about institutional credibility?

5. Mapping the types of violence that are normalised in party culture vs. those that spark response, and why.

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6. What are the consequences of this VAWP in The Gambia?

7. What steps should be taken to better prevent and respond to VAWP in The Gambia?

Ultimately, this research will provide baseline data to inform advocacy and policymaking, aiming to foster safer, more inclusive, and more equitable political environments in The Gambia. It will offer evidence-based recommendations for political parties, civil society, and government actors on how to prevent, monitor, and respond to all forms of gender-based violence against women in politics.

4. Suggested methodology

The research should be conducted using a combination of desk-based research of relevant literature and reports, alongside both quantitative and qualitative data and information, collected from key informant interviews and focus group discussions, as well as a survey tool, from and with critical stakeholders, including Political Parties executives, Interparty Committee including political aspirants, academics, civil society/media representatives and other relevant stakeholders. In addition, written contributions from respondents are also encouraged, knowing that reporting is a major hindrance to addressing VAWP and weak mechanism/ political trust might not be sufficient to provide a safe environment for survivors to share and speak.

Other methodology which could be considered by the researchers could be clustered case analysis, to allow group experiences of VAWP, reflective interviews that explore not just the incident but how the institution made the person feel safe or unsafe over time, as well as interface interviews with women and party official, if possible, should be employed if there won't reprisals.

It is expected that the broader desk-based research and analysis will set out the broader context of VAWP in The Gambia, focusing on anti-gender trends, gendered disinformation and the violence that is felt by voters and activists, but then the more focused interviews, survey results, and written contributions, be focused on the experience of existing and previous women leaders, current and ex candidates, and current and ex officials (within Parliament, Government, Political Parties etc).

In addition to producing a report summarising the findings, the selected researcher will also be expected to facilitate 2 event/roundtable discussion where the findings will be first validated and finally presented to relevant stakeholders The researcher is also expected to offer support and guidance to WFD in its follow-up engagements and outreach.

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5. Deliverables

- Research Framework, to include research objectives, methodology, work plan, and stakeholder engagement strategy. This Research Framework will be developed in consultation and agreed by WFD Gambia and WFD's relevant Heads of Practice

- Data collection, public consultation and stakeholder engagement on the existing forms and patterns of physical and mental harassment, violence and bullying against women in politics

- Draft report on the findings based on-desk research and public data collection and consultations

- Presentation and validation of the draft report with relevant stakeholders

- Final report which highlights key findings on the prevalence and impact of VAWP in The Gambia, as well as providing recommendations to Parliament, Political Parties, Government and Civil Society for safe workplace and gender inclusion of women in all aspects of political life.

6. Timelines

WFD expects the research to be undertaken in the months of July and August, with finalisation and presentation of the reports in September.

7. Funding

Funding for this study will be provided by WFD. The individual or research team is required to submit a financial proposal between GBP 5,000 – 6,000 (inclusive of all costs) in response to these terms of reference.

The costs for validation and presentation of the report, will be covered directly by WFD.

8. Consultant requirements

- Good level of understanding of issues related to Violence against Women in Politics in The Gambia.

- The lead researcher should hold a postgraduate or advanced university degree in political science, public policy, or another relevant field. Previous management of a research team is highly preferred.

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- Strong understanding of political party dynamics, not just political systems, and ability to translate that into practical, context-specific recommendations for different types of institutions.
- Strong experience and understanding of safeguarding and sensitivity protocols, with a demonstrated ability to conduct research involving survivors of trauma and violence, particularly those who have faced political, personal, or reputational harm.
- A member should have experience leading interviews and focus group discussions with political stakeholders.
- Strong writing and analytical skills in English
- Detail-orientated in work ethic, with a discipline to ensure the research method is of high quality.
- Willingness to work collaboratively to adapt framing, methods or ethics protocols where needed.

9. Application procedure

Qualified and interested applicants are hereby requested to send their bids to Tabu Sarr (Tabu.Sarr@wfd.org) and Fatoumatta Kanteh (fatoumatta.kanteh@wfd.org) by **COB Thursday 10 July** using the subject heading "Violence Against Women in Politics Research". Any queries can also be directed to these email addresses.

   a) An updated CV/resume to include relevant experience and qualifications.
   b) A technical proposal: To include a summary of the applicant's qualifications and experience, a brief methodology, outlining how they will approach and complete the research, and a tentative timeline.
   c) A proposed calendar of activity, as part of the project proposal with the respective dates for the deliverables.
   d) A financial offer in GBP to include: a clear breakdown of all costs.

Bids will be assessed and scored against the following criteria: relevant experience (25%), methodological approach (35%), qualifications of research team (20%) and value for money (20%).

Upon assessment by the WFD team, shortlisted candidates will be contacted for presentation of their proposal and interview by the WFD team.

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