



UNDP Research Report

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION to Sustain Peace during Electoral Processes

Sustaining Peace during Electoral Processes (SELECT) Project



Copyright ©UNDP 2023. All rights reserved.

Preferred citation: UNDP (2023). SELECT Project Report: Gender Equality And Women’s Participation to sustain peace during electoral processes 2021–2025.

One United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the leading United Nations organization fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet. Learn more at undp.org or follow at [@UNDP](https://twitter.com/undp).

Contents

| | |
|---|-----------|
| Acknowledgement & Disclaimers | 5 |
| Key terms and concepts | 6 |
| Chapter 1 Introduction | 11 |
| The SELECT project | 11 |
| Chapter 2 | 13 |
| Gender equality and women’s participation workstream | 13 |
| Framing the subject | 13 |
| Framework of analysis | 14 |
| The normative framework..... | 15 |
| Chapter 3 | 17 |
| State of research..... | 17 |
| Gender-based violence during elections: the current landscape..... | 17 |
| Situating gender-based violence during electoral processes | 18 |
| Chapter 4 | 20 |
| Women’s political participation: the current landscape..... | 20 |
| Contextual factors | 20 |
| Key actors in promoting women’s political participation..... | 21 |
| Chapter 5 | 22 |
| Regional analysis | 22 |
| Chapter 6 | 25 |
| Working Groups | 25 |
| Chapter 7 | 26 |
| Survey findings | 26 |
| Chapter 7 | 28 |
| Limitations | 28 |
| Chapter 8 | 29 |
| Considerations & recommendations for gender-responsive electoral programming | 29 |
| Understand and analyze context as a key step | 29 |
| Understand and tackle negative social norms..... | 29 |
| Address online and offline violence against women in public life | 30 |
| Consider the growing field of gender-sensitive technology and AI | 31 |

Support the role of women in dialogue and electoral reconciliation efforts32
Resources..... 33

Acknowledgement & Disclaimers

This report is a part of the Sustaining Peace during Electoral Processes (SELECT) project by the European Commission Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The development of this research report would not have been possible without FPI's generous support.

Its content focuses on identifying approaches that can be implemented on a national level as opposed to global strategies. Based on the recommendations set forth, a set of programmatic activities has been consolidated. This menu of activities is meant to be context-tailored and include practical considerations and implications. This document should, however, not be considered a policy document, and any solutions presented are intended to be informative and not prescriptive, recognizing that each country's context will be unique.

We are grateful to the many colleagues and partners who contributed to this research process by participating in consultations and the youth survey, serving as members of the Joint Working Group and reviewing and providing input to this report.

Brinda Gangopadhy Lundmark (UNDP) led the drafting of this report and was the lead expert of the gender equality and women's participation workstream. Gianpiero Catozzi (UNDP) and Saré Knoope (UNDP) provided critical supervision and guidance throughout the research process. A special thank you is also extended to Said Tahri (UNDP) for invaluable support throughout this process.

We are grateful to the dedicated Working Group on Gender Equality and Women's Participation, which provided valuable guidance throughout the process. The virtual consultations provided critical input to the report and, with thanks to UNDP colleagues, were hosted in the regional hubs. We appreciate the input from all stakeholders who participated and provided invaluable insights.

Lastly, we thank Aleida Ferreyra for her support throughout the development and clearance of this report.

The views expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) or any Member States. Moreover, the contents of this publication shall not be taken to reflect the views of the European Union.

Key terms and concepts

Electoral assistance: Electoral assistance can be defined as the legal, technical and logistic support provided to electoral laws, processes and institutions.

Electoral cycle: The electoral cycle covers the pre-electoral, electoral and post-electoral periods. The approach taken by UNDP includes emphasis on long-term activities and increasing the capacities to support inclusive political participation.

Election-related violence is understood as a form of political violence, “which is often designed to influence an electoral outcome and therefore the distribution of political power.”¹

Gender can be understood as “the roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women.”² These realities are socially constructed and learned through socialization. They are context and time specific and are subject to change. Although traditional forms of gender identity are based on the binary categorization of men and women, gender realities are diverse and fluid, constantly evolving, and the binary logic might restrict human beings’ freedom and possibilities, especially for transgender, intersex and gender non-conforming people.

Gender balance refers to the participation of an approximately equal number of women and men within an activity or organization. Examples are representation in committees, decision-making structures or staffing levels between women and men.

Gender-based violence (GBV) refers to violence directed against a person because of his or her role in a society or culture. Gender-based violence can include sexual, physical, mental and economic harm inflicted in public or in private. It also includes threats of violence, coercion and manipulation. This can take many forms such as intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child marriage, female genital mutilation and so-called ‘honour crimes’. The consequences of GBV are devastating and can have life-long repercussions for survivors. It can even lead to death.³

Gender equality means equal opportunities, rights and responsibilities for women and men, girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men are the same but that women’s and men’s opportunities, rights and responsibilities do not depend on whether they are born or they identify themselves as female or male. It implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration.

Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policy or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. Gender mainstreaming in Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs) ensures that women’s and

¹ ACE Project. Source: <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ge/ge1/ge11>

² *Ibid.*

³ [Gender-based Violence, UNHCR UK](#)

men's concerns, needs and experiences are taken fully into account in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all activities. Through this process, the EMB seeks to reduce the gaps in development opportunities between women and men and work towards equality between them as an integral part of the organization's strategy, policies and operations, with a focus on continued efforts to achieve excellence. The term 'gender integration' is also used in some contexts.

Gender-specific or gender-targeted interventions seek to tackle specific areas where women are unrepresented or disadvantaged, including through the adoption of TSMs, and are part of a comprehensive gender-mainstreaming approach.

Sex-disaggregated data are collected and tabulated separately for women and men. They allow for the measurement of differences between women and men on various social and economic dimensions.

Violence against women in politics (VAWP) is a form of discrimination, a human rights violation and a challenge to democracy. VAWP affects women engaged in formal politics and women across public life, including women activists, journalists and human rights defenders. VAWP includes cyberviolence, gendered disinformation, hate speech and trolling and is often used to delegitimize the assertion of women's rights. Violence, as both threat and lived experience, deters women, especially young women, from participating in politics and is a formidable obstacle to advancing women's political participation.

Political participation: Political participation includes "a broad range of activities through which people develop and express their opinions on their society and how it is governed, and try to take part in and shape the decisions that affect their lives."⁴

This document intends to provide an introductory overview of the topic. It should not be considered a policy document. It will propose parameters for study, define key terms and outline a provisional framework. Its audience shall be participants from a variety of organizations, including from the Global Working Group and participants of the regional consultative sessions who shall come from a variety of organizations and backgrounds.

⁴ Community-Based Rehabilitation: CBR Guidelines. Khasnabis C, Heinicke Motsch K, Achu K, et al., editors. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2010.

Summary

Despite certain setbacks, there has been considerable progress globally in women's political participation in the past two decades. Today more women than ever before hold public office and engage in electoral processes in several capacities, including as staff, voters, candidates or campaigners.⁵ Yet, numerous challenges continue to negatively impact, hamper or even prevent women's meaningful partaking in public and political life, with the perceived increase in violence against women in politics and electoral processes as the most alarming factor. Increased [gender-based violence \(GBV\)](#) in electoral cycles is taking various forms, ranging from harassment, intimidation and sexual and physical violence against women in public life, including online to gender-biased scrutiny by media and the public and targeted attacks against female voters, at times resulting in women's exclusion from electoral processes to forced resignations and assassinations of women politicians in the most extreme cases.⁶ Newly released global data from the 2023 UNDP Gender Social Norms Index also show that nearly half of all people believe that men make better political leaders than women do, pointing towards tenuous progress in changing persistent biases against women's full and active political participation.⁷

Considering the above-mentioned challenges and complex landscape, this report seeks to gain a better understanding of current trends and challenges as well as opportunities to bolster gender-responsive electoral programming and guide electoral practitioners in their endeavors to strengthen women's equal participation in elections in all their diversity. To that end, a thorough research process was conducted through several channels, including desk and literature review, surveys, expert meetings and a series of regional consultations with practitioners working at country and regional level, which have all guided the report's analysis.

With growing awareness of the need to strengthen electoral assistance to be better equipped to address the barriers that are hindering women's full participation in elections, including by tackling GBV targeting women during electoral cycles, efforts to address the root causes of violence and exclusion need to be better integrated. Such underlying reasons often stem from relevant social and cultural norms that are questioning women's partaking in political life and, in certain instances, even legitimizing gendered forms of violence. The report intends to shed light on both the causes and possible solutions to address them and suggests ways forward to positively change such norms.

The approaches and considerations suggested in this report are all based on best practices shared by practitioners working at regional and country level. Nonetheless, a word of caution also has its place here: It is critical to note that implementation of any of the recommendations needs to be coupled with robust contextual analysis to ensure conflict sensitivity and context specificity. This is especially vital to the programmatic options, informed by the recommendations in the report.

Recommendations based on the research exercise have been developed, which highlight that:

1. There is no one-size-fits-all approach available to tackle gender-based violence. A multipronged approach is critical when addressing matters related to violence prevention with sustained and targeted interventions in place before, during and after elections are held.

⁵ UNDP (2023). Strengthening Women's Political Participation: a Snapshot of UNDP-Supported Projects Across the Globe. Source: [Strengthening Women's Political Participation: A Snapshot of UNDP-supported Projects Across the Globe | United Nations Development Programme](#)

⁶ UNDP and UN Women (2017). Preventing Violence against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide. Source: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/VAWE-Prog_Guide_Summary-WEB.pdf

⁷ UNDP (2023). Gender Social Norms Index. Source: <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI>

2. A range of activities is required to tackle the issues at hand, which all need to be tailored to the specific context where it will be implemented. In light of that, a thorough gender analysis that can identify women's unique needs should be conducted in every electoral context before implementing any activity, programme or intervention.
3. To tackle the root causes of violence against women during electoral cycles, thorough assessment and analysis of relevant social and cultural norms are critical starting points to better outline tailored programmatic approaches. Conducting a social norms assessment is a helpful starting point for electoral practitioners to identify both harmful and positive social norms in the context they are working in.
4. **Temporary Special Measures (TSMs)** have proven to be effective methods to enhance women's political participation and contribute to positive social norms change. Successful implementation must, however, be based on wider acceptance of such measures in a society. Fostering an enabling environment for TSMs requires long-term advocacy campaigns and awareness-raising and needs to involve several actors jointly, including **Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs)**, international organizations, civil society and the media.
5. Supporting the design of gender-inclusive laws, policies and regulations more generally will lay the groundwork for meaningful participation in all aspects of an electoral process. This should be a priority for electoral programmes and for practitioners and must be coupled with protocols, procedures and training to ensure implementation.
6. The need to involve men and boys in this work is also critical, particularly to better challenge norms of violent masculinities that can lead to and legitimize violent behaviours. For such efforts, a number of interventions are available and preferably should be introduced at the same time, including awareness-raising campaigns, trainings and educational efforts. Other, more innovative approaches can also be explored, such as the use of virtual reality to foster inclusive behaviour and, in turn, a culture of non-violence that can challenge attitudes that justify violence.
7. The challenges and opportunities presented by the era of digitalization have transformed electoral processes in every country, including inclusion and participation aspects. Democratic participation can flourish as a result of digital technology, allowing for increased awareness-raising and information-sharing, community building, data-driven policy and programming and so forth. Expression in the online space, however, is not guaranteed for all, if not undermined for some. Of particular worry is the rise of online violence against women, which has become an endemic concern within elections, deployed to make public life untenable for aspiring female politicians and supporters. Gender-responsive early warning and early response systems and GBV hotlines are ways to increase reporting and address the impunity gap. Offering psychological support to female candidates who are at heightened risks of experiencing violence during times of elections can also be ensured through such hotlines. Engagement with political parties to set up zero-tolerance codes of conduct are another avenue. The programmatic option '**Support gender-sensitive design of technology and AI**' contains several activities electoral practitioners can implement to better grasp and respond to the impact of technology and AI on the inclusion and exclusion of women in electoral processes.
8. Women play a pivotal role in sustaining peace during electoral processes, including through dialogue and post-electoral reconciliation efforts. Today we also know that gender equality is the number one predictor of peace.⁸ In light of that, it is essential to support intersectional spaces where women – ranging from women community leaders to **women's wings** of political parties – can engage among themselves and others to build consensus and the foundations of long-term inclusive governance and peace.

⁸ United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs. 2023 Factsheet - Women Peace and Security. Source: <https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/wps.pdf>

9. Gender-proofing electoral processes such as including flexible polling hours and illiterate-friendly voting booths are concrete actions that can ensure electoral processes are gender-sensitive. Working with national security forces to ensure adequate measures to ensure women's safety are taken into consideration is also key to ensure electoral processes respond to women's unique needs.

Chapter 1 Introduction

The SELECT project

Credible, inclusive, transparent and peaceful electoral processes are essential to confer legitimacy to national and local governments. When these processes are conducted in a well-organized and transparent manner, they can offer the means of channeling grievances and expectations into respectful and constructive debate. Yet, electoral processes can also exacerbate underlying conflict dynamics triggering violence, sometimes undermining years of development and peacebuilding efforts.

The overall objective of the 'Sustaining Peace during Electoral Processes' (SELECT) project is to build the capacity of both national electoral stakeholders and international partners to (a) identify risk factors that may affect elections (b) design programmes and activities specifically aimed at preventing and reducing the risk of violence and (c) implement operations related to the electoral processes in a conflict-sensitive manner, by delivering on the two following project outputs:

- Output 1: Development of an online knowledge hub where implementable programmatic activities related to the prevention of electoral-related violence are listed, informed by research and knowledge development, available in French and English.
- Output 2: The organization of outreach events/workshops to enhance electoral violence prevention capacities at national, regional and international levels.

The Sustaining Peace during Electoral Processes (SELECT) project's main objective is to research and develop programmatic options to prevent violence during electoral processes. The project focuses on a number of topics and how they relate to the prevention of electoral violence, including on women's participation, information integrity, youth participation, inclusive

governance and parliamentary support. Under the SELECT project, the Gender Equality and Women's Participation workstream has been formulated with the aim to bring to light examples of programming that works towards advancing gender equality during electoral processes. These examples include both aspects of ensuring women's meaningful political participation and preventing and mitigating violence occurring before, during and after elections, all intended for use by practitioners when developing gender-sensitive electoral programming for the context in which they work.

Against this background, the SELECT project has developed an inclusive research process to ensure a multi-regional lens that takes into consideration experiences and knowledge from a wide range of stakeholders. The research process will be applied to various research topics included in the SELECT project document whereby the topics identified have the potential to positively mitigate or negatively contribute to the potential for electoral violence. The aim of

Topics under the SELECT project

1. Promotion of information integrity
2. Youth participation
3. Electoral violence monitoring and analysis
4. Parliamentary support and citizen consultations
5. Gender equality and women's participation
6. Programming inclusive governance

this topic-specific research process is to understand the main challenges in relation to the nexus between the topic and electoral violence and outline actionable solutions to be implemented in the second phase of the project.

Any solutions presented are intended to be informative and not prescriptive, recognizing that each country's context will be unique.

Each research topic under SELECT will be accompanied by a working group comprised of experts in the field and representatives of relevant organizations. The members of the working group shall share their experience and expertise, as well as support, with their networks.

The outputs of this project will not constitute United Nations policy recommendations.

This report is dedicated to the SELECT workstream on gender equality and women's participation.

Chapter 2

Gender equality and women's participation workstream

Framing the subject

The framing of this workstream is guided by the definition of election-related violence put forward by the United Nations Department of Political Affairs, as “a form of political violence, which is often designed to influence an electoral outcome and therefore the distribution of political power.”⁹ It may take the form of physical violence or other forms of aggression, including through coercion or intimidation. Incidents of violence can take place prior to and during polling, as its perpetrators may seek to influence electoral authorities, candidates, observers, journalists or voters and therefore the results; or it may take place during or following counting, aggregation or publication of results, when the intention may be to influence the future distribution of political power or negate the results.¹⁰ Since electoral processes are methods of managing and determining political competition with the outcomes deciding a multitude of critical issues, it can lead to a highly competitive environment where underlying societal tensions and grievances may be exacerbated, resulting in electoral violence.¹¹ Violence against women during elections prevents women from exercising and realizing their political rights in both public and private spaces. It is driven by gender-specific motivations and discrimination, notably as women contest and deviate from traditional gender roles and engage in political life. The most apparent motivation behind the violence is to prevent women from their independent

⁹ United Nations Department of Political Affairs (2016). Preventing and Mitigating Election-related Violence. Source:

https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/ead_pd_preventing_mitigating_election-related_violence_20160601_e.pdf

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ UNDP (2023). Information Integrity to Sustain Peace during Electoral Processes. Source:

https://www.sustainingpeace-select.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/48/2023/03/SELECT-Information-Integrity-report_compressed130323.pdf

political participation, exercising their electoral right or from pursuing a political career.¹²

This workstream is further guided by the broad understanding of women's political participation as a fundamental prerequisite for gender equality and inclusive governance. It facilitates women's direct engagement in public decision-making and can be a means of ensuring better accountability to women.¹³

Although violence against women in elections has remained in the margins of study due to the lack of reporting and available data, as well as limited understanding about the issue in some cases and general stigma attached to gender-based violence (GBV) in many societies, there is growing attention given to the topic in policymaking and academia. This workstream does not intend to duplicate what has already been published but rather to complement existing literature on the topics by providing concrete examples of programming that can enhance practitioners' understandings of the issue, as well as identify innovative interventions for both the prevention of gender-based electoral violence and women's meaningful political participation.

BOX: UN Electoral Assistance Framework

UN electoral assistance is provided to Member States at their request or based on mandates from the UN Security Council or General Assembly only. The UN system-wide focal point for electoral assistance matters, the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, decides on the parameters of such assistance, based on needs assessments led by the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). Implementation is guided by UN electoral policies set by **the focal point**, in consultation with UN entities, including UNDP.

¹² UNDP and UN Women (2017). Preventing Violence against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide. Source:

https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/VAWE-Prog_Guide_Summary-WEB.pdf

¹³ UN Women. Political Participation of Women. Source: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/governance/political-participation-of-women>

UN Electoral Assistance Framework

UN electoral assistance is provided to Member States at their request or based on mandates from the UN Security Council or General Assembly only. The UN system-wide focal point for electoral assistance matters, the Under-Secretary-General for Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, decides on the parameters of such assistance, based on needs assessments led by the Electoral Assistance Division of the Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs (DPPA). Implementation is guided by UN electoral policies set by [the focal point](#), in consultation with UN entities, including UNDP.

Framework of analysis

This research report is among the deliverables of the gender equality and women's participation workstream of the Sustaining Peace during Electoral Processes (SELECT) project and was developed to deliver on the content of the project Output 1 for the development of an online knowledge hub and to be used through the project on Output 2 for capacity-building and outreach. The research process has been designed to be inclusive and participatory to ensure the content produced in the final product has a multi-regional lens and takes into consideration experiences and knowledge from a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society.

The consultative research process has drawn on recent guidance material on women's participation, gender-responsive electoral programming and other guidance materials related to prevention of violence in the context of elections. The research process has also benefitted from the wealth of academic literature on topics related to gender equality in electoral cycles, particularly on GBV prevention and on women's political participation. Through consultations, discussion groups, desk literature review and scoping interviews, the process has brought together electoral practitioners from UNDP and other UN agencies, such as UN Women, the European Union (EU), national electoral institutes, civil society, academia, think tanks, grassroots networks, and other experts and stakeholders.

The aim of the participatory approach has been to truly capture the wealth of expertise among practitioners at country and regional levels. The research has benefitted substantively from insights shared by conversations with practitioners working in a variety of fields also 'outside' the traditional electoral assistance field including on gender equality and in peacebuilding, governance and human rights and other relevant areas.

Essential to the participatory process was the establishment of two global Working Groups on gender equality and women's participation: one internal group for UNDP colleagues working at a global level on related issues, and one group with external partners from across international organizations, the EU, civil society, think tanks and other actors with relevant practical and policy-related experience on the topics. The two Working Groups have offered overall guidance to the research process by providing inputs to the knowledge products developed by the SELECT project on supporting outreach and raising awareness of gender-sensitive electoral programming, as well as fostering coherence and synergies in programmatic approaches among a community of practitioners working on electoral assistance and gender equality. As such, the two Working Groups have served as sounding boards for the research process and ensured that themes and best practices put forward are aligned with the latest academic research and thought-leadership on political participation.

The research process has also benefited from a global survey on gender equality in elections, which was circulated to practitioners to map ongoing challenges and opportunities for advancing the gender equality agenda in electoral assistance. The online survey invited participants to list the

Key research questions

To frame the research for the workstream, the following guiding questions have been considered for the research.

- How are we addressing discriminatory and negative social norms that can hinder women's meaningful participation in public life, including through engaging men?
- How are we addressing democratic backsliding and backlash particularly affecting women's participation, in the region and beyond?
- What promising practices, initiatives, activities and projects are being undertaken at UNDP regional and country office levels to promote women's meaningful political participation and/or to address GBV during electoral processes? Are these preventive and long-term efforts?
- What concrete support are practitioners asking for – including in various contexts ranging from crisis/mission settings to countries that have held numerous elections – to help strengthen ongoing programmatic work and activities towards the two abovementioned objectives? What challenges and barriers have been identified for implementation, and what strategies can be employed to overcome them?
- How can we better include civil society, grassroots organizations and communities, including women's human rights defenders and peacebuilders in these efforts? Are there ongoing partnerships and initiatives we can continue to support, build on and potentially scale up with a specific focus on innovation?

main obstacles to achieving women's full and meaningful political participation. A detailed account and analysis of findings will

be presented in this report in the 'Regional Analysis' section.

The normative framework

Several international instruments on elections and human rights include provisions that recognize women's full participation in electoral and political processes. The normative framework is well established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) adopted in 1948 in which women's political participation finds its origin under the principles of equal enjoyment of political rights and of non-discrimination. Article 3 in the UDHR further states that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security," to which election-related violence poses a threat.¹⁴

The Convention of the Political Rights of Women (CPRW) from 1952¹⁵ explicitly states that the enjoyment of political rights shall be without distinction of any kind, including sex. The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),¹⁶ which was adopted in 1979 and ratified by nearly all Member States, reiterates the right of women "to hold office and perform all public functions at all levels of government."¹⁷

Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR, 1966) enshrines the rights of all citizens to "take part in the conduct of public affairs" and "to vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the electors." While the ICCPR

¹⁴ United Nations Focal Point for Electoral Assistance, Department of Political Affairs (2013). Promoting women's electoral and political participation through UN electoral assistance. Source: https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/ead_pd_promoting_womens_electoral_political_participation_through_un_ea_20131224_e.pdf

¹⁵ 1953 Convention of the Political Rights of Women. Source: https://treaties.un.org/doc/treaties/1954/07/19540707%2000-40%20am/ch_xvi_1p.pdf

¹⁶ 1979 Convention of the Elimination of all Form of Discrimination against Women. Source: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

establishes that no discrimination on the basis of sex is permitted in the exercise of the rights to vote and to participate in public life, the CEDAW goes beyond this approach, placing a positive obligation on States Parties to take all appropriate measures to end that discrimination. For example, Article 4 of the CEDAW encourages the use of [Temporary Special Measures \(TSMs\)](#) to accelerate the achievement of *de facto* equality, in light of Article 7 of the Convention.

The women's right to participate fully in all facets of public life has continued to be a cornerstone of UN resolutions and declarations, including in the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action (1995), the Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (2000) and the General Assembly Resolution 66/130 on Women and [political participation](#) (2011). Through them, governments have consistently been urged to implement measures to considerably increase the number of women in elective and appointive public offices and functions at all levels, with a view to achieving equal representation of women and men, through affirmative action, if necessary, in government and public administration positions. In addition, Sustainable Development Goal 5, which focuses on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls, seeks to ["ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life"](#) (target 5.5).¹⁸ Furthermore, Sustainable Development Goal 16 aims to ["promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels"](#),¹⁹ but this cannot be achieved without ensuring equal opportunities for men and women to participate in politics and elections.

This normative framework lays the foundation upon which the international community can show its commitment to ensuring women's full and meaningful political participation and to

actively work on preventative measures to respond to and eliminate GBV targeting women during electoral processes.

BOX: Election-related violence

The United Nations Policy Directive on Preventing and Mitigating Election-related Violence defines electoral violence as a form of political violence that is often designed to include an electoral outcome and therefore the distribution of political power. It can manifest itself as direct physical violence or take on other forms of aggression, such as intimidation, harassment or coercion.

Electoral violence can occur during any point of the electoral cycle, be it at the point of voter registration, political campaigning, polling day or the announcement of results. Critical to point out is that most understandings and definitions of electoral-related violence focus on the public sphere, often overlooking violence happening in the private sphere where most forms of GBV do occur.²⁰

Violence against women or GBV in elections is a specific form of violence that may have severe effects on women's political participation, sometimes hindering them from standing as candidates, discouraging women from voting or even punishing them for taking active parts in the electoral process and realizing their political and electoral rights, including the right to vote, hold public office or to associate or assemble.²¹ It can take the form of direct physical violence or be the threat of violence resulting in physical or psychological harm or suffering. Following this definition, violence against women during elections is, indeed, a form of political violence intended to impact the realization of their electoral and political rights.²²

¹⁸ UNDP Sustainable [Development](#) Goals. [Source: https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/](https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality/)

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ UNDP and UN Women (2017). Preventing Violence Against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide

²¹ *Ibid.* p. 18–19

²² *Ibid.* p. 23

Chapter 3

State of research

A wide range of actors are working on measures to support women's political participation across the electoral cycle and in electoral processes, including international organizations, Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs), civil society, media platforms, think tanks and others. While there has been an increase in efforts among electoral practitioners with the objective to enhance gender equality in electoral assistance and programmes, programming has focused less on the role that deeply ingrained social and cultural norms play in hindering women's meaningful participation. Such norms are often the very root causes of violence. We know today that deep-seated patriarchal beliefs can relegate women to less active roles in political processes, including elections, and at times can normalize violence against women, both as a means to exerting control and as a tool to dissuade women from challenging traditional power structures. In electoral processes, where power dynamics are heightened, these negative norms can manifest in various forms of intimidation, harassment and even physical violence aimed at deterring women from running for office or participating actively in campaigns. As is becoming increasingly evident, addressing and challenging these entrenched norms is crucial for creating an inclusive political environment that can ensure women their active, full and equal participation in decision-making processes.

Gender-based violence during elections: the current landscape

Notwithstanding its prevalence, studies on violence against women in politics – and particularly the topic of GBV in electoral processes – have remained in the margins often due to lack of reporting and available data, but also because of stigma attached to it in many societies, which further amounts to a lack of understanding of the issue in contexts where people talk less openly about it. Traditionally, electoral violence has also been defined with less focus on women's unique experiences, such as psychological abuse, harassment or

intimidation, amounting to critiques of such definitions being gender blind.²³

Oftentimes, GBV takes on a subtler form, many times occurring in private or domestic spheres and has not been part of mainstream understandings of election-related violence.²⁴ This has resulted in a lack of collected data to measure standard indicators in many electoral programmes to ascertain its prevalence or to document trends on a global scale. Datasets on national levels rarely incorporate or even recognize gender-specific forms of violence, which also shows a lack of systematically collected data, keeping the topic incomplete.

The information gap is also due to underreporting by victims when violence occurs. A so-called 'culture of silence' is a trend rather than an exception in most cases. As pointed out by scholars and practitioners, this has its origin in a 'culture of impunity' associated with violence against women; for instance, women avoid reporting different forms of violence, or women candidates have reportedly concealed threats in order to avoid appearing 'unfit' for a political appointment.²⁵ Another reason for the 'culture of silence' can be lack of media coverage on the issue. Violence against women in elections remains underreported in many countries. In addition, women continue to be underrepresented in leading roles in media outlets and platforms, including as reporters, which means mostly men set the agenda of daily news production and determine what constitutes as 'newsworthy'.

Lastly, a lack of political will to prevent, address and mitigate occurrences of GBV is often singled out as a key factor to its underreporting and continued prevalence.²⁶ The UN Secretary-General Reporting 'In-depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women' (2006) framed it as a lack of political will "reflected in inadequate resources devoted to tackling violence against women and a failure to create and maintain a

²³ UNDP and UN Women (2017). Preventing Violence Against Women in Elections: a Programming Guide

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ See for example (2020). Krook, M. *Violence Against Women in Politics*

²⁶ UNDP and UN Women (2017). Preventing Violence Against Women in Elections: a Programming Guide.

political and social environment where violence against women is not tolerated.²⁷ With growing commitments from the international community to prevent and mitigate violence against women in elections, there is growing agreement and hope that this, however, is slowly changing.

Situating gender-based violence during electoral processes

Violence against women during electoral processes is a global phenomenon. Often driven by gender-specific discrimination because women who are exercising their political and electoral rights can be seen as challenging gender stereotypes and traditional roles or as threatening the dominance of patriarchal power structures, it is deeply destructive and attempts to prevent women from exercising their electoral and political rights.

Organizations, such as the International Foundation for Electoral Systems, have reported that despite laws on the books and multiple punitive mechanisms in place, issues of impunity remain acute in most parts of the world, since offenders are rarely held to account. Impunity can make such offenses viable tactics both in campaigning and in post-election agitation; ensuring perpetrators do not go unpunished is not just an issue of individual rights.

Today we know that there is a strong correlation between women becoming more visible in politics and the increase in violence against women in the country's elections. A study from Nepal (2008) is often used to showcase this, as researchers found that educated women faced more violence compared to other groups, highlighting the linkage between violence and women who take an active and vocal stance in political and democratic processes.²⁸

²⁷ UNGA, A/61/122/Add.1. (2006). In-Depth Study on All Forms of Violence against Women: Report of the Secretary General. July 6.

²⁸ International IDEA (2008). Women, Representation and Violence: Exploring Constituent Assembly Election in Nepal. Accessed here: <https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/contestin-g-patriarchy-gender-gap-and-gender-based-violence-nepali-politics>

The issue of tackling violence against women during electoral processes is particularly pressing as women already face greater barriers to participation in public life and experience highly distinct forms of violence – especially forms that are often overlooked or hidden, including sexual assault, intimidation and threats. Ensuring perpetrators do not go unpunished is not just an issue of individual rights but also one of broader electoral justice and electoral integrity.

Different forms of violence

Violence against women in elections can take different forms, including physical violence, psychological harm or sexual attacks. When such incidents are inflicted on a woman to prevent her from exercising electoral rights, violence against women in elections is taking place. Today we know that women can be victims of such violence in many varying roles, including as voters, candidates, party supporters or family members to candidates.

Physical violence: This mostly includes intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing harm, injury or even death. It can include pushing, choking, slapping, punching, hitting, burning and threats to use a weapon or exercise violence. In some cases, it can also include kidnapping, arbitrary detention, stoning, displacement and physical abandonment.

Psychological violence: Forms of psychological violence seem to be the most common forms of violence used against women when exercising their electoral rights. Its intention is to intimidate and take the form of threats of abuse, abandonment, confinement to the home, threats to take custody of children, isolation or other forms of verbal aggression. Increasingly, much psychological violence is taking place online, including through social media and in public forums.

Sexual violence: Sexual violence includes any non-consensual sexual act or attempting to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual advances or comments, or even threats or acts of trafficking. It can include sexual assault, abuse, rape or harassment. Sexual threats may occur in public or private settings, for instance when a woman's political opinion differs from that of her husband, community or clan, or if she attempts to challenge traditional roles by seeking public office.

Sexual violence can also be opportunistic, especially during election-related upheaval. It can also be instrumental with the intention to weaken an opponent.

Incidents of rape most often take place in the home as a means of controlling women's political participation and choice. Yet, sexual violence in public is often committed by strangers, such as militia groups or the police and usually takes place in any public space; it may happen at polling stations, public meeting places, in the streets or on public transportation.

Chapter 4

Women's political participation: the current landscape

Despite women's rights to engage equally in democratic processes and their undeniable abilities as leaders and agents of change, women's political participation and their assumption of leadership roles continue to be restricted from global to local levels.²⁹ For instance, recent data from the 'Women in Politics: 2023' map show that women serve as Heads of State and/or Government in only 31 countries across the world. Further, women make up 26.5 percent of Members of Parliament, and globally fewer than one in four Cabinet Ministers is a woman (amounting to 22.8 percent).³⁰

Structural barriers such as discriminatory laws and institutions continue to pose obstacles to limit women's option to run for office, and capacity gaps, such as lack of education, keep widening this gap even further.³¹ Yet, we know that women's political participation is paramount for the advancement of gender equality: when women are actively engaged in politics, their experiences and priorities are better represented in decision-making processes leading to societies that are more inclusive. Increased representation of women in leadership positions also helps to break down stereotypes and barriers, empowering women to take part in politics and foster a new culture that can pave the way for future generations.³²

Considering the above, the need to combat discriminatory legislation and policies to improve gender equality outcomes in policymaking is becoming a growing focus area. Various stakeholders in the electoral community as well as among international actors and governments, international organizations, civil society, think tanks and others are tackling this by creating structures and strategic plans to enhance women's political participation. That also includes the creation of systems that can help

recognize women's essential role in empowering women as parliamentary representatives, supporting the emergence of gender-sensitive parliaments and adopting gender-sensitive policy and legislative frameworks.³³ Gains in women's participation have indeed been notable in countries that have taken proactive steps to support such measures, including reforming or amending discriminatory laws, taking concrete action to address violence against women in politics and gender discrimination within parliaments, addressing gender-specific barriers and supporting women in all forms of decision-making including at the local level and in executive government.³⁴

Contextual factors

Evidently, women's political participation continues to face multifaceted challenges globally, varying significantly across different contexts. In many regions, discriminatory laws and institutional barriers persist, limiting women's access to political positions and decision-making processes. Economic disparities can further exacerbate these challenges, particularly in contexts where women lack the resources and support networks necessary to pursue political careers. In addition, women from marginalized groups, such as indigenous communities or ethnic minorities, can face intersecting forms of discrimination that compound the different obstacles they may encounter.

In conflict-affected areas, security concerns and instability can pose additional risks to women's political participation, deterring them from engaging in electoral processes. It is therefore critical to note that any effort to address these challenges must be context-specific and consider a thorough analysis of the unique barriers they face related to legal, cultural, economic and security-related obstructions.

Post-conflict societies may also present a set of obstacles to women's equal participation in elections, such as volatile security situations, heightened GBV, the exclusion of women from peace negotiations that further determined the type and details of the electoral system and process, lack of investment in bringing together women as political actors and inadequate

²⁹ Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021). Women in Politics: Map

³⁰ IPU/UN Women (2023). Women in Politics

³¹ Krook, M. (2020). Violence Against Women in Politics

³² *Ibid.*

³³ UNDP. Women's Political Participation

³⁴ iKnow. Politics, Parliaments & Representatives

institutions for the protection and enforcement of women's rights.³⁵ At the same time, post-conflict contexts may also provide a unique opportunity to introduce a more inclusive political framework and advance women's political participation, including through peacebuilding efforts and political processes.

Key actors in promoting women's political participation

Several key actors play crucial roles in working towards ensuring women's political participation, particularly in elections:

Government and political parties:

Governments hold the responsibility of enacting and enforcing policies that promote gender equality and women's political participation. Political parties also play a vital role in nominating and supporting women candidates, as well as integrating gender perspectives into their platforms and agendas.

Civil society organizations (CSOs): CSOs, including women's rights organizations and advocacy groups, often lead grassroots campaigns, provide training and resources for women candidates and advocate for policy reforms to address barriers to women's political participation.

International organizations: Bodies such as the United Nations, the EU and regional organizations work to set global standards, provide technical assistance, and support initiatives aimed at enhancing women's political representation and participation worldwide.

Electoral Management Bodies (EMBs):

EMBs are responsible for organizing and overseeing elections. They can implement measures to ensure gender-sensitive electoral processes including developing and implementing internal gender policies to promote gender equality in its internal systems and processes. Ensuring gender parity among staff and training poll workers on gender sensitivity and gender equality principles are

examples of policies and activities that may be implemented.

Media: Media outlets have the power to shape public perceptions and influence electoral outcomes. Promoting balanced and inclusive media coverage that features women candidates and their policy platforms is essential for challenging stereotypes and increasing women's visibility in politics.

Think tanks and academic institutions:

Researchers and academics contribute to understanding the barriers to women's political participation and developing evidence-based strategies to address them. Think tanks also provide policy recommendations and analysis to inform decision makers and advocates.

³⁵ United Nations (2005). Women & Elections: Guide to promoting the participation of women in elections

Chapter 5

Regional analysis

The foundation of the research project was formed by a series of workshops, consultations and discussions that were held with practitioners and experts in the fields of information integrity, conflict prevention and elections, as well as a survey that was distributed online. Some of the discussions centered around challenges in certain regions, while others were with experts on a specific thematic topic. Several themes were identified, some of which were common across the geographic regions engaged, while others differed depending upon the context or type of interlocutor. Around 200 people in total were engaged in the research process, covering 40 countries, as well as individuals from regional organizations. The participants were predominantly from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) working in the field of governance, peacebuilding and gender equality, but also from development partners working on specific country contexts. These include the representatives of the EU, CSOs and national electoral bodies from the Global South.

The regional consultations provided important insights on current programming to inform future programming, including the need for an increased focus on tackling root causes of violence during elections, in particular, and across the electoral cycles, in general. Some of the overall key insights from consultations were:

- Across all regions, the need to work on addressing negative social norms, discriminatory practices and perceptions that hinder women's political participation through a multifaceted approach that encompasses legal reforms, community engagement, education and advocacy efforts. Examples brought up in the consultations in all regions included challenging discriminatory practices and norms in legal and policy frameworks; implementing community-based initiatives that can help shift social

attitudes over time; working with educational institutes on awareness-raising about gender equality and the importance of women's political participation; and fostering partnership between international organizations, government, civil society and grassroots movements. These measures can all help amplify advocacy efforts and create a more supportive environment for women entering politics. In the regional consultation in the Arab States, in particular, practitioners underscored that unpacking social and cultural norms preventing women's meaningful participation needs to be the starting point when designing gender-sensitive electoral programmes, pointing to the importance of conducting thorough social norms assessments and analysis of every electoral context when designing electoral assistance and programming. The importance of working with media platforms, and in particular social media, was highlighted in several consultations, including during the consultation with the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region.

- The importance of understanding elections as a journey rather than a stand-alone event is critical to focus on long-term interventions. That is particularly pivotal when addressing root causes of the gendered dimensions of violence in the electoral cycle, as it needs to be tackled from multiple fronts at the same time. For example, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the uneven care burden falling upon women was highlighted as a major obstacle for women to participate in public life. As such, the issue needs to be tackled from multiple frontiers, both through advocacy regarding the importance of

- women's participation in electoral processes, as well as on long-term interventions that address unequal care burden responsibilities and involve the men.
- UNDP practitioners stressed the importance of cross-sectoral collaboration as it can help them better assess and pinpoint where progress in gender equality is stagnant or even backsliding. Working towards a so-called Inclusive-Governance Approach (see the Inclusive-Governance Approach Workstream Report) that includes the 'portfolio approach', in which there is strong collaboration between projects operating under the same thematic umbrella, will also help with addressing systemic issues of exclusion at a broader structural level. In the Arab States, for example, UNDP practitioners at both regional and country levels underscored the importance of designing programmes focused on holistic thinking across sectors to unlock potential and speed up the process towards achieving results in issues related to gender and equality and women's political participation.
 - Digitalization can be a driver of inequality or a tool for inclusive electoral processes if used rightly and with focus on closing the growing digital divide. To do so, it is pivotal to increase digital infrastructure that works for all, adopt regulatory frameworks ensuring women's equal access to digital means and e-services as well as ensuring privacy is protected. With elections shifting towards digital means, it is critical to work on this to ensure women are not left behind due to the digital divide.
 - Addressing violent masculinities can be imperative in contexts where entrenched gender norms often intersect with heightened power dynamics, as they can contribute to a hostile environment that undermines the integrity of electoral processes and threatens women's safety and participation. A number of activities to better engage men and boys in such efforts were mentioned, including awareness-raising campaigns and partnering with educational institutes. Not only can such harmful behaviours perpetuate a culture of fear and intimidation, they can also, in turn, enable gender-based discrimination and inequality. By challenging such norms, it is possible to dismantle the structures that, at times, enable violent behaviour and instead foster environments that prioritize respect, inclusivity and essentially non-violence. Such efforts must entail working actively with men and boys to promote alternative models of masculinity that emphasize empathy, cooperation and non-violent conflict resolution, ultimately creating electoral spaces and processes where all individuals can feel empowered and safe to engage.
 - Enhancing gender equality and women's participation should always be mainstreamed as well as included as a standalone output, as it otherwise risks being sidelined or overlooked. This came out as a key recommendation from across regions and particularly strongly in Central Asia and Europe.
 - Lack of data on GBV in the electoral cycle continues to remain an obstacle. There is an urgent need to address these issues through innovative solutions, which also consider the growing online violence. Establishing

reporting mechanisms and GBV hotlines during electoral processes are concrete actions that can be deployed. They need to be coupled with effective response, however. EMBs can play a critical role in addressing the current data gap on women's voting behaviour. This needs to be done through joint efforts with collaboration between other stakeholders, including civil society actors and national partners. The need for sex-disaggregated data on voting behaviours was underscored across all regions.

- Temporary Special Measures (TSMs) are proven effective measures but need to be coupled with an enabling environment for their societal acceptance. The regional consultation in Asia and the Pacific particularly highlighted the importance of working in a sustained manner on advocacy on the importance of women's political participation and taking critical steps to overcome any gender imbalances in women's representation through, for example, quotas. Partnerships with media organizations and social media platforms to develop communications campaigns are key.
- The need to work in close collaboration with female journalists as key allies to change perceptions of stereotypes is a pressing issue across regions. In the consultations with the Africa region, the need to also strengthen partnerships was underscored given the dominance of men in the journalist workforce across the region. Suggestions to also work with social media platforms and target youth female journalists in trainings and capacity-building were highlighted.
- The importance for women leaders to have safe spaces to engage among

themselves is crucial to address critical issues related to women's engagement in political and electoral processes, including on addressing democratic backsliding. Such spaces also need to have an intersectional lens and to make sure to invite women from marginalized communities, including indigenous peoples. This was particularly stressed in the Latin America and Caribbean region as women from indigenous communities reportedly experience heightened levels of violence and also experience particular barriers related to access during elections, including on challenges to access polling stations in remote areas and domestic care responsibilities that make it challenging to leave the household for longer time periods.

Chapter 6

Working Groups

The two Working Groups met on a regular basis during the research process to discuss ongoing findings from the research process and share inputs from the regional consultations. Participants came from UNDP and other UN agencies, such as UN Women, the United Nations Department of Political Affairs, the EU, CSOs (such as the International Foundation for Electoral Systems), intergovernmental organizations (such as International IDEA), academia, think tanks and other independent experts on topics related to GBV, women's political participation and gender equality matters.

Some of the key findings from consultations from global experts included:

- The importance of sustained funding for civil society actors, women's networks and movements working on matters related to gender equality at local levels to ensure programme and intervention sustainability and a 'whole-of-journey approach' to elections in which efforts to bolster women's political participation is supported throughout the electoral cycles to ensure long-lasting change.
- The criticality of supporting electoral stakeholders in managing and monitoring social media, particularly in contexts where there is growing risk of online violence.
- Working on social norms change was stressed as a key recommendation for electoral assistance programmes across regions. Suggestions for relevant actors to conduct cost-benefit analysis of how cultural and social norms can also have disadvantaged effects on men were highlighted.
- Making gender equality expertise available at country level, particularly to international organizations and UN

agencies, came out as a key recommendation from both Working Groups. The importance of also including specific objectives related to gender equality and women's political participation in electoral assistance, as well as reoccurring evaluations of those, were also underscored.

- The need to formulate practical approaches to better include men and boys in gender equality efforts, particularly in electoral contexts, was discussed, including the importance of supporting models of positive male leadership in combatting violence.

Chapter 7

Survey findings

As part of the research process, a global survey was sent out to practitioners that captured a growing need to work towards tackling root causes of violence, pointing towards addressing these root causes. The survey on gender equality in the context of elections was designed and sent out to practitioners at regional and country level to gather insights on current programming, projects and interventions. The survey was hosted online and circulated through networks of national electoral practitioners as well as development partners and stakeholders. Qualitative content analysis was applied to open-ended questions to determine themes and draw findings from the textual responses.

A widely discussed topic was the need to involve a broad range of actors, both champions and those who are more cautious or who question change. For example, it was mentioned that involving so-called 'gatekeepers' in communities, such as religious leaders or prominent elder leaders, can open up possibilities of involving a wider range of actors in such efforts. Another suggested intervention was to conduct trainings with men and boys in non-violent communication, which can help foster dialogue and, eventually, challenge masculine ideals and behaviours that can lead to violence.

The majority of the respondents came from contexts where the level of violence against women in elections was identified as a problem but in 'moderate' levels.

Figure 1. Degree of difficulty for women candidate participation

9. In your country, what level of hindrances/barriers does electoral violence pose on women's participation in elections as voters and candidates?

[More Details](#)

| | |
|----------------|----|
| None | 3 |
| Low | 2 |
| Moderate | 11 |
| High | 9 |
| Extremely high | 2 |



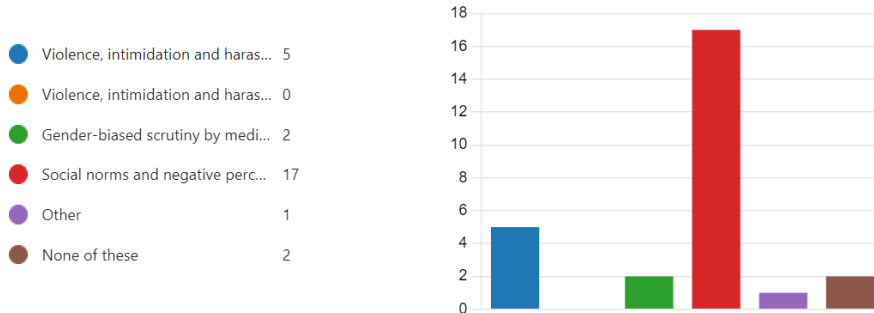
When asked what the main challenge to women's participation in elections was, a strikingly clear majority singled out negative social norms and perceptions as the major obstacle, amounting to the urgent need to work

on social norms change, which has come up through working group discussions and in research, regional consultations and experts' meetings.

Figure 2. Challenges to women's participation

10. What would you say is the main challenge to women's participation in elections in your country?

[More Details](#)



In addition to key recommendations mentioned (see 'Executive summary' and 'Recommendations for gender-responsive electoral programming'), other key issues came out during the survey, including:

- Barriers in sustained project funding and possibility to scale up projects related to women's political participation. The importance of ensuring collaboration and partnership among UN agencies was also stressed.
- The importance of understanding the need to work cross-sectorally on issues of gender equality, including on gender mainstreaming in all programmes. The case of UNDP Turkmenistan was highlighted as a country where project funding has been shrinking, which is affecting programmes particularly focused on inclusion and women's participation, pointing to both the need to ensure sustained funding as well as mainstreaming of such issues in all project portfolios.
- The need to work on legal reform against discriminatory laws, coupled
- rts.

with follow-up mechanisms to ensure accountability and implementation, was underscored in all regions and especially in the Arab States region.

- Education as a key enabler for social and cultural norms change was mentioned, particularly in the Arab States region, including the need to involve men and boys as part of civic education efforts on inclusion and the media to counter gender-insensitive reporting and the perpetuation of stereotypes.
- The importance of identifying champions to work on fostering normative changes and positive attitudes towards women's participation in political and electoral processes, including working with social media platforms and key figures in the public domain, such as influencers and other public figures. Promoting positive role models is key in this work and requires active involvement and partnerships with public figures who can serve as allies in these efforts.

Chapter 8

Limitations

A few words on limitations are important to add to this report, as they relate to the following sub-themes.

Consultations: Some issues considered sensitive will rarely be discussed during multi-stakeholder meetings. Therefore, the research has relied upon other data and studies to provide insights into areas such as GBV and threats towards women – and particularly young women – engaging in civic space, particularly in certain contexts where civic space is shrinking or currently under threat.

Survey: Designing global surveys is difficult for obvious reasons, since it attempts to pose generic questions to capture and address context-specific issues. The survey was shared online, which also creates limitations; some respondents might not feel comfortable sharing certain levels of information, and other target audiences might have limited or no Internet access, thus accelerating the digital divide since the target group had access to the Internet. This was considered when drawing conclusions from the youth survey findings, and a youth consultation was hosted to validate the findings. Because the survey was shared online, getting enough respondents proved difficult.

Desk research: As with all desk research, it runs the inherent risk of not identifying best practices from the ground, particularly from hard-to-reach areas. However, multiple conversations and dedicated consultations with practitioners with over 200 participants across all regions working predominantly at country level in the field were held to overcome this potential research gap.

Chapter 9

Considerations & recommendations for gender-responsive electoral programming

Following consultations with practitioners and experts in the field of electoral assistance, it is strikingly clear that there is no single one-size-fits-all solution to fight gender inequalities in electoral processes – including both when it comes to preventing GBV and assault or increasing the number of women meaningfully participating in elections. Rather, the issues ought to be tackled from several frontiers at the same time and through a multipronged approach.

There are alignments, contradictions and gaps between the research and the practical experience collated for this report. As noted by senior experts who were interviewed, the available research is expected to explode in the coming years, which may bridge some divides or provide more clarity on why there are these discrepancies – though there are likely no easy answers. Furthermore, the constantly evolving technological, social and political landscape will invariably create new questions or confound old answers.

Understand and analyze context as a key step: Each election is defined by a host of factors, creating a unique set of risks and opportunities. A starting point for any exercise should be an assessment of the context, namely its environment, directed by the particular political, security and social concerns in the country. Given the rapidly evolving dynamics, a continuous review should be in place as much as possible, with a specific focus on gendered dynamics. This is critical for all interventions and particularly needed when addressing GBV since different activities may be a better fit in certain contexts, for example different reporting mechanisms or hotline systems. In another context, it may be more appropriate to work to strengthen legal reform, especially if an appropriate legal landscape is not yet well developed.

Understand and tackle negative social norms: A growing and urgent need to target work more towards tackling root causes of violence and women’s exclusion in electoral processes, be it as campaigner, staff or voters, has been highlighted time and again. This particularly includes working preventatively on tackling negative social norms and perceptions against women’s involvement in political life.

- **Conduct a social norms assessment:** [Conducting a social norms assessment can provide invaluable insights into underlying beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that shape political participation. By understanding the prevailing social norms, including gender roles, power dynamics and expectations surrounding electoral processes, stakeholders can identify specific barriers that hinder women’s participation and perpetuate inequalities. Such an assessment enables policymakers, CSOs and electoral authorities to develop targeted interventions and strategies that challenge harmful norms and promote greater inclusivity and equality in electoral processes. By engaging diverse stakeholders and communities, a social norms assessment can facilitate dialogue and consensus-building around gender-sensitive approaches in such processes.](#)

[See programmatic option ‘Conduct a social norms assessment’.](#)

- **Work with men and boys to challenge violent masculinities:** This is essential for fostering inclusive electoral processes, as it addresses the root causes of gender inequality and promotes collective actions towards inclusion and gender equality. By engaging men and boys as allies in efforts to promote women’s political participation, it is possible to challenge traditional notions of masculinity and power dynamics that often exclude women from decision-making processes.

Through education, awareness-raising and dialogue, men and boys can become advocates for gender-sensitive policies, activities and practices within their communities and institutions. In addition, involving men and boys in initiatives aimed at promoting women's leadership can both help to cultivate empathy and understanding as well as break down resistance to change while fostering a sense of shared responsibility for achieving gender equality in electoral processes.

See programmatic option '[Engage with men and boys to challenge violent masculinities to foster normative change](#)'.

- **Introduction of Temporary Special Measures, such as quotas:** It has been shown repeatedly that TSMs are effective tools for supporting women's participation in political processes and elections since they provide targeted interventions to address systematic barriers and inequalities. Different TSMs, such as quotas or reserved seats for women, can help create opportunities for women to access political positions that they otherwise struggle to attain due to entrenched gender biases and discriminatory practices. By mandating a minimum representation of women in decision-making bodies, TSMs can help break the cycle of underrepresentation and challenge traditional power structures that perpetuate gender inequality. TSMs can be seen as catalysts for broader social change by increasing the visibility of women in leadership roles, challenging stereotypes and inspiring future generations of women to engage in politics. While TSMs are temporary in nature, they can have long-lasting impacts.

See programmatic option '[Support affirmative action policies and Temporary Special Measures, such as quota systems](#)'.

- **Support the design of gender-sensitive laws, policies and regulations:** Such gender-sensitive frameworks can help ensure that the rights and needs of all are addressed, thereby promoting equality and equal representation. By incorporating gender-sensitive provisions into electoral laws and regulations, such as measures to promote women's participation and protect against GBV, societies can create environments that facilitate the full and equal engagement of women and other marginalized groups in electoral processes.

See programmatic option '[Support the design of gender-inclusive laws, policies and regulations](#)'.

- **Support gender-sensitive awareness-raising campaigns:** [Awareness-raising campaigns, trainings and other forms of civic education can help debunk gendered myths and the spread of disinformation off- and online, as well as foster other narratives that are positive towards women partaking in political life.](#)

See programmatic option '[Support awareness-raising \(including civic education campaigns and trainings\) against gender stereotyping and violence against women](#)'.

Address online and offline violence against women in public life: Online channels of communication can and have been abused, serving as a means for perpetrating online forms of violence, including hate speech and harassment, at times leading to the instigation of real-world violence. These otherwise inclusionary tools can be used to scare women from participating in public life, including as candidates during electoral processes, thereby degrading and jeopardizing gender equality. Online violence is marked by a vast audience and hateful comments, and attacks have proven difficult to remove. Insults, hate speech and rhetoric can remain online indefinitely, both creating longer lasting damage, but also leaving a trail back to their perpetrator. By some measures, online attacks can be more vicious due to the anonymity and universality offered by the digital sphere. Online violence also suffers from a legal gap in many countries. Programmatic responses can include advocacy efforts and legal advice to close this gap. Not only can gender-sensitive early warning and early response systems and

hotlines contribute to increased data on the scale of online violence against women, but they can also facilitate response including psychosocial support for female victims.

[See programmatic option 'Hotline to report on sexual and gender-based violence during electoral processes'.](#)

- Engaging political parties through the development of zero-tolerance codes of conduct can deter actors from gender-discriminatory behaviour and speech. Traditionally, codes of conduct have been set up in many countries to regulate the behaviour of various stakeholders during the electoral process, including political parties, the media, election observers, traditional leaders and other key actors, among others, contributing to setting ground rules for a conducive and peaceful electoral environment. In most cases, this has meant that although the overall aim of such codes has been to promote peaceful elections, the code itself might not have included specific provisions on gender-based harassment, intimidation, assault or gendered forms of violence. With more political parties expanding zero-tolerance codes of conduct that condemn any forms of GBV and harassment, it is becoming increasingly clear that codes of conduct can help promote a gender-sensitive working culture through, for example, promoting gender-sensitive language and sanctioning gender-discriminatory behaviour and speech.

[See programmatic option 'Engagement with political parties and development of zero -tolerance codes of conduct'.](#)

- **Gender-sensitive early warning system:** A gender-responsive early warning system – which is also coupled with an early response system – can both serve the purpose of flagging imminent and emerging incidents and risks such as violence and strengthen collaboration between relevant actors involved in addressing risks of violence and conflict. Early warning systems that are people-centred – ensuring that appropriate, applicable and timely early warnings also reach the most vulnerable, including women – are most effective and can be critical tools to use in electoral processes when assessing risks of violence and other threats, particularly against women. A gender-responsive early warning system that also includes indicators with a strong gender component can help identify such risks.

[See programmatic option on 'Gender-responsive early warning system coupled with early response'.](#)

Consider the growing field of gender-sensitive technology and AI: The challenges, and opportunities presented by the era of digitalization, increased use of technology and artificial intelligence (AI) have transformed electoral processes in every country, including in relation to inclusion and participation aspects. Democratic participation can flourish as a result of digital technology, allowing for increased awareness-raising and information-sharing, community building, data-driven policy and programming and so forth. The rise and increasing use of AI may have also played a role in what some have dubbed the reversal of gains towards gender equality, including but not limited to bias within technology contributing to the perpetuation of gender stereotypes, women's exclusion, and manipulation for political or monetary gain. There are a number of activities electoral practitioners can engage in to better grasp the impact and use of technology and AI on the inclusion and exclusion of women in electoral processes including: (1) monitoring the use of political advertisements that aim to perpetuate gender bias and hate speech; (2) supporting advocacy efforts where domestic political advertising regulations may be lacking or social media-specific regulations may be weak, incomplete or nonexistent; (3) providing training for women in politics on how to use tools and platform features to better protect themselves online; (4) supporting the design and negotiation of escalation processes with platforms and national authorities; (5) organizing inclusive consultations whenever technology is introduced within elections so that impact on inclusion is considered and accessibility is ensured; and (6) organizing hackathons around the introduction of electoral technology, AI and inclusion to foster creative thinking. See programmatic option 'Support gender-sensitive design of technology and AI'.

Support the role of women in dialogue and electoral reconciliation efforts including through the facilitation of intersectional spaces for women to engage among themselves and with others: We know that elections can lay bare existing tensions and conflicts in societies. In post-conflict societies, they can serve as an important vehicle for channeling existing grievances and tensions in a constructive manner. However, they also have the potential to do the opposite. This is particularly the case in high-stakes elections, whereby the post electoral period can be viewed as a period in need of peacebuilding. Women can play a key role in such post-election reconciliation by creating spaces where grievances can be channeled and discussions around ongoing tensions can be facilitated. By providing platforms for women, particularly women leaders to share their knowledge and expertise among themselves and others, it can help foster collaborative approaches and innovative solutions to conflict resolution and long-lasting peace. Such spaces will also help maintain critical partnerships that are especially important in post-conflict contexts, where women leaders often continue to play a key role in building trust in political processes and institutions.

See programmatic option 'Strengthen women in their efforts to prevent violence and sustain peace during elections' and 'Support the creation of intersectional spaces for women to engage among themselves and with key partners'

Resources

Ace Project: The Electoral Knowledge Network. Accessed here: <https://aceproject.org/>

Ballington, J., Bardall, G., & Borovsky, G. (2017). Preventing violence against women in elections: A programming guide. UN Women. Accessed here: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2017/11/preventing-violence-against-women-in-elections>

Bardall, G., Bjarnegård, E., & Piscopo, J. M. (2020). How is political violence gendered? Disentangling motives, forms, and impacts. *Political Studies*, 68(4).

Birch, Sarah, Ursula Daxecker Kristine Höglund. Electoral violence: An introduction. *Journal of Peace Research*

Convention of the Elimination of all Form of Discrimination against Women. (1979) Access here: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ProfessionalInterest/cedaw.pdf>

Convention of the Political Rights of Women (1953). Access here: https://treaties.un.org/doc/treaties/1954/07/19540707%2000-40%20am/ch_xvi_1p.pdf

International IDEA, SAP International (2008). Women, Representation and Violence: Exploring Constituent Assembly Election in Nepal. Accessed here: cover_idea.indd (iknowpolitics.org)

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). Access here: <https://www.ifes.org/>

International Foundation for Electoral Systems (2016). Violence against Women in Elections: A framework for Assessment, Monitoring and Response. Access here: <https://www.ifes.org/publications/violence-against-women-elections-framework>

Inter-Parliamentary Union (2021). Women in Politics: Map. Accessed here: <https://www.ipu.org/women-in-politics-2021>

Inter-Parliamentary Union, UN Women (2023). Women in Politics: Map. Accessed here: <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2023/03/women-in-politics-map-2023>

iKNOW Politics Network. Access here: <https://iknowpolitics.org/en>

iKNOW Politics (2019). Summary of the e-discussion on Violence against Women in Politics. Access here: <https://iknowpolitics.org/en/learn/knowledge-resources/discussion-summaries/summary-e-discussion-violence-against-women-politic-0>

iKnow Politics, Parliaments & Representatives. Accessed here: <https://iknowpolitics.org/en/focus-areas/6060>

Krook, Mona Lena and Juliana Restrepo Sanin (2016). Violence against Women in Politics: A Defense of the Concept.

Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (2019). Violence against women, its causes and consequences. Access here: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/special-procedures/sr-violence-against-women>

Schneider, Paige and David Carroll (2020). Conceptualizing more inclusive elections: violence against women in elections and gendered electoral violence.

United Nations Department of Political Affairs (2016). Preventing and Mitigating Election-related Violence. Access here: https://dppa.un.org/sites/default/files/ead_pd_preventing_mitigating_election-related_violence_20160601_e.pdf

UNDP and UN Women (2016). Inclusive Electoral Processes: A Guide for Electoral Management Bodies on Promoting Gender Equality and Women's Participation. Access here: http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/electoral_systemsandprocesses/guide-for-electoral-management-bodies-on-promoting-gender-equali.html

UNDP and UN Women (2017). Preventing Violence against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide - Summary. Access here: https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/VAWE-Prog_Guide_Summary-WEB.pdf

UNDP (2014). Gender Equality in Public Administration. Access here: http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/public_administration/gepa.html

UNDP (2022). Gender Equality Strategy 2022–2025. Access here: https://genderequalitystrategy.undp.org/?_gl=1*14rxuez*_ga*MTU2MTUyOTM4LjE2NTY0MTE0NjQ.*_ga_3W7LPK0WP1*MTcwNzI0NjkwMy4xNzIuMS4xNzA3MjQ5NDgyLjU3LjAuMA.

UNDP (2023). Gender Social Norms Index. Access here: <https://hdr.undp.org/content/2023-gender-social-norms-index-gsni#/indicies/GSNI>

UNDP (2023). Strengthening women's political participation: a snapshot of UNDP-supported projects across the globe. Access here: <https://www.undp.org/publications/strengthening-womens-political-participation-snapshot-undp-supported-projects-across-globe>

UNDP (2023). Supporting the Introduction of Temporary Special Measures: Guidance for UNDP Country Offices. Accessed here: <https://www.undp.org/governance/publications/supporting-introduction-temporary-special-measures-tsms>

UNDP (2023). Building inclusive democracies: A guide to strengthening the participation of LGBTI+ persons in political and electoral processes. Access here: <https://www.undp.org/publications/building-inclusive-democracies-guide-strengthening-participation-lgbti-persons-political-and-electoral-processes>

UNDP Sustainable Development Goals. [Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.](#)

Accessed here: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/gender-equality>

UNDP Women's Political Participation. Accessed here: <https://www.undp.org/governance/womens-political-participation>

United Nations Gender Quota Portal. Accessed here: <https://genderquota.org/>

United Nations (2005): Women and elections. Guide to promoting the participation of women in elections. Accessed here: <http://iknowpolitics.org/en/knowledge-library/guide-training-material/women-elections-guide-promoting-participation-women>

UN Women. Political Participation of Women. Access here: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/focus-areas/governance/political-participation-of-women>

UN Women, OHCHR and SRVAW (2018). Violence against Women in Politics: Expert Group Meeting Report and Recommendations, 8–9 March 2018, New York. Access here: <http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2018/9/egm-report-violence-against-women-in-politics>

