

# SAWTNA

## Defying Violence Against Women In Politics

### Guiding Principles Handbook



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Author: Abir Chebaro

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Project director: Nada Saleh Anid

Layout and design: Tatiana Maalouf

Translator: Fady Abou Rjeily

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## **Introduction**

The massive participation of women in the protest movements during the October 17, 2019 revolution and the way they took charge of handling the Covid-19 pandemic where women's concerns were brought to the forefront, could give the false impression that the battle for their participation in politics has been won. Unfortunately, this is not the case. It seems that the old discriminatory mechanisms related to access to power persist and the increasing visibility of women in the public sphere comes at a high cost where they run the risk of becoming targets. With the rise in verbal and physical violence against women in the public life, something had to be done. In November 2020, Madanyat, with the support of the Public Affairs Section at the U.S. Embassy in Beirut, launched the program Sawtna defying violence against women in politics, which this publication is part of, to specifically address harassment on social and traditional media targeting women politicians, activists, and journalists.

We hope that this program will create the cornerstone to generate more awareness and that it will lead to the adoption of specific measures and policies to counter this problem. We remain fiercely convinced that progress in gender equality will strengthen the democratic process and bring about a more equitable and inclusive political life in Lebanon.

## **Who We Are**

Madanyat's aim is to bring together women, youth and men from around the country willing to work for political, economic, cultural and social justice for all. The NGO's objectives are to actively contribute to reaching gender equality in all designated and elected bodies, to advocate a new vision where politics is accessible to women and youth, to raise awareness about the impact of women's under-representation and to spread art and culture as a vector of social cohesion, diversity and human rights.

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# 1

## Context Overview

Violence against women in politics is considered to be an emerging researched topic, as it intersects between two areas: gender-based violence and women's political participation. It challenges the idea of «equal rights for men and women», as politics has always been exclusive for men, whom conveniently legislated, drafted constitutions and established political structures, excluding women and ignoring the gender-based perspective affecting women's participation and representation.

Having participated in the drafting of the Human Rights Bill<sup>1</sup> and adopting it, Lebanon was one of the pioneer states and the first country in the Arab world to enable women to run and vote in the parliamentary elections in 1952.<sup>2</sup> Lebanon also ratified the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women<sup>3</sup> (CEDAW), as well as both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The aforementioned entails an obligation for the state to guarantee the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all included rights.

The right to equal protection is guaranteed by the law, according to article 14 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights,<sup>4</sup> which is crucial in achieving justice.

Add that article 7 of the Lebanese constitution states that:

“All Lebanese are equal before the Law and enjoy, without any discrimination, political and civil rights, and assume public obligations and duties without any discrimination.”<sup>5</sup>

The National Accord – Taif Agreement also stipulated that “The parliamentary elections shall be held in accordance with a new law on the basis of provinces and in the light of rules that guarantee common coexistence between the Lebanese and that ensure the sound and efficient political representation of all the people's factions and generations. This shall be done after reviewing the administrative

division within the context of unity of the people, the land, and the institutions.”<sup>6</sup>

Women’s involvement in politics and their ability to hold leading and decision-making positions are crucial in achieving gender equality, as incorporated in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.<sup>7</sup> This was reaffirmed in the fifth goal of the Sustainable Development Goals<sup>8</sup> (SDGs), aiming 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”, as well as to “Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, to achieve a broader goal in a world free of discrimination.”

Because of the historical legacy of authority, politics was considered a “realm of men” or a “no-women’s-land” for far too long. According to many beliefs and practices, since the woman was created from the man’s rib, she will never be his match nor surpass him. Men held authority, throughout history and by tradition, not women, for authority was drawn from physical power and military abilities in order to control the land and the people. Because of that, in monarchies, the king’s spouse is dubbed a queen while a queen’s spouse might not be dubbed king, for this title wields the kind of authority that a woman cannot grant to a man. Comparatively, most of the Lebanese women in parliamentary or ministerial positions were spouses, siblings or daughters of political leaders, and rarely did independent women manage to break through this misogynic fortified wall.

Studies have also shown that the first generation of women in politics is, by all means, fully exposed to all kinds and aspects of violence.<sup>9</sup>

Globally, the overall change in politics around the world was very slow, as since 1960, only 74 women held absolute leading positions in their countries, seeing the fact that more than one third of them were on interim basis. Despite this growth within the last few years, only 19 women simultaneously held absolute leading positions/presidencies in one year, which is less than 10% of the number of men holding these same positions. Nowadays (2021), 12 out of 193 United Nations member states are women-led.<sup>10</sup>

Ever since Lebanese women got the right to vote and to announce candidacy in 1952, they were only represented in the parliament 27 times by 12 women, re-elected more than once.

Women's representation in the parliament, at its best, did not exceed 4.3%, most of them being related or heiresses to political leaders, as many men politicians consider that "politics in Lebanon is a family business".<sup>11</sup>

Likewise, only 18 women held ministerial positions in 76 different established governments since the independence,<sup>12</sup> with a peak representation rate of 30% within Dr. Hassan Diab's 2020 Government.<sup>13</sup>

And with the outbreak of the October 17th 2019 revolution, the role of women in politics was greatly highlighted, as experts unanimously dubbed it "The Revolution of Women".<sup>14</sup> Women from all ages and socio-economic backgrounds were active in the field work, in mobilization and in planning. Women activists' groups also collaborated in expressing their positions throughout social and traditional media and assemblies. Despite their drastic under-representation in politics, women have achieved some progress in political and public life through the growth of their participation in the electoral process, in the parliament, in the government, in municipal councils, in parties and in certain authorial positions, and their activism in the civil society (or SCOs) also expanded.

These accumulations have produced a bunch of positive effects for women, democracy and society. But progress is now threatened by widespread inequality, violent extremism and the rise of exclusionary policies, even though women are struggling vigorously to assert their existence and to claim their rights. Mindsets within families, political parties and law enforcement agencies remain gender discriminant, authoritarian, patriarchal and elitist, making women more prone to gender-based political violence. These efforts to strengthen women's political leadership have rarely been accompanied by mechanisms to ensure their security and well-being in the public sphere. Political systems are often patriarchal, change resistant and violent when challenged.<sup>15</sup>



## 2 Definition of:

### Political Violence Against Women / Violence Against Women In Politics

Gender-based violence in politics is any act or practice committed with the aim of depriving or impeding women of any political, partisan or social activity or any fundamental right and freedoms, such as voting, holding public office and enjoying freedom of opinion and expression,<sup>16</sup> simply because they are women. And it is based on gender discrimination, starting from unconscious prejudice and symbolic injustice extending to psychological, sexual and physical abuse and disservice through ongoing harassment and discrimination based on personal identity.<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the Patriarchal system is a source of such violence. This practice is not only reserved to male perpetrators but it also includes females who unconsciously discriminate and perpetuate masculine violent behavior against women politicians due mainly to inherited cultural norms and traditions.

Violence against women in politics (VAWP) differs from political violence. The latter relates to conflicts over political ideas and is widespread within a violent political environment, where healthy democratic debate is replaced by violent attacks against a male or female political opponent.<sup>18</sup> VAWP is gender based.

Gender-based violence in politics is not a new phenomenon, and it violates women's human rights and affects women's fundamental freedoms, democratic practice and the implementation of other human rights. With the increase in the number of women working in the public realm and the technological advancement, gender-based violence in politics or VAWP, became more frequent on traditional and social media.

# 3 Alarming Figures

The 2011 International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) study on violence against women in elections found that women and men experience electoral violence differently, with women suffering more than twice as much psychological abuse and violence as men do.<sup>19</sup>

In 2016, the Inter-Parliamentary Union published a study showing that 81.8% of the female parliamentarians in the sample were subjected to psychological violence, and 44.4% to death or rape threats or other forms of physical violence.<sup>20</sup>

The study published in December 2019, by the Network of Arab Women Parliamentarians for Equality - Ra'edat, revealed that 80% of Arab women parliamentarians, included in a sample of 216 parliamentarians from 16 Arab parliaments, are subjected to prolonged systematic violence, often practiced by authority figures and by their fellow partisans and parliamentarians.

The study also showed that social media and traditional media are among the places where women parliamentarians are most prone to gender-based psychological and verbal violence. And although half of women parliamentarians complain to their families, friends or colleagues, only one third report to official authorities such as the police and the judiciary, while 20% of women parliamentarians refrain from any complaint or reporting. And even in officially reported cases, complaints are usually futile, as women parliamentarians stated.

Even worse is the economic and political cost of such violence. The Ra'edat study revealed that more than 36% of women

parliamentarians experience economic violence, more than 70% experience psychological and verbal violence, 47% are subjected to death, abduction, rape or physical abuse threats, which drives 12% of Arab women parliamentarians out of politics, and leads to one third withdrawing and declining to run for office, with almost the half feeling fear and insecurity, hence impacting their political positions and their ability to express them,<sup>21</sup> and to effectively represent their constituents.



## 4 Why is violence against women in politics an unrecognized issue?

Despite alarming figures, violence against women in politics is an unrecognized issue due to several impediments:

- 1 The belief that there is no violence based on gender. Normalizing VAWP is due to the inequality and stereotyped gender based division of labor, that relegates women to traditional tasks imposed by gender roles such as caretaking and domestic work and confining them “to their place” at home.
- 2 The belief that it is not violence when the harm is not tangible and concrete.
- 3 Women who remained silent and did not report or were forced to do so after experiencing such violence, led to underreporting by survivors.
- 4 The culture of impunity as a result of political clout and immunities, granted to certain figures, particularly politicians.
- 5 And because some might justify these practices as a “cost” of political activity.



# 5

## The Goal Of Violence Against Women In Politics

The Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women<sup>22</sup> adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, in its resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993 recognized that:

**“Violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women, which have led to domination over and discrimination against women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women, and that violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men”**

The idea of subordination is perfectly in synergy with the patriarchal political systems. These are change resistant and violent in response to any challenge they may face in order to preserve their identity, especially since the gatekeepers of these structures are predominantly males.

It is no coincidence that political leaders are overwhelmingly men, because sectarianism<sup>23</sup> and clannish order are inherently masculine and inherited, as women rarely assume the leadership of the clan, sect or family.

Violence against politically active women – whether they are voters, candidates, councilors, mukhtar, mayoral and municipal councilors, parliamentarians, trade unionists, students, community activists, bloggers, or journalists - escalates as their activism increases.<sup>24</sup>

This violence is particularly intense against female opponents, to suppress the full and equal political participation of women who are considered outcasts, thus they are deprived from their natural and legal right to free expression and participation.

Silencing women's voices in decision-making bodies has gender discriminatory motives and reinforces inequalities. It contributes to the strengthening of traditional stereotypes, in order to maintain the monopoly of the political patriarchal masculine system by domesticating women, confiscating their voices, limiting them to stereotypical roles, consolidating their image in family functions, attaching them to men and their choices and making women subordinate to men and to their political bodies.

This undermines democracy by dissuading women from political activity, showing that women are unable and ineffective leaders and adversely affecting, in particular, the political ambition of young women due to programmed violence against women politicians. Hence, they refrain from participating in public life such as municipal, parliamentary or partisan candidates, which promotes inequalities and affects the ability of women politicians to effectively represent their supporters or voters, reflecting a negative experience that does not encourage voters to trust and vote for women.

In addition to curbing women from engaging in politics, these factors are also used to attract popular support away from women political activists, and to influence the perception of both women and men in society regarding specific issues, by politically assassinating political/public figures<sup>25</sup> through the exploiting of moral stereotypes, as the moral perversion accusations of certain women politicians to reach their positions.



# 6

## Factors influencing the phenomenon of VAWP

The national - political, economic, social, cultural and religious - context plays a role in defining the forms, intensity and impact of the violence that women activists can be exposed to in politics.

Studies have shown that the level and the intensity of violence increased whenever women were first-generation political activists, namely because they are recently involved in politics, inexperienced, cultured, independent, young, part of the opposition or minorities and if they were women's rights activists in a misogynic environment.

This problem is further exacerbated in Lebanon because of the qualitative and quantitative levels of women's representation in Lebanese politics. Most of the women elected (parliamentary) and appointed (ministerial) in senior positions have stumbled and, according to some women political activists, those have not provided successful women-leading models.<sup>26</sup> For most of these "token" women deputies or ministers have reached their positions because of their family ties, and recently because of their gender, in an attempt to whitewash parties before public opinion. And since it was not because of their political or feminist work nor the accumulation of experience, results were counterproductive and moot. They lack feminist backgrounds and are not driven nor advocating women's causes and empowerment as called for by women's and civic bodies. They did not stand in solidarity with other female colleagues in the face of violence against them, but strengthened patriarchal misogynistic dominant structures, by submitting to their parties' political pressure and clergy, especially on issues as fundamental and vital to women as laws against domestic and sexual violence, personal status and other discriminatory laws that have weakened and impeded women's empowerment. And in exchange for the "leader's satisfaction", their vulnerability to public opinion has increased. Nevertheless, this does not justify violence against them but requires political criticism.

# 7

## Other global common causes affecting VAWP:

1. The biased and discriminatory media coverage has exacerbated violence against women political activists.
2. The progress of information and communication technology (ICT) has increased the incidence of harassment and threats against women in politics through social media. There is a remarkable increase in online violence.
3. The lack of political will to address this issue and to protect women's political freedoms - including freedom of expression, of speech and of assembly.
4. Family members of women politicians might become targets of violence by opponents, to put more pressure over and threaten those women in politics.
5. The lack of litigation mechanisms and under-reporting of VAWP contributed to perpetuated impunity.

In addition to women participating in political life from different groups:

**female voters, activists, partisans, candidates, ministers and journalists,** this violence may also affect members of their families. Forms of VAWP vary with the types of perpetrators and its place of occurrence.



# 8

## Forms Of Violence Against Women In Politics

**Violence against women in politics may take various forms:**

### ● Psychological Violence

It operates on moral damage and psychological harm to the victim, to frighten her through blackmail, verbal assaults, personal humiliation and defamation, and the dissemination of misinformation to discredit the dignity and social standing of women. It aims to gain power by attacking women's reputation.

Psychological violence may be also in the form of marginalization and denial of opportunities to women.

**One of the most notable examples was when “Marcel Ghanem” hosted MP “Paula Yaacoubian”. The host implied that the deputy might be subjected to a campaign of fabricated erotic films, after her attitude towards parties,<sup>27</sup> to discredit and silence her.**

In another incident, former Minister “Ghassan Attallah” accused Deputy “Yaacoubian” of having reached her position in an immoral manner.<sup>28</sup>

To face those accusations, Paula Yaacoubian asked those who accused her to show any evidence condemning her and to stop false accusations, calling upon the public to fact-check the promoted rumors.

According to a study conducted on a sample of female candidates to the parliamentary elections in 2018, by UNWomen in Lebanon, 78.6% were exposed to various types of violence against women in politics. Psychological violence accounted for 85% of these cases. It focuses mostly on physical appearances, traditional gender roles and denial of media exposure and coverage.<sup>29</sup>

Recently, a political campaign against judge “Ghada Aoun” was extended, to focus on her appearance and social status with great

depravity, decadence, mockery and masculinity, instead of staying focused exclusively on her judiciary performance.<sup>30</sup>

### ● **Physical Violence:**

It aims to intentionally use force to kidnap, to beat, to harm and to cause injury, disability or even death to those women in politics or to their family members, in order to prevent women's political participation. The perpetrators might include family members and not only opponents.

“May Chidiac”,<sup>31</sup> journalist and minister, survivor of an explosive assassination attack, remains a clear manifestation of physical violence against women in politics.

Another survivor of physical VAWP is “Amani Albeaini”, a feminist member of the opposition and a civil rights activist. She suffered a concussion<sup>32</sup> after being severely attacked and beaten for organizing a campaign to oppose the building of the Bisri Dam.

### ● **Sexual violence**

It includes sexual assault, threats of sexual harassment, insinuation, extortion and sexual molestations of various kinds and forms. Many female media figures have faced similar threats, most notably a media figure Ms Dima Sadek.<sup>33</sup>

Some of the women activists participating in the October 17th uprising were also subjected to abuse, sexual harassment and threats of rape, as reported by the Legal Agenda.<sup>34</sup>

### ● **Community Violence or Cultural and Societal Violence**

It is the violence resulting from misogynistic customs, legacies and traditions, which have many aspects that place women in certain stereotypes and roles, such as being beautiful, dependent and submissive, exclusively fulfilling their care-taking roles, confined to the private sphere and excluded from participating in the public sphere.

In the elections, some advertising companies used women's bodies and linked them to the elections and temptation, as a means of

persuading a person to vote. One party also adopted “Be Beautiful and vote” (sois belle et vote) as an electoral slogan, in a reproduction of the well-known adage “Be Beautiful and Shut Up.”<sup>35</sup>

This is a subconscious indicator of what this party expects from women, namely to care for their appearance and to refrain from politics except through voting, thereby suppressing freedom of choice and debate.

The introduction of Minister “Inaya Ezeddin” as a divorced woman and as the sister of a martyr<sup>36</sup> also caused a feminist outcry. For Dr. “Ezeddin” is known for her political, social and scientific work which qualifies her for positions without the need for a familial or personal link. This media connection goes back to the cultural legacy, which always places women under the family umbrella and exposes them to violence in case of “disobedience”.

Domestic violence manifests itself through the rejection of women in political positions by families and religious authorities, because of a lack of confidence in their abilities, the belief that politics is exclusive for men and because women are perceived as a sensitive subsidiary being who cannot bear the pressure and cannot combine politics with their domestic care-taking task. Certain forms of violence occur through spouses’ negative backlash, such as threats of divorce, deprivation of children, confiscation of assets, physical and psychological violence, deprivation of liberty, ostracism and even murder.

According to ancestral patriarchal norms and traditions, men should lead. Women’s assumption of leadership positions, a taboo, is considered to cause power imbalance and stigmatizes families. Those might be disgraced and accused of lack of “manhood”.

In a statement, Member of parliament “Walid Albaarini”<sup>37</sup> reaffirmed the above, claiming that the people of Akkar refuse to be ruled by women. In a contradictory fact, the only parliamentary electoral list in Lebanon that included women-only candidates in 2018 was in Akkar.<sup>38</sup>

This devaluation and disdain of “female” sex is manifested by insults

against mothers and sisters, which is a verbal form of intersectional semiotic violence. It is commonly used to stigmatize all vulnerable groups ranging from women, refugees, migrants, persons with special needs to persons with different gender identities. Those are referred to with offensive racial and discriminatory demeaning terms.

Misogynistic political officials insist on repeatedly using those degrading terms to cement and reinforce the idea of women's inability and incapacity in political leadership. They highlight women's "tenderness and sensitivity" and emphasize the need to restrict women to their traditional care-taking roles, as stated by the Minister of Interior Mohammad Fahmi. The Minister triggered controversy for further stereotyping of women's roles, after controversial statements, depicting women and their roles and implying that the previous Minister of Interior failed in fulfilling her tasks because she was a woman.<sup>39</sup>

Subsequently, Minister Raya El-Hassan quoted John Steinbeck in a tweet<sup>40</sup> to reply to the accusing minister: "And finally , in our time a beard is the only thing that a woman cannot do better than a man, or if she can, her success is assured only in a circus." Her tweet gained many admirers.

The ongoing awareness-raising campaigns by feminists' organizations revealed to be fruitful in sensitizing a growing strata of the population. A counter-campaign was launched against Minister Fahmi with the hashtag #challenge\_Fahmi, aiming to emphasize male participation in domestic tasks, as an indicator of changing the patriarchal mindsets of a broad cross section of the youth.

As for the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament Mr. Eli Ferzli, he was accused of women debasement, by the media and by feminist and civil society groups, when addressing the Minister of Justice. This harangue is adopted by many politicians in their speeches, reflecting a patriarchal mentality that places women in negative sexual and stereotypical scope.<sup>41</sup> And while Mr. Ferzli refused to apologize for his statements, as many powerful men do when they offend women, women remain stigmatized, blamed and suffer the effects of



degrading comments.

The aforementioned incident surprisingly raises questions about the silence of women politicians, whether ministers or deputies, who witnessed these insults, especially that the target is a female minister entrusted with justice. It is therefore legitimate to question “justice” when a minister is silenced and her right to human dignity is overlooked in a Legislative Council. What would it have been like if women attendees, from all party affiliations, stood up for her and withdrew in protest against insulting jokes and comments they repeatedly face? Wouldn't that have provoked a media and popular outcry that would have taught male politicians a lesson, to stop such violence against women in politics, and showed how unacceptable it is? Women politicians, however, ignored the situation, preferred to remain deadly silent and not to oppose or offend their leaders or male allies, allowing perpetrators to escape accountability despite the high probability that other female colleagues, or even those female politicians themselves, could be targeted in the future.

This submission marks the tokenism of those women. It indicates the extent to which these women are subjected to patriarchal structures, are not independent, are subservient to political patriarchy and are deprived of their freedom of decision-making, in exchange of retaining their positions, while providing absolute non-negotiable support to the “leader.”

As for religious violence, it is considered a political assassination of women. It prevents them from exercising constitutional rights through “religious regulations” relating to their work and to their role in society, confining them to care-taking tasks. In 2016, some religious authority leaders in Hasbaya issued a fatwa prohibiting women from running for elections<sup>42</sup> and imposing religious sanctions on those who do not abide. Religious authorities constitute an influential electoral bloc. They promoted marginalization and discrimination against women and thus contributed to political-religious violence against them, as this discrimination encouraged competing parties

in the region to exclude women from their lists to abide by the fatwa and gain the support of the influential religious authorities.

In the event that women reach political status, they would be subjugated, domesticated and controlled, as was the case with Deputy Rola Al-Tabsh.<sup>43</sup> It was a message to all women, that they do not enjoy independence and freedom of choice, thereby undermining women's self-confidence and sending a message of intimidation to those who aspire to politics. Paradoxically, when some male politicians breach religious instructions and regulations, they benefit from the controversially established clerical "tolerance".

### ● Economic Violence

It is the forced behavior that aims to control and confiscate resources and economic opportunities, such as discrimination and denial of equitable and proportionate access to resources.

It may be an extension of domestic violence, as women may lack financial support from their families, and might be denied inheritance rights.

This lack of access to resources completely hinders or prevents their political activities or deprives them of simple political rights, including voting in elections.

At a partisan level, women may be structurally and systematically prevented from equally accessing the financial and economic resources available to their male counterparts, in particular resources for their electoral campaign or routine political activities. They can also be prone to the destruction of their resources.

At a professional level, women political activists may be discriminated against in the right to employment, payment, promotion or even dismissal from their jobs, and their subsistence might be threatened because of their political stands.

### ● Legislative or Legal Violence

This violence is based on legislative discrimination against women. The Personal Status Laws contain many discriminatory articles,

such as those related to inheritance. Those do not allow women's access to equal resources, whether movable or non-movable assets, such as money and property, thereby affecting their economic and political empowerment.

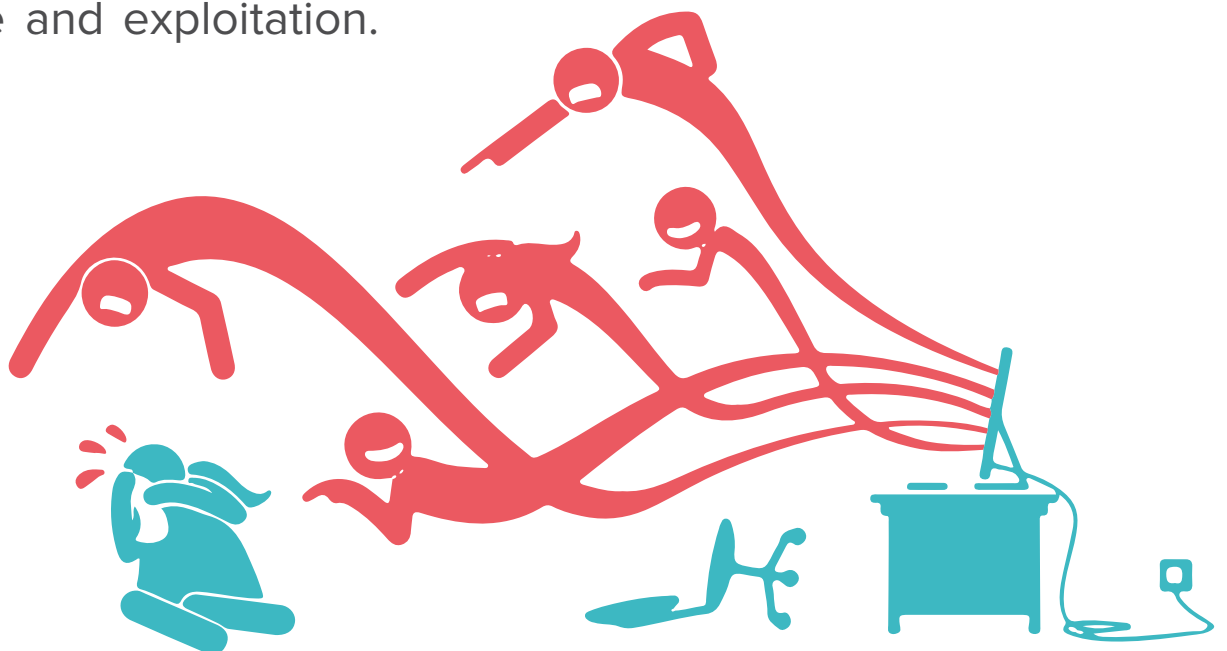
The Nationality Law prohibits Lebanese women's children and husbands from voting for them in the event of their candidacy, while Lebanese foreign wives are allowed to, because of their right to Lebanese citizenship with all civil and political rights.<sup>44</sup>

Furthermore, the current Electoral Law does not provide for any temporary special measure (TSM) or positive discrimination such as gender quotas, to empower women. Moreover, the existence of a sectarian quota creates significant obstacles to women's quantitative and qualitative political participation and representation.

Legal violence includes lack of gender sensitivity in the preparation and drafting of legislations governing public life, on various levels, including laws, regulations and instructions.

The focus should be on ensuring that legislation at all levels is gender sensitive, to enable women to participate equally and proportionally in all spheres, to ensure protection against all forms of violence and discrimination and to contribute to the empowerment of women in accordance with international treaties, most notably CEDAW.

Another aspect of legal violence is manifested in the absence of legal mechanisms for partisan advancement and the reliance of some parties on discretionary appointments which leaves an open wide door to quid pro quo sexual harassment among other types of violence and exploitation.



## ● Cyber Violence

It is the most common and the most challenging type of VAWP for women nowadays because of the psychological, economic and social impact it may have on them.

It includes offending women by bullying them on social media, refraining from positive criticism and projecting mistakes generally on women.

### **Cyber violence takes the following forms:**

- Cyber bullying is the online gender-based bullying, attacking women politicians depending on gender and away from the right to free expression.
- Hacking and Piracy is the targeting and hacking of political women's pages and accounts.
- Stalking is the pursuit of women politicians on all social media and public pages in a way that is intended to harm women involved in public affairs.
- Doxing is disclosing or leaking private information such as a residence address or phone number with threatening intentions.

Social media amplifies violence against women in politics through several ways:

1. The nature of messages facilitates psychological violence.
2. Fake images contribute to sexualized attacks on morality.
3. The scope and speed of dissemination of information and rumors online amplify their impact, regardless of their authenticity.
4. It is difficult to prevent or provide preventive justice, as the perpetrator may impersonate several illusory traits and identities that are difficult to detect. Besides, the occurrence of these crimes is unpredictable.
5. The absence of moral-legal immunity.<sup>45</sup>

For society in general and women in particular, must be aware of the negative effects of misusing technology and how to immunize their accounts to prevent any exploitation or piracy.



# 9

## Who are the perpetrators of violence against women in politics?

Political parties are among the most common perpetrators of political violence. The biggest challenge to the participation of women in elections as candidates, and during the electoral campaign period, according to a study conducted by the National Democratic Institute (NDI), was found to be the discrimination by party members against their female partisans.

Journalists and others who engage in public and political activity may also become perpetrators through certain discriminatory practices. This VAWP by political parties affects not only female opponents, but also female partisans and its perpetrators are both women and men. Parties have the ability to mobilize, especially electronically, because of their organizational structures, financial capabilities and ideological influence, protecting perpetrators who remain anonymous. Those findings of the NDI study were confirmed by female participants in the focus groups conducted for the purpose of our study. They reported that the absence of established party systems in the process of advancement, positions' assumption and decision-making is a form of marginalization that contributes to political violence against women and opens the door to their exploitation through pressure and bargaining. According to one participant, "there are no off-limits in elections", in reference to the intensification of violence with each election whether partisan, municipal, representative or trade union. This applies not only to rivals from different parties, but also to contenders from the same party.

For example, as a type of pressure, a female speaker's voice at a gathering or a rally may be cut, interrupted and covered up. Her opinion and experience undermined and underestimated to prevent her from communicating her opinion. In addition, the female candidate, her family and her familial status are targeted in order to defame her reputation, such as being stigmatized as divorced. Her social

media pages are browsed to alter some of her attitudes or positions and put them out of their genuine context.

The perpetrators, through psychological pressure, attack and direct defamation, aspire to push women competitors into collapse, to portray them as weak and unable to cope, to endure or to persist in difficult situations, and thus constrain the party to exclude them from acceding to decision-making positions.

The more women are in prominent positions, the more intense the violence becomes. The more women are popular and in the spotlight, the more they face various forms of violence and bullying from women and men, to impede their journey and political participation, not only to limit competitors but also because politics is perceived as an exclusive preserve of men and a long-time extension to their leadership. VAWP might also be an expression of rejection of the change agenda that women may carry and that defies the patriarchal customs and traditions.

Furthermore, aspiring people are frequently extorted into political positions, and as financial gifts are exchanged for positions of power, which is considered a bribe and an immoral act, some politicians or partisans expect women aspiring to political office to offer sexual services, as the “cost” to accede into those positions. This extortion falls into the category of violence against women.

As with other types of violence, the incidence of reported violence in politics is much lower than the incidence of the actual prevalence of violence, because of a culture of silence, the fear of social stigma, and the fear of being perceived as vulnerable and ineligible to politics. This under-reporting contributes to impunity, particularly in the absence of apparent bodily harm, and under slow judicial mechanisms that do not promptly guarantee justice and which places the burden of proof upon the victim,<sup>46</sup> and in the absence of a clear legal system that protects women from all forms of violence everywhere, resulting in discrimination and subsequently legal violence.

Many parties have established conduct controls and disciplinary boards to which anyone may have recourse in the event of being

molested or harassed by any means, with the possibility of bringing a judicial action. And although the penalty may amount to dismissal from the party, no complaints have been registered within the parties in this context.

During the October 17th revolution rallies, female activists from the capital and other regions reported that women had been subjected to sexual harassment and abuse by some participants. When they turned to security, some of them were, in multiple incidents, harassed instead of being protected, causing women to stop participating in later rallies.<sup>47</sup>

Violence against women in politics continues to be attributed to public insecurity rather than gender discrimination. Within the patriarchal culture rooted in the fabric of society and our norms and traditions, the issue of violence against women in politics becomes a regular issue that can be tolerated after blaming the victims and stigmatizing them.

In the absence of a law or provisions that guarantee women's rights to access decision-making positions, women remain highly prone to extortion and violence.



# 10

## Recommendations

Women’s right to participate in political and public life is guaranteed under international human rights law, as provided for in articles 7 and 8 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. State parties agreed in article 2 to “condemn discrimination against women in all its forms, agree to pursue by all appropriate means and without delay a policy of eliminating discrimination against women,”<sup>48</sup> by making laws and regulations, implementing policies and changing practices to eliminate discrimination against women, however violence against women in political life has not been addressed by stand-alone provisions.

To this end, state parties should undertake the following:


- (a)** To embody the principle of the equality of men and women in their national constitutions or other appropriate legislation, if not yet incorporated therein, and to ensure, through law and other appropriate means, the practical realization of this principle.
- (b)** To adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women.
- (c)** To establish legal protection of the rights of women on an equal basis with men and to ensure, through competent national tribunals and other public institutions, the effective protection of women against any act of discrimination.
- (d)** To refrain from engaging in any act or practice of discrimination against women and to ensure that public authorities and institutions shall act in conformity with this obligation.
- (e)** To take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization or enterprise.
- (f)** To take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to modify or abolish existing laws, regulations, customs and practices which

constitute discrimination against women.

**(g)** To repeal all national penal provisions which constitute discrimination against women.”

In Lebanese legislation, the victim may resort to several legal articles, such as defamation, slander and libel, attacking public freedoms and other articles of the Penal Code for prosecution, but in the absence of special legislation, criminalization is arduous.

The Inter-Parliamentary Union and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against women have issued some recommendations to the states in order to eliminate this issue.

 Recognizing the issue of “violence against women in politics”, and that it is not the cost that women must pay to participate in political life.

The United Nations’ adoption of November the 25th, the same day the “Trujillo” regime (Dominica) assassinated the opposing “Mirabal” sisters in 1960, as World Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women established a global and an international recognition of this type of violence and that it was not the price that women should pay to participate in politics.

 From the legal scope:

- Proposing and legislating strong and comprehensive laws, or incorporating appropriate provisions into existing laws and applying them strictly to eliminate violence against women in politics, covering all types of assaults and threats, including electronic ones, and relying on effective prosecution and enforcement mechanisms. For example, Bolivia passed in 2012 a special law penalizing all forms of sexual harassment and violence against women in politics, and enhanced it in 2016 by a Ministry of Justice decree prohibiting anyone with a precedent of violence against women from running for political office. Mexico had also amended the Law on Punishment of Violence against Women and the Electoral Law to add the definition of political violence against women, as had Canada and Tunisia.

- Disseminating women’s legal knowledge about protection laws and mechanisms and how to build upon them.
- Strengthening internal mechanisms of policies and laws, to raise awareness and change mindsets about the impact of certain sexual comments, jokes and sexism, especially during parliamentary, governmental and party meetings.
- Encouraging and supporting women to report and to break the silence and the stigma. Protecting them and the witnesses, and not blaming them because they are the survivors.
- Training law enforcement officials and members of the judiciary and military services not to underestimate violence against women and to counter any behaviour that promotes impunity.

### Changing political culture

- Adopting codes of conduct covering all forms of violence and harassment in political workplaces and media.
- Building the capacities of institutions to ensure a violence-free working environment.
- Enhancing the status of women through the solidarity of women activists and politicians, to prevent all types of VAWP, such as the “We have Got Your Back” campaign and other global campaigns, in which women have shown solidarity and made major changes. Another campaign is #MeToo which has put the issue of sexual harassment under the spotlight, broken women’s fear of stigma and condemnation, and led to the worldwide adoption of workplace protection and criminalization legislations against sexual harassment, previously considered a taboo.
- Strengthening the legal basis for gender parity and adopting temporary measures to accelerate the progress towards equality and enhancing women’s participation in political life.
- Collecting and monitoring data, and developing indicators to establish appropriate strategies preventing such situations, and to reflect the prevalence of this phenomenon.
- Empowering women in politics to address violence and to urge them not to be silent, to stand in solidarity and to reject stigma.





## Engaging men in addressing violence against women in politics

- Men are essential in the implemented solutions; they must participate actively in the debate and fully commit themselves to eliminating discrimination against women and discrimination in politics. Men must take a stand and assume their responsibilities alongside women, and recognize the negative impact of their actions on democracy. Minister “Adel Afiouni’s” disapproval of the degrading manner of dialogue with Deputy “Paula Yaacoubian”, and his call for political dialogue away from “rudeness, masculinity and bullying” and “vulgar mockery”, had a positive effect to build on.
- Addressing impunity for some politicians because of immunity that should promote mutual respect and the respect for others’ differences and ideas and not be used to protect the perpetrators of violence.



## Raising awareness

- To develop and disseminate the concept of “violence against women in politics”, through awareness-raising campaigns on the subject and its importance, targeting the public and women and men politicians, in order to change the stereotype of what is allowed/prohibited in politics, and not to condone this act, and to activate the role of popular and community public opinion and to mobilize it, by engaging it in the fight against this violation of democracy.
- Highlighting the efforts, discussions and statements that have been monitored.
- Training journalists on the non-discriminatory treatment of women in general, and women in the public field in particular, in order to stop approaching women in politics from a patriarchal angle, and to halt the entrenchment of male patriarchal ideologies. Journalists should also be trained on the use of non-sexist language and how to respond decisively to these kinds of comments and observations.

- Mobilizing public opinion, transforming societal attitudes and enhancing public awareness to reduce violence and stereotypes.
- Periodic reviewing of scholar textbooks to promote awareness of women's human rights and to change mindsets about the gender role allocations and addressing violence against women.

The word “politics” in English is derived from the Greek “politika”. It refers to the set of activities to make decisions in groups, or other forms of power relations by building human and consultative relationships that enable people to see the collective future of life management. Originally, it does not bear the meaning of violence. But some politicians integrated different concepts to it, such as “Niccolo Machiavelli”, who founded the “end justifies means” rule, which also became the norm for every politician, moral corrupt or tyrannical to justify his actions and to impose his hegemony even by force. For Machiavelli considered fear to be essential for the domination of people.<sup>49</sup> We can, therefore, conclude that gender-based violence is aimed at instilling fear in women who aspire or work in the political sphere, to control and exclude them from political participation.

To seriously combat the phenomenon of violence, the issue must not be fragmented and dealt with in isolation from the issues of society and the nation. The real causes of the increase in the phenomenon should be sought out. It reflects the prevalence of violence against women in the private sphere, which stretches and expands without accountability, to spread across the public space. The issue of violence against women is affected by the country's political, economic, social and cultural problems. Although women's political participation and leadership are not the only factors for achieving general peace and prosperity, but they are essential and crucial to inclusive sustainable development, particularly to the promotion of democracy.

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