

Violence Against Women in Politics and Elections: The Need for Increased Data and Measurement

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On March 14, 2018, black Brazilian activist and politician [Marielle Franco](#) was murdered in Rio De Janeiro. The city councilwoman was an outspoken feminist and human rights defender who decried police violence and gun violence affecting impoverished neighborhoods. On her way home from an event she planned called *Young Black Women Shifting Social Structures*, she and her driver were shot and killed in their car. Following her death, thousands of protesters took to the streets, many holding signs suggesting she was killed because of her activism.

Franco is not the first female politician to be killed for her views. In recent years, women politicians around the world have been victims of online attacks, as well as high-profile acts of physical violence. [Diane Abbott](#), a prominent female Member of Parliament (MP) of color in the United Kingdom, received over 8,000 abusive tweets in the six weeks prior to the 2017 Parliamentary elections. This is a prevalent type of harassment faced by female politicians, and in some cases, this harassment has escalated into physical violence. [Jo Cox](#), British Labour Party MP, was murdered in 2016; the perpetrator attributed his actions to Cox's defense of the European Union and immigrant communities. Bolivian councilor [Juana Quispe](#) was found strangled in 2012; she had been helping other female politicians file harassment complaints. [Angiza Shinwari](#), a provincial councilor in east Afghanistan and advocate for women's rights, was killed by a targeted bomb attack in 2015.

While some may suggest that violence targeting female politicians is simply a result of increasing representation of women in politics, research suggests that female politicians experience violence because they are female, and in gendered ways. This violence can be physical (including sexual), psychological, and/or economic; occurs in both public and private spaces (including online and domestic violence); and is perpetrated both by political opponents and people known to the victims, such as their intimate partners or members of their own political parties ([Bardall/IFES, 2011](#)). A [2016 study](#) conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) surveyed 55 women parliamentarians in 39 countries, focusing on their experiences as politicians and violence they may have experienced. The majority of those surveyed experienced psychological violence: 65% said they had been subjected to humiliating sexist remarks, and 44% reported receiving threats of death, rape, beatings or abduction. This study notes also that these types of violence against female parliamentarians have the intent and impact of dissuading them or female colleagues from participating in politics.

Some organizations have already made important strides in understanding this field and working to mitigate these disturbing trends of violence and harassment, including the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), which are both ACE partners, and UN Women. IFES has created the *Election Violence Education*

Dear readers,

This edition of the ACE Newsletter seeks to shine a light on violence against women in politics and elections and provide readers with an update of work being done in this field. The April 2018 edition of the ACE Newsletter further highlights:

- The latest questions and discussions on the Practitioners' Network
- Updates to the ACE Encyclopaedia
- New Publications and resources from ACE partner organizations

The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network promotes credible and transparent electoral processes with an emphasis on sustainability, professionalism, and trust in the electoral process. ACE offers a wide range of services related to electoral knowledge, assistance, and capacity development.

Thank you for reading April's newsletter and for your involvement with ACE. We look forward to your contributions to the Network!

Sincerely,

The ACE Electoral Knowledge Network

and Resolution (EVER) program, which collects publicly-verifiable data on election-related violence. It has been used in 13 elections since 2003, and there is gender-disaggregated data available for six of these cases. IFES also developed [*Violence Against Women in Elections: A Framework for Assessment, Monitoring, and Response*](#) to identify and address specific challenges related to gender-based violence in elections. In collaboration with UNDP, UN Women has also published [*Preventing Violence Against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide*](#), which seeks to aid technical assistance providers in identifying and documenting Violence Against Women in Elections (VAWE). In addition, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) launched its [*Votes Without Violence*](#) toolkit in 2016, which serves to aid citizen observer groups in collecting data about VAWE in every phase of the electoral cycle.

Violence against women in politics is a burgeoning field of research, but more data needs to be collected to fully understand the nature of the problem, particularly from a comparative perspective. This need informed the setting of a recent workshop on Violence Against Women in Elections, held by The Carter Center's Democracy Program and Emory University's Institute for Developing Nations, following a preliminary 2017 meeting in Uppsala, Sweden. Some of the world's leading scholars in this field attended the workshop including Gabrielle Bardall, Mona Lena Krook, Elin Bjarnegard, and Jennifer Piscopo, as well as representatives of organizations working on violence against women in politics and on broader election issues.

One of the goals of the workshop was to foster collaboration between different stakeholders to fully understand the scale and scope of violence against women in elections, and to think more deeply about the challenges of data collection and analysis. For example, much of psychological violence against women occurs in online spaces, which are difficult to study because of the sheer volume of threats and the anonymity and privacy of perpetrators.

Additionally, violence against women in politics often occurs in the private sphere, which poses barriers to observation. Participants also discussed the roles that different election stakeholders in both the election and human rights arenas can play in addressing these challenges and providing a fuller understanding of women's experiences as candidates, elected officials, election officials, voters and other electoral stakeholders. For example, election observation missions can address data collection challenges by training staff to ask context-specific questions related to women's absence from the electoral process and their experiences of political violence. Additionally, observers and election management bodies can disaggregate data they already collect on physical violence by sex. Election observation missions can also be more intentional in ensuring that gender is streamlined into the recommendations of needs and assessment reports.

The Carter Center shared these reflections and suggestions at a subsequent *Expert Group Meeting on Violence Against Women in Politics*. This meeting was organized by UN Women and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, in collaboration with IPU and NDI, and convened by Dubravka Šimonović, the UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Its Causes and Consequences. The lessons and recommendations shared during this Expert Group Meeting will support a thematic report to be presented by the Special Rapporteur to the UN General Assembly later this year. The meeting is one small part of UN Women's ongoing work to raise awareness and shape policy regarding violence against women in politics.

The impact of violence on elections is recognized as the subject of academic study and targeted programming. Now it is critical that the forms of violence that affect women and adversely impact their political participation, receive equal attention from practitioners, election managers and observation groups. ACE partners are among those charting new paths forward.

Practitioners' Network

Since January, 555

members logged on to the Practitioners' Network and shared their experiences, knowledge and expertise through 72

contributions to questions asked by their peers. Recent questions include: ["Head of list" election model](#), [Election management in autonomous areas](#), [Polling stations staffed by citizens](#), [Observer accreditation by separate body](#), and [Voter registration authorities](#).

[Consolidated replies](#) are published summaries of the discussions on the Practitioners' Network. The following page highlights some recently published consolidated replies, including: [Political Party Registration](#), [Case studies of risk factors for electoral violence](#), [EMBs maintaining level electoral playing field](#), and [Demographic voter information collected by EMBs](#). Dozens of questions have been consolidated already, so be sure to look [here](#) for a full overview.

Join the Network!

- Are you an election practitioner with expertise and experience?
- Are you not yet a member of the ACE Practitioners' Network?

If so, submit an application to be a member of the Practitioners' Network now: www.aceproject.org/apply.

Recently Consolidated Questions

[Political Party Registration](#)

In many countries, including my country of **Ethiopia**, a large number of political parties often contest elections but do not have distinct policy platforms. Ethiopia limits the number of candidates contesting a single member constituency to 12 (if there are nominees in excess of 12, the candidates are chosen by lot).

Rather than limiting the number of candidates eligible to run in an election, do any countries have a mechanism to deny the registration of a political party if it does not have distinct programs or policies from other parties that exist? Do any countries have experience limiting the number of political parties able to register?

[EMBs maintaining level electoral playing field](#)

I am looking for examples of EMBs taking necessary steps to ensure a level playing field in the pre-campaign period/before the announcement of the election schedule. Any specific example or legal framework or code of conduct on this will be welcome.

[Demographic voter information collected by EMBs](#)

Voter turnout is usually reported as an aggregate figure (total vote figure divided by the number of registered or eligible voters). However, in depth understanding of voter participation requires more data about which segments of the population are turning out more or less than the others. My question: are there any electoral management bodies (EMBs) who compile official voter participation data dis-aggregated by gender, age, level of education, level of income, ethnicity, religion, or any other characteristics of voters? I am not interested in survey data, post-election studies, polls, etc. I would like to learn if any EMBs collect administrative data, meaning that they use official voter registration and polling station data to compile dis-aggregated data described above.

ACE Encyclopaedia: The Latest Updates

If you would like to see a particular topic addressed in an ACE Focus On or translated into Spanish, French, or Arabic please send your suggestions to facilitators@aceproject.org.

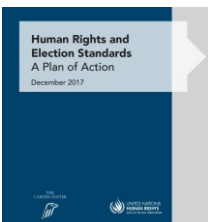
Recent Publications by ACE Partners



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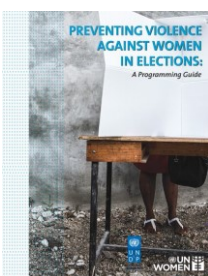
[Abuse of State Resources Research and Assessment Framework: Guidelines for the Democracy and Governance Community of Practice \(IFES\)](#)

IFES recently concluded a two-year Technical Leadership project examining the [abuse of state resources \(ASR\)](#) in election campaigns. This research initiative, funded by the United States Agency for International Development under the Global Elections and Political Transitions mechanism, focused on ASR (sometimes referred to as administrative resources) for the purpose of gaining an electoral advantage. The “Abuse of State Resources Research and Assessment Framework: Guidelines for the Democracy and Governance Community of Practice” is an abbreviated companion document to the complete framework developed in this effort. These guidelines were designed for use by international and domestic civil society actors, implementers, and advocates to evaluate the effectiveness of the ASR legal framework in a given country and develop additional tools for monitoring and advocacy.



[Human Rights and Election Standards: A Plan of Action \(The Carter Center, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights\)](#)

Through their joint initiative on Human Rights and Election Standards, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and The Carter Center have worked to bring the human rights and election communities closer and to foster stronger links and communication between them. This Plan of Action aims to advance human rights related to genuine democratic elections by charting a course of practical steps toward our shared goals. The draft plan was developed based on the recommendations formulated through consultations that took place between 2015 and 2017. Going forward, organizations and individuals may agree on an ad-hoc basis to disseminating and acting upon the recommendations in this Plan of Action. The publication is also available in [French](#) and [Spanish](#).



[Preventing Violence Against Women in Elections: A Programming Guide \(UNDP, UN Women\)](#)

This publication seeks to identify the specific components of violence against women in elections, including types, tactics, victims and perpetrators, and presents options for policy and programming responses based on current good practices. It also provides examples of definitions and methods from all regions that may prompt ideas for actions according to each country's national context. This guide is intended for those best positioned to prevent and mitigate violence against women in elections, including national electoral stakeholders, international organizations such as UNDP, UN Women and other UN agencies, as well as those providing programming support on electoral assistance, women's political participation, human rights monitoring and ending violence against women. It will also be a resource for members and especially leaders of political parties, electoral management bodies, civil society organizations, women's groups and gender equality activists.