

# **A CEDAW Shadow Reporting Methodology For Violence Against Women In Politics**



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This note prepared by the National Democratic Institute (NDI),<sup>1</sup> provides guidance to civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the development of a shadow report on violence against women in politics (VAW-P).<sup>2</sup> Following the submission of official reports by states, a shadow report on VAW-P can be presented to the United Nations (UN) Committee on the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as part of a larger shadow report or alongside other thematic shadow reports from civil society in that country.

## The Issue of Violence Against Women in Politics

A growing number of reports from around the world indicate that as more women have stepped into the political arena, they are met by acts of violence. In 2016, responding to the rising outcry against the violence experienced by politically-active women around the world, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) launched the #NotTheCost campaign<sup>3</sup> - a global call to action to stop violence against women in politics. Political violence can be experienced by both men and women, however, the specific issue of VAW-P has three distinct characteristics: it targets women because they are women; its very form can be gendered, as exemplified by sexist threats and sexual violence; and its impact is to discourage women in particular from being or becoming politically-active. While acts of violence against women in politics are directed at individual women, they have a meaning beyond their specific target: to frighten other women who are already politically-active, to deter women who might consider engaging in politics, and to communicate to society that women should not participate in public life in any capacity. In these ways, VAW-P is a human rights abuse, a denial of women's civil and political rights, and it undermines the integrity of democratic processes.

## Defining VAW-P

Violence against women in politics encompasses any act of gender-based violence (GBV) – whether in person or online – or threat of such acts, that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering, and that is directed against a woman in politics because she is a woman, or that affects women disproportionately. This definition recalls the definitions of GBV included in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (art. 1) and in general recommendation No. 19 (1992) on violence against women (para. 7) and general recommendation No. 35 (2017) on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women.<sup>4</sup> This definition fits within the existing

1 The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization working to support and strengthen democratic institutions worldwide through citizen participation, openness and accountability in government. With more than three decades of experience in 132 countries, NDI is the leading organization working to advance women's political participation around the world. The Institute supports women's aspirations for inclusive and responsive government, by ensuring that they are able to participate, compete and lead as equal and active partners in democratic change whether as citizen activists, voters, political party workers, candidates or decision-makers.

2 While it has been developed for the specific issue of violence against women in politics, this guidance can be used to develop a shadow CEDAW report on any issue.

3 National Democratic Institute. 2016, "NotTheCost Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics." <https://www.ndi.org/not-the-cost>.

4 Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on

framework of the 1993 United Nations (UN) Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.<sup>5</sup>

## Introduction to CEDAW

On 18 December 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. It entered into force as an international treaty on 3 September 1981 after the twentieth country had ratified it, and by 1989, almost one hundred nations had agreed to be bound by its provisions.

The implementation of CEDAW is monitored by the CEDAW Committee. The Committee's mandate and the administration of the treaty are defined in Articles 17 to 30 of the Convention. The Committee is composed of 23 experts nominated by their governments and elected by the States parties as individuals "of high moral standing and competence in the field covered by the Convention."

At least every four years, the States parties who have signed CEDAW, are expected to submit a national report to the Committee indicating the measures they have adopted to give effect to the provisions of the Convention. During its annual session, the Committee members discuss these reports with the Government representatives and explore with them areas for further action by the specific country. The Committee also makes general recommendations to the States parties on matters concerning the elimination of discrimination against women.

## CEDAW Articles relevant to the issue of VAW-P

Articles of CEDAW that specifically relate to the issue of VAW-P, include Articles 7 and 8.

### Article 7:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right: (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government; (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country.

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violence against women in politics, A/73/301, United Nations General Assembly, 2018, <http://undocs.org/en/A/73/301>

5 The 1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defines violence against women as, a range of gender-based harm which can occur in the private or public space and is "one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men. Violence against women in politics fits easily within this definition. United Nations. 1993, "Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women." <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>.

## Article 8:

States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to ensure to women, on equal terms with men and without any discrimination, the opportunity to represent their Governments at the international level and to participate in the work of international organizations.

## Shadow Reporting and the Simplified Reporting Procedure

CEDAW requires each state that has ratified the convention to submit a report to the CEDAW Committee detailing the steps the state took to implement the rights CEDAW defines. In some cases, government reports to the CEDAW Committee may (intentionally or not) misrepresent or otherwise distort the degree to which progress has been made. This might include overstating progress achieved or interventions implemented since the time of their last CEDAW report, minimizing or omitting challenges or regression since the state's last CEDAW report, or otherwise excluding important context or misrepresenting the way changes or a lack of changes or data are presented. A shadow report is a formal review of the state's report prepared by one or multiple civil society organizations. Shadow reports can help to provide the CEDAW Committee with context not included in the state's report, and about which the Committee may be unaware, or may provide a counter-narrative to information presented by the state in their CEDAW report. Shadow reports can present the CEDAW Committee with a fuller and more accurate accounting of a state's actions (or inaction) to address its commitments under CEDAW and to implement recommendations from the CEDAW Committee. Once submitted for review by the CEDAW Committee, the shadow report becomes as much a part of the official record as the report the state submits and is given as much consideration as the information presented by the state.

In March 2018, the CEDAW Committee reinstated **the simplified reporting procedure**. This new procedure allows for civil society organizations **to submit shadow reports on thematic issues related to the CEDAW Convention**. NDI seeks to encourage civil society organizations to submit shadow reports on the thematic issue of **violence against women in politics** (VAW-P), specifically to raise the profile of the issue at national and international levels, instigate more routine data collection, documentation and reporting on VAW-P, and ultimately to stop this global problem.

## Things to Keep in Mind When Writing a Shadow Report

There are three phases in writing a shadow report on any issue. In the first phase, you have to set the stage for your report. This includes **identifying allies or partners** and **reviewing the process** to submit your report.

### Identifying allies or partners

While it is possible for an organization to prepare and submit a shadow report independently, it is common – and generally considered a good practice – for multiple allied organizations to partner together in alliance or establish a formal coalition to prepare and submit either one joint shadow report or a broader collection of more narrowly-focused shadow reports. The purpose for this is both practical and strategic. First, the procedures to produce shadow reports, particularly the data collection process and the report-writing

process, can be both technically demanding and time-consuming, requiring personnel with significant time dedicated to these tasks and with various areas of issue expertise and research and report writing skills. Second, shadow reports submitted by a coalition or alliance can be more impactful or influential than those submitted by a single organization. This is due in part to the fact that having a diversity of stakeholders involved in the process can lead to a more representative report, incorporating a broader array of perspectives and experiences. Reports that are submitted jointly by a broad set of stakeholders also demonstrate that there is consensus around the findings and opinions included in the report and that there is broad support for the recommendations presented in the report.

When thinking about potential partners to form a coalition or alliance, consider which organizations or experts are allied with your organization and would be likely to want to collaborate or sign on to the shadow report. It may also be strategic to think about potential partners that would help fill gaps in your organization's expertise or that have complementary expertise. It is strategic to select partners that represent a collective of diverse women's rights organizations rather than a single entity. And while geographic diversity is important – particularly in large countries where national-level VAW-P data collection can demand more resources and pose more challenges – it is also crucial that partner organizations have at least a basic understanding of women's political participation or VAW-P, if not some expertise in (women's) political participation. Given the scope, complexity and time-intensity of the data collection process, it is ideal to have at least one partner that already has a routine documentation process for in-person and online VAW-P or experience gathering, analyzing and reporting on this data.

If you do not formally establish a coalition or alliance with other organizations, it is still a good idea to identify allies who are willing to sign on to your report and join in advocacy efforts to promote the report findings and lobby for the uptake of the recommendations presented. These allies could include other CSOs or NGOs, human rights defenders and activists, subject matter experts, academics or researchers, values-aligned celebrities or influencers, journalists or other members of the media, supportive politicians or members of government (in countries where the relationship between government and civil society is safe to engage in this way), and politically-active women who are willing to champion the campaign and potentially share their own experiences of VAW-P.

## Reviewing the process

You need to examine deadlines pertaining to your country shadow report<sup>6</sup> and when your country is scheduled for review by CEDAW.<sup>7</sup> You should submit the shadow report to align with the country's official report submission to CEDAW. Aligning the timing of your submission with the CEDAW Committee calendar for the country's report submission can help you to leverage the momentum and influence generated by the national reporting process. After finding the deadlines pertaining to your submission and review date, you will need to examine what has happened so far in the review process, including reading the outcome of the last review, the government's last report submitted and the CEDAW

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6 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, (2024), "2024 Deadlines for the submission of documentation." Available at: [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/TreatyBodyExternal/MasterCalendar.aspx](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/TreatyBodyExternal/MasterCalendar.aspx).

7 United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, (2024), "2024 Expected date of consideration." Available at: [https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/\\_layouts/TreatyBodyExternal/MasterCalendar.aspx?Type=Session&Lang=En](https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/TreatyBodyExternal/MasterCalendar.aspx?Type=Session&Lang=En).

Committee’s list of issues and the government’s response, if any. You should also read the reports submitted by other CSOs or NGOs in the past.<sup>8</sup>

*The second phase* involves planning and gathering the necessary information to form your shadow report – specifically, **making a work plan**. Think through what your organization has done on the topic with any specialized knowledge and who the organization has worked with. This will better inform your goal setting and planning for the review itself. Then develop a work plan pertaining to: how you will gather information; the timeline to submit your report, aligned to the CEDAW Committee’s calendar and corresponding with the timeline for state actions; and how you will advocate to your community on the findings and recommendations. When gathering information, especially if it is from women who are survivors of any type of violence, please be sure to have resources available in case the discussion triggers traumatic responses. Resources could include a local trauma-informed counselor, domestic violence advocate, or a phone number to a local hotline to report violence. Please see the Program Guidance document, *A How-to Note on Preparing a Shadow Report to the CEDAW Committee on Violence Against Women in Politics*, for more information and resources related to the ethical conduct of research with survivors of gender-based violence. These resources include information about how to respond if you receive disclosures of experiences of in-person or online VAW-P or other gender-based violence during your research.

The shadow reporting process is time-intensive and can significantly encumber your organization’s human resources if not planned carefully. Think strategically about the division of labor and staffing and oversight needs across your shadow reporting team and for the entire shadow reporting process (e.g., will you need to hire one or more staff to lead or support data collection, data analysis or report-writing?). If additional financial resources are needed to secure the appropriate staffing, you may need to pursue additional funding opportunities or consider strategic partnerships (e.g., with international NGOs or donor organizations) to support this work.

*The third phase* involves implementing your shadow report, which includes: **identifying your data sources and gathering data; writing your report and submitting it to the CEDAW Committee by the deadline; and implementing your advocacy and communications strategy.** **Data collection** should include both secondary and primary data sources and a variety of data collection methods (please see the Program Guidance document, *A How-to Note on Preparing a Shadow Report to the CEDAW Committee on Violence Against Women in Politics*, for illustrative data sources and data collection methods). When **writing** your report, it is important to include documentation, such as statistics, legal cases, individual testimonies, interviews, focus group reports or surveys of women in politics, news clips, academic research, provisions of national and local laws, and regulations. Any case histories and testimony should be complete, providing enough detail to indicate the impact of particular actions or inaction by the government or government agencies. **Advocating** your report could include: engaging in education and outreach within your organization, to the public and to the media; developing and implementing additional strategies to use your report to promote justice for your community over the long-term; and monitoring the implementation for the next review.

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<sup>8</sup> All information submitted to the CEDAW Committee, including information submitted by CSOs and NGOs, can be found on the main CEDAW Committee website. United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, (2024), “Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.” Available at: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/pages/cedawindex.aspx>.

## How to submit your shadow report

Most CEDAW Committee members want to have written shadow reports as a basis for asking the States useful questions. Details of how to have your shadow report reach CEDAW Committee members can be found [here](#).

- ▶ To reach Committee members well in advance of the session, shadow reports should be submitted by email to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights at [cedaw@ohchr.org](mailto:cedaw@ohchr.org).
- ▶ The Office will place the report on the CEDAW session website for reference by all the experts.
- ▶ To have **hard copies** of the shadow report distributed to the experts at the session, send 40 copies to the OHCHR to arrive at least one week prior to the first day of the session. Address: CEDAW Secretariat, UNOG-OHCHR, CH-1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland.
- ▶ NGOs may also send reports via International Women's Rights Action Watch Asia Pacific (IWRAP-AP), which will send electronic and/or hard copies directly to the experts.

## Introduction to NDI's Shadow Report Tool

NDI's goal is to help women overcome the barriers to their equal and active political participation. Violence against women in politics acts as a significant barrier to women's political participation, undermining democratic culture and practice. The questions found on this template are **a prompt and a guide** to collecting information needed to analyze the State's progress, as well as implementation gaps, and submit a shadow report on the thematic issue of violence against women in politics. The guide is not exhaustive – that is, we have not attempted to provide all the questions you could ask. There may be some questions which are specific to your particular political context that only you and your colleagues can draft, so do add them to your information gathering exercise. The response to the questions will help lay the framework of the full shadow report.

Similarly, because this guide is a global tool meant for use in many different political and country contexts, there may be some questions in the guide that you determine to be less relevant to your country context, or for which you are unable to obtain data. For these reasons, it is necessary when planning for data collection and developing data collection tools that you adapt the guide and associated questions to your context. ***It is important to stress, however, that if no data related to a specific question or issue exists in the country, this is an important finding in itself and should be included in your shadow report.*** Data and the absence of data can indicate both a state's commitment to achieving women's political empowerment and to overall gender equality. In other words, a state cannot fulfill its obligations to CEDAW if data does not exist on the topic.

In order to make an assessment of the extent to which in-person and online VAW-P affects women's political ambitions, opportunities, and influence, and the impact that this has on democracy, there are three main areas of your country's socio-political context that the template will help you to explore:

1. women's political participation in the country;
2. aspects of the country's political institutions and democratic practices that are relevant to the issue of VAW-P (e.g. political party nomination processes); and
3. the general level of violence that women in the country face.

Specifically, the questions in NDI's shadow report template are designed to help you gather information about:

- ▶ women's ability to be politically-active, as measured by their roles as activists, human rights defenders, voters, members of civil society, journalists, party members, candidates, electoral workers, elected or appointed officials at any level, and members of civil service or public administration;
- ▶ the extent to which women face violence (including online harassment, violence, or abuse) in the course of their political work;
- ▶ the types of violence women experience and the perpetrators of that violence;
- ▶ whether there is any recourse or redress for the violence women face, or any sanctions for the perpetrators of that violence; and
- ▶ the impact of the violence women experience on their political ambitions, opportunities, and influence.

## The Shadow Report Template

### Legal Frameworks and Democratic Health

In order to consider the level of risk to women's political participation, you need to gather information on the current level and ability of women to be politically-active in the country, as measured by its legal frameworks and overall democratic health.

*Please use the following as guiding questions:*

#### Overall Democratic Health of the Country<sup>9</sup>

- ▶ Are citizens allowed to form political and civic organizations, free of state interference and surveillance?
- ▶ Is there an effective system of checks and balances on the exercise of government authority?

<sup>9</sup> This section is based on the Economist Intelligence Unit's Democracy Index. See here: Economist Intelligence Unit, (2017), "Democracy Index 2017." Available at: [http://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/Democracy\\_Index\\_2017.pdf](http://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/Democracy_Index_2017.pdf).



- ▶ Are sufficient mechanisms and institutions in place for ensuring government accountability to the electorate in between elections?
- ▶ Does the government's authority extend over the full territory of the country?
- ▶ Is the functioning of government open and transparent, with sufficient public access to information?
- ▶ How pervasive is corruption?
- ▶ Do institutions provide citizens with the opportunity to petition the government to redress grievances?
- ▶ Are civil society, politicians, journalists, activists and human rights defenders, and the country's residents free to criticize or speak openly about the government without fear of targeting, harassment, violence, legal persecution, or other threats to their freedom and safety?

### Women's Legal Rights

- ▶ Are women and men treated equally under the law?
- ▶ Are women allowed to own land, property, and/or a private business free from undue government influence?
- ▶ Does the government invoke new risks and threats as an excuse for curbing women's human rights and civil liberties?
- ▶ Is violence against women a crime?

### Participation in Politics, Elections and Civic Life

- ▶ Are women able to participate freely in politics? In public administration or civil service? In journalism? In activism? In civil society? Are there any laws that either protect or limit their participation?
- ▶ Is there a women's quota implemented at any level of politics in the country? If yes, please list each level and each quota.
  - ▷ If yes, is the quota respected and fully implemented?
  - ▷ If the quota is not fully implemented, please explain why.
- ▶ Do women have access to positions in civil service or public administration?
  - ▷ Are there any laws that guarantee equal opportunities for their promotion into leadership positions?
- ▶ Do women have access to (elected or appointed) decision-making positions in ministries or independent and government institutions?
  - ▷ Are there any laws or decrees that either promote or limit their participation in these roles?

- ▶ Do special economic, religious, or other powerful domestic groups, including non-state actors and armed groups, exercise significant political power over the rights of women, parallel to democratic institutions?
- ▶ Are elections for the national legislature and head of government free to both men and women? Consider gathering answers in relation to the following options:
  - ▷ Essentially unrestricted conditions for the presentation of candidates (for example, no bans on major parties).
  - ▷ There are some restrictions on the electoral process.
  - ▷ A single-party system or major impediments exist (for example, bans on a major party or candidate).
- ▶ Are elections for the national legislature and head of government fair to both men and women? Consider gathering answers in relation to the following options:
  - ▷ No major irregularities in the voting process.
  - ▷ Significant irregularities occur (intimidation, fraud), but do not significantly affect the overall outcome.
  - ▷ Major irregularities occur and affect the outcome.
- ▶ Are municipal elections both free and fair to both men and women?
- ▶ Can women cast their vote free of significant threats to their security? Consider threats from state or non-state bodies, as well as shame or stigma from their community. Also consider whether the state or election management body has taken specific steps to protect women against these threats.
- ▶ Is violence against politically-active women (whether online or offline) a crime? If so, please collect details of the statute, and recorded levels of investigation, prosecution and punishment of any perpetrators. This is a measure of the level of impunity that exists.

## Institutions

What are different institutions in the country, including political parties and the police, doing to promote women's participation in politics and to protect politically-active women against violence?

*Please use the following as guiding questions:*

### Political Parties

- ▶ What is the percentage of the membership of political parties by gender? What percentage of party leaders are women?
- ▶ Are political parties state funded? If yes, are any of these funds set aside for targeted support to women, youth, and/or other marginalized populations (LGBTI, persons with disabilities, ethnic or religious minorities, etc.)?

- ▶ Is the process of financing political parties transparent, generally accepted and available equally to both men and women candidates?
- ▶ Do parties allocate their own funding equitably between men and women candidates?
- ▶ How are primaries, candidate selection, and party lists managed by the parties?
  - ▷ Are they accompanied by violence or threats of violence?
  - ▷ Do parties provide security? If so, is this provided equitably between men and women candidates?
- ▶ Are there any requirements for parties to have internal rules and regulations on anti-violence before they can register as a political party?

## Police<sup>10</sup>

- ▶ If violence against women is a crime, do the police respond to women's security needs in accordance with the law?
- ▶ Are there any special procedures, training, or laws for police to deal with violence against women and girls?
- ▶ How many incidents of violence against women in politics have been reported to the police or relevant government authorities?
- ▶ How many incidents of violence against women in politics (both in person and online) have been investigated? How many of these incidents have been prosecuted?
  - ▷ Who were the perpetrators of the violence against women in politics? Was any action taken against the perpetrators? If so, what?
- ▶ Do the police provide any support to survivors of violence?

## Socio-Cultural Norms

How do socio-cultural norms affect how women in politics are perceived by the public and portrayed by the media? How do these perceptions and portrayals impact women's level of risk to freely participate in politics?

*Please use the following as guiding questions:*

- ▶ Perception of Women in Politics and Public Sphere
- ▶ What percentage of the population believes that women are essential for maintaining democracies?
- ▶ What percentage of the population believes that women working in the economy benefit democracy and the economic system?

<sup>10</sup> See the figures from Georgetown University's Women, Peace and Security Index as one reference point. Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, (2018), "Women, Peace and Security Index." Available at: <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/WPS-Index-Report-2017-18.pdf>.

- ▶ How are politically-active women treated online? Is online violence against women in politics common? What form does this usually take?
- ▶ What is the use of gender in political discourse? Have there been instances of disinformation or misinformation targeting politically-active women?

### Media Environment

- ▶ What percent interest does the adult population have in following politics in the news (print, TV or radio)? What are the most common types of media used by the public to follow politics (including social media platforms)?
- ▶ Is there a free electronic and print media?
- ▶ Do women politicians have equal access to the media?
- ▶ Is media coverage of women politicians equal to that of politicians who are men?
- ▶ Have any incidents of violence against women in politics (in person or online) been reported in the media?

## Recommendations

After considering the questions above, reflect on the responses you have gathered before writing your findings and conclusions. Once those are done, think about what recommendations you should make to actors at the international, regional, national and local levels in order to stop, address or mitigate violence against politically-active women.

*The questions below can help you frame your response.*

- ▶ What actions can be taken to prevent, address, and/or sanction violence against women in politics by individuals and organizations on the international and regional levels? (This can include the UN or regional bodies.)
- ▶ What actions can be taken to prevent, address, and/or sanction violence against women in politics by individuals and organizations nationally in your country and to ensure that women who experience gender-based violence in politics can obtain redress? (This can include the government, police and justice sector, political parties or the election commission.)
- ▶ What actions can be taken to prevent, address, and/or sanction violence against women in politics by individuals and organizations locally in your country and to ensure that women who experience gender-based violence in politics can obtain redress? (This can include local victim support service providers, local government or civil society groups.)

- ▶ What are examples of good practices, legal and policy frameworks for addressing violence against women in politics that exist in your country? If there are none, provide examples from other countries or regions in the world that you think your country could adopt at the regional or international level.
- ▶ In your view, what further measures could be taken to address violence against women in politics in your country, and more generally accelerate gender equality and the political empowerment of women? (This can include action to change or mitigate the impact of social norms that inform the way women and men are seen by society or specific communities in your country).

***When you have finished writing your recommendations, please submit your shadow report as required by the instructions on page four of this guidance.***

An initiative of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI)

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