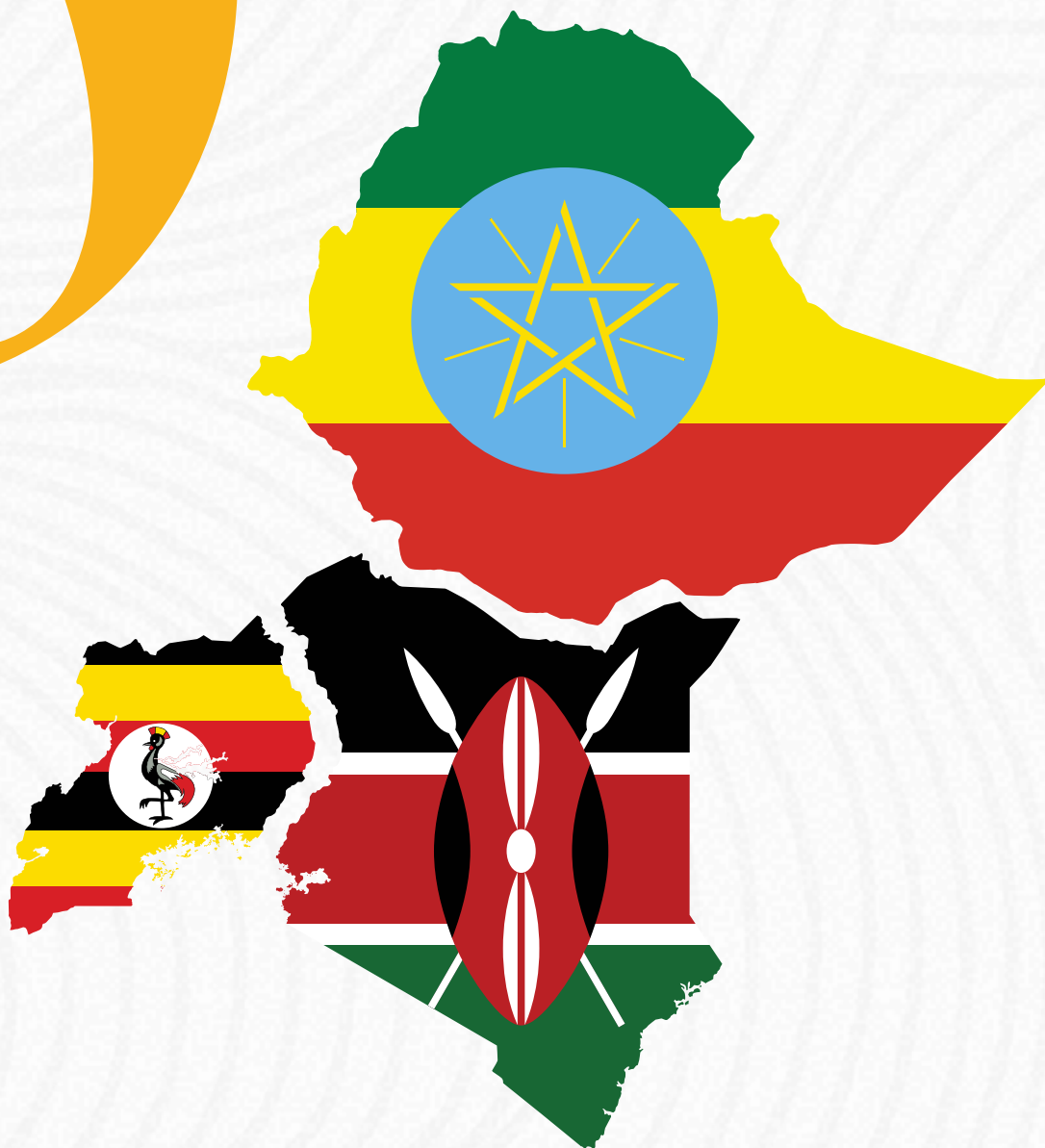




VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

Feminine Perspectives and Frontiers from
Uganda, Kenya & Ethiopia.



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Key Facts:

- Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP), influenced by non-transformative social norms, is a display of the continuum of gender-based violence (GBV). It is designed to silence women in politics and prevent them from participating in politics.
- VAWP manifests in physical violence, intimidation, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and economic harm online and offline.
- Women politicians with disabilities are adversely affected by VAWP which includes offline and online ridicule. Women with disabilities are twice as likely to experience GBV than non-disabled women, yet there has been a lack of attention to this issue¹.
- The effects of VAWP include psychological and emotional harm, physical scars, decreased representation of women in political office, limited influence in advocacy and policy conversations, increased barriers to networking and alliance building.
- The experience of VAWP isn't uniform; it's shaped by intersecting identities, such as race, sexuality, and disability, which amplify the effects and risks.
- An Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) survey found 80% of women parliamentarians in 50 African countries faced psychological violence online, 67% experienced sexist behavior, and 46% were targeted with online sexist attacks².
- Attacks against women are more likely to go viral due to the "shock factor" of breaking gender norms, worsening psychological and reputational damage.
- Women receive more threats of physical harm, including rape and death threats targeting them, their families, and supporters.
- Unlike men, women experience online VAWP that persists beyond elections, with sustained abuse while online attacks against men tend to decline.



¹ Goulden, A et al. (2023). Experiences of Gender-Based Violence Among Disabled Women: A Qualitative Systematic Review and Meta-Synthesis Protocol. International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 22. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231183763>

² IPU, Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians, 2016, <https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-parliamentarians>.

Executive Summary:

This policy brief has been commissioned by Womankind Worldwide through its AWESOME (Advancing Women's Engagement: Strengthening Opportunities to Mobilise for Equality) project which is being implemented in Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia. The aim of the AWESOME project is to contribute towards strengthening women's movements in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda, with a focus on the inclusion of women with disabilities in the mainstream feminist movement. This effort will result in a stronger collective voice to challenge social norms and influence policies and key decisions affecting them. The project focuses on catalysing an in-depth understanding of key factors and issues influencing women's participation and leadership through documenting and strengthening of intersectional feminist movements.

In many societies, gender norms evolve from various spectrums including the gender unequal, gender blind, gender aware, gender responsive and gender transformative spectrums.³ Milestones such as women's rights to vote and contest in elections have taken centuries to achieve. Despite societal norms tying women's value to homemaking, many African women have attained political leadership, supported by communal indigenous systems that embraced diverse gender roles.

Global efforts to boost women's political participation urge equality, but barriers like entrenched gender norms and Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP) persist, as seen in Ethiopia, Uganda, and Kenya.

VAWP is often invisible and enduring, seeking to silence women in politics, with intersecting identities. This is evident through the intersection of VAWP amongst women with disabilities, young women (under 40), unmarried women, women from minority groups, or in opposition parties who face heightened risks, particularly during elections. Advocates for gender equality are especially vulnerable.

During Kenya's 2017 and 2022 elections, women candidates faced physical attacks, sexual violence, and online abuse. For example, Psychologist Liz Njue, running for a county assembly seat, was assaulted during her party primary. Her hair pulled, blouse torn, and forced to flee without voting, ultimately losing the race. Dozens of female candidates experienced similar violence⁴.

The Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC) and UN Women's 2021 Rapid Assessment shows that women candidates in Ethiopia's elections face widespread gender-motivated verbal and physical violence, both online and offline⁵.

In Uganda, despite parliamentary action against sexual harassment, patriarchy continues to normalise VAWP within political structures. For instance, Doreen Nyanjura, a 2026 presidential candidate, has faced misogynistic attacks on various social media platforms including X. Critics have insisted she marry before running for office, arguing that Uganda cannot be led by an unmarried woman⁶.

VAWP is a violation of the human and political rights of women, with long-lasting and harmful effects on those affected, on democratic processes and on political institutions, as well as on society as a whole.

³ INEE, 2019 Guidance Note Gender Equality in and Through Education.

⁴ Mersie, A. and Omondi, J. (2022) 'Women candidates in Kenyan elections endure abuse and attacks', Reuters, 1 August. Available at: Women candidates in Kenyan elections endure abuse and attacks | Reuters (Accessed: 30 November 2024).

⁵ Gender based hate speech, violence against women participating in electoral process must be prevented - Ethiopian Human Rights Commission - EHRC' (2021). Available at: <https://ehrc.org/gender-based-hate-speech-and-violence-against-women-participating-in-electoral-processes-must-be-prevented/> (Accessed: 2 December 2024).

⁶ CNN, By Adie Vanessa Offiong, 25 May 2023 accessed from Ugandan women politicians are standing up to the online bullies -- and want more women to do the same - CNN on 13 December 2024.

On the other hand, male politicians' marital status is rarely questioned, underscoring the deep-rooted patriarchy that excludes women from politics. In Uganda, women face arrest threats during campaigns, often extended to their families, forcing many into hiding. Despite symbolic gains in Ethiopia after the 2018 reform, structural barriers, state violence, male-coded norms, and media sexism persist. These challenges, shaped by historical and political factors, affect women differently. Policy makers must address intersectionality, focusing on diverse needs of WPP. VAWP's overlap with age, socio-economic status, disability, and marital status further marginalises women, limiting political participation.

Introduction:

While both women and men in politics face violence, acts of violence against women are often gender-based, aimed at discouraging their political activism, restricting their participation, and preventing them from exercising their human rights⁷. Violence against women in politics undermines gender equality and the advancement of democracy. It differs from general political violence, which targets both men and women, by specifically aiming to exclude women from the political arena.

Women in politics face physical, psychological, and economic violence, sexist attitudes, and online attacks to limit their participation⁸. Economic violence against women in politics includes denial of funds, discriminatory resource allocation, and destruction of personal property. Physical violence threatens women's lives, while psychological violence, such as verbal attacks and insults, aims to silence them. Additionally, online spaces expose women and girls to various forms of sexist violence⁹.

In many African countries, including Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia, the intersection of politics and technology has created significant challenges for women. Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) hampers women's political participation, with online violence being particularly prevalent. An IPU study reveals that 42% of women parliamentarians have received death threats, rape threats, or threats of beating or abduction, usually online¹⁰.

Violence against women in politics is all acts of violence directed against women because of their gender to “discourage them from engaging in political activities and exercising their human rights, as well as to influence, restrict, or prevent their individual or collective participation in political life” ...

IPU



⁷ National Democratic Institute (NDI), Not the Cost: Stopping Violence against Women in Politics, Washington, 2016 in the Report Violence against women in politics, presented to the United Nations General Assembly by the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, Dubravka Šimonović, 2018.

⁸ International IDEA, 2024, Women in Political Participation Barometer

⁹ Cyber Violence against Women and Girls – A report by the UN Broadband Commission for Digital Development Working Group on broadband and Gender, 2015.

¹⁰ Ibid

VAWP – A Continuum of Violence



The Drivers of VAWP are both structural and political. Special measures meant to increase the proportion of women in politics are met with unfavourable conditions such as decisions being made in the middle of the night...”

Georgia Tumwesigye, FOWODE

Cultural values, lack of support, and dictatorships exacerbate VAWP and patronage systems. Women with disabilities in particular face heightened risks, requiring extra effort to participate in political engagement. Body shaming, online violence, and economic dependency amongst other barriers, deter engagement, while election costs undermine women’s ability to fulfil their mandates and harm credibility.

Cultural norms restricting women’s leadership must be challenged. Women with disabilities face heightened VAWP due to patriarchal and ableist social norms that support the idea that women that are physically or mentally impaired are unable to occupy positions of power. In Kenya, nomination quotas are undermined by discrimination, while young women face violence due to both their age and patriarchy. In Uganda, misogyny exposes women to hostility, sexual violence, and discriminatory practices that hinder affirmative action.

Political, economic, social, and cultural factors shape VAWP. Weak justice systems, impunity, and structural violence enables perpetrators to act without facing any consequences, denying victims redress. In Uganda, for instance, women continue to experience increasing pressure from both their husbands and society to undergo FGM. This pressure stems from their exclusion from leadership roles in community activities, such as serving elders, collecting food, and attending traditional meetings, despite the existence of legal protections. Girls living in border communities, particularly the Pokot and Sabinu communities along the eastern border with Kenya, are especially vulnerable¹¹.



“We need to work together as women politicians within the regional bloc to ensure we discourage and ultimately eradicate cross-border Female Genital Mutilation as this is often used to discredit women politicians...”

Kabahenda Flavia Rwabuhoro, Ugandan Politician

For example, deep-rooted political violence in Ethiopia has shrunk civic space, limiting dialogue between ruling and opposition parties. Crackdowns on media and human rights defenders, along with opposition groups operating in exile, have polarised politics and reduced women’s participation.

¹¹ <https://www.femnet.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/UGANDA-final-min.pdf>

Economic violence in politics disproportionately impacts women, as the monetisation of campaigns places them at a significant disadvantage. Women, especially those who are nominated, face online violence and are targeted for “taking a man’s seat,” reinforcing patriarchal narratives. Addressing this requires a feminist approach to reshape narratives, promote women’s participation, enact supportive laws, and dismantle unequal power structures through collective, non-capitalist strategies.

Intersectionality in VAWP

Overlapping identities and VAWP

Intersectional discrimination and VAWP affect women across various intersecting identities such as age, disability, sexual minorities minority, and marital status, particularly unmarried women. This overlapping social identities create unique vulnerabilities for each woman in all their diversities. Crenshaw’s intersectionality framework¹² highlights the importance of an approach that considers these intersecting identities, acknowledging that marginalized groups face multiple dimensional challenges¹³. For example, women with disabilities may face higher violence levels; or young, single women are often seen as sexually available, while widows and those defying beauty or gender norms face compounded harassment.

Political violence & VAWP - Political violence and VAWP often overlap, particularly for women in opposition, who face heightened violence. Women within their own parties may also be seen as rivals, intensifying the violence they endure. Women politicians advocating for women’s rights or gender equality face heightened violence, especially when taking a feminist stance or supporting gender and reproductive health laws. Political parties, which influence policy and candidate selection, are often frequent perpetrators of violence¹⁴.

Technology Facilitated Violence & VAWP - As women amplify their campaigns online, technology-facilitated violence rises, aiming to silence and prevent their political participation. While social media policies exist, they often fail to stop online violence, with VAWP’s intersectionality with age, disability, and the queer community particularly evident. VAWP occurs both offline and online, perpetrated by politicians, constituents, family, voters, religious leaders, media, State actors, anonymous trolls, and bots. Limited data, fear of retaliation, stigma, and disbelief hinder reporting, while risks of reputational damage during elections exacerbate the problem. Sexism, harassment, and violence against women in politics remain pervasive, varying by context.

Multiple and cross-cutting forms of discrimination can lead to an exponential increase in VAWP. The intersectional nature of the discrimination reveals that some women politicians, in particular are even more vulnerable to violence.

-IPU

¹² [Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color on JSTOR](#)

¹³ WomanKind, 2024, Women’s Participation And Leadership As Key To Gender Equity Draft Report

¹⁴ UN Women, “Gender-Responsive Election Observation: Regional Forum on Methodologies and Good Practices for East & Southern Africa”, meeting report. 2018



Technology has enabled a sharp rise in attacks on women in politics through media, digital spaces, tweets, and Facebook. People have begun using Photoshop to manipulate images, targeting women in politics. Specifically, we have legislation aimed at combating abuse against women and girls...

Kabahenda Flavia Rwabuhoro, Ugandan Politician

Young women in politics and VAWP - Young women face high violence levels and are often deemed inexperienced, reflecting misogyny that undermines their leadership. Many are urged to seek validation from family, community, or parties, reducing them to begging for political leadership. Women under 40, especially, experience significantly higher rates of sexual violence than their older counterparts¹⁵.

Socio-economic status & VAWP - VAWP intersects with socio-economic status of women in politics. While women who have high levels of income face VAWP simply because they are women, often being accused of uncouth means of earning income, the patriarchal dynamics within the space worsen for women with lower income. The high demand for financial resources in political campaigns has been used to prevent women with lower financial muscle from campaigning in elections¹⁶. Further, the distribution of available funds for campaigns within the political parties is discriminatory in all the countries targeted in this policy brief. Financial resource distribution can be used as a tool for abuse within the political circles as women are historically financially disadvantaged, for example when male actors with finance 'sponsor' campaigns for women politicians, they may use this to violate women under the pretence of 'returning a favour'¹⁷.

Natural disasters & VAWP - Intersectionality of VAWP with scarce natural resources driven by climate change is on the rise. The surgency of droughts, floods and unpredictable weather patterns implies that most of Africa's food security is under threat. This however presents an opportunity for perpetrators of VAWP to use scarcity of food and water to attack women politicians who have limited access to financial resources that can bridge the hunger gap in constituencies. When male politicians have access to food and water aid which is discriminately distributed between male and women politicians by political institutions and even donor agencies, this is then used as a bargaining tool to publicly shame women politicians' capacity to support their constituencies. In areas where disasters such as flood strike, it is usually the male political actors who have access to resources for rescue of community members whilst women will even use their own limited resources to input in such situations. This again is used as a platform to rebuke women politicians online and offline even mobilising voters for the next elections. An example is the escalation of violence against women during Covid 19 lockdowns¹⁸ where women leaders were being lauded as doing a disproportionately "great job" on pandemic responses compared to men¹⁹ yet they were being abused online with the increased use of online campaigns for elections²⁰.

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ B Harry, 2024, Gender Equality in Politics: Challenges, Strategies, and Implications, published on [\(PDF\) Gender Equality in Politics: Challenges, Strategies, and Implications](#)

¹⁷ M Ohman, International IDEA, Political Finance Regulations Around the World, 2012, Accessed from [political-finance-regulations-around-the-world.pdf](#)

¹⁸ UN Women, 2020, Online and ICT* facilitated violence against women and girls during COVID-19 [Brief-Online-and-ICT-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-during-COVID-19-en.pdf](#)

¹⁹ <https://www.cnn.com/2020/04/14/asia/women-government-leaders-coronavirus-hnk-intl/index.html>

²⁰ International IDEA, Women in Political Participation Barometer, 2021, available at [Women's Political Participation: African Barometer 2021](#)



Women with disabilities & VAWP - Women with disabilities face unique challenges, including body shaming and being silenced. They also face challenges in resource mobilization and dealing with disability-unfriendly infrastructure and processes. The experiences of women with disabilities are not a monolithic, and women with certain types of disabilities are more likely to be excluded from leadership positions. For example, Jackline from WCC highlights that women with physical disabilities or visual impairments are often more likely to hold leadership positions compared to women with intellectual disabilities or women who are deaf. This is largely due to electoral laws as well as existing gender social norms, which tend to favour individuals who fit traditional perceptions of leadership. Public infrastructure tends to be more accessible in terms of physical access, such as having ramps and accessible toilets, but it is less likely to consider the needs of those with other disabilities, like providing easy-to-read materials or sign language interpretation. This leaves women with hearing impairments and other disabilities more vulnerable. Additionally, assistive devices for individuals with intellectual disabilities and hearing impairments are less developed, making it even harder for these women to fully engage in leadership roles.

People with disabilities face additional risks violence when an election is not peaceful. According to FIDA-Kenya, less WWD vie for elections as the vote is divided into representation of all quarters including women, men and PWDs. Most of them, especially those with physical disabilities and the visually impaired, are unable to run when violence erupts. This exposes them to being trampled upon, falling, running into stationary objects among others and ultimately more injury, some of which can be fatal. The high podiums that are often the norm in campaign rallies are inconsiderate regarding access for those with physical disability. The expenses for WPWDs increase if they purchase cars that are WPWDs friendly and travel to campaign rallies. The majority need to move with guides, which is an added cost. Online violence amplifies the discrimination and marginalization WPWD already experience in the society. Online violence against WPWD is further intensified through online harassment, cyberbullying and can include computer generated images meant to mock them²¹.

²¹ AWESOME Policy Brief on the ILO Convention 190 and Recommendation 206, 2021

Intermarriages & VAWP - Stereotypes, socio-cultural issues especially those that are related to intermarriages affect women politicians who are in such situations. A woman is discriminated against at her home because she married outside her community and at the same time, she faces the same challenge where she is married because she is not fully accepted. Such intimidations and sexual harassments, sometimes among women aspirants themselves serve as a deterrent factor to women.

Legal and Policy Framework on VAWP

Legal frameworks on VAWP vary globally and in across Africa, with effectiveness largely depending on context, content, and compliance. Some examples of frameworks on VAWP include the [1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women](#) defines this violence and outlines an action plan for States²². The [International Labour Organization Conventions \(ILO\) C190](#) and [Recommendation R206](#) are the first international labour standards to provide a framework for preventing, addressing and eliminating violence and harassment in the world of work²³. They cover both the public and private sphere, the informal and formal sector, and urban and rural areas. This implies that the Conventions cover the women in politics too.

The CEDAW Committee links VAWP to gender-based factors like male entitlement, masculinity norms, and the desire to control or punish women. However, Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda have not ratified the CEDAW Optional Protocol, preventing individual or group complaints to the Committee.

Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda have ratified the ICCPR, ensuring equal rights for men and women. Other key crucial international frameworks such as [The Convention Against Torture](#), the [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), the Human Rights Council, and the Special Rapporteur on VAWP strengthen the international legal framework on VAWP²⁴. The adoption of the 2015 SDGs, especially Goal 5, reaffirmed States' commitment to ensuring women's full political participation at all decision-making levels.

The [Maputo Protocol \(2003\)](#) extends the UN definition of VAWP to include economic violence, occurring in both peacetime and conflict. It commits African States to eliminate discrimination and violence, outlining various forms of aggression and emphasizing the continuum of abuse.

Uganda's Constitution guarantees equality under the law, equal protection, and non-discrimination based on sex²⁵. Since 2019, Uganda's Parliament has had a Human Resource Policy Manual defining sexual harassment, including physical, verbal, and non-verbal forms. It outlines penalties for parliamentarians, staff, contractors, and visitors guilty of harassment, both within and outside Parliament, including at events and conferences²⁶. Though Uganda lacks a national VAWP policy, it relies on the Prevention of Domestic Violence Act (2010), Electoral Commission Act, and gender desk to address the issue. The 2022 amendment to the Computer Misuse Act expanded coverage to include hate speech. In Uganda, 50% of women politicians face online trolling,²⁷ with 66% blocking perpetrators and 14.5% deactivating social media accounts²⁸.

²² IPU, Resolution adopted by the 135th Assembly, October 2016, <http://archive.ipu.org/conf-e/135/item4.pdf>

²³ AWESOME Programme ILO CONVENTION 190 AND RECOMMENDATION 206 Policy Brief, 2021

²⁴ African Union, 2021, Legal Frameworks aim to break the cycle of violence against women and girls. | African Union. Available at: [African Union Legal Frameworks aim to break the cycle of violence against women and girls. | African Union](#) (Accessed: 10 December 2024).

²⁵ Constitution of the Republic of Uganda (2005), Article 21(1).

²⁶ Parliament of Uganda, Human Resource Policy Manual, Item 32 – Parliamentary Service Staff Regulations, 2019

²⁷ National Democratic Institute, 2021, The Impact of Online Violence Against Women in the 2021 Uganda General Elections, Accessed from [The Impact of Online Violence Against Women in the 2021 Uganda General Elections | National Democratic Institute](#) on 12 December 2024

²⁸ Pollicy, 2020, Accessed from [A Survival Guide to being a Woman on the Internet](#) ²² The Constitution of Kenya (2010), Article 21(3).



Every woman in Kenya has a right to be voted in and to be voted for according to the Kenyan Constitution, so there is no limit to being a candidate in the elective and even the nominated position regardless of your physical ability status..."

Betty Milgo, Kenyan Politician

The Constitution of **Kenya** places a duty on all state organs and public officials to address the needs of vulnerable groups, including women²². In Kenya, the National Gender and Equality Commission tackles VAWP, while the Sexual Offences Act, Election Offences Act, and Political Parties Act address related issues. Feminist movements call for a specific VAWP law. Though the Penal Code prohibits incitement, threats, and harm, it doesn't explicitly address digital violence or clarify its application online²⁹. Article 181 of Kenya's Penal Code prohibits circulating "obscene" media, a provision echoed in the Computer Misuse and Cybercrimes Act, which also bans the digital sharing of "intimate or obscene" images. The Sexual Offences Act prohibits sexual harassment, but its narrow definition applies only to power imbalances³⁰.

The Constitution of **Ethiopia** enshrines the right to equality and guarantees equal protection under the law generally³¹. Article 35 of Ethiopia's Constitution guarantees women equal rights with men and "affirmative measures" to address historical inequality. Lacking a specific VAWP law, Ethiopia relies on the Code of Conduct for Political Parties and the Criminal Code, which prohibits bodily harm, intimidation, and coercion. Despite reforms before the 2021 elections expanding political space for women, structural resistance and barriers to gender equality persist, including rejection of affirmative action by some parliamentarians and sexist public discourse.

Despite the overwhelming evidence that women's participation in politics is beneficial to the community and societies, and the existence of international conventions and legal frameworks guaranteeing women's political rights, politics remains discriminatory and marred with gender-based violence. Several factors that contribute to this include exclusionary electoral systems, lack of violence against women laws and their enforcement, economic exclusion, societal and gender norms, and the political economy of power and party politics³². The above are a few examples of existing frameworks on VAWP.



²⁹ Kenya Penal Code Cap. 63 (2009).

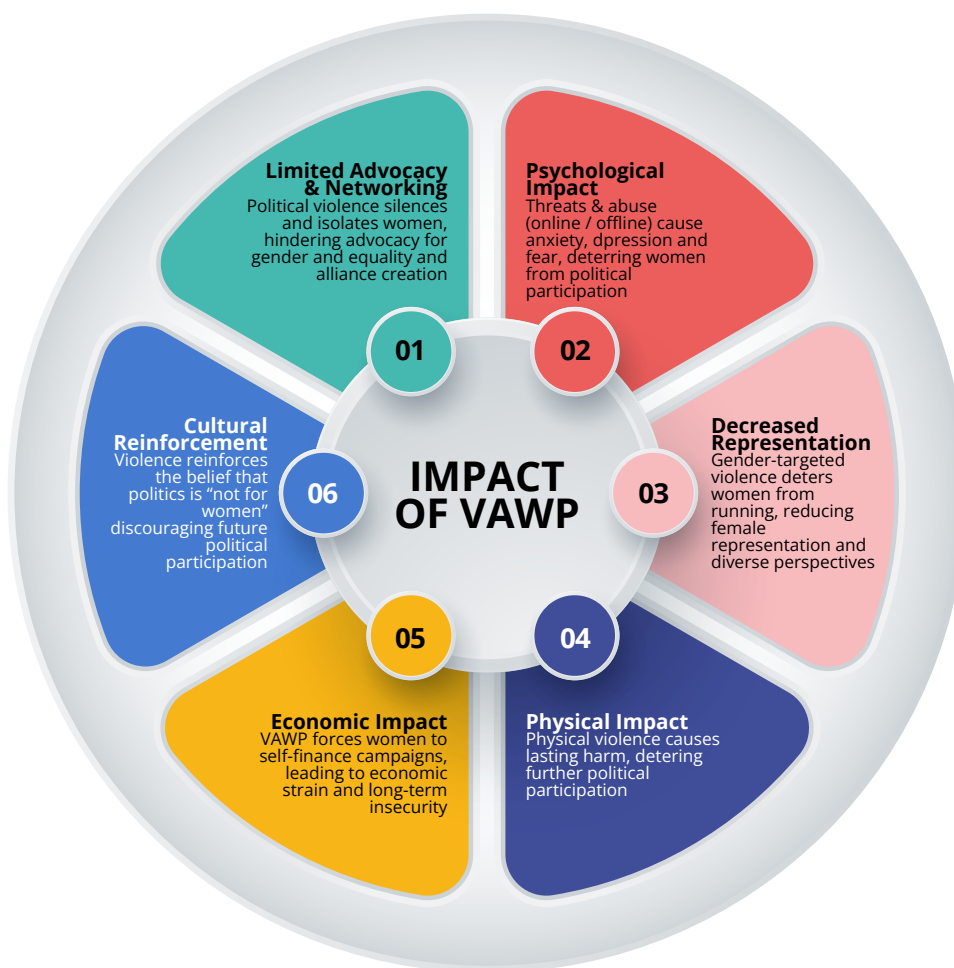
³⁰ The Sexual Offences Act No. 3 of 2006, Article 23

³¹ The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (1995), Article 25.

³² AWESOME Learning event report, October 2023

Effects of VAWP

Breaking the silence surrounding VAWP is key to ending it. Advocacy and raising awareness are crucial strategies in preventing this violence, which manifests in specific, gendered ways. Below are some examples³³.



- **Physical violence:** this includes assaults like assassinations, kidnappings, beatings – often with the intent to force women to resign or withdraw from political life.
- **Sexual violence:** examples include sexual harassment, unwanted advances and sexual assault, rape, sexualized threats. women are often subjected to altered pornographic or sexualized images intended to publicly question women's competencies and shame them.
- **Psychological violence:** This includes character assassination, stalking, online abuse as well as economic violence such as denial of salary or political financing, property theft or damage³⁴.

VAWP victims include political officeholders, candidates, supporters, voters, election workers, public officials, and civil servants. Civil society activists, media workers, and human rights defenders, along with their families, are also at risk. Women facing multiple forms of discrimination, such as age, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or political views, are particularly vulnerable³⁵.

³³ UN Women, 2021, Guidance Note, Preventing Violence Against Women In Politics, Accessed from [Guidance-note-Preventing-violence-against-women-in-politics-en.pdf](#) on 13 December 2024

³⁴ UN Women and UNDP, UN Women and UNDP (2017), Preventing violence against women in elections: A programming guide.

³⁵ National Democratic Institute, Guidelines on Gender Considerations in International Election Observation, Including Violence Against Women in Elections, Accessed from [NDI Guidelines for Election Observation and VAWP](#)

Prevention & Response of VAWP



“Enforcement of justice, healing programmes for VAWP, documenting and sharing their stories and monitoring the trends of feminist research are some of the ways to amplify the voices of VAWP survivors...”

Jackline Bartenge, Women Challenged to Challenge

Womankind Worldwide plays a critical role in addressing VAWP through a range of interventions including partnerships with local organizations in the focus countries. The AWESOME Programme (2021-2025) is an advocacy initiative that seeks to strengthen the women’s movements in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda by seeking to promote increased diversity, less fragmentation and more representative engagement including by women with disabilities. Partners in each focus country include a mainstream women’s rights organisation (WRO) with policy and advocacy expertise and a disability women’s rights organisation (DWRO).

In addition to Womankind Worldwide, the **AWESOME consortium** partners are: In Kenya- Federation of Women Lawyers, Kenya (FIDA-Kenya), Women Challenged to Challenge (WCC), Ethiopia-Siiqqee Women’s Development Association (SWDA), Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association (EWDNA), and Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE) in Uganda. With a specific thematic focus on Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) and Women’s Participation and Leadership (WPL), the programme operates at three levels including working with formal institutions to improve the policy and legal framework for the realisation of women’s rights. Thus, its overarching objective is ***“to strengthen the capacity and solidarity among WROs and DWROs to collectively challenge the unequal power relations that exist and perpetuate the cycle of poverty and gender inequality.”***

The AWESOME programme supports various advocacy actions, including developing key messages on Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP) and crafting position statements to articulate these issues. Collaborative efforts with duty bearers, such as policymakers, the registrar of political parties, and communities, have also been integral. Activities include:

- Leveraging community drama for awareness-raising in Kenya.
- Building movements to unite women with disabilities in voicing their concerns on VAWP in Kenya and Ethiopia.
- Utilising media platforms such as radio talk shows, TV programmes, and opinion pieces in Kenya and Uganda.

FIDA Kenya

FIDA Kenya operates a toll- free number across the 47 counties in Kenya that addresses the ESGBV (Electoral Sexual and Gender-Based Violence) in the country. Through the toll-free number, FIDA can reach women and children in need with the support of its partner community organizations, pro bono lawyers, counsellors, and mediators. FIDA continues to sensitize women politicians, civil society actors, advocates, male champions and paralegals on the ILO C190 Convention.

FOWODE Uganda

FOWODE has continued to grow her pool of young value-driven gender transformative leaders in Uganda through its platform for learning networking, sharing experiences and advocating for gender equality and equity in decision-making process. The platform continues to contribute to strong young women leaders challenging the status quo and working jointly to prevent SGBV against women and girls. Approximately 96% of the trainees have submitted action plans geared towards gender equality, social justice, and social transformation. 30% of these have already commenced implementing their plans.

Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association (EWDNA)

EWDNA supports various gender and disability focused clubs and movements in Ethiopia to enhance advocacy efforts to increase collaboration and participation of girls with disabilities in various initiatives. EDWNA collaborates closely with parliamentarians and actively engages in discussions with the National Election Board of Ethiopia to amend the Election Law, with the goal of incorporating quotas that guarantee the full participation of women and persons with disabilities (WPWDs) in political processes.

Women Challenged to Challenge (WCC)

WCC is centred on disability interventions around SGBV in Kenya. These intersectionality in SGBV, social and political factors that impede the desires of WWDs to run for political office, limited access to resources both financial and human, lack of support from society as well as accessibility issues including venues, campaigns and communication barriers among others. Through media engagements and a press release on the need for ILO C190 ratification, WCC has engaged with the Parliamentary Labor Committee (PLC) and selected organisations of PWDs and held multi-sectoral training on the importance of the ILO C190 to address issues affecting women with disabilities.

Siiqqee Women's Development Association (SWDA)

Through the AWESOME project, SWDA established GBV investigation teams composed of representatives from various offices, including Education, Social Affairs, Health, Attorney, Justice, Police, Women's and Children's Affairs, Women's League, Women's Federations, Women's Associations, and Custom Courts. These teams meet quarterly to assess and monitor the GBV situation in their respective towns across Ethiopia. As a result, the team has played an active role in apprehending perpetrators and ensuring justice for victims. Consequently, victims are now receiving much better justice than in the past.



Conclusion

The experience of VAWP is not uniform; it's shaped by intersecting identities, like race, sexuality, and disability, which amplify the impacts and risks. Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda have established mechanisms to address GBV but lack explicit provisions for addressing violence against women in politics (VAWP), but there are further advances needed in the implementation of these mechanisms and legal framework. While their constitutions affirm gender equality and mandate redress for historical inequalities, pre-colonial and colonial eras restricted women's roles.

Acknowledging the **disproportionate impact** of violence and harassment on women in politics, and on women with disabilities is key in achieving inclusive democracy. Women politicians with disabilities are often an afterthought in decision making processes, and though their lived experiences place them in a position to influence the development of policies, laws, welfare and services, they are often not included in these processes from the start. This demonstrates that there are several layers of barriers to women voicing out their concerns are some are more marginalized than others depending on their circumstances.

Women with disabilities face social stigma and economic and infrastructure challenges where voting stations are not disability friendly. To mitigate some of these challenges, a strong civil society voice and advocacy are needed to promote rights and raise awareness. Women with disabilities (WWDs) for instance are twice as likely to experience violence from partners and family members than women without disabilities, and up to 10 times more likely to experience sexual violence³⁶.

The rise of **technology** use has brought both socio-economic and democratic benefits but also intensified online violence, disinformation, and hate speech against women in politics. VAWP, rooted in patriarchy, is perpetuated by both men and women, with male politicians especially from rival parties as primary perpetrators. Women with disabilities, those unmarried, under 40, or from minority groups face greater risks, reflecting the broader continuum of GBV.

The **AWESOME programme** has raised awareness through civil and voter education, highlighting the importance of women in leadership. It has engaged men and advocates, conducted research, and documented survivors' experiences of VAWP. Additionally, women candidates have received training to help them run successful campaigns and tackle VAWP challenges across all levels of governance. These efforts have been effective, including women with disabilities (WWD) as 800 WWDs have been reached, raising the confidence of 20 who vied for political seats³⁷.

Despite progress, significant work remains, especially in policy reform on VAWP. Milestones like Uganda's Women's Manifesto, which outlines women's demands during elections, show progress. In Kenya, constitutional provisions affirm women's right to vote and run for office, but enforcement remains weak. Law enforcement must strengthen these rights to protect women's political participation. The persistence of patriarchy is evident in informal political appointments made at night or in exclusive spaces like gyms, places of worship, and entertainment venues, which many women politicians cannot access. The continuing scourge of VAWP despite investments to eliminate it requires sustained interventions such as those outlined in the recommendations below.

³⁶ UNWOMEN, 'From insights to action: gender equality in the wake of COVID-19'.

³⁷ AWESOME Partnership Learning event report, October 2023

Recommendations



“Survivors need to be encouraged to speak out about VAWP in safe spaces and that collective effort of documentation and mental wellness is important to prevent retraumatizing women...”

Moreen Majiwa, Womankind Awesome Programme Manager

While VAWP is a major deterrent of women’s political participation and advancement to democracy, there are proven interventions that can be used as counteractions. From policy changes to influencing change of attitudes, a collective of all these efforts will go a long way in eliminating VAWP. Below are some recommendations:

Policy and legal framework:

- Enact women-focused VAWP legislation in Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia, ensuring protection for women’s rights, including consensual sexual expression.
- Train law enforcement and judiciary on VAWP and sensitive case particularly when handling online VAWP cases³⁸.
- At a continental level, develop an AU-supported VAWP Protocol to unify actions aligning the Maputo Protocol with national reforms to foster women’s leadership and security.
- Accelerate efforts from the AWESOME program in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda to compel Member States to ratify and domesticate and implement International Labour Conventions, C190 and adopt R206 to protect women politicians during political office.
- Enforce gender quotas for meaningful participation of women in all their diversities.
- Establish frameworks can help to protect women democracy defenders and reject re-colonisation narratives.

Addressing intersecting layers of VAWP:

- Focus on vulnerable groups of women such as young women, refugees and women with disabilities who face more layers of VAWP.
- Invest in development of policies and framework that accommodate the vulnerable groups in the society.

Documentation:

- Invest in the documentation of women politicians’ who are survivors of violence ensuring that they are not revictimized.
- Prioritise the collection of data that is up to date, disaggregated by age, gender, disability, socioeconomic status data and that will tailor and inform policy and programmatic interventions in politics. For example, FOWODE undertook a documentation exercise for women politicians in Uganda.

³⁸ UN Women, GUIDANCE NOTE PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS, 2021, Accessed from [Guidance-note-Preventing-violence-against-women-in-politics-en.pdf](#)

Collaboration:

- Meaningfully engage and collaborate with disability and women's rights organisations, labour unions and movements as well as with civil society actors and activists to draw on their expertise in addressing violence and harassment in politics³⁹.
- Involve traditional and religious leaders in advocating for pro-feminist policies will ensure on the ground uptake of the campaign against VAWP.
- Feminists and WROs should push for law implementation, monitor VAWP, and raise awareness. on advancing gender equality in politics.

Women leading from the front:

- Women in leadership must commit to championing issues of gender equality, such as the elimination of gender-based violence, promoting parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws, and electoral reform, gender mainstreaming in governance amongst other issues⁴⁰.

Women leading from the margins:

- Engage women affected by VAWP to ensure relevant, grounded services. In Ethiopia for example, women are encouraged to lead even at the grassroot levels through trainings and capacity strengthening initiatives⁴¹. enabling peer to peer sharing and support.

Resource allocation and mobilization:

- Allocate dedicated funding for women politicians with disabilities to address violence and secure justice.
- Integrate support systems into reporting mechanisms for TFGBV.

Capacity Strengthening:

- Protect initiatives like the Women's Situation Room (WSR) and safeguard women leaders.
- Provide digital upskilling for women politicians to enhance safety.
- Build media capacity to raise VAWP awareness and normalize women's leadership is also key in changing existing gender social norms on VAWP.
- Train political institutions and communities to inspire a transformative feminist leadership approach.
- WROs should train women politicians on digital resilience, violence, and safe engagement. National research on VAWP.

Safeguarding:

- Apply feminist approaches to campaigns, using local languages and addressing women's roles.
- Protect initiatives like the Women's Situation Room (WSR) that safeguard women leaders.
- Create safe spaces for survivors to share, prioritizing mental wellness to prevent revictimization.

Monitoring:

- Replicate successful initiatives such as FIDA Kenya monitoring Electoral Related Gender Based Violence in Ethiopia, Kenya and Uganda to systematically track and address VAWP.⁴²

³⁹ WomanKind AWESOME Project, 2021, ILO Policy Brief on Convention 190 and 206

⁴⁰ AWESOME & FIDA Kenya Joint Statement on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) and Women's Participation and Leadership (WPL), 2022

⁴¹ WomanKind Worldwide, 2024, AWESOME Project draft report on Women's Political Participation and Representation.

⁴² FIDA Kenya, 2022, ESGBV report on Kenyan elections.

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