

# Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP)

## Feminist Perspectives from Uganda, Kenya & Ethiopia

Womankind Worldwide

AWE—SOME

# Definition & Scope

**Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWP) is a form of gender-based that is often invisible and enduring, seeking to silence women in politics.**

It aims to intimidate, exclude, or punish women for participating in public and political life, and is often compounded by intersecting forms of discrimination based on age, socio-economic status, marital status, ethnicity, and it disproportionately affects women with disabilities, who face compounded discrimination.

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. Overcoming these challenges requires not only stronger legal frameworks but also cultural shifts and increased support for women leaders to ensure lasting change and true representation.

Womankind's five-year Advancing Women's Engagement: Strengthening Opportunities to Mobilise for Equality (AWESOME) advocacy program, implemented in Ethiopia, Kenya, and Uganda, aims to strengthen inclusive women's movements by elevating the voices of marginalized groups, including women with disabilities. In line with SDG 5, the program addresses sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), promotes women's leadership, and combats violence against women in politics (VAWP).

As part of this initiative, Womankind developed a policy brief to guide advocacy on VAWP across the three countries. The brief outlines a strategic framework for broader VAWP efforts, underscores the importance of women's political representation, and offers actionable recommendations for partners, girl-led groups, women's rights organizations, policymakers, and other key stakeholders.

**This fact sheet highlights the policy brief's key points, identifies existing gaps, and summarizes the main takeaways and recommendations for addressing VAWP more effectively.**



# Core Findings:

•**VAWP is systemic and intersectional,** shaped by patriarchal norms, ableism, ageism, and structural inequalities across political, legal, and social spheres.

•**Psychological violence** is the most widespread form, with 80% of women parliamentarians in Africa reporting online threats, sexist remarks, or character attacks.

•**Sexual violence and harassment,** including threats of rape and physical assault, are used to silence and degrade women in the public eye. This often extends to their families and supporters.

•**Women with disabilities (WWDs)** face unique and heightened risks, including online mockery, exclusion from political processes due to inaccessible infrastructure, and a lack of inclusive campaign mechanisms.

•**Young women politicians** are often dismissed as inexperienced and sexualised while unmarried women are questioned on their morality and leadership skills.

•The **economic cost of VAWP** includes denial of campaign funding, destruction of personal property, and coercive "support" from male financiers who expect sexual or political favours. Campaign costs are higher for WWDs, who may need accessible transport, personal aides, or assistive technology, resources rarely provided through mainstream political funding.

•During election periods, **tech-facilitated GBV increases sharply,** with online harassment and misinformation campaigns targeting women's credibility and suitability for office. Online abuse targeting WWDs includes body shaming, doctored images, cyberbullying, and attacks mocking their disabilities, intensifying isolation and public ridicule.

•In Uganda, women politicians are frequently told to marry before seeking office. In Kenya and Ethiopia, women have been physically attacked or blocked from voting during primaries and national elections.



# Legal and Institutional Gaps:

•None of the three countries have laws explicitly addressing VAWP, although they have ratified broader human rights conventions like CEDAW and the ICCPR.

•Kenya and Uganda have implemented frameworks like the Sexual Offences Act and Computer Misuse Acts, but these do not comprehensively address online political abuse or intersectional violence.

•Ethiopia's reforms post-2018 have increased female participation but lack enforcement mechanisms to protect women from electoral and institutional violence.

# Impact:

•VAWP leads to a **decline in women's representation,** undermining democracy, policy diversity, and inclusive governance.

•It causes **long-term psychological harm,** including depression, anxiety, and political withdrawal.

•**Public perceptions of politics as a "male domain"** are reinforced, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion for future generations.

•**Women's advocacy and networking capacity** is hindered, weakening the collective power of feminist movements and civic participation.

# What Has Been Done So Far:

## Legal and Policy Frameworks:

The **1993 UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women** defines this violence and outlines an action plan for States.

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 work.

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 VAWP.

**Goal 5 of the SDGs** reaffirms 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.

The African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (AU-CEVAWG) adopted in February 2025, focuses on eliminating all forms of violence against women and girls, including physical, sexual, psychological, traditional and economic violence,

# National Frameworks:



## Kenya

•The **Constitution** of Kenya places a duty on all state organs and public officials to address the needs of vulnerable groups, including women.

•The **National Gender and Equality Commission** tackles VAWP, while the **Sexual Offences Act, Election Offences Act,** and **Political Parties Act** address related issues.

•**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.

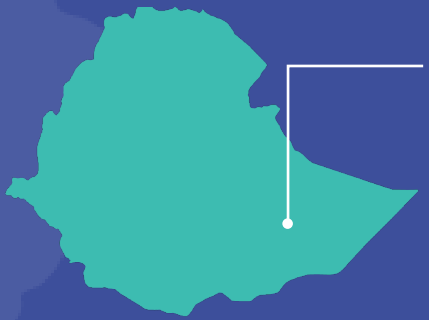


## Uganda

•Uganda's **Constitution** guarantees equality under the law, equal protection, and non-discrimination based on sex.

•**Human Resource Policy Manual** defines sexual harassment, including physical, verbal, and non-verbal forms.

•The **2022 amendment to the Computer Misuse Act** expanded coverage to include hate speech.



## Ethiopia

•**The Constitution** of Ethiopia enshrines the right to equality and guarantees equal protection under the law generally, with **Article 35** of the constitution guarantying women equal rights with men and "affirmative measures" to address historical inequality.

•**Code of Conduct for Political Parties** and the **Criminal Code**, prohibits bodily harm, intimidation, and coercion.



# AWESOME Project:

Supports various advocacy actions, including developing key messages on VAWP and crafting position statements to articulate these issues, including enhancing collaborative efforts with duty bearers, such as policymakers, the registrar of political parties, and communities together with the partners in Kenya Uganda and Ethiopia.

•**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. FIDA continues to sensitize women politicians, civil society actors, advocates, male champions and paralegals on the ILO C190 Convention.

•**FOWODE Uganda** continues 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.

•**Ethiopian Women with Disabilities National Association (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)** is centred on disability interventions around SGBV in Kenya. 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)** 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.



# Recommendations:

1. **Enact and enforce VAWP-specific legislation,** including provisions for online, psychological, and intersectional violence.

2. **Train police, judiciary, and electoral bodies** on handling VAWP cases, with sensitivity to disability and gender.

3. **Ensure inclusive infrastructure** and accessible campaign tools for women with physical, visual, and intellectual disabilities.

4. **Allocate targeted funding** to support women candidates, especially those with disabilities or from underrepresented communities.

5. **Document survivor experiences** through safe, trauma-informed processes and use data to inform national and regional policy.

6. **Strengthen coalitions between Women's Rights Organisations (WROs) and Disability Rights Organisations (DROs)** to amplify marginalised voices.

7. **Challenge societal norms** through community education, media campaigns, and engagement with traditional and religious leaders.

8. **Support feminist leadership training and digital security upskilling** for women in politics to enhance their resilience and safety.

# Resource:

AWESOME Policy Brief: Violence Against Women in Politics

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