STRENGTHENING DEMOCRACY BY REDUCING THREATS TO WOMEN IN POLITICS

A REVIEW OF EXPLANATIONS AND SOLUTIONS TO ONLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

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February 2024

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Executive Summary

Representative democracy is threatened by growing violence against politically active women. Burgeoning research shows that online violence – from image-based abuse to rape threats – is a daily reality for women politicians on different levels of government across the world (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016; Dhrodia, 2018; Collignon and Rüdig, 2020; Krook, 2020; Erikson, Håkansson and Josefsson, 2022; Buckley, Keenan and Mariani, 2023). The former President of the United Nations General Assembly (2022) called the existence of violence against women in politics a "moral and ethical failure on us as a society."

This report reviews how online violence against women in politics (with a focus on elected representatives and candidates) can be measured and addressed. The findings will inform the development of practitioner and academic work of HateAid and the Technical University Munich, in partnership with the Alfred Landecker Foundation, and further research by the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford.

Part I reviews ways to measure and monitor violence against women in politics. Approaches include gendering existing datasets, conducting original surveys, sentiment analysis, social network analysis, and combined manual and automated techniques.

Part II examines how the problem has been and could be tackled by governments. Some jurisdictions have adopted specific legislation to address violence against women in politics. Further policy interventions are necessary, such as gender-sensitive interventions to combat election violence. Online regulation is essential to provide support to and redress for politically active women.

Part III outlines other support mechanisms. Civil society organisations, such as our project lead, HateAid, have pioneered ways to support politically active women facing violence. Social media platforms have the power – but not always the will – to create safer online spaces through proactive content moderation and adequate reporting mechanisms. Government institutions and political parties can implement policy frameworks such as behavioural codes of conducts.

Recommendations

Measuring and Monitoring

- Adopt a clear definition of violence against women in politics for measuring and monitoring.
- Measure **both online and offline violence,** and pay attention to how **different groups of women**, such as by ethnicity and race, are impacted differently.
- **Combine research techniques** through mixed- and multi-method studies to gain more precise insights on the incidence and nature of online and offline violence.
- **Use automated techniques accompanied by well-resourced human team moderation** to ensure that context and language complexities are considered to measure online violence against women in politics.
- Increase partnership and data sharing between different platforms, as violence can occur on a range of platforms.

Government Policy

- **Adopt legislation addressing violence against women in politics which specifically includes online violence**. Policies should include reporting mechanisms, administrative sanctions, and monitoring mechanisms to understand this phenomenon.
- **Ensure the implementation** of such policy with adequate resources and training for relevant actors such as police, judges, and election officials.
- **Regulate the online space**, including by ensuring that social media platforms, and other relevant internet intermediaries, perform adequate and transparent content regulation and establish clear reporting mechanisms.
- **Implement a comprehensive policy framework** to prevent and address online violence against women in politics. For example, ensure that election safety mechanisms are gender sensitive, and incorporate online violence against women in politics into broader digital and political literacy policy efforts.
- **Report on the developments** to address violence against women in politics in international and regional human rights mechanisms country reports.
- **Incentivize different actors**, such as political parties, trade unions, parliaments, governmental institutions, electoral bodies, social media platforms, and other relevant private sector companies, to play a role in the prevention and detection of online violence against women in politics through regulation of internal policies as well as awareness campaigns.

Support Mechanisms

- **Civil Society** organisations should **prioritise tackling online violence against women in politics** in the ways it impacts the populations they serve. For example, feminist organisations could create specific programming on violence against women in politics. Academics and academic institutions can implement specific monitoring programs to map violence against women in politics locally and globally.
- **Social Media companies** should implement **"safety by design" principles**. For example, policies should specifically include and provide examples of gendered hate speech and harassment. **Both automated and human content moderators** should be trained on how online violence can manifest in different languages and contexts. Companies should provide transparent and gender-disaggregated data on addressing online harassment.
- **Government Institutions** should prioritize addressing online violence against women in politics for staff and politicians. For example, they have **security policy and procedures** and Advice which include **online monitoring of social media as** a regular part of security, a dedicated point of contact in parliament and **induction briefings** on online violence against women in politics. Furthermore, institutions should provide **training and well-being support for staff** who are often the first line of defense against political violence.
- **Individual women** can **take control of their data** by putting in place safety measures such as two factor authentication. Women can also **support each other** by publicly and privately calling out abuse, reporting incidents, and sharing information about redress mechanisms.

Introduction

Online Violence Against Women in Politics is a Threat to Democracy

Violence against women in politics (often abbreviated to VAWP or VAWIP) is a complex and growing problem. The previous President of the United Nations General Assembly (2022) called the existence of violence against women in politics a "moral and ethical failure on us as a society."

Burgeoning research shows that online violence– from image-based abuse to rape threats – is a daily reality for women politicians on different levels of government across the world. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) (2016) found that 82% of surveyed women parliamentarians had experienced psychological violence. In Ireland and Sweden, female politicians experience more sexualised harassment than their male counterparts (Erikson, Håkansson and Josefsson, 2022; Buckley, Keenan and Mariani, 2023). In the UK, Amnesty International (Dhrodia, 2018) showed that Black and Asian women Members of Parliament (MPs) experience particularly aggressive online abuse.

Online or digital abuse, threats and harassment are forms of violence. Female political leaders face direct threats of death and rape, hate speech, image-based abuse (including deepfakes), cyberstalking, harassment, doxxing (sharing personal information without consent), trolling (purposely disruptive content), and pile-on or mobbing (many different accounts re-posting abusive content) and disinformation (sharing incorrect information deliberately) (Bardall, 2013; Henry and Powell, 2016; Jane, 2017). While even one piece of harmful content may feel violating, often women in politics have to deal with the compounding nature of multiple, repetitive pieces of content from a variety of perpetrators. In Europe, 1 in 2 young women experience gender-based cyber violence, which particularly impacts women active in public life (European Commission, 2022). UK women are 50% less comfortable than men participating politically online (Enock et al., 2024).

The "chilling effect" on women's political participation threatens representative democracy. Women may temper their advocacy or even completely exit politics (National Democratic Institute, 2018, 2019b; Barker and Jurasz, 2019; Sobieraj, 2020). This impact on individual and group political participation has serious implications for democracy: an established body of research confirms that diverse representation is crucial for a world better led, better served and better governed (UN Women, 2023a).

Calls for action are growing to address this urgent problem such as by the U.N. General Assembly (2018) and the U.N. Special Rapporteur of Violence against Women (2018b). Although the problem is not necessarily "new," violence against women in politics has only relatively recently been identified by academics and policymakers as a specific problem that needs to be addressed for the sake of democracy (Krook, 2020).

Governments, police, judges, prosecutors, parliaments, political parties and social media companies and other actors have important roles to play. A growing number of countries have developed specific policy frameworks to sanction violence against women in politics, and reform electoral laws and other relevant legislation (Restrepo Sanín, 2022b). Some places, especially in Europe, have parliamentary and political party policy frameworks, such as codes of conducts, strengthened with complaint/investigation mechanisms (Collier and Raney, 2018; Verge, 2020; Raney and Collier, 2021; Julios, 2022).

This Report

The purpose of this report is to review relevant literature about measuring and addressing online violence against women in politics, with a focus on politicians (i.e., elected representatives and candidates). However, it is important to note that the phenomenon of violence against women in politics affects a wide range of professions, including journalists, activists, or women politically active in social media (Krook, 2020). Amidst a relatively new but rapidly burgeoning literature, this report highlights the main takeaways on how the problem has been and could be measured and addressed. It offers a preliminary evaluation of these existing and proposed measures and solutions.

The method used in this report is a rapid scoping review with broad research questions: 'What are the proposed ways online violence against women in politics has been measured and addressed?' 'What measurements, policies and support mechanisms have been implemented?' 'Who are the main actors in conceptualising and implementing these?' and, 'What is known about their effectiveness?'

We include both empirical studies that identify existing measurement and solutions, as well as conceptual work that proposes solutions. We look at both academic and "grey" literature (reports from international organisations, governments and civil society). The main search databases have been Google Scholar and Web of Science. We have also drawn on other specific databases and sites including VAW Politics (2022) (run by Mona Lena Krook), UN Women, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the Council of Europe. Given the breadth of the inquiry and the complex nature of the phenomenon, we have not included all the studies that exist.

Informal conversations with a range of stakeholders also allowed us to elaborate on the findings in the literature and ensure the contents aligned with cutting edge scholarship and practice. We are thankful to everyone who engaged and discussed this important topic with us. Furthermore, we are indebted to the scholars and practitioners who have and continue to work to understand and tackle online violence against women in politics.

The report is a starting point for further research. It will inform the development of academic and practitioner work on the part of HateAid and Technical University Munich in partnership with the Alfred Landecker Foundation, which will commence in 2024, and further work by the Blavatnik School of Government at the University of Oxford.

The vision for the overall project is to develop evidence-based research which identifies the most effective ways to reduce the threats and violence faced by politically active women so as to protect and improve political representation around the world. Equally important is the development of practical training and support for politically active women – such as the students and alumni of the Blavatnik School – who, as they run for elected office, are already suffering the forms of violence described in this report.

The report is organised into three parts: (i) Measuring and Monitoring, (ii) Policy Solutions, and (iii) Support Mechanisms. Each section gives an overview of the main takeaways for this specific topic, with some particularly relevant examples, and ends with recommendations.

Part I. Measuring and Monitoring

Introduction

Measuring online violence against women in politics is vital not just for tracking its magnitude but also for identifying what factors could reduce (or amplify) the problem over time. This part of the report will outline the challenges of measuring violence against women in politics. It will then review methodologies currently being used to measure this phenomenon with concrete examples and observations of methodological advantages and disadvantages. Finally, it provides recommendations regarding the best methodologies to measure online violence against women in politics.

Concepts and Measurement

The concept of violence against women in politics is a subject of intense academic debate (Bardall, Bjarnegård and Piscopo, 2020; Krook, 2020; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2023). Some argue for the need to compare men and women to identify gendered aspects of violence (e.g., Bardall et al 2020) while others (e.g., Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016) argue for the importance of focussing on women and that violence against women in politics is its own phenomenon. Furthermore, there are disagreements about what does or does not count as violence generally, which categories to use (physical, psychological, economic, sexual, online, among others) and within each category, what actions amount to violence. Unsurprisingly, there is not yet a universally accepted definition or methodology for this concept (UN Women, 2020; Ballington, 2016).

Useful and important, however, is the comprehensive definition from UN Women and UNDP (2017, p. 20): "any act or threat of gender-based violence, resulting in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, that prevents them from exercising and realizing their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including the right to vote and hold public office, to vote in secret and to freely campaign, to associate and assemble, and to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression."

Online or digital violence against women in politics is growing and spreading rapidly on social media platforms, with serious harmful effects (Jane, 2017; Barker and Jurasz, 2019; Esposito, 2023). Politically motivated "trolls" and "bots" spread disinformation and images, often using misogynistic narratives, a phenomenon called "gender disinformation" (Esposito 2023). Online violence can also lead to "offline" or in-person violence. And equally broadcasts of in-person violence can be used to spread hatred and threats online. For example, the Dutch Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister, Sigrid Kaag, left politics because of death threats, after a man carrying a lit torch stood in front of her family's home shouting slogans against them while broadcasting his activity live on the internet (Camut, 2023).

Measuring and addressing the rise of violence against women in politics poses several challenges. First, the speed at which violence is produced across social media and the enormous amount of data that must be filtered. Second, the anonymity of perpetrators and the use of private channels (Esposito in Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2023). Third, the challenges faced by investigators, and trust and safety workers from the various online platforms, in deciding precisely which content is abusive. Despite contestations and

complexity, an increasing number of experts are documenting and measuring this specific problem (Krook, 2020; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, 2023).

In the sections below, we outline three methodologies which have emerged to measure violence against women in politics generally (as identified by Krook 2020): gendering existing datasets, conducting original surveys, and gathering and systematizing testimonies from individual women. We also assess an additional mixed-methods methodology which is used in numerous studies and projects. For online violence specifically, we focus on the four principal methodologies: sentiment analysis, social network analysis, manual techniques, and combined human and automated techniques.

Methodologies: Violence Against Women in Politics

Gendering existing datasets

Multiple datasets measure political violence in which gender information is collected but not particularly analysed as a variable. One way to measure violence against women in politics is to re-evaluate these datasets actively taking gender into account. The results obtained may yield very different conclusions from those reached in the initial gender-blind analyses. In the case where datasets are updated periodically, another way to apply this methodology is to update the way in which data is collected or what data to collect, to include gender.

In her study *Breaking the Mold: Understanding Gender and Electoral Violence,* Gabrielle Bardall (2011) gendered existing datasets of the International Federation for Electoral Systems (IFES)' Electoral violence Education and Resolution (EVER) Program, which collected data between 2006 and 2010 in 13 countries. She analysed 2,005 cases of electoral violence records in six of those countries. She found gendered types of electoral violence and explicitly recommended refining data collection on electoral violence to reflect the gendered nature of electoral violence.

Another innovative example is the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) which measures political violence using over 11,000 events around the world, and now specifically includes "political violence targeting women" (Kishi, Pavlik and Matfess, 2019; The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, 2021). Violence against women has risen over time in almost every region covered by ACLED, including Africa, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Europe, Latin America, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

Incorporating gender-specific indicators into existing datasets on general political violence has several advantages. First, it is cost-effective, as it avoids having to create entirely new datasets solely on violence against women in politics. Second, it allows for historical comparison and insights into longer-term trends on the progress made and ongoing challenges faced by women in politics. Third, it can generate data to inform policies and interventions aimed at reducing gender-based violence and increasing women's political participation.

Some limitations should be considered and mitigated. The design of pre-existing datasets may not permit accurate measurement of gender-specific violence in politics. The definitions of gender-based violence used to create indicators can fail to capture the nuances of violence against women in politics. Intersectionality may have been overlooked, yet the

combined effects of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation, can greatly influence and amplify women's experiences of violence in politics (Kuperberg, 2018). In short, some cases will require entirely new, gender-sensitive studies.

Conducting original surveys

Surveys of women candidates and elected officials have been the primary data collection method for obtaining reliable information about the extent of violence against women in politics, its manifestations, and underlying risk factors (Krook, 2020).

The first international study using this methodology was the Interparliamentary Union's (IPU) (2016) report based on quantitative and qualitative data provided by 55 women parliamentarians from 39 countries across the world. The survey questions addressed psychological, physical, sexual and economic violence. The study concluded that there is violence against female parliamentarians in every nation, and that a sizable proportion of elected officials are victims. For example, 82% of surveyed women parliamentarians reported that they had experienced psychological violence.

Another illustrative example is the research using the Representative Audit of Britain survey, which collected original individual-level data from all candidates participating in the UK General Elections of 2019 (Collignon and Rüdig, 2020). This survey included a unique set of questions designed to capture instances of harassment and intimidation experienced by candidates, focusing on the political and gendered nature of these incidents. Collignon and Rüdig assessed the distribution of individual responses for types of harassment to identify overarching patterns. They then investigated whether the candidate's visibility or their response to abuse influenced electoral outcomes. They found that women were particularly targeted, and the gender gap in harassment was widening. Consequently, the harassment had specific gender-related impacts, such as women being more likely than men to alter their campaign strategies in response to the harassment.

Using surveys has several benefits. Surveys collect data from a diverse sample of participants involved in politics, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the prevalence and patterns of violence against women in politics (United Nations, 2014), providing valuable insights into different aspects of violence experienced or witnessed by women in political settings. Furthermore, surveys can provide anonymity to respondents, encouraging more honest and open responses. This is crucial in addressing a sensitive and stigmatized issue like violence, where individuals may be hesitant to disclose their experiences due to fear of political repercussions. Confidentiality can also help reduce response bias and improve the reliability of the collected data.

However, surveys also come with certain limitations. This method may not capture the full complexity and nuances of violence against women in politics. The qualitative aspects of these experiences, such as the psychological impact and the power dynamics involved, might be challenging to capture through standardized survey questions. Relying solely on closed-ended questions might overlook important contextual information, limiting the depth of analysis that can be achieved.

Another factor to take into consideration is that women politicians often do not perceive violence against them as a distinct form of violence but rather as an expected consequence of their political involvement (National Democratic Institute, 2019a). Additionally, surveys have potential for response bias. Those who have been affected by violence may be more

likely to respond to surveys, while others who have not experienced violence might choose not to participate.

Yet these limitations can be overcome. Researchers could consider creating surveys that ask more general questions about work environments, rather than only focusing on violence. The questionnaires should have both open and closed-ended questions to capture various acts of violence. If surveys are collected in-person, interviewers should be trained to encourage information disclosure while adhering to ethical and safety standards. This approach is critical in accurately gauging the extent and different manifestations of violence against women in politics.

Gathering and systematizing testimonies from individual women

Gathering and systematizing testimonies is another useful method to measure violence against women in politics. These testimonies can also be gathered by analysing complaints collected from prosecutors' offices or police stations, or from civil society organizations campaigns.

This systematization of testimonies was used in Wagner's (2022) study on online harassment towards women politicians in Canada. She conducted 101 extensive interviews with political candidates and representatives in Canada. Her research revealed that there was no evidence suggesting that online abuse hinders women's aspirations to enter politics. However, she did discover that female politicians expressed greater concerns about online harassment compared to their male counterparts. Furthermore, women reported that such harassment negatively affected their job performance and, in some cases, even led them to contemplate leaving their positions.

Another example is the Bolivian Gender Equality Observatory (GEO), in cooperation with International IDEA and several nations and international development aid agencies (OBERVATORIO DE PARIDAD – Democracia paritaria, 2016; Floru, 2019) which provides data on incidents of political violence and harassment in Bolivia through gathering testimonies and counting official complaints and resignations. This is also a useful method also for evaluating the effectiveness of the Bolivian legal framework on addressing violence against women in politics (see Part II for more discussion on policy frameworks).

A final example is the National Democratic Institute's (NDI) report (2019a) *No Party to Violence Compendium Report: Analyzing Violence Against Women in Political Parties*. The report focussed on Côte d'Ivoire, Honduras, Tanzania, and Tunisia, and included focus groups of exclusively women from political parties, specifically chosen due to their significant background in party activities or because they held positions as elected officials. To encourage open discussions, each focus group comprised members from the same political party or coalition to ensure familiarity and prevent any negative remarks from being shared publicly or exploited by rival parties. Additionally, NDI interviewed male and female party leaders to gain further understanding of how political parties perceive violence against women in politics. In terms of perceptions, experiences, and results of violence happening within political parties, they discovered substantial and widespread gendered tendencies. Furthermore, they found that women are more likely than men to be the targets of violence, to witness violence, and to detect a hostile atmosphere at their parties.

Gathering women's testimonies to measure violence against women in politics has proven to be a valuable and informative approach with both advantages and disadvantages. One of

the key advantages of this method is its ability to provide insight into underreported cases of violence. Many women may be hesitant to formally report incidents of violence due to fears of reprisal, societal stigma, or a lack of confidence in the justice system. By collecting their testimonies, researchers and civil society can access information about incidents that might otherwise remain hidden, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the issue.

It is important to consider that this approach is heavily dependent on women's willingness to come forward and share their stories, which may limit the representativeness of the sample. Moreover, relying solely on testimonies may overlook other forms of violence against women in politics that may not be captured through this method, such as online harassment, subtle forms of discrimination, or systemic barriers that deter women from entering politics in the first place.

Yet, gathering women's testimonies can empower women by giving them a platform to share their experiences. By amplifying their voices through testimonies, this method acknowledges the challenges they face and recognizes the significance of their participation in politics. Furthermore, testimonies can be used for advocacy purposes, raising awareness about the prevalence and severity of violence against women in politics. Policymakers, civil society organizations, and the public can gain a better understanding of the challenges women face and the urgent need for measures to prevent and address such violence.

Mixed methods

No single data collection approach can fully capture the phenomenon of violence against women in politics. For this reason, many researchers choose to use more than one methodology to have a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

For instance, the IPU (2016) report also used information on existing parliamentary structures, policies, and procedures to deal with inappropriate behaviour, sexual harassment, and sexist violence.   Likewise, NDI (2019b) conducted case study research in Indonesia, Colombia, and Kenya to investigate how online violence against women in politics affects the political engagement of young women. Researchers used workshops with civil society organizations, additional surveys and Twitter data from selected accounts. NDI's mixed method approach sought to gain comprehensive insights into the nature and impact of online violence against women in politics in these specific countries. The study's findings offer persuasive evidence of the direct and diverse effects of online violence against women in politics as a direct impediment to women's freedom of expression and as a chilling influence on women's political participation and aspirations.

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems' (IFES, 2018b) offers an array of tools specifically designed to reliably and consistently document violence against women in politics. Their threefold approach emphasizes the integration of qualitative and quantitative research methods, as well as technology-based data collection and analysis within this domain. The first facet of their approach, VAWE (Violence Against Women in Elections) Framework (2016), is an analysis and program implementation towards promoting women's participation and leadership in democracy assistance. It incorporates a typology of electoral violence, an assessment methodology, a monitoring methodology, and program recommendations. The second aspect is the VAWE Online sentiment analysis tool (IFES, 2019) to capture direct threats and abusive language aimed at women on social media platforms.

The third aspect monitors electoral violence through IFES' Electoral Violence Education and Resolution methodology (2014). The gender disaggregated data is then analysed to identify gendered trends and patterns concerning the types, forms, targets, and perpetrators. This data aids in providing immediate responses and long-term prevention and mitigation strategies.

Using mixed methodologies to measure violence against women in politics offers several advantages. Combining both quantitative and qualitative methods allow researchers to capture a broader range of data and insights. Quantitative data provides evidence that may prove the prevalence of violence and its patterns and help to establish trends and identify the scale of the issue. On the other hand, qualitative data allows for a deeper understanding of the nuances and contextual factors surrounding violence against women in politics.

Furthermore, a mixed methods approach enhances the reliability and validity of findings. By cross-referencing data from different sources and methods, researchers can corroborate the results and validate their conclusions. This reduces the risk of bias or errors inherent in any single method and increases the overall rigor of the study. In that sense, mixed methodologies can address the limitations of individual approaches.

Because of their rich potential, mixed methods approaches require substantial effort and expertise from the research team, potentially leading to higher costs and longer project timelines, which should be considered. Additionally, integrating different methods and data types can be methodologically complex. Researchers need to carefully design the study, ensuring the data collection instruments are compatible and that the analysis effectively merges the two types of data.

Methodologies: Online Violence

Sentiment analysis

Sentiment analysis is a technique in natural language processing used to discern the emotional tone or sentiment conveyed within a given text. Its objective is to categorize the sentiment as positive, negative, neutral, or sometimes more detailed emotions like happy, sad, angry, and others (Esposito, 2023). There are several approaches to sentiment classification. One method involves using lexicon-based techniques, which rely on predefined sentiment dictionaries associating words with sentiment scores. By calculating the overall sentiment score based on the words in the text, the sentiment label can be assigned. Another approach is to utilize machine learning methods. In this case, a classifier is trained on labelled data, where text examples are paired with known sentiment labels, allowing it to predict the sentiment of new, unseen text data. Hybrid methods, which combine lexicon-based and machine learning approaches, can also be employed to enhance the accuracy of sentiment analysis. Sentiment analysis has numerous practical applications, including social media monitoring for violence, abuse and harassment.

One example of sentiment analysis is Amnesty International's (2018) *Unsocial Media: Tracking Twitter Abuse against Women MPs* study. Researchers employed machine learning tools for sentiment analysis for the purpose of detecting and examining instances of abuse directed at female UK MPs on Twitter. The analysis yielded results indicating that out of 900,223 tweets

posted between January 1 and June 8 (before the general election that year), 25,688 were categorised as abusive. Additionally, the study brought attention to the women who encountered the highest level of negative sentiment, revealing the significant influence of intersectionality in online violence against women in politics. As an example, Diane Abbott, the first black women MP in the UK, received almost half of the negative tweets highlighted in the study.

Sentiment analysis is efficient, as it processes quickly large volumes of text data, allowing for fast detection and monitoring of violence across various online platforms. The scale of analysis is broad, providing a comprehensive picture of the extent and nature of the issue. Real-time monitoring capabilities enable fast responses to emerging threats, implementing timely interventions. Furthermore, the ability to identify patterns and trends in sentiments over time helps to better understand the evolving nature of online violence against women in politics, supporting the development of appropriate responses.

However, sentiment analysis faces certain limitations, which researchers should mitigate. Understanding the context of online discussions can be challenging, leading to potential misinterpretations and inaccurate results, particularly when dealing with sarcasm, irony, and language nuances. Language barriers further complicate matters, as different languages and regional dialects may not be well-handled by sentiment analysis algorithms. Additionally, some sentiment analysis techniques rely heavily on specific keywords to determine sentiment, which may not adequately detect more subtle or implicit forms of online violence. Researchers should pay particular attention to these contexts when designing studies.

Social Network Analysis

Social network analysis examines relationships and interactions within a social network (Esposito 2023). It can provide insights into the dynamics of abusive behaviour directed towards female politicians. The process involves data collection from online platforms, such as social media, forums, and comment sections, gather posts, comments, mentions, and interactions related to specific female politicians.

Using the collected data, researchers construct a social network graph where nodes represent individuals (for instance, users and commentators), and edges represent relationships (for example, mentions, replies, and retweets) between them. Researchers identify nodes of interest that engage in potentially harmful behaviors towards women in politics, such as those involved in online violence, harassment, or hate speech. Quantifying the interactions between nodes, researchers measure the frequency and intensity of abusive or threatening content directed towards female politicians. Centrality measures are applied to identify influential nodes in spreading online violence. Visualization techniques are employed to present the network graph, revealing patterns, clusters, and areas where online violence against women in politics is prevalent.

While it is not solely on violence against women in politics, a relevant example is Boyle and Rathnayake (2020) 's study #HimToo on the networking of misogyny. Boyle and Rathnayake utilized social network analysis to examine online gender-based violence against the #MeToo movement, specifically focusing on #HimToo, a Twitter response to #MeToo related to the Brett Kavanaugh hearings. They mapped actor centrality and connectivity on Twitter and combined this with a qualitative study of media portrayals of men's sexual violence against women. This approach allowed them to explore the development of #HimToo in two distinct phases, involving conservative engagement and subsequent responses. The analysis

revealed that while #MeToo had a global impact, the backlash exhibited regional characteristics.

Social network analysis provides a comprehensive view of the online environment surrounding female politicians, revealing the extent of abusive interactions, and identifying key actors involved in spreading online violence. With this tool, researchers can detect patterns and trends in online violence against women in politics, as it helps identify hotspots of abuse, common themes, and recurring tactics used by harassers. This information can inform targeted interventions. In addition, network graphs generated through this methodology offer visual representations of the relationships and interactions, facilitating better communication of findings to policymakers, stakeholders, and the public.

However, social network analysis relies heavily on the availability and reliability of data from online platforms, which can be limited due to privacy concerns ND platform policies. Moreover, there may be inherent biases in the data collected, as not all instances of online violence may be captured or reported, which could lead to an incomplete picture of the problem or skewed results. Some violence may take place in private groups, encrypted channels, or through alternative communication channels, escaping detection. These limitations can be mitigated through careful planning.

Manual techniques

Manual techniques are those in which only people intervene, without using automated means such as AI algorithms or techniques outlined previously. An illustrative example is Kuperberg's (2021) research on antisemitic and Islamophobic semiotic violence against specific UK MPs. She expanded two different datasets on prevalent online hate speech terminology. She reviewed 1,000 randomly chosen tweets and detected specific keywords linked to antisemitism and Islamophobia that were not present in the established hate speech wordlists. Then, she randomly selected 536 tweets and classified them regarding discriminatory language and, when needed, the original tweets were consulted for contextual understanding. Kuperberg found that the impact of online violence against women in politics cannot be only based on the target's gender, just as forms of violence cannot be properly comprehended from a singular emphasis on sexism.

As another example, Southern and Harmer (2019) used a team manual coders to measure incivility of tweets towards MPs which allowed for both qualitative and quantitative analysis. Drawing on Papacharissi (2004)'s online civility typology including stereotyping and name-calling, as well as additional variables specific to MPs such as questioning their position. A key finding is that female MPs were more likely to receive uncivil tweets and those with gendered stereotypes.

An advantage of manual methodologies is their capacity to provide a deep contextual understanding of the nature and impact of online violence experienced by women in politics. Human analysts can delve into the nuances of language, identifying subtleties like sarcasm or coded messages that automated tools might overlook. Furthermore, manual analysis facilitates the collection of qualitative data. Moreover, manual methodologies enable an element of accountability and ethical decision-making. Human analysts can better discern the severity of content and make nuanced judgments about what constitutes online violence.

Researchers should plan significant time investment for this method. Analyzing and interpreting each instance of online violence is labour-intensive, limiting the scale and comprehensiveness of data collection. This constraint poses challenges when attempting to capture the full extent of online violence across various platforms. Subjectivity represents another drawback. Human analysts may introduce biases and subjectivity when evaluating the severity of online violence, potentially resulting in inconsistent findings. This subjectivity could hinder the ability to make accurate cross-comparisons. Financial cost is another consideration. Employing a team of trained analysts for the extensive manual review and categorization of online content can be financially burdensome, particularly for prolonged research.

Combined automated and human techniques

Mixed methods combine autonomised techniques with human moderators. First, automated techniques are used. Then, teams of human moderators review the content according to the socio-cultural context and other factors. The teams usually follow policy guidelines that define what they will consider as violence, abuse, or harassment.

For instance, in their study of Twitter abuse towards UK MPs, Ward and McLoughlin (2020)created a semi-automated process for the identification of abusive tweets and those that contained hate speech. Firstly, they applied sentiment analysis to the dataset. Then, they coded the top 3,000 negative tweets manually based on the definition of online abuse they chose. Finally, they filtered the dataset for tweets that contained any one of the identified keywords. Each tweet was then manually verified to determine if the tweet was abusive or could be considered hate speech. If tested positive for abuse, they then verified if the MP was the intended recipient of the abuse or hate speech.

Mixed methodology ensures comprehensive data collection by relying on the strengths of each method. Automated tools enable efficient processing of vast amounts of content, identifying potential instances of violence, while human moderators add context and depth to the analysis. Humans can consider cultural and contextual factors, which are often crucial in understanding the motives behind and the impact of harmful content. The measurement then becomes more precise and avoids misinterpretations. On the other hand, the initial screening benefits from automation's objectivity, reducing human bias and enhancing the reliability of flagged content. The rich potential of this combined methodology requires carefully planning dedicated resources and expertise.

Recommendations

Measuring violence against women in politics demands a careful choice of methodologies to accurately face the challenges they encounter. The diverse forms of violence underscore the necessity for a comprehensive approach. To effectively measure such violence, acknowledging its multifaceted nature, we recommend:

- Adopt a clear definition of violence against women in politics for measuring and monitoring.
- Measure **both online and offline violence,** and pay attention to how **different groups of women**, such as by ethnicity and race, are impacted differently.
- **Combine research techniques** through mixed- and multi-method studies to gain more precise insights on the incidence and nature of online and offline violence.

- **Use automated techniques accompanied by well-resourced human team moderation** to ensure that context and language complexities are considered to measure online violence against women in politics.
- Increase partnership and data sharing between different platforms, as violence can occur on a range of platforms.

Summary Table 1: Methodologies to measure violence against women in politics

Methodology	Advantages	Limitations to be Mitigated
Gendering existing datasets	• Cost effective • Allows for historical comparisons • Helps to highlight gender-specific issues	• Pre-existingg datasets may not have been designed to accurately capture gendered violence • The gender variable must have been collected previously • Potential oversight of intersectionality
Original surveys	• Ability to collect data from a more diverse sample • Provides anonymity which encourages honest answers	• They are voluntary, so data might be limited or bias • They may not capture the nuances of violence against women in politics, especially in close-ended questions
Gathering and systematizing testimonies	• Provides insight into underreported cases of violence • Can empower women by giving them a platform to share their experiences	• Dependent on women's willingness to come forward • Findings may not be generalizable
Mixed methods	• Captures a broader range of data and insights • Enhances the reliability and validity of the findings	• Resource-intensive • Time-consuming

Summary Table 2: Methodologies to measure specifically online violence against women in politics

Methodology	Advantages	Limitations to be Mitigated
Sentiment analysis	• Efficiency: ability to process large volumes of data • Real-time monitoring capabilities that enable fast responses to emerging threats	• May not adequately detect more subtle or implicit forms of online violence • Language or cultural barriers
Social network analysis	• Comprehensive view of the online environment, revealing the extent of abusive interactions, and identifying key actors involved in spreading online violence • Network graphs generated may offer visual representations that facilitate the communication of findings	• Limited availability and reliability of data from online platforms • May be inherent biases in the data collected, as not all instances of online violence may be captured or reported
Manual techniques	• It can delve into the nuances of language that automated tools might overlook • Facilitates the collection of qualitative data • Understanding of social-context of data	• Resource intensive • Subjective
Combined automated and human techniques	• Ensures comprehensive data collection by utilizing the strengths of each method	• Resource-intensive, requiring advanced technology for automation and qualified human personnel for moderation

Part II. Policy Solutions

Introduction

Policy solutions "can be the most powerful in driving lasting improvement due to their ability to penalize perpetrators and influence attitudes and behaviours at a national or even international level." (Bardall, 2023, p. 205). This part of the report summarises the current policy frameworks that address, or could address, violence against women in politics. Given the complexity and comprehensive nature of the policy frameworks in different countries, we only give an overview of the main policy solutions for this specific topic, with some particularly relevant examples and recommendations. This part is organised into the following policy areas: violence against women in politics, violence in politics, violence against women, online violence, and general frameworks addressing violence.

Violence Against Women in Politics

Specific laws that address violence against women in politics are recommended in the literature (Krook, 2020; Restrepo Sanín, 2021; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2023). These laws can provide a definition of violence against women in politics and establish clear mandates on the role of different institutions in preventing and eradicating this form of violence.

Latin American countries have pioneered this specific approach (Restrepo Sanín, 2021). At a regional level, the Organization of American States (OAS) has adopted several mechanisms to address violence against women in politics. The *Declaration on Political Harassment and Violence against Women* (2015) is the first regional agreement devoted to this issue. Its measures include the adoption of public policies; dissemination of research and provision of trainings; and to incentivise democratic actors and institutions, such as political parties or electoral institutions, to incorporate violence against women in politics as part of their framework.

OAS subsequently developed a *Model Law on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women in Political Life* (2017) which emphasises that addressing this form of violence requires a comprehensive approach that encompasses a wide range of actors, and not limited to the state. As such, it establishes obligations for national gender equality/women's rights bodies, electoral bodies (commissions and tribunals), public bodies (Attorney General/Office of the Public Prosecutor, the ombudsperson or other human rights defence bodies), political parties and political organisations, organisations of public life (social organisations, trade unions, student organisations, human rights organisations, etc.), and the media.

All these mechanisms adopt a human rights approach and are based on the understanding that violence against women in politics is a form of gender-based violence which impedes women's political rights. These mechanisms are part of the framework to the *Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (Belém do Pará Convention)* (1994). Another innovative aspect of OAS' approach is the establishment of a link between political violence against women and the achievement of political parity. The adoption of gender quotas or electoral parity, while an essential first step, must be accompanied by measures that ensure that women exercise these rights free from discrimination and violence.

At the national level, Bolivia was the first country to specifically adopt a legislation addressing violence against women in politics (Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional., 2012; Krook, 2020). The *Law against Political Harassment and Violence against Women* (Law N. 243 of 28 of May of 2012) provides measures to eradicate harassment and political violence directed against women; ensures that political rights of women in politics are guaranteed; and promotes the development and implementation of policies and strategies. The law delineates administrative, constitutional and criminal mechanisms for female politicians to report instances of violence. It provides for administrative sanctions to perpetrators, and, more significantly, it amends the Criminal Code to incorporate specific crimes on political harassment and political violence against women.

Other Latin American countries have followed suit (Restrepo Sanín, 2022b), such as Panama, Law 184 (2020); Peru, Law 31.155 (2021) and Costa Rica, Law 10235 (2022). These laws provide mechanisms of prevention, including by mandating different governmental institutions to ensure the prevention of violence against women in politics, and establish disciplinary procedures for reporting and sanctioning this form of violence. They also establish different implementation mechanisms, such as obligations to develop annual reports on the implementation of the law (Panama and Peru), the establishment of a National Observatory of Political Harassment against Women (Peru), or mechanisms to monitor the compliance of political parties to prevent and sanction violence against women in politics (Panama and Costa Rica). What is particularly relevant of these laws is the provision of obligations to different organ of the government in addressing this matter, and not only putting the onus on individual politicians bringing forwards the cases. Other forms of policies, such as protocols, have been implemented in the region. For instance, the *Mexican Electoral Protocol to Address Political Violence against Women* (2016) guides public institutions and law enforcement officials on how to address violence against women in politics within the current legal framework.

Other regions have implemented different type of policies at various levels of government. At the international level, the United Nations General Assembly has passed several resolutions that specifically include violence against women in politics, for example *Women's Full and Effective Participation and Decision-Making in Public Life*, as well as the *Elimination of Violence, for Achieving Gender Equality and the Empowerment of All Women and Girls* (2020). Similarly, the Council of Europe adopted several resolutions seeking to address sexual harassment in its Parliamentary Assembly, as well as providing guidelines to national parliaments of states parties on this matter, such as *Resolution 2274* (2019) *on Promoting Parliaments Free of Sexism and Sexual Harassment*. These resolutions recommended the Parliamentary Assembly to modify the code of conduct to explicitly prohibit sexism, sexual harassment and sexual violence, provide additional training on sexual and violence against women, and include violence against women in the *Guidelines for the observation of election by the Parliamentary Assembly*.

There are further legislative proposals across the world. For example, Colombia is currently debating a bill on preventing and addressing violence against women in politics. In addition, United States House passed a Resolution, recognizing violence against women in politics as a global phenomenon and supporting women's full and meaningful participation in political life (2023).

Some research has highlighted the importance of the symbolic impact of these specific laws in terms of identifying the specific problem of violence against women in politics nationally

and internationally. In Bolivia, between 2016 and 2019, there were 124 reports on violence and political harassment, with 94% being reported by women, and 35 people resigned (Obervatorio De Paridad – Democracia paritaria, 2016; Floru, 2019; Defensor del Pueblo, 2020). On an international level, the early efforts by feminists in Latin America and elsewhere seems to have shaped global norms in terms of making the specific issue of violence against women in politics salient at the U.N. level (Restrepo Sanín, 2021) and in the policy, programmatic and academic literature, many continue to argue for the need for a specific law.

There is, however, some limitations to these specific laws. Some evidence suggesting that these laws may not be effective in terms of holding perpetrators to account and protecting women (Restrepo Sanín, 2021; Defensoria del Pueblo Peru, 2023). For example, prosecution for the murder of Juana Quispe, the female politician who inspired the first stand-alone law on violence against women in politics in Bolivia took almost twelve years (Defensoría del Pueblo, 2024). The lack of prosecutions or complaints likely does not reflect a lack of the problem. Rather, the lack of prosecutions likely indicates a lack of trust in the institutions, so women do not come forward and/or a lack of training, resources or structures in place on the part of institutional/policy actors.

Furthermore, the laws reviewed do not specifically or adequately address the digital/online space, which limits the symbolic and practical effect of this types of violence (Krook, 2020; Restrepo Sanín, 2022b). Likewise, little attention is paid to the role of private actors, particularly social media platforms, in preventing this form of online violence. The laws seem primarily focused on other politicians or persons in the public life as the perpetrators, leaving aside part of the violence committed online by other actors. Finally, from an intersectional perspective, these policies may not adequately protect those women who are already marginalised in politics (Restrepo Sanín, 2022b; Wineinger, 2023). As such, it is important that forthcoming policy innovations ensure adequate resources for implementation and attend to the potential differential impacts on different groups of women.

Violence in Politics

Many countries have policy frameworks addressing violence in politics, particularly during election periods, and security provisions related to addressing physical threats, such as terrorism. These policies can be useful to address the specific phenomenon of violence against women in politics, but in order to be truly transformative, policies should be gender-sensitive and pay dedicated attention to the specific forms of violence women may experience, including online violence.

A relatively developed area of criminal and civil code across the world is political violence during elections (Bardall, 2011; Krook, 2020; UN Women, 2020b; Retrepo Sanín 2022). These can be useful as evidence suggests that violence against women in politics increases during electoral periods (Albaine, 2021). These laws have expertise in addressing violence and harassment during elections, which may take the form of specific electoral crimes against violence in politics and fourth branches of government, such as electoral institutions. For example, Mexico has various laws or practices in place to specifically deal with violence in elections (Krook 2020, Restrepo Sanín 2022). In Europe, France has implemented a 10-year ban for those who are found guilty of a crime of misdemeanour, including sexual harassment, as part of its 2017 "trust in political life" law (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2023).

Some governments have also implemented codes of conduct for behaviour during elections. A growing number of these codes, including in Liberia, Nigeria, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, specifically mention the gendered dimension of violence against women in politics (Krook, 2020 224). Colombia and Ecuador have recently amended their Electoral Laws to include political violence against women within the competence of the electoral tribunals (Albaine, 2021). Similarly, Panama (Law 184, 2020) provides heightened protection during elections to women victims of political violence.

A range of international and national electoral assistance measures are explicitly gender-sensitive, involving safety and security risk assessments for women in politics. For example, the IFES (2018a) Kenya Electoral Assistance Program (KEAP) 2016-2018 focussed on improving electoral institutions' response to gendered violence and supporting women in politics, which led to more women running for office. Also in Kenya, in response to the online harassment against women in elections, UN Women (2023b) offered social media training. UN Women and UNDP (2017) have developed programming on tackling violence against women in elections.

While it is incredibly important to ensure safety during elections, an exclusive focus on electoral periods may miss the more "routine" or "everyday" violence that women face in their political participation, especially online. In terms of addressing the increasing range of threats, now some European countries, including the UK, have single points of contact in police forces to report threats and seek advice (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2017; Krook, 2020; UN Women, 2020a). As such, the UK's Operation Bridger, a national security plan for protecting MPs, includes a specific police team in parliament, the Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team, and single points of contacts for MPs in local police forces. Yet, little is known about how gender-sensitive these policies are in practice and emerging evidence suggests that the extent to which police take seriously online threats, especially threats towards women, varies (Jo Cox Foundation, 2024; Phillips, 2024). Intentionally ensuring gender sensitive polices throughout the pollical cycle is essential for safeguarding democracy.

Violence against women

A long history of feminist advocacy, internationally, regionally, nationally and locally, has led to the creation of violence against women, or gender-based violence, policy. Online violence against women politicians may also be covered by these existing laws and policies. These can be a promising avenue of policy support, especially with international and regional normative frameworks.

The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979) provides an international framework for women's human rights, including in the political sphere. The CEDAW Committee provides a broad definition of gender-based violence against women: "violence which is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately" (General Recommendation 19, 35), which encompasses political contexts, public spaces, and online or digital environments (General Recommendation 35, para 20).

The CEDAW obliges state parties to "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) (c) To participate in non-governmental organizations and associations concerned with the public and political life of the country." (Article 7)

Article 8 also provides that "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."

The focus of the CEDAW on women in politics has mostly been on non-discrimination and implementation of temporary special measures (CEDAW, General Recommendation No. 23 (1997), UN, 2018, para 53), yet violence in politics has been included in some concluding observations on specific countries. The U.N. more generally has also adopted policies on this matter, for instance it has specifically included violence against women in politics in its follow up resolutions on the Fourth Conference of Women (2021).

At the European level, the *Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)* provides a broad definition of violence against women. While no specific reference in its text is made to the political sphere, or to online spaces, the Council of Europe has recommended the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), who are responsible for the implementation of the Convention, address this issue in their country visits, reports and recommendation (Council of Europe, 2019) More recently, the proposal for the *EU Directive on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence* (European Commission, 2022) incorporates the context of women in politics. This Directive now includes criminlising digital violence, including nonconsensual dissemination of sexualised deepfakes and intimate images, cyberstalking and cyber harassment (HateAid, 2024) .

Local political initiatives demonstrate how local government can play an important role in protecting women. For example, Nottingham in the UK has specifically made misogyny a hate crime (Fish, 2021). The Stari Grad municipality of the City of Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina specifically includes protections from retaliation for those who report sexual harassment (OSCE, 2023).

Gender-based violence laws effectiveness might be limited because of their narrow focus on certain forms of violence – i.e., intimate partner violence – or contexts where the violence might take place, thus limiting their application to online political violence against women (Bardall 2023, Restrepo Sanín 2022b). Yet there have been significant initiatives to try to address these shortcomings. Notably, several Latin American countries have amended their national violence-against women laws to specifically include politically active women. For example, Paraguay recently incorporated the political space to the violence against women and girls framework, and other countries such as El Salvador, Argentina and Mexico have also included this in their legislation (Albaine, 2021; Restrepo Sanín, 2021; Verge, 2021).

Furthermore, in Europe, the state of Catalonia, Spain, recently amended its *Law 5/2008* (2023) *on women's right to a life free of gender-based*, to incorporate the online and political contexts. The law urges the need to conduct further research on the area of

violence against women in politics in order to determine its frequency, motives, its impact on the capacity to influence, including in the loss of opportunities, or leaving political life, as well as the responses for political institutions and the causes for the low levels of reporting. Similarly, it obliges political parties to adopt internal equality plans, and develop protocol on the preventions, detection and action in cases of gender-based violence.

Online Violence

A burgeoning body of literature examines online violence generally. While many democratic governments used to resist regulating the "new public square," increasingly policymakers agree that specific regulations are needed to protect the public from internet violence, especially on social media platforms. With cyberviolence impacting 1 in 2 European young women, particularly those active in public life, the EU and Council of Europe has clearly stated that this form of violence has an effect of undermining democracy .

A focus of recent policy discussion and development has been specifically targeting speech and images– and holding social media platforms accountable. A growing body of literature examines this complex area of internet governance which debates concerning the desirability and efficacy of regulating social media platforms. Concerns of regulation include limits of freedom of speech, and governments having access to data, especially for now anonymous whistle-blowers and human rights defenders .

Much of the literature on online violence against women (in politics) advocates for some degree of social media platform regulation, as well as other private Internet intermediaries, a way to force platforms to protect politically active women. In this regard, specific solutions include mandating platforms to implement clearer reporting mechanisms for users, automated techniques to remove abusive material, transparency from platforms about what action they have taken on include consistent definitions of online violence that include gender-sensitive, e-safety commissioners or cyber abuse ombudspeople, and ensuring the ability for users to reduce exposure to violence through blocking and muting .

The legal framework for addressing online violence is nascent but growing. In a recent study, the European Parliament (2022) found that only two countries in the EU, France and Romania, criminalise gender-based cyber violence. Other European countries with specific laws addressing cyber violence did not include a gender perspective in these. Yet in the latter case, there are several initiatives seeking to regulate social media platforms that could be useful for addressing online violence against women in politics.

A key example of regulation is Australia which set up the first government agency for e-safety (eSafety Commissioner) in 2015 with powers to facilitate the rapid removal of harmful online content by directing certain internet providers to block or remove it. The Australian *Online Safety Act 2021*, moreover, sets up Basic Online Safety Expectations that the technology industry must follow, and the eSafety Commissioner may require them to report on their compliance (Bardall 2023, BBC Reality Check 2020).

Other examples include Germany's *Network Enforcement Act*, or *NetzDG* () requires platforms to set procedures on complaint review, remove illegal content within 24 hours and publish updates on progress. Similarly, French hate speech law requires platforms to remove "obviously hateful" content within 24 hours. The new United Kingdom *Online Safety Law* was passed in 2023. One important aspect of the legislation is that providers have to proactively

take-down harmful content, including related to harassment and misogyny (rather than only reactively respond to user report).

The *European Union Digital Services Act (DSA)*, (2022) is one of the leading pieces of legislation which strengthens users' powers to report to platforms and use legal avenues. Relevant for our research, it obliges very large online platforms and search engines to identify, analyse and assess systematic risks in the EU, and this risk assessment should include "actual or foresseable negative effects in relation to gender-based violence." More recently, the Council of the EU and the European Parliament agreed on the text of the first EU law on violence against women, which seeks the criminalisaiton of certain forms of cyber-violence, mentioned earlier.

Establishing solid frameworks for online content regulation, including during election periods, and clearly articulating the obligations of social media platforms, while respecting the right to freedom of expression of users, is essential. The gender perspective to these regulations needs to be included, such as by particularly targeting online violence that disproportionally affects women in politics. This is particularly relevant as recent reports have showed how big tech companies such as Meta (formerly Facebook), X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, and YouTube have deprioritized content moderation and other trust and safety protection to users, making the online space a toxic environment "vulnerable to exploitation form non-democratic forces, white supremacists and other bad actors." (Free Press, 2023) These companies have rolled back on their content regulation policies, including on disinformation policies and policy moderation on violence, lies and political advertisements. Specific recommendations for social media platforms to safeguard democracy are covered in part three.

Other Policies to Address Violence

In lieu of specific laws, in most countries, aspects of online violence against women politician are covered by existing laws that sanction and criminalize harassment, stalking, malicious communications and threats (Restrepo Sanín, 2018; Bardall, 2020a; Krook, 2020). For example, the UK's longstanding malicious communications laws have been used to prosecute against cases of online violence against women in politics (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2017). However, there is some consensus that these existing legal frameworks may be insufficient to adequately protect women politicians because of the lack of clarity (Bardall, 2020; Krook, 2020) and lack of specific law enforcement training, especially for online violence (Committee on Standards in Public Life, 2017; Jane, 2017; Krook, 2020).

A clear policy solution is to educate law enforcement officials responsible for implementing policy – such as police, judges and prosecutors – on how existing laws cover online violence against women in politics. Individual policy actors can interpret incidences very differently, with some police officers and judges even believing that violence/abuse is "part of the job" of an elected representative (Phillips, 2024). Mandatory and regular training for such law enforcement actors would help address violence against women in politics. While not particularly focusing on law enforcement officials, the Mexican *Protocol on Addressing Violence against Women in Politics* (2016) is a good example of providing guidance to relevant actors of how to understand and address this phenomenon.

While seeking to hold accountable the perpetrators is essential, many advocate for focusing on prevention and awareness-raising, driven by an understanding of the complex causes and solutions needed to address violence, beyond individual, carceral measures. This is known as a "public health" approach to online violence against women in politics, and the

specific Latin American laws explained above seek to have this type of approach. A more comprehensive and longer-term aim to address digital violence is better education around digital literacy, digital citizenship and online violence against women (United Nations Broadband Commission, 2015; United Nations, 2018a; Glitch, 2020). For example, Mexican Federal Electoral Tribunal offers free resources on gender, violence, politics (Krook, 2020).

Recommendations

The complexities of the growing phenomenon of violence against women in politics calls for a holistic approach. A set of policies that can comprehensively address these aspects is needed. As such, we recommend governments:

- **Adopt legislation addressing violence against women in politics which specifically includes online violence**. Policies should include reporting mechanisms, administrative sanctions, and monitoring mechanisms to understand this phenomenon.
- **Ensure the implementation** of such policy with adequate resources and training for relevant actors such as police, judges, and election officials.
- **Regulate the online space**, including by ensuring that social media platforms, and other relevant internet intermediaries, perform adequate and transparent content regulation and establish clear reporting mechanisms.
- **Implement a comprehensive policy framework** to prevent and address online violence against women in politics. For example, ensure that election safety mechanisms are gender sensitive, and incorporate online violence against women in politics into broader digital and political literacy policy efforts.
- **Report on the developments** to address violence against women in politics in international and regional human rights mechanisms country reports.
- **Incentivize different actors**, such as political parties, trade unions, parliaments, governmental institutions, electoral bodies, social media platforms, and other relevant private sector companies, to play a role in the prevention and detection of online violence against women in politics through regulation of internal policies as well as awareness campaigns.

Summary Table 3: Government polices to address online violence against women in politics

Policy	Advantages	Limitations to be Mitigated
Violence against women in politics	• Symbolic commitment from the government and normative attention to the specific problem of violence against women in politics • Clarifies the role of different public institutions • Establishment of reporting mechanisms	• May not adequately cover online forms of violence • Focus on individual perpetrators rather than structural problem/solution • Enforceability limitations
Violence in politics	• Specific focus on politics/politicians • Heightened attention to electoral period • Often involves other actors such as political parties and electoral bodies	• Often time-limited to electoral periods • Often misses the more "routine" violence that women face • Often not adequately gender-sensitive
Violence against women	• Often identifies the structural gendered aspect of the problem • Human rights framing • Establishes support services	• May not adequately cover online forms of violence • May be limited to only certain types of violence against women
Online Violence	• Can symbolically and legally indicates that online violence *is* violence • More precise understanding of the online complexities • Regulation of social media platforms and other intermediaries	• Often not gendered • May be insufficient for platforms to take action
Other policies to address violence	• When applied specifically, can be helpful to address this problem	• Lack of understanding by law enforcement of the applicability of these laws to online violence against women in politics • May be focussed on individual, carceral solutions rather than a preventive approach

Part III. Support Mechanisms

Introduction

This final part of the report reviews existing and proposed support mechanisms for politically active women. Civil society organisations have pioneered ways to tackle online violence against women in politics through innovative collective action and advocating individual protective measures. Social media platforms have the power – but not always the will – to create safer online spaces through proactive content moderation, and adequate reporting mechanisms. Government institutions and political parties can implement policy frameworks such as behavioural codes of conducts.

Civil Society

As we have already evidenced throughout the report, civil society organisations lead the way in tackling violence against women in politics through monitoring the problem, providing front-line services and pushing for policy change. Notably, as referenced earlier, Restrepo Sanín (2022a) credits the advocacy of Bolivian women for directing international attention to the specific problem of violence against women in politics. Furthermore, with government and social media platform policy slow to change, civil society has taken the lead on understanding digital forms of violence (Sobieraj, 2020).

Some groups have a core purpose to support online violence in women in politics. The global organization #ShePersisted (2024), focusses on protecting politically active women from gendered misinformation. Another prime example is our project lead, HateAid (2024b), which provides legal advice to politically active women facing digital violence, undertakes strategic litigation, and leads EU-wide advocacy to pressure policymakers to take

Other organisations work on addressing online abuse towards women, which can be particularly helpful to those who are politically active. For example, the UK based Glitch (2020) offers "Digital Self Defence" training as part of its suite of guidance and advocacy tools to combat online abuse and centre the experiences of the most marginalised especially black women, other people of colour and LGBTQI+ people. The European Women's Lobby' #HerNetHerRights toolkit (2017) offers policy recommendations and practical guidance to women to improve their online security.

Feminist groups have prioritised tackling the topic. For example, the UK Fawcett Society (2017) produced research and recommendations that include on the impact of gendered political violence on political participation on the local and national level. The National Women's Council of Ireland (2022) has published various research and guidance, including a social media toolkit for political parties to tackle violence against women in politics.

Groups supporting a specific community against abuse have increasingly included online abuse against politically active women. An example is the Community Safety Trust (2023) in the UK which provides safety and security advice for the UK Jewish community. Similarly, the German-based Alfred Landecker Foundation (2023) which fights group-based hate, focussing on anti-Semitism, generously supports this project on digital violence against women in politics.

Many larger civil society organisations that are not predominantly focussed on women or online violence also have a key role to play. The global organization the National Democratic Institute pioneered advocacy, research and support for violence against women in politics with its #NotTheCost (2018) campaign. For example, its "think10" resource (2023) supports politically active women to create a security plan to prevent and address violence. Large international organisations such as Amnesty International (Dhrodia, 2018) and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Brechenmacher, 2020) have taken up the cause of talking online abuse against women in politics.

Included in civil society is the work of academics who have worked independently as well as closely with organisations to measure the problem and create advocacy products. A non-exhaustive list includes Krook's work with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), Restrepo Sanín's policy work in Latin America, and Bardall and Bjarnegård's research with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). There are a number of growing examples of funded academic research on this topic. For example, the Princeton University's "Bridging Divides" project (2020) maps incidences of violence in US local government. The Research Council of Norway's "The Cost of Doing Politics: Gender Aspects of Political Violence" (2020) examines the gender dimensions of political violence in Europe and Africa. Our project partner, the Technical University Munich (2023), explores online misogyny against politically active women.

Civil society are innovators in understanding violence against women and politics through monitoring, providing support for politically active women, and agitating for change. The fact that civil society, which may be under-resourced, is taking on so much of the onus of tackling this problem points to gaps in the policies of government and digital platforms. Going forward, governments and social media platforms should listen to and work with civil society experts in addressing this urgent issue.

Social Media Platforms

Social Media Platforms have an important power to address online violence against women in politics and safeguard democracy. A rich scholarship on digital governance highlights drawbacks and opportunities for social media platforms to prevent and address violence (Sloan and Quan-Haase, 2017; Atalanta, 2018; Barker and Jurasz, 2019; Glitch, 2023).

Platforms' have recently deprioritised safety measures which could impact the integrity of the 2024 elections around the world (Free Press, 2023). For example, the recent change of leadership of Twitter (now X) prompted a mass change of policy (Staff, 2022), including the removal of the external Trust and Safety Board and the human rights team. Research including by HateAid and the Landecker Digital Justice Movement (2022) indicates that users find many platforms' current complaint mechanisms insufficient. Going forward, platforms can and should take action. As Bardall (2023) puts it, platforms can "integrate and elevate" online violence against women into platform policies.

"Safety by design" mechanisms are important. Platforms can proactively protect users from violence. From a gendered perspective, scholars and activists suggest that, at a minimum, online gendered harm is prohibited with specific examples of what may constitutes online violence against women clearly communicated (Citron, 2014; Bardall, 2023). Ideally, platforms have specific policies for politicians to seek support and flag harmful content. Some platforms, including Google/YouTube (2019), have improved their policies to specifically include and provide examples of gendered hate speech. Furthermore, platforms

could employ targeted awareness raising for online violence against women in politics, similar to the disinformation campaigns during the coronavirus pandemic. Platforms should (re) prioritise staff responsible for safety and moderation (Free Press, 2023).

Comprehensive content moderation is essential to efficiently and accurately respond to harm – but challenging implement. Those who target women may employ "malign creativity" (Jankowicz, 2022) to attempt to bypass artificial intelligence monitors by using a seemingly harmless word that, in context, is a proxy for a gendered and/or racial slur. Automated content and human moderators may be limited to certain languages and contexts. For example, in their study of online political campaigns in Brazil, Udupaa and Koch (2024) found that automated moderators were unable to fully detect the range of misogynistic terms. Furthermore, research indicates that content moderator's working conditions may be extremely challenging; improving pay and psychological support could help improve content moderation (Roberts, 2019). Platforms should employ human content moderators and providing training in how online violence against women in politics can manifest. To specifically address poltical violence, Sobieraj (2020, p. 148) calls for "pre-emptive moderation" for those who are particularly at risk, such as women in politics i.e. those particularly at risk have content that mentions then moderated.

Transparency is another important principle. Platforms should clearly disclose metrics of harmful activity to allow researchers to conduct analysis on online violence against women in politics. This information should be affordable, accessible and comprehensive (Free Press, 2023). In a similar spirit, many suggest platforms set up external advisory groups/Councils Trust and Safety Boards. Facebook (now Meta) set up an Oversight Board to advise on policy and content removal appeals (Bardall, 2023; Glitch, 2023). In sum, social media platforms should take seriously their responsibility for creating safe online spaces in the interests of democracy.

Government Institutions and Political Parties

Government institutions, such as parliaments and local authorities, have an important role for addressing violence against women in politics, usually through codes of conduct and security measures. Political parties are also important actors in addressing online violence against women in politics. So much political activity, including candidate selection, campaigning and governing is organised by political parties. In fact, many perpetrators of violence against women in politics are from women's own parties (National Democratic Institute, 2019a).

Parliaments around the world, have recognized harassment in their institutions following the #MeToo movement, with updated sexual harassment and complaints mechanisms. The #MeToo movement shed light on the prevalence of sexual harassment experienced by parliamentary staff across the world and the ineffective policies. The campaign group #MeTooEP has successfully raised awareness and advocated for change in the European Parliament (including the Council of Europe, Resolution 2274 (2019) mentioned earlier). Following a series of horrific revelations, the UK Parliament set up the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme (ICGS) (Julios, 2022). In 2019, Chile set up a parliamentary complaints protocol for both parliamentarians and staff (Nimmo, 2022). Furthermore, some local authorities have updated their ethics or standards policies to include addressing sexual harassment against elected officials (Phillips and George 2022). For example, in the United States of America, 23 US states introduced over 125 bills to address sexual harassment in local legislatures in 2017 (Williams, 2018).

A challenge for addressing violence against women politicians is that elected representatives are not usually "employees" so institutions may not have the same legal duty of care to protect them. To combat this, some, including the OSCE (2023) and Council of Europe (2019), recommend adopting a specific, stand-alone parliamentary policy on violence against women in politics which includes clear definitions, complaint mechanisms, sanctions, regular data collection and training. Government institutions can also raise awareness of violence against women in politics, for example with specific parliamentary debates, as has occurred in Sweden (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2023), Catalonia (Verge, 2021) and the UK (Phillips, 2023).

Security policy and procedures are another avenue of response to protect politicians in particular (and their staff). Many parliaments in Europe have increased security provisions for parliamentarians, with an increasing focus on monitoring and addressing online threats (European Conference of Presidents of Parliament, 2023). Many parliaments have a dedicated point of contact in parliament responsible for the security of MPs and include online safety in new MPs' briefings. For example, the UK Parliament has improved its security offering since two murders of MPs and a terrorist attack (Jo Cox Foundation, 2024; Phillips, 2024). As well as the UK's specific police team in parliament, Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team (PLAIT), UK parliament also changed the way that security spending was reported – from against individual offices spending to reporting spending centrally. MPs may be more likely to take advantage of security measures when they are not reported against their own office costs (Phillips, 2024).

The main way in which political parties across the world have implemented online violence and/or violence against women in politics is through codes of conducts which are sometimes supported by investigation mechanisms. They are often general in address political violence in different forms but increasingly may include social media guidelines and attention to women's adverse experiences (Phillips, 2024). For example, in the UK, the three major parties into or revised codes of conducts to include sexual harassment (Krook, 2020; Julios, 2022).

Recently qualitative and other anecdotal evidence gives a mixed picture of the effectiveness of political parties to respond to violence. Women may not want to report party colleagues/members. Often political considerations/leadership can intervene to mitigate political risk and (National Democratic Institute, 2019a; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2023). Therefore, some propose independent mechanisms for codes of conduct that are separate from the central party procedures (Julios, 2022).

A dedicated, gendered approach is necessary to ensure that the specific problem of online violence against women in politics is taken seriously. Thanks to international and national efforts, including by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2011; 2018) and Childs' (2016) Good Parliament report, many parliaments have adopted Gender Sensitive Parliament Frameworks, which aims to improve the experiences of women parliamentarians and staff with a view of making government institutions more inclusive and, as such, effective. For example, in its recent gender sensitive audit, Scottish Parliament (2023) included reflections on social media and security, and recommended attention to gendered social media violence be an area focus going forward.

"Self-Help": Individuals and Groups of Politicians

A final and important way that women in politics protect themselves through violence is through individual and group support mechanisms. The concepts of individual and community "self-help" (Lorde, 1988; hooks, 1999) and "safety work" come from black feminist literature and violence against women in politics scholarship, respectively (Vera-Gray and Kelly, 2020). In the face of structural problems and the lack of structural responses, women must take control of their online and political safety.

Individual actions for "digital self-defence" (Glitch 2020) includes taking control of data. Women can and should use password managers and two factor authentication to reduce hacking. If permitted, women can de-list home address from ballots and elsewhere on the internet. Women can carry out risk assessments and data checks themselves, or recruit a service to find any past content that may result in threats today. Another practical tip is setting boundaries with if/when use social media to protect mental health (Akiwowo, 2022; Jankowicz, 2022).

In terms of collective action, groups of women share advice and experiences of how to address online violence and navigate policy and other support mechanisms in what Jankowicz (2022) calls a "circle of solidarity". Individuals can develop these networks by following other women or egnage with more fromal networks. For example, the Association of Women Councillors of Bolivia was set up in response to harassment experienced by councillors, and continues to support women (Krook, 2020). The UK Labour Women's Network (2021) training programmes for prospective candidates now cover dealing with online abuse. Furthermore, women can support other women by sending positive Tweets, "lovebombing," "counter-speech." Such "hashtag activism" or "hashtag feminism" (Clark 2016) can be organised by civil society or produced more organically. Examples of organized campaigns include the global #NotTheCost campaign by NDI and the European Parliament #MeTooEP #NotMyParliament, and the ParityBotA AI automatically sends a positive tweet when detects abusive tweet (Areto Labbs, 2019).

Another more individualised and potentially effective solution is the role of political staff. The activities and importance of staff is an under-explored aspect of politics in general (Miller, 2021), especially in relation to the issue of violence in politics. The limited research (Tenove *et al.*, 2023; Wineinger, 2023) indicate that staff play an important role. Just as responding to violence has become "part of the job" for politicians, so it has for their staff. They are often "first responders" for violence, especially online, in terms of managing social media accounts and correspondence. They make decisions on how to deal with violence through using policy or other support mechanisms. From the point of view of politicians, staff teams can be an invaluable resource for tackling online violence and reducing the onus on themselves as elected representatives. However, staff can face major issues related to workload and well-being in already under-resourced settings. Improved training provided by political institutions could help these important actors (Phillips, 2024).

While specific research on causal mechanisms limited, this form of individual and group support may temper women leaving politics as a result of the violence they experience (Jankowicz, 2022). The rich, global women in politics literature that group support can be essential to recruiting and maintaining women's political participation (Lawless and Fox, 2010; Butler, Campbell and Hudson, 2021).

Yet, these individual actions put the onus on individuals to address a multi-faceted, structural problem. Informal networks may mean a lack of resource and again puts the onus on groups of women to protect themselves rather than governments and social media platforms to

take the problem seriously. As Sobieraj (2020, p. 225) expresses, "these survival tactics are essential in a context that fails to take their abuse seriously, but they are rarely effective, because digital abuse can only be addressed meaningfully through systemic solutions."

Recommendations

Various actors have the responsibility and power to support politically active women from the regular online violence they face. We recommend:

- **Civil Society** organisations should **prioritize tackling online violence against women in politics** in the ways it impacts the populations they serve. For example, feminist organisations could create specific programming on violence against women in politics. Academics and academic institutions can implement specific monitoring programs to map violence against women in politics locally and globally.
- **Social Media companies** should implement **"safety by design" principles**. For example, policies should specifically include and provide examples of gendered hate speech and harassment. **Both automated and human content moderators** should be trained on how online violence can manifest in different languages and contexts. Companies should provide transparent and gender-disaggregated data on addressing online harassment.
- **Government Institutions** should prioritize addressing online violence against women in politics for staff and politicians. For example, they have **security policy and procedures** and Advice which include **online monitoring of social media as** a regular part of security, a dedicated point of contact in parliament and **induction briefings** on online violence against women in politics. Furthermore, institutions should provide **training and well-being support for staff** who are often the first line of defense against political violence.
- **Individual women** can **take control of their data** by putting in place safety measures such as two factor authentication. Women can also **support each other** by publicly and privately calling out abuse, reporting incidents, and sharing information of redress mechanisms.

Summary Table 4: Support mechanisms to address online violence against women in politics

Mechanism	Advantages	Limitations to be Mitigated
Civil Society	• Expertise, leadership and commitment to addressing violence against women in politics • Advocacy expertise and capacity to influence policy making	• Under-resourced (budget and human resources) • May be doing work in lieu of policies by governments or platforms
Social Media Platforms	• Core power in addressing abuse	• Lack of incentivisation if not regulated by the government • Policies may not be gendered
Government Institutions (parliaments, local government authorities)	• Treats violence as a 'workplace' issue	• May be limited to certain forms of violence certain actors (i.e., focus on staff, not politicians as victims)
Political Parties	• Key actor to address this issue internally • Symbolic statement to addressing violence against women in politics	• Politicised/lack of independence of complaints and support mechanisms
"Self-Help" (individual and networks of politicians, staff and volunteers)	• Necessary/first line of defence • Networks may prevent women from leaving politics due to violence	• Puts the onus on individuals to address a structural problem

Conclusion

Online violence against women in politics is an urgent problem. With over 70 national elections in 2024, action is needed more than ever. Professor Ngaire Woods (2023), Dean of the Blavatnik School of Government, warns that if nothing changes, "representative democracies will become less representative and less democratic." This report has offered a snapshot of the ways to strengthen democracy by reducing threats to women in politics in terms of measuring and monitoring, policy solutions, and other support mechanisms.

Measuring and monitoring the problem is essential to understand its manifestations and causes. Methods include gendering existing datasets, conducting original surveys, sentiment analysis, social network analysis, and combined manual and automated techniques. Data collection is not just the responsibility of academic and civil society researchers but should form part of government policy in order to form evidence-based solutions.

Furthermore, governments should consider adopting specific laws to address violence against women in politics, establishing clear mandates to public institutions on their roles and providing resources such as training for law enforcement. Online regulation is particularly crucial to ensure that social media platforms are held accountable for keeping women safe.

While policy is crucial, the complexity of this phenomenon requires further action. Social media companies have a particular responsibility to prioritise safety. Tech giants and governments alike should learn from the civil society experts, such as HateAid, to put in place adequately resourced mechanisms to prevent and address online violence against women in politics. Governments and political parties can intentionally create gender-sensitive procedures and cultures in which violence is not tolerated.

Transformative change is required. As Krook (2020, p. 217) expresses, "single-pronged solutions … may not suffice, on their own, to address the fuller spectrum of acts of violence against women in politics." This report contributes to the much-needed conversation on how to address this growing threat to democracy. We trust that this review will prove helpful to inform the essential projects that HateAid and Technical University Munich will undertake, and further work at the Blavatnik School of Government and beyond.

Appendix: Event Summary – Roundtable: Strengthening Democracy by Reducing Threats to Women in Politics

25 January 2024

Representative democracy is threatened by growing violence against politically active women. Burgeoning research shows that online violence – from image-based abuse to rape threats – is a daily reality for women politicians on different levels of government across the world. The Blavatnik School of Government hosted an expert roundtable on ways to understand and address online violence against women in politics. The School's report [link forthcoming], part of a project generously supported by the Alfred Landecker Foundation and HateAid, formed a starting point for the discussion.

The diverse and dynamic expert group included academics from Oxford and Mexico, Ireland and Finland; a Thames Valley Police Assistant Chief Constable, politicians, and civil society representatives including the Alan Turing Institute, the World Wide Web Foundation and Project Liberty. Chaired by Dean Ngaire Woods, the discussion's takeaways included: the importance of a gender-specific legislative agenda, implementation of policies, regulation of social media companies, the role of political parties, and better understanding the motives of perpetrators.

A gender-specific legislative agenda is key to addressing this gendered problem. As pioneered in the Latin American context, governments should consider adopting specific, stand-alone laws to address violence against women in politics. The creation of such laws practically and symbolically shifts the burden from the individual to positive obligations on the part of the state. Experts emphasised that, such a law, or the amendment of other relevant laws, force different actors, such as social media companies and political parties to take action in cases of violence against women in politics.

Of course, legislation is only as good as it is implementation. It took over ten years to prosecute the murder of the politician which prompted the first stand-alone law on violence against women in politics in Bolivia. This example points to the need for proper resourcing and gender-specific training for those involved in all stages of law enforcement – from police to prosecutors to judges. Even when training is offered, it needs to be implemented with the support and leadership from senior officials.

Government regulation of technology and social media companies is essential to promote a healthy internet and stop violence against women. Platforms must have an enforceable legal responsibility to address violence such as through authenticating images and videos and improve content moderation. Agile, cultural and context specific moderation systems are needed to stay ahead of transnational perpetrators who quickly invent new ways to abuse powerful women online. Improved collaboration between regulators could also help effectively hold platforms to account – for example, information commissioners and human rights commissioners could share their retrospective technology and gendered expertise in order to address tech-facilitated gendered violence.

As well as technology companies, political parties have a key role in both perpetrating and stopping violence against women in politics. Research indicates that much of the violence experienced by women politicians around the world occurs inside their own political parties, perpetrated by party members and even other politicians. Experts reflected on the persistent misogynist culture in political parties across the ideological spectrum. Examples of violence

range from male politicians ignoring their female colleagues to physical assault. Roundtable participants discussed the possibility for further regulation of political parties, perhaps with more powers to electoral commissions or another independent body.

A final takeaway was the need to better understand perpetrators. While much research has valuably focussed on the perspectives of victims, more scholarship is needed to understand the individual and cultural motives and facilitating factors that leads to people abusing women in politics. With a strong evidence-based of the complex reasons for such violence, we can create effective solutions. For example, comprehensive digital and media literacy may be needed to prevent online violence.

A clear message from the roundtable is that addressing gendered political violence is not only a women's issue, but is about strengthening democracy for all. As Dean Ngaire Woods recently warned in an op-ed, if we do not act now, in this important election year, "representative democracies will become less representative and less democratic." The report and roundtable are contributions to the much-needed conversation about reducing threats to women in politics. We look forward to continuing this work in partnership with the experts in the roundtable and beyond to safeguard democracy.

For more information about the 'Strengthening Democracy by Reducing Threats to Women in Politics' project at the University of Oxford, please contact Ngaire Woods *dean@bsg.ox.ac.uk* or Hannah Phillips *hannah.phillips@spi.ox.ac.uk*

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