

ADDRESSING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN
POLITICS IN THE OSCE REGION: TOOLKIT

Tool 5

Support and Encouragement for WOMEN IN POLITICS



**Addressing Violence Against Women in
Politics in the OSCE Region Toolkit**
Tool 5: Support and Encouragement for
Women in Politics



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Addressing Violence Against Women in Politics in the OSCE Region
Tool 5: Support and Encouragement for Women in Politics

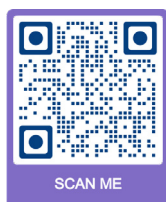
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Toolkit for Addressing Violence against Women in Politics

Violence against women in politics is a human rights violation, a barrier to women's political participation, and a serious challenge to the democracy, peace and security of the OSCE participating States. There is a need to respond to and eradicate its different manifestations in all areas of political life.

The 2018 OSCE Ministerial Council Decision on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women acknowledges that “women engaged in professional activities with public exposure... are likely to be exposed to specific forms of violence or abuse, threats, and harassment, in relation to their work”. It also “encourage(s) all relevant actors, including those involved in the political process, to contribute to preventing and combating all forms of violence against women, including those engaged in professional activities with public exposure and/or in the interest of society, by, inter alia, raising the issue in public debates, and developing awareness-raising initiatives and other appropriate measures, also considering the chilling impact of such violence on young women.”

This Toolkit for Addressing Violence against Women in Politics in the OSCE Region aims to raise awareness and strengthen knowledge and capacities of OSCE participating States towards effective measures for addressing and responding to this type of violence. It offers five separate tools:

ODIHR's Toolkit for Addressing Violence Against Women in Politics in the OSCE Region

- **Tool 1 – the Introduction** defines violence against women in politics and describes solutions for effective prevention, protection of victims, the prosecution of perpetrators and coordination of policies.
- **Tool 2 - for Parliaments** provides data and examples of promising practices to guide parliaments towards measures which address violence against women in parliaments and beyond.
- **Tool 3 - for Political Parties** assists political parties in taking internal steps to tackle violence against women within their structures.
- **Tool 4 - for Civil Society** explores the role that civil society and women's movements can play in combating violence against women in politics.
- **Tool 5 - for Women in Politics** is a guide for women affected directly or indirectly by such violence about how to seek protection, remedy and support.

Introduction

“As I became more active in higher levels of decision-making, the support of networks of women in politics became more meaningful to me. They strengthened my belief that every time a woman is being attacked, it’s our common duty to step up and say no to violence.”¹

Gender-based violence affects women in all aspects of life. Politics is no exception. Equal access to participate in politics is essential to ensure thriving democratic societies, national growth and sustainable development that benefits all. Violence against women in politics can prevent women’s access to both the legislative and regulatory arenas where gender equality is taken from words to actions. It is in these spaces where gender-based discrimination prevention initiatives are debated and adopted.

Violence against women in politics is still far too often trivialized and dismissed as “the price women have to pay” for being in politics. To move beyond this mentality, it is crucial to raise awareness of sexism and violence against women in politics, as well as to adopt and implement laws, policies, and measures to prevent it effectively.

To understand the phenomenon, it is essential to look both at gender-based violence as a form of human rights violation, as well as shed light on politics as the specific arena in which this violence occurs. Helping to remove the barriers to women’s participation, by ending violence against women in politics, is crucial for making politics and democratic participation truly accessible for all, and for creating gender-responsive political parties and parliaments that respond to the needs and interests of all its citizens.

Women’s rights to participate in politics on equal terms with men, both as voters and candidates, are protected under international law; e.g., pursuant to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Articles 7 and 8) or the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR Article 25). It is also mentioned, for instance, as part of the Beijing Platform for Action and the Sustainable Developments Goals.

¹ Each section will begin with a quote from women politicians interviewed for this tool by Annika Ojala.

Violence against women in politics constitutes a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. It violates the state's obligation to ensure that women can participate in political processes fully, freely and safely.

Violence against women in politics is a form of gender-based discrimination: "...violence against women, however, target them [women] because of their gender and take gender-based forms, such as sexist threats or sexual harassment and violence. Their aim is to discourage women from being politically active and exercising their human rights and to influence, restrict or prevent the political participation of individual women and women as a group".²

Violence against women is never acceptable. States have an obligation to criminalize all forms of violence against women.³

When referring to women in politics, this toolkit limits the definition of 'women in politics' to those serving in formal political roles, such as candidates, members of political parties, and elected and appointed officials.

More action is needed to tackle the culture of silence against gender-based violence and to speak up and report this violence to the appropriate national and international mechanisms, in order to hold the perpetrators accountable and advance system-wide changes on the path to achieving equality between women and men in political and public life and eradicating gender-based violence.⁴ While this tool focuses on violence against women in politics, it acknowledges that political violence has gendered forms and, for example, men who advocate for gender equality, non-discrimination and other social justice issues can face increasing amounts of violence and harassment.⁵

This tool seeks to provide a range of solutions to this international phenomenon from a number of perspectives. It unravels and explores various existing practices which support the safety and participation of women in politics across the OSCE region. The tool is divided into different sections: First, it covers forms and manifestations as well as the effects of violence against women in politics. Next, it provides tips and guidance for women in politics on prevention, protection, safety, reporting and access to justice.

2 Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics, A/73/301 - E - A/73/301, 2018, <<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1640483>>.

3 See e.g. General recommendation No. 35 on gender-based violence against women, updating general recommendation No. 19, CEDAW Committee, 2017, CEDAW /C/GC/35, <<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1305057>>; Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (Istanbul Convention), Council of Europe, Istanbul, 11 May 2011, Art. 3. a, <<https://rm.coe.int/168008482e>>.

4 *Op. cit.*, note 2.

5 See the Introductory tool which discusses violence against women and gendered political violence.

Lastly, it contains a section for both women and men politicians on how to support a colleague experiencing violence and what politicians as decision-makers can do to address and prevent violence against women in politics. A number of women politicians shared their direct experiences and provided tips for inclusion in this tool.⁶

While the topic of this tool is grim, politics can be extremely rewarding, a tremendous source of positive inspiration, and a way to make an impact on our societies. The aim of the tool is not to discourage anyone from entering or remaining in politics, but to provide guidance to be prepared better for the negative sides of being women in politics.

⁶ The author spoke to Eva Biaudet, Member of the Finnish Parliament, and Jess Phillips, Member of the UK Parliament as well as other women politicians (who asked to remain anonymous) about their experiences and practical tips for fellow women politicians.

Forms and Manifestations of Violence against Women in Politics

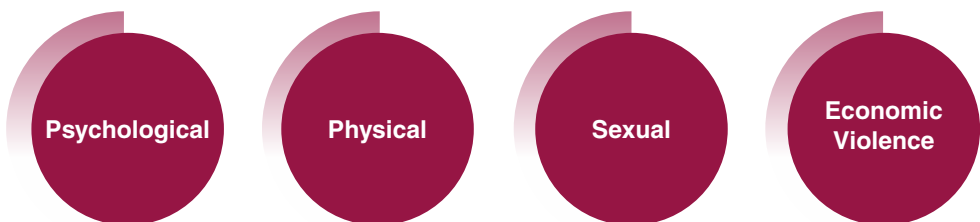
“ It felt as if the attack wasn’t aimed at me, but more at what I represent: a Black woman taking up space in politics.

When addressing violence against women in politics, it is essential to highlight that women are targets of violence because they are *women* and because they are *in politics*.

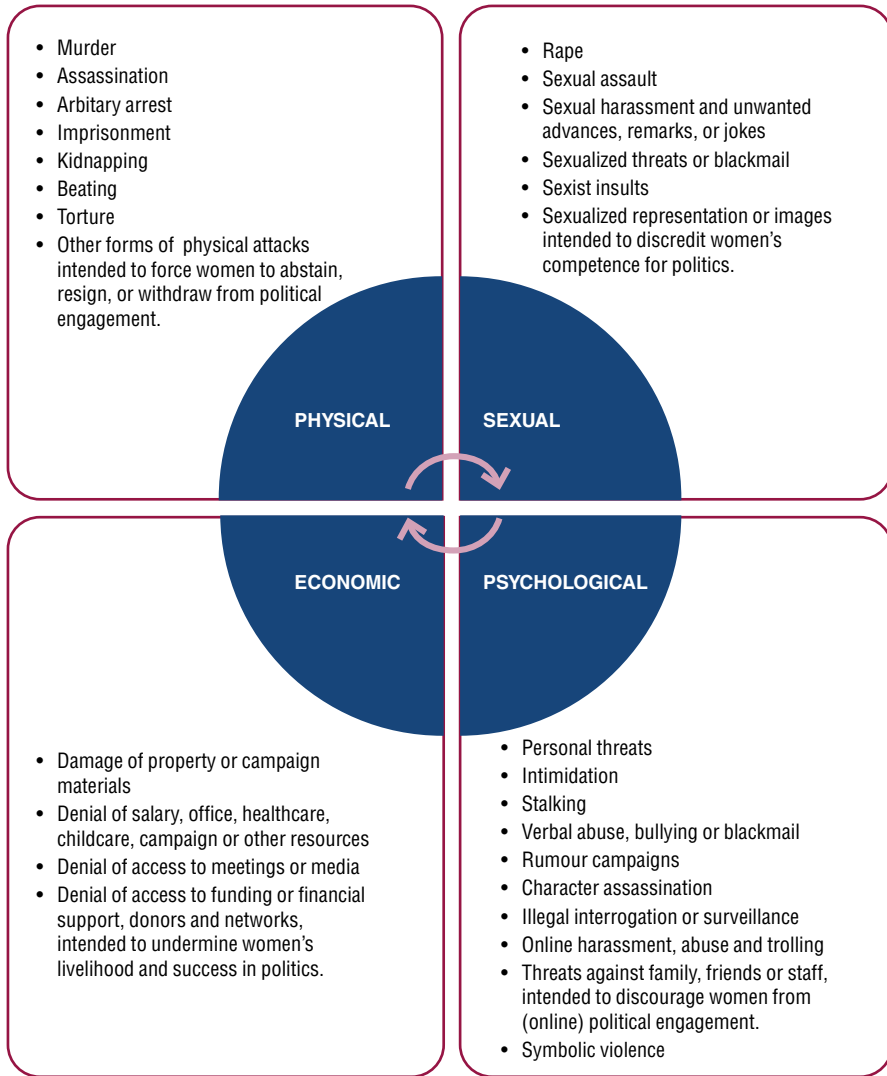
As a form of gender-based violence, violence against women in politics aims to prevent women’s political participation and women’s access to power. It is a global phenomenon, which has no geographical boundaries, and therefore can affect all women, across all OSCE participating States. Any woman in politics, no matter their background, religion, or social group, can be a victim. However, it is important to acknowledge that violence against women can intersect with and be aggravated by racism, ableism, homophobia or other forms of discrimination.

Violence is not always perpetrated from outside, but also from within a party or democratic institutions. Intimidation can take place in the ‘workplace’, as in the chambers or during a parliamentary session (see the [Parliament and Political Parties Tools](#)). Perpetrators can be of all genders.

Violence against Women in Politics takes four forms:



These commonly, but not exclusively manifest in the following way⁷:



See international standards on preventing violence against women in politics and more information on the prevalence of violence against women in politics in the [Introductory tool](#).

⁷ See forms of violence outlined for example in "Guidance Note: Preventing Violence against Women in Political Life", UN Women, New York, July 2021, p. 4, <<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/Guidance-note-Preventing-violence-against-women-in-politics-en.pdf>>; "Violence against Women Journalists and Politicians: A Growing Crisis", OSCE Parliamentary Assembly's Special Representative on Gender Issues, Annual Report 2021, <<https://www.oscepa.org/en/documents/special-representatives/gender-issues/report-17/4247-2021-report-by-the-special-representative-on-gender-issues-violence-against-women-journalists-and-politicians-a-growing-crisis/file>>.

ONLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Women in politics live their lives in the public eye, and are therefore even more exposed to **digital or online violence** than other women who can shelter in their private lives. Politicians' physique, tone of voice, and mere existence are under constant scrutiny as images and videos of them spread globally at unprecedented speed (see Annexe 1 for a glossary on online violence).

GREVIO (Group of Experts to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence) adopted its first General Recommendation in 2021 defining online violence against women as follows: “the digital dimension of violence against women encompasses a wide range of acts online or through technology that are part of the continuum of violence that women and girls experience for reasons related to their gender, including in the domestic sphere, in that it is a legitimate and equally harmful manifestation of the gender-based violence experienced by women and girls offline. GREVIO’s understanding of the concept of violence against women in its digital dimension encompasses both online aspects (activities performed and data available on the internet, including internet intermediaries on the surface web as well as the dark web) and technology-facilitated (activities carried out with the use of technology and communication equipment, including hardware and software) harmful behavior perpetrated against women and girls”.⁸

As with violence offline, gender-based violence against women perpetrated in the digital sphere has a serious impact on women’s and girls’ lives, including on their psychological and physical health, livelihoods, physical safety and reputation.⁹ Violence and harassment perpetrated through digital technologies may silence women’s voices in the public sphere.¹⁰

The UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences highlighted that women in politics are regularly victims of online violence and violence facilitated by information and communications technology (ICT).¹¹ New forms of gender-based violence surface as “deepfakes”, zoom-bombing and gendered disinformation campaigns (see Annexe 1 for glossary). Hate speech, intimidating messages and edited hyper-sexualized images fill politicians’ inboxes. Most women in politics deal with this type of violence on a daily basis and — far too often — in silence. The violence imposed on women in politics online is a prime example of the abusive opportunities that new technology enables.

8 “GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women”, Council of Europe, adopted 20 October 2021, <<https://rm.coe.int/grevio-rec-no-on-digital-violence-against-women/1680a49147>>.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Ministerial Council Decision Nr. 4 on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women, OSCE, MC.DEC/4/18., Milan, 7 December 2018, <<https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/406019>>.

11 *Op. cit.*, note 2.

CONTINUUM OF VIOLENCE

Even if each act of violence is serious and should be punished, violent actions are usually not one-off events, but a continuum of structural violence, psychological violence and more subtle discriminatory actions against individual victims. These are often experienced as a series of connected events. Feminist scholars highlight that violence against women must be seen as a set of actions that encompass a wide range of behaviours, and that *all* of these behaviours affect the victim's self-worth, emotional well-being and mental health.¹² The logic applies to the phenomenon of violence against women in politics: the acts are rarely one-off events, but rather a string of actions aimed to silence, hurt, and question whether they want to stay in politics.

VIOLENCE WITHOUT AND WITHIN

The women politicians who shared their experiences with the author highlighted a form of dual 'policing'. They explained that on one hand, as women in politics, the outside world is constantly trying to police them as a woman in politics, by evaluating their looks, tone of voice and actions firstly as woman, a body and an object, 'thank', so 'rather than as a politician. They are subject to sexual comments, innuendo, threats and violence from people they have never met, just because they are women who are active in politics.

Simultaneously, another wave of violence comes at women from within the political structures. The women interviewed explained in detail their experiences of humiliation, insults, degradation and sexism, which happen within the chambers, hallways and in their inboxes. This double reality can be extremely hard to navigate. One interviewee reflected on the hidden side of democracies, where so many women have cried in the hallways of parliament buildings, following the violence imposed on them by their peers.

INTERSECTIONALITY



When I get hate messages, I get them as a woman, a lesbian, a woman of colour, with a migrant background who is read as Muslim. The element of intersectionality is still lacking a lot in the responses we get when seeking help for violence.

Women have intersecting identities, and face intersecting axes of discrimination. Women's experiences in politics are not limited to their gender alone. Research on the intersectionality of violence against women shows that women in politics experience violence that is not only gendered, but also lies at the intersection of many types of other discrimination.¹³

¹² Joanie Connors and Michelle Harway, "A Male-Female Abuse Continuum." *Family Violence & Sexual Assault Bulletin* 11: 31–35, 1995

¹³ Rebecca Kuperberg, "Intersectional Violence against Women in Politics", *Politics & Gender*, Volume 14, Issue 4, December 2018,

Some women in politics may be more exposed to the risk of gender-based violence than others, including: human rights defenders, women with disabilities, the young, indigenous people, LGBTQ activists, members of the opposition or minority groups, and those voicing minority, dissenting or 'controversial' views.¹⁴



The Effects and Impact of Violence on Women's Political Participation



There's this idea where the public thinks that if you are a politician, a public servant, everyone should have the right to access your space and your body.

But so are teachers and police officers!
Are you going to go to a police officer and insult them?
You would be arrested so fast!

So no, I don't think I need to develop a thick skin to be in politics.
You need to change your behaviour and end your violence against women in politics!

Experiencing or witnessing violence against women in politics has various serious, detrimental effects on women's mental and physical health, safety, earnings, offices, property, and political participation. Women might stay away from politics or choose not to run for political office and this can have a chilling self-censorship effect on women. In addition to the violence that women face, their families and the communities they represent are also affected.

At the societal level, violence has an impact on productivity and comes with an extensive social and economic cost. For example, the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE) has estimated the cost of violence against women in the EU is 289 billion euros a year.¹⁵

¹⁵ "The costs of gender-based violence in the European Union", EIGE, 28 October 2021, <<https://eige.europa.eu/publications/costs-gender-based-violence-european-union>>.

OSCE/ODIHR-supported studies¹⁶ found **violence against women in politics has a serious impact on women politicians**. In these studies, women politicians reported that violence led to, for example:

- Decision to end their political careers
- Stress
- Fear for their own and their family's safety
- Isolation
- Sadness and anger
- Decreased ability to perform duties and express political views
- Strengthened motivation to continue working as an MP and/or a politician
- Becoming more belligerent and prepared to face perpetrators openly.¹⁷

Additionally, some of the women experiencing continuous violence, as reported in the study conducted in Serbia, stated that they began to get somewhat accustomed to violence, and violence became 'normalized' as part of their lives and politics. Even if 'normalization' helps women to endure violence without further victimization and traumatization, it ignores the fact that the perpetrator has committed a crime and may hinder creating mechanisms and taking measures to prevent violence against women.¹⁸

The media also plays a role in gender-based violence in politics. Women politicians were worried about family members, particularly children, being exposed to violent content and the media chase. On the other hand, some women reported using the media as a tool to address the violence and perpetrators.¹⁹

These findings are in line with a study conducted in 2018 by the Council of Europe and IPU entitled *Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe*²⁰, which found that women parliamentarians exposed to violence reported feeling distraught, humiliated, angry, sad or disoriented at the time (see the table below). Several reported that violence or harassment had triggered anxiety, health problems or sleep disorders.²¹ About 53 per cent of women parliamentarians emphasized that these incidents had affected their ability to work normally. One third of them had feared for their safety and that of those close to them, and more than 33 per cent stated that the acts of violence affected their freedom of expression and scope for action during their term of office: they admitted to "being more guarded" in what they said and in the stances they took, becoming "more cautious and more watchful" and seeking to be "a little less visible".²²

16 "Report on Gender-based violence against women politicians in Serbia", OSCE, 1 October 2021, <<https://www.osce.org/mission-to-serbia/500611>>; and Z. Kochorbayeva, N. Prigoda, B. Islanbekova, M. Tyulegenov, "Violence against women in politics in the Kyrgyz Republic: Results of study", Social Technologies Agency, supported by OSCE and ODIHR, November 2021-January 2022, <<https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/c/5/519390.pdf>>.

17 *Ibid.*

18 "Gender-based violence against women politicians in Serbia", *op.cit.*, note 15.

19 *Ibid.*

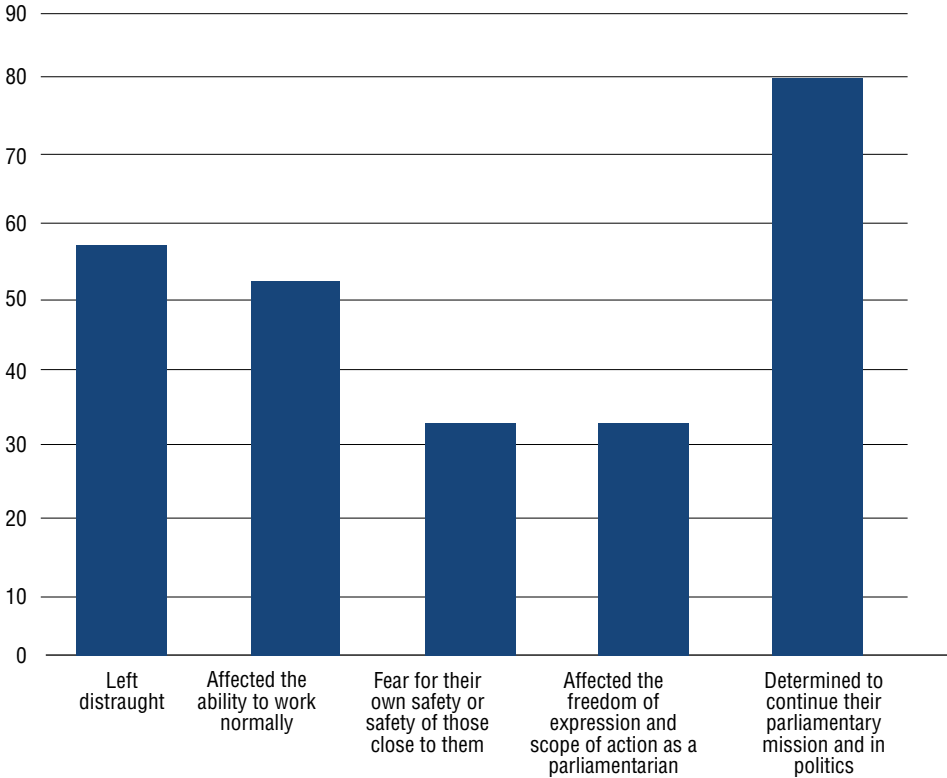
20 "Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe", Council of Europe and IPU, 2018, <<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2018-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-against-women-in-parliaments-in-europe>>.

21 *Ibid.*

22 *Ibid.*

Despite these serious consequences, about 80 per cent voiced their determination to continue in politics and running for another term.²³

Impact and effects of violence against against woman parliamentarians in Europe (per cent of women survey respondents)



According to the same study, women rarely reported the cases of violence and harassment: only about 23 per cent of women MPs and six per cent of women parliamentary staff who had been sexually harassed had reported the incident.²⁴ Half of women MPs who had received threats of physical violence had reported the incidents to the police, the security department in the parliament or another department.²⁵

Despite the violence, getting into politics is worth it. You will never be

23 *Ibid.*
24 *Ibid.*
25 *Ibid.*

Support and Measures to Ensure Safety and Access to Justice



alone. There is so much goodness in people. For one hate message, a hundred people will support you. Don't lose hope.

When you enter a construction site, you will notice that staff on the ground will be wearing hard hats. When you meet a professional driver, you notice that they make sure to fasten their seatbelt before starting the engine. As a woman in politics, it is essential that you have the necessary tools, which will keep you safe while doing your job.

This section provides tips and tools for women in politics and for women aspiring to become politicians on how to keep yourself safer in political life. While the section focuses on what women themselves can do, it is important to note that **violence and harassment are never the victim's fault**. The responsibility for violent action lies with the perpetrators and structures that enable the abuse and do not prioritize women's safety; including governments, parliaments and social media platforms. The strategic focus of all anti-violence work must be to change those structures. However, women cannot wait until this has been achieved. They need to navigate contemporary politics, society and digital spaces and this section aims to provide practical advice on how to do this as safely as possible. Rather than being a complete and exhaustive list of everything women in politics can do, this section aims to provide an initial set of practical tips and tools.

Violence and harassment are traumatizing violations to experience and even witnessing them may be upsetting or may trigger a past experience. Violence and harassment are never acceptable and need to be taken seriously — always.

While situations and contexts vary greatly within OSCE participating States, these tips try to address diverse conditions and diverse forms of violence — not all of them may apply to you. Politicians also have access to different resources depending on their level of engagement in politics. Having an assistant and perhaps parliamentary security services available gives different possibilities than may be available for those aspiring to be a politician or engaged in local politics.

It is important to repeat that women in politics face different levels and forms of violence, harassment and discrimination. In addition to discrimination based on sex and gender, other types of discrimination — based on ethnicity, disability, class, sexual orientation, etc. — often interlink and exacerbate violence and harassment. Depending on the nature of the violence and harassment, it may be advisable to look for peer support beyond that just based on sex or gender.

In all situations that pose immediate risk, stay in contact with local emergency services and law enforcement if it is safe to do so in your context.

PREVENTION AND PROTECTION: WHAT CAN YOU DO BEFORE YOU ENTER POLITICS OR BEFORE ANY INCIDENTS?

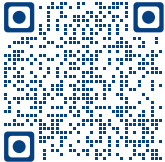
Preparation is one of the keys to feeling safer in politics. Making sure that you and your social media presence are as protected as possible can help you feel more confident. In today's politics it is most likely that at least some online harassment will be perpetrated against you at some point and the more secure your online presence is, the better you may withstand the harassment.

Increase your awareness and capacity

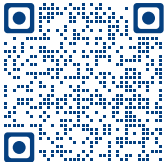
The more familiar you are with your offline and online environment and how to navigate them in case something should happen, the better equipped you will be not to panic if there is an incident. If possible, be curious rather than fearful about increasing your awareness and capacity, as this will then be exciting rather than stressful.

- Get to know your state's **laws on gender equality, harassment, violence against women, and the paragraphs of criminal code on violence that protect you**, including those related to digital violence. Even if laws do not mention digital spaces, privacy and stalking laws, for example, can often be used to pursue justice in cases of digital violence.
- Get to know the **Rules of Procedures, Code of Conducts and safety protocols** of your **political parties, parliament, regional or local councils** and how they address violence and harassment against women in politics. It can also be helpful to talk to the security staff/focal point of any of the previously mentioned (see examples of party and parliamentary measures in the [Tool for Parliaments](#) and [Tool for Political Parties](#)).

- Make sure you have a clear understanding of **what kind of traces you leave** when you use devices. For example,

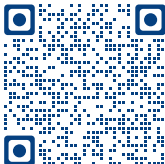


You can check your online presence with *Tactical Tech's*²⁶ helpful guidance: <https://datadetoxkit.org/en/privacy/search/> or;



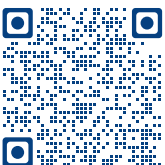
Do a quick test (not updated, but still useful) at *Trace my Shadow*: <https://myshadow.org/trace-my-shadow>

- Check which **local NGOs support women** who have experienced or are experiencing violence. In some participating States, there are NGOs that also specifically support women in politics or public life such as journalists. Many NGOs have **confidential helplines, chats and peer support groups** for women who have experienced any kind of violence. Your **parliament or party's women's network** may also be able to provide support and advice.



women Against Violence Europe Network (WAVE Network) — a network of over 150 European women's NGOs — has a finder service that lists over 1500 women's specialized support services in Europe for women who have experienced violence. <https://wave-network.org/find-help/>

- Make sure that you are the person in charge of your devices and the one who keeps them updated and that you understand your **devices' safety functions**, such as turning off your GPS and location sharing.



For example, see for iPhone: <https://support.apple.com/en-us/HT207092>

- **Reflect on what safety and security mean to you** and what makes you feel safe to improve your safety tactics and security.



You can use this exercise developed by *Tactical Tech* in their Holistic Security Manual to guide you: <https://holistic-security.tacticaltech.org/exercises/prepare/1-1-reflecting-on-existing-security-practices.html>

²⁶ Tactical Tech is an international non-profit organization working at the intersection of technology, human rights, and civil liberties. See <<https://www.tacticaltech.org/>>.



The Local Government Association has a guide for councillors in the UK on handling harassment, abuse and intimidation. It includes tips on home security and safety in public meetings, among other things.²⁷
<https://www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-handling-harassment-abuse-and-intimidation>

- Learn more about **safe ways to use technology** and to protect your privacy.

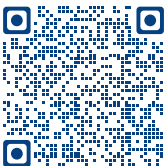


See for example the *National Network to End Domestic Violence Tech Safety* project's application. Even though some of the information focuses on domestic violence and applies in the US, plenty of information is also applicable elsewhere. It is available both in app and browser versions.
<https://www.techsafetyapp.org/home>

- » European Women's Lobby (EWL), the largest umbrella organization of women's associations in the European Union, offers *#HerNetHerRights* training for women in politics that provides practical tips, peer support, legal guidance and empowerment related to tech and digital spaces. In the EU, you can ask your national EWL coordination to organize this training and take part.
- #ShePersisted has a Digital Resilience Toolkit for Women in Politics, which provides guidance and tips for digital safety.²⁸
- Be aware that often the more power and prestige you gain, more violence you could be confronted with. **As you proceed in your career, take precaution and consider adding new safety measures** to your daily life as a politician.

Maximize online security

- Make sure you are using the highest level of **security settings on your official/ professional website**. It is a sensible investment to pay a bit extra for security.
- Check that you have the basics covered. The **most common security breaches** are caused by human error so it is good to be mindful.

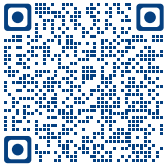


Check, for example, Google's security tips: <https://safety.google/intl/eng/security/security-tips/>

27 "Councillors' guide to handling harassment, abuse and intimidation", The Local Government Association, UK, <<https://www.local.gov.uk/councillors-guide-handling-harassment-abuse-and-intimidation>>.

28 Kristina Wilfore, "A Digital Resilience Toolkit for Women in Politics - Persisting and Fighting Back Against Misogyny and Digital Platforms' Failures", #ShePersisted, 2022, <https://secureservercdn.net/160.153.137.91/r2g.26a.myftpupload.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/ShePersisted_Digital_Resilience_Toolkit.pdf>.

- **Two-step verification** is the easiest way to secure your accounts. Make sure you use it for at least your most important accounts.
- Consider using a **Virtual Private Network (VPN)** if you do not want to leave traces of your online activity and to enhance security.
- Install a **firewall and anti-virus/malware software** on all your devices if possible.
- When you choose which **platforms, programmes and applications to use, consider their commitment to privacy** as one of your selection criteria.



See helpful suggestions from the *Tactical Tech's* website: <https://datadetoxkit.org/en/alternative-app-centre/>

Increase your social media safety

SETTINGS

Depending on which platforms you are using, there are many settings that can help you **moderate what material you see and how people can engage with you**. The relevant settings you should be aware of and check are often named as “privacy” and “security”.

For instance, both Twitter and Instagram have settings where no-one, except your followers, can send you direct messages. This can prevent graphic harassment reaching you. You can also limit who can comment on your posts and tag you in theirs.

If you wish you can also **block and hide** certain keywords preferred by trolls from your feed. This will ensure that you might not stumble upon content that is harmful. However, blocking keywords may also prevent you from seeing critical discussion related to, for instance, violence.

While you may wish to keep your public profiles as open as possible during normal times, using more **private modes** is something to consider if you are being targeted (see below).

Get your accounts verified, with the help of your Party if needed. This unlocks some safety functions on several social media platforms.

CURATE

Pre-emptive blocking is a good strategy to keep your posts and feed free from trolls or perpetrators. If you see a comment on someone else's posts, that is harmful or obviously trolling, after reporting, block the account. You save time and future harm doing pre-

emotive blocking. You may also explore the 'restrict and mute' options for people that you know and might not be able to block for social or political reasons.

Root out trolls and fake accounts from your comments and followers. Spending a little time looking at the profile and feeds of accounts who comment or follow you can help you keep your social media safer.

If someone you know has a new account, **verify** this from another source. It may be a fake profile, which is used for harassment or phishing.

You can also curate your feed into a more pleasant experience by selecting carefully who and what kind of accounts you follow. If you have to follow someone for political reasons but you do not want to unfollow, you can mute them if their posts make you feel uncomfortable. Curating this way can make your social media experience less stressful.

You could also invite **friends or staff to assist with managing the social media accounts** and therefore reducing the amount of hate that you are exposed to. Ask trusted people to help you manage your page, and reduce the violence you are exposed to on a daily basis. Make sure that everyone on the team follows joint instructions on safety and security.

MODERATE

Almost all of the platforms allow you to **remove or hide comments**, in addition to reporting. When you post something on your own accounts, it is important you follow the discussion and make sure that it remains safe and respectful for you and your followers. The Local Government Association in the UK has developed **Rules of Engagement for a politician's social media profile** to be posted on your official website; see their tool below²⁹:

Rules of engagement

Welcome to my page, which aims to communicate my activities as a councillor.

If you wish to be a part of this online community, you must agree to abide by this code of digital engagement, which is designed to keep everyone safe.

RULE 1
Debate and disagreement are welcome on this page, but only if expressed with courtesy, respect and politeness.

RULE 2
Posts should not contain abuse, harassment, intimidation or threats of any form.

RULE 3
Posts should not contain any form of discrimination – including racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, transphobia or religious intolerance.

RULE 4
Posts should not spread false or unverified information.

RULE 5
For transparency reasons, users should not post anonymously.

If any of these rules are broken, page admins reserve the right to delete posts, block users and report content to the police if necessary.

It may not be possible to respond to all queries on this page due to time constraints – if you have specific enquiries or casework, please send directly to my official email.

Local Government Association, CASC-UK, nilga, COSLA

For more information on the LGA's work on handling abuse on social media and digital citizenship visit: www.local.gov.uk/civility-public-life

REF 43.4

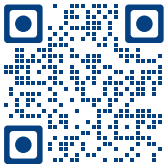
²⁹ The Local Government Association. UK. Digital citizenship: support and resources for councillors. Available at: <https://www.local.gov.uk/our-support/guidance-and-resources/civility-public-life-resources-councillors/handling-abuse-and-0>.

Think carefully about privacy

- Secret address and/or personal phone number:

You may wish to keep your address and personal phone number secret. Check how this is possible in your country; often a telephone operator can offer a contract or additional service for these purposes. If you have a recognizable name, you might want to consider removing it from the door or the post box. Some politicians choose to use their partner's name or abbreviations when using delivery services, such as food delivery to their home. Make a list of the different places where your personal information might be available, such as online shops or food delivery providers. Consider requesting removal.

- Be aware that a lot of data is shared when publishing photos

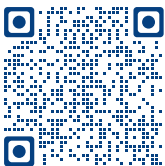


When you make the choice to share a photo publicly, you are also sharing the metadata such as date, time, shutter speed etc.; sometimes even the location. You can test what information is available by using an example photo at: <https://exifdata.com>

- Limit the public sharing of information about your family

While you have chosen a public life, your family may have not. Particularly if your family includes minors, keeping them out of your public profiles (including photos, posts, etc.) or engagements, may be a good safety choice. Also, consider what information you share about them publicly. Set boundaries to your and family's privacy, early on in your career. Think whether all publicity is worth it.

- Curate your online identity and accounts



Make sure you are not accidentally sharing things online that you do not wish to be public. See easily accessible tips on how to dispose of unwanted information in Tactical Tech's Data Detox Kit: <https://datadetoxkit.org/en/privacy/search/>

Ensure physical safety

In some OSCE participating States it may be advisable to use private **security services** such as private, secure transport or security guards, for instance, during a visit to a region of heightened risk or during a period of heightened risk, even if you are not personally or currently being targeted.

In general, it can support your safety to use only licensed taxi services in some participating States.

#Think10 tool – Guidance for safety



The National Democratic Institute (NDI) developed in 2018 a **questionnaire and safety planning guide for women in politics**.

This questionnaire can help in assessing individual safety and the guide proposes measures to increase safety in contexts of moderate, elevated and severe risks of safety. Safety plans should be regularly updated.³⁰ The questionnaire and guide are available here: [https://](https://think10.demcloud.org/sites/default/files/questionnaire/Questionnaire-English.pdf)

think10.demcloud.org/sites/default/files/questionnaire/Questionnaire-English.pdf

In 2018, NDI developed #think10 as a guidance tool for women in politics on how to enhance their personal safety. The tool involves a confidential self-assessment questionnaire posted online, but also available in a mobile app and paper formats, in five languages: English, French, Spanish, Ukrainian, and Arabic. Women's answers to these questions are then combined with a country score from NDI's Women's Political Participation Risk Index to generate an individual safety plan, based on assessment levels — low, moderate, or high risk.

For a woman based in the United States with a moderate risk of violence, for example, the tool offers the following list of safety precautions: identifying one or two trusted contacts, as well as memorizing or safely storing their contact details; designating one or two safe places to escape to in an emergency, including how to get there by different means; keeping personal information private and de-listing home addresses and personal phone numbers; placing important documents in a secure location; and remaining aware of the surroundings when carrying out political activities, checking for easy exits, and reviewing the security of homes, workplaces, and political locations.

The tool also recommends travelling with a trusted colleague, using safe transportation routes and letting trusted contacts know about travel plans; managing digital footprints by using precautions with passwords, installing firewalls and anti-virus/malware software, creating separate work and personal email accounts, taking screenshots of malicious communications, and reporting online harassment and abuse to the authorities; identifying local support services like shelters, clinics, or influential leaders; and documenting incidents of violence, like saving voice messages, keeping a journal of incidents, and photographing physical injuries. The tool also advises sharing the safety plan with a trusted colleague, ensuring that family and friends do not inadvertently undermine the plan, and reviewing the plan every few months and revising it accordingly.

30 Think 10 – Questionnaire and Guide, NDI, 2018, <<https://think10.demcloud.org/sites/default/files/questionnaire/Questionnaire-English.pdf>>.

Prepare for safety at meetings and events

OFFLINE

When attending public events, **never do it alone**. Make sure that you are familiar with your surroundings, including **emergency exits**, if you have an open meeting or political gathering.

If possible ask for **registration** before the meeting or gathering you are organizing. If you have reason to believe harassers will attend, check their known social media accounts and chats for verification. Make preparations accordingly, for example, **save the numbers of security services or official law enforcement** in your mobile and **contact law enforcement** if there is a threat towards your safety or contact allies, party members, friends or your team/staff to make sure you are prepared in the event of their appearance.

If the venue or organizer has their own **security**, make sure they know about the situation and potential threats, and that they have a description or photograph of perpetrators.

Be aware that some political opponents or stalkers may try to 'hatestream'³¹ your events and be prepared to intervene as this may create unsafe conditions for you and other participants.

ONLINE

For all online meeting platforms make sure you have, or request an organizer to ensure that the meeting has a moderator who knows how to:

- **Freeze** all participants' transmissions, cameras, microphones in sudden cases of, for example, sexist, racist, violent, etc., content or streaming;
- **Remove** participants from an online meeting and ensure that settings do not allow automatic re-entry; and
- **Control** the chat and delete comments if necessary.

³¹ Hatestreaming refers to live recording and/or broadcasting through social media accounts with malicious intent to audiences with predisposed hateful attitudes towards what is being streamed. This is a strategy used particularly against women and minority politicians both to intimidate them and to organize mass online attacks/harassment.

RESPONSE, HOW TO DEAL WITH INCIDENTS WHILE THEY ARE HAPPENING?

Politicians can face various types of threatening or violent attacks. Violence can manifest as ongoing sexual harassment or an act of violence, or it can be an organized mob attack online. Each situation requires a different response(s), which is good to keep in mind while choosing the response(s).

Prioritize physical safety

This is the most important thing to consider first. If you can **leave safely**, immediately leave a public or otherwise unsafe location. If you cannot leave safely, try to hide in a safe place and mute your phone without vibration.

Get in touch with the security services. In most participating States this is law enforcement. If you are a parliamentarian, you may have access to parliamentary security services.

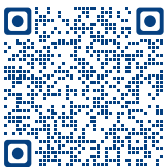
Ask for support

Ask for help and support from your team, your party, your loved ones, from NGOs who work on these topics, from peers and from different security services and law enforcement.

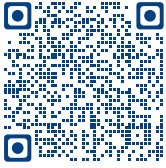
Investigate

If you are not under immediate risk of physical or other harm, it may be helpful to **investigate or ask someone else to investigate the perpetrator**. Whether the attack is happening online or offline, a Google search can be helpful if you have a name or an image. Furthermore, investigating the images of an anonymous profile can help you understand what you are dealing with.

Tactical Tech has a list of different tips on how to do an investigation:

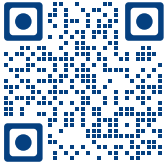


- Images: <https://datadetoxkit.org/en/misinformation/reversesearch/>



- Bot or not: <https://datadetoxkit.org/en/misinformation/botornot/>

For more image-related support, visit:



- <https://tineye.com>

In case of violence which is clearly in violation of current laws in your country, leave all investigation to law enforcement or the authorities.

Report and block

If you are not in any immediate physical risk, it is important **to report the incident** as soon as possible or as soon as you are comfortable to do so; either to law enforcement and your party, parliamentary/local government body, or to the social media platform where it happened or is happening.

Blocking accounts that harass you or have harassed you is also vital to make you safer.

Collect all evidence

As long as this doesn't put you at increased risk of harm, always **document the evidence of an incident**, even if you are not sure exactly what happened. This will be important information during any investigation or trial. Documenting and keeping track of violence may also help you understand if a situation is escalating.

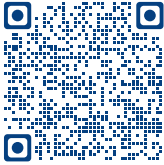
Documenting may mean taking photos, videos or screenshots, saving items (physical or files), saving police and medical records, writing a diary, etc.

Increase security and safety levels on all social media and applications

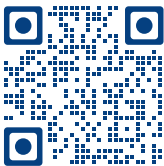
You can, for instance, **temporarily remove the opportunity for commenting or tagging** if you are being mob attacked, or prevent your posts from being directly shared. Do remember, though, that screenshots may also be used to distribute your materials so your post may still be spreading. On Instagram, for instance, there is a function called "limits" which aims to help people targeted by a mob attack very fast. With just one click it is easy and quick to activate and makes the profile safer and more private immediately. In some apps you can **make your whole profile temporarily private**.

Remove content

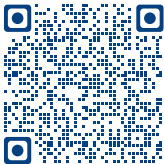
If **intimate images are being shared** without your consent or someone is threatening to share them, several non-profit organizations provide guidance and tips on measures to take.



- *The Cyber Civil Rights Initiative*³² has collected information from the most popular sites on how to remove intimate images shared without consent. See their step-by-step guidance on how to document, report, and remove intimate images: <https://cybercivilrights.org/online-removal/>



- *Stop Non-Consensual Intimate Image Abuse (Stop NCII)*³³ is a free tool designed to support victims of Non-Consensual Intimate Image (NCII) abuse. Currently, it partners with Facebook and Instagram to detect and remove images from being shared online: <https://stopncii.org/>



In case of doxxing or other privacy breaches on websites, you can also contact the website manager directly (see Annexe 1 for glossary). See Google's guidance on how to contact site's webmaster: <https://support.google.com/websearch/answer/9109>

You may also wish to **remove any of your own posts or other content** that gives out too much information about your location, family or other issues. However, bear in mind that even after removal the information may still be spread in screenshots or in other formats.

Counter-campaign

If you are the target of a smear campaign, deepfake or any other kind of disinformation, make sure that you **respond swiftly with accurate information** and get your political party, community, friends and followers to share the information (see [Annexe 1](#) for glossary).

Solidarity among politicians and cross-party collaboration can also help, especially when perpetrators are fellow politicians. Pressure from across party lines sends a strong signal about unacceptable behaviour and can hold the perpetrator politically accountable if, for instance, they attack colleagues or other women in politics.

32 Non-profit organizations, based in the US, serve victims/survivors around the world and advocate for technological, social, and legal innovation to prevent and combat online abuse. See <https://cybercivilrights.org/>.

33 Stop NCII is operated by the Revenge Porn Helpline which is part of SWGfL, an international charity that believes everyone should benefit from technology, free from harm. See <https://stopncii.org/>.

Women in politics can also turn to **the media** for support. It matters how cases of violence against women in politics are reported. Using gender-inclusive language for reporting, for instance, can shape public perception of the subject. The **women's movement and women's NGOs** are also strong allies in addressing both individual cases and violence against women in politics in general.

When attacks happen, women in politics can be the counter force and speak up. By condemning such behaviour, women in politics can raise awareness of sexism and violence against women in politics. Speaking up and reacting to violence must, however, always be done only as long as the actions do not risk their health and safety.

Surviving and thriving as a woman in politics while facing harassment:

Tips from Eva Biaudet, MP, Finland, who has over three decades of experience in politics and public life, including as a former OSCE Special Representative on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings

WHAT KIND OF HARASSMENT HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED?

Over the years I've faced a lot of different kinds of harassment, sexualized threats, despising comments about my person and appearance, verbal harassment etc. Currently what troubles me the most is actually an old case that has resurfaced. In 2007, a male politician wrote a blog in which he implied that I should be raped. He has since removed that part in his blog. I was very shocked at the time but, over the years, and with the public discourse becoming tougher and tougher, I have become more numb. However, now that he leads the Committee on Foreign Affairs and I have to work with him every day, the sense of threat in his presence has returned. This is a person who wished for my rape. It is adding an extra burden to my work at the moment.

The case is also a good example of the more dangerous sexist hate speech which you can legally claim is innocent and which escapes also all the social media platforms' community rules, but every human who reads it knows what it implies. The implication may not be legally the same as a plain statement but the effect is the same. Both personally and in society.

The system responds to these implied threats or harassments poorly at the moment and that is stressful.

WHAT HELPS YOU DEAL WITH INCIDENTS?

I don't read the comments section on news sites. In general, I try to ignore the most horrendous conversations and comments on social media. I don't think it's cowardice or avoidance, I rather see it as saving my energy and strength and using them strategically. I believe that not being provoked by someone who tries to provoke you can also be counted as victory. I don't really block people on social media, except on Facebook because I want to keep one social media space for me. Sometimes harassment makes me also more determined to not back down on the issues that matter to me.

I pay a lot of focus on attending my wounds. I talk to my peers about what I experience and how it affects me. I also try to reframe these separate cases into a political agenda.

By naming the harassment actions as deliberate and systematic parts of a political movement, aiming at SoMe-grabbing the media space and the public discussion, whilst pushing feminist women's voices out and ridiculing the human rights agenda, I am trying to reveal that the harassment is not so personal as it feels.

My assistant is an invaluable help in curating my channels. So, I don't even get to see everything. That helps me but can also sometimes create a false sense of safety, a misconception that I am not actually receiving hate mail.

At the moment our Gender Equality Network of the Finnish Parliament is planning to create an official organ to deal with harassment and hate speech. It will be a great asset.

We need also to open up possibilities for anonymous claims of harassment, procedures where actions against a culture of harassment is addressed also on a more general level, without the need for the victims to stand out.

In general, I'm quite good at letting go of past things, but for instance with the Committee on Foreign Affairs case, what bothers me even more now is the reaction of others, that they don't see the severity. It's not just about me, it's the modus operandi of this politician. The rhetoric he uses is dangerous and hurtful."

WHAT HAS HELPED YOU TO HAVE SUCH A LONG CAREER IN POLITICS?

Peer support with like-minded people helps me a lot, it's important to have a circle of people who share your values and priorities. What can help a politician withstand difficult things is the belief that you, exactly you, were elected as the representative for a reason.

I have also made it my business to support younger women, just as I was supported. So I pay it forward.

Additionally, I am trying to remind myself how things have really changed and that I can see this change already during my own political career. Hence we cannot stop making change happen. During the history of the Finnish parliament, women from all political backgrounds have always been the strongest drivers for social change. I am good at finding my allies, also across political party lines.

Nowadays my age and experience help me understand that the issues related to Human Rights are indeed important so no matter how much harassment I receive raising issues related to Human Rights, my resolve is unmoved.

AFTER AN INCIDENT

- **Reflect and make space for your feelings**

Experiencing violence, online or offline, is painful and it may make you feel isolated. Take a moment to acknowledge how you are feeling.

- **Listen to your body**

No matter what type of violence you experience, your body will react and will also tell you what you need. Do you need extra sleep? Do you need someone to hold you? Do you need a walk in nature?

- **Share with peers and/or women's networks in politics**

Do not stay silent about what you experience. Sharing with people who you trust, who understand and have perhaps gone through similar things can help you recover and can provide invaluable support. As with any other form of violence, sharing experiences and having peer support helps deal with the trauma and provides much needed validation, especially with some forms of violence that even victims often belittle. Understanding that, what has been done to you is not your fault, but a symptom of a system rigged against women, can be helpful to some women in politics. Be open about your experiences and share them with someone who you can trust: the shame is not yours to carry, but that of the perpetrators and a system that does not hold them accountable. Understand that even though online violence or harassment may feel like it is disconnected from 'real life', it has very similar negative impacts on your health as offline violence. Recovery is important.

- **Spend time with friends and loved ones**

Feeling connected and spending time with people who love you and who make you feel safe can help you rebuild your general feeling of safety. Long days and night in politics and in the public eye can make you lose perspective. Continuous harassment and attacks can ignite a sense of hopelessness. Make sure you also have a support system outside politics, which will help you stay grounded. To get support you have to ask for it; create it around you. Do this from the outset. Surround yourself with people, friends, partners or family who remind you of empathy, reason and hope for a better future.

- **Visit a health professional**

If you are experiencing (prolonged) emotional or physical harm after an incident, it is always important to see a physician or talk to a qualified therapist/psychologist.

- **NGO support service**

Many women in politics have also found help from, for example, the non-partisan peer support groups that Women's NGOs facilitate.

- **Take a break if possible**

If possible, consider taking a break to focus on things other than politics — recharging your batteries can be powerful. Ensure you get enough rest and sleep, even if this means booking time for it in your calendar. Even small breaks can be useful, for example, not using social media for a few days or skipping an event.

- **Check your security settings**

After an incident, it is important to check all your security settings and make sure they match the severity of your current situation. Also, check that you have updated all apps and programmes. If using social media feels too much, you can also ask someone else to do this for you.

- **Inform friends, family and staff about different support opportunities**

Learning of, or witnessing someone you love being attacked physically or online is also a hard experience. While it is important not to have to carry your loved ones' distress during what is a tough time for you, you can steer them towards support services or self-care. Many NGOs also support the loved ones of victims/survivors of violence and provide online materials. If you have staff or direct reports, make sure they know all the available support services as well.



» See, for example, this guidance from *RAINN*³⁴ which specifically focuses on sexual violence but can be applied to other forms of violence too: <https://www.rainn.org/articles/self-care-friends-and-family>

- **Reflect on yourself and your purpose in politics**

According to a 2021 report by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, women in politics tap into their leadership motivations and potential from several avenues. One of these is to reflect upon yourself and your purpose in politics.³⁵ Find a way to connect to your purpose and do not lose touch with 'why' you are in politics and want to continue. Remember too that entering politics does not mean that you have to be a politician for the rest of your life. Some politicians, especially ones who face constant violence based on their intersecting identities, find solace in the idea that they also have the right to decide to leave politics, if they so wish. No matter what you choose, your health and well-being should always be your priority.

- **Speak up and share your experience, if you can**

Traditional and social media can be a powerful tool for making the threats and harassment visible to a larger audience. Shattering the stigma around the phenomenon is essential. The shame is not yours to carry. Always make sure that going public or publishing threats will not risk your own health and safety. Also keep in mind and be prepared that, in some cases and contexts, going public may lead to legal action taken against you, for example, for defamation.

- **Seek justice**

This may mean very different things depending on the legal context, the type of violence or the perpetrator. It may be particularly hard if the perpetrator is someone from your own party. Seeking justice is nevertheless important, not only for you and your recovery, but also for keeping others safe from future potential incidents. Seeking justice may mean punishment for the perpetrators and compensation for the harm suffered and it may come through a court, parliament or other official routes, or from within the party.

Be prepared that, in seeking justice or just speaking about your experiences, you are likely to face opposition, even within your own party and from people you would not expect it from.

"Online harassment can make you feel like your life is spinning out of control. However, there is still one thing you can control: how you treat yourself. There are a number of ways to practice self-care, both big and small, that can help take the immediate sting out of an episode of online abuse and offer space for clarity and reflection."³⁶

35 Rebecca Gordon et al., "Women's political careers: where do leaders come from?" Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) and FCDO, March 2021, <<https://www.wfd.org/what-we-do/resources/womens-political-careers-where-do-leaders-come>>.

36 PEN America. Online Harassment Field Manual, <<https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/>>.

Surviving and thriving as a woman in politics through the prosecution and incarceration of a violent perpetrator

Tips from **Jess Philips, MP, United Kingdom**, who also serves as Shadow Minister for Domestic Violence and Safeguarding.

1. WHAT HELPED YOU MANAGE THROUGH THE LEGAL PROCESS?

For me it was very important to insist on having a single point of contact in the police forces dealing with my cases. Women, including women politicians, often drop out from a criminal justice system because of the duration of proceedings and the lack of information on their cases.

Especially for women politicians, it is easy to forget and think that 'I am over it now. It happened a year ago and I do not want this attention to be about me, as this will not get justice to my constituency'. For these reasons, it is important to have a champion of your case in the police or in state agencies, someone who follows your case, keeps in touch with you, and you feel you can go to.

Secondly, make your own advocates and create your support network. In my experience, women politicians are not very good at advocating on their own behalf. With my staff I was advocating for them and but they were also advocating on my behalf to push back when a perpetrator was not pleading guilty on all accounts. Try to find advocates in your own team with whom you can check things against.

Thirdly, parliament's security services should know about your case. I interacted with the UK Parliament's security team on my cases, feelings and checked with them if more safety measures could be put in place. In the UK, the Parliament's liaison team knows every case related to a parliamentarian, and the Head of Security for MPs' safety is a woman. Her concerns for me had an understanding of a gender-based violence and that was helpful.

2. WHAT WOULD YOU PERSONALLY DO DIFFERENTLY NOW?

I have had horrible online harassment and abuse cases that the police were ill-equipped to deal with at the time and I had to sit through evidence, wedges of paper, which is enough to re-traumatize yourself. When state authorities do not act how they should be, you become your own 'police officer', so I was gathering evidence and I found reading through all harassment and abuse towards me more traumatizing than the actual acts. I will not do it again and would not recommend

anyone else to do it, if possible. Recently, better response systems have been put in place in the UK so I have built a trust with them. I would be very careful about obsessing over and reading lots of violent and vicious abuse towards you because that actually silenced me more than the acts of violence. Do not think you are immune to trauma.

3. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE A WOMAN IN POLITICS THINKING ABOUT PURSUING THEIR RIGHTS LEGALLY RELATED TO HARASSMENT? HOW COULD ONE PREPARE FOR WHAT'S ABOUT TO HAPPEN?

Regardless what happens, be prepared for the media and news attention. In my two court cases, my name appeared in the media without me even knowing it, as I did not need to go or testify at a court, which is preferable.

Also, prepare when the case is going to the court to lose a little bit of control. Once the case is handed over to a legal process, you become a witness, not a party to the case, so you lose control of the way people talk about it and the way it is handled. Be prepared that that may happen and people say things in the media you were not expecting and may be shocking to you. Prepare also your family and especially children, as it can be hard for them.

Have stamina when seeking justice and be prepared for a lengthy process: my case took three years from investigation to conviction — and as an MP I was treated well, and I felt guilty that my constituents are not necessarily getting as good and 'quick' a response as I got when facing racialized and/or gender-based violence.

Furthermore, be prepared for different feelings. I did not feel euphoric after convictions but rather sad. On the other hand, I also felt much safer as those men are now in prison.

Finally, being supported and getting psychological and/or trauma-counselling is very important — do not be a hero as you will not be able to serve your people well if you are frightened yourself, so do not be a hero and get yourself help too.

HOW TO SUPPORT A COLLEAGUE? A FEW KEY POINTS

If a fellow politician is facing violence and/or harassment, fellow politicians can support in several ways.

- **First and foremost: listen, believe and validate**

One of the most traumatizing aspects of any act of violence is if the community or state authorities around the victim/survivor do not believe or take the violence seriously. Therefore, one of the most important things one can do as a colleague is to listen without judgement, to validate the victim/survivor's experience and its traumatizing effect. It can place your colleague in a particularly vulnerable position if the perpetrator is a member of your own party.

- **Offer support**

- » Ask your colleague if there is something you can do to help, ask what they need.
- » Your support can be something very practical like doing their grocery shopping if it is unsafe for them to leave the house. Or offer to check all their social media accounts for them and screenshot all the evidence if they are being targeted by an online harassment campaign.
- » Sometimes just knowing that support is available is enough. Therefore mentioning and offering support, even repeatedly but on the victim/survivor's terms, can make them feel safer and cared for.

- **Take action**

- » Whether you witness violence or harassment online or offline, there are many things you can do to intervene at the time of the incident or afterwards. The five D's of intervention – intervene *Directly*, if safe; *Delegate* tasks once risks are assessed; *Distract* attention away from the perpetrator, survivor or the situation; *Delay* by checking with the survivor after the incident; and *Document* the situation by telephone and take notes. These are all useful approaches.³⁷
- » If you are witnessing online harassment, the UK charity Glitch has a resource which highlights five steps:
 1. Spot the violence,
 2. Support the victim/survivor,
 3. Report the incident to the website/platform or organization that may provide help,
 4. Reply to the original post, distracting attention from the violence, and
 5. Amplify the voice of the person experiencing the violence.³⁸

³⁷ See for example, "The five Ds of Bystander Intervention", the Center for Anti-Violence Education, NYC, USA, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e1b96b78d93e3087ddd7675/t/5e47147f0310305ee6929a60/1581716608382/Toolbox_The+5+Ds+of+Bystander+Intervention.pdf>, and Cambridge University's guidance webpage on active bystanders, <<https://www.breakingthesilence.cam.ac.uk/prevention-support/be-active-bystander>>.

³⁸ A Little Means A Lot How you can be an Online Active Bystander, Glitch UK, webpage, <https://glitchcharity.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Glitch_Online_Active_Bystander_ALMAL_Sept2021.pdf>.

- **Use your position, power and networks within your party or parliament** to support a colleague who has experienced violence or harassment and to advocate and leverage change.

As a Politician and Member of a Political Party, One Could...



As a survivor of childhood sexual abuse, I learned to be vocal about what happened to me, because it's not my responsibility to keep that and take it on: I didn't do it to myself.

That same strategy has applied to keep myself safe in politics. I make sure that the people who hurt are held accountable for their actions.

The shame is not mine to carry, it is theirs.

...PREVENT

Together with civil society or an international organization, politicians **can host training programmes** on how to prevent and stop gendered violence in politics for all people working in political parties. Educating everyone involved in the party's day-to-day work is a strong message to condemn any unwanted behaviour. Making the training mandatory and inclusive to all, also broadens the network of allies and supporters.

Call on your party to **create manuals and guidelines** on what to do if a person is faced with violence. This insight can be extremely useful, and equip women with the right tools to act when violence occurs. Distribute to all members and emphasize colleagues' role in supporting victims/survivors.

As a politician, lead by example. Speak up, if you are in a position to do so. Your example shapes the culture and takes power away from perpetrators. You can use your platform and power to raise awareness of violence.

Advocate for the founding of a women's wing within your political party. These specific units can be strong advocates against violence against women in politics.

Influence **the way your party both recruits women and welcomes them** into politics. Support women who are entering politics, as well as those who have been in politics for longer. **Encourage women to stand for election.**

Provide mentoring for women politicians. According to a study by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy³⁹, ongoing mentorship from a diverse range of people is important for addressing fears and concerns that motivated women may have, and for recognizing that support and skill development needs to adapt to the different stages along the road to political leadership (see more ideas, measures and guidance from the other tools in this toolkit).

...PROTECT

Women in politics face barriers to securing justice, including re-victimization during the reporting and complaint process, resistance from law enforcement officials responsible for prosecuting perpetrators and inadequate legal protection or access to integrated services. These are all features common to other forms of gender-based violence against women.⁴⁰

From your position as a decision-maker, **advocate for adopting new laws or updating existing ones and strengthening complaint mechanisms and response protocols in line with international standards.** Legal reforms are necessary to ensure proper legal definition and recognition of violence against women in politics, in turn also ensuring proper prevention, protection, and prosecution measures. In addition, advocate for and adopt codes of conduct and protocols or update regulations or statutes to cover violence against women in politics for institutions, such as parliaments, political parties, or local administrations. Ensure **enforcement mechanisms** are functional.⁴¹ After your party has adopted a code of conduct, it can then encourage other parties to do so, too. Advocate for an internal procedure to be in place within your party to ensure that victims are aware of and have access to support and advice services that are confidential and which put the victims' rights at the centre (see more ideas, measures and guidance from the other tools in this toolkit).

...PROSECUTE AND SANCTION PERPETRATORS

Women face many barriers in access to justice for cases of violence against women, including in politics. However, politicians can shape the culture around the phenomenon. Women and men in positions of power, such as acting members of parliament or regional councils, can end impunity for perpetrators **by introducing and applying disciplinary sanctions.**

One women's rights organization in the UK has called for **a lifetime ban on running for office** for perpetrators of violence against women in politics.⁴²

39 Rebecca Gordon, "Women's political careers", *op. cit.*, note 34.

40 *Ibid.*

41 *Ibid.*

42 "Fawcett open letter calls on Government to impose a lifetime ban on candidates who promote violence", Fawcett Society, petition, 22 May 2019, <<https://www.fawcettsociety.org.uk/news/fawcett-calls-on-government-to-impose-a-lifetime-ban-on-candidates-who-promote-violence-through-open-letter>>.

As online violence is commonly faced by women politicians and often happens on social media platforms, call **on internet intermediaries** to align with the international human rights framework and ensure that all forms of ICT-facilitated violence against women in politics is criminalized and prosecuted.⁴³ (See more ideas, measures and guidance in the other tools in this toolkit).

...COORDINATE POLICIES

Collecting data

Surveys and research projects are a great way to gather data on the current state of violence against women in politics in your regions or country. Surveys on the prevalence of sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament can be used to liaise with law enforcement, or to pressure political parties and governments into action to remedy the situation.

Within political parties, advocate for the monitoring and **evaluation of the party's policy** and practices on violence against women in politics. Gender audits, such as ODIHR's Gender Audit Tool for Political Parties⁴⁴, can assist you in gathering information.

Data collection and analysis may involve combining data on violence against women in politics with other indicators in **national statistical monitoring** or establishing dedicated monitoring bodies or observatories for the protection of women's rights.⁴⁵

Speak to law enforcement and let them know which methods of reporting could make the collection of data easier for victims. Uploading the information into an online platform, for instance, might make it more accessible for women who cannot get to the police station to open a case. This method, according to women interviewed in the process, would lower the reporting threshold and therefore provide more data to the police on the magnitude of the problem (see more ideas, measures and guidance from the other tools in this toolkit).

Forming alliances

Engaging with civil society or international organizations on preventing violence against women in politics is a good way to bring the topic to a wider and larger audience and to shape public perception of the topic.

43 Report of UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, *op. cit.*, note 2.

44 OSCE Gender Audit, webpage, <<http://genderaudit.osce.org/>>.

45 Report of UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, *op. cit.*, note 2.

Invite law enforcement, journalists, judges, lawyers and other actors to join the campaign.⁴⁶ This method can be a valuable asset, if the atmosphere within a political party is not co-operative.

Partnerships hold the key to sustainable change in attitudes. Include **men and women politicians** in efforts to prevent and respond to violence against women in politics as advocates and agents of change for gender equality and women's rights. As men hold the majority of decision-making positions, they are central to achieving change. **Men can play a significant role in promoting the development of gender equality.**

In Sweden, men parliamentarians used their position as opinion leaders to change attitudes. The Swedish Male Parliamentarian Network, a cross-party grouping in existence since 2004, encourages men to engage in debate about their values, their prejudices and the equality of all human beings. The Network organizes meetings with police officers, lawyers, judges, the military, sports coaches, schools and trade unions to discuss values, attitudes and the need for change.⁴⁷

As a politician, you are also in a position to call for **change in the culture of the parliament**. The structures and performative nature of politics shape the way politics is done. Parliamentary networks or committees can support women's political participation and send a strong message of solidarity towards women in politics. Support from government in encouraging women to participate in public life or run for office can also take the form of training events.

Lastly, **find allies in the media and among reporters**. Many women politicians receive threats and harassment in the comments section of new articles, which might have nothing to do with the topic, but more with *who* they are. Speak to the media, and find out if it is possible to close or moderate the comment section. By building partnerships with the media, you can also support them in their work in **promoting non-sexist representation and respectful coverage of women in politics**. Deeply rooted gender stereotypes, which often play a role in promoting violence against women, can be unlearned by collaboration and mutual respect.

Look into **international collaboration**. Find support, look for role models or good practices from across the globe to help you keep up the work (see more ideas, measures and guidance from the other tools in this toolkit).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Theo-Ben Gurirab, "Women in Politics - The Fight to End Violence Against Women", UN Chronicle webpage, United Nations, last accessed 14 October 2022, <<https://www.un.org/en/chronicle/article/women-politics-fight-end-violence-against-women>>.

Annexe 1: Glossary of online harassment and violence against women terms⁴⁸

Astroturfing: Astroturfing is the dissemination or amplification of content (including abuse) that appears to arise organically at the grassroots level and spread, but is actually coordinated (often using multiple fake accounts) by an individual, interest group, political party, or organization.⁴⁹

Creepshots: Creepshots are sexually suggestive pictures of women taken without their consent.⁵⁰

Cyberflashing: Cyberflashing consists of sending unsolicited sexual images using dating apps, message apps or texts, or using Airdrop or Bluetooth.⁵¹

Cyber-Mob Attacks (aka Dogpiling): When a large group of abusers collectively attacks a target through a barrage of threats, slurs, insults, and other abusive tactics.⁵²

Deadnaming: Deadnaming is the intentional act of using a trans person's birth name (not corresponding to their gender) in order to shame, threaten, scare or abuse.⁵³

Deepfake: The use of artificial intelligence's deep learning to make manufactured images, audio, and/or video that appear real. These images, audio, and/or video are can be mimicking speech or facial expressions so as to make it appear that someone has said or done something they have not.⁵⁴

48 Compiled from glossaries: "Defining 'Online Abuse': A Glossary of Terms", PEN America, last accessed 14 October 2022, <<https://onlineharassmentfieldmanual.pen.org/defining-online-harassment-a-glossary-of-terms/>>, and the "GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women", Council of Europe, 20 October 2021, <<https://rm.coe.int/grevio-rec-no-on-digital-violence-against-women/1680a49147>>.

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50 The "GREVIO General Recommendation No. 1 on the digital dimension of violence against women", Council of Europe, 20 October 2021, <<https://rm.coe.int/grevio-rec-no-on-digital-violence-against-women/1680a49147>>.

51 *Ibid*

52 *Op. cit.*, note 48

53 *Op. cit.*, note 49

54 *Op. cit.*, note 48

Denial of Service (DoS) Attacks: A cyberattack that temporarily or indefinitely causes a website or network to crash or become inoperable by overwhelming a system with data. DoS attacks can prevent one from accessing their own devices and data, and these attacks can compromise sensitive information stored on devices.⁵⁵

Doxing (aka Doxxing): The publishing of sensitive personal information online — home address, email, phone number, social security number, photos, etc. — to harass, intimidate, extort, stalk, or steal the identity of a target.⁵⁶

Flaming: Flaming is the act of posting offensive or hostile messages, including insults, on social networks or forums.⁵⁷

Hacking: The unauthorized intrusion into a device or network, hacking is often carried out with the intention to attack, harm, or incriminate another individual by stealing their data, violating their privacy, or infecting their devices with viruses. When hacking is used to perform illegal activities or intimidate a target, it is a cybercrime.⁵⁸

‘Happy Slapping’ (filmed assault): ‘Happy slapping’ /filmed assault is the act of attacking (physical attack or sexual assault) a victim with the objective of recording the assault and sharing it online.⁵⁹

Image-based Sexual Abuse: Image-based sexual abuse consists of a perpetrator obtaining sexually explicit images or videos in the course of a relationship, or hacking or stealing them from the victim’s computer, social media accounts or phone, to share them online.⁶⁰

Lollipopping: Anything meant to infantilize a woman, from calling her ‘hon’ or ‘sweetie’ to telling her she will get it when she gets older. Named after the sweets that doctors and merchants used to give to young children to placate them.⁶¹

Non-consensual Intimate Images (aka Revenge Porn): Nonconsensual pornography is the distribution of private, sexually explicit images or videos of individuals without their consent.⁶²

55 *Op. cit.*, note 48

56 *Op. cit.*, note 48

57 *Op. cit.*, note 49

58 *Op. cit.*, note 48

59 *Op. cit.*, note 49

60 *Op. cit.*, note 48

61 *Op. cit.*, note 48

62 *Op. cit.*, note 48

Online Impersonation: Creation of a hoax social media account, often using the target's name and/or photo, to post offensive or inflammatory statements to defame, discredit, or instigate further abuse. A harasser can also impersonate someone the target knows in order to cause harm.⁶³

Unsolicited Pornography: Sending sexually explicit or violent images and videos to a target.⁶⁴

Unwanted Sexualization: Sending unwelcome sexual requests, comments and content to a target.⁶⁵

Sextortion: A form of blackmail in which an abuser threatens to expose a nude or sexually explicit image in order to get a person to do something.⁶⁶

Silencing: Silencing in the digital sphere refers to one's inability to participate fully and express themselves online out of fear of violence and abuse, ultimately resulting in their exclusion from public debates they would like to be part of.⁶⁷

Swatting: Swatting is the use of telephones and often computer systems to deceive an emergency service in order to send law enforcement to a specific location based on a false report.⁶⁸

Threats: "A statement of an intention to inflict pain, injury, damage, or other hostile action" against a target [Source: Lexico]. This includes threats of any forms of violence, including death threats, threats of physical violence and/or sexual violence.⁶⁹

Trolling: The act of deliberately posting abusive comments online, sometimes with the express intention of causing alarm, distress or humiliation. The attacks can also be carried out by a group of people in a coordinated and targeted manner.⁷⁰

Zoombombing: The act of hijacking a virtual meeting and disrupting communication through the sharing of text, video, or audio. It is also commonly referred to as 'raiding' or 'bombing'. These raids can be for targeted reasons, including disruption of business activities and identity-based attacks on marginalized groups.⁷¹

63 *Op. cit.*, note 48

64 *Op. cit.*, note 48

65 *Op. cit.*, note 48

66 *Op. cit.*, note 48

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