

Report on Violence Against Women in Elections in Jordan

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Introduction

The United Nations (UN) defines violence against women as “any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.”¹ The UN definition challenges traditional or popular concepts that violence against women is limited to physical or sexual “violence” or confined to the home as a private matter. Public discussion and actions to address violence against women have increased greatly in many countries in recent years. However, the topic continues to be taboo and misunderstood in societies where gender-based roles and stereotypes continue to be rooted in conservative, patriarchal cultures.

There is also increasing international attention to acts of violence and harassment against women in politics, recognising the intersection between violence and women’s public participation and how this impacts the validity of democratic processes. Violence against women in elections is an act of gender-based violence aimed principally at women because they aspire to engage in political processes, such as running for office, working as election officials or attending campaign rallies. Election-related violence includes acts of coercion or using force or threats to influence individuals’ voting choices, which has an asymmetrical impact on women because of their marginalised and vulnerable status in their communities.

Violence throughout the electoral cycle dissuades women from participating as **voters, candidates, and election administrators** and has critical implications for the integrity of the electoral process. When women are prevented from voting for their preferred candidates, executing their campaigns, or fulfilling their mandate, democratic processes suffer. International standards for elections require the full

¹ [Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women.](#)

and equal participation by all citizens to act as voters, candidates, election administrators and observers. However, when it comes to the fundamental rights of men and women to participate in these processes, violence, intimidation and coercion prevent women from exercising these rights.

Currently, the greatest challenge in addressing violence against women in elections is the dearth of information and data. Several organisations — including, but not limited to, the UN, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), and the National Democratic Institute for international Affairs (NDI) — are working with activists around the world to systematically collect data and develop tools that address the issue of violence against women in elections. Within this context, and as Jordan faces parliamentary elections for the 19th House of Representatives later in 2020, the Karak Castle Center for Consultations and Training, in cooperation with Friedrich Ebert Stiftung - Jordan Office, contracted Binda Consulting International Ltd (BCI) to design and analyse research to begin filling the knowledge gap and inform future interventions to mitigate and prevent election-related violence against women in Jordan. BCI also drafted this report highlighting the most important findings.

Karak Castle Center for Consultations and Training

A national institution established in 2008 in the Governorate of Karak in the south of the capital Amman. The center aims to build and enhance the capacities of women and youth, and thereby contribute to their economic, political and legal empowerment and to improve their skills and to provide opportunities for equal and effective participation in the development of society within a framework that respects the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Vision

Towards a society of equal opportunities, achieving justice, and consolidating the participatory approach in accordance with relevant best international practices, and inconsistency with the legal framework and the national interests. This is realized through quality tools built according to the programs' application requirements.

Mission

Activating the role of civil society organizations, which contributes to promoting the participation of all segments of society in the decision-making process, especially women and youth, through building their capacities and raising their awareness of the concepts and requirements of comprehensive and sustainable community development.

Friedrich Ebert Stiftung

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is a non-profit organization committed to the values of social democracy and is one of the oldest of Germany's political foundations. In Jordan, FES opened its office in 1986 and is accredited through a long-standing partnership with the Royal Scientific Society (RSS). The aims of the activities of the FES Amman are to promote democracy and political participation, to support progress towards social justice and gender equality as well as to contribute to ecological sustainability and peace and security in the region. FES Amman supports the building and strengthening of civil society and public institutions in Jordan and Iraq. FES Amman cooperates with a wide range of partner institutions from civil society and the political sphere to establish platforms for democratic dialogue, organize conferences, hold workshops and publish policy papers on current political questions.

Methodology

To understand the experiences of women engaged in Jordanian electoral processes, the Karak Castle Center research team interviewed 128 women in 12 governorates and three Bedouin electoral districts. Using an interview guide developed by Binda Consulting International (BCI)'s senior gender expert, 11 researchers (four women and seven men) interviewed 40 former election administration officials and 88 former female candidates in past parliamentary or municipal elections. Interviews were conducted between March 8th and March 22nd, 2020. While many interviews were conducted in person, several were conducted remotely, with restrictions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This research is, in no way, a comprehensive or exhaustive examination of violence against women in Jordanian elections. While the interviews provide important insight into the views and experiences of a small number of election officials and candidates, they represent a narrow snapshot of a complicated and larger problem. Most of the women interviewed can be considered elite and well-educated and do not, necessarily, represent or understand the experiences of all women engaged in various political processes — particularly voters, many of whom are less privileged than the respondents in this study and have different constraints on their political participation. Despite (or because of) the limited scope of this research, the results suggest a need for expanded inquiry and increased public discussion to understand and tackle the issue of violence against women in Jordan's political processes.

This research is supplemented by desk research on recent incidents of gender-based violence against women in politics in Jordan.

Karak Castle Center extends its thanks to the women who participated and shared sensitive information on topics that, for many in Jordan, remain taboo. In order to protect the privacy of respondents, this report does not identify participants by name or location.

Summary

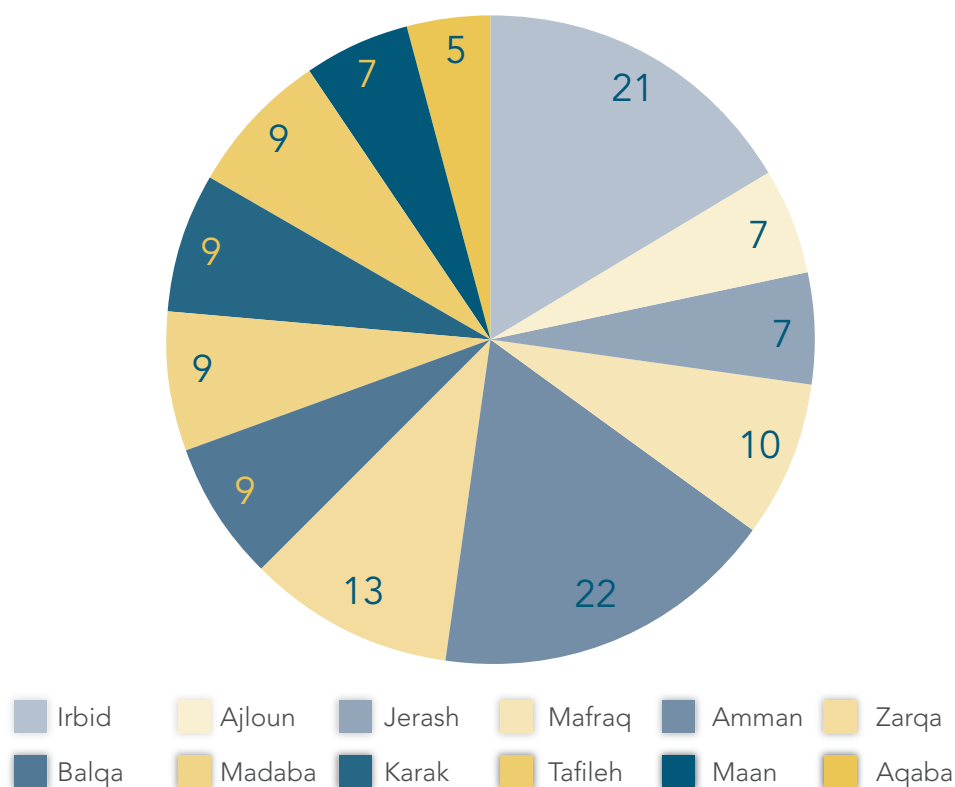
Women in Jordan, as their sisters around the world, are victims of violence in the home and in public life. The causes of violence against women in Jordan are, broadly, economic and cultural. Poverty and the lack of financial independence make women vulnerable to exploitation and violence — particularly within the family. A conservative and traditional culture, particularly in rural communities, promotes women as dependent on men and submissive to family and tribal decisions.

A culture inured to various forms of violence against women has crucial repercussions for women's participation in public life, particularly politics and elections. As voters, many women are coerced and intimidated to make choices dictated by their fathers, brothers or husbands. Threats of divorce, public shaming or physical violence prevent some women from making informed and independent decisions in elections. As candidates, women face public derision, threats and pressure to withdraw from election contests. The lack of financial independence presents female candidates with unique challenges in financing campaign activities on an equal basis with their male counterparts.

Although former election officials interviewed for this study report a relatively low number of incidents of violence directed towards them, analysts with expertise in the Jordanian election process suggest that these numbers may belie a systemic culture of gender-based harassment and bullying that is largely accepted and tolerated by many women. Although the Independent Election Commission (IEC) has policies and mechanisms to protect election officials against violence, it has no specific policies on gender-based violence for staff and election workers.

Gender-based violence is a complex and multi-layered problem requiring multiple strategies and interventions to mitigate. Its impact on elections is, however, significant as it deprives women of their rights to participate equally as citizens in the democratic process. Mitigating election-related violence will require strategies to provide equal economic rights, to protect victims of domestic and familial violence, and to provide resources for women to independently participate in public life. Ultimately, political will is necessary to enhance and implement policies that reduce and eradicate violence against women.

Number of interviews per governorate



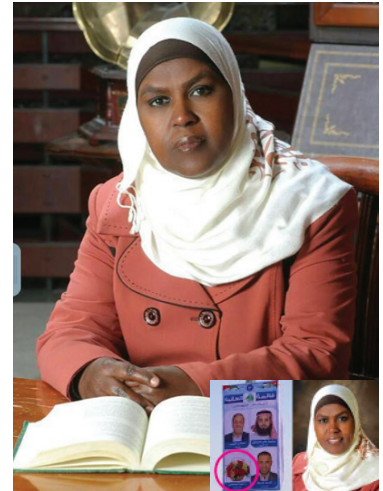
Violence Against Women in Elections in Jordan

Increasingly women candidates are speaking up on the discrimination and violence against them as they pursue their rights to seek public office. As reinforced by Karak's survey of women candidates (noted below,) much of the violence against women candidates is intended to convince candidates to drop out of elections or not to stand at all.

A recent article¹, published by the Women Empowered for Leadership program of Hivos in Jordan, notes how harassment and threats dissuade women from exercising their political rights. Siham Kavar, a municipal councillor in Al Fuheis, described how "thirty men approached her brother to push him into pressuring to withdraw her candidacy in 2007." Although Kavar's brother resisted the pressure, some from his own tribe, once elected, Kavar faced gender-based discrimination and belittling.

¹ [Political Violence Against Women in Lebanon and Jordan.](#)

As Karak's research confirms, women candidates in Jordan often face pressure and discrimination from within their own families and tribes. Another candidate, Falha Al-Ahammneh's own sons initially opposed her candidacy for the municipality of Al She-rah in the 2017 elections. Similar opposition, from their own tribes, was placed on two other women candidates — Salam Al Zo'bi and Reem Rawajbeh. For Rawajbeh, the opposition was accompanied by online insults and attacks.



Attacks against women candidates also come in the form of the destruction of campaign materials, particularly posters and banners. In 2016, one candidate for the parliamentary election created a public furor over her decision to replace her photo on her list's materials with a bouquet of flowers. Although Alia Abu Hillel later denied she replaced her photo over fears of the destruction of campaign posters¹, speculation on the Stepfeed website suggested otherwise.

Participants in past Karak programmes, particularly members of the Elected Women's Network have confirmed that destruction of election materials means candidates often do not publish their photos in campaigns. Gender stereotypes and conservative values are often used to criticise women who publish their photos.

For example, in 2016 Lamia Dawood faced abusive backlash on social media after posting a photo of herself to announce her candidacy in the city of Zar-qa.² While criticism of appearance and dress is a daily reality for many women around the world, the controversy over Dawood's photo ignited fresh debate in Jordan about the fundamental participation of women in Jordanian politics and exposed a significant lack of support for women's rights to engage in electoral processes.

¹ [Why a Female Politician Is Running for Office in Jordan as a Basket of Flowers.](#)

² [The most beautiful female candidates for the Jordanian elections challenges extremists.](#)

As confirmed in Karak's recent research, conservative opposition to women's participation in politics is often perpetuated by the family and tribe. For example, a young candidate from a bedouin tribe in southern Jordan publicly admitted that her husband divorced her after she refused to submit to his desire to withdraw in favour of a candidate from her husband's family in her electoral district.¹ Although family coercion and intimidation of women is a serious and violent violation of rights, it continues to be a taboo topic for public discussion and usually seen as a "private" matter. The participants in this research acknowledged that the threat of divorce is a common tool used to control women's voting choices and, sometimes, their ambitions to run for elected office.

¹ <http://www.rumonline.net/print.php?id=98835>

The Study

Although this study focused on violence against women in elections (VAWE), it is important to locate this specific issue in the broader context of violence against women in Jordan, in general. Before addressing VAWE, researchers asked respondents to describe the forms of violence women experience in the workplace and to opine on the levels of awareness and resources available to victims of violence.

In the workplace

Almost all interviewees agree that women in Jordan face some form of violence in the public sphere, particularly in workplaces. Respondents believe the exploitation of women is greater in the private sector, but certainly not absent in public sector workplaces. Women employees in Jordan often face sexual harassment, physical and verbal assault and are more likely to have their labour rights abused. Poverty and the lack of economic independence mean women are more vulnerable to workplace violence (including discrimination and exploitation) and, many respondents noted, these factors make them more likely to accept lower wages, unpaid overtime and the lack of employee benefits.

"The private sector prefers males because women need maternity leaves and don't have the ability to work late or in the field (on the road – out of office). Also, men are allowed to concentrate on their paid work, while women have to balance paid and non-paid (house) work and child-caring responsibilities. For women, in particular, there are lower salaries in the private sector, and they have to put up with sexual and physical exploitation and unwanted flirting."

— 43-year-old, divorced, former candidate

"Sexual harassment from the principal, and I know a woman who was fired because she refused to go with it. No health insurance for female employees."

— 43-year-old, married, former election official

Generally, the public sector is safer in terms of violence or harassment toward women workers, and fairer concerning salaries and insurances. However other benefits are subject to administrative or supervisory whim, such as vacation benefits. While supervisor or co-worker harassment is reported less frequently in the public sector, several respondents make the point that front-line public-facing civil servants are subjected to abuse by clients, more so for women. Nonetheless, women in the public sector face glass ceilings, undervalued capabilities, and men who resent their productivity and ability.

"The public sector erodes women's rights in taking higher administrative positions, it doesn't grant them the power to become managers. Society is controlled by favouritism, they consider females are emotional even if they hold administrative positions, they will not work properly and try to limit their authorities."

— 32-year-old, married, former election official

"In public work, women are exposed to moral and verbal violence because men always try to undermine their spirits and try to cut her way not to reach senior positions and promotions. "

— 61-year-old, married, former candidate

The causes of violence

Respondents provided a variety of causes of violence against women in Jordan, which are, broadly, economic and cultural. A few respondents suggested that poverty and the lack of financial independence make women vulnerable to exploitation and violence.

"The weak economic status of a woman, where her salary remains under the authority of her father or husband."

— 43-year-old, married, former election official

"Economic violence is also depriving women of their right to inheritance and, in case she objects, she is exposed to violence from brothers. Poverty is a cause of violence, he is bored, so he takes it out on his woman."

— 63-year-old, married, former candidate

The overwhelming majority of respondents attributed the causes of violence to socio-cultural traditions. Most interviewees paint a picture of a society that promotes women as dependent on men, and a culture inured to violence against women, where abusers act with impunity. Ideas that women are submissive to men, belong in the home, and must accept male decisions contribute to conditions that allow for violence against women. These are long held beliefs, ingrained deeply over time, and cycles of violent behaviour are handed down over generations. Interviewees predominantly view violence as stemming from the family, to avoid bringing shame to the family, and to maintain standing within the tribe.

"The society's view is that women must stay at home, which is a commonplace notion we were all brought up with. We also connect women to shame, for example, if a woman was upset with her husband and he really abused her and turned to her family, her father might not let her have divorce because it is [thought to be] a shame to be a divorcee."

— 51-year-old, married, former candidate

"Women in some areas are controlled and her fate is not hers to decide, but for the family. We find some people in some areas not allowing their daughters to study, even in selecting husbands, which are all violence against them."

— 48-year-old, single former election official

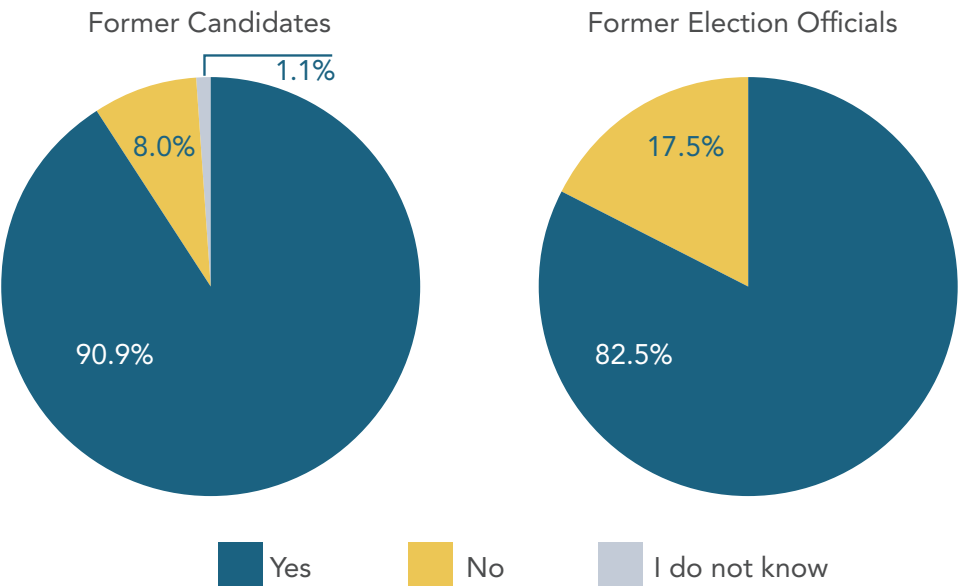
While former candidates also cite culture and traditions as major causes of violence, this group — more than former election officials — lays some blame on women themselves for either accepting violence as the way it is, not being aware of their rights, or being weak and not assertive. A possible explanation for this distinction is that women candidates endure a measure of harassment and abuse as aspirants for political office, a domain culturally reserved for men. Presumably, these experiences mean women candidates develop a "thick skin" and reject violence directed at them. As noted earlier, the women interviewed for this study are mostly elite and privileged and, therefore, are better educated on their rights and have choices and resources to escape violent circumstances; choices and resources that are not available to many Jordanian women.

"Male dominance over decision-making, impunity and the absence of punishment that avoids repetition of this action. Our community promotes violence in the day-to-day language (if he controls her, then he is a real man) and his manhood increases if he exposes a woman to violence. Lack of awareness of women/media, series and movies play a big role in promoting violence against women as does upbringing. Religion and hadiths could be interpreted in the wrong way."

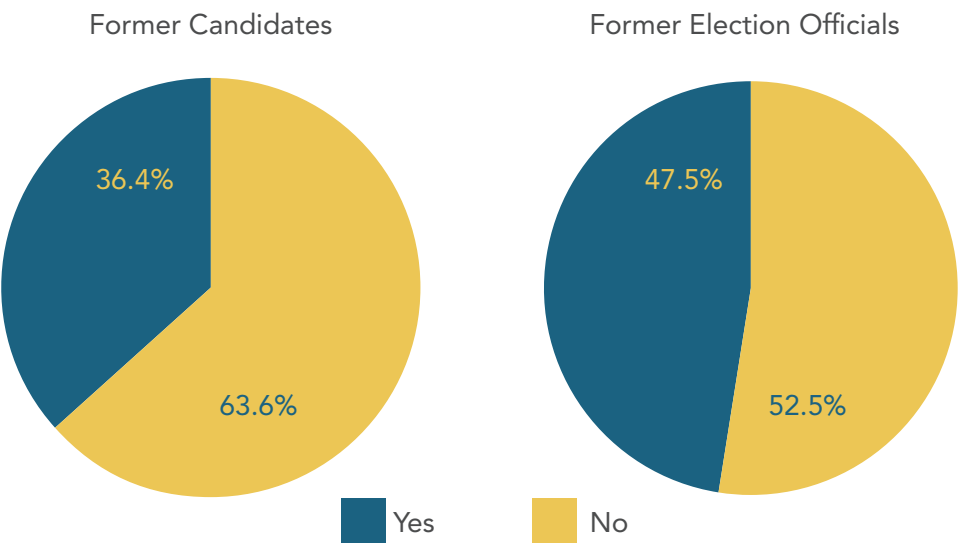
— 52-year-old, married, former candidate

When asked if socio-cultural traditions affects levels and forms of violence against women, most respondents said they did.

Q: In Jordan, do socio-cultural traditions affect levels and forms of violence against women?



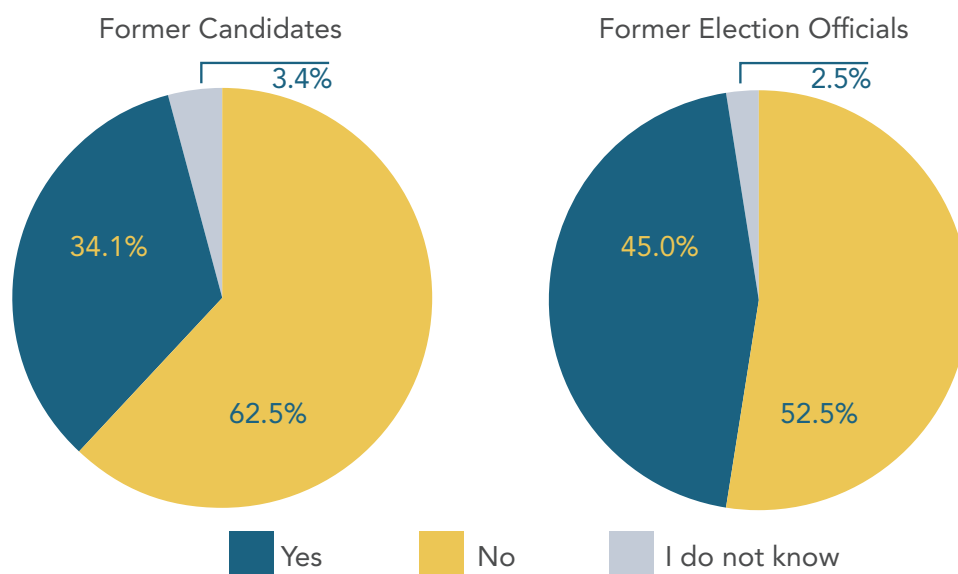
Q: Do you believe there is sufficient awareness about violence against women in Jordan?



Not surprisingly, given their levels of education and awareness of rights, respondents opinion divided about adequate services or resources for victims

of violence in Jordan. Also, interviewees have similar opinions that the legal and judicial system does not protect women against violence (55 percent of former election officials and 62.5 percent of former candidates), there are no provisions in Jordanian law to prevent or prosecute VAW.

Q: Are there adequate services or resources for women victims of violence?



Although less than half of the respondents believe the legal and judicial protect women, they acknowledge that many victims do not access this protection. The barriers to victims of violence seeking redress and justice are similar to the causes of violence in the first place — culture and tradition. Critically, shame and dependence are major barriers to women accessing the justice system. Women fear their families' reactions and the shame of a scandal to seek justice outside of the family or tribe.

"Shame is the biggest obstacle women face when asking for justice. Despite being a victim, asking for justice could result in her death, so the family are not disgraced."
— 46-year-old, married, former candidate

"There is no secrecy if a girl turns to court, which is a crisis because we are tribes, and the tribal system doesn't allow the law to take its course because some parties intervene and solve it with a cup of coffee."
— 32-year-old, married, former election official

In addition to cultural and traditional barriers, several interviewees agreed that women's financial dependence limits their practical ability to access the legal and justice system, even where laws exist to prevent or punish gender-based violence. While some respondents acknowledge the fairness of laws, they note that legal processes can be both expensive and time consuming. If a woman does not have access to her own finances, mounting a legal process is difficult, as is finding safe accommodation during the proceedings.

"[She] forfeits her rights to keep her children protected, even if she sees violence. No other place to go, except her husband's house, for example, if she left her husband, her family doesn't shelter her, or they have a difficult financial situation."

— 51-year-old, married, former election official

"Financial dependency on men [is a barrier]; if she is independent, she will not stay in a home full of violence ... Laws and justice system: Alimony and custody cases, in particular, may take several years, as well as lawyers' fees."

— 46-year-old, married, former candidate

Election-Related Violence Against Women in Jordan

Women in Jordan are actively engaged in electoral processes including as candidates and electoral officials. In 2017, the IEC engaged 11,374 women in the election process. As the table below shows, the majority of those women worked at the local level in polling stations.

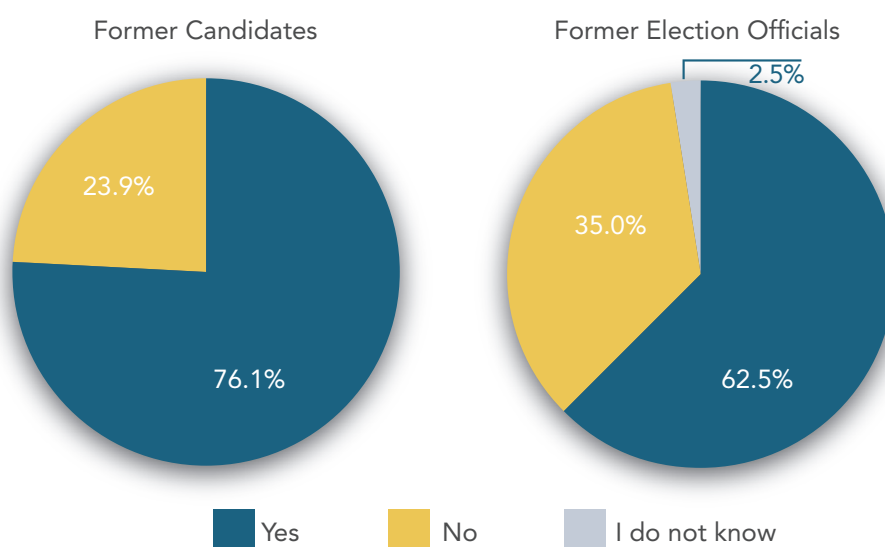
Number and percentage of females among the staff in 2017 elections¹.

Type	Number of females	Total number of staff	Percentage of female
IEC Commissioners council	1	5	20%
Electoral committee offices	159	1776	9%
Voters lists presentation staff	77	441	17%
Data entry staff	50	150	33%
Systems connection staff	36	321	11%
Polling and counting committees' staff	8,345	26,973	31%
polling and counting centers staff	2,429	6,630	37%
Operation rooms and results staff	269	1,838	15%
Special committees' staff	8	72	11%

A majority of both groups interviewed for this research believe that VAWE occurs and is publicly visible. However, a greater proportion of former candidates (76.1 percent) believe this to be the case than former election officials (62.5 percent).

¹ This table was generated based on the final report of 2017 elections published by IEC.

Q: Is violence against women during elections visible publicly?



Violence against women voters

Overwhelmingly, former election officials and candidates believe that a significant form of VAWE is intimidation and coercion of women's voting choices. While more former candidates (86.4 percent) believe that women are prevented from voting or coerced to vote in a certain way, more than three-quarters of former election officials (77.5 percent) also believe this to be the case. Most agree that members of the family or tribe are usually the perpetrators of this form of violence, preventing women from making free choices.

"Forcing her to vote for whoever the family sees fit, not who represents her."

— 51-year-old, married, former candidate

One former election official even revealed a personal experience of familial election-related violence:

"I boycotted the elections, but my brother slapped me for not voting for the tribe's candidate, but because I love him, I went and voted."

— 32-year-old, married, former election official

Given the vast dependency of many Jordanian women on their families, coercion on voting choice is likely to be much more common behind closed doors, with threats of divorce being cited frequently by both groups of interviewees. For many families — particularly in rural communities — bloc or family voting is the norm.

"We live in a society where men promise to vote for certain candidates and give them his wife, children and his name without consultation. If a man wants to vote, then a woman is allowed to only for the candidate the husband chose."

— 27-year-old, single, former election official

Respondents also provided several examples of ways in which male family members are publicly violent and coercive towards female votes:

"A case in Mafrag; a husband threatened to divorce his wife if she didn't vote for someone."

— 40-year-old, single, former candidate

"A man threatened his wife with divorce if she voted for another person. A brother pressed his sister to vote for someone, and when she refused, he hit her in front of the election center."

— 55-year-old, married, former election official

Very often, intimidation involves violating a voter's right to cast a secret ballot to ensure she makes the "right" decision.

"The woman is forced to vote as an illiterate, so her husband can know who she voted for. Women's hands are tied to appear as broken, so their husbands can enter with them and elect whoever he wants."

— 43-year-old married former election official

In addition to intimidation, coercion and physical violence, economically disadvantaged women are victims of financial exploitation to influence their vote.

"Vote buying and political money are economic violence because this exploits women's needs."

— 40-year-old, single, former candidate

Violence against women voters has crucial implications for equal participation in democratic processes. Almost half of the respondents (47.7 percent of former candidates and 47.5 percent of former election officials) believe that women in Jordan fear becoming involved in elections or voting. Many women in Jordan who fear familial retribution and community shame are unable to independently choose their representatives or participate in political events.

Violence against women candidates

The 88 former candidates reported 153 different incidents of violence directed towards them in their experiences running for office. Most of the respondents understood the violence was intended to force them to withdraw their candidacy, usually to make room for a male candidate. Several interviewees report offers of money to withdraw their candidacy. If financial extortion is unsuccessful, many threats against women candidates in Jordan question their fitness to run for office based on traditional and cultural stereotypes.

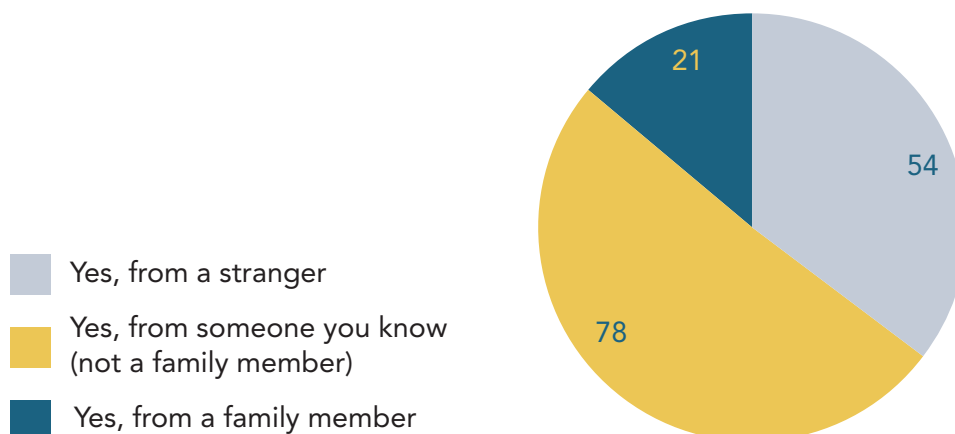
"Threats, intimidation, negative language, comments from the same people to withdraw from the elections to favour someone else."

— 33-year-old, married, former candidate

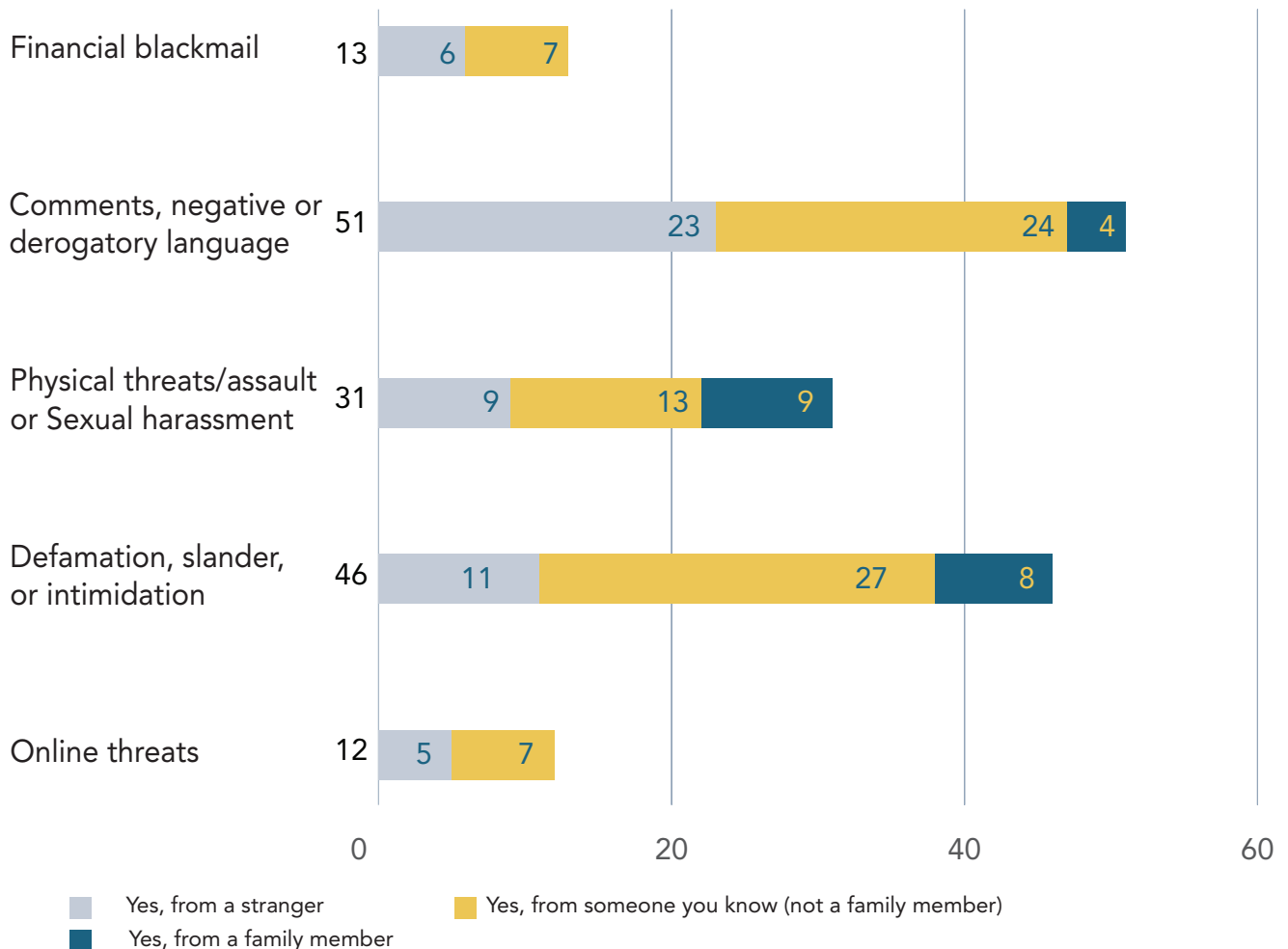
"A group of people incited my brother against me not to let me run for the elections and that I am a woman and it is disgraceful because men must represent the tribe."

— 51-year-old, married, former candidate

Number of reported violence cases against women candidates



Q: When you were a candidate, did you experience any of the following?



Half of the violent incidents reported by former candidates can broadly be categorised as gender-based hate speech, including:

- Comments about the personal life of candidates,
- Negative or derogatory language, and
- Defamation or slander.

The respondents report many perpetrators of gender-based hate speech use social media and online sites to direct violent comments towards female candidates to threaten and intimidate them.

"I was exposed to many threats, usually by competitors ... They send threats by messenger ... Post insults on tribal pages and news websites."

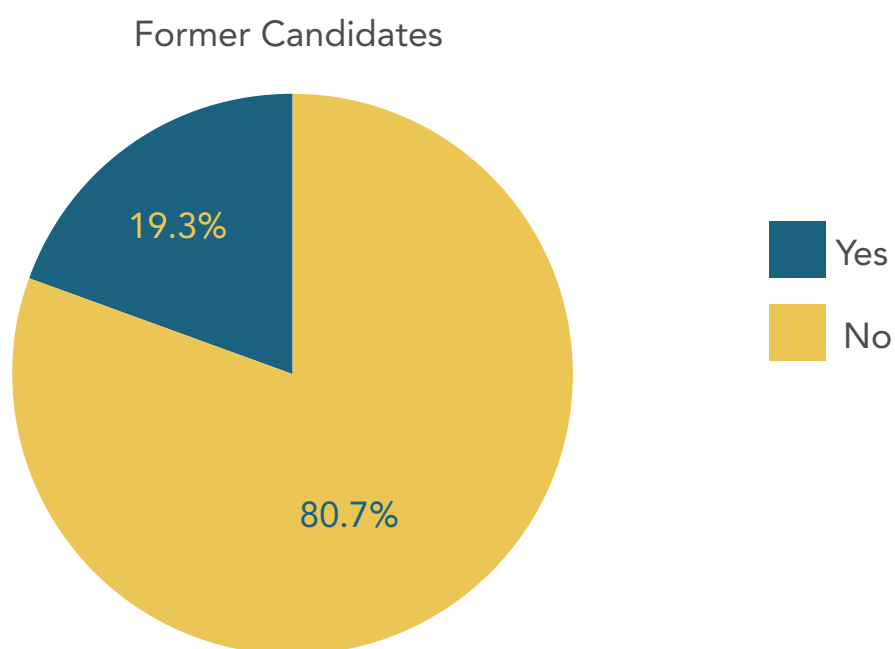
— 53-year-old, married, former candidate

"On social media, I was defamed and intimidated by fake accounts. My personal life was attacked as well."

— 52-year-old, married, former candidate

Incidents of VAWE towards female candidates come from both strangers and people known to the candidates. The research showed that 83 of the incidents were perpetrated by family members or non-family members the candidate knew and 70 incidents were committed by strangers.

Q: Have users of social media ever referred to you in a negative or derogatory way?



In Jordan, as in many countries, gender-based hate speech on social media is personal and often targets female candidates' families.

"Facebook posts said that I take advantage of my appearance to promote my election campaign and that I use my daughters as commodities in elections. Also, hacking my Facebook's account and posting sexual videos to all my friends. Comments on my personal life such as I will benefit my husband's family in favor of mine."

— 50-year-old, married, former candidate

"Personal life comments on my lifestyle and the way I dress, calling me a liberated woman who can't represent tribal women."

— 43-year-old, divorced, former candidate

"Negative and insulting language, such as you are an inexperienced girl, how will you represent a tribe or the society. Also personal life comments as some people I'm not familiar with spread rumors that I'm separated from my husband and my children are against me in the election campaign."

— 44-year-old, married, former candidate

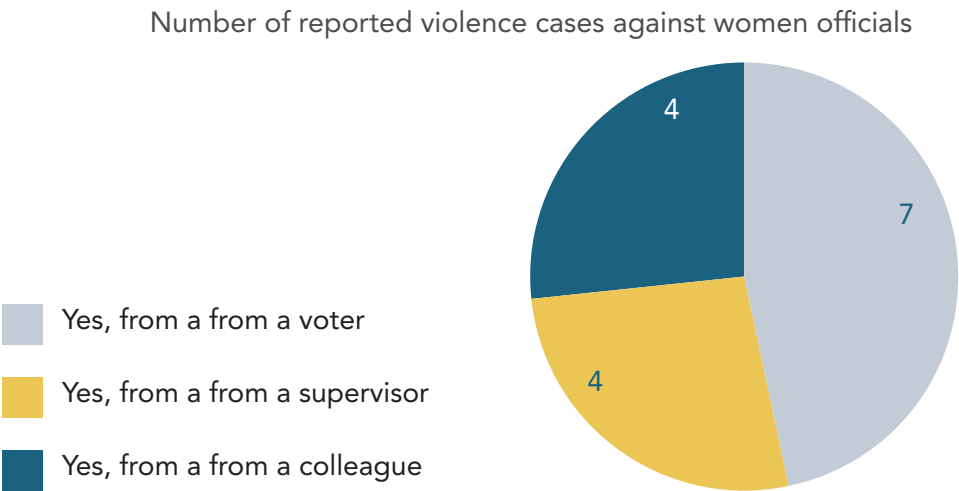
While many users of social media can be vicious towards women candidates, only five respondents said they were aware that mainstream media had ever referred to them in a negative or derogatory way. Slightly more respondents (14), noted they were referred to in a negative or derogatory way when participating in debates during the election by an opposing candidate, the moderator or a member of the audience.

The former candidates were asked what, if any, action they took regarding the incidents they identified to researchers. Almost all respondents said they took no action. A few attempted to engage in dialogue with perpetrators of hate speech, and seven respondents said they took some sort of legal or official action, including lawsuits and reports and complaints to the Cyber Crimes Unit within the Police Directorate. Despite the severity of many of the threats and violence, Jordanian women candidates demonstrated determination and perseverance since only two of the respondents said they withdrew from the election campaign.

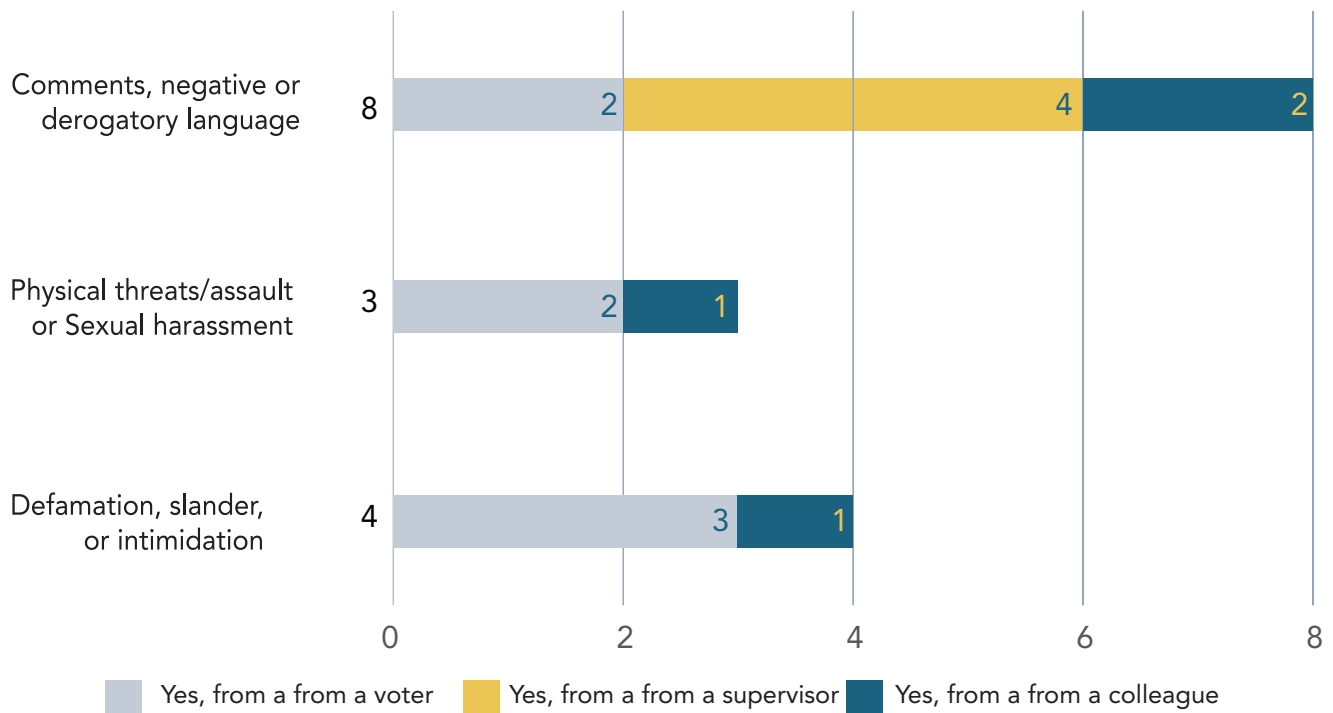
Violence against female election officials

The experiences and perceptions of VAWE is significantly different for female election officials compared to candidates. Very few of the former election officials interviewed for this research reported that they experienced any incidents of violence. In fact, the 40 former election officials said they experienced a much lower ratio of violence with only 15 incidents. Of these, eight involved negative or derogatory language or comments about their personal lives.

Since the sample of former election officials surveyed for this study is less than half a percent of all women employed by the IEC in 2017, it is too small to draw a definitive conclusion about why female election officials experience low levels of violence compared to candidates. While election experts agree that, in general, violence against election officials in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region occurs less frequently than in countries where violence plaques election processes, further research is required .



Q: When you were an election official, did you experience any of the following?



While further inquiry with a broader sample of IEC respondents is necessary, one possible explanation for the difference in levels of violence reported by former election officials and candidates might be that female election officials are usually government employees — a culturally acceptable profession for women in Jordan. It should be noted that Jordanian law includes protection of government employees against general violence (although not gender-based violence). Additionally, the IEC has policies or mechanisms to protect election officials against violence. Most incidents of experienced violence appear to relate to supervisors or colleagues being disrespectful or verbally abusive.

"A supervisor wearing a badge from the Independent Election Commission told me to give him a ballot paper from the papers I have, but when I refused because I'm responsible for them, he said he is a supervisor and was angry and took one paper. When I told him I will call the police, he put the paper back and said you passed the test, I just wanted to see your reaction. Of course, he made it appear as a test, but in reality, it is not and it was a lie."

— 51-year-old, former election official

The former election officials did report witnessing 18 incidents of violence against female voters at polling stations, which included six incidents of intimidation and 11 incidents of coercion. The majority of the former election officials, understandably, defended the voting process and environment in and around polling stations.

"There is a comfortable environment by taking policies to protect women, and there is no inconvenience even for women wearing a veil as there are female security officers to supervise them, and in case men enter they are taken out."

— 62-year-old, widowed, former election official

Unique barriers to women's electoral participation

Most former election officials believe the IEC has successfully integrated women into election administrative processes. The evidence, however, demonstrates that the IEC has not yet reached gender parity within the organisation. As the earlier table shows, slightly less than 30 percent of the 38,206 IEC employees in 2017 were women. The former election officials also believe that the presence of female security forces helps protect many women voters from physical violence, although not coercion or intimidation by family members. Most respondents in both groups, however, admit that the distance women must often travel to reach polling stations and the crowded and the unruly atmosphere outside of polling stations can make the election process hostile to women and present barriers to their participation. Women — particularly elderly or those with disabilities — are less likely to travel long distances to polling stations or endure crowds of disorderly men to cast their ballot. Although many polling stations in Jordan have separate lines for men and women, many respondents noted that this separation is often not implemented or men congregate close to women-only polling stations or lines, intimidating the women.

"Each candidate sends his supporters in front of polling stations and the riot, verbal or physical harassment begins."

— 27-year-old, single, former election official

"Polling stations are crowded, unorganised, and chaotic. The big number of men and the long distances without means of transport."

— 61-year-old, married, former candidate

Both groups of respondents agree that Jordan's conservative culture and traditional stereotypes perpetuate coercion and intimidation that prevent women from participating equally in election processes as voters. They also agree that the lack of financial independence and access to campaign funds prevent women from standing as candidates. The cost of elections and campaigning creates an unlevel playing field between men and women.

"The financial situation where money plays a primary role in printed materials and advertisements for campaigns."

— 44-year-old, married, former candidate

"Women don't run for elections because they have to quit their jobs, which deprives them of their income. The election process needs a lot of money."

— 41-year-old, married, former election official

Conclusion

While there is a marked difference between the personal experiences of female candidates and election officials, both groups agree that VAWE exists in Jordan. Cultural traditions that create societal and economic inequality promote gender stereotypes permitting male heads of families to deny women their independence to participate equally as voters and candidates in the democratic process.

While Jordan has attempted to narrow the political gender gap with minimal quotas for candidates, it has much to do to prevent and mitigate violence against women during elections. Policies and strategies that empower women in all aspects of their lives (such as economic independence, education, and citizenship rights) will contribute to women's ability to resist and fight against intimidation and coercion in elections. Resources and services for victims of violence, including safe avenues for seeking redress and justice, will help mitigate familial and domestic violence. Changes to negative culture take time and an increased presence of elected women will help change citizens' perceptions and acceptance of women as equal participants in political processes. Until attitudes change, however, the women who are brave enough to face violence in the name of democracy deserve support and protection.

Recommendations

- Voter education materials produced by the IEC and election-related civil society organisations should address the issue of violence against women, including intimidation and coercion on voting. Voter education materials should deliberately target familial violence against women voters.
- The IEC or the government of Jordan should support, cooperate and engage with expert civil society organisations and health professionals to develop policies and mechanisms to monitor and mitigate violence against women in elections, including providing safe avenues for women to report violence and seek justice. For example, the IEC or the government of Jordan can support organisations that provide services to victims of violence to establish hotlines, women-friendly community-based safe spaces (for example, in health centres or clinics), and provide legal resources to victims seeking justice. A useful model to consider is the use of women's situation rooms (WSR) used in several countries across Africa¹.
- Election officials (men and women) should receive information and awareness on the issue of election-related violence against women.
- Election officials (men and women), civil society organisations and national and international observation groups should receive adequate training on the issue of election-related violence against women that includes at least:
 - Definition of violence
 - Types of violence
 - Examples of violence
 - How to record and report on violence against candidates/voters/election officials
- The IEC should rigorously enforce regulations that provide for independent assistance of illiterate and disabled voters, to prevent family intimidation and coercion.
- International and national election observation and monitoring organisations should incorporate VAWE in their methodologies, data collection and reporting.

¹ [Preventing VAW in Elections, UN Women, p. 67.](#)

- Organisations that engage in media monitoring during elections should include the collection and reporting on data related to VAWE.
- Government and non-governmental organisations should develop strategies and programmes to support women candidates who are victims of threats and violence. For example, civil society can develop networks to speak out against violent action, the government (specifically the Cyber Crimes Unit) should develop robust regulations and punish perpetrators who abuse women online and engage in election-related violence.
- The IEC should make polling stations more accessible and less hostile to women. Travel to polling stations and long and disorderly queues deter many women from voting.

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