

# **Towards a More Complete Understanding of Election Violence: Introducing a Gender Lens to Electoral Conflict Research**

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## **Abstract:**

Electoral violence is a common problem in many elections worldwide yet it is deeply misunderstood. This article reveals and defines the gendered nature of electoral violence through the analysis of over 2,000 documented incidents of election violence collected in six countries between 2006 and 2010. I argue that in order to develop policy solutions to protect and promote equal participation, we must first re-evaluate our understanding of the problem of election violence. I demonstrate that women's experience with electoral violence is profoundly different from that of men. While men and women both experience (and perpetrate) violence as candidates, representatives, voters, party supporters and in other public roles, the forms of electoral violence that women experience are radically different, including socio-psychological and sexual violence. The perpetrators of electoral violence against women are distinct as are the locations in which violence occurs and the ways in which it is reported. Because women's experience of violence is different than that of men, its impact on their participation is also distinct. Some acts of election violence are also acts of GBV/VAW (targeted against women because they are women), which we call VAWE. Many acts of election violence are not committed because of the victim's gender, but they affect men and women very differently. This article addresses a pressing gap in International Relations. Women's political participation is a defining characteristic of democratization processes around the world. The conceptual framework for electoral violence must be revisited to reflect the reality of women's experience and to provide a basis for protection and prevention.

**Key Words:** Election Violence, Gender, Sexual Violence, Political Participation

Electoral violence – in all of its various incarnations -- is a common occurrence in many elections in transitional and post-conflict states. Taking place before, during and/or after an election, it affects candidates, political party members, voters and many other civic stakeholders. A burgeoning body of literature in recent years has explored the phenomenon in terms of its causes, effects, manifestations and implications. Yet the very nature of violence itself has often been taken for granted. Our understanding of electoral violence is limited by holdovers from male-dominated perspectives on political participation.

These perspectives are rapidly becoming outdated. We have entered the ‘Century of the Woman’ according to some (Clinton 2000, 2011; Bachelet, 2011). Advances in political gender equality, women’s political representation and participation in all areas of civic life have marked the first decade of the new century in many countries around the world. More women hold office today than any previous point in history and, for the first time in 2015, women’s suffrage will become reality in every state in the world (excluding Vatican City). The changing face of political and civic life compels us to revisit some of the longest-standing concepts of the field, notably electoral violence.

Electoral violence is gendered in nature. While men and women both experience (and perpetrate) violence as candidates, representatives, voters, party supporters and in other public roles, the forms of electoral violence that men and women experience are radically different, including socio-psychological and sexual violence. Women and men do not share the same experience of electoral violence – they face different types of violence at different frequencies, at different times and places. Patterns and trends among perpetrators of electoral violence vary according to the sex of the victim. Some acts of election violence are also acts of GBV/VAW (targeted against women because they are women), which we call VAWE. Many acts of election violence are not committed because of the victim’s gender, but they affect men and women very differently. Indeed, the very ways in which we are able to document acts of electoral violence follow clearly traceable patterns according to the sex of the victim and the perpetrator. In some cases, acts of election violence are committed specifically to undermine women’s electoral participation on the basis of her sex. Because women’s experience of violence is different than that of men, its impact on their participation is also distinct.

This article reveals and defines the gendered nature of electoral violence. Two key research questions are addressed: How is election violence different for men and for women? In what ways do election violence and gender-based violence overlap? The first section reviews key definitions and offers a gender-sensitive definition of election violence. In the second half of the study, I present four types of election violence: physical, social-psychological, sexual and economic. Each type is explored according to two lens: first, I present how each form of violence is experienced differently by men and by women, and secondly, I argue that, in some cases, each form of election violence may also be committed with a gender-specific intent.

The research draws on indicative quantitative data of over 2,000 documented incidents of election violence collected in six countries between 2006 and 2010 (Bangladesh, Burundi, Guinea, Guyana, Nepal, Timor-Leste), as well as extensive field experience and interaction with victims of gender-specific election violence, and desk research. I demonstrate the specific nature of election violence, exploring its distinctions including victims, perpetrators, forms and locations.

The objective of the study is to demonstrate that, by adopting a gender-sensitive definition of election violence, we will enhance our understanding of a central and pervasive issue in political science and international relations. The research helps bridge the existing gap between democratization and electoral research and gender studies, especially where violence and conflict are concerned.

### **Defining Violence and other Key Concepts**

Understanding political violence is a core theme of political science. From the earliest writings of Hobbes and Weber, political violence is understood to be pervasive, affecting rich and poor states, established democracies and all others (Weinberg and Rapoport, 2001; Bates, 2001, Bufacchi 2005). Yet there is no consensus on the basic definition of violence or of election violence (Straus and Taylor). Minimalist definitions focus on acts of excessive force (Ted Honderich 2003) while comprehensive approaches consider violence as a violation of personal or human rights (Steger 2003, Riga 1969 and Wade 1971 in Bufacchi 2005). In light of measurement challenges, political analysts and international relation theorists have tended to draw upon minimalist definitions however even these often fail to fall into neat classifications and may overlap regarding the meaning and purpose of the act of violence, the level or scope of organization of the violent actors, or the nature of the violence itself (Krause 2009). Krause argues that the narrow concept of ‘violence as physical harm’ omits some forms of violence related to armed conflict and common-sense understandings (2009, p 340). As argued below, the minimalist definition also omits key forms of election violence experienced by women and thus limits our understanding of the nature of election violence.

Drawing on the tradition of Audi (1971), Riga (1969) and Wade (1971), I approach the present study from a rich understanding of the concept of violence as “a means of control and oppression that can include emotional, social or economic force, coercion or pressure, as well as physical harm. It can be overt, in the form of physical assault or threatening someone with a weapon; it can also be covert, in the form of intimidation, threats, persecution deception or other forms of psychological or social pressure. The person targeted by this kind of violence is compelled to behave as expected or to act against his/her will out of fear.” (UN Office for the Constitution of Humanitarian Affairs).

This violation-oriented definition allows for a cross-disciplinary analysis, specifically to examine the intersection between electoral violence and gender-based violence. The concepts of gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against women (VAW, a subset of GBV) have evolved into rich and

nuanced definitions over the years, reflecting the growing literature based on comprehensive definitions of violence. Meanwhile, definitions of political violence and election violence (EV, a subset of political violence) have tended to draw upon minimalist definitions that facilitate large-n research. A brief recap:

Gender-based violence (GBV) is the “general term used to capture violence that occurs as a result of the normative role expectations associated with each gender, along with the unequal power relationships between the two genders, within the context of a specific society.” (Bloom 2008, p14). According to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), GBV is defined as “*violence that is directed against a woman because she is a woman or that affects women disproportionately*”. This includes acts that inflict physical, mental or sexual harm or suffering, the threat of such acts, coercion and other deprivations of liberty (CEDAW, General Recommendation No. 19 on VAW (GR 19)). Violence against women (VAW) is defined 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” (DEVAW 1993). VAW may occur in public or in private, including in the family, in the general community or violence perpetrated and condoned by the state.

A subset of political violence (Hoglund 2009), **election violence** (EV) has no consistent definition in the social sciences. To study the complex phenomena, the concept of election violence has been disaggregated into classifications according to the timing, actors, intensity of violence and motives (Hoglund 2009; Straus and Taylor 2009; Reif 2005, Hafner-Burton et al 2014, Kehailia 2014). In order to study its causes and consequences, authors have operationalized the concept broadly to include civil war to riots, political strikes and assassinations (Collier 2009), armed conflict (Synder 2000). Others have sought to refine it more closely to the electoral process, notably Straus and Taylor (2009) who define it as “physical violence and coercive intimidation directly tied to an impending electoral contest or to an announced electoral result.” Linebarger and Salehyan (2012) use violent social conflict incidents to measure social unrest around elections. Given their focus on physical violence, all of these definitions are of the minimalist family.

Barriers to operationalizing the dependent variable and the lack of cross-national data have limited the study of election violence according to its type. A handful of authors have broadened the interpretation of EV to include other acts such as political imprisonment and harassment (Hafner-Burton 2014), blackmail and ‘abuse’ (Fischer 2002, Reif 2009) and verbal abuse and psychological manipulation (Reif 2009). The academic literature has wholly ignored the gendered-implications of election violence. In a laudable effort to counter-male dominated perspectives on EV, Hafner-Burton et al use the feminine pronoun throughout their article in referring to the incumbent perpetrators of election

violence, however this is symbolic only – incumbent sex was not one of the independent variables tested and, indeed, none of the case studies had a female incumbent. Specific definitions related to the gendered-nature of election violence is otherwise absent in the literature, and we are left to rely on the gender-neutral conceptualizations to understand the experience of EV for both men and women alike.

We rely on these definitions to understand election violence through a gender-lens, yet they are problematic. On one hand, election violence and gender-based violence appear to be, by common definition, mutually exclusive terms because their purposes are dissimilar. The object of election violence is to harm an electoral process or outcome, while the object of GBV is to harm someone on the basis of their sex or gender. Further to this, the gender-neutral definition of EV has defaulted to reflect almost exclusively the types of election violence that men perpetrate against other men, to the exclusion of women's distinct experience of EV. These common assumptions mask two important distinctions.

First, there is an intersection between GBV/VAW and EV. The two forms of violence are not mutually exclusive because the victims of election violence are not inanimate processes or political outcomes, but the human beings engaged in the political process – the demos of democracy, both men and women. Classic definitions of election violence consistently tend to view the immediate, human causalities of election violence as intermediaries for the ultimate victim: the democratic process. However, women's electoral participation may be targeted for violence for misogynistic purposes, to maintain patriarchal control of the political sphere. When an attack occurs to limit or deny an individual or group's right to participate in an election on the basis of his or her sex or gender, election violence becomes a form of GBV/VAW. A distinct term has been developed for these gender-specific acts of election violence: **Violence Against Women in Elections** (VAWE, see Ballington et al 2015). VAWE is recognized and criminalized as a distinct form of violence in Bolivia and Mexico.

The second point concerning definitions is a caveat: VAWE only describes a limited subset of election violence. The victims (male and female) of election violence are targeted for a multitude of reasons, only one of which is their gender. Indeed, gender is a pertinent but infrequent motivation for election violence. However, as this article demonstrates, general election violence (ie, non-VAWE) manifests itself in profoundly different ways depending on the sex of the victim, and therefore the limitations of the classic EV definition render it inadequate to capturing the reality of the phenomenon. In order to fully understand the diverse forms, outcomes and actors involved in election violence and drawing on the literature (notably Reif 2009 and UN-OCHA), I propose the following definition of election violence, which draws on the lessons of violence research in other areas:

Electoral violence is a means of controlling and/or oppressing an individual or group's right to free participation in an electoral event through the use of emotional, social or

economic force, coercion or pressure, as well as physical and sexual harm. Occurring from the date of voter registration to the date of inauguration of a new government, election violence may take place in public or in private, including in the family, the general community, online and via media, or be perpetrated or condoned by the state.

This definition holds an advantage over classic definitions of EV because it avoids the omissions common to all minimalist approaches to understanding violence, thereby allowing a truer understanding of the nature of this form of violence. It belongs to the family of classifications most used in international relations and political science (Krause 2009), in that it focuses on the meaning and the purpose of the act of violence (i.e., to control/oppress electoral participation) but recognizes the relevance of other demonstrated facets of violence, including its scope (i.e., interpersonal/collective) and its nature (physical/psychological/sexual/economic). It therefore responds to a gap in the political science literature long-recognized in other fields.

Based on this, we may define the relationship between the terms by stating that all acts of GBV/VAW that are used to control or oppress a woman or women's right of electoral participation are necessarily acts of election violence (VAWE), but not all acts of election violence against women are acts of GBV/VAW. I base my subsequent discussion on this framework: in each aspect of election violence discussed in the following pages, I address the gendered-nature of election violence in general followed by consideration of specific VAWE that occurs within each area.

Two final notes: another term, Violence Against Women in Politics (VAWiP), has also emerged among the practice community in recent years. The term is subject to conflicting interpretations<sup>1</sup> and it is intentionally omitted here.

It should also be noted that both VAWE and VAWiP use "violence against" in their phrasing, implying women's victimization. This is a further reason to limit interpretations of VAWE to a subset of EV. Both men and women act as perpetrators of election violence and therefore the conceptualization of the concepts must not be gender-specific. With that said, because the vast majority of acts of election violence in the research sample were perpetrated by men, the empirical examination here focuses on primarily this perspective. For a discussion of women as perpetrators of electoral violence, refer to my 2011 publication.

In sum, shortcomings in historic definitions of election violence have resulted in a male-biased interpretation of the phenomenon. Some acts of election violence are also acts of GBV/VAW (targeted

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<sup>1</sup> There are multiple conflicts in defining the term VAWiP. In some contexts, the idea of "women in politics" is interpreted broadly to include many categories of women stakeholders (UNW Southeast Asia) while other authors intentionally use "in politics" to limit the pool to female candidates and elected or appointed officials (IDEA 2008). The relationship of VAWiP to

against women because they are women), which we call VAWE. Many acts of election violence are not committed because of the victim's gender, but they affect men and women very differently. This is why it is important to revisit the definition of election violence and expand our understanding of the problem. A gender-sensitive definition allows for a more complete understanding of the nature of election violence.

Having proffered a gender-sensitive definition, we now justify it through an empiric exploration of the gendered nature of election violence.

### **Forms of Election Violence**

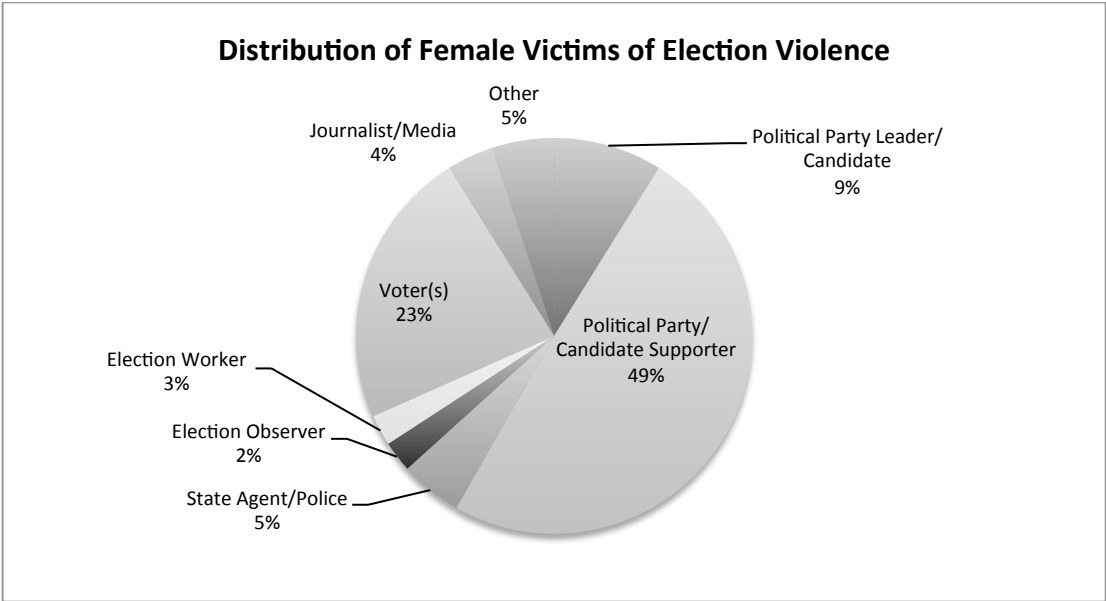
Election violence falls into four broad categories: direct physical violence, social-psychological, sexual and economic election violence. While many of these categories have been recognized and recorded by traditional research approaches in the past, their gendered impacts have not been systematically recognized, resulting in an incomplete understanding of the nature of election violence and inadequate policy responses. As described above, each of these four categories has specific gender dimensions. In addition, each of these forms of violence may also become forms of VAWE when they are used to disempower women on the basis of their sex.

Common victims of all forms of election violence include voters, elected officials, candidates, political aspirants (i.e. those seeking nomination), political party members and leaders, electoral workers, journalists, individuals engaged in civic and voter education and electoral security providers. They are all targeted by violence to control or oppress their electoral participation, according to their relative roles in the process. There are also a multitude of perpetrators which may be classified in three groups:

- 1) non-state political actors (party members, leaders, candidates, paramilitary, party militia, non-state armed actors);
- 2) state actors (state security (police, armed forces), government institutions (executive, judicial and legislative actors), electoral agents (poll workers, EMB staff, electoral security agents), and state proxies (militia, gangs, insurgents, mercenaries, private security); and
- 3) societal actors (journalists/media, voters, community members or groups, religious leaders, traditional leaders, employers, criminal actors, intimate partners/spouses, electoral observers, youth groups) (Ballington et al 2015).

An individual may be both a victim and a perpetrator in some cases. As victims, women are targeted in all forms of electoral actors however almost half of the acts documented in the EVER cases targeted women political party supporters. According to the EVER data, women voters represented the second most frequent type of women victims of election violence (23% of all female victims). These women were attacked either at polling places, during voter registration or during other civic activities. In the

dataset, women voters were victims at roughly four times the rate of men voters (6% of total male victims). Women in rural settings were particularly vulnerable, with over half of recorded incidents against women taking place outside of urban and suburban areas.



Although many aspects of EV have been overlooked by minimalist definitions, the following pages document the nature of election violence according to these four areas and illustrate the distinct ways it impacts men and women. Forms of EV that have been overlooked tend to be those most experienced by women. This supports the argument in favor of a more comprehensive definition of EV. Secondly, I argue that each of these four areas of EV may become forms of VAWE when used to disempower a woman specifically on the basis of her sex. A summary is provided in Table 1.

<b>Form of Violence</b>	<b>Examples</b>	<b>Perpetrators</b>
Physical	State and/or Militia-sponsored violence	Police, Military/Paramilitary, Covert Government Actors (ethnic, religious or militia), National Intelligence Agencies
	Physical Harm	Political partisans, Thugs, State security, family
Social-Psychological	Psychological Intimidation	Family and Community, Religious leaders, political parties, state-sponsored (all levels), Social media users/Trolls
	Social Sanctions and Punishment	Community, Family, Religious Leaders
	Familial Pressure	Family and Community
	Child Abuse	Family and Community
	Domestic Violence	Family Members



Economic	Exploitation of IDPs and Refugees	Political Parties, State Actors, Military or Paramilitary, Local Strongmen
	Economic Coercion and Punishment	Community, Family, State or Private Employers
Sexual violence	Rape, Assault, Harassment,	Police, Military/Paramilitary, Family and Community Members, Political parties

The quantitative analysis in this paper analyses 2,005 individual incidents of electoral violence collected in six countries between 2006 and 2010.<sup>2</sup> This indicative data was collected through the Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) project under the auspices of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), a US-based non-profit organization. Additional insight, notably in the areas of electoral-related domestic violence, violence via information and communication technologies and sexual and economic violence, was drawn from informal field interviews, classroom straw polls and exchanges, and conversations with male and female candidates, party representatives and elected officials; civil society members; electoral management body (EMB) members and general citizens by the author in the course of multiple missions as an advisor on women's political participation with United Nations and international non-profits over the course of the past five years. Given the sensitive nature of the experiences of violence, the names of individual victims are withheld from publication. Feedback from the field includes 10 informal classroom polls and dialogues conducted by the author between 2012-2014, with roughly 250 adult participants from electoral management bodies, government agencies and civil society organizations from roughly four dozen countries.<sup>3</sup> Desk research was conducted to supplement the study.

### ***Physical Violence***

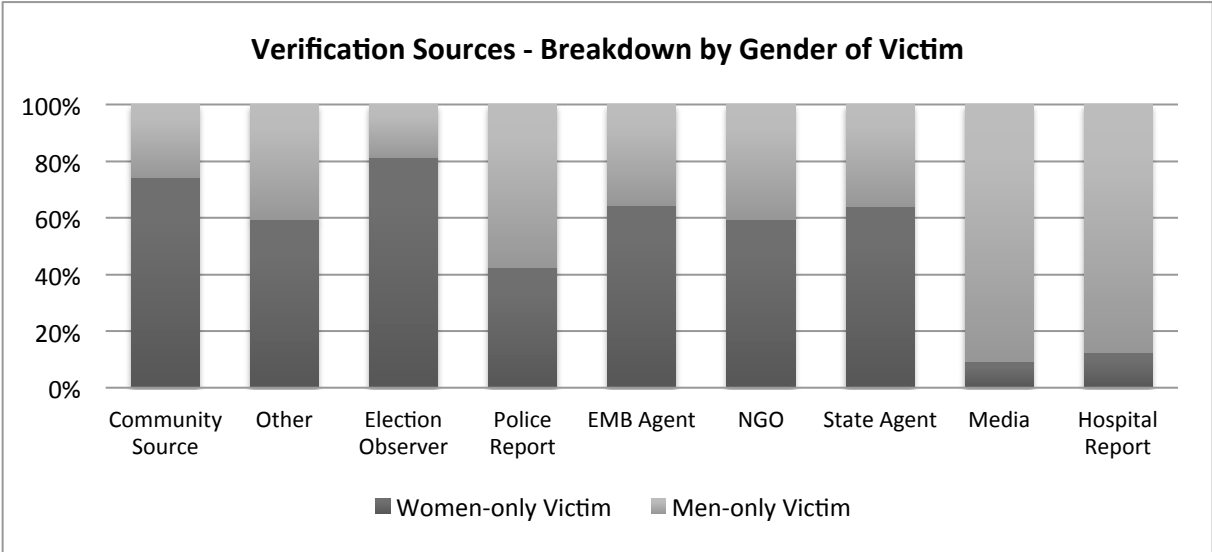
Physical violence causes direct bodily harm to a person in relation to their involvement in an electoral process, and/or bodily harm to a proxy (child, family member, etc). Forms of physical violence include beating and assault; assassination, murder/attempted murder; kidnapping/attempted kidnapping; grenade attacks; shooting, stabbing, armed or unarmed battery and assault; violent dispersion of protests and public gatherings including mass rape; destruction or appropriation of property; political/arbitrary arrest/detention/imprisonment, excessive use of force, torture and mistreatment of prisoners by police and intelligence agencies including virginity tests and sexual exploitation; domestic violence and child abuse, and all other action resulting in bodily injury.

<sup>2</sup> The author acknowledges the International Foundation for Electoral Systems for access to the EVER data used herein. Some parts of this paper appeared in an IFES White Paper in 2011. Please refer to methodological note in annex for full description of cases and dataset information.

<sup>3</sup> Workshop participants in activities discussing gender and election violence were from: Antigua, Benin, Barbados, Belize, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cape Verde, Canada, DRC, El Salvador, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kosovo, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, South Africa, Sierra Leone, Suriname, Swaziland, Togo, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia, USA, Zambia, Zimbabwe.

Of the types of physical violence documented by the EVER data, acts of physical violence are most common among men (men as both victims and perpetrators). As victims, the proportional frequencies of acts of physical harm and murder/attempted murder against men were respectively 67% and 64% higher than among recorded incidents against women. Men were involved as perpetrators of violence in over 95% of cases – only 3.8% of acts in the data were perpetrated by women acting alone, 20% of acts involved men and women acting together. While this number is overwhelming, variations within it are also telling. When compared proportionally to those acts perpetrated women, men were more than twice as frequently involved as perpetrators in acts of murder/attempted murder, and five times more frequently the authors of acts of physical harm/threats of physical harm. This was consistent across six countries studied.

As recorded by EVER, most acts of physical violence take place in public settings and can often be documented through public records. For example, even though the EVER data did not employ a gender-sensitive definition or methodology, the data still shows that, compared to violence acts against men, violence against women is nearly twice as likely to take place in private locations (homes, etc, 21% for women v. 13% for men) or in ‘other’ locations not captured by the gender-neutral methodology (14% for women, 6% for men). Likewise, incidents involving only male victims were far more likely to be verified through official records including police reports, hospital records and the media. Meanwhile, incidents involving only female victims were most often traced through information from election observers, electoral agents and community sources (27% of incidents of violence against women in the EVER data were documented through community sources compared to only 9% of cases of male-only victims).



Other physical forms of election violence that were not recorded in the EVER data but that are more commonly experienced by women include domestic violence, child abuse (where the child is a proxy target for a woman) and gender-specific police abuse, such as virginity tests.

Domestic violence includes physical, as well as emotional or sexual violence committed by an intimate partner in the home or in public. It is considered as election violence when committed with the intent of controlling electoral participation or disenfranchising. Domestic violence has many forms, including physical aggression or threats thereof; sexual abuse; emotional abuse; controlling or domineering behavior; intimidation and stalking (Shipway 2004). 95% of domestic violence cases worldwide are against women (Advocates for Human Rights 2006).

Child abuse, defined as “any act or series of acts of commission or omission by a parent or other caregiver that results in harm, potential for harm, or threat of harm to a child” (CIDC) includes neglect, physical abuse, psychological/emotion abuse and child sexual abuse. Child abuse may take place in private or public. These take on an electoral nature when they are employed to intimidate, politically control or disenfranchise a spouse, other family member or other adult. In both of these cases, the perpetrators are often (but not always) intimate partners/spouses or close family members (parents and in-laws) and the acts of violence generally occur in private settings.

A victim testimony illustrates these two under-recognized physical forms of election violence. In interview, Marie-Thèrese<sup>4</sup>, a Congolese woman in her mid-forties described her experience when she decided to run for national office in the 2010 DRC elections. When she declared her intent to run for office, she attested to being beaten by her husband and threatened with rape if she didn’t abandon the campaign to stay home with her children, whipped by her in-laws, and hit and stoned by her village priest for the same reasons. Her husband terrorized their children by blaming their mother for targeted acts of electoral violence the family had experienced since she launched her candidacy, causing them to believe she was intentionally trying to harm them and that she was of low moral character. Marie-Thèrese recounted being subject to further attacks by rival political parties, including being shot three times in the legs; having her home broken into and searched repeatedly; being kidnapped, beaten, burned and abandoned in a ditch; and receiving multiple threats against her children. Ultimately the children were sent away to school for the remainder of the campaign.<sup>4</sup>

Marie-Thèrese’s case offers a glimpse into the complexity of electoral violence against women. Multiple forms of violence coexist and cannot be isolated in unique categories. Perpetrators range from intimate partners, to family and community figures, to political opponents not personally acquainted with the victim. Children were used as a proxy by both the husband and the political rivals to coerce the victim’s behavior, but they also became victims in their own right. The violence was committed as an act of gender-specific election violence on the part of the family and community members protesting her candidacy on the basis of her sex. Other aspects of the violence were

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with the author. October 13, 2012. Gaborone, Botswana. Names changed to protect the victim. The victim brought a newspaper clipping to the interview documenting the most serious act of violence, and displayed the leg bullet wounds, however no other verification exists for the other incidents beyond the interview.

committed on presumably gender-neutral grounds (electoral rivalry) but used gender-specific methods, such as threatening the candidate's children (while effective against both sexes, women candidates may be particularly vulnerable to such attacks).

As the dual intent of the perpetrators in Marie-Thèrese's case illustrate, physical violence can be gender-specific (VAWE) when it is perpetrated with the intent of repressing a woman's electoral participation because she is a woman. Historically, politically prominent women often became victims of election violence through their associations rather than through their actions. In both post-conflict and non-conflict countries, women rose to political visibility as partners, wives, mothers and daughters of political personalities. In these roles they became targets for political opponents seeking to intimidate and disrupt electoral proceedings.

However, as women's political visibility rises, so does their vulnerability to election violence targeted at political leaders and candidates. This risk may be amplified by anger against their rejection of women's traditional roles and mores. For example, in Afghanistan, the Free and Fair Election Foundation for Afghanistan (FEFA) reported that 9 out of 10 threats against candidates in the 2010 election campaign were against women (FEFA 2010). In one particularly noteworthy case, ten campaign volunteers working for female candidate Fauzia Gilani were kidnapped while working on her campaign; five of them were killed when she refused to quit the campaign. Gilani told the Guardian newspaper that, "Society is run by men, they are in charge and they don't want a woman to be over them" (Boone 2011).

In another anecdote recounted to the author by an international electoral advisor close to the case, a young Afghan woman faced severe resistance from her family when she sought work as a poll worker in Afghanistan's 2010 elections, due to objections to exposing herself in public in an unwomanly role. One night, after being required to work late, the young woman missed the provided women-only transport and took a public taxi to return home. In anger against riding with a male taxi driver after dark and for unwomanly conduct as a poll worker, the women's mother-in-law purportedly doused her daughter-in-law with petrol and lit her on fire. The poll worker later died of the injury.<sup>5</sup>

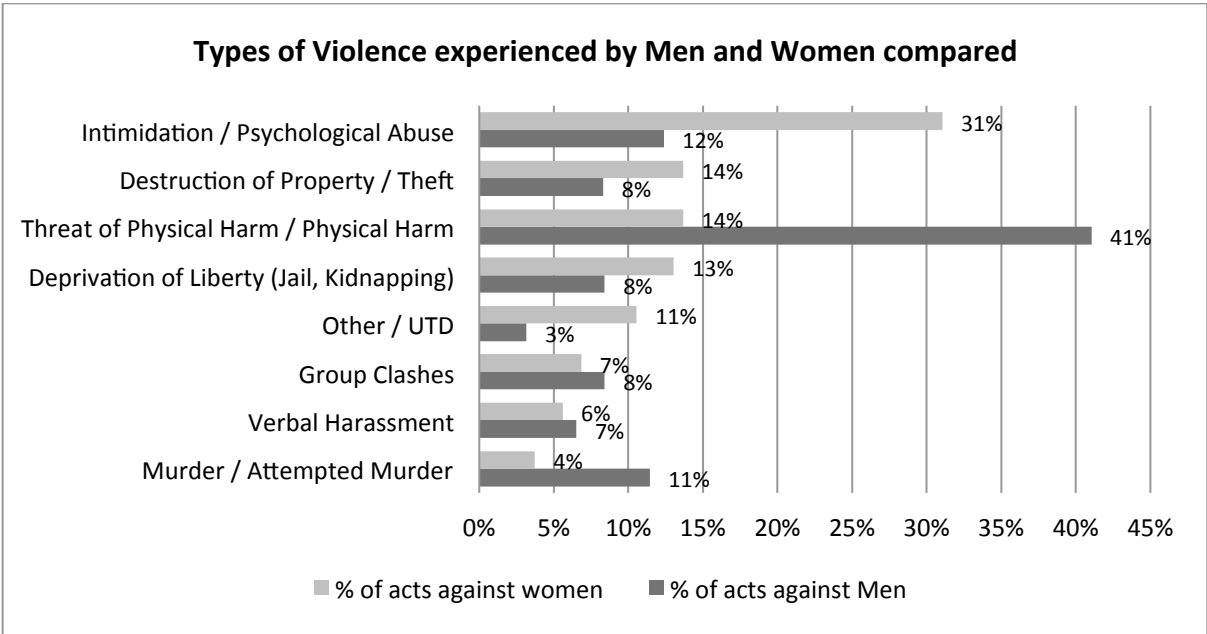
### ***Social-Psychological Violence***

Social-psychological violence causes harm by inflicting fear on its subject as punishment for their behavior or to coerce their behavior. It can include psychological intimidation, social sanctions and punishment, family pressure and character assassination. It may be perpetrated on its own, or in

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<sup>5</sup> Author interview with international electoral assistance provider, September 2012. New York City. Interviewee requested not to be named. No additional documentation regarding the case was available.

connection with another form of violence (for example, child abuse is a physical violence against the child as proxy, and a psychological violence against the proxied target, as in the case of Marie-Thèrese above). Psychological violence is the single most prevalent form of election violence experienced by women, accounting for one third of all incidents of violence against women recorded in the EVER data. The difference is striking: the proportional frequency of intimidation against women is almost three times greater than for men, while the proportional frequency of physical violence is three times greater among men than women. This powerful contrast illustrates the fundamental difference in the experience of electoral violence between men and women.



A widespread tool of political manipulation, intimidation is also often associated with situations of power imbalance and control in household settings. Psychological/emotional abuse includes rejecting, degrading, terrorizing, isolating, corrupting/exploiting in a sustained or repetitive manner. Some forms are most prevalent in the domestic context and may be sub-sets of domestic violence while others (such as terrorizing or degrading) may take place publically by public political actors.

Social sanctions and punishment are social mechanisms to regulate individual behavior can include informal means of control (systematic ridicule, ostracism, shame, criticism, exclusion, discrimination) and formal means of control (laws, statutes, regulations against deviant behavior). This disproportionately affects women. Election violence in traditional societies often takes the form of social censure. That is, a community may turn against publically, politically active women who are perceived to break with traditional roles, not only through limits on movement and speech that may be imposed by husbands and male community or religious leaders, but also marginalization, isolation and rejection imposed by older female relatives as well as by other community leaders.

Family pressure is a specific form of intimidation, control or forced disenfranchisement. It may include spousal or parental pressure on who to support in an election, refusal of permission to leave house to vote or run for office, refusal of relatives to watch children for women to vote, family sanction or rejection for a woman candidate or aspirant. This disproportionately affects women due to traditional roles. Perpetrators of social and family related violence are most often close to the victim, in the community of the domestic sphere.

Evidence from different countries suggests that women can become victims of violence and threats of violence by their kin when they seek to pursue political office, to publically voice their political opinions or even when they disagree or fail to vote according to the wishes of their husband, parents or clan. Schaffer's (2011) study of controlled voting (dictating women and younger men's vote choices by senior male household members) and split voting (deliberate allocation of a family's vote across two or more candidates) highlights the coercive nature and provides examples as far-ranging as Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Gabon, Guatemala, India, Israeli Bedouins, Macedonia, Niger, Pakistan, South Africa, South Korea, and Uganda. He notes that in these cases, "the ballot cast is not an expression of the controlled voter's opinion. In fact, vote control is often accompanied by violence or threats of violence. Women from various parts of the world, for instance, have been beaten or killed for disobeying their husbands' electoral orders" (p 13).

During the Egyptian elections of 2011-12, women in some rural regions were threatened with divorce for failing to vote according to their clan's electoral choices.<sup>6</sup> The threats were backed by references to marriage vows to obey the husband, and a belief in the non-secrecy of the ballot due to public voting and result counting in small communities. In these cases, the threat of divorce was devastating as it implied exile from children and family, social ostracism, loss of financial assets and income and the real possibility of homelessness.

In India, human rights activist Savitri Goonsekere explain that "'character assassination, kidnapping of their children, rape and even murder of winner women politicians by opposition party members after losing elections, social boycott for being involved in politics, breakage of relationships, ill treatment by husbands...there are a whole lot of reasons which discourage women from entering the field'" (IANS 2009). In other countries, the legal framework does not protect women from domestic pressure and violence; in some there are legal stipulations of male dominance and such clauses may be invoked to impede women's political participation as voters, activists or candidates. For example, in Algeria, Article 39 of the family code stipulates that "The duty of the wife is to obey her husband". Although the constitution allows freedom of movement to all citizens, "policemen and court officials in Algeria, and in many other countries in the region, consider it an acceptable practice for a husband to forbid his wife to travel without his permission" (Freedom House 2006).

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<sup>6</sup> Carter Center Election Witness Mission in Egypt 2011-12.

Psychological violence is the single most prevalent form of election violence experienced by women. The most frequent reported threat to women is intimidation, which accounts for over one-third of all cases of violence against women, and nearly 90% of cases against women party leaders or supporters or women candidates. International Alert reports a striking example of the challenges of intimidation faced by women candidates, in this case from Sierra Leone:

In December 2009, Elizabeth Torto stood as a candidate in the Paramount Chieftaincy election in Kono District. Directly descended from a former chief, she had received the full support of traditional leaders in her community and was confident of victory. However, the all-male 'poro' society viewed her candidacy as a contradiction of traditional practices and vowed to block her from standing. When she appeared in public she was confronted by extreme intimidation from men in her community. 'They accused me of starting a revolution,' she recalls. She received death threats warning her never to return to the area and her supporters were attacked and beaten. Under a hail of stones she was eventually flown to safety in Freetown in a UN helicopter.

In her absence, a loophole in a recently passed law was used to bar her from the resultant election, which was won by a man. The 2009 Chieftaincy Act stipulates that women have equal rights to contest chieftaincy elections, but only 'where tradition so specifies'. (Kellow 2010)

Social-psychological attacks are particularly potent instruments of violence where women are concerned, for several reasons. Firstly, attacks against women's morality or ethical character often carry greater social costs for women than for men because of the implications they may have on the victim's children or because of the existence of double standards as far as what constitutes 'moral behavior' for male and female politicians (Bardall 2013). This makes psychological-violence a particularly effective weapon against women in general and specifically in electoral contexts.

Women in post-war states may be particularly susceptible to psychological attack during elections because of the experience of conflict. Elections in transitional countries often open up virulent, unhealed political disputes, social divisions and (in post-conflict cases) the rivalries of previously warring factions, many of who remain heavily armed. States already suffering from the social disorganization and eroded authority of conflict or authoritarian rule may find increased impunity and weakened social control during electoral periods. For many citizens and potential political actors alike, this volatility translates into a fear of a return to (or introduction of) wartime conditions that have severe impacts on women. In fact, political candidates may explicitly evoke the terror of war-time relations in their speeches and rhetoric. Whether explicitly evoked or implicitly understood, this

environment of instability and the fear it inspires are assaults on the mental integrity of its victims, and thus, they are forms of election violence. Given the profound impacts of war on women (including physical attacks, loss of loved ones, displacement, disintegration of community, breakdown of support mechanisms, reduced access to food and shelter, among others) the intimidation and psychological violence perpetrated through invocations of return of wartime relations or levels of disorder are intense discouragement from becoming politically involved and/or triggers for post-traumatic stress.

Emerging forms of violence take a particular toll on women because of their unique vulnerability to this type of attack. Intimidation and psychological violence is increasingly perpetrated online, via SMS and in the media. Internet and other social media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) have proven to be uniquely dangerous instruments in perpetrating election violence against women because of the relative importance of psychological violence in women's political experience (Bardall 2013). ICTs may be used directly as a tool of intimidation by threatening or inciting physical violence against women candidates, voters or representatives, such as during the post-election violence in Kenya in 2008–09, when tribal-based political partisans sent SMS messages to women in opposing tribal-based political groups, threatening bodily harm, rape and even death (Wanyeki). A number of the specific qualities of social media make them peculiarly suited to inflicting psychological violence on women in public life. For one, the nature of messaging in social media facilitates ridicule, shaming and other psychological forms of VAWE. The ubiquitous presence of images which are used to sexualize, emotionalize and trivialize women candidates or aspirants, for example in Tunisia, where women parliamentarians reported being harassed and taunted by degrading Photo-Shopped images of them during sessions of parliament.<sup>7</sup> The speed with which information travels through social media networks and the scope of its diffusion magnify the impact of acts of VAWE. Finally, social media benefits from a significant degree of legal and moral impunity, because of the greater distance between the perpetrator and the victim (for full discussion see Bardall 2013). All of these factors contribute to new forms of social-psychological election violence against women.

### ***Sexual Violence***

The WHO defines sexual violence as “any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed, against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work”. Sexual violence is a unique type of harm in that it is both physical and psychological in nature, and of an intimate and degrading nature specific to the victim's gender identity, setting it apart from other categories of violence. Sexual abuse for electoral motives includes politically-motivated rape as a tool of terror and intimidation, marital rape as a tool of repression, sexual harassment, assault and abuse with the objective of controlling, intimidating, humiliating and

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<sup>7</sup> Conversation with the author. July 2013. Tunis, Tunisia.



disfranchising the victim (including poll workers sexually assaulting voters, male MPs sexually assaulting women MPs, etc), virginity tests and sexual exploitation of female political prisoners and detainees.

It may be both a physical attack and/or a psychological assault. It may be perpetrated by a stranger, sometimes in a public position (police, military, co-MPs, etc) and also by domestic partners and members of the victims' community known to the victim.

Women become victims of electoral violence in various forms as public citizens. Documented cases of wartime rape in the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Burma and Bosnia, have demonstrated that rape can be a tool of political violence that not only represses political action, but also represses, dishonors and humiliates the political actor. Rape as an agent of electoral violence in non-conflict states, like in Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire in 2010 (Human Rights Watch, 2011), has the same effect. Rape as political intimidation and dissuasion has amplified effects during an electoral process, making gender-specific violence a high impact tool of political coercion.

Sexual abuse by public actors is estimated to be seriously under-reported, while private abuse for political or electoral purposes remains almost entirely outside of formal research approaches to date. Some gross violations make headlines, as in the case of the brutal army crackdown on a pro-election rally in Conakry, Guinea in 2008, when scores of women were raped or in Zimbabwe where the "government is systematically deploying the most brutal forms of sexual violence to deter women ... from participating in opposition activities" (Democracy Digest 2011). More intimate examples are harder to document but equally damning. In interview, a female Nigerian MP reported being regularly groped, propositioned and sexually harassed on the floor of parliament by fellow, male MPs.<sup>8</sup> A Haitian MP reported a similar experience.<sup>9</sup>

Although barriers to systematic documentation are high, sexual violence for political and electoral purposes is believed to be substantial. Committed in the home by domestic partners, this remains the most difficult form of violence to document. Sexual violence for electoral purposes also takes place in public settings by actors as diverse as police and military to interparty and extraparty sexual harassment.

### ***Economic Violence***

Economic harm, coercion, or abuse comes in institutional as well as personal forms. It includes harm or threats to harm a business, termination or threat of termination of employment, or other threats or theft related to one's livelihood. In families or between spouses, it may include situations where one

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<sup>8</sup> Conversation with author, January 2013, Abuja, Nigeria. Anonymous by request.

<sup>9</sup> Conversation with author, April 2013, Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Anonymous by request.

member or spouse partner intentionally denies access to financial resources to another to enforce dependency and coerce her or his electoral decisions and/or participation. It may include theft, preventing a spouse from acquiring resources, forcibly limiting spouse's expenditure on essential goods, creating debts or spending a spouse's resources without her or his consent, preventing a spouse from seeking employment/education/assets, etc. Spousal economic harm disproportionately affects women.

Examples include situations in which one partner intentionally denies access to financial resources to another partner to enforce dependency and coerce their electoral decisions and/or participation. This may include theft, preventing a spouse from acquiring resources, forcibly limiting their expenditure on essential goods, spending a spouse's resources without their consent/creating debt, preventing a spouse from seeking employment/education/assets, etc. In traditional, patriarchal households, women's political participation or even the expression of divergent political views may be punished by increasing labor burdens, withholding of financial allowances, diminished bride-dowries or even reduction of food rations within a household (Adams et al 2008, Saunders 2006). These acts, when done to influence voting or political behavior are just as intimidating and coercive as those done in the more public spheres of commerce and employer/employee relationships. These acts happen in the home, and they disproportionately affect women, not only in traditional or explicitly patriarchal societies, but in all societies where men predominantly control household financial resources. In such societies, women may also participate in this form of violence against other women through encouragement and/or support of male actions, or by direct actions against younger women in their households.

Data on economic harm or financial loss was collected in 3 of the 7 cases available in the EVER data (Burundi, Guinea and Bangladesh-2008). Yet, 45% of cases that identified financial losses as the impact of violence were against women or women and men together, and 62% of cases that recorded disruption of economic life (businesses/roads closed). Financial loss and disruption of economic life constitute fully 22% of impacts of the cases in the countries where it was recorded, and the reality is likely much higher. The widespread nature of the issue coupled with what we know both of tactics of political disruption and gender-based violence on the whole confirm that conscious acts of economic abuse intended to disrupt, delay or suspend an electoral process constitute distinct forms of violence in their own right.

While further documentation will provide more insight, there are indications that deliberately coercive and explicitly political acts of theft, economic damages and other forms of financial coercion may exist equally in the private sphere as in the public sphere. Economic harm/coercion is a regularly recognized form of domestic violence (Mouradian 2004, NCADV 2011, Wettersen et al 2004, De Benedictus 2004) and must be recognized equally as electoral violence when its intent is clearly to

interfere with the choices and participation of legal voters. For example, the EVER data records that women-only victims constitute 12.9% of targets of election-related thefts, and an additional 19.4% are directed at both men and women together. If theft is considered a form of election violence in the public sphere, it must also have the same status when it takes place in the home with the same intent to disrupt freedom of choice and participation in electoral processes.

Another form of economic electoral violence relates to the exploitation of internally displaced peoples (IDP) and refugees. The “forced displacement of civilians for electoral ends” (Dunning) is a unique form of violence and may include prolonging IDP status, artificially conferring status, forcing movement, preventing refugee return or forcing refugee return to influence voter geography and registration; misuse/misdirection of aid resources, extortion. Studies of what Klopp calls “gerrymandering by moving people” (Klopp 2001; see Kasara 2009). While it takes a physical and emotional toll as well, the role of financial coercion is predominant. The tactic has been documented in Columbia (Acemoglu, Robinson, and Santos-Villagran (2009), Steele) and in Kenya (Kasara 2009). In these two cases, as consistent with worldwide global statistics, 80% of refugees and IDPs are composed of women, children and the elderly. Thus, although this form of EV is not gender-specific in its intent, its impact is disproportionately assumed by women.

## **Conclusion**

The exceptionally high cost of electoral conflict, especially in post-war or transitional societies, make the study of electoral violence critical for citizens around the world. Yet, study of the topic has frequently excluded half of the population – women of developing states who become victims of this distinct form of violence and (though not explored here) those women that support or employ violent means to express and enforce their political aspirations

Our knowledge of election violence relies on definitions that are overwhelmingly reflective of the masculine experience of election violence. In order to capture the full nature of election violence, we must adapt definitions that reflect the reality for all actors in the electoral process. Diverse form of election violence exist. Some of these types of violence are well-documented. Others remain anecdotal and unexplored, such as economic coercion and sexual abuse for electoral ends. Electoral violence against women is perpetrated by actors ranging from state to community to family. It is perpetrated by men, women and, at times, both sexes acting in conjunction. Likewise, different forms of electoral violence vary in impact on different groups and classes of women. The discussion in the preceding pages does not seek to exhaustively describe all forms of gender-specific electoral violence, but simply demonstrate that a gendered understanding of electoral violence expands the forms and areas of violence from those traditionally associated with this field. Through this exercise, the necessity of re-thinking the definitions used to address electoral violence becomes apparent.

Rethinking the definition is necessary because In today's context, electoral violence in changing democratic contexts may feature:

- Distinct victims who are targeted for their participation in a democratic process, who suffer the intentional consequences of acts against them or against the process, or who are so impoverished and focused on the struggle for survival that they become victims of de facto disenfranchisement
- Distinct perpetrators with diverse motivations and strategies, both rational and irrational, who reject peaceful institutional channels of making their voice heard in favor of disruptive tactics and physical harm
- Distinct forms, tactics and strategies to disrupt legitimate electoral processes, to disenfranchise, or to protest, pressure or punish perceived illegitimate electoral events
- Distinct geography, including urban mobilizations, national and transnational crisis-communications, the victimization of vulnerable rural and internally displaced population and “non-physical” locations of violence, such as in ICTs
- Distinct time/space including all phases of the electoral cycle (pre-, during and post-elections)

Electoral violence has evolved from historical patterns in tandem with the growing participation of women in politics. In the case study countries, almost half (48 percent) of all identified types of female victims of electoral violence were supporters of political parties. Many writers have noted that women's opportunities for empowerment and their political involvement tend to increase during conflict periods when men are absent and women assume full responsibility of households and increased responsibility within communities from which they would normally be excluded in peacetime (O'Connell, 1993). When democratic transitions follow such conflicts, this empowerment frequently translates into increased roles for women as candidates and party supporters. In countries that were not in the midst of conflict but begin to experience transitions from authoritarianism, as in the Arab Spring events, women may use transitional moments to take more prominent roles in civic life and may expect to translate this into political empowerment as well. Likewise, the exponential growth of gender-quotas in recent years is bringing unparalleled number of women to political prominence. Finally, women are increasingly becoming victims of electoral violence as they join social movements and non-governmental advocacy networks to voice their political concerns, including defense of human rights. Participation in local civil society groups has skyrocketed in the past two decades, particularly in transitional and post-conflict states. Inevitably, as these groups clash with police, governments, rival parties or other opposing groups in both public and private protest, the number of violent incidents and the number of female victims of violence increase.

What are the implications of these findings when combined with current understandings of gender and violence more broadly? For one, the rapid changes in the roles of women in many countries mean that normal risks of political activity are augmented with the risk of rejecting traditional roles and values. Familial or social intimidation or pressures that play out in private spaces are not captured by quantitative studies, nor are they included in traditional responses to electoral violence – we must adapt research tools according to the nature of the violence. So long as research continues to limit the definitions of election violence to the forms of violence primarily experienced by men, we will overlook the distinct yet pervasive challenges that face a globally under-represented segment of citizenry.

## ANNEX -

### Note on Methodology

The quantitative research in this paper analyses 2,005 individual incidents of electoral violence collected in 6 countries between 2006 and 2010. The data was collected through the Election Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) project under the auspices of the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), a US-based non-profit organization. EVER was introduced by IFES in 2003 as a tool to support the capacity of CSOs to monitor; report and mitigate electoral violence. The EVER methodology draws on trained civil society investigators to collect verified incident-level data on election violence.

To be included in the dataset, each incident must meet the definition of electoral violence, have specific victim or victims, must be confined to an identifiable time and place. Data collected on each incident includes the time and place, the perpetrator and victim, the type of violence (murder, imprisonment, etc.), the method (weapon, etc.) and the impact. Data sources are recorded for each incident. Project duration, forms and reporting mechanisms varied between the cases, however the core variables remained standardized. For the purpose of this study, country-specific variations (such as regionally-specific weapons), were grouped with standardized categories.

Although 15 EVER monitoring projects had been conducted in 13 countries at the outset of the current investigation in autumn 2010, less than half disaggregated their perpetrator and victim data by sex. The cases used in the current study include:

Country	Dates	Duration	Type of Election	# Incidents
<b>Timor-Leste</b>	May-September 2007	5 months	Parliamentary	162
<b>Nepal</b>	November 2007 – April 2008	6 months	Constituent Assembly (originally scheduled for November 2007, held in April 2008)	403
<b>Bangladesh</b>	Oct 2006 – January 2007, December 2008	5 months	General Election (originally scheduled Jan 2007 date was boycotted and cancelled, election held Dec 2008)	290 + 110
<b>Burundi</b>	April – September 2010	6 months	Series of 5 elections covering Presidential, parliamentary, communal and local offices. A boycott resulted in uncontested executive and legislative races.	519
<b>Guinea</b>	May – November 2010	7 months	General elections	499
<b>Guyana</b>	April – August 2006	5 months	General and Regional Elections	22

The EVER dataset was selected because it was unique in providing cross-national, sex-disaggregated micro-level data on election violence. It also had the advantage of a comparatively more gender-sensitive approach to data collection than other options involving publically available sources (media, police reports, etc.) in that it favored reports of firsthand witnesses and included testimony of community members as a source of verification, as well as the public record. However, violence against women (in elections as in general) is underreported in the public record and frequently discovered through community sources. Thus, although the EVER data was not explicitly gender-sensitive (see below), it inadvertently diminished this form of gender-bias in its methodology. Finally, it provides a breadth of comparative data that would have been otherwise impossible to collect with academic resources.

The most significant limitations in the EVER data were its use of the traditional, male-oriented definition of election violence and its non-gender sensitive data research approach. Although the data on perpetrators and victims was disaggregated by sex, the types, methods, locations and other variables did not reflect the gender-sensitive distinctions described in the previous section, such as violence in the home and online/in media, sexual assault and the diverse forms of social-psychological violence experience by women, etc. Likewise, the field researchers were not trained to be aware of gender-specific types of EV or to collect their data according to gender-sensitive practice standards (for example, specific approaches to documenting sensitive issues such as sexual violence). This constrained the scope of the recorded data. Based on the overall findings of the project, it is believed that the extent of the problem is much greater than the current data shows (as is common with GBV/VAW) but that the data analysis presented here confirms the hypotheses regarding the existence of these distinctions in EV.

For categories that were excluded from the EVER data, such as domestic violence, violence via information and communication technologies, sexual violence, etc, informal field interviews with male and female candidates, party representatives and elected officials; civil society members; electoral management body (EMB) members and general citizens were conducted by the author in the course of multiple missions as an advisor on women's political participation with United Nations and international non-profits over the course of the past four years. Desk research was also conducted to supplement the research.

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