

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO HOLD A WOMAN'S HAND TO WIN AN ELECTION?



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Introduction

Women's participation in politics in most countries around the world is increasingly accepted as a cornerstone for the development of a country. A lot of research has been done by various organizations and institutions at national, regional and international level on the challenges that young women and women face as they seek for elective positions in their respective countries around the world. Some of the challenges include:

- Lack of resources to run a campaign;
- Different forms of violence on line and off line;
- Lack of confidence in women's candidature;
- Social norms and gender stereotypes that undermine women's leadership;
- Lack of party support for women's candidature;
- Lack of family support for women's candidature;
- Lack of political skills and knowledge on elections;

Some of the proven ways that enable women to run for election include:

- Access to information on the election laws and how to get nominated both within the political party and during the general election, election laws and regulations on the campaigns and voting day dos and don'ts;
- Access to finance for nomination fees, campaigns, communication, payment of campaign staff, logistics among others;
- Access to the media and training on how to effectively use both traditional and social media to profile oneself to win the election;
- Emotional support from their families and friends;
- Physical security

Holding a woman's hand to win an election means:

For family, friends and supporters

- Organize mini-fundraising events for the candidate among family and friends to raise funds as well as give the candidate the opportunity to share her vision. Candidates need more to pay nomination fees, meet campaign costs including posters, t-shirts and other campaign materials that give the candidate maximum visibility, pay for radio airtime, data for online meetings and social media campaigns;
- Print posters, fliers, t-shirts or other campaign regalia for the candidate to give her visibility;
- Offer time to campaign for the candidate, to pin up posters, give your car, motorcycle or bicycle to support her campaign. Offer office space to the woman candidate as a campaign office;
- Offer expertise at no cost to train campaign agents, volunteers and agents on polling day;
- Offer expertise to develop the candidate's message, profile and to listen to her mock campaign speeches and to give her advice;
- Move door to door to campaign for the candidate and meet with different target groups to do the same;
- Attend the candidate's campaign rallies to motivate her, boost her numbers and give her feedback to enable her to improve or maintain the best practices;

- If you have access to traditional media, offer space in the media for the candidate to profile herself and campaign;
- Share information on persons within and outside your network that the candidate can get resources from;
- Vote for the candidate on polling day
- Volunteer to work for the candidate in areas where you have expertise e.g. accounts, coordinator for volunteers, campaign agent, party agent at the polling station

Political parties

- Review and amend laws that discriminate against women in the party candidate selection processes;
- Put in place policies that address the challenges that female candidates face. For instance discount nomination fees for women and youth;
- Party leaders take time to visit the female candidate's family and persuade them to let her contest in the election if they are hesitant to support her ambition;
- Contribute funds to support her candidature e.g. nomination fees and logistical support depending on what the candidate has and what the party can offer/afford;
- Build the capacity of the candidate on politics and skills that they need including how to campaign and communicate in the political context in the country where the candidate is contesting;
- Offer party agents to work for the candidate on polling day where possible;
- Create a safe environment by introducing laws that promote safety for candidates including policies against sexual harassment. Ensure that such policies are enforced to create confidence of party members on their safety in the political party.
- Campaign for the candidate;

Media

- Profile women candidates and desist from bias as you do this. For instance, give women and men candidates' similar space in the media and mention all their credentials without negating the achievements/qualifications of women candidates in comparison to the male candidates.



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- Avoid using words that bias women vis-a-vis men candidates. For example, if there are women candidates running for presidential elections too, do not use words like “*may the best man win*” when concluding your article on the presidential candidates.

Women Rights Organizations

- Conduct studies/ research on women’s participation in politics and share findings with political parties, government and the public to address the challenges and consolidate the positive gains.
- Conduct training for women candidates on how to win and election by exposing them to experts and former politicians who have won election. The topics of training can include: fundraising, using the media; voter targeting, campaign planning, campaigning, budgeting, preparation for polling day etc.
- Document the progress and deficits of women candidates and women in politics for learning and actions.
- Monitor the participation of women in elections and emerging gender issues for advocacy.
- Give technical advice to women candidates.
- Work with political parties to undertake gender audits in order to assess progress of political parties on gender equality in their respective political parties;
- Build partnerships with former women politicians to collectively advocate for women’s rights and gender issues in politics and elections;
- Refer women candidates to resources that they need using your networks. The resources can include: media
- Support political parties by offering technical support to address gender issues in the party that prevent women from contesting for election e.g. support policy development and enforcement processes; direct the party to resources that they need e.g. partners and information to address needs in this area.
- Build capacity of party leaders and members on gender and relevant concepts to address the issues that prevent women from participating in political parties and politics.

Former women politicians

- Meet with the women candidates and share your experiences and insights on how to win an election;
- Share information on the challenges that the women candidates are likely to face and how they can overcome them;
- Build partnerships with women in CSOs to collectively advocate for women’s rights and gender issues in politics;
- Provide mentoring and coaching to women candidates.

Parliament

- Enact laws the prevent Violence against women in elections (VAWE);
- Monitor the enforcement of these laws by demanding for reports from government institutions responsible for enforcement.

- Condition political party budgets to address specific needs of women candidates' e.g. party financing from public resources can be used to guarantee redress of specific gender issues affecting women's participation in political parties and politics.
- Appropriate gender responsive budgets to address specific issues that affect the participation of women in elections and politics.

Executive

- Following consultation with political parties, NGOs that work with women leagues of political parties and women league leaders, introduce bills to Parliament that protect women's participation in politics for passage into law;
- Enforce laws that protect women's participation in politics;
- Monitor enforcement, document progress and deficits and share information with Parliament, Judiciary, Executive, non-state actors, political parties and the public with clear recommendations to the different actors.
- Budget for specific concerns of women that affect their participation in politics e.g. prevention of VAW during elections