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EFFECTS OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE ON WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN POLITICS AND HOW TO ADDRESS IT



Procession of a woman candidate contesting in Arua Municipality, Uganda in the 2016 general elections

Political violence significantly hampers women's participation in politics, creating a hostile environment that deters women from engaging in public and political life. This violence includes physical threats, psychological harassment, online abuse, and structural barriers, each impacting women's ability to campaign, hold office, and advocate effectively.

Here are some effects of political violence on women's political participation and ways to address them:

1. **Psychological Impact:** Threats, harassment, and abuse (both online and offline) can lead to anxiety, depression, and a lack of confidence. This discourages many women from participating in political activities, fearing harm to themselves and their families.
2. **Decreased Representation:** Political violence, especially gender-targeted, creates a chilling effect that leads to lower numbers of women candidates and, subsequently, women in office. This not only affects individual careers but also limits the diversity of voices in decision-making.
3. **Limited Advocacy and Policy Influence:** Women facing political violence are often silenced or dissuaded from pursuing policies that promote gender equality and women's rights. This further perpetuates inequalities and limits progress on issues important to women.
4. **Barriers to Networking and Building Alliances:** Violence and intimidation isolate women, making it harder for them to connect with peers, mentors, or organizations that could support their political careers. Isolation reduces their collective power and effectiveness in promoting change.

5. **Cultural Reinforcement of Gender Norms:** When women face violence for participating in politics, it reinforces societal norms that politics is “not for women,” thereby discouraging future generations of women from seeking political office.

Strategies to Address Political Violence Against Women

1. **Strengthen Legal Protections:** Implement and enforce laws that criminalize political violence, specifically addressing violence targeted at women in politics. This includes physical violence, harassment, cyberbullying, and other forms of intimidation.
2. **Promote Safe Reporting Mechanisms:** Establish confidential and accessible mechanisms for reporting incidents of political violence, allowing women to speak out without fear of retaliation.
3. **Supportive Networks and Mentorship Programs:** Establish support networks and mentorship programs for women in politics to create safe spaces for sharing experiences, advice, and coping strategies, while building resilience.
4. **Awareness Campaigns and Advocacy:** Raise awareness about the impact of political violence on women and advocate for cultural and institutional change. Engage communities, political parties, and civil society organizations in campaigns to normalize women's participation and condemn violence.
As the world marks 16 days of activism against gender-based violence between November 25-December 10 every year, it is important to amplify the voices of women and girls who are affected by political violence and for political parties, security agencies, citizens and other actors to undertake corrective measures to address their concerns.
5. **Engagement with Political Parties:** Political parties can adopt zero-tolerance policies on gender-based violence within their ranks and ensure women's safety by training party members on respect and anti-violence measures. Creating and resourcing committees or offices dedicated to women's affairs within parties can also provide women with institutional support. The committees should have a mechanism for reporting their actions to the mainstream political party to ensure that the political parties make progress on addressing gender-based violence internally.
6. **Cybersecurity Training and Online Safeguards:** Since much harassment occurs online, providing cybersecurity training to women candidates and leaders is essential. Social media platforms can also be held accountable to enforce stronger policies against online abuse.
7. **Data Collection and Monitoring:** Collecting data on instances of political violence against women helps to illustrate the scope of the problem and measure the effectiveness of interventions. Tracking incidents over time can influence policy changes and allocate resources effectively.
8. **International Pressure and Support:** Organizations that work on women's civil and political rights, development partners and allies can put pressure on governments to protect women in politics and allocate funding to support anti-violence initiatives. Training and solidarity from regional and international women's networks can also empower women politically and make the concerns of women in politics on the policy agenda of regional and international bodies to fast-track action.

By addressing political violence through these measures, societies can create safer, more inclusive political spaces where women are empowered to participate fully and equitably.