

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

KEY CONCEPTS AND FACTS



Moldova, 2023

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Sources:

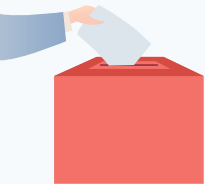
- "Preventing violence against women in elections: A programming guide," UN Women and UNDP (2017)
- "Guidance note: Preventing violence against women in politics," UN Women (2021)



WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS?

Violence against women in political life is any act of, or threat of, gender-based violence, resulting in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, that prevents them from exercising and realizing their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including:

- **Right to vote and hold public office**
- **Vote in secret and campaign freely**
- **Associate and assemble**
- **Enjoy freedom of opinion and expression**



WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS?

“ **Make no mistake:**

violence against women in politics is gender-based violence, and its goal is stopping not just the individuals specifically targeted, but all women from expressing their political voice and agency. ”

Dubravka Šimonović

Former UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women and girls, its causes and consequences

Quoted in UN Women – OHCHR Expert Group Meeting Report and Recommendations on Violence Against Women in Politics, 8–9 March 2018, New York



WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS?

**Violence against women in politics
is a human rights violation.**

**It targets women exercising their political rights
because they are women, and aims to silence
women's voice, agency, and power in the public sphere.**

Such violence can be perpetrated by a
**family or community member, media,
political actors, and/or by the State.**

Human rights and democratic values are
increasingly threatened through the use of
violence and harassment towards women leaders
perpetrated by **misogynistic and exclusionary groups.**



WHAT IS VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS?

Democratic debate intended to critique a policy idea or political acumen is a normal and healthy part of a democratic process.



**THIS IS NOT
VIOLENCE!**




**VIOLENCE
IN POLITICS**

is intended to interfere or change the outcome of a political process through the use or threat of force.

IS VIOLENCE A NORMAL PART OF POLITICS? NO!

Violence against women in politics is intended to silence women as political leaders and actors.

- 
- ▶ It targets women because of their **gender**
 - ▶ It is rooted in unequal power relations between **men and women**
 - ▶ It aims to **reverse the positive trends of women's participation in politics** by intimidating women who speak up in the public space, run for election, or hold office

FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS



PHYSICAL


PSYCHOLOGICAL

SEXUAL

ECONOMIC



FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

PSYCHOLOGICAL VIOLENCE

- 
- ▶ Verbal harassment & assault
 - ▶ Threats of harm & intimidation
 - ▶ Bullying, exclusion
 - ▶ Verbal harassment over political choices
 - ▶ Ridicule, shaming, rumours
 - ▶ Forced voter preference/family voting
 - ▶ Negative media portrayals
 - ▶ Online harassment
 - ▶ Threat of divorce
 - ▶ Moral sanctions by religious & traditional leaders

FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

- 
- 
- ▶ Intentional use of force to cause injury, harm, or death
 - ▶ Murder and threats of murder
 - ▶ Physical abuse and torture
 - ▶ Beating, physical attacks, assaults
 - ▶ Arbitrary arrests and detentions
 - ▶ Violent dispersion of gatherings
 - ▶ Restrictions on free movement
 - ▶ Kidnapping

FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- ▶ Unwelcome sexual advances or requests for sexual favours
- ▶ Sexual harassment
- ▶ Sexual exploitation
- ▶ Unwelcome verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature
- ▶ Politically motivated rape as a tool of terror and intimidation
- ▶ Sexual assault and abuse intended to control, intimidate, humiliate, and disenfranchise



FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS



ECONOMIC VIOLENCE

- ▶ Property damage
- ▶ Denial of salary/funds
- ▶ Denial of access to financial resources, including family resources
- ▶ Denial of campaign resources

FORMS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

The types of violence experienced by women are different from those faced by men.

Women are more likely to face:

▶ **PSYCHOLOGICAL** or **SEXUAL VIOLENCE**

▶ **VIOLENCE BASED ON FEAR** for their personal security and that of their families, attempts at social exclusion, and attacks on their moral character

▶ **SEXUAL HARASSMENT** within their political parties or be demeaned in a sexual way



WHO ARE THE TARGETS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS?

- 🎯 Women candidates
- 🎯 Women office holders
- 🎯 Women voters
- 🎯 Women journalists
- 🎯 Family members
- 🎯 Women human rights defenders
- 🎯 Women civil society activists
- 🎯 Women election workers and observers
- 🎯 Women civil servants and public officials
- 🎯 Women political party supporters and campaign workers
- 🎯 Women from underrepresented groups due to their ethnicity, age, religion, disability status, or sexual orientation



WHO ARE THE TARGETS OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS?

Women in politics who face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination due to their **ethnicity, religion, disability** or other status are particularly targeted by violence, harassment, and threats.



WHAT DOES THE DATA SAY?

Violence against women in politics and in the public sphere is unfortunately common and widespread.



Most women parliamentarians face threats or violence*

1 in 2

members of parliament and parliamentary staff receive threats of death, rape or beatings

3 in 5

are victims of online abuse on social media

4 in 5

experience psychological violence during their term in office

The attacks on women in politics radiate and those who are close to them are also threatened with violence.

* IPU and Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, "Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe" (2018).

WHAT DOES THE DATA SAY?

Most women journalists face threats or violence*

6 in 10

journalists
have experienced
online violence

4 in 10

journalists
have experienced
physical attacks, offline
harassment and abuse

The attacks on women journalists radiate and those who are close to them are also threatened with violence.



WHAT DOES THE DATA SAY?

Violence against women in politics and in the public sphere is unfortunately common and widespread.

Moldova is no exception.



218 incidents of
violence against
women candidates*

145 cases

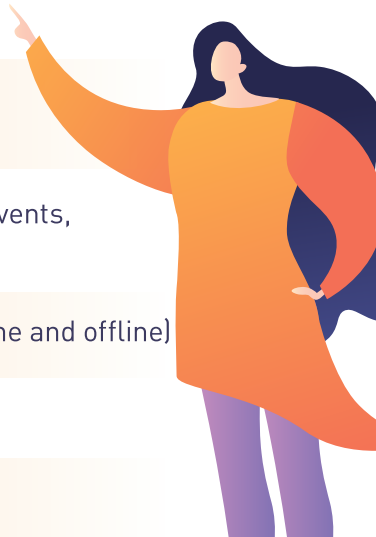
during the 2020 Presidential Elections race

73 cases

during the 2021 Parliamentary Election
campaign period, including 4 cases
of physical violence

HOW are women candidates targeted during ELECTIONS?*

- 🎯 Negative portrayals of a woman candidate because of her personal life choices
- 🎯 Spreading of slanderous rumors and character assassination
- 🎯 Exclusion from public debates, public events, TV appearances & funding
- 🎯 Threats, stalking and harassment (online and offline)
- 🎯 Sextortion**
- 🎯 Trolling



* This list is not exhaustive.

** The act of threatening to release sexual information or images about women into the public domain to create fear and/or extort money or favors.

HOW are women candidates targeted during ELECTIONS?*

- 🎯 Critique of women's appearance or gender rather than her political ideas
- 🎯 Media perpetuate negative stereotypes about women candidates
- 🎯 Women prevented from registering to run
- 🎯 Women forced to withdraw from the election
- 🎯 Women forced to resign after election victory
- 🎯 Threats to women candidates' family members
- 🎯 Attacks or murders of women candidates



What are some **LONG-TERM EFFECTS** of violence against women in politics?

- ✓ Women are discouraged from running for office
- ✓ Women politicians are dissuaded from speaking up
- ✓ Women may withdraw from politics
- ✓ Women's voices missing from public debate on law and policy
- ✓ Perpetuation of stereotypes against women leaders



What are some **LONG-TERM EFFECTS** of violence against women in politics?

- ✓ Younger women and women from underrepresented groups can be deterred from engaging in politics
- ✓ Women politicians are delegitimized
- ✓ Contributes to societal polarization
- ✓ Normalizes violence against women in the public and political sphere
- ✓ Suppression of political voice*



* In a 2019 survey, conducted by the Institute for Democracy and Civil Society 58% of 7,000 German women surveyed said they did not share political opinions online for fear of abuse.

10 things **STATE AUTHORITIES** can do to address violence against women in politics*

1. Pass new laws and enforce existing ones
2. Create complaint mechanisms and response protocols
3. Establish and enforce effective sanctions
4. Ensure emergency assistance and safety measures for victims
5. Provide victim support, protection, and access to justice
6. Train law enforcement
7. Mandate codes of conduct for state institutions and/or political parties
8. Electoral Commission regulations for prevention & enforcement
9. Put in place election day arrangements with the police
10. Collect data on the prevalence of violence against women in politics/elections

* This list is not exhaustive.

7 things **MEDIA** can do to prevent violence against women in politics*

1. Use gender-sensitive reporting techniques during and after elections
2. Avoid producing and sharing news which portrays women using stereotypes and sexist language
3. Report on incidents of violence against women in politics and elections when they occur
4. Train editorial and writing staff on gender-responsive reporting
5. Social media can remove disinformation and threats against women in politics and elections
6. Provide equal airtime for women and men politicians and candidates
7. Demonstrate no tolerance for reporting which amplifies or incites violence against women in politics



* This list is not exhaustive.

7 things **CANDIDATES** and **POLITICAL PARTIES** can do to prevent violence against women in politics*

1. Sign a pledge to campaign free of violence against women in politics
2. Abide by a Code of Conduct which prohibits violence against women in politics for candidates and party members
3. Demonstrate no tolerance for violence against women in politics
4. Organize trainings for candidates, campaign, and party staff on violence against women in politics
5. Speak out against violence against women in politics
6. Report cases of violence against women in politics to the appropriate authorities
7. Refer to women politicians' accomplishments and policies; not their personal lives or appearance



* This list is not exhaustive.

7 things **INDIVIDUALS** can do to prevent violence against women in politics*

1. Call out sexist attitudes towards women politicians in private and public discussions
2. Provide a balanced representation of women's political record
3. Don't target women in public life for their appearance, family or social status
4. Report cases of violence against women in politics to the appropriate authorities
5. Advocate for local and national authorities to pass new laws and enforce existing ones
6. Use social media and other forums to take a stand against violence against women in politics and elections
7. Show support and solidarity with women victims of violence against women in politics/elections



* This list is not exhaustive.

Legal annex on protection mechanisms for women facing violence in politics and during elections in the Republic of Moldova

Legal protection mechanisms for women facing violence in politics

Article 43 of the Civil Code of the Republic of Moldova states that any individual has the right to life, health, physical and mental integrity, free speech, a name, honour, professional dignity and reputation, own image, respect for their intimate, family and private lives, protection of personal data; and other such rights stipulated by the law.

Liability mechanisms are in place to protect women facing violence in politics:

Civil

Contraventional

Criminal

Prohibited actions under the Civil Code

Article 46 of the Civil Code states that the following actions are considered invasions of privacy:

- a.** The unauthorized interception of a private conversation [...] or the knowing use of such interception.
- b.** Capturing or using the image or voice of a person in a private space without their consent.
- c.** The dissemination of images showing the interior of a private space without the consent of the lawful occupant.
- d.** Using any means to observe someone's private life, except in cases expressly provided for by law.
- e.** The dissemination of news, debates, investigations or written or audio-visual reports concerning one's intimate, private or family life, without the consent of the person concerned.
- f.** The dissemination of material containing images of a person undergoing treatment in healthcare facilities and/or their personal health data [...].
- g.** The dissemination or use of correspondence or other personal documents, including address details [...], as well as telephone numbers of a person or their family members, without the consent of the person to whom they belong.

New legal protection mechanisms for women facing violence in politics

In 2022, the Parliament of the Republic of Moldova passed amendments updating the Criminal and Contravention Code to discourage hate speech, incitement to discrimination and incitement to violent actions.

- The terms **“hate speech”** and **“incitement to discrimination”** during the election campaign period or in election campaign materials were introduced in Article 52 of the Contravention Code (on ‘Prohibited election campaigning’).
- The concept of **“grounds of prejudice”**, an offender’s preconceived ideas based on race, colour, ethnicity, national or social origin, nationality, sex, gender, language, religion or religious beliefs, political opinions, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, health status, age, marital status and/or migrant or asylum seeker status, was introduced in the Criminal and Contravention Code (Article 46(3) of the Contravention Code and Article 134(21) of the Criminal Code).

Penalties for unlawful acts against women in politics or women candidates (I)

Civil liability, governed by the provisions of the Civil Code.

- According to Article 1998(1), the person who acts unlawfully and culpably is obliged to repair the material damage and, in cases provided for by law, the moral damage caused by an action or omission. **This liability is enforceable through the courts.**

Contraventional liability, applied mainly in accordance with the provisions of the Contravention Code and, if applicable, the Code of Audio-Visual Media Services, No 174/2018:

- According to Article 52(3) of the Contravention Code, the use of hate speech and/or incitement to discrimination by candidates during election campaign periods and/or in election campaign materials is punishable by a **fine of 7,500 to 12,500 MDL for individuals and a fine of 12,500 to 20,000 MDL for legal entities.**
- According to Article 70(1) of the Contravention Code (on 'incitement to discrimination'), intentional actions, public appeals, the dissemination of information or other ways of informing the public, including through the media [...], aimed at incitement to discrimination on grounds of prejudice is punishable by a **fine of 1,000 to 4,000 MDL for individuals and 6,000 to 10,500 MDL for persons in a position of responsibility.**
- In the context of the aforementioned actions, the provisions on harassment in Article 70/2 of the Contravention Code can also be applied.

Penalties for unlawful acts against women in politics or women candidates (II)

Criminal liability, applied in accordance with the Criminal Code:

- According to Article 176(1), [...] any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference regarding the rights and freedoms of a person or group of persons; any support for discriminatory conduct in the political, economic, social, cultural or other areas of life based on race, nationality, ethnic origin, language, religion or belief, sex, age, disability, opinion, political affiliation, or any other criterion:
 - a committed by a person in a position of responsibility,
 - b which has caused extensive damage*,
 - c committed by posting discriminatory messages and symbols in public places,
 - d committed based on two or more criteria,
 - e committed by two or more persons,

is punishable by a **fine of 37,500 to 47,500 MDL, unpaid community service of 150 to 240 hours, or by imprisonment up to two years, in all cases with (or without) the deprivation of the right to hold certain positions or to practice certain activities for two to five years.**

- According to Article 346, incitement to hatred or violence in the form of public appeals, dissemination of information or other ways of informing the public (including through the media, in writing, as a drawing or image, or through an information system) against a category of persons on grounds of prejudice is punishable by a **fine of 25,000 to 30,000 MDL, unpaid community service of 180 to 240 hours, or by imprisonment of one to three years.**

* According to Article 126(1) of the Criminal Code, extensive damage is the amount of damage caused by a person or a group of persons, which exceeds the forecast for 20 monthly average salaries, as set by the Government decision in force at the time the offence is committed, which for 2023 exceeds MDL 234 000.

Where to seek help?

If you have been a victim of discrimination, harassment or any act of violence that has prevented you from exercising and realizing your political rights in the public or private sphere, do not hesitate to seek professional support or help.

The relevant authorities for filing cases are the **police and the Broadcasting Council**. **If appropriate, the Equality Council and/or the public prosecutor's office shall also intervene.**

Report a case

0 8003 3388

(free call from a landline)

*Council for Preventing and Eliminating
Discrimination and Ensuring Equality*
www.egalitate.md

Visit

gender.monitor.md to file a report on any cases of election violence against you or another woman in politics

File a complaint

at any police station or call
+373 22 868 112

If you have witnessed an instance of violence against women in politics or elections, report it following the steps above and be part of the CHANGE!