



POLITICAL PARTICIPATION AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS IN SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE



Research report



Political Participation and Violence against Women in Politics in Southeastern Europe

Research Report

Sarajevo,
February 2021

Updated December 2021

Southeast Europe Regional Political Integrity

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a non-profit, nonpartisan, and non-governmental organization that has supported democratic institutions and practices around the world for more than two decades. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to establish and strengthen political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government.

The Olof Palme International Center is a Swedish non-governmental organization and the Swedish labor movement's cooperative body for international issues. The center's areas of interest include democracy, human rights, and peace. The center is named after the late Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme.

The Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS) is a progressive think tank at the European Union (EU) level. The mission of FEPS is to develop innovative research, policy advice, training, and discussions to inspire and inform progressive politics and policies across Europe. FEPS facilitates progressive solutions to Europe's current challenges.

This manual was produced with the financial support of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED). Opinions expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the views of NED.

The document was prepared as a joint effort of NDI's staff (Maja Brenjo, Amna Hadzikadunic, Valon Kurhasani Pranvera Lipovica, Vildan Plepi, Armela Prevazi, Ana Radicevic, Alice Ratyis, Elizabeth Saam, Dragan Tomic, Ryann Welch). Special thanks to Edina Omeragic from Valicon Research and Lejla Gacanica, Gender Consultant, for their time, vast knowledge, and vital contributions to this project.



Copyright© National Democratic Institute 2021. All rights reserved. Portions of this work may be reproduced and/or translated for non-commercial purposes provided NDI is acknowledged as the source of the material and sent copies of any translation.

Foreword

Prominent academics and independent media report increased ‘brutalisation’ of the public sphere and political discourse in the region of Southeast Europe. This increased violence in public speech has decreased space for tolerant dialogue, civilised disagreements, and pluralism of opinions. The atmosphere of violence seems to be on the rise, and when democratic norms and standards deteriorate, women are one of the first marginalized groups to bear the consequences.

Women’s political participation has profound positive impacts on communities, legislatures, political parties, and citizen’s lives. Inclusion of women results in tangible gains for democracy, including greater responsiveness to citizen needs, increased cooperation across party and ethnic lines, and more sustainable peace. Even though women’s political participation and representation has made unprecedented progress over the last century, there is still a long way to go before women and girls can be said to enjoy their fundamental rights, freedoms, and dignity that are their birthrights.

Women in Southeastern Europe (SEE) remain significantly underrepresented at all levels of political decision-making. There are numerous barriers to women’s political participation in addition to a unique form of violence against women in public space, a phenomenon which is one of the major reasons women are discouraged to participate, especially in politics. While both men and women experience violence in politics, women are subjected to particular types of violence and intimidation that would rarely, if ever, happen to men. The Research on Political participation and Violence against Women in Politics (VAW-P) undeniably identifies psychological violence as the most common form of abuse against politically active women in SEE. It encompasses a spectrum of acts committed in person and, increasingly, online, that are designed to control, limit or prevent women’s full and equal political participation.¹

In order to address VAW-P, it is necessary to understand its forms, where it occurs and why. Unfortunately, such violence is widespread and systematic. Closely connected with patriarchy and overall perception of women in SEE societies, VAW-P also preserves traditional gender roles and stereotypes. It is a globally underreported phenomenon, often normalized and tolerated, with the vast majority of women who have experienced attacks likely to remain silent about them. This violence has enduring consequences on women, their families, their political careers, and ultimately on the health of democracy itself.

¹ National Democratic Institute, “Not the Cost: Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics,” NDI, 2021, <https://www.ndi.org/not-the-cost>.

This research will add to NDI's more than five years of global analysis to help inform the design and implementation of programs which will address VAW-P. Particularly relevant for the SEE region will be raising awareness, working with young politicians, governments, parliaments and the media in programs that would lead to change of political culture more welcoming of women in public life.

Ana Radicevic, Program Director
Regional Political Integrity Southeast Europe, NDI

Executive Summary

Violence against women in politics (VAW-P) in the Balkans is widespread but often discreet. This “hidden violence” uses subtle and sophisticated tools to control or restrict women’s participation in politics. Some of these tactics include gaslighting, withholding information and using gender-based disinformation in smear campaigns. As many as four in 10 women respondents reported experiencing some form of VAW-P. Half of the research participants claimed to be witness to some form of VAW-P, including psychological/verbal, economic, sexual, physical and/or online violence.

Breakthroughs in representation, policy, and legislation exist throughout South-eastern Europe; however, on the whole, progress is uneven. Patriarchal structures are the norm in political leadership across the countries studied. These result in many cultural barriers, ranging from unequal distribution of family obligations to lack of professional opportunity and discounting women’s capabilities as leaders.

In politics, women tend to be siloed, silenced or attributed “traditional” women’s portfolios. Representation at local levels is especially low. These harmful stereotypes and norms contribute to essentialist visions of women’s leadership which limit the complexity of leadership to unidimensional stereotypes. Interviewees felt that it is essential to transform the role of media away from its current reinforcement of harmful stereotypes toward increasing public awareness and confidence in women leaders through increased and gender-neutral coverage.

Findings suggest nuanced contexts, in which common generalizations about gender need to be reevaluated. For example, interviewees identified numerous positive qualities associated with women’s leadership (honest, loyal, tireless, etc.). While this might initially appear to be a net gain for empowerment, in fact, many of these traits reflect the ongoing existence of problematic essentialist understandings of femininity. Similarly, feedback on gender quotas was similarly nuanced: while recognizing their general potential for good, research participants were swift to note both conceptual and practical shortcomings.

Psychological forms of violence were reported across the region including verbal abuse, blackmailing, and intimidation. Participants identified potential causes as backlash to women’s rising influence and negative perceptions of women who take on leadership roles. Violence and harassment in online spaces is also widespread, especially for high-profile women leaders. The assault on women’s character and integrity in these public roles takes a lasting toll on their well-being and undermines public respect for women in politics.

Economic coercion and unequal access to financial resources is another form of hidden violence. Women interviewed describe fear of losing a job or position,

economic dependence on their job or on men in power, or smaller chances for promotion. Some describe a feeling of helplessness in the face of this form of coercion.

Sexual harassment and violence against women interviewed included a broad range of gender-based insults, commenting on the physical appearances of women, unwanted touching, inappropriate forms of communication, including messages and calls, nonverbal communication, and sexist jokes. These acts, like many other forms of violence experienced across the study, too often go unpunished despite being prohibited by law. Women in politics also experience physical violence, including reported cases of physical assault and squeezing.

The consequences of violence against women in politics in the SEE region range from impacting women’s health, their work, their families and ultimately, their ability to participate in political processes. Overcoming VAW-P must include dedicated work from a number of actors to transform the institutional, socio-cultural, and individual factors that increase the prevalence of violence and to buttress those that promote equality. Although action must be tailored to each country’s context, the following recommendations are useful to consider for the region as a whole.

Type of Violence	Recommendations
<p>Psychological abuse</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that VAW-P and/or GBV laws provide adequate coverage of these forms of harm. ● Train police and judges about these forms of harm, including appropriate police investigation techniques and gender-sensitive justice practices. ● Help women leaders learn about subtle and discreet forms of harm, to recognize the signs of gaslighting and to learn to document cases to enable redress. ● Ensure that these forms of harm are encoded in political party and media codes of conduct and that the measures are upheld and respected.
<p>Social media and internet-based abuse</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learn about effective counterspeech strategies, as well as other effective responses to social media-based abuse. ● Empower women leaders to document cases of online abuse. ● Enshrine the right to block abusive accounts for women in politics, based on the fact that gender-based attacks are a human rights violation and not part of freedom of speech.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote good digital hygiene practices among targeted groups to reduce risk. ● Work with civil society actors to engage in collaborative bystander intervention strategies online. ● Educate political women on new privacy and moderation standards
Economic violence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote gender-sensitive campaign finance reform. ● Support women’s capacity to undertake autonomous political fundraising initiatives. ● Monitor and report on political parties’ respect for existing gender finance provisions. ● Highlight good practices within the region in promoting women’s access to political resources.
Sexual harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that existing legal provisions on GBV cover GBV in political spaces and recognize that GBV in politics is an aggravating factor of harm. ● Introduce policy reform, up to and including standalone laws and protocols covering sexual violence in politics. ● Maintain a zero-tolerance policy for sexual violence, including everything from sexual humor and stereotypes to assault and rape, within all election- and political-related codes of conduct. ● Ensure that law enforcement and justice actors are educated on sexual violence in politics and equipped to deal with it in an appropriate and sensitive manner. ● Ensure access to assistance and services for victims of sexual violence in politics.
Physical attacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that law enforcement and justice actors are versed on the aggravated impacts of physical assaults in the political space. ● Ensure that women in politics potentially targeted with personal harm have access to security resources as needed, including for their homes and families. ● Maintain a zero-tolerance policy for any actor that promotes, encourages or engages in physical attacks or threats of attacks against political women.
Mediating harmful consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop and promote networks with resources for survivors of VAW-P, including community support networks and self-care resources.

Influence factor	Recommendations
<p>Positive popular perception of women’s leadership qualities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Civil society awareness campaigns emphasize positive contributions of women in politics, drawing on impact studies, statistics, and testimonies, especially at the local level. ● Awareness campaigns avoid and denounce essentialist depictions of women in politics, whether the narrative is positive or negative. ● Women candidates are trained to recognize and call out essentialist depictions (whether positive or negative) and resist drawing on essentialist stereotypes in campaign rhetoric.
<p>Quotas can marginalize women or make them dependent on male leaders</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Examine quota design at the country level to identify disempowering factors and propose quota formula revisions towards more empowering models. ● Draw on regional examples for progressive reform and improvements of quota laws. ● Introduce complementary laws, such as political finance (Albania), to reduce dependence on male party members. ● Promote complementary channels to reduce dependence for women candidates, such as supporting independent fundraising by women candidates.
<p>Poor implementation and misuse of quotas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review enforcement mechanisms at the country level and propose reform. ● Promote civil society watchdogs to monitor quota implementation and report on misuse. ● Advocate for strict quota implementation action from EMBs and other responsible parties. ● Draw on regional examples (Albania) for progressive reform and improvements of quota laws.
<p>Low representation at local levels of government</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build networks and use in-person outreach to promote awareness and the importance of women’s participation at local levels. ● Introduce mentoring programs for women considering entering politics and/or for young women. ● Develop available resources to facilitate the work of women in local politics, including orientation to the office and how-to guides for policy processes.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote awareness of the positive contributions of local level elected women in civic education campaigns.
Elected women face limits on their power in office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify blockage points and conduct consultations on how to overcome specific barriers with stakeholders. ● Create coordinated advocacy goals with firm targets based on increasing women’s substantive influence. Use indicators such as “Women hold 50% of non-traditionally female ministerial portfolios” or “Women chair committees controlling at least 50% of national budget spending,” etc. ● Provide resources, such as enhanced and targeted parliamentary research services, to assist women in making an impact. ● Promote positive messaging highlighting women’s contributions to leadership in non-traditional roles (i.e., defense or economy portfolios, etc.)
Media bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Name and shame” media groups that regularly promote harmful stereotypes, and/or offer “report cards” to highlight media groups that offer more balanced, gender-neutral coverage. ● Organize constructive civil society counter-speech campaigns to counter negative messaging online. ● Offer media training to women candidates to enhance skills in speaking to the press and developing a public persona. ● Institute media codes of conduct around elections and hold media responsible for violating any hate speech, harmful stereotypes or other protected-identity-based abuse.
Harmful stereotypes and norms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with multi-sectoral allies to deconstruct and counter harmful norms in different sectors. ● Focus programs on youth leadership, especially work with boys. ● See recommendations above regarding messaging, counter-speech, etc.
Multiple marginalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify salient identity groups in each context as an adapted framework of analysis. ● Ensure that all gender policies and strategies undergo a review to assess impacts from an intersectional lens.

Table of Contents

<i>Executive Summary</i>	7
Part I.	
<i>Status of Women in SEE:</i>	
<i>Opportunities, Challenges & Constraints</i>	16
<i>Positive factors</i>	16
Positive popular perception of women’s leadership qualities	16
Gender quotas	17
Regional breakthroughs	18
<i>Challenges & Constraints</i>	19
Inequality in local participation	19
Media bias	21
Harmful gender stereotypes and norms	23
Segregation of responsibilities	26
Overlooking multiple marginalizations	27
Recommendations – Part I	27
Part II.	
<i>The “Hidden Violence”:</i>	
<i>Addressing Violence Against Women in Politics in SEE</i>	30
Psychological violence: “hidden abuse” is pervasive and insidious	31
Social media and internet-based attacks drive gender-based harassment	35
Economic violence: Women in politics are at a disadvantage	40
Women subjected to degrading comments, sexist jokes, and harassment in the political sphere (Sexual violence)	44
Physical force used as retaliation against female politicians (Physical Violence)	47
Consequences of violence against women in politics	50
Recommendations – Part II	51
<i>Conclusion</i>	54

Introduction

Gender equality is central to EU membership (Romania) and accession treaties (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo, Montenegro, and Serbia). Nonetheless, women in political life in SEE face many obstacles, including gender-based discrimination and stifling traditional gender roles. Women are politically under-represented in all SEE countries, and in all decision-making bodies. Gender norms that associate men with belonging in the public sphere and women belonging in the private, domestic sphere of the family and home persist in SEE, as in many parts of the world. Such norms include perceptions that a woman's role should be restricted to the home and caretaking, that politics is not relevant to the daily lives and needs of women, and that women are incapable and ineffective leaders.

Despite gender equality entering the public agenda across SEE nearly two decades ago, significant changes to public consciousness have yet to occur. Awareness about gender-based discrimination in politics and the general public is very low in SEE countries. NDI's findings show that problems of gender inequality, gender-based discrimination or VAW-P are not widely discussed or understood.

In particular, the issue of VAW-P is undermining women's participation across the region and creating a chilling effect on women considering political careers. While all forms of VAW-P exist across the region, so-called "hidden forms" are the most destructive. These actions undermine women's leadership at all turns, mocking and degrading them in public, shaming them, and excluding, gaslighting, and silencing.

"Marital status should not be important in the assembly. I'm not someone's wife. I am my own person."

Kosovo, woman interviewee

NDI's research found a low level of awareness among politicians about sexual harassment and the problems of gender discrimination, harmful "jokes," and verbal violence. Politicians from BiH, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia believe that VAW-P is a "normalized occurrence." Participants from Albania and Kosovo believe that gender-based violence against women in the politics of their country is not perceived as a "normalized occurrence."

This report is composed of Part I. Status of Women in SEE: Opportunities, Challenges & Constraints, Part II. The "Hidden Violence": Addressing Violence Against Women in Politics in SEE and the Conclusion. After the methodology, Part I explains the challenges and constraints faced by women in the region, looking at common features, as well as some of the distinct issues faced in the countries studied. Part II takes a deeper look at VAW-P, which is one of the least studied threats to women in public and political life across the region.

Methodology

Within this research, “women in politics” is defined as all women involved in political activities, including those elected at the local or national levels; members and candidates of political parties; government officials at the local, national, and international levels; civil servants; ministers; ambassadors and other positions in the diplomatic corps.²

To better understand the issue of VAW-P and its impact on women’s participation in public and political life, NDI conducted a qualitative study with female politicians who have experienced and/or are familiar with gender-based forms of violence (economic, online, physical, psychological, sexual, and verbal violence).

The aim of this research is to provide a foundation for the development of comprehensive activities, policies, and programs to prevent all forms of VAW-P. In this research, six SEE countries were examined: Albania, BiH, Kosovo, Montenegro, Romania, and Serbia.

An online questionnaire was sent to 72 targeted participants. The research also used a qualitative method designed by Valicon (the firm contracted for the research) for online interviews. In this method, called the Simulation Technique of Group Dynamics (STGD), the opinion of one respondent is conveyed as an argument to another respondent to use as a prompt for discussion. The same 72 participants were reached for STGD interviews. This format was used to simulate focus group discussions, given the sensitive nature of the topics and out of health and safety considerations for participants and facilitators, as research was conducted amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The data collection and analysis was performed by Valicon Company. The research was conducted from July 1, 2020, through September 30, 2020.

Selection and inclusion criteria for the research participation involved women and men who are active members of political parties and women and men who have political responsibilities at any level of government - in total, 60 women and 12 men. A total of 72 in-depth interviews were conducted in Albania, BiH, Montenegro, Kosovo, Romania, and Serbia (12 STGD in-depth interviews per country).

A limitation of this research is the size of the research sample. While 72 in-depth interviews were conducted, the findings cannot account for the entire population of SEE. An additional limitation is the instrument of measurement itself. Findings are based on the subjective responses and assessments of the research participants. Overall, however, the results of this study can provide some thematic and overarching conclusions.

² United Nations Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences on violence against women in politics*, (United Nations, June 2018).

Part I.

Status of Women in SEE: Opportunities, Challenges & Constraints

Positive factors

Positive popular perception of women's leadership qualities

Women's success in politics depends on popular support rooted in perceptions of their leadership qualities. This is a delicate subject – while negative bias and stereotypes are clearly harmful to women's empowerment, essentialist perceptions of feminine qualities (e.g., “nurturing,” “gentle,” “caring” etc.) can be equally repressive.

While the study sample size was too small to draw general conclusions, NDI nonetheless found many positive indications about the perception of women as leaders.

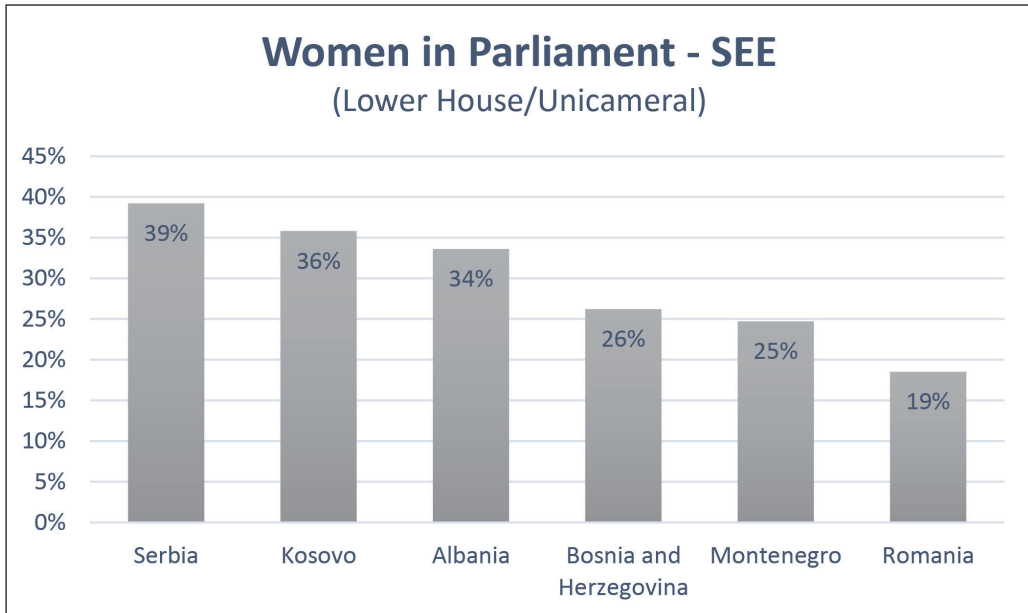
Research participants cited advantages they perceived to women's leadership in politics. Most participants perceived women in politics as trustworthy and resilient to temptations of corruption. Other positive perceptions of women's leadership qualities cited include being respectful of rules, thoughtful and deliberative in decision-making, cautious and prudent in evaluating risks, and generally upstanding in maintaining the dignity of their office, their position, and their role in the family. Other qualities suggested by participants included perceptions that women are assertive, ethical, good negotiators, and organized.

Perceptions of Women Leaders in SEE

Interviews described women leaders as:

- **Assertive**
- **Reliable**
- **Loyal**
- **Respectful and empathetic**
- **Having strong negotiation and conflict-management skills**
- **Tolerant and patient**
- **Productive**
- **More transparent and respectful of ethics**

Gender quotas



Gender quotas for political party candidate lists in elections are in place across the six SEE countries studied, though to varying extents of implementation and practice. Thirty (30) percent of the less represented gender is required in Albania, Montenegro, and Romania. Forty (40) percent is required in BiH, Kosovo, and Serbia. Sixty-five (65) percent of research participants supported the introduction of gender quotas for women. Participants noted that mandatory positions provide an opportunity for women to participate in politics in greater numbers and influence political parties to hire more women. They can also shift the quality and substance of policy development by ensuring women provide their perspectives. However, participants also perceived negative effects of quotas, such as minimizing the importance of women in politics and preventing women from having real power and making decisions independently.

While gender quotas can be an efficient mechanism, they have varying success, and flawed implementation can inhibit their ability to bolster women's numerical, effective, and sustained political leadership and empowerment. The Kvinna till Kvinna report "Women's

"When we talk about gender representation, we are not talking about that minority representation, but we are talking about 50% of the population that is not represented at all, and their needs are not articulated in an adequate way. No matter how hard some men try to provide support, they really can't quite understand these problems."

Bosnia and Herzegovina, woman interviewee

Rights in Western Balkans”³ shows that many inconsistencies and misuse of quota systems appeared during the period 2016-2020, from replacing female candidates who were elected with their male party colleagues to only partial implementation of quotas.

Regional breakthroughs

Progress of women in politics in the region in recent years is uneven and slow. However, there are important (if isolated) breakthroughs throughout the region. For example, at the time of writing, women held a near equal number of ministerial positions in Albania and Serbia. Kosovo recently elected the highest number ever of women to the Assembly. Of the 44 women that were elected, 33 were elected directly without relying on the quota.⁴ In Albania, progressive legal reform has addressed shortcomings in the quota rules and complementary campaign finance regulations have been introduced.⁵

³ <https://kvinnatillkvinna.org/publications/womens-rights-in-western-balkans-2020/>

⁴ Die Morina van Uijtregt, “Representation of Women in Kosovo’s Parliament Increased Without Reliance on Gender Quotas,” Exit News, March 8, 2021, <https://exit.al/en/2021/03/08/representation-of-women-in-kosovos-parliament-increased-without-reliance-on-gender-quotas/>.

⁵ Source: Westminster Foundation for Democracy

Challenges & Constraints

Inequality in local participation

Women remain underrepresented in democratic processes, both as decision-makers and in democratic policymaking. There was a virtual consensus among participants that women's representation was insufficient in their countries and that more women should be engaging in the political sphere.

Despite some improvements in women's participation at the national level across the six SEE countries studied, the gap between men's and women's participation is most visible at the local level. In the November 2020 local elections in BiH, for example, of 425 candidates for mayors, 29 were women, and only four were ultimately elected.

Gender Quotas and Representation	
Albania	In Albania, one woman must be included in the first three places on parliamentary election lists. A 50 percent gender quota for lists of municipal councilors was introduced into Albanian law in 2015, which facilitated women holding 44 percent of council positions. To enforce the gender quota, Albania issues penalties for non-compliance, which includes monetary fines and the ability to refuse political party lists. According to the 2020 Gender Equality Index, women hold 45 percent of ministerial positions in Albania, which is higher than the 28 percent average in EU member states. Women also hold 36 percent of positions in Albania's regional assemblies, in comparison to the EU member states average of 28 percent. ⁶
Bosnia and Herzegovina	In 1997, a gender quota was introduced in BiH. However, gender disparity remains within all levels of government. A woman has never held a position within the three-member Presidency of BiH. Only one woman has been elected out of 11 presidents of the Federation of BiH. Men also have dominated as prime ministers in all 10 cantons in BiH. Women hold 15 of 96 cantonal minister positions. Women hold most of these positions in "classical women's areas," such as education, health, and social policy.

⁶ Ministry of Health and Social Protection and Institute of Statistics of the Republic of Albania, *Gender Equality Index for the Republic of Albania 2020*, (Tirana: Ministry of Health and Social Protection and Institute of Statistics of the Republic of Albania, January 2020), http://www.instat.gov.al/media/6661/gender_equality_index_for_the_republic_of_albania_2020.pdf.

	<p>While BiH meets their gender quota of women on electoral lists, the number of women elected to government remains low. Women are still underrepresented in all higher-level positions.⁷</p>
Kosovo	<p>In Kosovo, the Law on General Elections requires a minimum gender quota of 30 percent on party lists.</p> <p>Women remain underrepresented within political parties. Among the Kosovar political parties, there is only one female party leader. However, more women were directly elected by the popular vote to parliament in October 2019 than ever before.</p> <p>In Montenegro, the Law on Election of Councilors and Representatives stipulates that every fourth person on the election list must be a woman. Furthermore, if a female candidate resigns, the replacement must also be a woman.⁸</p>
Montenegro	<p>The Women’s Political Network launched an initiative to have 40 percent of women on each electoral list and was supported by all political parties. However, almost all the political parties violated this agreement.</p> <p>In Montenegro, women are underrepresented in positions of political power, and they do not have the same influence as men in regard to laws, policies, and reforms that shape socio-economic development. According to the 2019 Gender Equality Index, there are still concerns that men hold positions with the most decision-making power, and women hold positions in more “soft” portfolios, like sociocultural issues.⁹</p> <p>Approximately 24.7 percent of members of the National Parliament are women.¹⁰</p>
Romania	<p>Romania has a bicameral parliament that has implemented voluntary party quotas. Furthermore, Romanian law stipulates that 30 percent</p>

⁷ Lejla Gačanica et al., *Women’s Rights in Western Balkans*, (Sweden: Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation, November 2020), https://kvinna.tillkvinna.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/The-KvinnaTillKvinna-Foundation-report-WRWB_2020.pdf.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Olivera Komar, *Gender Equality Index — Montenegro 2019*, (United Nations Development Programme, January 2020), https://www.me.undp.org/content/montenegro/en/home/library/womens_empowerment/GEI2019.html.

¹⁰ Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), “Monthly Ranking of Women in National Parliaments,” Inter-Parliamentary Union, November 2021, <https://data.ipu.org/women-ranking?month=10&year=2021>.

	<p>of women must be on electoral lists. In the Chamber of Deputies, 72 of 329 (22 percent) seats are held by women.¹¹</p> <p>The women research participants in Romania do not agree with gender quotas and mandatory positions. According to the participants, women who are not well-suited to certain political positions can do more harm than good. While gender quotas are a “necessary evil” in society, they can also become restrictive once a certain degree of democratization has been achieved.</p>
Serbia	<p>Serbia adopted a gender quota of 40 percent for candidates on electoral lists in 2020. Aiming to increase female representation in politics, Serbia’s parliament amended two laws: the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament and the Law on Local Elections.</p>

Media bias

The media, including newspapers, magazines, television, radio, internet, and mobile phone communications, is a key factor in shaping the perception of the image of a politician. The media influences the attitudes, behavior, and worldviews of both the general population and politicians themselves. Research participants described the impact this can have on women in politics. Media, as they saw it, could play an ameliorating role by increasing coverage of women in politics and decision-making, increasing the public confidence of women in politics, condemning VAW-P, and promoting democratic values of inclusion and representation. They also emphasized that media outlets can, and currently do, promote negative norms and stereotypes by providing insufficient coverage of women in politics, reinforcing sexist presentations and objectification of women in politics, trivializing the role of women in politics, or by focusing on tabloid and sensationalist reporting.

“A journalist will ask [women politicians] something from the private sphere, something they would never ask a man, like ‘do you go to the market?’”

Montenegro, woman interviewee

¹¹ International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, “Gender Quotas Database: Romania,” International IDEA, last modified February 24, 2021, <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/gender-quotas/country-view/252/35>.

Gender in the Media	
Albania	<p>According to research participants in Albania, the media plays a significant role in creating and establishing the public image of female politicians.</p> <p>The media has the capacity to promote certain behaviors, beliefs, and ways of thinking to the public. The media can also disseminate information and share opinions on the work of male and female politicians. Research participants noted that the media often promotes unsuitable role models and incorrect behaviors, including undermining and psychologically, verbally, and sexually harassing female politicians.</p> <p>Research participants in Albania stated that men dominate within the country's media. Participants also said that a biased media has a negative impact on society.</p>
Bosnia and Herzegovina	<p>Research participants in BiH noted that the media lacks gender awareness and sensitivity. BiH media often encourages and affirms a brave, combative, and "macho" male persona.</p> <p>When reporting on the activities and characters of women in politics, the media can be aggressive, uninformed, and vicious. Furthermore, the media does not provide women with sufficient visibility.</p> <p>However, research participants stated that the media in BiH is more political party-biased than gender-biased. In this context, all political figures, regardless of gender, are subjected to negative treatment by the media.</p>
Kosovo	<p>Although the media plays an important role in shaping the values of society, research participants in Kosovo asserted that the media often uses their platform to report on sensationalist or superficial information that negatively impacts female politicians. Reports on women focus on their scandals, rather than their values. The media also perpetuates stereotypes to create distorted pictures of the realities of female politicians.</p> <p>In Kosovo, research participants noted that the media only speaks about female politicians during election campaigns. Even then, female politicians are spoken about in a superficial manner, instead of detailing their political potential and potential contributions. Men hold leadership positions within government and are more visible in the media.</p>
Montenegro	<p>In Montenegro, research participants stated that the media is politically biased and tends to report on sensationalist events, such as outbursts by politicians.</p>

	<p>The media in Montenegro is interested in reporting on violence only when it occurs, but does not relay preventative measures.</p> <p>According to research participants, the media does not contribute to the visibility of women in politics. Leaders of political parties, who are mostly men, are given the most media attention. When women are discussed in the media, they are degraded, objectified, and sexualized. The political activities of women are reduced to their physical appearances and private matters, while their actions, qualities, political merits, and community contributions are overlooked.</p>
Romania	<p>In Romania, research participants stated that the country's media consists largely of tabloid and sensationalist journalism. Participants also noted that the Romanian public takes an interest in scandals and superficiality.</p> <p>Compared to men, women in politics are more heavily scrutinized and criticized by the media.</p> <p>According to research participants, the media is a powerful force that can positively or negatively impact society.</p>
Serbia	<p>Research participants in Serbia asserted that the media is the most powerful weapon of VAW-P. Discussions on equality, gender, and violence are moderated by and reduced to closed circles of like-minded people. According to research participants, these topics are not of importance to the Serbian media, as they will not "sell the news." Instead, the media focuses on superficial topics, specifically the physical appearances of female politicians.</p>

Harmful gender stereotypes and norms

Research participants stated that gender barriers act as a hindrance for female participation in politics. Participants unanimously felt that patriarchy remains the dominant social system within their country. Many participants reported that the notion that politics is not a job for women still permeates the political sphere in SEE and, in turn, influences public opinion. Research participants cited a number of other challenges to female participation: family obliga-

"It is much easier for men to leave home, engage in politics, participate in conferences and workshops. Their family obligations never violate or make it difficult for them to commit to and pursue a political career. You have never heard a man say, 'I will not accept this invitation or either one because I have to raise a child.'"

Romania, woman interviewee

“Women do not want to be perceived as ‘un-good’ mothers, as women who do not have happy families. Their moral code in this aspect is the first thing to be attacked, because the people who cause the attacks know very well that this is the weakest place for women.”

Kosovo, woman interviewee

tions or lack of support from the family, use of the family in political attacks and smear campaigns, obstruction by colleagues, lack of opportunities for advancement, minimization of the importance and influence of women in politics, disregard of female politicians, and discriminatory representation of female politicians

in the media (focusing on their physical appearances or family circumstances, rather than substantive issues). Seventy-nine (79) percent of research participants considered that women in politics sacrifice more than men.

In addition, research participants noted that women are often siloed within the public sphere. Women tend to be put into more “passive” roles as party members or advocates. Furthermore, research participants described that women tend to be represented in public spheres that align with what is traditionally considered “women’s issues:” education, health, and human rights. By contrast, men tend to hold positions that deal with finance, security sector, foreign affairs etc. Research participants described these challenges as common, and in general, female participants stated that they could cope with them.

Another pervasive challenge identified by research participants was the “glass ceiling” phenomenon in the political spheres of SEE countries, which prevents women from reaching leadership positions or positions of political power and decision-making. According to their experiences, women are allowed to progress until the moment they become a perceived threat to the positions of men.

Gender Norms	
Albania	<p>According to research participants, patriarchy has deep roots in Albanian culture and politics. Patriarchal values are more prominent in rural areas. In urban areas, there is a greater push for breaking taboos and achieving women’s economic resilience, independence, and participation in political activities.</p> <p>Research participants noted that political participation is considered a “male activity” in Albanian society. Although women are more educated, they are perceived as incapable of sufficiently tackling political challenges. When women engage in politics, research participants said that some are assertive and combative, while the majority bow to their male colleagues.</p>

	<p>Research participants stated that educational institutions and the media should participate in breaking the taboo of “women in politics.” Participants suggested the incorporation of an educational curriculum to empower women or urging the media to promote and report on successful women in leadership.</p>
Bosnia and Herzegovina	<p>In BiH, research participants expressed that the patriarchal views and values are less prominent and extreme. A woman would not be challenged if she wanted to participate in politics. However, she would be asked “whether she was accomplished as a wife and mother” and, instead, be judged on this criterion.</p> <p>Participants asserted that women in BiH are the greatest proponents and supporters of upholding patriarchal values.</p> <p>Patriarchal views are promoted within educational institutions. The curriculum is based on traditional values where men are assigned the role of the breadwinner and hero, while women are assigned the role of mother, wife, or witch. According to BiH research participants, religious instruction in primary education also contributes to the promotion of patriarchal views.</p> <p>In BiH, women do not hold positions as party presidents, except in the case of the Peasant Party, or in cases of parties appointing directors of public companies.</p>
Kosovo	<p>As stated by the research participants, Kosovo is a highly patriarchal society. While there has been progress in the last decade to combat gender stereotypes, some girls and women do not have the freedom of choice regarding economic stability, schooling and independence.</p> <p>Research participants stressed that men hold all key positions of power in the Kosovar government.¹² However, patriarchal views and values are changing. Women are becoming braver in their political roles and slowly bringing pro-European changes to Kosovo. According to the research participants, women engaged in political activities are at the beginning of a challenging path. To empower women, break taboos, stereotypes, and patriarchal ideologies, research participants said that change needs to start in educational institutions and within families.</p>
Montenegro	<p>In Montenegro, participants noted that citizens (including young people), media, and religious and educational institutions still promote and adhere to traditional and patriarchal values, which promote gender stereotypes and traditional roles for women and men.</p>

¹² Please note this research was conducted before Vjosa Osmani was elected President of Kosovo in April 2021.

	<p>Patriarchy contributes to the systematic discrimination of women engaging in politics. While there is female representation in the political sphere, women do not hold leadership positions. However, research participants mentioned that a woman, Dr. Draginja Vuksanovic, ran for president in Montenegro.</p>
Romania	<p>Romania is a member of the EU, where gender equality is an important criterion for admission. However, research participants stated that patriarchy has only been eradicated “on paper,” and patriarchal values are still prevalent in Romanian society.</p> <p>Participants asserted that Romania culturally supports patriarchal values and views. The role of a “housewife, caretaker, and mother” is first ascribed to a woman before she can take on the role of a “politician or successful manager.”</p> <p>Women have limited access to job opportunities because men perform the most “important” jobs and reach job-related agreements in informal circumstances. Furthermore, leadership positions are often reserved for men.</p> <p>Research participants stated that the media and educational, political, and religious institutions could contribute to changing existing social patterns. However, these institutions do not pay sufficient attention to issues of gender equality.</p>
Serbia	<p>Research participants concluded that Serbia has moved away from patriarchal views and values. However, the most “important functions” are still performed by men.</p> <p>In addition, participants noted that many women in Serbian society uphold and ascribe to patriarchal views, despite progress made towards gender equality in politics. and gender-based discrimination.</p> <p>To combat these patriarchal patterns, participants stated that change must begin with education, and then through the media and political action, particularly as each institution (education, health, media, and politics) currently promotes a patriarchal model.</p>

Segregation of responsibilities

The research suggests that women’s political forums, associations and/or networks in the region have limited significance in strengthening the position of women. Although various parties have created structures like this as part of their declared support of women’s political participation, interviewees felt they are not having the desired impact. Specifically, women’s political portfolios tend to be restricted to stereotypical “women’s topics” such as gender equality, health and family, humanitarian actions, and social issues. Men continue to dominate topics perceived

as “more important” such as defense, the economy, and foreign policy. In light of this, intraparty forums and associations struggle for influence. They often lack any budget or resources for elevating their positions.

Overlooking multiple marginalizations

Intersectionality is a neglected component of political participation in SEE countries. Women from ethnic minority groups and LGBTQI+ communities face additional barriers to meaningful political participation, decision-making, and leadership. For example, a recent study on Albania by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy finds regional and ethnic divisions impacting women’s political participation: “The conservative Gheg culture of Northern Albania has long been more difficult for women to take on non-traditional roles than the more progressive southern Tosks. Similarly, women’s leadership is reportedly more accepted in urban and peripheral areas compared to rural areas.”

Recommendations – Part I

Influencing Factor	Recommendations
Positive popular perception of women’s leadership qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Emphasize positive contributions of women in politics, drawing on impact studies, statistics, and testimonies, especially at the local level, through civil society awareness campaigns. ● Avoid and denounce essentialist depictions of women in politics, whether the narrative is positive or negative. ● Train women candidates to recognize and call out essentialist depictions (whether positive or negative) and resist drawing on essentialist stereotypes in campaign rhetoric.
Quotas that can marginalize women or make them dependent on male leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Examine quota design at the country level to identify disempowering factors and propose quota formula revisions towards more empowering models. ● Draw on regional examples for progressive reform and improvements of quota laws. ● Introduce complementary laws, such as political finance legislation in Albania, to reduce dependence on male party members.

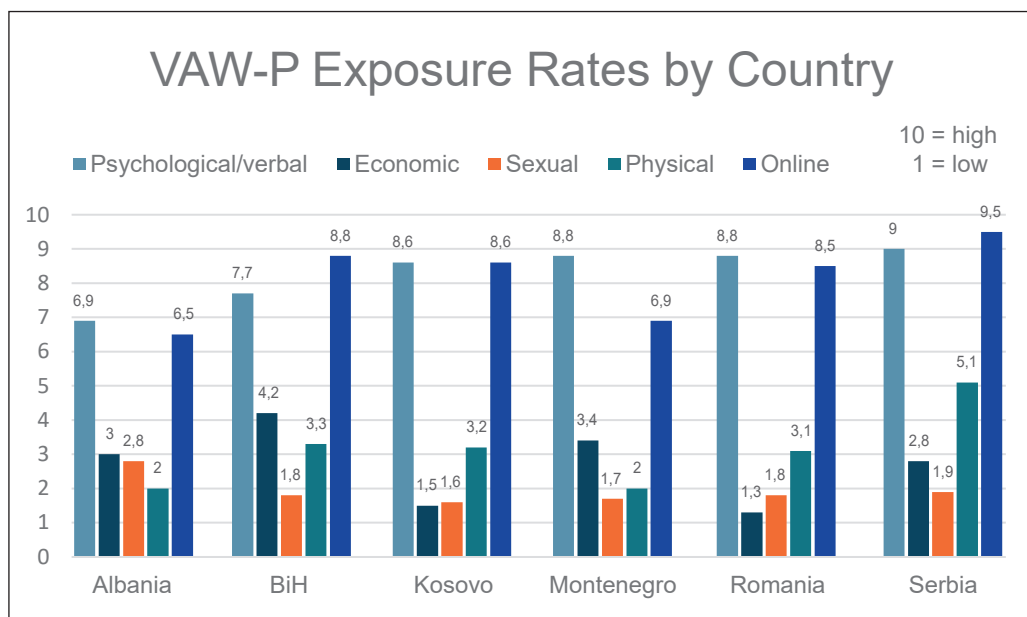
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote complementary channels to reduce the dependency of women candidates, such as supporting independent fundraising by women candidates.
Poor implementation and misuse of quotas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Review enforcement mechanisms at the country level and propose reform. ● Promote civil society watchdogs to monitor quota implementation and report on misuse. ● Advocate for strict quota implementation action from the electoral management bodies (EMBs) and other responsible parties. ● Draw on regional examples for progressive reform and improvements of quota laws.
Low representation at local levels of government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Build networks and use in-person outreach to promote awareness and the importance of women’s participation at local levels. ● Introduce mentoring programs for women considering entering politics. ● Develop available resources to facilitate the work of women in local politics, including orientation to the office and how-to guides for policy processes. ● Promote awareness of the positive contributions of local-level elected women in civic education campaigns.
Elected women face limits on their power in office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify blockage points and conduct consultations on how to overcome specific barriers with stakeholders. ● Create coordinated advocacy goals with firm targets based on increasing women’s substantive influence. Use indicators such as “Women hold 50% of non-traditionally female ministerial portfolios” or “Women chair committees controlling at least 50% of national budget spending,” etc. ● Provide resources, such as enhanced and targeted parliamentary research services, to assist women in making an impact. ● Promote positive messaging highlighting women’s contributions to leadership in non-traditional roles (i.e., defense or economy portfolios, etc.)
Media bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● “Name and shame” media groups that regularly promote harmful stereotypes, and/or offer “report cards”

	<p>to highlight media groups that offer more balanced, gender-neutral coverage.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organize constructive civil society counter-speech campaigns to counter negative messaging online. ● Offer media training to women candidates to enhance skills in speaking to the press and developing a public persona. ● Institute media codes of conduct around elections and hold media responsible for committing any hate speech, harmful stereotypes or other protected-identity-based abuse.
<p>Harmful stereotypes and norms</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with multi-sectoral allies to deconstruct and counter harmful norms in different sectors. ● Focus programs on youth leadership, especially work with boys. ● See recommendations above regarding messaging, counter speech, etc.
<p>Multiple marginalization</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Identify salient identity groups in each context as an adapted framework of analysis. ● Ensure that all gender policies and strategies undergo a review to assess impacts from an intersectional lens.

Part II.

The “Hidden Violence”: Addressing Violence Against Women in Politics in SEE

Violence against women in politics in the Balkans is widespread but often discreet. This “hidden violence” uses subtle and sophisticated tools to control or restrict women’s participation in politics. Across the region, NDI has documented tactics like gaslighting, using gender-based disinformation in smear campaigns, and withholding information as the means of inhibiting women’s exercise of their political rights. VAW-P in the Balkans occurs in both public and private spaces, including in political parties and parliament. Unlike other forms of electoral or political violence usually carried out by political opponents, in these cases perpetrators may include a woman’s family members and friends. Media outlets contribute to VAW-P in the Balkans by promoting harmful stereotypes and promoting degrading images of political women through their reporting.



Sixty-eight (68) percent of research participants stated that VAW-P in their country is widespread and 56 percent considered it to be a normal phenomenon. As many as four in 10 women respondents reported experiencing some form of VAW-P. Half of the research participants claimed to be witnesses to some form of VAW-P. BiH and Serbia are the case studies where the highest percentage of

participants reported experiencing some form of VAW-P. Anecdotal observation suggests there are more women in politics in these countries who have publicly questioned established patriarchal norms, and therefore have become targets and experienced higher levels of violence. This research found that young women with less experience in politics and those who are perceived as a threat to men's positions experienced VAW-P more than their colleagues.

VAW-P, as examined by this research, manifested in five primary forms: psychological/verbal, economic, sexual, physical, and online violence. Asked to assess how often they were exposed to some form of violence in politics (whether they were direct victims or directly observed violence perpetrated against others), research participants stated that they were frequently exposed to violence, especially to psychological abuse and online violence. Economic violence was most prevalent among politicians in Kosovo, BiH, and Montenegro. Other forms of violence were noted as individual sporadic incidents, but ones that attract significantly more attention from the political community, the media, and the general public.

Psychological violence: “Hidden abuse” is pervasive and insidious

Definition

Psychological violence in politics involves hostile behavior and abuse intended to cause fear, emotional harm, and/or damage to a woman's reputation and social status.

A commonly recognized form of psychological VAW-P is verbal abuse, which can involve insulting, shouting at, and swearing at female politicians. However, psychological violence in the Balkans is characterized as “hidden abuse”, such as denying, harassing, ignoring, intimidating, isolating, threatening, and underestimating women in politics. Such violence can range from subtle comments related to women's competencies or physical appearance to a wide spectrum of behaviors, such as the psychological phenomenon of gaslighting, withholding information, conducting smear campaigns, shaming, blackmailing, labeling women as aggressive, emotional, or hysterical, minimizing the importance of women's opinion or initiatives, excluding women from decision-making, interrupting or speaking over women, ascribing guilt and shame, or even blaming women for banal problems, and linking a woman's success with an influential man.

In SEE countries, psychological and verbal violence against women in politics was identified as the most widespread form of violence and directed towards women in all positions. Participants reported that failure to recognize the forms and acts

of psychological violence was particularly worrying, as it results in a lack of public condemnation.

Patriarchal norms create space for sexist jokes and comments and other forms of psychological violence. Participants also noted that one motive of violence appears to be when others run out of substantive arguments against a proposal or position. Women noted fear of losing their jobs, low self-esteem, preference for taking the path of least resistance, and acceptance of these forms of behavior among themselves. Ultimately, this type of violence is often normalized across SEE.

“When they have nothing else to say in the discussion, they start to attack you as a woman to discredit your work or ideas.”

**Bosnia and Herzegovina,
woman interviewee**

Apart from Albania, where the reported experiences of psychological and verbal violence were described at a moderate level, all other SEE countries reported high levels. Psychological violence often targets different groups of women, such as those who are not married and women who have no children in Montenegro, or young women in Bulgaria, Kosovo, and Serbia. In Bulgaria, acts of psychological violence are oriented towards intimidation in the form of gendered disinformation, such as fabricating stories about a woman politician or her family or proclaiming women politicians as traitors of the state.

Representation of violence against women in politics							
		High		Medium		Low	
		Albania	BiH	Montenegro	Kosovo	Romania	Serbia
In the politics of my country, violence against women occurs		High	High	High	Medium	High	High
I have witnessed violence against women in my country's politics		High	High	Medium	High	High	High
I have survived gender-based violence in politics		Medium	High	High	High	Medium	High
In the political party to which I belong, violence against women is being conducted		Low	Low	Low	Low	Medium	Low

Psychological Violence	
Albania	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: high level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: giving orders, pressuring and blackmailing women, disabling freedom of speech and independent decision-making, excluding women from decision-making, gender-based insults and inappropriate jokes, and deeming female reactions as emotional or hysterical.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: all women in public and leadership positions.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: men, women, the media, social media, political leaders, political parties, and non-party colleagues.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: control and domination over women, exploiting women and their positions to achieve personal goals, lack of respect for women, minimizing the importance of women and their work, the perception that women are less valuable and cannot engage efficiently in politics.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: patriarchal views and patterns, women’s economic dependence, low self-esteem among women, and women’s desire to not be perceived as weak, sensitive, or spoiled.</p>
Bosnia and Herzegovina	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: high level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: women are underestimated, excluded from decision-making, ignored, insulted, mocked, and called inappropriate names; men minimize the importance of women’s opinions, comment on women’s physical appearances, make gender-based jokes and non-verbal gestures, and interpret female reactions as emotional or hysterical.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: all women in public and leadership positions, specifically those who think outside of the box or dare to be outspoken and question male authorities.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: men, women, the media, social media, political leaders, political parties, political workers, and legal institutions.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: to dominate and discredit women while making them feel powerless. Additional motives include jealousy and using violence in the absence of a constructive argument.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: patriarchal views and accepted behaviors, gender stereotypes, women fearing they will lose their positions and, instead, following the path of least resistance.</p>

<p>Kosovo</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: high level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: intimidation, exclusion, and lack of independent decision-making, minimizing women’s opinions, gender-based insults, and inappropriate nonverbal communication.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women in all positions of government, specifically independent and/or young women.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: men, women who are jealous or in competition with other female politicians, the media, social media, political leaders, political parties, and workers.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: domination or envy/jealousy.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: patriarchal values and the acceptance of male dominance; furthermore, women who are politically ambitious, inexperienced, and/or question male authorities are often targeted.</p>
<p>Montenegro</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: high level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: intimidation, harassment, excluding women from decision-making, ignoring women, gender-based insults and jokes, deeming female reactions as emotional or hysterical, and linking a woman’s success to a man.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women in all political positions, specifically those who are outspoken and think outside of the box, question male authorities, do not have children and/or are not married.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: men, women, the media, social media, political leaders, political workers, and legal institutions.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: domination and humiliation of women in politics.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: patriarchal views, lack of understanding on issues of gender inequality and gender-based violence.</p>
<p>Romania</p>	<p>LEVEL OF EXPOSURE: high level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: limited independence in decision-making, hostile behavior towards ambitious women, blackmailing, underestimating or intimidating women, gender-based insults, and asserting that women are emotional, hysterical, or sensitive.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women in all political positions are exposed to psychological and verbal forms of violence. More specifically, victims are often women who are outspoken and question male authorities, think outside of the box, have low self-esteem, and/or are young.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: men, women, the media, social media, political leaders, and colleagues.</p>

	<p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: control and domination.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: negative perception of politics, the lack of punishment or condemnation of violent behavior, sensationalist reporting by the media, and social and cultural discrimination.</p> <p>IMPACT OF VIOLENCE: women fearing secondary victimization and reported low self-esteem and ambition.</p>
<p>Serbia</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: high level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: women are underestimated, excluded, blackmailed, intimidated, ignored, denied the opportunity to speak, insulted, and have a lack of independence in decision-making.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women in all political positions, specifically those who are in leadership positions, have low self-esteem, and/or are young.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: men, women, the media, social media, political leaders, and colleagues.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: to dominate and overpower women.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: patriarchal views, the lack of punishment of violent behavior, and the accepted perception of ambitious or successful women as threats.</p>

Social media and internet-based attacks drive gender-based harassment

Definition

Internet violence is a general term for any communication activity with cyber-technology, which can be considered harmful to both the targeted individual and the consumers of digital technology and participants in online discourse.

Online violence includes inciting group hatred, attacks on privacy, harassment, stalking, insults, unscrupulous access to harmful content, and the spread of violent and offensive comments. As identified in NDI’s “Tweets That Chill” report on the unique phenomenon of online VAW-P, “This ac-

“Most personal experience relates to [online] violence because it allows perpetrators to cover up and do so without consequences and behind hidden profiles.”

Albania, woman interviewee

tivity can be anonymous, borderless, sustained, and permanent. The perception of impunity emboldens perpetrators and raises women’s sense of insecurity and violation.”

Research reflected different levels of online VAW-P in SEE countries. Participants from Montenegro and Albania reported moderate exposure, while findings for BiH, Kosovo, Romania, and Serbia suggested a higher level of exposure to internet violence.

“I have wanted to leave social networks 1,000 times so far, because I do not want to suffer that kind of frustration or aggression.”

Serbia, woman interviewee

Women who are public figures, including government officials, are the main victims of internet violence. Perpetrators were often from the media, and particularly tabloid media, and the general public. Participants from Kosovo and Romania stated that society’s general indication of what does and does not constitute violence is very much reflected in the discussion on VAW-P. For example, many research participants considered online physical threats and blatant harassment as examples of online violence, while rude comments about appearance may not be.

“The deputy minister, who appeared on TV every day, was turned into a meme.”

Albania, woman interviewee

For all SEE countries, sanctions are weak or do not exist for these forms of online VAW-P. Public publicity, and particular public profiles on social media, appears to create space for this type of violence against women in politics. Echoing NDI’s

prior research on online VAW-P, five participants believed that internet violence prevents or restricts women from engaging in politics and affects their private lives as well as their public image. Participants stated that motives for internet violence are to discourage women from engaging in politics, to weaken a woman’s power, and to minimize women’s influence.

Online Violence	
Albania	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: moderate level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: attack on privacy, violation of privacy, exposure to inappropriate family content, harassment, stalking, insult, dissemination of violent and offensive comments, publishing of private images, editing inappropriate images, threats, memes, mockery.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women at all levels of government; women in public positions; women who are publicly exposed; women who stand out for their political affiliation or pleasing appearance; suc-</p>

	<p>successful women; popular women.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: media in general, tabloid media, citizens, men, women, party colleagues, and non-partisan colleagues. Whoever forwards such news is an accomplice.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: degradation of women at the gender level, marginalization of a woman’s influence if she holds important positions or initiates a valid project, jealousy, unconsciousness of doing anything wrong, a tabloid culture of living.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: opportunity to inspect and deal with the private lives of public figures, possibility of anonymous publications/inappropriate forms of behavior under the veil of anonymity, impossibility or difficulty of sanctioning these forms of violence.</p>
<p>Bosnia and Herzegovina</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: high level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: attacks on privacy; violation of privacy; exposure to inappropriate family content; harassment; stalking; insult; dissemination of violent and offensive comments; publishing of private images; editing inappropriate images; threats.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women at all levels of government; women in public positions; women who are publicly exposed; women who stand out for their political affiliation or pleasing appearance; successful women; popular women.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: media in general, tabloid media, citizens, men, women, party colleagues, and non-partisan colleagues. Whoever forwards such news is an accomplice.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: degradation of women at the gender level; marginalization of a woman’s influence if she holds important positions or initiates valid projects; jealousy; bad intentions; unawareness of doing anything wrong; tabloid culture of life.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: tabloid culture, opportunity to inspect and deal with the private lives of public figures, possibility of anonymous publications/inappropriate forms of behavior under the veil of anonymity, impossibility or difficulty of sanctioning these forms of violence.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: public exposure through more social media, publishing private pictures, comments, etc.</p>
<p>Kosovo</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: high level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: attacks on privacy; violation of privacy; exposure to inappropriate family content; harassment; stalking; insult; dissemination of violent and offensive comments; publishing of private pictures; editing inappropriate images; threats; mockery.</p>

	<p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women at all levels of government; women in public positions; women who are publicly exposed; women who stand out for their political affiliation or pleasing appearance; successful women; popular women; strong women.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: media in general; tabloid media, citizens, men, women, party colleagues, and non-partisan colleagues. Whoever forwards such news is an accomplice.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: intimidation of women; discouraging women from engaging in politics; degradation of women at the gender level; marginalization of women’s influence; jealousy; bad intentions; unconsciousness of doing anything wrong; a tabloid culture of living.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: society’s general indication of what is and what is not violence; tabloid culture of life; the opportunity to inspect and deal with the private lives of public figures; the possibility of anonymous publications/inappropriate forms of behavior under the guise of anonymity; impossibility or difficulty of sanctioning these forms of violence.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: public exposure; presence on social networks in an inappropriate and provocative way (pictures, posts, etc.); public exposure through more social media, publishing private pictures, comments, etc.</p>
<p>Montenegro</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: moderate level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: incitement of group hatred; privacy attacks; harassment; stalking; insult; dissemination of violent and offensive comments; publishing of private images; editing inappropriate images and content; threats.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women at all levels of government; women in public positions; women who are publicly exposed; women who stand out for their political affiliation or pleasing appearance; successful women; popular women.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: media in general, tabloid media, citizens, men, women, party colleagues, and non-partisan colleagues. Whoever forwards such news is an accomplice.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: degradation of women at the gender level; marginalization of women’s influence; jealousy; bad intentions; unconsciousness of doing anything wrong; a tabloid culture of living.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: tabloid culture of living; opportunity to inspect and deal with the private lives of public figures; possibility of anonymous publications/inappropriate forms of behavior under the veil of anonymity; impossibility or difficulty of sanctioning these forms of violence.</p>

	<p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: public exposure through more social media, publishing private pictures, comments, etc.</p>
Romania	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: high level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: attacks on privacy; violation of privacy; exposure to inappropriate family content; harassment; stalking; insult; dissemination of violent and offensive comments; publishing of private pictures; editing inappropriate images; threats; mockery.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women at all levels of government; women in public positions; women who are publicly exposed; women who stand out for their political affiliation or pleasing appearance; successful women; popular women; and provocative women.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: media in general, tabloid media, citizens, men, women, party colleagues, and non-partisan colleagues. Whoever forwards such news is an accomplice.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: intimidation of women; discouraging women from engaging in politics; degradation of women at the gender level; weakening of a woman's power; marginalization of women's influence; bad intentions; unconsciousness of doing anything wrong; a tabloid culture of living.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: society's general indication of what is and what is not violence; tabloid culture of life; opportunity to inspect and deal with the private lives of public figures; possibility of anonymous publications/inappropriate forms of behavior under the veil of anonymity; impossibility or difficulty of sanctioning these forms of violence.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: public exposure; presence on social networks in inappropriate and provocative ways (pictures, posts, etc.); public exposure through more social media, publishing private pictures, comments, etc.</p>
Serbia	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: high level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: attacks on privacy; violation of privacy; exposure to inappropriate family content; harassment; stalking; insult; dissemination of violent and offensive comments; publishing of private images; editing inappropriate images and content; threats; mockery.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women at all levels of government; women in public positions; women who are publicly exposed; women who stand out for their political action or pleasing appearance; successful women; popular women.</p>

	<p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: media in general, tabloid media, citizens, men, women, party colleagues, and non-partisan colleagues. Whoever forwards such news is an accomplice.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: degradation of women; weakening of a woman’s power; marginalization of women’s influence; jealousy; bad intentions; refusal to acknowledge wrongdoing; a tabloid culture of living.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: tabloid culture of living; opportunity to inspect and deal with the private lives of public figures; possibility of anonymous publications/inappropriate forms of behavior under the guise of anonymity; impossibility or difficulty of sanctioning these forms of violence.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: public exposure through more social media, publishing private pictures, comments, etc.</p>
--	--

Economic violence: Women in politics are at a disadvantage

Definition

Economic violence includes the systematic denial of resources to women for election activities or restricting women’s access to resources that are available to men.

This includes coercive behavior that controls women’s access to economic resources, thus depriving them of the tools necessary for active political action, professional development, or routine political activity that belong to them by law or are otherwise available to their male colleagues. While less visible, it strongly impacts women in politics, either in a direct way or contributing to vulnerability to other forms of violence. Research

“There was an internal agreement, which should have been respected by all parties. A certain amount of money, now I don’t know if it was 3% of the total amount from the budget that the party receives, goes to the women’s forum, no one respected that, and internally everyone agreed.”

Montenegro, woman interviewee

participants cited, for example, fear of losing a job or position, economic dependence on their job or on men in power, or smaller chances for promotion. Participants also noted that male colleagues have disproportionate control of budgets, clubs, commissions, and ministries. Other forms of economic violence include

the disproportionate financial support to men’s projects, a lack of paid positions or poorly paid positions for women in politics, restricted or no access to money within the political parties for women, a lack of women participating in financial decision-making, and a lack of funding for women’s political campaigns.

Respondents reported that perpetrators of economic violence were generally male politicians, political party leaders, and political workers at all levels. As with other types, external factors contributing to economic violence were primarily patriarchal norms and poor enforcement of existing laws. Both result in economic power resting primarily in the hands of men and non-recognition of forms and acts of economic violence.

Respondents reported economic VAW-P less frequently. Those from BiH and Montenegro recognized intimidation via targeting women (with their political position/existence) to enforce obedience to the party, while others noticed that political parties rarely or never fund women’s projects. Participants vocalized a “helplessness to change anything” (BiH), which leads to low or non-existing reporting of economic violence against women in politics.

Economic Violence	
Albania	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure with sporadic incidents.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: men solely controlling ministries, clubs, and commissions that bring money; men manage and control budgets; financial support of projects in which the holders are men; enabling men to manage money/budgets independently; women have restricted or no access at all money within the political parties to which they belong; non-financing of women’s political campaigns.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women in all positions without exception.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: men in the party; and party leaders.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: control; domination; exploiting a woman’s voice or position to achieve the personal goals of the leader or political party to which the woman belongs; minimizing the importance of women and the products of her work.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: patriarchy; unconsciousness gender boas.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: gender ignorance; non-recognition of forms and acts of economic violence; struggle for equal economic conditions within political parties.</p>

<p>Bosnia and Herzegovina</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: women do not have access to the party’s money or budgets; women do not participate in deciding how to distribute/spend party budgets; blackmailing a woman to be obedient and follow party ideology; women in campaigns have little or no financial assistance; women do not join clubs or commissions that bring in money; women do not hold (additional) political functions that bring in money; political parties rarely or never fund women’s projects.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women in all positions without exception.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: men, some women, leaders, decision-makers, political workers at all levels, party colleagues.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: the desire for economic power combined with cultural, ideological, and social inherited patriarchy which dictates that “man is the bearer/bearer of money;” failure to recognize forms and acts of economic violence.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: patriarchy; domination; retaining power/money in the hands of men; laws that are not enforced.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: economic dependence/blackmail; gender unconsciousness; non-recognition of forms and acts of economic violence; helplessness to change anything.</p>
<p>Kosovo</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure with sporadic incidents.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: women do not have access to positions that bring in money; women do not participate in deciding how to distribute/spend party money or budgets; women in campaigns have little or no financial aid/men have significantly more financial aid in campaigns than women; women do not have the opportunity to participate in commissions and clubs that bring money.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women in all positions without exception.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: men, some women, leaders, decision-makers, political workers at all levels, and party colleagues.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: power; domination.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: patriarchy.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: non-recognition by women of forms and acts of economic violence; gender unconsciousness; acceptance of patriarchy (unreservedly).</p>
<p>Montenegro</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: blackmail of a woman in order to be obedient and follow party ideology, women do not have access to positions that bring in money, women do not participate</p>

	<p>in deciding how to distribute/spend party's money or budgets, political parties rarely or never fund women's projects.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women in all positions without exception.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: men, some women, leaders, decision-makers, political workers at all levels, party colleagues.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: power.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: cultural, ideological, and social patriarchy, non-recognition of forms and acts of economic violence, gender unconsciousness.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: unconscious gender bias, submissiveness towards men, non-questioning of patriarchal patterns, leaving the responsibility to others.</p>
Romania	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure with sporadic incidents.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: women do not have access to party's money nor budgets; women do not participate in decisions about how to distribute/spend party money or budgets.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women in all positions without exception.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: men, leaders, and decision-makers.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: power; domination.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: patriarchy; habituation.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: general gender ignorance; failure to recognize forms and acts of violence.</p>
Serbia	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure with sporadic incidents.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: women do not have access to party's money nor budgets; women do not participate in deciding how to distribute/spend party money or budgets; women do not join clubs or commissions that bring in money; women do not hold (additional) political functions that bring in money; political parties rarely or never fund women's projects.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: women in all positions without exception.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: men, leaders, and decision-makers.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: power.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: society's habituation to patriarchal values, ideology and culture.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: gender ignorance; non-recognition of forms and acts of economic violence (which is not recognized and cannot be suppressed).</p>

Women subjected to degrading comments, sexist jokes, and harassment in the political sphere (Sexual Violence)

Definition

Sexual violence includes any sexual act or attempt to carry out or obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or advances, or attempts to sexually exploit a person by force or coercion.

Sexual violence includes harassment, such as unwanted sexual comments, sexual exploitation, rape, threats of violence, forced sexual services for promotion, unwanted touching, and inappropriate jokes. Forms of sexual violence observed in SEE countries included inappropriate or unwanted comments, gender-based insults, comments on the physical appearances of women, unwanted touching, inappropriate forms of verbal and non-verbal communication, inappropriate messages and calls, and sexist jokes.

While sexual and gender-based harassment are prohibited by gender equality laws and anti-discrimination laws, these are rarely effectively enforced in the political sphere in SEE. Few participants witnessed timely condemnation of this behavior when it occurred in political spaces, which perpetuates this type of violence.

“Everyone said they voted for her because such an ass should be sent to the European parliament.”

Romania, woman interviewee

“Specifically, the vice-president of the then parliament of Montenegro simply told me that in case I want to get a job, we should do some (sexual) things, etc.”

Montenegro, woman interviewee

Women in politics expressed fear of speaking out about sexual violence, afraid of being perceived as helpless, violence being minimized or disbelieved when reported (“she deserved it/she asked for it”), undermining their credibility, or potentially limiting opportunities for advancement.

Women respondents did not agree on a unifying definition of what was acceptable, citing blurry boundaries about how a woman could “allow” herself to be approached in the workplace.

Research participants stated that external factors contributing to sexual violence include public ignorance of the issue and poor implementation of legal solutions or internal party codes of conduct and procedures for sanctioning inappropriate forms of behavior.

Sexual Violence	
Albania	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure with sporadic incidents.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: inappropriate and degrading comments, gender-based insults, denying women the power to act and make decisions independently, prejudice based on physical appearance, creating fake stories to publicly degrade women, sexist double standards, and sexual harassment.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: young and inexperienced women.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: men, some women, political leaders, and colleagues.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: domination, demonstration of power, degrading women.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: public ignorance, lack of legal solutions, lack of internal codes of conduct and procedures for sanctioning inappropriate forms of behavior.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: fear of being viewed as helpless, fear of exposure to secondary victimization and public condemnation, fear of losing or being excluded from opportunities.</p>
Bosnia and Herzegovina	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure with sporadic incidents.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: gender-based insults, degrading and sexist comments, prejudice based on physical appearance, creating fake stories to publicly shame women, double moral standards, sexual harassment, inappropriate non-verbal communication, and sexist jokes.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: young, inexperienced, and/or unprotected women.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: political leaders and colleagues.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: degrading women, a demonstration of power, the belief that certain behaviors are permitted.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: public ignorance, lack of legal solutions, lack of internal codes of conduct and procedures for sanctioning inappropriate forms of behavior, and a lack of clear and timely condemnation of inappropriate forms of behavior.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: fear of being viewed as helpless, fear of exposure to secondary victimization and public condemnation, fear of losing or being excluded from opportunities and/or advancement, and fear of losing credibility.</p>
Kosovo	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure with sporadic incidents.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: complimenting, gender-based</p>

	<p>insults, degrading and sexist comments, commenting on physical appearance; lying or creating fake stories to publicly shame women, sexual harassment, and inappropriate non-verbal communication.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: young, inexperienced, and/or unprotected women.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: political leaders and colleagues.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: degrading women, demonstration of power, the belief that certain behaviors are permitted.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: public ignorance, lack of legal solutions, lack of internal codes of conduct and procedures for sanctioning inappropriate forms of behavior, and a lack of clear and timely condemnation of inappropriate forms of behavior.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: fear of exposure to secondary victimization and public condemnation, losing credibility, fear of losing opportunities to advance in the workplace.</p>
<p>Montenegro</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure with sporadic incidents.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: gender-based insults, degrading and sexist comments, prejudice based on physical appearance, creating fake stories to publicly shame women; double moral standards, sexual harassment, inappropriate non-verbal communication, and sexist jokes.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: young, inexperienced, and unprotected women.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: Political leaders and colleagues.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: Degrading women and a demonstration of power.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: public ignorance, lack of clear and timely condemnation of inappropriate forms of behavior.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: fear of being viewed as helpless/powerless, fear of exposure to secondary victimization, fear of losing credibility, fear of losing opportunities, and ill-defined workplace boundaries.</p>
<p>Romania</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure with sporadic incidents.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: blackmailing, gender-based insults; degrading and sexist comments, prejudice based on physical appearance, lying or creating fake stories to publicly shame women, double moral standards, sexual harassment.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: young and inexperienced women.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: political leaders and colleagues.</p>

	<p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: degrading women and a demonstration of power.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: societal ignorance, lack of concrete laws to condemn such behavior.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: fear of being viewed as helpless/powerless, fear of exposure to secondary victimization and public condemnation, fear of losing credibility, fear of losing opportunities to advance in the workplace.</p>
Serbia	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure with sporadic incidents.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: blackmailing, gender-based insults, degrading and sexist comments, lying or creating fake stories to publicly shame women, double standards, sexual harassment, inappropriate nonverbal communication, and sexist jokes.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: young, inexperienced, and unprotected women.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: political leaders and colleagues.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: a demonstration of power, degrading women, and bullying.</p> <p>EXTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: societal ignorance, lack of concrete laws that condemn such behavior, lack of clear and timely condemnation of inappropriate forms of behavior.</p> <p>INTERNAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: fear of being viewed as helpless/powerless, fear of exposure to secondary victimization and condemnation, and fear of losing credibility.</p>

Physical force used as retaliation against female politicians (Physical Violence)

Definition

Physical violence includes any violent act that results in bodily harm. It is the intentional use of physical force with the potential to cause physical harm.

Physical violence in politics includes using force as retaliation, such as slapping, pulling, pushing, inflicting bodily injury, assault with a weapon, and similar instances. Acts of physical violence reported by women in politics in SEE include hitting, pushing, throwing objects, and threats.

Most participants stated that SEE countries reported low exposure to this type of violence in politics. Serbia reported the highest level of physical violence. In all

countries, higher levels of physical violence were associated with tensions due to conflict situations.

Respondents from BiH and Serbia reported instances of abduction, slapping, mobile phone theft, and hair pulling as physical violence against women in politics. Women participating in local politics, women in less-powerful positions, and women present in

“People think slapping someone on the butt is a great thing, interesting and funny. Or hug around the waist, but if you don’t want to and oppose, he will tell you that you are hysterical.”

BiH, woman interviewee

“All Marinikas¹³ should be killed, first by sniper and then by artillery’, was specifically announced the threat of rape and murder a few months ago. And then he publicly told me that I should be torn apart first, cut my hair bald, sprinkled with tar and feathers and raped, and then throw to dogs. And then his followers started calling me Joe, alluding to British delegate Joe Cox, who had been stabbed in the middle of the street the year before.”

Serbia, woman interviewee

areas of conflict are most likely to experience physical forms of violence. According to the research participants, an additional external factor in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the perception of rule of law, where public perception tends to be that most male political officials are above the law.

Physical Violence

Albania

EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure with sporadic incidents.

MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: shooting, hitting objects, hitting the table with their hands, threats of bodily injury, pushing, and squeezing.

VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: men and women in local politics, and women in less-powerful positions.

PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: society in general

MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: escalation of tensions due to conflict situations.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: the unwillingness and/or inability to talk and negotiate without physical violence.

¹³ Marinika Tepić is a prominent woman politician in Serbia. The interviewee is referring to the practice of referring to the brave woman politicians in Serbia who “dare” to stand up to those in power as “Marinikas.”

<p>Bosnia and Herzegovina</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: shooting, hitting objects, hitting the table with their hands, threats of bodily injury, pushing, squeezing, physical assault, abductions, and fighting.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: men and women in local and national politics, and women in less-powerful positions.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: members of society, including men, and women.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: escalation of tensions due to conflict situations.</p> <p>FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: the unwillingness and/or inability to talk and negotiate without physical violence.</p>
<p>Kosovo</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: Low level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: shooting, threats of bodily injury, pushing, squeezing, physical assault, and fighting.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: men and women, specifically those in less-powerful positions.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: members of society, men, some women, party activists.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: escalation of tensions due to conflict situations.</p> <p>FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: The unwillingness and/or inability to talk and negotiate without physical violence.</p>
<p>Montenegro</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure with sporadic incidents.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: shooting, pushing, squeezing, and physical assault.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: men and women who are in the presence of men.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: members of society, men, women, and party activists.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: escalation of tensions due to conflict situations.</p> <p>FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: the unwillingness and/or inability to talk and negotiate without physical violence.</p>
<p>Romania</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: low level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: shooting, beatings, threats of bodily injury, physical threats, pushing, squeezing, physical assault, and fighting.</p>

	<p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: men, women in local politics, and women in less-powerful positions.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: members of society, men, women, party activists, colleagues.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: escalation of tensions due to conflict situations.</p> <p>FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: the unwillingness and/or inability to talk and negotiate without physical violence.</p>
<p>Serbia</p>	<p>EXPOSURE LEVEL: moderate level of exposure.</p> <p>MOST COMMON ACTS OF VIOLENCE: shooting, hitting, hitting objects, hitting the table with their hands, threats of bodily injury, physical threats, pushing, squeezing, physical assault, slapping, mobile phone theft, and hair pulling.</p> <p>VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE: men and women.</p> <p>PERPETRATORS OF VIOLENCE: members of society, men, women, party activists, and colleagues.</p> <p>MOTIVE OF VIOLENCE: escalation of tensions due to conflict situations.</p> <p>FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO VIOLENCE: the unwillingness and/or inability to talk and negotiate without physical violence.</p>

Consequences of Violence Against Women in Politics

VAW-P is a significant social problem with serious consequences that affect all aspects of a woman’s life. The findings of this research indicate that VAW-P has an impact beyond its primary targets: it also seeks to send a message to society that women as a group should not participate in politics. Intimidating one woman to stop her political activities can discourage other women from engaging in politics, both undermining their rights and reinforcing women’s political exclusion more broadly. A lack of condemnation or response to VAW-P can have wide-ranging repercussions, including reinforcing hostile environments where women do not feel safe reporting violence they face. NDI’s research showed that women subjected to violence fear secondary victimization, blaming, and endangering their image of fearlessness and strength. These dynamics and impunity for perpetrators further diminishes space for adequate response to VAW-P, and few institutional or systemic avenues for recourse and support exist.

Participants described short- and long-term physical and psychological consequences of experiencing VAW-P. Health consequences mentioned by participants included headaches, sleep disorders, panic attacks, depression, anxiety, rumination,

VAW-P in the Balkans impacts women's...			
...families	...health	...political participation	...work
reduced credibility within their families family members suffer from physical and psychological ailments victimization of children, partners, and extended family divorce	headaches sleep disorders panic attacks depression anxiety rumination fear low self-esteem	accepting patterns of violent behavior political apathy leaving their political parties or their positions in political and public life	compelled to take frequent sick leave reduced work performance increased pressure passed up opportunities

fear, and low self-esteem. In terms of impact on their work, women politicians reported taking frequent sick leave, noted reduced work performance and increased pressure, and passed-up opportunities. Women reported accepting patterns of violent behavior, political apathy, and ultimately leaving their political parties or their positions in political and public life. Women also noted reduced credibility within their families; saw their family members suffer from physical and psychological ailments; witnessed the victimization of children, partners, and extended family; and experienced divorce. Within society, VAW-P directly and indirectly perpetuates the idea that politics are “men’s business” or that “women are incapable of politics.” It demotivates women who would potentially join public and political life and drives those that are currently participating away from public life entirely. Further, it is a threat to democracy and the core principles of representation and inclusion.

Recommendations – Part II

Type of Violence	Recommendations
Psychological abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that VAW and/or GBV laws provide adequate coverage of these forms of harm. • Train police and judges about these forms of harm, inc-

	<p>cluding appropriate police investigation techniques and gender-sensitive justice practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Help women leaders learn about subtle and discreet forms of harm, to recognize the signs of gaslighting and to learn to document cases to enable redress. ● Ensure that these forms of harm are codified in political party and media codes of conduct and that the measures are upheld and respected.
<p>Social media and internet-based abuse</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educate about effective counter-speech strategies, as well as other effective responses to social media-based abuse. ● Empower women leaders to document cases of online abuse. ● Enshrine the right to block abusive accounts for women in politics, based on the fact that gender-based attacks are a human rights violation and not part of freedom of speech. ● Promote good digital hygiene practices among targeted groups to reduce risk. ● Work with civil society actors to engage in collaborative bystander intervention strategies online. ● Educate political women on the new privacy and moderation standards agreed upon under the UN Generation Equality Forum pledge.
<p>Economic violence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promote gender sensitive campaign finance reform. ● Support women’s capacity to undertake autonomous political fundraising initiatives. ● Monitor and report on political parties’ respect for existing gender finance provisions. ● Highlight good practices within the region in promoting women’s access to political resources.
<p>Sexual harassment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that existing legal provisions on GBV cover GBV in political spaces and recognize that GBV in politics is an aggravating factor of harm. ● Introduce policy reform, up to and including, standalone laws and protocols covering sexual violence in politics. ● Maintain a zero-tolerance policy for sexual violence, including everything from sexual humor and stereo-

	<p>types to assault and rape within all election and political-related codes of conduct.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that law enforcement and justice actors are educated on sexual violence in politics and equipped to deal with it in an appropriate and sensitive manner. ● Ensure access to assistance and services for victims of sexual violence in politics.
Physical attacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ensure that law enforcement and justice actors are versed on the aggravated impacts of physical assaults in the political space. ● Ensure that women in politics potentially targeted with personal harm have access to security resources as needed, including for their homes and families. ● Maintain a zero-tolerance policy for any actor that promotes, encourages or engages in physical attacks or threats of attacks against political women.
Mediating harmful consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Develop and promote networks with resources for survivors of VAW-P including community support networks and self-care resources.

Conclusion

Political violence doesn't always make front page news. Treacherous forms of hidden violence against women in politics in the SEE region consistently undermine women's abilities to advance as political and public leaders. These often silent acts of violence take a physical and emotional toll on women leaders and their families. They contribute to marginalization and cycles of exclusion. These discreet yet damaging acts are expressions of patriarchal systems that undervalue women's contributions and create structural barriers to growth. While explicit misogyny is rarely a driver in these cases, pervasive stereotypes reinforce essentialist views of women that are often tied to traditional roles and gender norms. These stereotypes pigeon-hole women's identities, overlooking important complexities and creating normative expectations for women's performance in office. These essentialist norms are insidious because they can lay a foundation for backlash if and when women leaders fail to adhere to gendered expectations.

Avenues for addressing the problem of VAW-P exist across multiple fields. Legal frameworks are largely in place; however, implementation remains a challenge. This requires a concerted effort among advocates to demand equal justice. Justice actors may require sensitization. Victims often need support to know their rights and to take their cases to court. In the many instances where acts of VAW-P are not codified, different approaches are required. Much of the VAW-P in the region is rooted in cultural stereotypes and norms. Addressing these underlying factors requires deeper change, including working with the media on its depiction of women.

The experience of gender-based violence is never an isolated one. NDI's research demonstrates that the experience of VAW-P shares many similarities across the region. Recognizing these common challenges and working together in solidarity to overcome them is a critical step in achieving political gender equality.

