COFEM



Tip Sheet 2:

Addressing Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence Against Women Politicians

Key Points



TFGBV is a systemic attack on democracy

Online violence against women politicians is not a collection of isolated incidents but a coordinated and systemic tactic of networked misogyny and authoritarianism intended to silence women, undermine truth-telling, and disrupt women's participation in democratic processes.



Digital threats have real-world consequences

Recent growing incidents of offline gender-based violence have alarmingly and increasingly begun to spill over from online attacks, abuse, and harassment.



Collective action and system-based accountability can serve as political tools

Individual resilience and self-care are extremely important, but sustainable change requires radical collaboration among women's rights movements, tech platforms, states, media, and international organizations to enforce human rights frameworks, ensure accountability, and shift the cost of abuse away from women and girls.



Proactive and strategic response is non-negotiable

Effective response moves beyond countering disinformation to identifying early warnings of misinformation and disinformation, separating personal response from strategic action, and building rapid response coalitions to verify, document, and mobilize collective counter-narratives and solidarity messaging.



Feminists and international actors have researched and produced a rich body of work on women's experiences of Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence (TFGBV) in public life.[1] Although women politicians' experiences intersect with those of other women in public life, there has been less exploration of women in politics from a movement perspective. This tip sheet builds on that body of work, offering evidence-informed, movement-inspired insights and practical strategies to strengthen collective action against TFGBV targeting women politicians.

It draws on experiences shared during Shifting Narratives to Counter Anti-Gender-Based Discrimination, a session in COFEM and UN Women's Knowledge as Resistance: Learning and Dialogue Labs under the ACT to EVAWG project, alongside related empirical evidence on safeguarding women's participation in leadership, decision-making, and democratic processes.

What is the Issue?

TFGBV often involves networks of perpetrators who systematically create, share, and amplify abusive content. Using tactics such as coordinated harassment, mass reposting, and algorithmic amplification, these campaigns can escalate within hours, disproportionately targeting women in public life and limiting their ability to participate safely in public and political life.[2] TFGBV refers to acts of violence that are committed, assisted, aggravated, or amplified through information and communication technologies (ICTs) and digital platforms.[3]

Women are targeted because of unequal power relations and deeply rooted gender norms that perpetuate discrimination, control, and violence. Online violence is both a manifestation and a driver of gender inequality, limiting women's safety, autonomy, participation, and access to opportunities across all aspects of life. Women who are at the margins of multiple identities face heightened risks of violence due to the compounding effects of discrimination and structural exclusion.

[1] See, e.g., *Tipping Point study and Guidelines for monitoring online violence against female journalists.*

[2] UN Women: Press Release. Seven in ten women human rights defenders, activists and journalists report online violence. December 09, 2025. Seven in ten women human rights defenders, activists and journalists report online violence | UN Women – Headquarters

[3] United Nations Population Fund. (2025, November 26). Technology-facilitated gender-based violence: A growing threat. https://www.unfpa.org/TFGBV

Evidence reveals the severity of TFGBV:

Constrained democratic engagement

Qualitative and regional evidence indicate that TFGBV diminishes visibility for women politicians and public office holders[4], and that it can contribute to anxiety, burnout, and other mental health harms, which leads some women politicians to withdraw from political life, decline to seek re-election, or leave public office altogether.

Human cost

TFGBV has significant mental and physical health consequences for women in public leadership, including chronic stress, anxiety, depression, sleep disruption, and safety concerns that affect their professional and personal lives[5]

Structural barriers

TFGBV is more than individual harassment; it creates structural barriers to women's political participation by increasing the costs of leadership, discouraging candidacy and retention, and undermining inclusive democracy which creates structural barriers for women politicians and signals regression.[7]

High cost

A cross-sectional study across Africa – Addis Ababa, Nairobi, Kampala, Dakar and Johannesburg – that TFGBV significantly affected women politicians' safety, wellbeing, and political participation.[6]

Prevalence

Around 70% of women politicians, human rights defenders, activists, journalists, and media workers surveyed reported experiencing online violence in the course of their work indicating that TFGBV is widespread rather than an isolated phenomenon.[8]

Ai-assisted violence

Nearly 24% of women respondents in a global survey reported experiencing AI-assisted online violence, demonstrating how emerging technologies are expanding both the scale and intricacy of gender-based abuse.[9]

Spillover effects

Online violence often extends beyond digital spaces. In the same study, 41% of women surveyed in the same study reported experiencing offline attacks tied to online abuse, emphasizing the interconnected nature of digital and physical threats.[10]

The widespread nature of TFGBV and its capacity to deepen structural inequalities undermines progress made on gender equality, particularly, the perpetuation of intimidation and denigration of women's representation in democratic processes.

[4] Posetti, J., Williams, K., Hellmueller, L., Renaud, P., Shabbir, N., Aboulez, N. (2026). TIPPING POINT: Online Violence Impacts, Manifestations and Redress in the AI Age (UN Women: New York).

[5] Juanita and Herrera and Conor Lennon. Anxiety, Paranoia, Fear: The Consequences of Digital Violence Against Women. United Nations. March 12, 2025. 'Anxiety, paranoia, fear': The consequences of digital violence against women | UN News

[6] Neema Iyer, Bonnita Nayamwere and Sandra Nabulega. Alternate Realities, Alternate Internets. African Feminist Research for Feminist Internet. August 2020. https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/alternate-realities-alternate-internets-african-feminist-research-feminist-internet

[7] Chompunut Chalieobun. Thailand's evolving landscape for women's political leadership. WFD. May 12, 2026 https://www.wfd.org/commentary/thailands-evolving-landscape-womens-political-leadership

[8] Posetti, J., Hellmueller, L., Williams, K., Renaud, P., Aboulez, N., and Shabbir, N., UN Women (2025). The Chilling Escalation of Online Violence Against Women in the Public Sphere. New York. https://www.unwomen.org/en/node/608314

[9] Ibid

[10] Ibid

Why Does It Matter?

There are multiple examples around the world where women politicians either withdraw from a political race or step down from political office due to incidents of TFGBV. This experience undermines women's political participation and weakens democratic engagement. Rather than isolated incidents, TFGBV functions as a strategic tool to intimidate, discredit, and silence women in or those seeking public office. Forms of abuse vary. TFGBV, however, consistently relies on gendered tactics to delegitimize women leaders, discourage their political participation, and reinforce structural barriers to women's equal representation.

Women politicians are disproportionately targeted by attacks that exploit gendered stereotypes and social norms. These include disinformation about their personal lives, marital status, or family roles; sexualized abuse and harassment; non-consensual sharing of intimate images or AI-generated sexual content; and coordinated online campaigns that question their integrity, competence, or legitimacy as leaders. Such attacks often intensify during election periods and other politically significant moments when they can have the greatest impact on electoral outcomes and public perceptions. The severity of these attacks tend to worsen in countries with limited reporting mechanisms and limited digital safety awareness. Addressing TFGBV is therefore not only about protecting individual rights and safety but also about safeguarding democratic participation, political inclusion, and the integrity of electoral processes.

The consequences of TFGBV are well documented. It can discourage women from entering politics, pressure candidates to withdraw from elections, force elected officials to resign, reduce their public engagement, and deter them from expressing political opinions online. Beyond its impact on individual women, TFGBV undermines democratic processes by limiting political competition, reducing the diversity of voices in public decision-making, and weakening citizens' ability to choose from a representative pool of candidates. When women are driven out of politics by targeted online abuse, the quality and inclusiveness of governance diminish.

Experiences across multiple countries illustrate common patterns and show how, consistently, the same patterns emerge.

Sexual imagery is used to humiliate and expel: In the United States, Representative Katie Hill resigned from Congress in 2019 after leaked intimate images were widely circulated online. [11]`In Ireland's 2024 general election, Gráinne Seoige was targeted with AI-generated pornographic images intended to discredit her campaign,[12] Similarly, in 2024, in Rwanda, Victoire Ingabire was subjected to sexually manipulated images on X (formerly Twitter) in an apparent attempt to humiliate her and silence her public voice.[13]

Attacks on marital and family roles were used during Kenya's 2022 general election, where coordinated fake accounts on facebook spread false narratives about Helen Tullie Apigo's marital status, family life, and integrity. [14] This same tactic was also deployed in Uganda's 2021 presidential election, Nancy Kalembe faced gendered attacks questioning her marital status and fitness to lead.[15]

In addition, perpetrators also used abuse-driven withdrawal strategies. In Canada, Sandra Jansen withdrew from a political leadership race after relentless online attacks on her feminist views and support for reproductive rights.[16]

All these acts to undermine women politicians are ultimately aimed at getting them to withdraw from public life.

[11] Sarah D. Wire. Katie Hill 'I am leaving because of a misogynistic culture that gleefully consumed my naked pictures'. Los Angeles Times. October 31, 2019. https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2019-10-31/katie-hills-gives-her-final-floor-speech

[12] Harry Finnegan. Star's Hell "Biggest regret of my life", says ex-RTE star Grainne Seoige as she opens up on vile abuse during Dail run campaign. The Irish Sun. Updated November 23, 2024. https://www.thesun.ie/tv/16148535/grainne-seoige-vile-abuse-biggest-regret-general-election-decision/

[13] Association for Progressive Communication (APC). "Human rights in the digital context in Rwanda". Accessed July 08, 2026. https://www.apc.org/en/pubs/human-rights-digital-context-rwanda

[14] UN Women. Online harassment risks pushing Kenyan women out of politics. September 13, 2023. https://www.unwomen.org/en/news-stories/feature-story/2023/09/online-harassment-risks-pushing-kenyan-women-out-of-politics

[15] Collaboration on International ICT Policy for East and Southern Africa (CIPESA). Brief: Digital Threats to Women in Politics- during the Uganda 2021 election. 2021.

[16] Erika Tucker. Sandra Jasen withdraws from Alberta PC leadership race citing hostile takeover. Global News. Updated November 10, 2026

The impact of TFGBV against women in politics and those serving in public affairs extends far beyond the individual. TFGBV compromises fundamental democratic integrity and human rights by:

Undermining democratic participation and integrity

These attacks aim to silence women, suppress their engagement, and hinder democratic participation. When women face barriers to participate in public life, inclusive democratic engagement shrinks and removes guardrails against corruption and authoritarianism.[17]

Intensifying misogynistic norms and human rights violations

TFGBV violates international human rights law and strengthens misogynistic behaviors. When women politicians experience online attacks, it stifles their freedom of expression and fuels threats and abuse.[18]



Impairing effective leadership

When women leaders are forced to deal with relentless violence, their mental well-being suffers and they are burdened by emotions from online attack and may lack the will to question government's actions, laws and policies. This compromises their ability to be effective leaders.[19]

Reinforcing structural inequality

TFGBV often weaponizes gender, sexuality, and ethnicity to broaden structural, political, and leadership inequality.[20]

[17] International IDEA. Violence against women in the digital space: A growing threat to democracy. November 27, 2025. https://www.idea.int/blog/violence-against-women-digital-space-growing-threat-democracy

[18] United Nations General Assembly 79 Session. Secretary General Report. Intensification of efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls: technology-facilitated violence against women and girls. October 08, 2024. https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2024/10/intensification-of-efforts-to-eliminate-all-forms-of-violence-against-women-report-of-the-secretary-general-2024

[19] Ibid

[20] Ibid



Women Politicians' Experience and Advocacy

"I was attacked as the wife of my ex-husband, whereas the truth is I am his ex-wife but in the news it's still the wife. If you look at this story, it is misinformation, but what I realized is that this is even more systematic than I realized as my Wikipedia page was edited to include those narratives."

Kunthida Rungruengkial, a former parliamentarian from Thailand.

At the 2025 G20 Summit in South Africa, former and active women parliamentarians and political leaders described TFGBV as a pandemic - one that spreads across borders, escalates unchecked, and undermines women's political participation and advancement. They called for more urgent, multi-pronged intervention, including regulatory measures and robust legal frameworks to deter perpetrators. Women parliamentarians and senators agreed that TFGBV negatively impacts their participation in politics and limits their career advancement.

During the ACT session on *Shifting Narratives to Counter Anti-Gender-Based Discrimination*, panelists shared the strategies they have used to strategically turn personal experiences of TFGBV into political momentum:

Self-care

Emotional and physical wellbeing is fundamental to what is a long-term fight, beginning with acknowledging vulnerability and knowing one's limits.

Systematic Response

No individual politician should carry the response alone. A dedicated team or community can provide clear steps for documentation, escalation, and counter-narrative development.

Narrative Reclamation

Reconstructing one's own story and naming TFGBV as a political act exposes the structured nature of these attacks, rather than reinforcing a false narrative of personal failure.

These strategies are not theoretical. The following spotlights show how two organisations have put them into practice: Pollicy, by mobilising rapid, coordinated response during an election, and the Solidarity Alliance of Women in Politics, by building the networks that sustain women before and after the attacks come.

Spotlight

Pollicy

In 2022, a feminist collective known as Pollicy documented how women politicians were targeted in the Kenyan election through coordinated #campaigns that weaponize sexual rumors and ethnicity narratives to discredit them.

"We used rapid coordination and narrative reclamation with fact-checkers, data researchers, and women's rights organisations to rapidly document abusive content, such as screenshots, URLs, and timestamps, map coordinated behavioural patterns, counter narratives rooted in verified facts and amplify solidarity messaging across trusted networks. Simultaneously, findings were published through media outlets, prioritising the removal of harmful hashtags and accounts and the reframing of candidates' narratives".

Danai Daisy, Pollicy

Solidarity Alliance of Women in Politics

Kunthida Rungruengkial is a member of the Solidarity Alliance of Women in Politics, a political space whose work transforms women's political participation, creating a solidarity network of women in politics in Bangkok for peer-support interventions through her political party, Future Forward Party.

"The Progressive Movement Foundation in Bangkok launched a flagship program to incubate future women politicians. At the end of its first cohort, it trained and mentored 50 women politicians. Ten out of the 50 women politicians ran in Thailand's last general election. Two women MPs were produced by the initiative".

Kunthida Rungruengkail

Guiding Principles: Radical Collaboration and Shared Responsibility

Three principles underpin any effective response to TFGBV against women in public-facing roles:

1

No one fights alone. TFGBV cannot be addressed by any single person; it demands collective, coordinated accountability for what are, at their core, human rights violations.

2

Anticipate, don't just react. Attacks follow patterns, and patterns can be predicted. By preparing before the attacks come, women can define their own narratives, build robust digital safety measures, and separate personal emotional responses from public, strategic ones as Pollicy demonstrated during Kenya's 2022 general election.

3

An attack on one is an attack on all. Every attack on a woman politician assaults the credibility of all women in public life. Solidarity must therefore be rapid, transnational, and focused on defending each other's legitimacy, so that online harm never becomes the background noise of a woman's public identity.

Putting Principles into Practice

How do we co-create a digital world that protects women's rights to participate, lead, and hold public office? Action is needed at three levels:

Individual

Know why you do this work: a clear sense of purpose sustains a public presence through relentless attack. Know your limits, and build self-care and recovery into your long-term plan rather than treating them as afterthoughts.

Network

Share intelligence on emerging attacks within trusted networks, so that defence is rapid and collective rather than solitary. Build solidarity structures that nurture and mentor future women politicians, institutionalizing support before it is needed.

Structural

Maintain standing rapid-response coalitions with fact-checkers, researchers, and feminist digital-security networks who are able to document abuse, map coordinated behaviour, and release timely counter-narratives. Above all, shift the cost of abuse away from the women targeted and onto those responsible: platforms must be held legally and financially accountable for failing to prevent harm, and perpetrators for causing it.

Practical Recommendations

Practitioners and Researchers

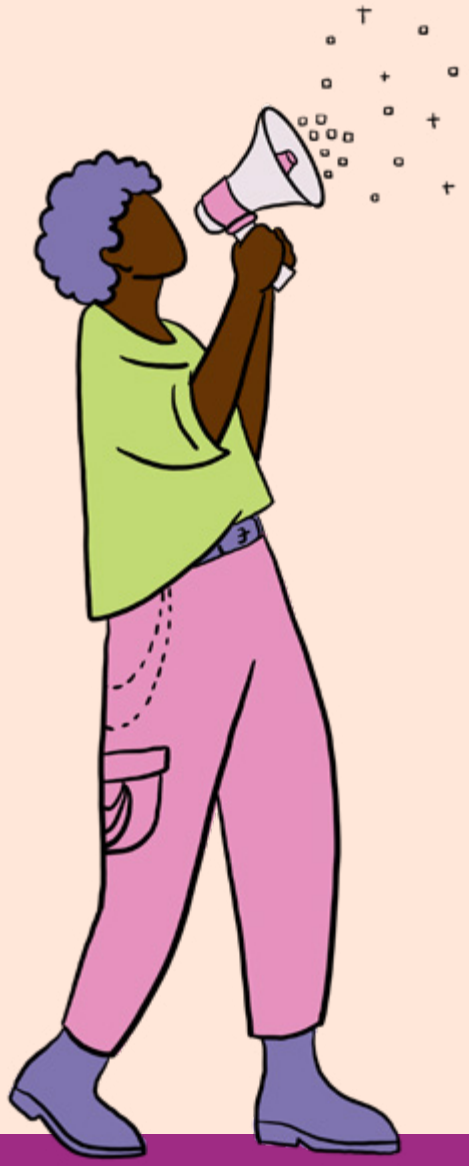
Collaborate and use emerging evidence to build a systematic rapid response, and use research to map coordinated patterns and push platforms for access to large datasets to monitor abuse.

Donors

Support women's participation in political and public life and, through technical skills development, such as training and workshops to address TFGBV, and fund the development of rapid response teams.

Policy Holders, States

Regulate the development and distribution of AI technologies designed to abuse women. Move the cost of abuse upward through regulations and not just reputational pressure.



Additional Resources

1. Becker Castellaro, Sebastian, et al. Artificial Intelligence and Information Integrity: Latin American Experiences. Policy Paper No. 34. 2025. https://www.idea.int/publications/catalogue/artificial-intelligence-and-information-integrity-latin-american-experiences

2. Repository of UN Women's work on technology-facilitated violence against women and girls. (2025). https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2025/03/repository-of-un-womens-work-on-technology-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls

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