

**ALIGN BRIEFING**

# **CHALLENGING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE**



**'In order to address the issue of violence in public life, it is crucial to 'name it' and call it what it is'**

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## Introduction

This ALIGN Briefing is a summary of discussion drawn from an expert meeting hosted by [ALIGN](#) and [ODI](#) in May 2021, entitled 'Changing harmful norms to prevent violence against women in politics and leadership: charting a forward-looking agenda'. During the Covid-19 lockdown, ODI facilitated a closed-door roundtable on Zoom with invited guests, experts and scholars from different countries to discuss their work in this space. This brief is a record of the discussion to help facilitate further thinking.

[ALIGN](#) and [ODI](#) have been exploring barriers and enablers to women's political voice and representation in various national, regional and sub-national settings. This is in light of the critical need for more research aligned with a current agenda which aims to direct attention to issues around violence and exclusion across multiple sectors (including [social movements](#), [legislatures](#) and [judiciaries](#)). This work also includes identifying and addressing discriminatory social and gender norms at the root of violence, trying to better understand the gendered experience of public life, and women's access to decision-making roles.

This ALIGN Briefing does not claim to be a comprehensive overview of all knowledge on violence against women in public life and politics. Instead it aims to represent a collection of insights and perspectives from across global time-zones and geographies. It raises questions and presents expertise from discussants at the roundtable, based on participants' current work.

Their contributions are situated in the context of current research trends, and are also examined in relation to current agendas and policy investments on women's experiences of accessing positions of leadership and decision-making in public life.

As an introduction to violence faced by women in public life, this ALIGN Briefing draws on the core messages and findings that emerged from the roundtable discussion. It highlights key learnings to date and proposes a meaningful way forward, focusing on where future research could seek to fill gaps in knowledge.

## The prevalence of violence against women in public life

There have been significant gains in enhancing women's participation in public life in recent decades. Yet, many challenges remain, including, critically, the [high levels of violence](#) (Bhan, Yore and Raj, 2020) that permeate experiences worldwide by those who are in decision-making positions, or who aspire to assume public office.

While violence against women in public life is a longstanding problem, the proliferation of online media and technology has brought with it new spaces for the perpetration of violence. Violence is enacted in all types of spaces, including many which today purport to offer equal voice to men and women. Male violence towards women is often driven by patriarchal gender and social norms which operate below the surface. This violence has widespread consequences.

Therefore, this briefing focuses in particular on the experience of violence, and its impact on two branches of office with significant decision-making powers across society: judiciaries and legislatures. How violence is perpetrated here is deeply gendered and shapes who is able to be heard within these systems. This affects how public office is experienced and exercised, with consequences for political outcomes associated with the decision-making roles of judicial and legislative office.

Violence against women in public life is widespread. While global studies are limited and do not cover all political contexts and spaces, an Inter-Parliamentary Union study (IPU, 2016) on violence against women in parliament across the globe found that:

- 81.8% of women parliamentarians had experienced psychological violence;
- 44.4% had received threats of death, rape, beatings or kidnapping; and
- 25.5% had experienced physical violence in parliaments

Evidence also suggests that levels of violence may be increasing. The Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project found that **twice as many cases of violence against women in politics** were reported during the first quarter of 2019 compared to the first quarter of 2018. This was based on data collected from across the African continent, Southeast Asia, South Asia, the Middle East, Southeastern and Eastern Europe and the Balkans (ACLED, 2020). This indicates both the severity and the urgency of the problem.

## What we know so far

### Setting the scene

To counter the violence women experience in public life, research on different ways this violence is driven, and manifests, must be explored. As a global phenomenon happening across a multitude of spaces, patterns of violence against women in public roles takes multiple forms, and varies in its effects and motives. Violence can be subtle, in the form of harmful rumours, psychological harassment, physical or sexual harassment. Or, it can be overt in the form of physical attacks, rape threats and even killings. Violence can even be internal, in that it is perpetrated by colleagues and tolerated by the reigning hierarchy within the organisation, party or state department.

Violence may also take the form of external threats directed towards particular persons. These mirror wider social norms underpinning sexist oppression and gender inequalities, which creates high levels of tolerance for male violence towards women and gender-non confirming individuals. Regardless of whether violence against women in public roles is motivated by misogyny, violence may have different effects on men and women due to gendered interpretations: women and men may have different ways of interpreting their own vulnerabilities as a public person due to socioeconomic differences between the genders and established gender norms.

On the one hand, there has been much progress to celebrate in relation to the expansion of women's political voice over recent decades. This includes both legislative change on women's representation and presence in positions of public and political office, as well as increased numbers of women in public office. Such victories have often taken place in spite of the constant threat of violence and harassment. While political space was for centuries a place reserved for men, women today are active in both social mobilisation and political office. They are activists in social movements and civil society, human rights defenders, journalists, and they hold office in public and elective roles, as decision-makers in legislatures and government, in the judicial branch at different court levels, and as peacebuilders, among many other roles.

Following the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, women's parliamentary representation around the world rose from 12% in 1997 to 25% in the late 2010s (George et al., 2020). Global numbers for women judges are hard to come by, but it is estimated that around 27% of the world's judges are women (O'Neil and Domingo, 2015). Alongside this, attitudes towards women's leadership are also shifting. According to World Values Surveys, in the mid-1990s, 50% of the world's population agreed with the statement that 'men make better leaders' – a figure which has today dropped to 35% (George et al., 2020).

On the other hand, many challenges remain regarding women's access to, and experience of, public life and political office, and violence remains at the very heart of the problem. Despite important advances, both real and virtual spaces of politics and public life are still far from being gender equal. Experiences of gendered violence, harassment and brutality remain common among women in public roles, and this in turn increasingly discourages many women from pursuing such careers, even though the formal barriers to their participation have been reduced (ibid.).

## The many faces of violence against women in public life

**Violence against women in public roles can expose gendered or misogynistic attitudes and behaviours, based on a belief that political space belongs to men.**

It is useful to recognise two related phenomena: violence in politics (which affects both men and women, can be identity-based, and is driven by political and ideological objectives) and violence against women in politics (which is in addition to what men may experience, gender-based, driven by patriarchal attitudes, and specifically targets women).

Violence against women in public roles often exposes gendered or misogynistic attitudes and behaviours, based on a belief that political space belongs to men. It underpins the idea that women who defy gender norms by taking action in this space should be penalised. This form of violence targets women specifically because of their gender, punishing them when they push against the status-quo by taking up roles in decision-making and/or other 'untraditional' roles (Albaine, 2014, Krook, 2017; Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2019; Krook, 2020).

In other cases, both women and men may experience politically motivated violence, but the motive, impact and form of violence might be more or less gendered (Bjarnegård, 2018; Bardall et al., 2020). This is particularly the case in contexts with high levels of state fragility, where impunity is widespread and violence is routinised. In these contexts, female decision-makers may be affected by violence without this necessarily being motivated by misogyny (Piscopo, 2016).

The roundtable participants stressed that, in order to address the issue of violence in politicised spaces, it is crucial to 'name it' and call it what it is. That means recognising its distinct features and challenges. There is consensus in the literature on the need for a comprehensive definition of gender-based violence in public life. This is necessary to grasp the full scope of threats, risks and hostilities facing women in decision-making positions.

For instance, Krook (2020) identifies five forms violence against women in politics can take:

1. Physical violence (bodily harm, including killings, beatings and involuntary confinement)
2. Psychological violence (threats and psychological harassment, online or in person)
3. Sexual violence (sexual acts and attempted sexual acts by coercion, including sexual assault or harassment)
4. Economic violence (for instance, controlling economic resources or destroying property)
5. Semiotic violence (words, images or body language aimed to injure, discipline or subjugate, for instance sexualised images)

An expanding literature on violence against women in public roles has focused on the political sphere. Violence can be used by political opponents to keep women from running for elections as political candidates (*ibid.*). Political parties themselves – due to their traditionally elite male power structure and women’s lower status within them – may even allow and enable violence to take place against their female members (*ibid.*).

There is less systematic knowledge about violence against women judges. There have been misogynistic verbal attacks on women judges in the US, and unwarranted charges of misconduct, particularly against women judges who reach ‘feminist’ decisions in highly publicised cases (Kenney, 2012). Reports on violence against women human rights defenders, which sometimes includes judges, also find that those working on women’s rights and sexual rights are particularly at risk of violence (APWLD, 2007; Forst, 2019).

The hierarchical and traditionally male-dominated structure of the judiciary also provides fertile ground for violence against women judges, in the form of negative workplace behaviour (Gertner, 2018). Research finds that women working in male-dominated environments are more likely to be stereotyped and mistreated (Kanter, 1977). Moreover, courts are often isolated and decentralised workplaces where it is easy to take advantage of asymmetric power dynamics with little risk that such behaviour will be held to account. This may help explain why violent acts, such as sexual harassment, are widespread in many judiciaries (Impunity Watch, 2017; Litman and Shah, 2020).

Findings from the ongoing Chr. Michelsen Institute/ODI project *Women on the Bench: The Role of Female Judges in Fragile States* suggest that violence against women judges is very much a reality (Domingo et al., forthcoming). Researchers working with women judges in Haiti, for example, have identified that sexual violence is very prominent in judiciaries, which is probably linked to the ‘very hierarchical nature of the courts’ and the important roles of (usually) male gatekeepers in hindering or enabling women’s progression within these systems.

For example, male gatekeepers may insist that women perform sexual favours before promoting them, or they may make use of other subtler forms of male violence, such as sexual harassment or sextortion, which can discourage women from seeking judicial positions as well as hinder them from progressing within justice systems (Tørraasen, forthcoming).

## Understanding the drivers of violence

Women who enter traditionally male decision-making spheres are often regarded as interlopers or outsiders. This sometimes gives rise to various forms of hostility towards female leaders (Puwar, 2004), as they are seen to be violating appropriate gender norms (Eagly and Karau, 2002, Sanbonamatsu 2008). Some also suggest that violence can be part of conservative backlashes, which often occur when women are seen to be moving in increasing numbers 'too far, too fast' into male-dominated decision-making spheres (Mansbridge and Shames, 2008).

**Impunity makes violence against women a viable tactic for keeping women out of public roles.**

There is a need to understand the role masculinities play in shaping politics, also in relation to institutional and normative frameworks (such as elections, political party configuration, media coverage and political processes). This can link to ongoing learning on changing or transforming harmful masculinities such as the work of [Promundo](#) (see Fried, Lauro and Barker, 2020), with agendas to end violence against women in politics. It is also critical to understand the role(s) that male champions can play in promoting these transformative agendas, to amplify their effectiveness in changing harmful gender norms, preventing and protecting against violence, and elevating women's political voice.

Violence against women in public roles (as in any roles) is largely met with impunity, and much more robust systems are needed to adequately address violence and proactively prevent it. This includes investment in institutional change that enables women's voice in calling this violence out, and effective mechanisms of accountability and to end impunity. According to former United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon (quoted in McCulloch et al., 2019):

**Impunity for violence against women compounds the effects of such violence as a mechanism of control. When the State fails to hold perpetrators accountable, impunity not only intensifies the subordination and powerlessness of the targets of violence, but also sends a message to society that male violence against women is both acceptable and inevitable.**

Impunity makes violence against women a viable tactic for keeping women out of public roles. It poses additional barriers to women's participation and often takes hidden forms (IFES, n.d.). Addressing this through effective policies and sanction-based enforcement is critical to enabling an inclusive political space. The absence of safe spaces for whistleblowing in relation to incidents of violence, both internal and external to political spheres, is often a core issue.

In countries where there are formal laws to criminalise violence against women in politics, these still need to be backed up by adequate enforcement and implementation. This means that formal rules and procedures must be integrated into wider institutional mechanisms to enable effective and appropriate actions, including, ultimately, the prosecution for perpetrators.

Understanding what drives these diverse and devastating manifestations of violence is central to forming prevention and protection responses. The sometimes invisible nature of the drivers of violence makes this a challenge. Such drivers include harmful gender and social norms, and embedded exclusionary practices in decision-making arenas. Harmful gender and social norms can either directly normalise gendered violence (such as in contexts where verbal abuse or sexual targeting of women in public life are seen as expected or normal), or shape unequal social spaces, through 'meta-norm' views such as 'men make better leaders' or 'women should work primarily in the home' (George et al., 2020; Harper et al., 2020).

While there is an expanding agenda of programming to address harmful social and gender norms and violence against women in general. For example, the UK's DFID-funded [What Works to Prevent Violence Against Women Program](#), UNICEF's [Communities Care](#) initiative, and the global [Prevention Collaborative](#), among others. This work is primarily focused on interpersonal and intimate partner violence. Yet, more work is needed to apply learning and methodologies from this area to the gendered dynamics by which women access positions in public office, and political decision-making roles.

### Box 1: Violence in political life: women and gender norms in Nepal's parliament

[ALIGN's micro-granting facility](#) funds innovative research to respond to knowledge gaps and generate new learning on gender norms, most recently through a series of grants to support understanding violence in the workplace. Through these funds, [YUWA](#) was supported in 2020 to produce survey [research on gender norms the experiences of violence among female parliamentarians in Nepal](#).

As a youth-run and youth-led organisation, YUWA translates as 'youth' in the Nepali language. Their work promotes youth participation through empowerment and advocacy. YUWA were concerned with the statistic that women still account for only one-third of parliamentarians in Nepal, and about concerns that women's inclusion in parliament in Nepal has been largely limited to their representation rather than meaningful involvement in major decision-making processes.

To understand more about what was holding women back in politics, YUWA launched an exploration into the types of violence directed towards women parliamentarians, as well as the gender norms that sustain prevailing power imbalances, and the hostility or discrimination that women politicians in Nepal experience.

The key findings of their study include:

- Women representatives in Nepal's parliament report high levels of emotional and verbal gender-based violence. Respondents felt that there needed to be expanded opportunities for reporting for this form of violence, as existing channels are limited to reporting only physical violence.
- Women parliamentarians who were interviewed in the study reported that Nepali media tends to prioritise the views of male parliamentarians on key social and political matters while the views of female parliamentarians on these issues are rarely sought or respected. This leads to a political space which feels unequal and at times unsafe.
- Patriarchal social attitudes and unequal gender norms, which can shape heightened family expectations for women around their roles as daughters, daughters-in-law or mothers, which respondents identified as major challenges to the safe exercise of political voice as a legislator in Nepal. These norms shape a context where violence in the form of verbal or emotional abuse is sometimes expected or seen as the 'norm,' and working to transform these social norms is critical to enable a safer and more inclusive political space.

## Working for change at different levels

To effectively address violence against women in public life, action is needed at different levels and among different actors.

### The role and limitations of legislation

Legislation has a critical role to play in addressing violence against women in public life, by placing sanctions on perpetrators and thereby deterring violence from occurring. However, legislation alone will not end violence – its effectiveness depends on adequate resourcing and implementation, wider society-level and norm-based changes and other supportive factors (Elman, 2013; Brechenmacher, 2017; Klugman, 2017).

This includes a need for existing laws and policies to go further in ensuring adequate mechanisms are in place to protect persons who report abuse from reprisals, as has been identified necessary to strengthen Law 243 in Peru (Brechenmacher, 2017). There is also a need to work with political parties and institutions to strengthen mechanisms to address issues such as intimidation, bullying and other forms of violence (Westminster Foundation for Democracy, 2018).

National and international women's movements have played a critical role in calling for international and regional agreements and conventions to highlight these issues, and in calling on governments to commit to addressing them. Complementary laws around violence against women, as well as specific laws and conventions to address violence against women in politics, can work together to support agendas in this space. The roundtable experts stressed the need for more research to understand and strengthen the critical link between women's grassroots mobilisation and programming which supports women's voices and works to reduce violence in public life through civic action.

A number of legal reforms to address violence against women, including violence against women in politics and public life in particular, have been achieved, often driven by women's mobilisation. Key examples include:

- The United Nations General Assembly's Resolution 73/148 17 on the Intensification of Efforts to Prevent and Eliminate All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls (December 2018) includes a clause stating: it is 'deeply concerned about all acts of violence, including sexual harassment against women and girls involved in political and public life, including women in leadership positions, journalists and other media workers and human rights defenders.'
- Bolivia's Law 243 Contra el Acoso y Violencia Política Hacia las Mujeres (Law Against Harassment and Political Violence Towards Women, May 2012), was the first law to explicitly legislate against violence towards women in politics.
- The Inter-American Model Law on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women in Political Life (Belém do Pará Convention), which was the first international treaty to enshrine a right to a life free from violence for women with a focus on the public sphere, adopted in 1994 and ratified by most members of the Organization of American States.
- Participants also highlighted that legislative proposals are underway to tackle violence against women in public life in many contexts around the world, including in Ecuador, Peru, Costa Rica, and Mexico.



Complementary violence against women frameworks which have been connected to and supported these initiatives include:

- The Inter-American Covenant on Violence Against Women (1994)
- 15 countries with legislation on femicide: in Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, and Peru, femicide (men's murder of women) is codified as its own crime, and in Argentina and Venezuela the crime is considered aggravated homicide.

A combination of formal leadership – of feminist actors, both male and female – to help call for and enact these changes through legal systems, and to enforce them through justice systems, and the work of civic movements and actors, has helped to create and sustain the changes needed to advance these agendas and make legal change and their enforcement a reality.

## Civil society influence

Civil society actors are central to supporting change. For example, as well as influencing the public discourse and initiating policy discussions such as on violence against women, they play a crucial role in creating spaces of support for survivors with resources to report their experiences and find redress. These spaces can be critical in forming links between formal legal institutions (which may criminalise violence) and the lived realities of women who lack spaces for reporting. They create an environment where they can call out injustices and seek advice about their rights. A hotline in Kenya, for instance, was critical to helping connect women in public life to legal help and support from the police (Krook, 2020).

Leveraging the power of research, advocacy and support can also be important for tackling multiple drivers of violence in politics. In the US, the private foundation [Barbara Lee Family](#) foundation was cited as an example of an organisation which works across political research and builds strategic partnerships. Another axis of their work includes offering grants and endowments to support activism which focuses on combatting barriers to women's political voice, including addressing pervasive political sexism and violence.

The roundtable participants also discussed the importance of exploring the differences, trade-offs, and complementarities between actions in this space. For example, those which are reactive versus those that are proactive, as well as the relationships between prevention and protection.

Historically, gains in advancing women's representation, including formal access to political and public life, has involved strategic action by women's groups and feminist activism. In addition to feminist social movement mobilisation (Rodriguez, et al., 2021), investing political capital in cultivating strategic alliances with champions in formal politics and decision-making roles has further contributed to advancing and consolidating institutional and political reform.

## Feminist movements and women's mobilisation

Feminist movements are arguably the most important factor in bringing about progressive gender norm change (ibid.). Not just in changing laws and policies to support women, but also in catalysing wider transformations across society. Feminist movements have a key role in advancing gender equality and justice, encompassing women's rights and the gendered violence women face. Feminist activism has been a key channel for women's leadership to shape social and political outcomes. Firstly, by driving change in policy, as well as legal and institutional reform – which is clear in relation to the enactment

of laws prohibiting violence against women (Weldon and Htun, 2013; Htun and Weldon 2018). Women's movements in the 1970s, for example, helped bring about a wave of gender equality laws, including laws to prevent and protect against violence towards women in the late 1980s and 1990s, such as the 1994 Belen Inter-American Covenant on Violence Against Women (Molyneux, 2003).

We also know there are major challenges in terms of the implementation of laws. Under-resourcing continues to be a challenge; to advance this agenda, more resources are needed to fund gender training of the police and the judiciary, as well as to provide more support for civil society organisations and women's movements. In Latin America there is a wave of ongoing action in this space, sparked, for instance, by the #NiUnaMenos (Not One [Woman] Less) movement and other global campaigns against gender-based violence. For example, the Chilean feminist group *Las Tesis*, created a performance called *Un Violador en tu Camino* (*A Rapist in Your Path*). This sparked a viral social media phenomenon with women creating their own versions of the intervention across the globe – including by feminists in India, the Philippines, Colombia, Mexico, Canada, France, Turkey and elsewhere. This wave of feminist activism is garnering media coverage, with activists' use of online technology bringing both benefits as well as new challenges, such as online violence and issues related to access and privacy.

At the same time, we also know that there is a time lag between legal reform and social norm change. Progress in implementation cannot be taken for granted, and political histories are littered with experiences of progressive legal and constitutional frameworks on gender equality and GBV, but ineffective realisation of these legal gains. Here, the terms and nature of the underlying political settlement, and how it may contribute to sustaining gender discriminatory gendered norms and practices and related high levels of tolerance for violence against women in public life is important (Nazneen and Sultan, 2014; O'Neil, 2016). At the same time, women and feminist leaders both in political office and public life, as well as in civil society, have contributed to advancing implementation, including through occupying decision-making roles. This is the case of Justice Ruth Ginsburg – the second woman to sit on the bench of the US Supreme Court.

### Box 2 Standing up in the aftermath of the killing of Marielle Franco

In Brazil, Marielle Franco, who was a well-known councilwoman in Rio de Janeiro and a feminist and human rights activist, was assassinated along with her driver Anderson Gomes on 14 March 2018.

Marielle was a black, bisexual and working-class city councillor and sociologist from Maré (one of Rio de Janeiro's northern favelas). She was murdered as she left Casa das Pretas – a downtown community space where Marielle had participated in an evening debate series: Young Black Women Moving Structures.

Marielle's killing galvanised global feminist solidarity around human rights and democracy, sparking protests both in Brazil as well as other countries like Argentina and Chile. It also catalysed action among those working to address violence against women in public life.

The killing was [seen as a motivating factor](#) in the political careers of several black women in Brazil, three of whom were elected to the Rio de Janeiro state legislative assembly in March 2019. These women stood for office and were elected in the face of (and in spite of) many barriers which stand at the intersection of racial and gender norms, putting women at greater risk of violence as so clearly manifested in Franco's assassination.

Today, there exist a number of vibrant movements to address gendered violence against women in public life. There is great potential to expand these efforts, and [#ShePersisted](#) is a social movement which takes the initiative by aiming to leverage social media – in particular to expose and address gendered disinformation and online violence against women in politics.

The movement takes a three-pronged strategy of: increasing understanding on this issue; supporting women leaders who are targets; and influencing conversations about social media standards (with a focus on the US and the UK/Europe). This includes the critical work of addressing the legal and regulatory landscape around how social media and gender norms intersect to proliferate online violence, which is an emerging area for research (ALIGN, forthcoming; and Diepeveen, forthcoming). This work to understand the online context and support women in politics could be further expanded on the global scale.

Female leaders, such as the First Lady of Namibia Monica Geingos, also have played an important role in galvanizing movements to specifically address the experiences of violence which women in public life can face. In March 2021 on International Women’s Day, Geingos shared a video revealing the online abuse she has faced, galvanizing supporters from around the world to expose and speak out against rampant online trolling and ‘slut shaming.’

Feminist activists, movements and leaders can play an important role in contributing to shifts in social conversations and norms to support female leaders’ safety. Still, the roundtable participants raised concerns that feminist actors themselves are sometimes nudged out of programming which aims to support women’s political voice. Within the international donor environment of development assistance, the need for greater attention on the power and voice of actors on the ground who experience and respond to violence was highlighted. Rather than assuming what women need, greater interdisciplinary solutions among policy and programming actors could do more to support women’s groups on a range of levels.

There is also a balance between online and offline activism to understand. In the case of ‘pan-African feminism and wider global feminist solidarity,’ Jessica Horn has highlighted the [importance of in-person connection](#), stressing:

**Ideally, if there are ways to physically and virtually meet one another to talk and to spend some time with one another, that is important. In any struggle, you have to spend time with people because that is how you understand who they are.**

Participants in the roundtable also emphasised the need for more learning and work on the links between women’s movements and formal politics. Particularly, the critical need for building strategic coalitions across civic space and formal politics to create and sustain change.

## The role(s) of political parties

Understanding the particular role(s) that political parties have in shaping and structuring the political environment, and sometimes reflecting or entrenching harmful norms which uphold violence, is central to addressing this violence. However, roundtable participants highlighted that minimal evidence and programming focuses on this area.

## Looking forward: suggestions for future research

Many gaps remain in understanding and addressing violence against women in public life. There is a critical need for greater attention to and work on ensuring that reform agendas are responsive to context specific conditions, in efforts to address violence against women in politics. This includes work to respond to context specific manifestations of harmful norms which are often the root cause of violence, and to work with political change opportunities as they exist in practice. This includes the need to look closely at particular political settings, including the dynamics of online abuse, misinformation and other factors that can shape particular political contexts and drive specific forms of violence.

**Masculinities and addressing the role of men remain critical issues and must be high on the agenda for future work supporting change in this area**

Masculinities and addressing the role of men remain critical issues and must be high on the agenda for future work supporting change in this area. There is also a need for work which looks across a range of other public roles in public life, including within the police, civil services, media, local governments and other spaces, to explore where women's experiences of violence in public life are cross-cutting as well as where they are distinct.

Also critical is the need for more research and data collection to better understand how intersectionality and different forms of vulnerability and marginalisation impact on prospects for reform. Women in decision making roles may not be gender equality champions, and their political loyalties may lie with other political agendas. Essentialist views about women in public office, which assume they share common views and common experiences need to be critically reviewed, in order to ensure that the complexities of intersecting, and their socio-political impact, are fully understood. Elite experiences are often very different from those of women in marginalised socioeconomic, ethnic, sexual or other groups. Efforts to achieve a truly safe and equal political space for all women must better identify, understand and address these experiences. This must include targeted actions to elevate the leadership of the most marginalised women.

**Efforts to achieve a truly safe and equal political space for all... must include targeted actions to elevate the leadership of the most marginalised women**

In all of this work, silos must be broken down in order to enable more collaboration across different areas of policy and programming, disciplinary work, methodologies and learning.

The current landscape of work on inclusive governance, democratisation (including work on state fragility and elections), supporting social justice movements and transforming harmful gender norms (and other related areas) could be better bridged to enhance learning. More work would also be welcome which makes connections between experiences and solutions at different scales – such as the community, local, national, regional and international levels.

# Appendix: Partial list of participants

The table below lists those participants who in May 2021 attended the ODI Roundtable: Changing harmful norms to prevent violence against women in politics and leadership: charting a forward-looking agenda and agreed to include their names in this ALIGN Briefing.

Name	Job title and affiliation	Country of residence
Grace Bantebya Kyomuhendo	Professor, School of Women and Gender Studies, Makerere university	Uganda
Paola Bergallo	Law Professor, la Universidad Torcuato Di Tella	Argentina
Nandita Bhan	Senior Research Scientist, Center on Gender Equity and Health, UC San Diego	India / USA
Elin Bjarnegård	Senior Lecturer/Associate Professor, Department of Government, Uppsala University	Sweden
Saskia Brechenmacher	Research Fellow, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and PhD Candidate, University of Cambridge	Germany / USA
Sofia Collignon	Lecturer in Political Communication, Department of Politics and International Relations, Royal Holloway, University of London	UK
Pilar Domingo	Senior Research Fellow, ODI	UK
Sophia Fernandes	Senior Adviser - Political Inclusion, Westminster Foundation for Democracy	UK
Rachel George	Senior Research Officer, ALIGN/ODI	USA
Caroline Harper	Principal Research Fellow and Head of the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Programme at ODI/ALIGN Project Director	UK
Rachel Marcus	Senior Technical Advisor, ALIGN/ODI	UK
Maxine Molyneux	Professor of Sociology, Institute of the Americas, University College London	UK
Sohela Nazneen	Fellow, Governance Cluster, Institute of Development Studies (IDS)	Bangladesh / UK
Jennifer M. Piscopo	Associate Professor of Politics and Director of the Center for Research and Scholarship, Occidental College	USA
Anita Raj	Professor and Center Director, Center on Gender Equity and Health, University of California San Diego	USA
Samin Rijal	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Officer, YUWA	Nepal
Elin Skaar	Research Professor, Chr. Michelsen Institute	Norway
Marianne Tøraasen	Doctoral Researcher, Chr. Michaelson Institute	Norway
Georgina Waylen	Professor, Department of Politics, School of Social Sciences, University of Manchester	UK

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**About ALIGN**

ALIGN is a digital platform and programme of work that is creating a global community of researchers and thought leaders, all committed to gender justice and equality. It provides new research, insights from practice, and grants for initiatives that increase our understanding of – and work to change – discriminatory gender norms. Through its vibrant and growing digital platform, and its events and activities, ALIGN aims to ensure that the best of available knowledge and resources have a growing impact on harmful gender norms.

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