Transform Digital Spaces Program

DIGITAL THREATS AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION LANDSCAPE ASSESSMENT METHODOLOGY

DEEPENING CONTEXTUAL UNDERSTANDING OF TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE TARGETING WOMEN IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC LIFE

SEPTEMBER 2024

Transform Digital Threats and Public Participation Landscape Assessment Methodology

The Transform Digital Threats and Public Participation Landscape Assessment Methodology reflects the collaboration and contribution of many people and organizations engaged in preventing, responding to, and mitigating Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence. All sources have been cited. Contributors of individuals remain unnamed here for their confidentiality and safety.

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CSO	Civil Society Organization
GESI	Gender Equity and Social Inclusion
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
KII	Key Informant Interview
LGBTQI+	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex Asexual and other
TFGBV	Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence
UN	United Nations
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VAWPP	Violence Against Women in Politics and Public Life
WHRDs	Women Human Rights Defenders

INTRODUCTION

Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV) is a global threat to health, safety, and political and economic wellbeing—not just to those who experience it, but to society as a whole. Indeed, the 67th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (2023) highlighted the deep impact of technological change on the empowerment of all women and girls and the ability to achieve gender equality.[1] Nearly 40% of women globally have experienced TFGBV,[2] with research highlighting certain groups of women that are at higher risk of attack, including women in politics, women journalists, women human rights defenders, and women in other public facing roles.[3] This assessment centers women in politics and public life,[4] and the nuanced ways TFGBV threatens and impacts them. TFGBV is an increasingly prominent form of violence against women in politics and public life (VAWPP), which is defined as an "act, or threat, of physical, sexual or psychological violence that prevents women from exercising and realizing their political rights and a range of human rights."[5]

Much like other forms of gender-based violence (GBV), there is clear data to indicate that TFGBV is a universal problem[6] that affects women in all their diversity regardless of socioeconomic class, educational status, religious affiliation, or other social identities.[7] TFGBV reinforces gendered stereotypes and rigid patriarchal social norms and harms the well-being of those who experience as well as witness it. TFGBV also exacerbates other forms of harm directed at women, girls and LGBTQIA+ persons based on racialized ethnicities, caste, [dis]ability and other intersecting identities. However, TFGBV is uniquely able to amplify and persist in perpetrating harm against women and gender diverse individuals with highly visible online presence due to their occupation or activism, resulting in the systematic silencing of women in public spaces such as politics, journalism, and civic activism—a phenomena known informally as the "chilling effect."[8]

In the *2023 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy*,[9] USAID noted the impact of TFGBV:

Women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals disproportionately face online threats and harassment. TFGBV is carried out using the internet or information and communication technologies by one or more people to harm others based on their actual or perceived sex or gender identity. This can include, but is not limited to, online harassment, cyberstalking, child sexual exploitation and abuse, online gendered disinformation and misinformation, and nonconsensual image-based abuse. In addition to causing harm, TFGBV can discourage women, girls, and gender-diverse persons from engaging in the digital ecosystem.

1.   UN Women. Commission on the Status of Women. (2023). **https://www.unwomen.org/en/csw/csw67-2023**.

2.   UN Report (2021). *Technology-facilitated Gender-based Violence: Making All Spaces Safe.* **https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA-TFGBV-Making%20All%20Spaces%20Safe.pdf**.

3.   Ibid.

4.   The term women in politics and public life includes women who are directly involved in politics (e.g., member of parliament, candidates, cabinet members), as well as activists, human rights defenders, and journalists. Additional categories of women (e.g., teachers) may be included in some contexts where those roles are politicized.

5.   UN Women. (2021). *Guidance Note: Preventing Violence Against Women in Politics.* **https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2021/Guidance-note-Preventing-violence-against-women-in-politics-en.pdf**.

6.   The Economist Intelligence Unit. (2021). *Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women.* **https://onlineviolencewomen.eiu.com/**.

7.   German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ). 2022. *The influence of gender-based online violence on political and societal participation of women and girls.* **https://gender-works.giz.de/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/GIZ_2022_EN_Briefing-Paper_The-influence-of-GBOV-on-political-and-societal-participation-of-women-and-girls.pdf**.

8.   National Democratic Institute. (2019). *Tweets That Chill: Analyzing Online Violence Against Women in Politics.* **https://www.ndi.org/tweets-that-chill**.

9.   U.S. Agency for International Development. *(2023). 2023 Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Policy | Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment.* **https://www.usaid.gov/gender-policy**.

Seeing the need for a common assessment methodology that could inform cross-national comparison as well as context-specific interventions for TFGBV targeting women in politics, women activists, women human rights defenders, and women journalists, the Transform Digital Spaces (Transform)[10] project devised an assessment methodology and piloted it in Georgia, Guatemala, and Kenya. Transform is a three-year, three-country pilot effort to effectively redress the impact of TFGBV on women in politics and public life. Deep country-specific assessments of TFGBV improve program implementation by highlighting particular needs and identifying challenges and opportunities in these disparate contexts.

UNDERSTANDING TFGBV AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC LIFE

TFGBV is a form of VAWPP that plays out in public digital spaces.

Mona Lena Krook synthesized multiple international normative definitions of Violence Against Women in Politics as incorporating three common elements: "The problem is one of: 1) aggressive acts aimed largely or solely at women in politics; 2) because they are women, often using gendered means of attack; and 3) with the goal of deterring their participation in order to preserve traditional gender roles and undermine democratic institutions."[11] Although this work originated focusing on women in politics, women in other areas of public life are similarly attacked. A significant hallmark of VAWPP is that it happens in public with negative consequences for the entire society and women and girls who may be considering participation in politics and public life, in addition to the individual target of the attacks. VAWPP restricts the policy space as well. The women politicians, journalists, and activists who are attacked are frequently targeted because they voice support for opposition positions, often gendered policy issues; studies indicate that those women often limit their public advocacy and discussion of those issues as a result of experiencing attacks.[12]

This assessment methodology focuses on the targeting of women political and public actors and views TFGBV as a form of VAWPP. The lack of a commonly accepted definition of TFGBV, especially as it impacts women in politics and

public life, has posed a barrier to effectively building a common base of knowledge.[13] However, there is agreement on common components. A 2021 United Nations (UN) report defined TFGBV as "an act of violence perpetrated by one or more individuals that is committed, assisted, aggravated and amplified in part or fully by the use of information and communication technologies or digital media, against a person [or group of persons] on the basis of their gender."[14] TFGBV encompasses—but is not limited to—actions such as stalking, bullying, sexual harassment, defamation, hate speech and exploitation. Additionally, TFGBV can include publishing someone's personal information (doxing), impersonation, and online disinformation and misinformation that frequently appeals to misogynistic cultural tropes. TFGBV can also lead to offline forms of GBV including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm.[15]

The UN definition, like the USAID quotation in the introduction, takes a broad view of TFGBV, and does not emphasize the specific characteristics of TFGBV as applied to the democratic context, including its impact on women's, half of the population, ability to participate in politics and public life without fear of reprisal. In assessing TFGBV, it is important to make a distinction between forms of TFGBV characteristic of intimate partner violence and domestic violence, such as abuse and coercion perpetrated by partners and relatives through proximity to the survivor (e.g. shared data plans and devices), and forms of TFGBV characteristic of anti-democratic forces, such as abuse and harassment of women candidates,

11.   Krook, Mona Lena. 2017. "Violence Against Women in Politics." Journal of Democracy. Vol 28, No. 1. 74-88. At 78.

12.   UNESCO (2021). *The Chilling: global trends in online violence against women*. **https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000377223**; "Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians", Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2016. **https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/issue-briefs/2016-10/sexism-harassment-and-violence-againstwomen-parliamentarians**.

13.   The Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse. 2023. *Technology-Facilitated Gender-Based Violence Preliminary Landscape Analysis*. **https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/technology-facilitated-gender-based-violence-preliminary-landscape-analysis**.

14.   UN Report (2021). *Technology-facilitated Gender-based Violence: Making All Spaces Safe*. **https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/UNFPA-TFGBV-Making%20All%20Spaces%20Safe.pdf**.

15.   Ibid.

voters, activists, and journalists. Violence against women in politics and public life can be perpetrated by the state, political opponents, strangers, trolls and bots using social media to silence, intimidate and drive women and gender diverse leaders out of public civic spaces (e.g. smear campaigns, threats, doxing and gendered disinformation). While there are some tactics common to both, the goals and patterns of perpetration differ. Both authoritarian and non-authoritarian political actors may leverage gender norms and use TFGBV to silence opposition and to control political and electoral outcomes. While TFGBV typically targets specific women in politics, its impact is both deeper and broader, including stifling consideration notably of policy matters related to gender.

TFGBV is a multifaceted problem.

Assessing the factors that enable perpetrators of TFGBV against women in politics and public life to operate and evade accountability requires incorporating information about the technological environment as well as the social, political, and legal context. This assessment framework is thus guided by a review of other assessment methodologies focused on Gender and Social Inclusion (GESI), women in politics and public life, VAWPP, and assessments of the digital divide and participation of women in the technology sector, including civic tech and digital democracy organizations. This assessment methodology also investigates key political and security context factors that may increase the risk of TFGBV against women participating in the public sphere.
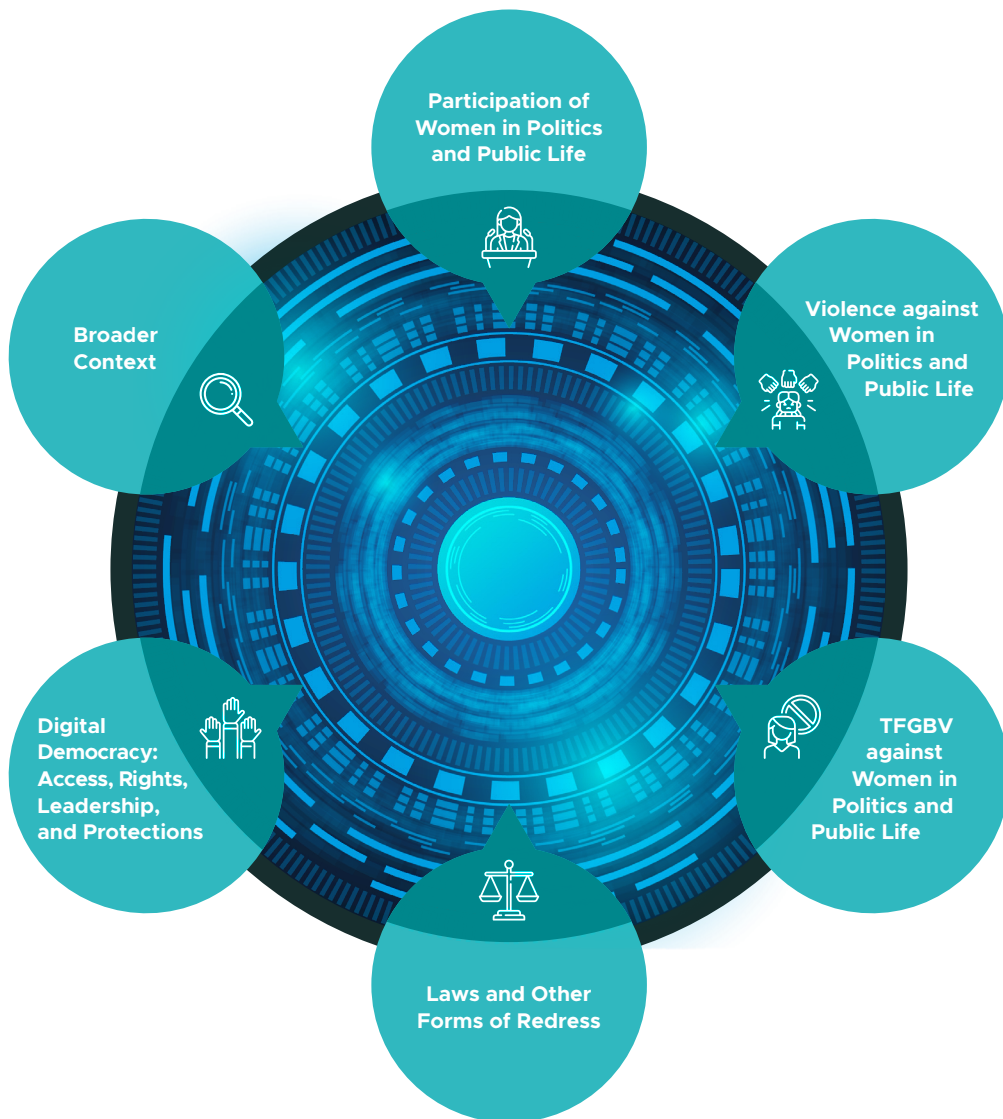
Importantly, this assessment methodology situates TFGBV against women in public life within broad concerns relating to democracy and civic participation, economic development, and the use of digital technologies. TFGBV is not just a "gender problem," but a human problem that has consequences for whole societies with impacts on human rights, democracy, economic opportunity, and health. More can and should be done to integrate TFGBV research and programing throughout development activities; this methodology contributes to that effort.

A thorough assessment should inform strategies and programming to counter TFGBV. Notably, a TFGBV assessment will identify relevant stakeholders and reveal patterns in how, where, and against whom TFGBV is commonly perpetrated in that context. That evidence informs decisions to focus programming on the most common or the most acutely damaging forms of TFGBV, and with which communities or stakeholders to engage in targeted outreach and interventions. The TFGBV assessment will also reveal opportunities and barriers to different approaches, such as the relative openness of the operating environment for Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Information about the reach of different technologies and platforms will guide decisions about which platforms to use for awareness raising, for example, or about what kinds of digital tools or other innovations would best serve women in politics and public life who have greater and lesser access to cell phone data connectivity, high speed internet and their own digital devices.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

TFGBV is a problem whose redress requires the efforts and commitment of people and organizations across society and should not be considered a problem only for the people, primarily women, who are targeted by it. As such, this assessment methodology includes information about digital democracy, government responses to TFGBV including legal mechanisms, the extent of women's civic and political participation, the extent of violence against women in politics in both online and offline settings, and key contextual factors such as incidence and redress of GBV more broadly, identification of groups who are especially vulnerable to intersecting oppression, and recent conflicts. The graphic below represents the primary domains of inquiry that guide this assessment methodology.

These domains structure the assessment and inform different kinds of opportunities and barriers for activities to counter TFGBV. The VAWPP domain sheds light on who experiences this violence, who perpetrates it, and how it is understood. The TFGBV domain sheds light on common characteristics of TFGBV, trends in perpetration including the extent of anonymous perpetration, characteristics of women politicians and civic actors most commonly or disproportionately targeted, and evidence of online violence crossing over to offline violence. The women in politics and public life domain provides context for the general environment for women's political and civic participation and official power. The domain of Laws & Redress identifies relevant laws and their enforcement, and codes of conduct, regulation and monitoring relating to elections and political parties. The Digital Democracy domain sheds light on the digital divide, relevant technology companies and platforms, opportunities to use digital platforms for government transparency, civic technology stakeholders, and women's participation in the technology sector. The final domain captures features of the broader context that influence violence against women in politics and TFGBV, such as prevalence of gender-based violence generally, populations that are especially vulnerable, current or recent conflict, and existing international activities to support and address online and offline violence against women in politics.

Given the multi-faceted nature of the perpetration, impact, and response to TFGBV, this assessment methodology employs both quantitative and qualitative data. Possible sources of data include the following, which are discussed in more depth below.

- Scans of traditional and social media
- Key informant interviews
- Focus groups
- Identification of relevant laws
- Stakeholder mapping, and
- Available statistics and reports produced by national and regional civil society organizations (CSOs) and national governments.

These TFGBV assessments should generally proceed in two phases, beginning with desk research and rapid stakeholder mapping. That preliminary research then contributes to identifying key informants to interview, relevant media platforms and outlets to scan, regional and national organizations that may have done previous research, and other fruitful avenues during the second phase of research. Those KIIs, focus groups, and media scans will likely surface additional sources of data or additional stakeholders to be included.

Existing Data and Desk Research

At the present time, there are gaps in relevant knowledge in most if not all national contexts. Information on many relevant factors is rare below the national level, presenting challenges for assessing differential impacts on specific groups of women or distinct patterns in different regions of a given country. Moreover, statistical data may be incomplete due to limitations in data collection by CSOs or other researchers. Official statistics on TFGBV and on online or offline VAWPP may be only partial or completely absent as a reflection of absent or limited legislative frameworks. Even where relevant legal frameworks exist, official statistics are dependent on survivors reporting violence and abuse through official channels such as law enforcement, in which survivors may have low levels of trust.

Gaps also exist in global data. Nonetheless, there are global data sources that can contribute to assessments of TFGBV. Annex 2 provides some recommended sources of cross-national data. Notably, Transform could not identify a single global data source for the prevalence of TFGBV, whether against women in public life or more generally. No global or regional reporting on laws, regulations, or law enforcement related to TFGBV could be found. An increasing number of studies report the extent of VAWPP in specific countries, but a global source for data on VAWPP does not yet exist. Moreover, most studies focus on violence against women politicians and aspirants, with far less data available for violence against Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and other kinds of women in public life. The Political Violence Against Women in Politics reporting covers only physical violence, but has global data from 2021.[16] Common democracy indices do not incorporate robust measures of women's participation or VAWPP, or measure TFGBV and other digital barriers. These indices vary in how they rate women's participation, rarely disaggregating more than a few components by gender. Freedom House asks its expert raters whether women are allowed to freely run for office and whether women's interests are represented in political

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16. ACLED. "Political Violence Targeting Women." 2024. **https://acleddata.com/political-violence-targeting-women**.

parties, but not directly about VAWPP.[17] The Varieties of Democracy dataset includes expert ratings of indicators such as women's access to justice and right to own property, but many other ratings are not disaggregated by gender, including those relating to harassment of journalists or clean elections.[18] While a relatively small number of studies exist that provide rich data on one country, typically during one electoral cycle, the variations in methodologies render cross-national comparison difficult. Regional surveys, such as the Afrobarometer or the AmericasBarometer may offer data on harassment of women in public life, as well as attitudes and perceptions of citizens regarding women's participation in public life more broadly.

Relevant Laws and Regulations

There are at the present time few laws that explicitly address TFGBV, and significant gaps in laws against VAWPP. In some contexts, other laws may provide opportunities and barriers to pursue accountability through the justice system, whether through criminal prosecution of civil lawsuits. Laws governing conduct in elections may be especially significant, alongside laws that relate to GBV and to cybercrime. Laws that provide oversight of elections and political parties more generally, define defamation or libel, and govern information and communication technology overlap with many facets of TFGBV and may be relevant. KIIs can guide the identification of these laws and regulations, as well as provide insight into how and when the laws are applied in practice.

Stakeholder Mapping

The primary goal of mapping stakeholders as a part of a TFGBV assessment is to inform the design and adaptation of strategies and programming to counter TFGBV. Important stakeholders commonly include the technology sector including civic tech, CSOs including women's organizations, the media sector, political parties, and the government itself. In addition to identifying potential partners and opportunities for collaboration, the TFGBV assessment seeks to map existing networks and other avenues for coalition building such as committees, councils, or conferences that provide

opportunities for coordination and input among CSOs and between CSOs and duty bearers. An initial rapid mapping of key organizations and stakeholders guides the next phases of research and is then further developed into a fuller picture of relevant stakeholders.

Civil society stakeholders

Within civil society, researchers should identify organizations that promote women's political participation and women's rights more broadly, as well as organizations that support survivors of GBV in general. Organizations that support democracy promotion, including anti-corruption and transparency or accountability, should also be mapped.

Understanding that Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) and women environmental activists are frequently targeted with VAWPP and TFGBV, and that our knowledge of that targeting is especially weak in comparison to women political candidates, key human rights organizations and environmental organizations may also be important stakeholders.

Technology sector stakeholders

Stakeholders in the technology sector are important collaborators in addressing TFGBV because of their involvement in creating and managing platforms and outlets where TFGBV occur. Civic tech and other technology sector stakeholders have the ability to contribute to creation of technology-based solutions for addressing TFGBV. The mapping should identify popular technology and social media platforms, which are often documented in internet market research reports. Stakeholders working in the civic technology sector and on digital democracy and digital rights issues may be able to build important bridges between women's organizations and technology companies. Organizations that promote women's participation in the technology sector and in coding, are also important stakeholders. It has been Transform's experience that, among technology companies, those working primarily within the national context are likely to be more receptive to collaboration than are the major global companies.

17. Freedom House 2024. "Freedom in the World Research Methodology" **https://freedomhouse.org/reports/freedom-world/freedom-world-research-methodology**.

18. Nord, Marina, Martin Lundstedt, David Altman, Fabio Angiolillo, Cecilia Borella, Tiago Fernandes, Lisa Gastaldi, Ana Good God, Natalia Natsika, and Staffan I. Lindberg. 2024. *Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot*. University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute. 52-57.

Media sector stakeholders

Mapping the journalism media landscape serves multiple purposes. First, given the frequent role of various media outlets in the spread and perpetration of TFGBV, identifying influential media outlets is necessary to understand the problem of TFGBV in a specific context. Second, some media outlets and specific journalists are themselves stakeholders and potential collaborators; many women journalists and other media figures themselves experience TFGBV. Finally, understanding the media landscape informs decisions about interventions and programming. For example, the relative prominence of radio versus television is an important factor to consider in developing awareness raising activities. Researchers should identify popular print, radio, and television outlets, as well as influential digital media outlets. Important stakeholders among individual journalists or content creators aren't necessarily the most prominent; KIIs and media scans should inform the identification of those individuals. Organizations serving journalists and content creators should also be identified.

Political party stakeholders

Political parties are potentially valuable collaborators in addressing TFGBV, and they can also put up substantial barriers. Additionally, political party members and candidates may perpetrate TFGBV against women from both within their own party and rival parties. Researchers should identify political parties that contested the most recent election, including those that operate within only part of the country. They should also record the relative power of the parties in the national executive and legislature and, where relevant, in local or subnational governments. In contexts with many smaller political parties that routinely exist only long enough to contest 1 or perhaps 2 elections, it is also important to map the coalitions that bring together multiple smaller parties. In some contexts, those coalitions may persist longer than any of their member parties, although those coalitions may coalesce and collapse quickly in other contexts. To the extent possible, researchers should review party statutes to determine if they reference VAWPP and identify caucuses or internal bodies within political parties that may hear grievances, mete out discipline, or promote internal shifts. Women's caucuses and councils within political parties should also be identified where possible. Cross party women's rights structures or cross sector structures that bring together representatives of political parties and civil society, should be identified where possible.

Governmental stakeholders

Mapping government stakeholders should be informed by, and done in parallel with, surveying the national legal landscape. Individual elected officials or organizations or caucuses of women elected officials will be important stakeholders, as will be electoral management bodies. The survey of national laws will help to identify which government bodies are empowered to investigate or enforce laws related to TFGBV or electoral violence, and will indicate whether national human right institutions, along with women's affairs ministries, can be helpful depending on their particular focus areas and levels of funding and influence. These agencies are often represented within a president's cabinet or as part of the executive branch outside of the cabinet, but they take a variety of institutional forms. Where they exist, local or subnational women's councils, such as those in Guatemala, may have influence within local politics. Prosecutor's offices, law enforcement agencies, and others within the justice sector may be important stakeholders, especially those involved in investigating, prosecuting, and adjudicating cybercrime or GBV.

Key Informant Interviews and Focus Groups

Local stakeholders, researchers and professionals with experience and expertise relating to TFGBV and VAWPP Key organizations advancing women's political leadership and public participation, including those working to advance elected women, women journalists, WHRD, etc. should be considered. Organizations working to advance women's digital rights are likely to be valuable key informants if they exist. Broader civic tech organizations working on digital democracy, civic tech etc. without a gender lens are also key to engage. The context-specific literature review and rapid stakeholder mapping should be used to identify key informants. A "snowball" approach, in which research ask key informants for recommendations of others with relevant experience and knowledge, will likely identify additional key informants, interested CSOs, and other

sources of information.[19] Researchers should base their planned questions on those in Annex 1, adapting them to the local context and relevance to the particular key informant.

Focus groups may also be helpful in identifying common experiences, learning strategies the participants use for prevention and mitigation of TFGBV, and understanding attitudes of participants. Focus groups including with the same type of roles, such as journalists or political aspirants, would facilitate learning about common experiences and mitigation strategies. Focus groups are also a helpful way to gain insight into the attitudes of men, such as male politicians, who might not express their views on TFGBV and VAWPP in public forums.

Media Scans

Scans, or keyword searches across multiple platforms, of traditional, digital, and social media help to build the evidence for multiple different aspects of the TFGBV assessment. These scans can also inform future efforts to monitor TFGBV. These scans may reveal prominent incidents of TFGBV, discussion of the impact of TFGBV and VAWPP more broadly, and any efforts at redress or accountability that may have happened. These scans may also reveal attitudes and sentiments of prominent individuals in politics and public life of all genders through their public statements. They can also help to identify additional stakeholders and key informants. Preliminary desk research and KIIs should aid in generating search terms that are most relevant in the local context.

Ethical Considerations

Transform is committed to conducting research and all activities in ways that are survivor-centered and trauma-informed. In assessing violence, researchers have an imperative to avoid causing additional harm to the individual survivors who participate in the research, survivors whose experiences may be shared based on either public reporting or personal communication, and the broader community. Transform recommends several strategies to prevent re-victimization or other harm to participants:

- Any individuals or organizations who participate in interviews, focus groups, or otherwise share information should have the opportunity to provide their informed consent, including the right to withdraw their consent at any time.
- As a part of the informed consent process, participants should be invited to indicate their desire to participate confidentially, with their names redacted and identifying details obscured, or to have public credit.
- Persons facilitating interviews or focus groups should be trained in trauma-informed methodologies and should make available to participants resources for psychosocial support.
- Outreach to people or organizations for interviews, participation in focus groups, or information gathering should clearly inform them of their right to refuse to participate and their right to control their personal information.
- In conducting focus groups or other public forums, researchers should not create situations where survivors are made to participate alongside abusers.
- Community members and other relevant stakeholders should be asked to review planned questionnaires or other instruments to be used in interviews or focus groups to ensure appropriate sensitivity to local contexts.
- Participants should be apprised of their right to report any concerns flowing from their participation to ombuds or other relevant oversight bodies and should be provided with appropriate contact information.
- Assessment data, especially qualitative reports, should generally be kept confidential, with personal identifying information redacted in publicly disseminated reports or other documents.
- Researchers should follow relevant data security protocols, such as storing data on secure servers, deleting data from personal devices, using secure messaging systems, and using VPNs where appropriate.
- Finally, researchers themselves should be aware of vicarious trauma that they can experience when conducting assessments of TFGBV and utilize self-care and other psychosocial and mental health resources and tools as they conduct this important work.

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19.   While "snowball samples" are not able to produce a statistically representative sample for quantitative analysis, they are useful in reaching populations who may be hard to reach. Researchers should be careful to take steps to enhance the diversity of their key informants, as snowball samples can be biased by the first several participants. Kirchherr, J., & Charles, K. (2018). Enhancing the sample diversity of snowball samples: Recommendations from a research project on anti-dam movements in Southeast Asia. *PloS one*, 13(8), e0201710. **https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0201710**.

ADAPTATION OF THE METHODOLOGY FOR LOCAL CONTEXTS

While TFGBV affects women in public life around the globe, differences in local contexts present different avenues for perpetration and for possible accountability. Researchers should be aware of the need to adapt this methodology to respond to local contexts. Some of these differences can be identified early in the assessment through literature review, but other adaptation needs may only become clear after data gathering is underway. Engaging local stakeholders and key informants early can help to identify these adaptation needs earlier.

Differences that can be identified through literature review and other initial research relate to the political system, ethnic and linguistic diversity, and cultural or religious considerations. Many of the topics included in this assessment assume that a country is a democracy or has the common institutions of a democracy such as political parties, elections, and representative bodies, even if they are weak or coopted by authoritarians. Within democracies, political system differences such as the electoral system influence possibilities; for example, a proportional representation system where parties present lists of candidates allows for a variety of gender quota options that are generally not possible in plurality systems where only one candidate is elected in each district. Research strategies and selection of research teams should be informed by ethnic and linguistic diversity to avoid exclusion of specific populations. Religious and cultural sensitivities that could affect openness to be interviewed by researchers of particular genders, for example, should also be considered.[20]

When the assessment is underway, interviewers or other researchers should be alert to considerations that may limit the willingness of people to share their experiences and knowledge freely. In authoritarian or closing contexts, women leaders may be hesitant due to potential repression. Even democratic contexts, women leaders may be hesitant because of concern about reputational harm that could affect their future political and professional options. Women in politics may also risk retribution by their own or opposition parties if their participation or views were made public. Rivalries or hostilities between different CSOs, activists, and political parties often inject bias into information that is shared and others to whom the researcher gets connected. The same can be true of friendships and positive relationships. It is advisable to seek out multiple perspectives.

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20. These factors are considered in greater detail in USAID's **Women's Political Participation and Leadership Assessment Framework**.

CONCLUSION

The global landscape for understanding and acting to redress TFGBV is rapidly changing in response to growing awareness. Careful assessment of national contexts contributes to improved programs and activities to prevent, respond to, and mitigate the impact of TFGBV. This multi-faceted assessment methodology will identify important stakeholders and opportunities for and barriers to redress TFGBV against women in politics, journalists, activists, and others in public life. The questions in Annex 1 can guide a thorough assessment.

ANNEX 1 QUESTIONS

The following table outlines the main components of each of the primary TFGBV assessment domains, specific questions to be answered in assessing them, and recommended sources of evidence.

DOMAIN 1: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC LIFE		
Incidence	Are there statistics kept on VAWPP?	Desk research, KIIs with local stakeholders
	What is the incidence of VAWPP reported in media or in local, regional, and international reports?	Desk research, media scans
	What do Key Informants share about the prevalence of VAWPP?	KIIs with local experts or women's rights stakeholders
	What types of VAWPP are most prevalent? (Physical, psychological or verbal, sexual, economic, online)	Media scans, KIIs with local experts, focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life
	When in the democratic process or political cycle (e.g., during elections) do we see increases in VAWPP?	Data review, media scans, KIIs with local experts
Survivors	Among women active in politics and public life, which types are targeted with VAWPP, including TFGBV? (e.g., women in politics, activists, journalists, human rights defenders)	Media scans, KIIs
	What groups of women have been especially vulnerable to be targeted for VAWPP? (e.g., ethnic minorities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, women with disabilities)	Media scans, KIIs
Perpetration	Can perpetrators be identified? How often is perpetration anonymous?	Media scans, KIIs with local experts, focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life

	What kinds of perpetrators do we see? (e.g., politicians or political parties, private or business sector actors, criminals and criminal organizations, current or former intimate partners or other known individuals, foreign malign actors)	Media scans, KIIs with local experts, focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life
	Are the majority of perpetrators state based?	KIIs with local experts
	How often are perpetrators from the survivor's own political party? Other political parties?	KIIs with local experts, focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life
Public Discourse	How is VAWPP discussed in the traditional media, on social media, and in public speeches and statements, either in general or regarding specific incidents?	Media scans, KIIs with local experts
	How is VAWPP viewed by male political leaders and stakeholders?	Media Scans, Focus groups with men

DOMAIN 2: TFGBV AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC LIFE

Incidence	What statistics are available from official or unofficial monitors? What other reports are available from social media and traditional media, reports, and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs)?	Desk research, KIIs with local stakeholders
	To what extent can statistics and reports be disaggregated to identify trends during election periods and outside of election periods?	Data review
Survivors	Among women in politics and public life, which types are targeted with TFGBV? (e.g., women in politics, activists, journalists, human rights defenders)	Media scans, KIIs with local experts
	What groups of women have been especially vulnerable to be targeted for TFGBV? (e.g., ethnic minorities, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, women with disabilities)	Media scans, KIIs with local experts
Perpetration	Can perpetrators be identified? How often is perpetration anonymous?	KIIs with local experts, focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life

	What kinds of perpetrators do we see? (e.g., politicians or political parties, private or business sector actors, criminals and criminal organizations, current or former intimate partners or other known individuals, foreign malign actors)	KIIs with local experts, focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life
Characteristics	What is the format? (text, personal information, image, video, audio, false or manipulated materials)	Social media scans, KIIs with local experts, focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life
	Through what platform is it being introduced and disseminated?	Social media scans, KIIs with local experts, focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life
	How is it being shared across platforms?	KIIs with local experts
	Is there a crossover to offline spaces? (e.g., stalking, physical attacks)	KIIs with local experts, focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life
	Is the content sexualized, racialized, or otherwise targeting identity-based stereotypes?	Media scans, KIIs with local experts
Prevention and Response	What tools and strategies are women in politics and public life currently using to try to prevent TFGBV?	Focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life
	What tools and strategies are women in politics and public life currently using to respond to and mitigate the impact of TFGBV?	Focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life

DOMAIN 3: WOMEN IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC LIFE

Political Participation	Are women restricted in their ability to vote, voice opinions about matters of public policy, participate in legal protest, and engage in other forms of political participation?	Desk research, KIIs with local stakeholders
	To what extent and in what ways do women participate in politics?	Desk research, KIIs with local stakeholders
Civic Participation	Are women restricted in their ability to join and form organizations, engage in different forms of protest, engage in public debate online and offline regarding social and political issues?	Desk research, KIIs with local stakeholders
	To what extent do women lead civic organizations?	Desk research, KIIs with local stakeholders

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	Are there spaces of convergence or coordination among CSOs or between CSOs and politicians, political parties, and/ or government stakeholders?	KIIs with CSO stakeholders
	Are feminist organizations able to operate freely? Do they experience legal challenges or harassment?	KIIs and focus groups with feminist organizations
Representation and Official Power	How many women are in the national parliament?	Desk research
	How many women are in regional or municipal governing bodies?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	How many women participate as candidates for election?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	Are there gender quotas in place that seek to increase the number of women candidates, e.g., by requiring a minimum percentage of women be included in party lists?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	Are there gender quotas or reserved seats for representation in the legislature itself?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	Are there gender quotas or reserved seats for representation in regional or municipal governments?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	What are prominent CSOs led by women?	KIIs with USAID or NGOs, Stakeholder mapping
	Is there an office, cabinet secretary, or agency assigned to promote women's affairs at the national level?	Desk research, Stakeholder mapping
	Are there offices or agencies to promote women's affairs at local, regional, or provincial levels?	KIIs with local experts, Stakeholder mapping
Stakeholders	Who are key stakeholders in government, CSOs, and education, including both those directly affected by TFGBV and those in a position to support or resist change?	Stakeholder mapping
	What is the level of cooperation, competition, and conflict among different stakeholders?	KIIs with CSO stakeholders, Stakeholder mapping

	What is the perception of key informants of relevant stakeholders?	KIIs

DOMAIN 4: LAWS AND OTHER FORMS OF REDRESS

Relevant Laws	Are there laws against TFGBV, or provisions on TFGBV within other existing laws? If so, how is it defined? Are civil or criminal remedies provided?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	Are there laws against cybercrime? If so, how is it defined? Are civil or criminal remedies provided?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	Are there laws against VAWPP? If so, how is it defined? Are civil or criminal remedies provided?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	Are there other relevant laws against slander, fraud, stalking, GBV or other related harms? Have they been used to seek redress for VAWPP or TFGBV? Are there barriers to using them to seek redress for TFGBV?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
Enforcement of Relevant Laws	Have complaints been filed seeking redress for TFGBV under any of the above laws? What resulted from those complaints?	KIIs with local experts
	Have there been civil or criminal cases regarding TFGBV? What was the outcome?	KIIs with local experts
	Are justice sector agents such as police, prosecutors, and judges trained about TFGBV and relevant laws? Do they know what procedures to follow when there is a complaint?	KIIs with local experts
	Are survivors of TFGBV aware of relevant laws, how to file a complaint, and how to provide evidence of TFGBV?	KIIs with survivor-serving organizations, Focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life
	Are relevant laws used to harass or intimidate activists or other women in politics and public life?	KIIs with local stakeholders
Political Parties and Representative Bodies	Do political parties have internal codes of conduct that address gender equality and the behavior of party members, including norms of interaction?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts, Focus groups with politicians

	Do political parties have internal committees that are empowered to review the actions of party members and to hold members accountable?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts, Focus groups with politicians
	Do legislatures or other representative bodies have codes of conduct that address gender equality and the behavior of members, including norms of interaction?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts, Focus groups with politicians
	Do legislatures or other representative bodies have internal committees that are empowered to review the actions of members and to hold members accountable?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts, Focus groups with politicians
Elections	Do electoral management bodies have regulations or codes of conduct that address gender equality and the behavior of candidates and political parties, including norms of interaction?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts, Focus groups with politicians
	Do electoral management bodies have complaints processes or reporting mechanisms that include VAWPP and TFGBV?	KIIs with local experts, Focus groups with politicians
	Have electoral management bodies implemented these regulations or codes of conduct? Have they sanctioned or publicly reported on violations of codes of conduct or other rules that address gender equality and the behavior of candidates and political parties, including norms of interaction?	KIIs with local experts, Focus groups with politicians
	Have election observers tracked and reported on TFGBV as a form of VAWPP?	KIIs with local experts and election monitors
Platforms	Do social media platforms in use have policies for redress of TFGBV on their platforms?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	Are women in politics and public life aware of these policies?	Focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life
	Do women in politics and public life seek redress through platforms? What responses do they report?	Focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life

DOMAIN 5: DIGITAL DEMOCRACY

Digital Divide	What is the extent of access to the internet and smartphone connectivity?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	What is the gender gap in access to internet and smartphone technology?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	Are women able to access the internet and use smartphone technology without supervision or monitoring of intimate partners or family members?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
Digital Rights	Has the government codified or committed to promote digital rights?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
Transparency	Are there laws or other policies guaranteeing access to government information?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	Are there official portals or other websites to facilitate access to government information?	KIIs with local experts
	Are there unofficial portals or other websites to facilitate access to government information?	KIIs with local experts
Surveillance	How is spyware or other means of spying used by governments or other actors to monitor, expose, and control their opponents? How is that surveillance used against women?	KIIs with local experts, Focus groups with women in politics and other women in public life
Civic Technology	Are there official or unofficial efforts to promote online civic or political participation?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	What organizations or other stakeholders are active in promoting digital democracy?	Stakeholder mapping
	Are there official or unofficial efforts to monitor TFGBV, either in general or specifically against women in politics and public life?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
Women in Tech	To what extent are women employed in the tech sector? To what extent do they hold leadership positions in the tech sector?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	Are there programs to encourage women to enter the tech sector?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts

	What are the attitudes of male members of the technology sector, including the civic technology sector, to women's participation and gender equality in the technology sector?	KIIs and focus groups with men from the technology sector
Platforms	Which online platforms have local offices or local staff?	KIIs with local experts
	Do multinational platforms have moderation in local languages?	KIIs with local experts or platform staff
	Which platforms are commonly used as sources of news?	KIIs with local experts, Focus groups with men, Focus groups with women
	Which platforms are most commonly vectors for the spread of disinformation?	KIIs with local experts, Focus groups with men, Focus groups with women
	Which platforms are used by politicians for public comments (e.g., X) and for private communication (e.g., WhatsApp)?	KIIs with local experts, Focus groups with men, Focus groups with women
	Does TFGBV content appear to originate from closed groups or platforms? Is it disseminated in public forums in a sporadic or coordinated manner?	Media scans, KIIs with local experts
Stakeholders	What are key organizations, companies, start-ups, universities, and networks that promote digital democracy or women's participation in tech?	Stakeholder mapping

DOMAIN 6: BROADER CONTEXT

Gender-Based Violence	What is the prevalence of GBV more generally, such as sexual violence and intimate partner violence?	Desk research
	Are there laws against GBV? Are they enforced effectively?	Desk research, KIIs with GBV stakeholders
Vulnerable Populations	What groups may be highly vulnerable to TFGBV as a result of bias and intersecting oppressions?	KIIs with local experts
	Are women in politics and public life in some regions more likely to be targeted for TFGBV?	KIIs with local experts

	Are there sizable communities of refugees or internally displaced persons?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
Conflict	Are there significant ongoing or recent (last 5 years) violent conflicts in the country? Are some regions more affected?	Desk research
	Are there significant ongoing or recent (last 5 years) protest movements? Are some regions more affected?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	How widespread is violent crime?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	Are there significant organized criminal networks?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	What is the relationship between organized crime and politics? Do organized criminal networks support one or more politicians or political parties? Do organized criminal networks threaten, bribe or extort politicians?	KIIs with local experts
Democratic and Civic Openness	Is this context democratic, closed, or closing?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	What have been the trends in this context towards greater or less openness in the past 5 and 10 years?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	What restrictions are there on CSOs and the media?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
	What have been the trends in women's civic and political participation in the past 5, 10, and 20 years?	Desk research, KIIs with local experts
Existing International Activities Supporting WPPL and addressing VAWPP	What activities are underway, soon to begin, or have been implemented recently (last 10 years) that specifically support women's political participation and leadership and address VAWPP?	Desk research, KIIs with USAID or NGOs

ANNEX 2 SELECTED SOURCES OF GLOBAL DATA

Relevant data exists that can inform many aspects of a TFGBV assessment, although many sources have geographic and demographic gaps. Researchers should be aware of the possibility that different sources may not be cross-nationally comparable. The following sources cover a large number of countries on relevant topics. This list does not include other valuable data sources that have narrower geographical coverage focused on one or a few countries, or on one continent.

Women Count by UN Women – global and country-specific gender equality data related to political representation, poverty, legal environment, and other context indicators.

Women Peace and Security Index by Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace, and Security – scores and ranks 177 countries in terms of women's inclusion, justice, and security.

Political Violence Targeting Women in Politics Dataset by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project provides counts of incidents of physical violence against women in politics, including sexual violence, with disaggregation available by different roles such as voters, candidates, and human rights defenders; violence against women journalists is not included in these counts.

Inter-Parliamentary Union – composition of elected representative bodies by gender and age.

World Economic Forum's annual Global Gender Gap Reports – gender gap index with coverage (in 2023) of 146 countries. Subindexes highlight Economic Participation, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment.

DataReportal – global and country-specific data on digital trends, internet use, smartphone use, and social media participation by platform.

GSMA's Annual Global Gender Gap Report – data on women's use of mobile internet and the digital divide.

ICNL's Civic Freedom Monitor – reports for 50 countries on key legal issues affecting CSOs.

Freedom House – Annual data on Political Rights and Civil Liberties, and focused data on post-Soviet countries and on *Freedom on the Net*.

Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) – Annual data for all countries from 1789 to the present on 600+ indicators related to political equality, media, civil society, exclusion, and characteristics of elections, among others.