USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

CEPPS
Strengthening Democracy through Partnership

Violence Against Women in Elections in Haiti: An IFES Assessment



May 2018

Violence Against Women in Elections in Haiti: An IFES Assessment was coordinated with support from three U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) grants: the USAID Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) Global Women's Leadership Program Rapid Response Fund was the primary funding source; the USAID CEPPS/Haiti program provided logistical and country context support through IFES' local office in Port-au-Prince; and the USAID Conflict Mitigation and Management project "Bridging the Gaps: A New Framework for Gender and Electoral Violence" provided the development of the VAWE framework and assessment methodology.

Violence Against Women in Elections in Haiti: An IFES Assessment

May 2018

Lead author:

Dr. Gabrielle Bardall

Contributing authors:

Jessica Huber, Lesley Richards, Dr. Fernanda Buril,
Ana Santos, Lourdes Gonzalez Prieto, Jean Batiste Azolin, and Natacha Clerge





Violence Against Women in Elections in Haiti: An IFES Assessment
Copyright © 2018 International Foundation for Electoral Systems. All rights reserved.

Permission Statement: No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without the written permission of IFES

Requests for permission should include the following information:

- A description of the material for which permission to copy is desired.
- The purpose for which the copied material will be used and the manner in which it will be used.
- Your name, title, company or organization name, telephone number, fax number, email address, and mailing address.

Please send all requests for permission to:

International Foundation for Electoral Systems
2011 Crystal Drive, 10th Floor
Arlington, VA 22202
Email: editor@ifes.org
Fax: 202.350.6701

This report is made possible by the support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). The contents are the sole responsibility of IFES and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.

Contents

Preface 1
Introduction and Overview 2
What is VAWE? 3
Methodology 4
VAWE In Haiti 5
Political Context 5
Women's Political Participation in Haiti 6
Assessing Violence Against Women in Elections in Haiti 7
Factor 1. Status of Women 8
Factor 2. Women's Access to the Electoral Process 10
Factor 3. Trends in Violence Against Women in Elections 14
Physical Violence, Intimidation, and Threats in Public and Domestic Spaces 15
Women Candidates and the Culture of Political Violence 15
VAWE in Haiti is Primarily Structural and Non-physical 16
Factor 4: Responses to VAWE 18
Recommendations 20
ANNEX 21

Preface

For over three decades, the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has worked to advance good governance and support *all* citizens' rights to participate in credible elections. We recognize that violence against women in politics is a substantial threat to the integrity of the electoral process – it can affect women's participation as voters, candidates, election officials, activists, and political party leaders, and it undermines free, fair, and inclusive democratic processes.

IFES works to document, prevent, and end violence against women in politics through our projects on four continents and through our cutting-edge research. We share this commitment across the world, and both men and women at IFES work to increase awareness about the issue and to instigate action to address it.

This report demonstrates our commitment to combat violence against women in politics. It identifies the many forms of violence against women in Haiti and understand how this violence – be it physical or psychological – contributes to the lack of representation of Haitian women in politics. Readers will gain insight into the many routes national and international partners can take to support Haitian women and reduce the obstacles they face to access justice and effect political change. With our work on gender inclusiveness in Haiti and around the world, IFES prioritizes the empowerment of women and girls as a crucial component of healthy and resilient democracies.

With this publication, we welcome you to join our fight to end violence against women in politics and in all spheres of life.



Michael D. Svetlik
Vice President, Programs

Introduction and Overview

Violence against women in elections (VAWE) and political life is deeply entrenched in Haiti. The existence of widespread VAWE creates a threatening and repressive environment for women's public participation and is one of the primary reasons that Haiti is ranked as 186 out of 189 countries for women's political representation in the world today (IPU 2017). This report assesses VAWE in Haiti, drawing on over two years of research and fieldwork, and presents recommendations for mitigating and preventing violence in the future.

VAWE in Haiti is overwhelmingly structural in nature, rooted in the social norms and stereotypes that condone and tolerate general violence against women, skew perceptions, and generate power imbalances between the sexes. VAWE is rooted in the status of women, where restrictions on women's lives, activities, choices, and power stem from rigid cultural beliefs about women's roles, as well as from enduring instability and crisis in Haiti. This general context of violence and inequality creates an environment that is hostile to women's participation in the electoral process.

Challenges for women as candidates stem from both cultural and structural issues. Legal gaps include lack of gender-specific or gender-responsive electoral security provisions, failure to implement the constitutional quota and tenuousness of the partial local quota, and poorly designed financial incentives for quota implementation. Political parties are male-dominated and largely lack interest in promoting women's involvement. Media coverage of candidates often magnifies and, in some cases, exacerbates gender stereotypes. Prominent male political leaders are often dismissive or insulting regarding female peers.

VAWE in Haiti exists in all its forms: physical, sexual, social-psychological, and economic. It affects women across socio-economic strata and in the many roles in which women engage in political processes. Violence occurs both in public and private spaces, as well as in domestic spheres, online, and in the media. It is both structural and interpersonal in its nature. Women face threats of direct harm, including risks of polling violence and widespread family voting shadowed by the threat of domestic violence. Rape, kidnappings, harassment, intimidation, and domestic violence are acts tied to the experience of women in politics in Haiti, whether as candidates or voters in rural or urban areas. Outsiders and strangers perpetrate these acts, but there is also tremendous pressure and resistance to women's active political engagement from within the family.

In addition to the threats and intimidation, sexual- and economic-related VAWE are serious obstacles to women's participation. Women who engage in politics face constant and vicious attacks on their moral character and probity of their sexual behavior. Women who pursue or who have successful political careers are routinely accused of prostitution or performing sexual services in return for political favors. Women pursuing political positions not only fear violence, but demonstrate an inability, reluctance, or refusal to mobilize violently, which sets women candidates apart – and at a disadvantage for victory. Lacking violent resources (or refusing to employ them), women lose political advantage in contexts where violence is prerequisite for access to power.

Responses to VAWE have been limited to date, and impunity and difficult access to justice are key problems. Haiti's relatively substantive legal and normative framework for women's political participation and personal security has been eclipsed by a near-total lack of implementation. In general, the policy and legal frameworks in the country have been unsuccessful in full implementation due to lack of political will, inadequate financial resources, political instability and excessively slow legislative processes.

What is VAWE?

Political violence occurs in highly distinct patterns (forms, locations, victims/perpetrators, frequencies) according to the gender identity of the victim.[1] Gender-motivated political violence is "harm that violates an individual's or group's political rights on the basis of their gender-identity and is motivated by a desire to repress, deter, control or otherwise coerce the political rights of the victims because of the victim's gender."[2]

These forms of VAWE are a threat to the integrity of the electoral process affecting women's participation as voters, candidates, election officials, activists, and political party leaders, and undermining free, fair, and inclusive democratic processes. Through increased attention to women's participation and women's voices in democracy assistance, narratives of violence against women in elections in their homes, political arenas, and public spaces have become more visible. Common understandings of electoral violence originate in definitional frameworks that often privilege public acts of physical violence and violence between public stakeholders.[3] These definitions reflect male experiences of political violence and tend to overlook personal relationships between perpetrators and survivors, the variation in spaces where violence occurs, and nuances within types of potential violence – all of which are essential for understanding the distinct nature of election violence experienced by women.[4] The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) defines VAWE as:

> *Any harm or threat of harm committed against women with the intent and/or impact of interfering with their free and equal participation in the electoral process during the electoral period. It includes harassment, intimidation, physical harm or coercion, threats, and financial pressures, and it may be committed in the home or other private spaces, or in public spaces.*

---

[1] G. Bardall. *Breaking the Mold: Understanding Gender and Electoral Violence*. IFES. 2011.

[2] G. Bardall. "Violence, Politics, and Gender." Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. 2018.

[3] IFES defines electoral violence as: "any harm or threat of harm to persons or property involved in the electoral process, or the process itself." This includes physical and psychological harm, as well as property damage. In 2009, the UNDP *Guide to Elections and Conflict Prevention* defined electoral violence primarily as "acts or threats of coercion, intimidation, or physical harm perpetrated to affect an electoral process, or that arise in the context of electoral competition…." USAID's 2010 *Electoral Security Framework* concludes that "electoral violence refers to physical violence and coercive intimidation directly tied to an impending electoral contest or to an announced electoral result." The IFES definition was developed as part of IFES's Electoral Violence Education and Resolution (EVER) programs around the world. Further discussion of the evolution of the definition and the EVER methodology can be found in Lisa Kammerud, *Managing Election Violence: The IFES EVER Program* (IFES October 2009) and online at www.IFES.org.

[4] For more details on the development of the VAWE typology, see http://www.ifes.org/publications/violence-against-women-elections pg. 12

These acts may be directed at women in any of their roles as electoral stakeholders (e.g., voters, media, political actors, state actors, community leaders, electoral officials).[5]

Methodology

To document the nature and impact of VAWE in Haiti, this study establishes the historical context for violence and women's political participation and defines the cultural and socio-political norms that impact the status of women in society as well as their participation in the electoral process. The study also looks at community and institutional responses to the issue. The analysis is organized around four key factors[6] which influence the incidence and impact of VAWE:

Assessment Factors	
Status of Women	Addresses broad concerns related to the status of women in their local and national communities; helps identify root causes of violence against women in general and in elections specifically.
Women's Access to Election Processes	Examines gender dynamics specifically related to political and electoral processes, as well as democracy, rights, and governance issues more broadly. Categories of this analysis explore the gender dynamics related to the electoral legal framework, election administration, voter registration, women's political participation as voters, activists, and the role of political parties.
Trends in Violence Against Women in Elections	Identifies incidents and trends of violence against women that occur within the context of the electoral cycle; examines triggers for gender-based violence against women in elections.
Responses to VAWE	Explore responses to VAWE being implemented by official actors and civil society, including political parties and the media. Identify strategies to reduce or prevent violence against women during the electoral cycle.

IFES conducted an initial, field-based VAWE assessment[7] in order to understand the potential challenges that were created and exacerbated by violence against women in the lead-up to Haiti's scheduled 2016 national elections. Fieldwork was conducted by two IFES headquarters staff members from June 26 through July 2, 2016.[8] The team convened 25 government officials, representatives from civil society and women's organizations, and other political actors from across the country for key informant interviews

[5] IFES, *Violence Against Women in Elections: A Framework for Assessment, Monitoring and Response*, 2016 pg. 2. http://www.ifes.org/publications/violence-against-women-elections, pg. 2

[6] These assessment factors are inspired by CARE's Gender Assessment Framework (available at http://gendertoolkit.care.org/Pages/Gender%20Areas%20of%20Inquiry.aspx), IFES' Gender and Elections Analysis tool, and USAID's Electoral Security Framework and Best Practices in Electoral Security.

[7]The VAWE Assessment Haiti was coordinated with support from three USAID grants: The USAID Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) Global Women's Leadership Program Rapid Response Fund was the primary funding source; the USAID CEPPS/Haiti program provided logistical and country context support through IFES' local office in Port-au-Prince; and the USAID Conflict Mitigation and Management project "Bridging the Gaps: A New Framework for Gender and Electoral Violence" provided the development of the VAWIE framework and assessment methodology.

[8] Fieldwork was conducted by Jessica Huber and supported by Ana Santos, Lesley Richards, Lourdes Gonzalez Prieto, Natacha Clerge, and Jean Batiste Azolin.

and a two-day assessment seminar in Port-au-Prince. A complete list of respondents' titles/positions can be found in Annex 1, although individual names are not provided to protect participants' privacy.

Following the 2016 fieldwork, IFES Haiti (based in Port-au-Prince) and IFES' Gender and Elections Team (based in Virginia, USA) collaborated on monitoring developments and collecting further information and feedback on the status of VAWE throughout the electoral cycle. This included IFES Haiti's ongoing activities in this area including trainings and dialogues with members of the electoral management body, civil society activists, gender-based violence experts, and service providers. Over the course of the 2016 and 2017 electoral processes, IFES sponsored a call-in complaints line for victims of VAWE. Coupled with desk research, the following report represents over 18 months of collected research on the status of VAWE in Haiti today.

It is important to also note that a major impediment to this assessment was the severe lack of data and statistics available in Haiti in general, and specifically on the topic of gender and election violence. In view of the consistent concerns raised by individual women impacted by violence in the electoral process, as well as by government officials representing various Haitian institutions, the issue is significant. However, without appropriate data it is difficult to confirm trends, identify populations impacted and their unique needs, and plot a course for resolute action.

VAWE In Haiti

Political Context

Modern Haitian political life has been marked by instability and violence. The current constitutional order was established in 1987 following the ouster of the brutal Duvalier regime. Democratic progress through the 1990s and 2000s was halting and frequently reversed, marked by numerous military coups, violent, failed or deeply flawed elections, and successive transitional governments. The United Nations (UN) maintained a continual peacekeeping presence in Haiti from the early 1990s until the end of 2017. Delayed over 11 months following the devastating earthquake that struck Haiti in January 2010, the 2010-11 national elections were highly contentious and the scheduled local elections did not take place. The country subsequently entered a constitutional crisis. As the 2011 and 2014 legislative elections could not be organized on time, the mandate of all 99 members in the outgoing Chamber of Deputies and the 10 senators elected in 2009 expired in early 2015, leaving only 10 sitting senators (inadequate to meet quorum).[9] All elected women in Parliament were termed out by 2015, making Haiti one of the only countries in the world with no women in Parliament. Parliament was dissolved in January 2015 and Haiti was effectively ruled by presidential decree. Following years of delay due to the political impasse, political upheaval, boycott, violence, and further natural disasters, general elections were held in October 2015. Results of the first-round presidential elections were annulled and new elections were held in November 2016, bringing Jovenel Moïse to power. Legislative run-offs and local elections were held in January 2017, partially restoring the local government structure that had been inactive for over a decade.

[9] Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) Parline 2017. http://archive.ipu.org/parline/reports/2137.htm

Women's Political Participation in Haiti

As previously stated, although Haiti has a relatively substantive legal and normative framework for women's political participation and personal security, it has been eclipsed by a near-total lack of implementation. In addition to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1981), Haiti is party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2013), the Inter-American Convention on the Granting of Political Rights to Women (1958), the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1958), and the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women (1997).

Before the political impasse in 2015, Parliament guaranteed equal treatment for children born out of wedlock,[10] protections against human trafficking,[11] and the integration of persons with disabilities (by the Law of 2012). In 2011, a constitutional amendment to article 17.1 established a minimum quota of 30 percent for women's representation at all levels of political life and in public services; however, the constitutional quota was not applied. In fact, in 2016, the quota's failure was foretold well ahead of Election Day, when women counted for less than 10 percent of legislative candidates for both Houses. After the most recent legislative elections in 2015, the rate of women's representation in the Lower Chamber rose to 2.5 percent, and to 3.6 percent in the Senate, which placed Haiti in the 187th position out of 190 countries in terms of women's political participation.[12] Women hold three of the 16 ministerial seats and occupy one-third of the electoral body secretariat, and represent roughly 10 percent of judges in the country's highest courts.



The Electoral Decree of February 2015 established a minimum quota of 30 percent for female candidates on voting lists for municipal and local elections, and provided financial incentives for political parties to encourage compliance. For the first time in Haiti's history, the quota was fully implemented to multiple local office races in 2015-16, albeit only to those offices filled by direct elections (indirect local elected seats remain unfilled as of time of writing). This is an important but tempered success. Women were overwhelmingly elected to positions of secondary authority in the local elections. Also, because the local-level quota was mandated through decree, it will not be applied to future elections without further legislative action.

[10] Paternity, Maternity and Filiation Act, 2014
[11] Human Trafficking Act, 2014
[12] UN Women. *Background Briefing to the Executive Board*, 2018 "Operational Response at Country Level: Haiti." Retrieved from http://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/executive%20board/2018/first%20regular%20session%202018/background%20note%20-%20haiti%20-%20february%202018%20eb-final.pdf?la=en&vs=1356

Haiti has advanced its policy and institutional framework for gender equality in recent years, including a Gender Equality Policy (2014-2034), National Plan of Action (2014-2020), Gender Equity Office in Parliament (2013), Office to Combat Violence against Women and Girls (2013), and an Interministerial Human Rights Committee (2013); mandated to coordinate and monitor public policies on human rights and propose national strategies for their implementation; and assisted in mainstreaming gender equality in all State agencies.[13]

Those policy and legal frameworks have been, however, unsuccessful in full implementation due to lack of political will, inadequate financial resources, political instability and excessively slow legislative processes. Funding for the Ministry for the Status of Women and Women's rights was cut from 1 percent to 0.3 percent of the state budget in 2016.

Assessing Violence Against Women in Elections in Haiti

Violence against women in Haiti is a longstanding problem and the violent nature of the political context exacerbates this issue. The 2016 CEDAW review noted "with grave concern that women and girls continue to be subjected to widespread gender discrimination and mistreatment and that pervasive gender-based violence against women and girls represents the most severe manifestation of discrimination in the country, and that it has increased significantly after the earthquake owing to the increased poverty and disastrous housing situation."

Rape was not criminalized until 2005. Violence against women in political contexts in Haiti has been documented since the UN International Civilian Mission began recording human rights abuses in the 1990s, including 66 instances of rape "of a political nature" in 1994.[14] In the same year, the National Coalition for Haitian Refugees and Human Right Watch reported that military forces "used rape and sexual assault to punish and intimidate women for their actual and imputed political beliefs, or to terrorize them during violent sweeps of pro-Aristide neighborhoods. Rape also functioned as punishment for the political beliefs and activities of the victims' male relatives."[15] In March 2015, the Commission of Women Victims of Rape (*Commission des Femmes Victimes de Viol*) reported the high frequency of rapes in the poor neighborhoods of Port-au-Prince and asked the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) to take the issue more seriously. The number of cases of rape reported in Village de Dieu and Cité Soleil alone shows that the previous efforts to provide security to women have not been enough.[16]

Political violence was also gender-motivated, as the same report documented military and civilian security forces attacking women's organizations "for their work in defense of women's rights and subjected women to sex-specific abuse ranging from bludgeoning women's breasts to rape." It is against this backdrop that IFES assessed the status of VAWE in Haiti today, according to four key factors.

---

[13] CEDAW. Concluding observations on the combined eighth and ninth periodic reports of Haiti. March 2016.
[14] UN/Organization of American States International Civilian Mission in Haiti, Press Release, Ref. CP/94/28, June 17, 1994
[15] Human Rights Watch and National Coalition for Haitian Refugees, "Rape in Haiti: A Weapon of Terror," *A Human Rights Watch Short Report*, vol. 6, no. 8 (July 1994).
[16] *Commission des Femmes Victimes pour les Victimes*, *Déclaration à l'Occasion de la Journée Internationale de la Femme*, March 8, 2005. http://www.ijdh.org/articles/article_recent_news_march-8.html

Factor 1. Status of Women

In 2016, the CEDAW committee expressed concern that "discriminatory stereotypes on the roles and responsibilities of women and men in the family and in society are conveyed from early childhood, that they are pervasive in society and find expression in the judiciary, the executive and legislative branches, and that no comprehensive strategy to promote cultural changes and eliminate discriminatory stereotypes about women has been formulated by the State party."[17]

Restrictions on women's lives, activities, choices, and power stem from rigid cultural beliefs about women's roles, as well as enduring instability and crisis in Haiti. International organizations widely assess the status of women in Haiti as being poor, with Haiti ranking 163rd in the world using the UN Development Program (UNDP) Gender Inequality Index, reflecting the deep barriers that exist to women's ability to achieve equality in empowerment, the labor market, and reproductive health.[18] The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development's Social Institutions and Gender Index notes that there are a variety of barriers that women face to equal civil liberties, including threats of gender-based violence, bias in Haitian media, and limited access to financial services.[19]

Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, with over three-quarters of the population living on USD $2 per day and half the population earning less than USD $1 per day.[20] A full half of Haiti's population is undernourished and nearly 60 percent live in poverty, nearly a quarter of whom live in extreme poverty. Literacy rates hover at 64 percent for men and 57 percent for women.[21]

The country has also some of the worst gender-skewed statistics in the Latin America and the Caribbean region, and a 2010 United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Gender Assessment in Haiti identified a "feminization of poverty."[22] Despite being backbones of society and the local economy, women's unemployment in the formal sector is a third higher than that of men, and women-led households (which represent nearly 40 percent of households in the country) experience higher levels of poverty than among male-headed households. Women who do find formal sector employment earn 2.5 times less than men earn.[23]

"Little girls carry and come. Little boys carry and go." – Creole proverb

The traditional cultural understanding of gender roles in Haiti places women as the "central pillar," which celebrates the woman as the center of the household. This has evolved, however, to mean that women are expected to serve their families. Movement outside of the household for tasks other than livelihood, especially in rural areas, is limited and discouraged. This conditioning starts at a young age, where girls are socialized to dedicate themselves to taking care of

[17] CEDAW/C/HTI/CO/8-9. March 8, 2016. page 6.
[18] http://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/68606
[19] http://www.genderindex.org/country/haiti
[20] World Food Program, 2018 http://www1.wfp.org/countries/haiti
[21] *ibid*
[22] USAID 2010 http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PA00K556.pdf
[23] *ibid*

and serving others, while boys are encouraged to go beyond the household and explore. One respondent, interviewed during the assessment, underscored the inability of women to experience downtime or life beyond the immediate service of their family. She offered the example of cockfights, which are commonplace in the countryside and usually attended by both men and women. The difference, according to the respondent, is that generally men get to enjoy the fight, whereas the women are relegated to providing refreshments, food, and other services.

The assessment found that in households with unemployed men, the usual practice is for women to hand over all earnings to them. As one respondent put it: "Women have a paradoxical status in Haiti: they play a key role in daily life but are completely outside the power structures." There is some divergence from this in the elite class in Haiti, where women entrepreneurs are often successful, and, importantly, more socially and culturally accepted as active participants in the formal economy's private market.

A key highlight in CEDAW's 2016 report is the increasing isolation of rural women, for whom life is extremely difficult and access to services is limited. The Haitian government identifies this challenge through several health indicators, including the risk of cholera and high maternal mortality rates, as well as low literacy rates – with literacy rates for urban women hovering around 58 percent versus a 37 percent rate for women in rural areas.

The Human Development Index has also identified significant swaths of urban and rural poverty using multiple indicators, such as income level, literacy rates, and access to health services.[24] Heavily armed and violent gangs promote lawlessness, severely limit access to urban neighborhoods, and isolate many rural villages. The Haitian government's failure to enforce the rule of law in the country has generated ubiquitous impunity and, specifically in the case of the 2015 elections, the disregard for both "law and order and [the] enforcement of civil liberties and human rights."[25] Respondents in IFES' field assessment were unanimous in recognizing pervasive violence, often linked to poverty and the absence or lack of enforcement of the rule of law.

Under these circumstances, women bear the brunt of poverty's effects, and are dependent on, as well as beholden to, their communities in a manner that overshadows their rights and endangers them. Additionally, in these conditions, crimes against women are not high priorities for law enforcement, and "sexual harassment is largely tolerated by the state where victims can often find themselves blamed for being raped or abused".[26] Consequently, violence against women is infrequently addressed in the court system, even though it is reported as very common in Haitian society by gender-based violence (GBV) response practitioners, government officials, civil society leaders, and individuals.

[24] Haiti ranks 163 out of 174 countries on the Human Development Index (UNDP 2016)
[25] 63rd Session of the UN Committee on CEDAW. "Republic of Haiti: Gender Issues Facing Women and Girls." *Bureau des Avocats Internationaux*, Gender Action, Institute for Justice & Democracy in Haiti
[26] USAID 2010

Access to services for survivors is inadequate. Few perpetrators are brought to justice, an issue that is more complicated because perpetrators are frequently family members themselves, meaning that the survivor-perpetrator relationship is often among close individuals. There is a sense that men have, at best, legal impunity, and, at worst, sanction from the community to take feelings of anger, frustration, or powerlessness out on women. This is often manifested through violence, in part due to a combination of negative masculinity tied to systemic violence, traditional gender values and roles, unemployment, and generally high levels of violence and insecurity in the country. Young men are increasingly becoming perpetrators of GBV, and this rate is affected by growing pervasive, hyper-aggressive, and violent masculinity in Haitian society, coupled with weak governance. The Ministry of Women's Affairs and Women's Rights (MCFDF) receives dozens of survivors on its doorsteps every week but has very little resources or capacity to fully support these individuals. Furthermore, the deeply under-resourced and often dysfunctional Haitian judicial system largely fails in its pursuit of justice for perpetrators of GBV and other crimes against women.

Factor 2. Women's Access to the Electoral Process

Already challenging in regular contexts, barriers to women's participation in the electoral process were greatly exacerbated by the 2010 earthquake and Hurricane Matthew in 2015. Notably, few Haitians, especially poor women and children, have formal identity cards (e.g., passports, birth certificates) due to legal and financial barriers,[27] and the successive natural disasters resulted in the loss or destruction of many existing personal identity documents. Besides these obstacles to voting, women face even more challenges as candidates, stemming from both cultural and structural issues.

The data from a nationwide survey organized by the Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS) and administered by *Borge y Asociados* between October and November 2017 make these obstacles clear. While 84 percent of women reported feeling completely free to vote for a candidate of their choice, most of them still reported facing restrictions that can influence their ability to fully engage civically. Only 44 percent of women reported being completely free to leave their house without permission. In fact, 18 percent reported being completely restricted from doing so. Only 60 percent reported feeling completely free to exercise their freedom of speech and talk about critical issues to neighbors or friends, and only 53 percent say they can move about in public areas without fear or pressure.[28]

If women face challenges to simply exercise their right to vote, those who intend to pursue a political career see those challenges multiply. The lack of support and even mistreatment they receive from both men and other women can certainly deter them from pursuing their political goals. The same survey showed that men and women differed significantly in their opinions about women's political participation. For instance, while 68 percent of women strongly supported that their female fellows run as candidates, only 48 percent of men expressed the same opinion. Sixty-six percent of women strongly supported having women working for electoral commissions, while only 46 percent of men did so. The

[27] USAID 2010
[28] CEPPS *Haiti Public Opinion Survey 2017.*

sphere of political participation where both men and women are more averse to women's participation is in protests. Only 46 percent of women and 34 percent of men strongly supported women's participation in protests. It is also interesting to note that, after participation in protests, having women "working for a candidate" was the category men rejected the most, with only 44 percent of them strongly supporting that form of participation. This might suggest a general awareness of the level of harassment to which women are subject when working with/for politicians.

There are several legal gaps inhibiting women's full access to electoral processes. Laws regarding electoral security have no specific provision for women candidates' security, which – according to the field interviews – is an important need, especially as they might have more difficulty affording private security services. USAID's 2010 recommendation for laws to increase police presence and community monitoring systems with early alert systems to identify potential political 'hotspots' also holds true today, eight years later. Such laws would help "set up legal processes to reduce the likelihood that women and girls are caught up in violence, and ensure that everyday life for women and girls is not disrupted during election times." According to the same report, violence has in past elections kept women from engaging in economic activity, and boys and girls from attending school.

Structurally, the constitutional gender quota lacks enforcement mechanisms, and the local level quota remains susceptible to partial implementation (applied to direct elections only), imbalance (women were rarely elected to positions of primary responsibility) and legal volatility (quota was implemented under a decree, not a law). Regarding the national quota, many respondents in the assessment argued that the top-down imposition of this provision negatively impacted reactions to women's political participation. Indeed, the national quota has faced continual backlash since its introduction in 2011, including by the few women parliamentarians elected to national office in Haiti. In our recent survey, only 29 percent of men and 46 percent of women strongly agreed with state-imposed quotas for women in political parties.

Access to political and financial incentives for parties implementing the quota is also problematic. Both the Haitian Constitution of 1987 (Article 17.1) and the Electoral Decree of 2015 (Article 100.1) set a quota of female participation as electoral candidates at 30 percent. Article 92.1 of the 2015 Electoral Decree stipulates also that the party that reaches that goal will benefit from a 40 percent reduction in registration fees. In addition to that, if the political party (or group of political parties) lists women as at least 50 percent of its candidates and manages to elect at least half of them, it will benefit from an increase of 25 percent in state funding for its next campaign (Art. 129). Women candidates interviewed for the assessment expressed consistent criticism of this, claiming that political parties that qualified for the incentive did not use the additional funds to actually support their candidacies.

Additional structural hurdles to electoral access are also in place. Political parties are male-dominated and largely lack interest in promoting women's involvement. Within this context, women are nearly invisible, and political parties fail to place women in decision-making roles. Several respondents described political parties as having the attitude that women are "dead weight" and "unwinnable." Media coverage of candidates often magnifies and, in some cases, exacerbates gender stereotypes.

Prominent male political leaders are often dismissive or insulting regarding female peers, as evidenced in the sexist and degrading remarks made by former President Michel Martelly toward a woman in a rally during the 2015 campaign.[29]

These perceptions trickle down to the electorate, who believe that men will do anything to get elected and have the resources to deliver on promises to their constituents. Conversely, these attributes are not associated with women candidates, either by assumption or assertion by the candidates themselves. As such, women candidates often fail to secure support from voters, even women voters, largely because they are seen as either non-viable as candidates or incapable of delivering financial prosperity to their constituents if elected.

Additional structural elements in the electoral process compromise women's power and access to politics. A respondent who was a candidate in the 2015 parliamentary elections described a decision in the electoral process that she believes negatively impacted women in a way perhaps unanticipated in its enactment:

> "The prime minister issued a circular[30] stating that government officials must resign from their posts to run for office. This circular was announced after the 72-hour period allowed by the law for candidates to withdraw their candidacy. By design, this circular was a blow to all women running for office. Women lost their jobs because they could not withdraw their candidacies, and parties did not support them financially."

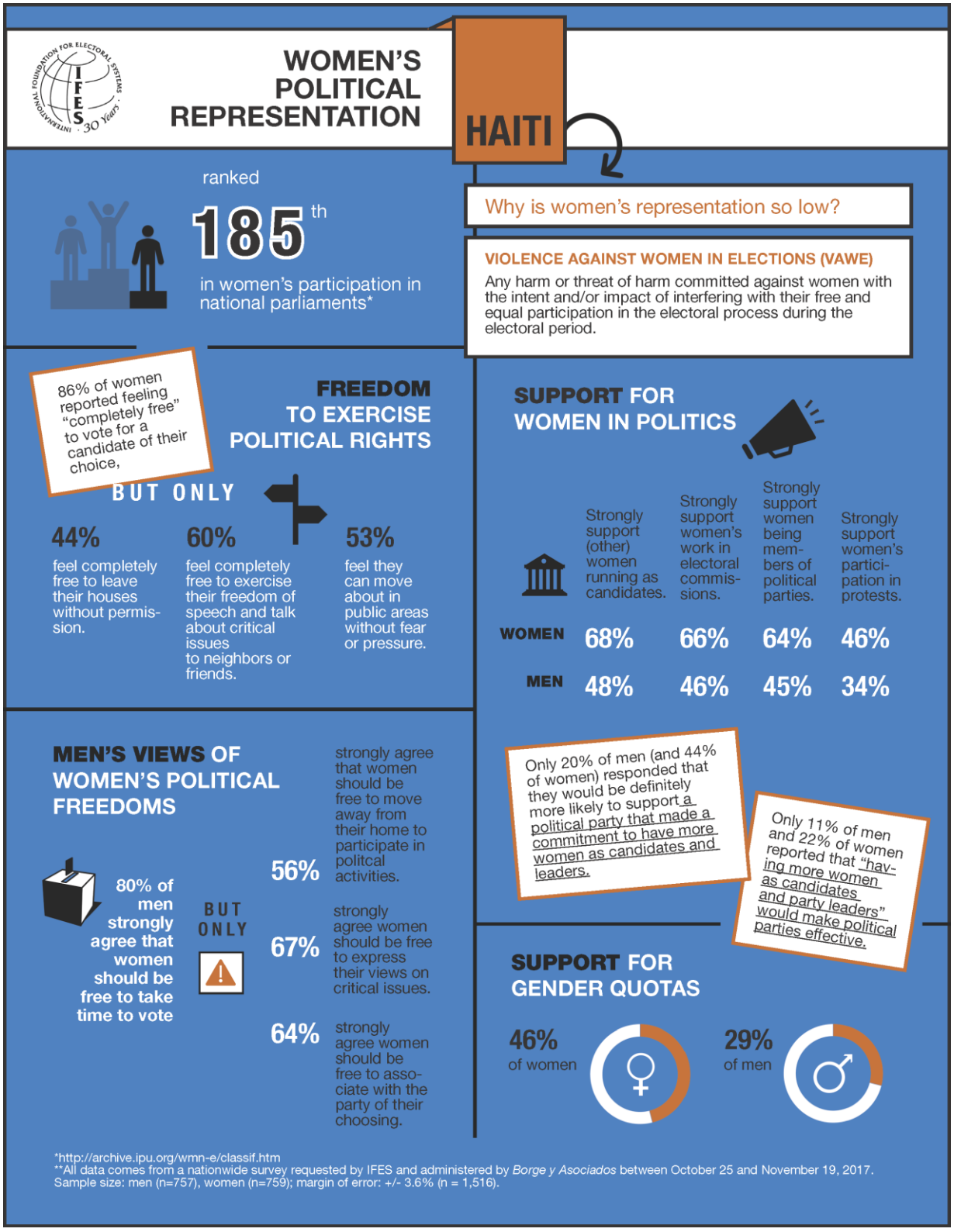
While it is unclear how many women were affected by this measure in 2015 (i.e., how many of the eight percent of women legislative candidates held government positions at the time of the circular), the 11th hour nature of the decision and its adverse impacts on the livelihoods of those affected could plausibly create a deterrent for future political aspirants.

Culturally, Haitian politics is dominated by men and considered out of bounds for women. For women voters and activists, challenges to participation stem from the burden of household responsibilities, political instability, apathy toward politics from all Haitians, and historically rampant electoral violence (to be described in further detail below). Women are pressured by their families to stay home and out of politics. As one respondent said, "politics is not the family." Women themselves embrace the role of family first and self-select out of external activities that do not directly benefit the family. Women who do participate are still expected to receive permission from the men in their family.

When discussing various types of electoral activity, the use of political party-nominated "poll watchers" ("*mandataires*") was identified as a challenge among respondents. Each political party is able to place a representative in polling stations to ensure voting is transparent. Women poll watchers remain few and

[29] BBC. 2015. http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-33801311
[30] Circular n.006, April 17, 2015

far between. Where women are nominated as poll watchers, respondents indicated that male poll watchers often intimidate women voters or other poll watchers regardless of political ideology.



Factor 3. Trends in Violence Against Women in Elections

All of the women and men interviewed for this assessment spoke in agreement that VAWE is a very serious problem in Haiti. This stems from a particularly unstable and violent society with rigid gender roles, where women are exposed to high levels of GBV, combined with a particularly turbulent electoral process, itself rife with violence and fraud. Indeed, nine in 10 Haitian women and girls have experienced some form of GBV, sexual harassment is largely tolerated by the state, and the victim is often blamed by society.[31]

Likewise, election-related violence is widespread in Haiti and considered a conventional tool to establish dominance in Haitian politics.[32] Political institutions are extremely weak, making power-seekers more prone to employ violence as a tool where other means are lacking. The judicial system is also weak and lacks resources to adequately handle crimes related to elections. There is little traction to set up electoral dispute resolution mechanisms, such as tribunals.

VAWE in Haiti exists in all its forms: physical, sexual, social-psychological, and economic. It affects women across socio-economic strata and in the many roles in which women engage in political processes. Violence occurs both in public and private spaces, including in domestic spheres, online, and in the media. It is both structural as well as interpersonal in its nature. It is important to note that, although women from all socio-economic strata experience VAWE, Haiti's deep wealth gap results in very distinct experiences. National-level political races are, to date, the exclusive domain of a wealthy elite. The implementation of local gender quotas, however, introduced a broad new group of women to political life, including many middle-class women and female community organizers, who have distinct security risks and needs. These include risks related to the offices they hold or seek to hold, because they are very proximate to populations that are expressing anger or frustration with state services or policies, making emotional and sometimes aggressive demands on their local representative, and/or amplifying the impacts of attacks on the moral character of a locally elected woman within the community where she lives. These risks also include security issues connected to the locations where these women work, as they need to travel to remote and insecure places as part of their jobs or campaigns. Women in local-level politics also must deal with risks within the institutions where they work, where colleagues (co-party members, other elected officials, staffers, etc.) engage in abusive and violent behaviors and the institutional leadership condones or tolerates such behavior.

The vast majority of Haitian women who participate as voters still come from profound urban or rural poverty, where levels of illiteracy and malnutrition are high. The obstacles these women face – including VAWE – are entirely distinct from that of elite Haitian women politicians. Lacking basic resources, security and education, many Haitian women voters feel far removed from the political space and suffer the consequences of political unrest in the disruption to their livelihoods and heightened insecurity (including sexual violence). Exclusion is so profound for impoverished Haitian women voters that VAWE is structural and omnipresent. Voting is the unique channel of civic participation for many, but an

[31] USAID 2010

[32] Fischer, Jeff, *Electoral Security Assessment – Update Haiti 2016*, Creative Associates International, pg. 13.

independent, informed and empowered voice in civic leadership is far out of reach for women in this class.

Physical Violence, Intimidation, and Threats in Public and Domestic Spaces

In Haiti, Election Day has often been marred by violence at or around polling centers. Poll watchers are often cited as perpetrators. One respondent said, "Male poll watchers intimidate female poll watchers regardless of party [affiliation] to get them to do what they want." Respondents reported that male poll watchers routinely harass and intimidate women voters and women poll watchers, not for their political associations, but simply for participating in the male realm of rough-and-tumble politics. Male poll watchers have also been known to play the part of hooligan or strongman, often touting their access to violence through links to informal gangs associated with the candidate they represent to intimidate voters.



"On Election Day, if you run out onto the street you become a victim of violence."

Voter turnout is frequently under 20 percent in Haiti and some respondents suggested that these low turnout rates are connected to the threat of violence at polling stations, especially for women. One respondent suggested that there is a "subtle pressure to keep women away from the polls," noting that when lines start to form, people start to push, shots are fired, and people scatter. Women, especially those responsible for their household, steer clear of these volatile situations associated with elections. Another respondent told a story from Delmas in Port-au-Prince, where a group of 15 women set out for their polling station. Three men approached the group and started insulting them. Only five women made it to the polling station. Freedom of movement for women who wish to participate in political activities is often restricted by fear of entering "no-go areas" and dangerous neighborhoods, where armed men rove and violent protests are frequent, but may also coincide with their polling station's location.

As in many countries in the Latin American and Caribbean region, family voting is common, especially in rural areas of Haiti. In these circumstances, women are pressured or otherwise coerced to vote according to the political preferences of their male relatives. Several respondents believe that women who do not comply are often threatened. They suggest that women in these circumstances have legitimate fears of domestic violence being used to punish them for straying from the political decisions of their male relatives. Based on the interviews, domestic violence or the threat of it is a likely tactic used to prevent women from leaving the home to participate in political activities. This is perceived to be an even bigger risk for women in isolated rural areas, where they would have to go to great lengths to leave their homes and travel great distances to vote, in defiance of male decision-makers in the household.

Women Candidates and the Culture of Political Violence

Respondents in the assessment noted that candidates are only successful if they use "any means necessary (including violence)" to win an election. Indeed, this has been the case for successful,

overwhelmingly male, elected officials in Haiti. Consequently, respondents noted that it is not only fear of violence, but an inability, reluctance, or refusal to mobilize violently, that sets women candidates apart – and at a disadvantage for victory. Where women lack violent resources (or refuse to employ them), they lose political advantage, as violence is a prerequisite for access to power in that context. The effectiveness of this political strategy of violence and corruption likely contributes to the reluctance among certain stakeholders to change course.

Respondents described an electoral and political experience for women that is violent, filled with harassment, and which builds upon the broader cultural and systemic obstruction to women's political participation. Rape, kidnappings, harassment, intimidation, and domestic violence are acts tied to the experience of women in politics in Haiti, whether as candidates or voters in rural or urban areas. Outsiders and strangers perpetrate these acts, but there is also tremendous pressure and resistance to women's active political engagement from within the family. As a result, many women (especially poor and rural women) do not enter politics on a level playing field. They are hesitant, furtive, and fearful, because politics is not considered their domain and is inhospitable to their participation.

Women candidates for national legislative office described the attacks they suffered as aiming at their characters rather than their political platforms. They mentioned receiving constant threats directed at themselves and their family members.

VAWE in Haiti is Primarily Structural and Non-physical

Although physical violence against women in Haiti is not negligible, VAWE in Haiti is overwhelmingly structural and non-physical in nature, rooted in the social norms and stereotypes that condone and tolerate violence against women, skew perceptions of gender, and generate power imbalances between men and women. In addition to the threats and intimidation described above, sexual-related intimidation and economic forms of VAWE are serious threats for women's participation.

Women who engage in politics face constant and vicious attacks on their moral character and probity of their sexual behavior. Women who pursue or who have successful political careers are routinely accused of prostitution or performing sexual services in return for political favors. In some cases, women reported that these comments were not simply rumors or slander but that they had, indeed, been asked to engage in such behavior by members of their political parties. Whether accused or directly exhorted, many women reported feeling shame, low self-esteem, and even anxiety about their children becoming aware of such accusations. Within their families, women running for office confront resistance and shaming from husbands, extended family, and community members, including religious leaders. They are led to feel inadequate and negligent in their maternal and household duties. Several interviewees reported feeling anxiety, guilt and shame, even though they stated that they continued to perform their home duties as usual.

Economic VAWE includes "being denied funds that an individual is entitled to during her term of office or political campaign; being denied other resources an individual is entitled to in connection with her political office or campaign (offices, computers, staff, salary); harm or threats to harm a business, termination, or threat of termination of employment; or other threats or theft related to one's

livelihood."[33] In the assessment, economic or financial violence was widely reported in diverse forms. In addition to the election-specific forms in the definition, women also experienced this violence in a broader context of state corruption, access to legal and illicit campaign funding, public expectations of financial benefits from elected officials, and general female poverty in Haiti.

Several respondents discussed political fundraising, noting that women candidates generally lag far behind their male counterparts in securing campaign financing because they face constant harassment while seeking those funds. Several accounts were given of offers made by male leaders to support female candidates in exchange for sexual acts, along with insinuations of loose morals, and general disdain for their attempts to enter a "man's domain." Another respondent, using the term "financial violence," described frequent circumstances in which the need to have financial resources to run for office and to simultaneously provide for their family leads women into potentially violent situations. For example, the burden of caring for a sick child or the need to raise enough money for school fees, both responsibilities primarily placed on women, renders women candidates powerless, vulnerable to extortion, sexual harassment, and exploitation.

Patrimonial politics has an uneven impact on women candidates in Haiti. Campaign costs often include an expectation for candidates to provide token payment for supporters' participation in rallies and events (food, drink, cost of transport, etc.), as well as the cost of private security providers (both within and outside the law). Vote-buying is also a widespread practice. Successful candidates are often faced with myriad, personal financial requests from their constituents, which are viewed as reciprocal favors for electoral support. With substantially less wealth and lower access to credit (and thus less ability to take on necessary debt to run for office) due to higher informal-sector employment (especially for women seeking lower-level offices), women are disadvantaged in this aspect and even more vulnerable when unable to pay for their security needs. In general, the intersection of the necessity of self-financing, absent or underfunded public resources, and general poverty drive politicians to engage in high-stakes behaviors, often characterized by aggression, corruption, or even violence, driving out and threatening "outsiders" – including women – that try to enter this competitive space.

Economic violence also impacts voters. Respondents described vote buying and coercion through threats of violence and exploitation as common features of Haitian politics, which impact women in myriad ways. First, many women respondents categorically denied interest in participating in illicit financial practices and violent behavior, which weakens their pathway to elected office relative to their male counterparts, who tend to accept these as norms and winning strategies. Second, women complained that such commonplace practices make women candidates vulnerable to manipulation because they are not financially solvent, and thus succumb to pressure to participate in corrupt practices as the only viable pathway to elected office. Third, by refusing to play the game or to use these types of tactics to win in politics, they are unable to defend themselves before their constituents against a competing candidate using these tactics. Finally, this paradigm impacts women voters, who, facing pressure to provide for their families in extremely impoverished conditions both in rural and urban

[33] Bardall, "Violence, Politics, and Gender". Oxford University Press. 2018.

areas, are vulnerable to vote buying, extortion, and other advances or threats made by candidates willing to exploit their dire circumstances.

Factor 4: Responses to VAWE

The *Conseil Electoral Provisoire* (CEP), along with the Ministry of Defense, police, and MINUSTAH, have all sought to address violence as part of efforts to stabilize electoral processes in Haiti. Nonetheless, persistent electoral violence remains a serious issue undermining political stability. As a result of this overarching concern for an electoral process in disarray, the specific concern of VAWE and the need to address the issues women face when participating in political and electoral activities has been episodically addressed by the CEP, but not explicitly as part of official strategy sessions among security stakeholders. The underlying justification is that, as one respondent put it: "It's all bad – equally so for men and women." However, this fails to underscore the fact that Haitian men and women experience violence differently, and these different types of violence require distinct security strategies. As described in the previous section, women are often clearly targeted for entering a sector dominated by men. By all accounts provided, women are experiencing coercion, harassment, and domestic violence for their interest, participation, and leadership in political activities.

There are only a few targeted strategies in place in Haiti for addressing VAWE, with no coordination between security personnel. The MCFDF is the official body responsible for coordinating and implementing programs to assist and protect women in Haiti, but it is seriously underfunded, as discussed above. Over the course of four years prior to the 2016 elections (2010-14), the UN provided the National Police of Haiti (PNH) with a capacity training on gender-based violence (though this group was not specifically trained on how violence, including election violence, impacts men and women). The project, financially supported by Norway, trained 1,129 police officers to work with victims of violence and resulted in 13 GBV units located in different police stations around the country. During the 2016 elections, IFES and other institutions raised awareness of VAWE focal points through civic education campaigns. During the same cycle, the MCFDF and the PNH coordinated to include responses to VAWE into the PNH's electoral security plan.

Impunity for electoral violence is widespread, and the criminal justice system and electoral dispute resolution process in Haiti are nonfunctional or unavailable, limiting the ability of both men and women to pursue justice on election-related disputes or crimes. Additionally, a broader challenge for women is that their access to formal justice mechanisms for any type of violence or dispute they may experience is severely limited. The CEDAW report notes that access to justice is particularly difficult for survivors of violence against women. Other obstacles to accessing justice include "linguistic barriers, economic factors, a dysfunctional judiciary, lack of awareness of rights and reticence to file complaints because of fear of social stigma and prejudices, relationship with the offender, reservations of parents or guardians, and financial dependence of the victim" (CEDAW report, March 2016). The lack of formal cases involving violence against women seems at odds with the extensive accounts from respondents of the levels of violence women experience during the election period. Civil society actors have sought to fill this gap,

notably the *Réseau National de Défense des Droits Humains*, who provided legal support to women elected in local races through dispute processes in 2016 and 2017 with support from UN Women.

Haiti's electoral management body, the CEP, made notable efforts toward improving women's participation from 2015-17, supported by widespread grassroots activism and women candidacies at the local level. With the assistance of IFES, a Gender and Elections Strategy was adopted by the CEP in July 2015, after extensive public consultation. The CEP's Gender and Elections Strategy committed the body to reach more women as voters, candidates, CEP staff, and civil society members. The strategy focuses on addressing gender inequality in all phases of the electoral process. This goal is articulated in seven specific objectives, as follows:

1. **Legal Framework**: Adopting an inclusive legal framework, in accordance with international and national law, including the constitution, which establishes a minimum 30 percent gender quota at all levels of public administration.
2. **Election Management**: Establishing a roadmap for an election management body to engage and promote men's and women's participation in the electoral process.
3. **Voting**: Promoting the active participation of women as voters in the electoral process.
4. **Decision-Making**: Increasing the presence of women in electoral and political decision-making processes.
5. **Political Parties**: Integrating gender equality in political parties, in order to guarantee the access of men and women to their decision-making structures, as well as to introduce measures to promote gender equality in their electoral programs.
6. **Media**: Promoting pluralistic and inclusive media coverage of the electoral process, which takes into account the interests of women voters and remains respectful toward women candidates.
7. **Violence Against Women**: Promoting a peaceful environment and developing conflict prevention mechanisms, which take into account both public and private violence against women in elections.

The CEP, with support from IFES, opened a call line for women to register complaints about election violence on the 2015 Election Day. The CEP also partnered with the *Promoteurs de l'Objectif Zerosida*, a national organization, to implement a national complaint line for the January 2017 elections for one month, which covered Election Day up until the publication of the results. During local elections, the CEP sought to coordinate with the PNH on the development of a security plan for voting centers, including adopting gender-specific measures. They initiated meetings with political parties to encourage them to nominate women and to discuss gender-specific issues during the campaigns, as well as to establish a code of conduct for candidates. The CEP sought to document incidents of electoral violence, including limited specific references to violence against women.

Civil society is very active in addressing GBV and violence against women in general, but there is little involvement on VAWE in particular. Among the GBV-specific organizations interviewed during the assessment, there was agreement that violence against women in elections was likely common and likely to include sexual and domestic violence, yet none of the GBV organizations had identified specific strategies to address it. Indeed, a survivor-centric approach to GBV response may preclude these groups from drawing the link between a particular case of violence against a woman and the electoral cycle.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, and in consultation with the respondents in this assessment, the following recommendations are offered to stakeholders engaged in promoting women's political participation and ending VAWE at all levels of civic participation:

- Support measures to implement existing Constitutional quota provisions, enact and enforce legislation for the local quota in both direct and indirect elected positions; enhance awareness and understanding of gender quota laws, including financial incentives, responsibilities for enforcement, and impact on women in the electoral process;
- End impunity for acts of VAWE by improving access to justice for victims and awareness of VAWE violations among law enforcement and prosecutors;
- Conduct data collection and evidence-based analysis and programming on the issue of VAWE, including VAWE in social media and other online and media spaces, as well as intersectional analysis of VAWE (including across levels of government and socio-economic strata);
- Conduct trainings for electoral and security stakeholders on gender inclusion and GBV to increase awareness and reduce factors that contribute to VAWE;
- Provide VAWE-specific training and planning sessions for security providers and justice sector actors, including sharing resources available for responding to VAWE in media;
- Identify key allies, including male allies, who can be trained to act as catalysts for change to reduce the factors that lead to VAWE;
- Support women's organizations to create a network or coalition to consolidate efforts to respond to VAWE;
- Train non-electoral stakeholders on elections and VAWE to help them create appropriate responses to VAWE;
- Create mechanisms that allow women to access financial resources to enter politics and to reduce the threat identified as financial violence;
- Create access and support for women candidates to the electoral dispute resolution process; and
- Include VAWE within the overall context of improving electoral security, electoral integrity, and the overall electoral process in Haiti.

ANNEX

Individual Respondents

1. President of the CEP
2. Secretary General of the CEP
3. Minister of the Ministry of Women's Affairs
4. Executive director of the Ministry of Women's Affairs
5. Former candidate for deputy - political party *Verité*
6. Former senator - political party *Famni Lavalas*
7. Former candidate for deputy - political party *Fusion*
8. Director of *L'Institut Mobile d'Éducation Démocratique*
9. Director of *Bureau Technique de Femmes*
10. Inspector of the Haitian National Police
11. University professor of gender issues

Focus Groups with Women's Organizations

1. *Association Femmes Soleil d'Haiti*
2. *La Coalition Haïtienne de Femmes Leaders*
3. *Organisation des Femmes de Charet* (OFC)
4. *Kay Famn*
5. *Fédération des Femmes du Bas-Artibonite*
6. *Komisyon Fanm Viktim pou Viktim*
7. Representatives from the political party *Organisation du Peuple en Lutte*



Global Expertise. Local Solutions.
Sustainable Democracy.

IFES | 2011 Crystal Drive | 10th Floor | Arlington, VA 22202 | www.IFES.org