



Government Offices of Sweden



MINISTRY
OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS



Summit for Democracy Cohort on Gender Equality as a Prerequisite for Democracy Free, Fair and Transparent Elections

INTRODUCTORY OVERVIEW

Gender equality is an imperative for thriving democracies. Any effort to build strong democracies and inclusive institutions will be flawed if it excludes or marginalizes half the world's population. Countries where women prosper also tend to be healthier democracies.¹ Hence, empowering women and safeguarding democracy go together; gender equality is a prerequisite for inclusive democracy.

Around the world, gender equality and women's rights to participate in public life are being undermined by the same forces that are pushing back on democracy. For instance, gendered disinformation and online abuse against women in politics are increasingly used to erode the gains on gender equality, women's empowerment and democracy. Efforts towards more inclusive and equitable democracy are taking place but need to be strengthened and accelerated.

The recommendations of the Summit for Democracy's Gender Cohort, co-led by Sweden, Romania, the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) and International IDEA, provide suggestions to strengthen democracy by striving for gender equality. Considering the close link between gender equality, democracy and free and fair elections, we encourage the Government of Zambia to consider the outlined recommendations when hosting the upcoming regional event on free, fair and transparent elections.

¹ "Exploring the Links between Women's Status and Democracy", Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2023. <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/exploring-the-links-between-womens-status-anddemocracy/>

GENDER & ELECTIONS

Gender equality is fundamental to the electoral process because it enables women—as voters, candidates and elected officials—to influence public policy and advocate for their interests. However, women face significant obstacles to political participation, including the use of targeted gender-based violence and intimidation meant to discourage them from running for office or exercising their political rights. Challenges and risks are even greater for women from historically marginalized communities. Additionally, women are less likely to be recruited and selected as candidates, are less likely to have equal access to campaign funds and face greater challenges to proportional representation.

There can be no governance by the people, for the people—a hallmark of democracy—if women are not able to participate equally in electoral processes. Advancing women’s participation and leadership in politics requires an enabling environment at all stages of the electoral cycle, including pre- and post-election periods. Women must be able to secure a voter ID, register and vote independently of their husbands/family, move and travel safely, and compete equally for elected office.

Women’s political leadership is essential to diversify the voices and interests represented in a democratic society and strengthen democratic institutions. To support inclusive democracy, harmful and discriminatory gender norms and practices in political institutions must be identified and addressed, and in some cases, electoral reforms should be considered. For example, proportional representation electoral systems consistently elect more women to parliament than majoritarian electoral systems.² With women making up only 26.5 percent of global parliaments, free and fair elections are a critical means for increasing the representation of more diverse interests in decision-making bodies. Political parties—the gatekeepers to elected office in most places in the world—also have an important role to play in promoting women’s political leadership. The recommendations below offer concrete actions to support free, fair and transparent elections, promote gender equality, and strengthen democratic resilience.

² Pippa Norris, “The Impact of Electoral Reform on Women’s Representation,” *Acta Polit* 41 (2006): 197–213.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Identify and address harmful and discriminatory gender norms and practices in political, legal and educational systems and processes.

- **Proposed action:** Develop public advocacy campaigns tailored for women/girls and boys/men with messages to dismantle harmful stereotypes and promote gender equality and shared decision making in both the private and public spheres, and to educate women and girls on their political rights and how to exercise them safely.

Eliminate violence against women in politics (VAWIP) and address the proliferation of technology facilitated gender-based violence and abuse.

- **Proposed action:** Adopt legal standards on zero tolerance for all forms of gender-based violence including online and between/within political parties. Recognize hate speech against women in politics and the media as a cybercrime and form of gender-based violence.
- **Proposed action:** Address technology facilitated gender-based violence and abuse in collaboration with social media companies. Increase coordination between online platforms and law enforcement entities in order to identify and respond to threats and hold perpetrators accountable.
- **Proposed action:** Support election integrity by commissioning independent observers and training them on how to monitor and report gender-based violence and intimidation of women voters and politicians.

Engage men and boys in transforming discriminatory practices, attitudes and behaviours that prevent gender equality and women's political empowerment.

- **Proposed action:** Build the capacity of men and boys to become strategic allies and advocates for gender equality by challenging discriminatory practices, attitudes and behaviors in societies, within organizations and political parties.

Foster conditions that promote women's political empowerment, leadership and representation in decision-making.

- **Proposed action:** Support strategic networks and access to resources by earmarking funding for women's political empowerment and leadership programs; convene networks of women for mutual support across political parties to promote opportunities for knowledge sharing, collaboration, and mentorship.
- **Proposed action:** Call upon political parties to adopt inclusive and transparent policies and practices to proactively support gender equality and women's political empowerment. This includes political parties adopting gender equality commitments within policy frameworks and adopting candidate lists that alternate men and women candidates to enable women to compete equally.
- **Proposed action:** Support electoral management bodies (EMBs) to create an enabling environment through gender mainstreaming in the management and administration of electoral processes.

Implement policies and legal reforms for achieving gender equality in political and public life.

- **Proposed action:** Identify gaps in legislative frameworks to eliminate discriminatory laws and policies, including addressing conflicts between formal laws and customary laws and practices.
- **Proposed action:** Institute candidate lists that alternate men and women candidates to enable women to compete equally in electoral systems using party lists for proportional representation.

Incorporate gender responsive planning and budgeting in policies and resources allocation.

- **Proposed action:** Adopt gender budgeting to ensure that resources are equitably distributed and promote the empowerment of women and girls.
- **Proposed action:** Encourage electoral management bodies (EMBs) to collect and analyse gender-disaggregated data to understand the scope of women's participation as voters and candidates in elections and to inform voter outreach.

Leverage UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda to strengthen democratic processes and institutions.

- **Proposed action:** Integrate the WPS Agenda into post-conflict reconstruction and political transition processes to establish and strengthen democratic processes and institutions and good governance structures.

Work collaboratively to develop strategies and tools to mitigate risks to women politicians, human rights defenders, and civil society leaders.

- **Proposed action:** Partner with democratic governments, civil society, law enforcement, and women in politics to develop strategies to identify and respond to risks women face; tools to track and report threats and violent incidents; and rapid response plans.