

# *Violence Against Women in Politics: Research on political parties in Honduras*

This report has been translated from its original Spanish form

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## Introduction

Democracy, as an ideal of political organization and as a form of coexistence, has historically signaled a demand for greater equality and representation. The contemporary debate on democracy focuses on the capacity or inability of the political system to manage and represent the interests and needs of the population, considering its diversity, as well as the capacity to neutralize the historical structural expressions of inequality and discrimination towards broad sectors of the population. One of the central aspects in this discussion is related to the enjoyment and full exercise of rights by diverse social groups, on the basis that their differences should not imply inequality.

For a long time, women were not considered individuals with rights, let alone citizens, and were excluded from political and public life. It is indisputable that the status of citizenship, through suffrage, allowed them nominal entry into political space. However, reality shows that achieving the equitable and equal representation of women in access to and participation in public affairs – part of their political rights – on equal terms and without discrimination, continues to be a challenge that Honduras shares with many other countries of the world.

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) develops actions to support and strengthen democratic institutions and practices, in conjunction with its national partners; part of its work is the promotion of women's full political participation and representation, while accounting for the obstacles that limit them. Violence against women in politics is an area of particular concern that has motivated NDI to generate its global initiatives *Win with Women: Global Action Plan* and *No Party to Violence: Assessing Violence Against Women in Political Parties*.

In this context, NDI has facilitated and produced this study, ***Violence against women in politics: Research on political parties in Honduras***. NDI hopes with this publication to put the issue at the center of the democratic concerns of political parties and Honduran society.

## Executive Summary

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) launched this research with the *objective* of identifying manifestations and practices of violence against women in politics in Honduras. For this purpose, a qualitative investigation was carried out with stakeholders from the *five parties* studied: the National Party (PN), Freedom and Re-Foundation Party (LIBRE), Liberal Party (PL), Anti-Corruption Party (PAC)<sup>1</sup> and Innovation and Social Unity Democratic Party (PINU-SD).

The *first section* of this report outlines the methodological aspects of the research. The information that was collected included a review of various documents, as well as qualitative inquiry through in-depth interviews with women and men who were leaders of political parties (13 in total), focus groups with only women in political parties (five focus groups with 57 women politicians in total), and surveys of women and men in the parties (20 in total). For this purpose, the inquiry was conducted according to the methodology and materials developed by NDI as part of its global initiatives *Win with Women: Global Action Plan* and *No Party to Violence: Assessing Violence Against Women in Political Parties*. The reviewed documentation and results of the application of these tools were processed, organized, systematized and analyzed, allowing for the development of a report exclusively for each political party, and a country report for public disclosure.

The *second section* gives a brief description of Honduran women's political participation regarding the enjoyment and exercise of their political rights, to provide general context for the relevant aspects that are linked to the research objective. A brief reference is made to the electoral system, considering the inclusion of mechanisms to promote women's political participation in political parties (a quota for progressive increase towards parity), aimed at increasing their representation in elected office and party supporters. Considering the timing of the investigation – following the March primary elections in preparation for the national elections of November 2017 – information is included in that regard.

The *third section* provides the conceptual framework on violence against women in politics and its manifestations, based on the framework produced by NDI in its global initiative *No Party to Violence: Assessing Violence Against Women in Political Parties* and other developments in the field. It outlines the existing legal and regulatory frameworks in Latin America for tackling the problem, as well as legal tools developed as a model by international organizations.

There is a “normalization” of the behavior of political violence as part of political practice and the contest for power; it is conceptualized as any manifestation of violence in the political sphere that is directed against women for being women (or that disproportionately affects women),

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<sup>1</sup> The qualitative investigation with the PAC was carried out before the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) appointed deputy Marlene Alvarenga as the leader and presidential candidate of the party.

whose objective or result is to totally or partially prevent them from enjoying their political rights. This violence is caused simply by being female and participating in public and political space, keeping in mind that it is not the physical space where the violence is performed that defines it, but the power relations that occur within it.

The research findings are highlighted in the *fourth section*. Leaders from all political parties agree that political violence against women is not a part of partisan will. It is agreed by the leaders of all political parties that political violence against women is not part of a partisan will. Its existence requires attention, as it is contrary to partisan democratic principles and functioning.

Women from the different political parties show that, although there are various manifestations of violence – toward men and women – that have been considered “typical” in the exercise of politics, women are the objects of specific violence due to the socio-cultural constructions of gender that reproduce patterns and stereotypes of inequality and discrimination in politics. Violence towards women in politics occurs in different spheres of participation: in partisan life; in the selection and nomination to the candidate lists for positions of elected office; and in the exercise of council or municipal office.

The *fifth section* develops the main conclusions and recommendations for action, based on the results of the research. Violence against politically active women is a serious problem that discourages women from participating in political processes, constitutes a fundamental violation of their human dignity, undermines democracy and is an obstacle to the strengthening of egalitarian and non-discriminatory societies.

The recommendations for action are directed at political parties, public institutions and civil society. The aim is to make the problem visible, as well as to facilitate initiatives that contribute to the strengthening of internal party democratization processes and the promotion of egalitarian, non-discriminatory and non-violent relations. The deepening of democratic processes in the field of politics requires various types of changes to institutions and political actors to build a new political culture.

## 1. Research Methodology

This research was launched by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) with the *objective* of assessing manifestations and practices of political violence towards women in Honduras in the field of politics. Five political parties were selected as subjects of the study, considering their relevance on the political-electoral stage and their existing technical assistance relationship with NDI. They are listed below in the order of the results of the general elections of 2013.

- National Party (PN)
- Freedom and Re-Foundation Party (LIBRE)
- Liberal Party (PL)
- Anti-Corruption Party (PAC)<sup>2</sup>
- Innovation and Social Unity Democratic Party (PINU-SD)

The research process *lasted* five months, from March to July 2017. It implemented a *methodology* for gathering information using primary and secondary sources, with an emphasis on conducting a review of various documents and contact with key party stakeholders for qualitative inquiry.

The *qualitative research tools* used are part of the methodology and materials developed by NDI within the framework of its global initiatives *Win with Women: Global Action Plan* and *No Party to Violence: Assessing Violence Against Women in Political Parties*. Between March 22 and 31, 2017, in-depth interviews were conducted with female and male leaders of political parties, as well as focus groups with only women from political parties. A total of 13 in-depth interviews and five focus groups were conducted, as detailed below:

	Political Parties	Women	Men	Total
<b><i>In-depth Interviews</i></b>	National Party (PN)	1	1	2
	Freedom and Re-Foundation Party (LIBRE)	1	1	2
	Liberal Party (PL)	2	1	3
	Anti-Corruption Party (PAC)	1	2	3
	Innovation and Social Unity Democratic Party (PINU-SD)	1	2	3
				13

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<sup>2</sup> The qualitative investigation with the PAC was carried out before the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) appointed deputy Marlene Alvarenga as the leader and presidential candidate of the party.

	<b>Political Parties</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Focus Groups</b>	National Party (PN)	12	12
	Freedom and Re-Foundation Party (LIBRE)	14	14
	Liberal Party (PL)	13	13
	Anti-Corruption Party (PAC)	6	6
	Innovation and Social Unity Democratic Party (PINU-SD)	12	12
			57

The *in-depth interviews* were requested from each party based on leadership positions, regardless of the sex of whoever held them. In the case of the *focus groups*, the investigation was carried out with women from political parties with extensive experience in party work and/or in positions of elected office at the municipal or parliamentary level, with each party selecting the participants. On average, in-depth interviews lasted one hour and focus groups were carried out within three hours.

In addition, each party was asked to provide contact information for seven men and seven women, who were given a *survey* to be completed. The experience demonstrates that, even with constant follow-up, it is difficult to get a response to online surveys or those sent by email. A total of 20 surveys were received.

	<b>Political Parties</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Surveys</b>	National Party (PN)	2	--	2
	Freedom and Re-Foundation Party (LIBRE)	2	4	6
	Liberal Party (PL)	3	1	4
	Anti-Corruption Party (PAC)	2	1	3
	Innovation and Social Unity Democratic Party (PINU-SD)	2	3	5

The tools<sup>3</sup> used for the in-depth interviews and focus groups consisted of structured questionnaires with open-ended questions, facilitating dialogue and voluntary interaction on the part of the person being interviewed or among the focus group participants. The survey

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<sup>3</sup>NDI clarifies that these tools of qualitative research are not final instruments, since the experience of applying them for the first time in Honduras is contributing to their modification and improvement for implementation in other countries. The research tools will be published on [www.ndi.org](http://www.ndi.org) in January 2018.



consisted of a questionnaire of closed questions, with some questions differentiated if the respondent was male or female.

NDI guarantees the confidentiality and anonymity of the information received, which has been used exclusively for the purposes of the investigation. The source of the quotations that are included in the document as illustrative of the topic under consideration, reflect that anonymity, using general names like “leader of party” or “political woman in focus group.”

The reviewed documents and the results of the implementation of the tools were processed, organized, systematized and analyzed. A document was put together *for each political party*, the content of which reflects the findings of the research and proposes recommendations for action, in order to contribute to the strengthening of their internal democratization processes and the promotion of egalitarian and non-discriminatory relationships. The reports will be presented to each party for analysis and work in conjunction with NDI.

The synthesis and analytical reflection of all the information gathered makes up a country report for public disclosure, which seeks to contribute to critical reflection – of political parties, public institutions and Honduran civil society – on the existence of practices that have been normalized in the public and political spheres, which are forms of violence that damage the human rights of women.

## 2. Context: Political rights and political participation of Honduran women <sup>4</sup>

*Human rights* are set out in international instruments on the subject, constituting a set of states' *obligations*, aimed at guaranteeing human dignity without distinction of any kind. *Equality* and the *prohibition of discrimination* are the two fundamental principles of human rights. Respect for them is the basis for the development of a democratic society and the rule of law.

*Political rights* cover three substantial manifestations: the right to vote and to be elected; the right of everyone to participate in the administration of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives; and the right to equal access to public service. This implies the full participation and representation of women in the effective exercise of political power and in decision-making processes in all spheres of public and political life, on an equal basis with men and without any discrimination.

For a long time, women were not considered individuals with rights, let alone citizens, and were excluded from politics. Citizenship and equality were men's issues, as were political activity and public life. The process of change led by women beginning in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries led to the recognition of their political rights (Torres Garcia, 2014). However, reality shows that achieving equitable and equal representation of women continues to be a challenge at the global level. According to data from 2017 (IPU and UN Women), there are 11 women heads of government, out of a total of 193 countries. That same year, the world average of women parliamentarians reached 23.1% (IPU and UN Women) and in Latin America and the Caribbean, it reached 28.1% (ECLAC). As the Secretary-General of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU, 2017) points out:

“These developments show that progress in gender equality remains slow in all structures of power and types of decision-making. Power is still firmly in men’s hands, and although we have witnessed some positive trends – for example, the current record number of 53 women speakers of parliament or legislative chambers out of 273 posts, globally – much remains to be done if women are to play on a level field with men.

“Equal representation in positions of power is a fundamental precondition for truly effective and accountable democracy.”

*Honduras* faces the same challenges to the enjoyment and full exercise of the political rights of half its population – women – on equal terms and without discrimination, as guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic and the international human rights instruments ratified by the

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<sup>4</sup> This section aims to provide general context for relevant aspects that are related to the subject of this research, and does not claim to be a full assessment of the participation and political representation of female Hondurans.

Honduran state. Although Honduran women were granted the right to vote and be elected in 1954, their access to positions of elected office has been slow, as exemplified by data from 2002-2006 (TSE):<sup>5</sup> during this time, women accounted for only 7% of the country's national deputies (legislators), 9% of mayors, 12% of vice mayors and 17% of local councilors.

It was the approval of the Law on Equal Opportunities for Women (2000) and through various reforms to the law on Electoral and Political Organizations (2004 and 2012), that contributed to the inclusion of mechanisms for promoting and assuring women's political participation and representation in the electoral system: specifically, a quota as an affirmative action mechanism and, subsequently, for parity (NDI and IFES, 2013).

The 2004 reform of the Electoral and Political Organizations Act (LEOP), which was implemented during the 2005 elections, made it obligatory during electoral processes to comply with a *30% quota of women* for leadership positions within parties and for elected office (primary and secondary deputies for the National Congress and the Central American Parliament, mayors, vice mayors and councilors). In the 2012 reforms to the same law, the quota was *increased to 40%*, and was implemented in the 2012 primary elections in preparation for the general elections held in 2013. This reform also stipulated a transition to electoral *parity* – 50% women and 50% men – with the inclusion of a mechanism for alternation in the LEOP. This modification would begin with the 2016 primary election process, which was moved to March 2017, and with the general elections in November of the same year:

“Article 105-A. Principle of Parity.

“Beginning with the primary electoral process to be held in 2016, a Principle of Parity is established in relation to the participation of women and men in the nominations for positions of leadership of political parties and positions of elected office; to the effect that they are integrated to contain fifty percent (50%) women and fifty percent (50%) men. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal will regulate the application of this Parity Principle and implement the mechanism of alternation for women and men in the creation of the candidate lists and nominations to be presented.

“To strengthen the capacities required for the Principle of Parity to be implemented with equal opportunities for women, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, starting in 2013, will make budget forecasts to be included in the General Budget of Revenues and Expenditures of the Republic in order to transfer an amount, equivalent to ten percent (10%) of the total political bonds, annually to the Political Parties. These funds should be used exclusively for the training and political advancement of women; Political Parties may apply financial mechanisms in anticipation of the resources and cancel the debts

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<sup>5</sup> The statistics on the electoral contained in this section have been sourced from the web page of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE): <http://www.tse.hn>

when the transfers are received. The Supreme Electoral Tribunal shall regulate and supervise the transfers and use of these funds and shall establish corresponding pecuniary and administrative sanctions when they are not used for the established purpose.”

The law also stipulates that political parties must “create the material conditions that allow the true inclusion of women in all aspects of party life” (article 103) as well as adopt and implement a “gender equity policy” that they are required to present to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (article 104).

Obstacles to the effective implementation of quotas have been extensively documented (NDI and CEDOH, 2014. NDI and IFES, 2013. UNDP, 2010). Even so, the data show that it fostered an increase in women’s political representation, mainly in the National Congress: in 2006-2010 the number of female deputies rose to 24.2%, and, although it decreased to 19.5% during the period between 2010 and 2014, it increased to 25.8% in 2014-2018 (TSE).

In this context, it is essential to consider the characteristics of the *electoral system*. This component of representative democracy exerts a significant influence on the access of women to positions of elected office – to those spaces of power and decision-making through which the political class represents and takes in the demands of the society. The Honduran electoral system is characterized by *open lists*. The *preferential vote* allows the electorate to change the order of the candidates on the same party list, voting for the person they prefer; those who accumulate the highest number of preferential votes are elected, on a descending basis. *Two types of elections* are held in the country:

- In the *primaries*, the political parties choose their unique candidates for the Presidency and Offices of the Republic, deputies of the National Congress and Central American Parliament and members of municipal authority (mayors, vice mayors and local councilors), through the preferential vote that changes the order of the list.
- In the *general election*, the population votes for these authorities based on the lists that the political parties present as the result of their primaries. This election uses the *departmental electoral quotient* method, wherein the total valid votes obtained by all political parties, alliances and independent candidates are divided among the number of positions to be elected; this implies that the posts at the end of the lists have no real possibility of being elected.

Both the *quota* and the current rule for *parity* only apply to the political party lists for primary elections. However, political parties that do not conduct primaries because they do not have internal factions in contention must implement parity (and previously, the quota) in their candidate lists for the general elections (NDI, 2014. NDI and CEDOH, 2014).

In 2016, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) approved the ‘Regulations for the Application of the Principle of Parity and Mechanism of Alternation for Women’s and Men’s Political

Participation in Electoral Processes.’ Although the regulation enforces the principle of parity, the alternation mechanism (woman-man or man-woman) is limited according to the electoral offices of the departments.

Depending on the departments’ electoral offices, *alternation* is mandatory from the second position onward (continuing through the third, fourth and fifth position). In other words: alternation for local government positions in departments with three to six positions starts in position three; in departments of seven to nine offices, it starts in position four; and in departments with 20 and 23 positions, in position five. This provision was implemented for the first time in the March 2017 primary elections, and applies to the general election in November of the same year as well.<sup>6</sup>

Considering that this research began shortly after the *primary elections*, it is interesting to *illustrate some results* that will affect the political representation of women going forward to the general elections. The data of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal show that all political parties that went to primaries – National (PN), Liberal (PL), Freedom and Re-Foundation (LIBRE) – complied with the Regulations in their forms for the National Congress; only one party, LIBRE, applied by its own decision the alternation from the first to the last position

The data released by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal show that all of the political parties that conducted primaries – the National (PN), Liberal (PL), and Freedom and Re-Foundation (LIBRE) parties – complied with the parity regulations in their candidate lists for the National Congress; only one party, LIBRE, made the decision to include alternation from the first to the last position.<sup>7</sup>

In general terms, it was primarily men who occupied the top positions of the lists of primary candidates (those not subject to alternation) and in the first place of the final lists, which are the positions most likely to win election; this is an indication that party leaders continue to regard men as “natural” or more competitive candidates. The voting behavior of the population also shows a preference for male candidates, since only 37.2% of the nominated candidates elected to party lists were women. It is estimated that the gap in local government will be even greater, since for the position of greatest power – the mayor – the political parties nominated men at a rate of 81.7%, and the electorate chose men at the rate of 89.5% (CESPAD, 2017). This is consistent with the persistence of a cultural framework and values in the collective imagination that is based on the social construct of inequality and discrimination, which underestimates the capacities and performance of women in the world of politics (Torres Garcia, 2014).

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<sup>6</sup> On July 28, 2017, the TSE resolved (Agreement 11-2017) how ballots should be in the general election, stating that the electorate may choose their candidates for elected office either by individual marks, or by using a continuous line for two or more candidates of the same party or political movement.

<sup>7</sup> See: TSE [http://www.tse.hn/WEB/elecciones\\_2017\\_EP/Papeletas\\_EP2017/index.html](http://www.tse.hn/WEB/elecciones_2017_EP/Papeletas_EP2017/index.html)

The *challenge* for Honduran society is clear. The limited participation of women in political and public life in Honduras is a matter of concern to the *UN Human Rights Committee*, which oversees compliance with the obligations set out in the UN's *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. In its concluding observations to Honduras, issued on July 24, 2017, the Committee noted:

“Equal rights between men and women

“12. The Committee is concerned about the limited participation of women in political and public life, and in particular the Regulations for the Application of the Principle of Parity and Mechanism of Alternation for Women's and Men's Political Participation in Electoral Processes, which do not guarantee effective alternation in positions of elected office (articles 2, 3, 25, and 26).

“13. The State should intensify its efforts to increase women's participation in political and public life, including the adoption of special temporary measures, if necessary to give full effect to the provisions of the Covenant, as well as amending the Regulations to ensure effective parity.”

The *UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women*, which oversees the implementation of the obligations set out in the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*, has previously expressed its concern about the deficit in women's political representation.

In its most recent comments, from November 25, 2016, the Committee recommended that the country should: “Ensure full compliance with the statutory quota of 50% women in all national and local elections;” and expressed its concern about political violence against women: “The Committee notes that a draft law against harassment and political violence against women is in progress, but is concerned that women, especially in rural and peasant communities, are subjected to repression, discrimination and violence if they participate in political and public life.”

Against this context, there is one final reflection. At present, *parity* occupies a dominant position in the debate on *enriching democracy*. Parity is an accelerator of de facto equality, and through it, the “equal value of dignity and rights of the two faces of humanity” is acknowledged (Marques-Pereira, 2005). Unlike the quota, which is a temporary adjustment aimed at reducing the underrepresentation of women in politics, parity is a definitive measure that seeks to share political power between women and men.

When speaking of parity, this refers not only to a correlation between the sexes and the organs of representation. It is a re-conceptualization of the responsibilities of men and women in the public and private spheres, so that women can become individuals with full access to their rights and political actors with the capacity for intervention and negotiation (Sierra and Del Pino, 2007).

The shift from quotas to parity is not just a numerical change, but a *transformation of the very meaning of political representation and democracy*, which embraces diversity and moves away from the universe constructed by those who have excluded women (Bareiro and Soto, 2015, Bareiro and Torres García, 2009).

Adopting a quota or parity mechanism certainly promotes a quantitative increase of women in areas of political representation and decision-making, but it also entails going further.

It is a question of situating “...the democratic system at the center of transformation. It represents a model of democracy in which parity and substantive equality embody the two axes of an inclusive state” (PARLATINO and UN Women, 2015). What is needed, then, is a qualitative advance in terms of deepening the democratic processes in the political sphere, which requires various types of changes to institutions and political actors, aimed at building a *new political culture*.

*“Parity is one of the key driving forces of democracy, whose aim is to achieve equality in the exercise of power, in decision-making, in mechanisms of social and political participation and representation, in diverse types of family relations, and in social, economic, political and cultural relations, and constitutes a goal for the eradication of women's structural exclusion.”*

*ECLAC. 10<sup>th</sup> Conference, Consensus of Quito, 2007.*

*“For the purposes of this standard, the term Parity Democracy means a model of democracy in which substantive equality and parity between men and women form the backbone of the transformations that a responsible and inclusive State assumes.”*

*PARLATINO and UN Women. Framework to Consolidate Parity Democracy, 2015.*

*“Formal and informal equality between women and men is a fundamental human right. Equality requires parity in the representation and administration of Nations.”*

*European Summit on Women and Decision Making. Declaration of Athens. 1992.*

### 3. Violence against women in politics: Concepts, manifestations and legal developments

*Violence* is a complex and difficult concept to understand; it has multiple analytical approaches, as well as a multifactorial and multidimensional sense of causes and consequences. It is a phenomenon present throughout the whole history of humanity, which has manifested itself in wars, conquest of territories, control of women<sup>8</sup> and various human groups, among others. It is a social construction of domination and subjugation that has highlighted the need to transform scenarios and societies based on violence into scenarios and societies of coexistence, organized based on values and principles of public good, which can lead to democratic and inclusive systems organized to guarantee human rights in all aspects and social spheres (Arboleda, 2012).

#### **The starting point: Human rights**

The violence women face in the political sphere is a *manifestation of the different types and modalities of violence against women*, based on socio-cultural constructions that are revealed in practice by unequal and discriminatory treatment based on a set of norms for conduct, stereotypes, values, different meanings, and disadvantages given by society simply for being a woman. *Inequality* and *discrimination* have consequences for the treatment of the people who are subjected to them, in their way of seeing the world and of their social relations overall; this influences their opportunities and, therefore, the full realization of their capacities and human rights (Ferrajoli, 1999; Facio, 2009; Torres García, 2010).

The international community has made efforts to strengthen the promotion and protection of *women's human rights*, adopting specific international legal instruments that take as their starting point the historical inequality and discrimination towards half of humanity, which are added to the set of instruments that make up international human rights law.<sup>9</sup>

The conceptual development around violence against politically active women is based on the states' obligations included in the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* (CEDAW) of the United Nations (UN) and the *Inter-American Convention to*

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<sup>8</sup> It is no coincidence that the Rome Statute creating the International Criminal Court recognizes and classifies as part of the crimes of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes, rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, enforced sterilization, or other sexual abuse of comparable gravity against women.

<sup>9</sup> Basic international instruments of international human rights law: the Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination; Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women; Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment; Convention on Children's Rights; Convention on the Protection of the Rights of Migrant Workers and Members of their Families; and Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.



*Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women* (also known as the Belem do Pará Convention) of the Organization of American States (OAS).

*“For the purposes of the present Convention, the term “discrimination against women” shall mean any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field..”*

*CEDAW Convention, Article 1*

The *CEDAW Convention* defines discrimination and establishes the concept of substantive equality: it is not only a question of achieving formal equality – the formal concept laid out in treaties, the Constitution of the Republic and the law – but the real, informal equality that aims at social transformation (Facio, 2009). The Convention recognizes the role of culture and traditions, as well as gender roles and stereotypes of women and men, as fundamental aspects that contribute to maintaining discrimination against half of the population.

In articles 2 and 3, states commit to, by all appropriate means and without delay, the adoption of concrete measures (legislation, public policy and others) in all spheres (political, social, economic and cultural) for the elimination of discrimination against women. Article 7 enshrines their *obligation to eliminate discrimination in political and public life*.<sup>10</sup>

Article 1 of the *Belem do Pará Convention* defines violence against women and explicitly states its different manifestations, stipulating in article 6 that “the right of every woman to a life free of violence includes...the right to be free from all forms of discrimination.” It also states that the right to a life without violence extends to both the “public and private spheres” (article 3).

*“Violence against women shall be understood as any act or conduct, based on gender, which causes death or physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, whether in the public or the private sphere.”*

*Belem do Pará Convention, Article 1*

This instrument establishes that the duties of the state (article 7) to include the adoption of policies, by all appropriate means and without delay, to prevent, punish and eradicate violence

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<sup>10</sup> See also the following General Recommendations of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW Committee): GR N° 19 “Violence against women,” updated on July 14, 2017, through GR N° 35 “Violence against women based on gender;” GR N° 23 “Political and public life;” and GR N° 28 “Concerning the basic obligations of States on non-discrimination” (available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CEDAW/Pages/Recommendations.aspx>).

against women. Articles 4 and 5 refer to the *free and full exercise of women's political rights*, recognizing that “violence against women impedes and nullifies the exercise of those rights.”

In addition, the international community has been reaffirming by consensus the need to strengthen actions to ensure women's full enjoyment of all their rights. In this regard, the *ethical and political commitments* made by states at several United Nations conferences stand out, particularly those focused on Human Rights (Vienna, 1993), Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), Women (Beijing, 1995) and the Millennium Development Goals (New York, 2000). The conferences of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), especially the 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Regional Conferences on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (Mexico, 2004, Quito, 2007, Brazil, 2010, Uruguay, 2016), were also fundamental as drivers of governmental agendas in the region.

### **Violence against women in politics: Conceptual framework and manifestations**

This research is based on the conceptual framework developed by the National Democratic Institute (NDI) in its global initiative *No Party to Violence: Assessing Violence Against Women in Political Parties* (2017). It is estimated that *violence against politically active women* is a serious problem that discourages women from participating in political processes, constitutes a fundamental violation of their human dignity, undermines democracy, and is an obstacle to strengthening egalitarian and non-discriminatory societies.

The problem has been hidden, unknown, ignored or unacknowledged, and considered as part of the “normal” practices of politics or as the “cost of doing politics” and the contest for power. NDI emphasizes that the specific manifestation of violence against women in politics has three particular *characteristics*:

- “It targets women *because* of their gender;
- “In its very *form* it can be gendered, as exemplified by sexist threats and sexual violence; and
- “Its impact is to discourage *women in particular* from being or becoming politically active” (NDI, 2017, page 12).

NDI *defines* violence against women in politics as follows:

“It encompasses all forms of aggression, coercion and intimidation against women as political actors simply because they are women. These acts – whether directed at women as civic leader, voters, political party members, candidates, elected representatives or appointed officials – are designed to restrict the political participation of *women as a group*. This violence reinforces traditional stereotypes and roles given to women, using domination and control to exclude women from politics” (NDI, 2017, page 12).

Bolivia was a pioneer in Latin America in documenting experiences of harassment and political violence, as a result of the efforts of the Association of Councilwomen (ACOBOL) to demonstrate a practice that was harmful to the political rights of Bolivian women during candidate selection in electoral campaigns and during the exercise of their elected office. The *concept* developed by the activists and academics who studied the subject, aptly synthesizes what this specific manifestation of violence consists of:

“Expressions, actions and practices of physical, psychological, sexual, economic and symbolic sexual violence faced by women who exercise their right to political representation, especially in local areas, in order to frighten, pressure, or discredit them and force them to act against their will. In many cases, this is meant to make them resign their elective offices and/or to make political decisions with which they disagree; in others, to make them support discretionary decisions in the management of power and resources, against all ethics and standards of public management and the functions that public servants must fulfill” (Machicao, 2004, page 5).

In addressing the *effects* of political violence against women, NDI (2017) emphasizes that women in politics around the world report the same variety of experiences, although their nature, intensity and impact are different depending on the political and socio-cultural contexts in which they are politically involved.

“For example, there have been notable attacks on politically active women in environments with well-established democratic systems and norms to include women in the political process. However, when the violence is directed at women with fewer resources or who lack support systems or the knowledge of coping strategies, this violence has a greater impact on stifling their voice and participation. Those in even more disadvantaged circumstances – for example, due to extreme marginalization or physical or geographic isolation – are vulnerable to all kinds of abuse and harm, as well as actions that may not seem at first glance to be violent” (NDI, 2017, page 15).

What is common to all the documented experiences is the repercussions on the ability and willingness of women to participate in public life. NDI (2017) highlights that political participation is affected in each of the different aspects in which women’s participation develops: as activists, voters and candidates, and in carrying out an elected position.

*Manifestations* of violence towards politically active women are classified in several common categories – psychological, physical, sexual and economic – that present distinctive features when carried out in the field of politics. NDI (2017) categorizes them as follows:

- *Psychological violence*. Involves hostile behavior and abuse designed to cause fear and/or emotional harm. In politics, this can include threats of physical violence, coercion,

defamation, sexual harassment, social boycott (increasingly occurring on social networks) and acts intended to impair the social status and image of women.

The patterns of abuse and harassment that constitute psychological violence seek to delegitimize women as political actors, undermining their confidence, competence and visibility in the political and public sphere, negatively affecting the way they are portrayed and, therefore, how they are perceived.

- *Physical violence.* Involves injuries inflicted directly on women, as well as acts of bodily harm against their relatives, such as: murders, kidnappings, beatings and even domestic abuse, in order to prevent their political participation.
- *Sexual violence.* Includes sexual acts and attempts of sexual acts by coercion, including unwanted sexual comments or innuendo. Examples include sexual harassment (and even rape) in order to force women to “exchange” sexual favors to win a nomination or get funding, for example.
- *Economic violence.* Implies coercive behavior to control access to economic resources. For example: voters may be denied funds in order to coerce their vote or prevent them from voting; women politicians can be systematically denied access to financial and economic resources to which they are entitled by law (either for political training or for a campaign) and which are available to their male counterparts.
- *Threats and coercion.* Threats can be verbal or physical indications of intent to cause harm or commit violence. Coercion is the practice of persuading or forcing a person to do something using threats or violence.

*“The problem of women’s underrepresentation is a reflection of the discrimination faced by women in public life, and political violence against women is one of its worst manifestations.*

*“Acts such as preventing a woman from voting, the use of sexual violence against electoral candidates; the burning of women’s campaign materials; pressures for their resignation; continuous trials against women in the media, the main perpetrators of symbolic violence which, based on prejudices and stereotypes, undermines the image of women as effective political leaders; the violent messages and threats received by many women in public positions through social networks, which often also affect their families; constitute only some of the terrible acts of violence that women face, because they are women, in the exercise of their political rights.*

*Sadly, this region has even witnessed the femicide of women for the act of participating in politics.”*

OAS. 2017.

As has been pointed out, the consequences for women are serious and manifold; they depend on the type of political violence – and combinations of those types – that women are subject to, but in all cases their personal integrity is harmed and their human rights are affected.

The impact that violence has on women's enjoyment and full exercise of their political rights is also serious: it impedes their participation and political representation; many times, it causes them to abandon a political career after holding an elected office; inhibits the desire of other women to participate in political life; and has high costs on a personal level (emotional, psychological and physical). As NDI (2017) states, "...democracy without the equal and active participation of half the population is impossible, and violence represents a direct threat to the ability of women to participate in politics freely and without fear."

### **Regulatory and legal developments in Latin America**

*Bolivia* is a pioneer both in the region and the world, because it has a legal and normative framework that categorizes and sanctions violence against women in politics. The legislative initiative was driven by the Association of Councilwomen (ACOBOL) for over ten years as part of their advocacy focused on bringing about a state response to lived experiences – especially the experiences of women in municipal politics – which were documented continuously by the organization.

*Two definitions* were developed – for political harassment and political violence – that, although closely related, pose differences in depth or degree. *Political harassment* is understood as pressure, impediment, restrictions or bullying; and *political violence* is conceived as aggression and damage to personal integrity. In the Bolivian experience, it was established that any act or action which begins as harassment (conflict, at first) and is not solved at that stage, tends to become political violence based on gender (Rojas, 2012).

Bolivia's Electoral System Law (Law No. 26, 2010) recognizes political harassment as an *electoral crime* (article 238) and defines it as: "The person harassing a female or male candidate during or after an electoral process, in order to force them to resign their candidacy or office against his or her will, shall be punished with a prison sentence of two (2) to five (5) years."

The Bolivian Law Against Harassment and Political Violence against Women (Law No. 243, 2012) has as its *objective* (article 2): "To establish mechanisms for the prevention, treatment, and punishment of individual and collective acts of harassment and/or political violence towards women, in order to guarantee the full exercise of their political rights." The following fundamental *definitions*, relevant to this research, are transcribed below:

*“Article 7. Definitions.*

*“Political harassment.* Political harassment refers to the act or set of acts of pressure, persecution, harassment or threats committed by a person or group of people, either directly or through third parties, against women candidates, elected women or women carrying out public political functions, or their family, for the purpose of preventing and/or inducing an action or omission against their will in the performance of their duties or in the exercise of their rights.

*“Political violence.* Political violence is understood to be physical, psychological or sexual actions, behaviors and/or aggression committed by a person or groups of persons, directly or through third parties, against women candidates, elected or appointed women, women carrying out public political functions, or against their family, in order to shorten, suspend, prevent or restrict the exercise of their office, or to induce or force them to perform an action or omission against their will in the performance of their duties or the exercise of their rights.”

It should be noted that the Bolivian law lists acts that constitute harassment and political violence (article 8), and among its main content, establishes mechanisms for denunciation and punishment through administrative, criminal and constitutional means (article 14).

Other countries have incorporated aspects of political violence into their general laws on violence against women. This is the case in El Salvador's Special Comprehensive Law for a Violence-Free Life for Women (Decree No. 520, 2010), which includes mockery, discrediting, degradation or isolation of women as types of violence in different spheres “...including spaces of political or citizen participation.” Argentina’s Law on the Comprehensive Protection of Women (Law No. 26.485, 2009) includes in its definition of institutional violence that which is exercised in political parties, trade unions, business organizations, sports and civil society.

In Mexico, the Political Constitution of the City (January 30, 2016) recognizes political violence against women as a cause for the annulment of an election. It should be noted that the General Law on Women's Access to a Violence-Free Life (2013) already defined gender-based political violence as: “those acts that seek to impose gender stereotypes, or limit women’s ability to exercise a political role” (article 21). At present, various federal entities have included the concept of political violence against women, and classified it as a criminal offense, in some of their legislation.

The Protocol to Address Political Violence against Women (2016), formulated and implemented in Mexico during the 2015-2016 elections, is a useful tool – which necessitated a consensus among various state institutions – to address and intervene against this problem.

*“That it is the responsibility of the State, citizens, political parties, social and political organizations, and trade unions, to foster legal and cultural changes in order to guarantee the substantive equality of women and men in political spheres, according to the recommendations of the United Nations Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women and the commitments assumed through the Convention of Belém do Pará;*

*“That the problem of political harassment and/or violence against women highlights that to achieve political parity in a democracy, it is not enough to adopt quotas or ensure electoral parity; instead, it requires a comprehensive approach that on the one hand, ensures equal access of women and men to all government institutions and political organizations and, on the other hand, ensures that the conditions for exercising that access are free of discrimination and violence against women at all levels and in all arenas of political life.”*

*Declaration on Violence and Political Harassment Against Women.  
OAS Mechanism for Follow-up to the Convention of Belem do Pará, 2015*

Framework to Consolidate Parity Democracy, which was approved in 2015. In Article 5, the framework emphasizes as one of its guiding principles the need to “...eliminate all forms of violence, including political harassment and political violence,”

and reiterates in various articles that “...the prevention and eradication of harassment and political violence against women requires measures, including legislation, comprehensive plans and institutional reforms for its prevention, punishment and eradication, at all

In March 2017, the Mexican Senate approved an Opinion that aims to: “Incorporate the definition of gender-based political violence in the General Law on Women's Access to a Violence-Free Life, in the General Law on Institutions and Electoral Procedures, the General Law of Political Parties and the General Law of the Appeals System. In addition, to incorporate sanctions for those who commit these types of acts.” The ruling is now in the Chamber of Deputies and has already secured the approval of the Governance Commission (April 2017) for discussion in plenary. As can be seen, the Mexican approach seeks to modify and strengthen existing legislation, rather than creating new laws.

It is important to note that various *regional bodies* have expressed their concern about manifestations of violence towards women in politics, calling on states for prevention, treatment and punishment.

The Latin American and Caribbean Parliament (PARLATINO), with the support of UN Women, has formulated a Regulatory

*“To adopt legislative measures and institutional reforms to prevent, punish and eradicate political and administrative harassment of women who reach decision-making positions through electoral means or by appointment at national and local levels, as well as in political parties and movements.”*

*Quito Consensus  
10<sup>th</sup> Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean  
ECLAC, 2007*

territorial levels and in all powers of the state. Political parties and organizations must accept responsibility to prevent and eradicate this phenomenon.”

The conceptual definition of *violence against women in politics* and how it can be prevented, eradicated and sanctioned via legislation, public policy and the actions of institutions and/or powers of the state, is still in the process of being constructed. As Piscopo (2016) points out: “Definitions matter, because the way in which problems are defined indicates to a large extent how states mobilize resources and institutions to deal with them.”

The practical experiences and the academic developments focused on the problem have put the importance of a *comprehensive and inter-institutional approach* at the *center of the debate*. Electoral bodies are designed to guarantee political rights, not to resolve acts that are carried out against women in the political context but that are crimes over which the *justice system* has jurisdiction (such as violations of women’s physical integrity). In the face of political violence against women, the *electoral body* can: regulate and punish political parties and their leaders or members who perpetrate violence, restore a woman to her position, guarantee and control the use of financial resources meant for women’s training and political development; however, this body does not have the authority to act if there is sexual harassment or sexual violence, for example (Piscopo, 2016).

From this perspective, it is incumbent upon the electoral bodies to strengthen their performance on the issue in accordance with their responsibilities; for political parties to undertake internal measures for egalitarian, non-discriminatory and non-violent action; and for existing legislation be revised and reformed, so that women have full access to a life free of violence.

A fundamental reference, which constitutes the most recent conceptual and normative development, is the *Model Inter-American Law on Political Violence against Women*.<sup>11</sup> This was approved in May 2017 by the Committee of Experts of the Monitoring Mechanism of the Belem do Pará Convention (MESECVI) and the Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) of the OAS. It recognizes that political violence against women constitutes a serious violation of their human rights and is a major threat to democracy, stressing: “The urgency that, pursuant to the mandates established in the international and inter-American legal framework, states should take all necessary measures for its eradication, on the understanding that the elimination of political violence against women is an essential condition for democracy and good governance in the hemisphere.”

The Model Law was developed out of the contents of the Belem do Pará Convention, which was *the first regional effort to:*

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<sup>11</sup> General information is available from the OAS at: <http://www.oas.org/es/cim/violenciapolitica.asp> y <http://www.oas.org/es/mesecvi/>. The text of the Model Law will be available soon on this website.



- define the problem of political violence against women, incorporating the inter-American and international legal framework;
- identify the responsible bodies and guidelines for action in relation to the prevention, treatment, punishment and redress of this violence; and
- determine what type of acts of political violence should be punished – distinguishing between serious and very serious offenses, and criminal offenses – indicating a series of specific sanctions that could be applied.

The key to the *definition of political violence* embodied in the Model Law is found in the expression “gender-based.” The concept thus encompasses any manifestation of violence in the political sphere that is directed against women for being women, or that disproportionately affects women, with the purpose or result of preventing them from fully or partially enjoying their political rights. Thus, *women experience this violence because they are women participating in public and political space, keeping in mind that it is not the physical space where violence happens that defines it, but the power relations that occur within that space.*

“Article 3. Definition of political violence against women

“‘Political violence against women’ means any action, conduct or omission carried out directly or through third parties that, based on their gender, causes harm or suffering to one or more women, and has as its objective or result the impairment or negation of the recognition, enjoyment or exercise of their political rights.”

“Political violence against women can include, among other aspects, physical, sexual, psychological, moral, economic or symbolic violence.”

It should be noted that the Model Law establishes the *areas* in which political violence can occur: in *private or within the family*, where violence can occur when a partner prevents a woman from voting or going to the polls; in the *public* sphere, referring to the violence that can occur, for example, in a political party or through the media; and within the *state*, as is the case of violence perpetrated by people in government positions. It also contains an important *catalog of actions, behaviors or omissions* (article 6) that constitute acts and manifestations of political violence against women, incorporating the different studies that have been carried out in various countries of the region.

The Model Law serves as a legal foundation and provides states with the legal framework necessary to ensure women’s right to a life free of political violence, and thereby, to move forward in the process of synchronizing national legal systems with the provisions established in the Inter-American Convention to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women (Belem do Pará Convention).

## 4. Violence against women in political parties in Honduras: Research findings

This section explains the findings from the application of qualitative research tools (in-depth interviews with women and men who are leaders of political parties, focus groups with women from political parties, and surveys of women and men) on the five political parties studied, which are listed below in the order of the results of the general elections of 2013.

- National Party (PN)
- Freedom and Re-Foundation Party (LIBRE)
- Liberal Party (PL)
- Anti-Corruption Party (PAC)<sup>12</sup>
- Innovation and Democratic Social Unity Party (PINU-SD)

The analysis focuses on the root causes of violence against women in politics, as noted by NDI (2017):

- *Institutional Causes*. The lack of institutional mechanisms, laws or policies that prevent discrimination or limit the ability of women to participate in public life. This also includes the absence of laws or policies that defend victims of this violence, and of norms or structures that address violence against women in political institutions or that promote women's leadership/participation.
- *Socio-cultural Causes*. These originate from discriminatory gender norms, including those that relegate women to the private sphere and privilege men as politicians by nature. They are also based on the “normalization” of violence in general and violence against women in particular. They can include how much is known in general about violence against women in politics; and whether it is socially recognized and acceptable.
- *Individual Causes*. These include whether people understand or recognize violence against politically active women, as well as refer to the lack of opportunities, knowledge or resources available to women in politics.

The *findings* fall into *two broad areas*: the verification of the persistence of patterns of inequality and discrimination against women in political life; and the recognition of the existence of specific manifestations of violence against women in politics. Both are presented below, although in the first area only the general and most important highlights are included, as it was the second area that was the subject of closer study. In each one, quotations are interspersed in an illustrative

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<sup>12</sup> The qualitative investigation with the PAC was carried out before the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) appointed deputy Marlene Alvarenga as the leader and presidential candidate of the party.

way, while always protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of those who contributed to the qualitative inquiry.

### **Persistence of patterns of inequality and discrimination against women in political life**

It is a widespread perception that women face obstacles in political and public life that are related to practices and customs in Honduran society that are deeply rooted and based on *inequalities* and *discrimination*. This indicates that “machismo” is present every day in the private sphere as well as in the public spaces where political activity takes place.

*“What happens in the political party is a repetition of what happens in society.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“Women in Honduras have to wake up; many do not know what their rights are.”* Party leader.

In general terms, women are said to make up half of party activists, although their political action takes place in a cultural and values context that underestimates their capabilities and performance. This means that – in practice – they are often not considered suitable for leadership or positions of responsibility, even though their fundamental role within the parties is recognized.

*“Women are not sought as leaders to take a seat at the main table and use the microphone, but they’re sought to go knocking door to door, to proselytize. There is strength in the woman of the base, who is always working, who is not recognized enough by the party, nor by many leaders.”* Party leader.

*“Women are like ants, in all the grassroots activities of the party and behind the candidate or the leader. But they always ask us to take care of the kitchen, the protocols, the decoration, to assist the leader and ‘bring him his cup of water.’ And women, because of the culture, naturally lend ourselves to that.”* Political woman in a focus group.

It was also stated that the level of requirements for women is much more rigorous than that applied to men. The fact that men have historically been in politics perpetuates a masculine model for leadership, so that the qualities, skills and abilities of women remain little recognized or “competitive.”

*“We have seen that the party base does not vote for women; it votes for men. Men have more credibility. And that happens much more in rural areas.”* Party leader.

*“Men are the referents, especially at the local level. They vote for them because they have known them forever.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“Women have to work doubly hard to be seen by the party. The measuring stick is higher for women.”* Political woman in a focus group.

A substantive aspect that affects women's access to opportunities and the development of their capacities in politics is the **dichotomy between the public and the private**. A greater or lesser participation in the public domain often depends on the time available and the autonomy to use it. Many women are limited in their political participation due to the socio-cultural role they are assigned in the family, which entails a lack of control over their lives and a lack of economic autonomy. These situations are aggravated for women in rural areas and are further worsened if they are Afro-descendants or from indigenous groups.

*"Women have the ability to lead, but not the opportunity of time. One of the obstacles is motherhood; the woman by vocation is dedicated to the family. Family support is very important; if you do not have it, it is an obstacle to participate in positions that require dedication."* Party leader.

*"It is not the same to be political woman in the city, as it is to be political woman in the interior. In rural areas women face a much stronger machismo, their role as a mother and wife is more pronounced, in many cases they have no income and are dependent on their husband. If the husband does not agree that she can leave to attend a party training or does not want her to stop caring for their children to participate in politics, then the woman does not do so."* Party leader.

*"To participate in politics, women definitely need family support. And in many cases, their husband 'gives them permission.' What a man does normally is not so easy for a woman. If a party meeting ends late, the woman is affected by family dynamics. It is worse in the interior [of the country]: if it is necessary to attend a training or a political activity and the woman must sleep away from her house, her husband does not like it; then he either 'does not give permission' or he accompanies her and interferes with her political participation. Women do not have freedom."* Political woman in a focus group.

*"Sometimes women take their children to party meetings, because they have no place to leave them. And in the meetings, there are no conditions for that, so you have to improvise; other women of the party help to take care of them so that these mothers can participate properly in the meeting."* Political woman in a focus group.

*"What the family says has a lot of influence; that could be the father, mother, husband, sister or brother, whoever. There is this idea that 'politics is dirty and corrupt, why would you want to get into that.' Many women are limited by 'what will the neighbors say?' or by what their friends say: that if you 'abandon your family to become involved in politics,' you 'lend yourself to problems with your family or to those who speak badly about you.'"* Political woman in a focus group.

*“Being in politics has meant a lot of sacrifice. I have received complaints from my family because they have felt abandoned, especially my children.”* Political woman in a focus group.

For the reasons above, this confirms that many women prefer not to commit themselves to political positions or positions of responsibility within a party, instead participating in a secondary way or in support of others so as not to affect their family “obligations” or face the pressures from multiple shifts of work or social sanction.

Political women's leadership potential is also hampered by the **socially-learned** and -transmitted *patterns* of “**being a woman.**” As part of assigned gender roles, women’s success lies mainly in fulfilling the role of “good daughters, mothers and wives” in the family. These roles, by extension, are reproduced in political parties.

*“They assign the organization of Mother’s Day or Children’s Day celebrations to us, but don’t call us in to participate in meetings where important party decisions are made.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“We have a deep-seated feeling that they need us more somewhere else. Sometimes we do not want to be at the main table or we are embarrassed to take the microphone, we often do not promote ourselves.”* Political woman in a focus group.

Although Honduran women have gained access to education and have joined the world of work, there are marked differences in their level of education and income, which influences a greater or lesser assumption of traditionally feminine roles. This indicates that the educational level of women politicians varies: for positions of greater power (such as a national deputy or mayor) they have a secondary education and higher, while for lower positions they’ve reached primary or secondary education.

There is a need for women to be aware of their human rights, to be aware of gender inequalities and discrimination, to be empowered and to assume their position as rights holders, with full capacity to be leaders. In that sense, political training and education is essential for women, but it cannot be neglected that a party training strategy to change the “macho party culture” must “reach men.”

The **media** reproduce the patterns and stereotypes that are present in Honduran society, with a marked tendency to disadvantage women. Media coverage, especially during the electoral period, does not contribute to the visibility of women who are candidates or who participate in politics.

*“The media portrays the candidate in her role of mother, or focus on traditional feminine aspects; they speak very little of her political proposals. They refer to women as ‘a beautiful candidate who adorns the party list’ and do not portray them as leaders; they*

*sexualize them. The parties themselves and their leaders often fall into that game and speak in the same way; that has to change.”* Party leader.

*“The media influences how women of the party are shown and how women’s policy proposals are covered. If they have a pretty face, they focus on them as an ornament for the ballot. They direct different questions at men and women. Men are asked about their proposals; women are asked about ‘naturally’ feminine issues (like education or health) and not socially important ones (such as economics or security), and they talk about how we dress or say that we are ‘the party’s sexy candidate.’”* Political woman in a focus group.

In general, the media associates stereotypically masculine traits as the characteristics that define a good political leader: ambition, rationality, seriousness, control, firmness, aggressiveness and competitiveness. These aspects are rarely associated with the behaviors considered to be typically feminine: sensitivity, emotion, affectivity; although it emphasizes that “women are less corrupt,” they portray women as “lacking the strength required for politics.” These practices are considered to discourage many women from taking on visible positions within the party or from being candidates, and have a greater effect when media exposure (or exposure on social networks) may jeopardize women’s “reputation” or “image” and affect their personal and public lives.

### **Recognizing the existence of specific manifestations of violence against women in politics**

The **leaders** of all political parties agree that political violence against women **is not part of a party’s or leadership’s will**. When exploring their knowledge of situations where it has occurred, perceptions vary:

*“This has not happened in party activities, there is total respect for others.”* Party leader.

*“It’s happened in isolated cases.”* Party leader.

*“It is not a party line; there are specific cases.”* Party leader.

*“Eventually in campaigns passions get inflamed, it’s a struggle for power.”* Party leader.

*“It happens; it’s most obvious in campaigns or in municipal governments.”* Party leader.

*“Women speak about the topic among themselves, it hasn’t been discussed in the party.”*  
Party leader.

However, all the women participating in the **five focus groups** (57 political women in total) expressed that even though it is not a formal party line, **there is violence against women in politics**, and that this occurs in different areas of participation:

- In party life
- In the selection and nomination of candidates for elected positions
- In carrying out legislative or municipal duties.

It is important to highlight some of the specifics that women gave regarding the **context of political violence**, beyond those identified as inherent in inequality and structural discrimination.

*“It’s necessary to separate the violent practices that occur because of being a woman in the party, and the practices that are part of traditional politics.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“There should be no discrimination of any kind within the party, it is necessary to eradicate the ‘rings’ of power or family that exclude many women and many men. The party is not an estate and should not have owners.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“It is a matter of power, of the competition for power. Political tricks have ‘corrupted’ the participation of men and women. There are bad practices of dirty politics within all parties, which must be changed.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“In electoral campaigns, it seems that people stop thinking like a party; they think of themselves as individuals (both men and women, there are no differences there) who strive for power. Then they move away from the ideologies or commitments of the party and personalize it. This exacerbates conflict, favors political violence against women and encourages dirty politics.”* Political woman in a focus group.

The detected types of **violence** towards politically active women are classified in several **common categories** that have distinctive features when carried out in the political sphere. These are similar to those outlined in the third section of this report:

- Psychological violence
- Physical violence
- Sexual violence
- Economic violence
- Threats and coercion.

In light of the different types or common categories of violence, the various **manifestations** are exemplified by illustrative quotes below.

***Psychological violence.***

*“In the current electoral process, there is a lot of psychological violence. There is defamation, the candidate is badly spoken of and she is delegitimized: ‘she does not show enough leadership,’ ‘she has not won a place in the party, who knows what she did to get*

*there', 'she's coming to take membership away from men who have been in the party longer.'"* Political woman in a focus group.

*"If the woman seems like competition, they play with her dignity, lower her reputation, involve her in stories or bad business."* Political woman in a focus group.

**Physical violence.**

*"In the National Congress, physical aggression is used against those who have contrary ideas; it's hidden, but it's there. They push you when you pass through a group of deputies – once is a coincidence, but several times, and after you've had political differences, that's violence."* Political woman in a focus group.

*"In the party, I was shoved on several occasions. At political rallies, when all the nominees were there, they would say 'let her talk last' and prevented me from taking the microphone first."* Political woman in a focus group.

**Sexual violence.**

*"If a woman is intelligent, prepared, qualified and besides all of that she is beautiful, she is a problem. In the campaign, I received invitations from men in the party to go out at night because they 'wanted to get to know me' and when I said 'of course, I come accompanied by my husband,' they answered me 'not like that, you won't have any votes here.'"* Political woman in a focus group.

*"I have suffered from sexual harassment. One doesn't look for it; the same companions of the political movement tell me things. And it's worse if you're young."* Political woman in a focus group.

**Economic violence.**

*"When we haven't supported certain initiatives in the National Congress, on several occasions the salaries of supplementary deputies (men and women, or just women) have been suspended 'because they misbehaved.'"* Political woman in a focus group.

It should be noted that the five focus groups highlighted the need for sustained and decentralized training processes for women, using the funds allocated for these purposes in the Electoral and Political Organizations Act (LEOP).

*"We don't know what happened to the 10% of the political bonds that the electoral law says are for training women. There are very few training activities women and they do not reach the local level."* Political woman in a focus group.



*“The Women's Secretariat has not been informed of this (the use of the 10%), nor has it been provided with resources for the training and political education of women with these funds.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“That these resources for training women are not seen as an expense, but as an investment.”* Political woman in a focus group.

Considering that in the interviews with leaders and in all the focus groups there were women with experience in positions of elected office as deputies or in municipal government, their expressions on the manifestations of political violence that they saw or to which they were subjected are synthesized here:

- Pressure to make decisions in favor of certain groups or interests.
- Intimidation, threats, physical violence (pushing).
- Concealment of information.
- Withholding payments, undue budgetary constraints.
- Exclusion from sessions by way of deception or non-notification, or summons for the wrong times.
- Disregard for opinions or proposals.
- Denial to speak or interruption (verbal or muting the microphone), or unwarranted delay to give the floor (before they gave it to men who requested it after her).
- Disrespectful treatment in formal or official sessions: while men are treated according to their position title or as “lord,” women are called by name or with other epithets (such as “girl,” “little girl,” “beautiful”).
- Segregation to commissions, functions or positions of minor importance or those considered traditionally female.
- Discriminatory treatment on the part of the mass media: calling into question their personal life, their sexual behavior, their physical appearance, their attire.

Discriminatory and disrespectful treatment of women who are currently deputies in the National Congress has emerged in the media, as exemplified below:

*Remarks by Deputy Esdras Amado López of the Freedom and Re-Foundation Party (LIBRE): “The journalist and deputy Esdras Amado Lopez referred to deputy Scherly Arriaga on social networks: ‘Tell LIBRE’s deputy from San Pedro, who has more legs than brains, to respect the name of Esdras Amado Lopez.’ This statement was a response to a political comment that the deputy uploaded to her Facebook account where she mentioned the journalist...” [www.ultimahora.hn.com](http://www.ultimahora.hn.com). September 23, 2015.*

*Radio Statement of Salvador Nasralla, President of the Anti-Corruption (PAC): “About the PAC deputy Fatima Mena: ‘Yes, she was the head of the party faction. But I tell you that because she is a woman, the National Party bigwigs tell her to “sit here little mama, you have a great political career,” to convince her. I have a high regard for her, but these dinosaurs, who are 60 years old and have a lot of experience, know how to conquer a little girl, they take her to dinner to sleep with her,’ he can be heard saying to Nasralla in the recording.” La Tribuna. June 2, 2016.*

*Interview with Doris Gutiérrez, Deputy for the Innovation and Democratic Social Unity Party (PINU-SD): “Now deputy, tell me, what didn’t you like about your return to your seat in Congress?’ ‘I did not like the discrimination I was subjected to; since I entered I’ve been removed from all ordinary commissions. It is the only legislative bench that has neither a presidency, nor a vice-presidency, nor a secretariat.” La Tribuna. July 2, 2016.*

There are similarities in the variety of **those responsible** for exercising violence against women politicians:

- Members of the same political party who share the same religion.
- Candidates of the same party who are trying to fit on the nomination sheet for an elected position.
- Candidates from other parties competing in the same geographic region.
- Men of the same party or other parties, with whom women share work spaces while performing the duties of an elected position (national and local governments).

In a sense, this highlights the manifestation of and general concerns about the aggressive and violent practices and behavior of many women politicians towards other women, whether from the same party or from other political parties. This impedes working relationships based on common interests and the establishment of alliances, to the detriment of the party's own women, since “men become allies easily.”

*“It is not just men, there is also machismo on the part of women. Many are like ‘cannibals who eat their own kind.’” Political woman in a focus group.*

*“Women are a stumbling block for women, we trip ourselves. The female party leaders are not united, men are united and protect themselves more.”* Political woman in a focus group.

Violence has an important **impact** on politically active women, both in their personal and public lives. There is a consensus that there is wear and tear in every sense, including the self-imposed need to meet the demands of party life (and public office) and family responsibilities.

*“We are not aware of the different forms of violence towards women in the party, we see it as part of being in politics.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“Being in politics has a very high cost. If I had a weaker character I would have given up. We must resist and persist.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“Sometimes it’s demoralizing; it is tiring to be fighting against ridicule, disqualification, slander. We must work one hundred percent and more to prevail and be taken into account. It has served to strengthen my character, but the truth is that it is exhausting.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“Too much violence. If I could go back in time, I would not agree to be a candidate for deputy.”* Political woman in a focus group.

All the leaders interviewed from the five political parties were unanimous in stating that the **existence of violence** against women in partisan and political life is **unacceptable** and contrary to statutory provisions. In contrast, from the information received in some interviews, together with the result of the focus groups with political women, it is evident that a large part of the leadership has no knowledge or communication channels that would allow them to understand and address the problem.

*“Political violence is not an issue discussed or recognized within the party. At the level of authorities there is no talk of it. As is most evident in the intermediary structures of the party or in local areas and governments, it’s known that it is fashionable, that it’s used, that it exists, but it’s not recognized.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“Political violence against women has to be a party issue. Perhaps not doing anything to discuss it on the part of the party is a way to contribute to the situation continuing. The very fact that is not spoken, that it’s omitted, contributes to the problem.”* Political woman in a focus group.

If violence against women in politics is not the subject of partisan attention, the **channels** for complaints or treatment remain nonexistent and there is no consideration given to **mechanisms** that would allow for hearing about cases and giving a response. How to activate existing

mechanisms (disciplinary, ethical or honor courts), or establish them (in some cases, they only exist on paper) to address the problem, is a challenge that must be faced.

*“Political violence is not something that is talked about among women.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“Many women do not file a complaint in order to protect the image of the party, there is a misunderstood ‘esprit de corps’ – what about their human rights?”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“Cases must get to the party authorities; we must have mechanisms. At this moment, there is nothing. Women do not know how it will be taken if they file a complaint, or they are afraid to speak, ‘well, why are you going to go talking about that if nothing is going to happen, nothing is going to be done.’ It is also true that there is so much tradition, that many times it is seen as part of doing politics.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“It wouldn’t be good if the party is known as the one that fosters acts of violence against women by doing nothing about it. Since there is no internal procedure, the party would be greatly strengthened if it creates one that works.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“The party has not taken a stance or taken measures on cases of political violence against women that have been in the public domain. This does not give security, it contributes to impunity.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“Many acts of violence appear normal in politics; men do not know that they are violating women’s rights. And women are also not aware that these acts affect their rights. It is important to have awareness, training, information.”* Political woman in a focus group.

The formulation and implementation of an **internal code of conduct** (or ethics) for political parties and their members was considered desirable by the leaders interviewed and the women in the focus groups. It was stressed that this code should include respect for human rights, equality and non-discrimination, non-violence; and should be part of the commitments for members, candidates or those who occupy elected positions.

*“There is no code of conduct, it would be important to go beyond the base laid down by the law. It would serve to establish principles and strengthen commitments to the party and to the Honduran people.”* Party leader.

*“An internal code of conduct would be good. Let it be a commitment that is taken seriously, not as a photo-op, but as an action that strengthens the party and helps change the culture and attitudes within the party.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“You have to speak about it inside the party; you have to make changes. That way it would advance the party, and make the most of its female members.”* Political woman in a focus group.

Finally, it was unanimously agreed that the **image** of political parties is harmed if they do not take measures to promote respect for the rights of women in politics in conditions of equality, non-discrimination and non-violence.

*“The party would be damaged badly, perhaps that may be the reason it does not move beyond political violence against women, since that affects its image and the image of its representatives in the National Congress.”* Political woman in a focus group.

*“It’s a disgrace for a party, that it doesn’t respect human rights.”* Party leader.

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations for action

### **Equality, non-discrimination and democracy**

This research shows that, although *Honduras* is advancing positively in promoting the status and condition of women in society, there are persistent obstacles and challenges that must be faced. Like many countries in the world, the main national challenge lies in the *transition from formal or legal equality to informal or substantive equality*. Discrimination and inequality continue and are further deepened when gender is intertwined with ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender identity, race, social class or age (the “intersectionality” of discrimination as outlined by the UN Committee for the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, in General Recommendation N° 28).

It is undeniable that the participation of Honduran women in political and public life has increased, although there are still *important gaps in the enjoyment and full exercise – in equality and without any discrimination – of their political rights*. Public space continues to be a predominantly male world that excludes women, particularly if they are indigenous or Afro-descendants. The progress that has been achieved is still insufficient, and women continue to be perceived as strangers or newcomers to politics.

The exercise of political rights and citizenship cannot be analyzed separately from the notion of *democracy*. Democracy is a system of government and coexistence where the people’s will and needs, as well as the benefits they can access, are considered within a framework of equality. As the principle of democracy is the distribution and recognition of powers, resources and opportunities for all human beings, its main challenge is the inclusion of all social interests in the political decision-making process, recognizing their plurality, diversity and autonomy (Soto, 2009).

Inequality and discrimination is not a “women’s issue” or a problem of groups that have historically been discriminated against; it is a responsibility of the entire society. It is necessary to learn how to build *democratic relationships* – in the public sphere and in the private sphere – without forgetting that a fully egalitarian democracy cannot ignore the participation and representation of the interests and needs of half of the population.

Women’s equality in the enjoyment and full exercise of their political rights and citizenship, as well as the aspiration to achieve parity, are elements that deepen and strengthen democracy.

### **The role of political parties in democracy**

The main function of *political parties* is to act as intermediaries between society and the state, articulating the various interests of different social actors, with the purpose of proposing a collective project for all society. The party system operates as a clearinghouse of interests and

political projects that allows for and regulates competition, making the legitimate exercise of government possible; therefore, their functions are of vital importance in representative democracies and in the framework of peaceful competition for power (IIHR/CAPEL, 2017).

It should be noted that parties in contemporary societies are not the only channels of representation. Currently, there are different organizations and groups that work to organize citizens, and by taking advantage of various areas for pressure or the construction of agreements or alliances, can establish direct links with the branches of government. Traditionally excluded social sectors have also emerged as political actors, such as women (who make up a part of all social groups), indigenous peoples, the Afro-descendant population, the sexual diversity movement, among the most well-known. However, since the Honduran system is one based on political parties, they remain essential democratic representation and for channeling social demands.

Increasing the quality of democracy in *Honduras* requires strengthening *political parties* as spaces for interaction and representation of all citizens, in their diversity and plurality, which involves deepening *modernization* efforts to update the parties' ideological and programmatic frameworks, consolidate mechanisms of internal democracy and reinvigorate leadership (Freidenberg, 2006).

Parties are a “gateway” to institutional politics, and determine who makes up the candidate lists and the electoral choices that citizens will have (IDEA International, 2008. NDI and UNDP, 2011). Their *behavior is key* to ensuring women's participation and their access to positions of elected office or party decision-making. Parties also determine the country's political agenda, making women's participation in politics and the inclusion of their interests and needs prerequisites for democratic development and a direct contribution to good governance.

In this context, Honduran political parties face the challenge of *taking full responsibility of the obligations of equality and non-discrimination*, as well as the effective implementation of parity with alternation, in accordance with the constitutional and electoral principles of democracy and equality. Increasing women's participation and representation generates a symbolic effect on public opinion and voting behavior, as well as providing new models for other women's leadership and for the *general renewal of party leadership*. This contributes to modernizing and replacing the system of political representation.

As mentioned above, the violence women face in the political sphere is a manifestation of the different types and modalities of violence towards women, based on socio-cultural constructions that are expressed in unequal and discriminatory treatment. *Violence against women in politics* constitutes a serious violation of their human rights and a threat to democracy. The eradication of practices considered to be “natural” or “typical” of political work requires not only awareness, but also determined action by political parties to promote qualitative changes in traditional

politics. Moreover, the deepening of democratic processes requires several different changes in institutions and political actors to construct a *new political culture*.

### 1. Recommendations for political party action

- The explicit mention of human rights, as well as equality and non-discrimination between women and men, in the objectives and principles enshrined in the ***statutes, regulations or other foundational documents*** of the parties, providing the framework for sustaining internal actions for progress towards equality and inclusion. It is advisable to review and update partisan regulations with corresponding reforms, to strengthen their contents on the same topics.
- The ***body dedicated to the promotion of women within the internal party structure***,<sup>13</sup> generally referred to as the Secretariat, is defined – in general terms – as the entity in charge of organizing women and their support for the work of the party. The most widespread trend is using it for activism or grassroots mobilization, mainly in the pre-electoral and electoral period.

One job for the Secretariat, sustained over time and decentralized to account for party action at all levels (national, departmental, municipal and local), would be to strengthen its actions. In this sense, it is appropriate to review and adapt the profile of these bodies into the party statutes, so that they are substantive organs for the promotion of party policies for equality, women's rights and non-violence in politics. Key questions for this include: From what perspective were they created? What role do they play? Some guiding criteria for strengthening these entities, on which there is consensus in different studies (IDEA International, NDI, IIHR, among others), are:

- o They exist formally, in the statutes and in the structure of the party.
  - o They have well-defined roles and responsibilities.
  - o They are integrated into the party operations.
  - o They have a presence and vote in the executive committee of the party.
  - o They have powers to vote in decision-making processes.
  - o They have the authority to influence party policies.
  - o They have a budget.
- The promotion of ***participatory processes among women members*** to define strategies that they may put forward, and to put the party policy on gender equality and equity into practice, is a mechanism that should be developed. In doing so, this process not only contributes to

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<sup>13</sup> Traditionally, they have been referred to as women's "wings," "fronts," "movements" or "secretariats."



the party's ownership and vision regarding equality and political nonviolence, but also allows the party to renewing contact with its base and mobilize women members beyond electoral activism.

- It is advisable for political parties to have membership **databases** (with corresponding precautions according to national data protection legislation) with **information disaggregated by sex and age** (particularly learn about youth membership), as well as a **register of women in the governing bodies and decision-making structures** of party bodies at all levels (national, departmental, municipal and local).

Having such information available can contribute to the design of measures for women's advancement within the party, as well as to establishing the need for the recruitment and political training of women.

- Political party conventions are spaces where policies and a party's most important decisions are made. The **inclusion** of topics related to the party's work for equality, non-discrimination and the eradication of political violence **in the issues discussed at the conventions** contributes to the status and internalization of these issues, and a greater commitment by the party.
- It is also advisable to establish goals or practical actions that the party can promote to bolster women's equal participation all partisan work, through the formulation and implementation of an **internal policy for gender equality and equity**, as established by the Electoral and Political Organizations Act. In this regard, it is necessary for this policy to **integrate** aspects related to the **prevention of and help for political violence**.

The knowledge and ownership of this policy by party leadership and membership (at all levels) is fundamental. The follow-up to and results obtained by the implementation of this policy can be reported in the party conventions, thus promoting internal accountability and making it easier to improve or deepen the intervention.

- Political parties can identify **formal and informal barriers** that impede women's participation, and establish mechanisms or actions that motivate them, facilitate their leadership and promote equal conditions of participation. As an example, some considerations may include:
  - o Does the timing of meetings or training encourage women's participation?
  - o Particularly in rural areas, are there conditions for women to have some support if they must bring their children to meetings or trainings?

- o Do party activities account for and take place in safe environments and travel routes for women?
  - o Of the party's financial resources within the electoral campaign framework, is 10% of the political bonds invested in the political training and promotion of women leaders, in accordance with Art. 105-A of the Electoral and Political Organizations Act of Honduras?
  - o Do party outreach campaigns convey discriminatory patterns and stereotypes, or diminish the portrayal of women as politicians?
- Much depends on **political will** and how involved a political party is in promoting equality and non-discrimination; for example, in the appointment of women to key positions or selecting them to top a candidate list. Parity by alternation is an important “accelerator” of women’s presence, but solving the problem of underrepresentation requires going further.

It should be noted that the low level of women included in the first place of candidate lists indicates that party leaders continue to regard men as the most natural or competitive candidates. Being “number one” has a symbolic effect on the acknowledgement of power, and a direct effect on eligibility. The small or limited presence of women at the top of the nominations or in single-person positions suggests that the effective resolve to include women in these positions should be strengthened.

Certainly, the way candidates are **selected** and creating electoral lists is a party decision, set within the framework of internal and electoral regulation. However, for nomination processes to result in greater equality and fairness in representation, parties should have **clear, formalized rules or criteria** for the selection of leadership and should conduct the process with transparency.

**Internal party democratization** should proceed through regulated and defined procedures, rather than a system of “loyalty” or “influence” to those in power. It is a move from power concentrated in the party elites or leadership, towards more horizontal, democratic and inclusive forms of power.

- Parties should establish or strengthen **guidelines** – such as a code of ethics, a letter of commitment or a covenant – to **regulate the behavior** of those in party, including aspects related to equality, non-discrimination and political violence. The scope of these guidelines should not only be restricted to party life, but should also extend to elected office in the National Congress or local government.

- The establishment or strengthening of existing **party mechanisms** – such as disciplinary, ethical or honorary tribunals, which in several of the parties are only in the bylaws – is essential to strengthen the modernization of the party and to eradicate impunity that may lead to the absence of mechanisms or insufficient action.

The action of these tribunals, and their connection to compliance with the guidelines or ethical commitments previously suggested, would make the action's impact more powerful. It is also important that treatment for and resolution of political violence cases should be included as part of the tribunals' functions; to that end, those who sit on the tribunal will require adequate training and knowledge.

- Closely connected with the above, it is advisable to draw up an **internal protocol to address political violence against women**, as a tool to guide party action in general and that of the tribunal in particular.
- The **training and political education of women and men** in the party – in aspects related to human rights, equality, non-discrimination and political violence against women – benefits members because it increases their capacity and knowledge, which in turn benefits and strengthens the party. It thus smooths the path towards a more egalitarian political culture, as a responsibility of the men and women of the party.

These topics can be included continuously in trainings for all members, spanning the different levels (national, departmental, municipal and local). Considering that traditionally – in most cases – party practice does not provide systematic and sustained training or a process perspective, a more constant training/education period will be required in the non-election and electoral periods to acquire or strengthen knowledge and political skills.

- In addition, effective compliance with the Electoral and Political Organizations Act is required with respect to the use of the 10% of the political bonds that correspond to each party, which should be earmarked for women's training and political advancement. This entails conducting **specific training** aimed at enhancing the leadership of **women** at different levels, incorporating contributions from party women with experience in campaigns or positions of elected office, who can participate in these trainings through sharing their experiences and lessons learned.

It is important for both types of training – of both women and men, or only women – to consider developing **specific training materials**, which in turn increase knowledge, and include information to strengthen skills and competencies if a candidate is elected to office.

- In addition to ramping up the processes of communication and internal disclosure, political parties can **improve the use of their website and social network pages**. It is important that members and the public can access, for example, information on: actions in favor of equality and non-discrimination for women (including the internal gender equality and equity policy); practices and manifestations of political violence against women; sex-disaggregated information from candidate lists for different elected positions, the gender-disaggregated results of primary and general elections, all in a user-friendly and accessible way.

It should be noted that the disclosure, announcement or contact methods used by parties (such as WhatsApp, Messenger, Google groups, etc.), parties should take measures to comply with national legislation on the **protection of personal data**. If this legislation does not exist or is insufficient, it is the responsibility of the parties to protect the personal information of their female members so as not to put them at risk of sexual harassment or other manifestations of violence.

## 2. Recommendations for action by public institutions

- The **electoral body** plays a central role in **guaranteeing political rights under conditions of equality and non-discrimination**. This implies the inclusion of political violence against women as something which affects the enjoyment and full exercise of those rights, as well as stronger **oversight** on the topic of equality. In accordance with the attributions conferred by the Electoral and Political Organizations Act, the following are up to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, for example: effective oversight of compliance with parity by alternation not only in candidate lists, but also in party leadership positions; the timely delivery of funds from political bonds and oversight of the percentage allocated for women's training and political advancement; the approval and monitoring of the implementation of each party's gender equality and equity policy.
- The information that the Supreme Electoral Tribunal makes available on its **website** can be strengthened by incorporating user-friendly and accessible documentation on the topics above and on the electoral results (both primary and general), disaggregated by sex, as well as divulging how political and electoral rights are affected by manifestations of political violence against women.

The experience of electoral bodies in other countries shows that **taking on equality and non-discrimination as part of its work** strengthens the entity's internal and external action. Recommended strategies include the formulation and implementation of an internal policy for equality, with a corresponding action plan and budget allocation; and the reactivation of the gender equality unit, with corresponding staff and budget.

- The preliminary analysis of the March 2017 primary election results makes it clear that the Regulations for the **application of parity with alternation** reduces the scope of Article 105-A of the Act: although it applies the principle of parity, the mechanism of alternation (following the woman-man or man-woman pattern) is limited for elected positions, and this affects women’s political participation. This **regulation should be revised**, and take up the criteria issued in due course by the Women's Secretariats of the seven (out of ten) political parties competing in the 2017 general elections, the Network of Inter-Party Women, various civil society organizations, the Gender Equality Commission of the National Congress and the National Institute of Women, with the backing of the international organizations that work to promote women’s equal and violence-free political participation.
- **Violence against women in politics** and its manifestations is a human rights issue. It deserves to be placed on the public and political agenda, taken out of the realm of anecdotes or tabloids, brought to the level of guarantees and legislation, and to establish public policy actions for prevention, sanction and eradication (IDEA International, JNE and Flora Tristan Center, 2017).

This requires a **sustained effort** by political parties, as well as relationships and collaborative work between the **institutions** that make up the framework of the state and which have power in this area. It is a problem that requires a comprehensive and inter-institutional approach, and that concerns the human rights of women, and because of this it is not merely the Supreme Electoral Tribunal that has a role to play.

- The **National Institute of Women** (INAM) can develop a methodology for researching and connecting political violence with the obligations of equality/non-discrimination/non-violence, considering existing legislation and public policies. The **National Commissioner for Human Rights** (CONADEH) may, in the exercise of their powers, monitor the protection of women’s human rights. It should be noted that various manifestations of violence against women that occur in the field of politics, have protections established in national legislation, and their interface falls within the scope of **judicial protection** and **due diligence** (OAS, 2017; Piscopo, 2016).

Parity is not only measured by the number of women who occupy public and political space; it also includes the existence of certain egalitarian conditions necessary for the effective realization of political rights. The eradication of political violence against women is one condition of parity (OAS, 2017).

- A substantive action – for which the National Congress is responsible – is to **categorize** violence against women in politics and its manifestations **in the legal system**, with provisions that ensure the protection of women and sanction actions or omissions which prevent or make their participation difficult.

It is advisable to pay attention to the “Initiative against Harassment and Political Violence against Women” presented by Deputy Doris Gutiérrez, who is currently in legislative power. Its text can be reviewed and enriched in the light of the most recent experiences in Mexico and the Inter-American Model Law on Political Violence against Women (OAS, 2017), and/or used to strengthen protections for women to live free of violence in the framework of reforms to the Penal Code or related legislation.

- The formulation of a **treatment protocol for political violence against women** is recommended, since it is a tool that allows for coordinating and guiding action from the appropriate **institutions** to address and intervene in the face of this problem. In addition, any approach to and action in the matter – due to ignorance and “normalization” – cannot ignore the necessary **sensitization and training** for the relevant institutions and their respective civil servants.

### 3. Recommendations for action for civil society

- Although the concept has no express regulation and, consequently, no sanctions, Honduran national legislation and human rights instruments signed by the state, provide a frame of reference with which to work on the treatment and protection of violence against women in politics.

Considering the pre-electoral context for the national elections of November 2017, it is advisable to prepare a **minimal roadmap** for documenting cases and encouraging action from appropriate institutions, the design and implementation of which should involve various non-governmental organizations of civil society.

- In relation to the above, an **observatory on violence against women in politics** can be established promptly in the present pre-electoral context, although with the future expectation that it will be broader and more sustained. To this end, it is essential to have **minimum indicators** for monitoring and evaluation, which requires verified and reliable **sources of information** (which in electoral matters, would have to be generated and provided by the Supreme Electoral Tribunal).

- In the context of the present electoral process, and for those that follow, it is desirable to include national **election observation** organizations from civil society (such as the Non-Partisan Observation Coalition “Observation N-26”), which can observe political violence against women as an aspect to be addressed together with equality and non-discrimination in political participation and representation. It may also be an area of consideration for international electoral observation bodies.
- Civil society and women's organizations working to prevent, eradicate and punish violence against women – within the framework of a comprehensive approach to violence in all its manifestations – could **incorporate** violence against women in politics as part of their work. The experience of these organizations could also be very useful for political parties.
- The **media** are central actors in political communication, in the assessment and portrayal that is broadcast about political events, the attributes of male and female candidates, and the performance of women and men in a public office.

The exclusion of women from the public-political sphere is rooted and normalized through discourse, representations and stereotypes that historically and culturally have portrayed women as strangers to political work; and, in the end, as companions or assistants whose role is to help men with their work. The media should undertake **conscious, appropriate and objective action** that does not contribute to the reproduction of stereotypes and acts of political violence against women.

A look at the role of the media can be part of the actions of the suggested observatory, as well as the electoral observation in general.

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Specialist in human rights, women's rights and gender equality. Professional expertise in research, education, training (face-to-face and virtual), technical assistance, the production of specialized materials and project development (formulation, negotiation, management and evaluation) to address human rights, women's rights and their international protection, electoral systems and political rights, freedom of expression and access to information, equality in the workplace (including workplace sexual harassment), violence against women, and gender equality, among others.

Professional experience in advising and consulting for various agencies of the United Nations system and international organizations (UNDP, UN Women, IDEA International, National Democratic Institute (NDI), Inter-American Commission of Women/OAS, Central American Integration System (SICA), Central American Institute (ICAP), Dutch Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), UNFPA, UNICEF and FLACSO, among others); and as Officer of the Women's Human Rights Program of the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights (2002-2009).

Invited lecturer at various international forums and universities. Scope of action in Latin American and – in recent years – with emphasis on Mexico, Central America and the Dominican Republic. Author, coauthor, academic coordinator and editor of articles and publications on human rights. Member of the Roster of Specialists for Latin America of the United Nations Population Fund.