



# Addressing Online Misogyny and Gendered Disinformation: A How-To Guide



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## About the National Democratic Institute

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI or the Institute) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization that responds to the aspirations of people around the world to live in democratic societies that recognize and promote basic human rights. Since its founding in 1983, NDI and its local partners have worked to support and strengthen democratic institutions and practices by strengthening political parties, civic organizations, and parliaments; safeguarding elections; and promoting citizen participation, openness, and accountability in government.

NDI is a leading organization working to advance women's political participation around the world. The Institute empowers women to participate, compete, and lead as equal and active partners in democratic change. Mobilizing its global networks and drawing on three decades of experience in 132 countries, NDI supports women's aspirations for gender equality in order to achieve inclusive, responsive and resilient democratic governance. NDI's multinational approach reinforces the message that, while there is no single democratic model, certain core principles are shared by all democracies.

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## Message from Moira Whelan, NDI's Director for Democracy and Technology

The best investment that can be made to advance democracy in the world is to create an internet that enables all people to be politically engaged. This is why; for years, NDI has worked to address the gendered attacks, including disinformation, faced by 50 percent of the world's population when attempting to engage online.

Given how extensively this issue has been documented and how global and persistent the problem is, it is shocking that it still requires considerable investment of time and effort by political actors around the world. This important guide represents NDI's comprehensive effort to move beyond admiring the problem and take systemic action to change it.

A tech solution to misogyny does not exist, but a tech solution to misogyny online most certainly does. Tools like those documented here will continue to be needed by political actors everywhere, but fundamentally it is critical that we shift the burden of solving this problem from women themselves to the companies that have allowed the problem to fester. Every day, NDI partners share stories of female politicians' experience of manipulated information or vile responses to their social media posts. Their staff must work around the clock to counter and respond to relentless attacks. Threats of violence and the inaction of social media companies to do anything about them have caused women to silence themselves and not pursue public office. Inaction by social media companies on gendered disinformation and attacks online is a choice that tips the political scales, and it is long overdue for change.

This report demonstrates that action can be taken to stop gender-based disinformation online. We know how and why it happens. We know what to do, and we know how to do it. Taking action will move us closer to a digital space that enables democratic culture and supports the democratic practices that will benefit all people.

## Executive Summary (English)

The internet is a tool that can simplify and encourage democratic engagement, but the rise of online disinformation challenges even the world's most robust democracies. While the most recognizable disinformation campaigns are related to national politics, disinformers frequently employ narratives targeting women's gender and sexuality in order to disrupt democracy. This is often then amplified by media agents and the general population, who may not have the intent to drive disinformation nor the capacity to discern it. NDI's robust research in this field concludes that gendered disinformation is the use of false information to confuse or mislead by manipulating gender as a social cleavage to attack women and/or to sway political outcomes.<sup>1</sup> It has three primary goals: to keep women out of politics; to change the views of women and men about women's political participation; and specifically to change party policies or political outcomes. In short, it aims to undermine women's free and equal participation in politics to the detriment of inclusive, resilient democracy.

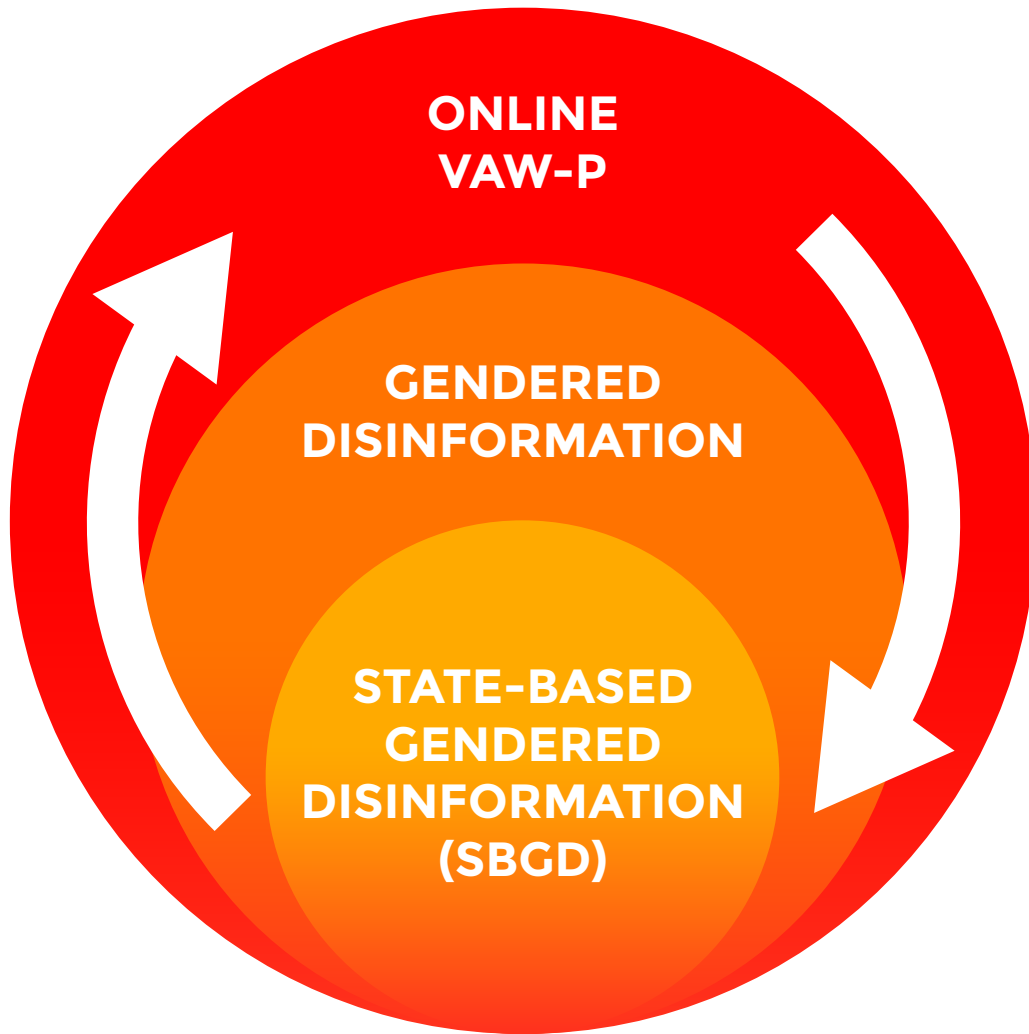
NDI has released two landmark studies on Online Violence Against Women in Politics (Online VAW-P): "Tweets that Chill" (2019), which measured similar violent phenomena experienced by women engaging in politics online across three countries; and "Engendering Hate" (2020), which examines the role of gendered disinformation as an intentional tactic by certain actors which can be unintentionally amplified by others within the media and the general public. In the former case, this is often a political tactic to deliver specific political outcomes. The reports highlight how some words and phrases generally representative of Online VAW-P are being reclaimed by women; emphasize intersectionality and local expertise in identifying and rooting out gendered disinformation; and encourage policymakers to cooperate with women in crafting solutions to the problem in order to create positive, empowering, and equitable online environments.

Ultimately, NDI sees gendered disinformation as a form of Online VAW-P. As the below diagram illustrates, not all instances of hate speech, threats, or gendered attacks against women and gender diverse individuals are instances of gendered disinformation, but they all fall under the umbrella of Online VAW-P. Forms of Online VAW-P can be used by bad faith actors for the purposes of disinformation which influences how men and women view particular issues and engage with political discourses and processes in order to change political outcomes. When state-based actors utilize online violence to conduct disinformation campaigns that target politically active women, they consciously and purposefully undermine the freedom and integrity of the political information space and ultimately threaten democratic processes. In those states with illiberal or authoritarian contexts, state-based gendered disinformation has the purpose of furthering the agenda of the regime in power. Reflecting the permeability of our media environments, this gendered disinformation can in turn be used either by non-state-based actors to pursue Online VAW-P

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1 According to the **CEPPS Countering Disinformation Guide**: "gendered disinformation includes false, misleading, or harmful content that exploits gender inequalities or invokes gender stereotypes and norms, including to target specific individuals or groups; this description refers to the content of the message. Beyond gendered content, however, other important dimensions of gendered disinformation include: who produces and spreads problematic content (actor); how and where problematic content is shared and amplified, and who has access to certain technologies and digital spaces (mode of dissemination); who is the audience that receives or consumes the problematic content (interpreter); and how the creation, spread, and consumption of problematic content affects women, girls, men, boys, and people with diverse sexual orientations and gender identities, as well as the gendered impacts of this content on communities and societies (risk)."

to their own ends or be unintentionally amplified by media professionals and citizens who are not able to discern its lack of integrity. State-Based Gendered Disinformation is a unique phenomenon and subset of gendered disinformation as a form of Online VAW-P.



Based on research conclusions, this paper outlines recommendations for NDI, its partners and those working globally to mitigate the democratic harms of disinformation, to ensure women’s safe participation and leadership in politics, and to monitor the social media and information environment in elections. These recommendations include:

- Serve as a trusted conduit between partners and social media platforms;
- Integrate into programming training on protecting one’s personal information and mitigating psychological trauma from online disinformation;
- Build better organizational structures for women affected by gendered disinformation;
- Establish support networks of women who have been targeted by such campaigns;
- Adopt organizational human resources policies supporting women subject to gender-based abuse and disinformation;

- Maintain databases of abuse and reports against women employees and affiliates, and share them regularly with platforms;
- In legislatures, adopt rules against the sharing of disinformation or manipulated media, and allow elected officials to moderate gender-based attacks on their online profiles;
- Invest in training on platform reporting and moderation tools for partners who may be subject to gendered disinformation;
- Proactively interface with women in politics and their teams, including by naming specific local points of contact responsible for gender issues in each country/region;
- Invest in on-platform awareness building campaigns to deter gendered disinformation; and,
- Build societal awareness of gender-based disinformation campaigns and their effects, including in the media, so that individuals might avoid engaging in or amplifying such campaigns in the future.



## Executive Summary (Tagalog)

Isang kasangkapan ang internet na maaaring makapagpagaan at makapaghimok ng demokratikong pakikiisa, ngunit ang pagtaas ng disimpormasyong online ay sumusubok maging sa pinakamatatag na estruktura ng demokrasya sa mundo. Pinakakilalang uri ng kampanya ng disimpormasyon ay may kinalaman sa politikang pambansa, gayunpaman ay karaniwan ding gumagamit ang mga tagapaglaganap ng disimpormasyon ng mga salaysay laban sa kasarian at sekswalidad ng kababaihan upang gambalain ang demokrasya. Kadalasan itong pinapalago ng mga kinatawan ng media at ng masa, maaaring walang intensyon na magpalawig ng disimpormasyon, ni walang kakayahang mabatid ito. Pinagtibay ng pananaliksik ng NDI ukol dito na ang disimpormasyong pangkasarian (*gendered disinformation*) ay ang paggamit ng maling impormasyon na may layuning makapagpalito o makapaglinlang sa pamamaraan ng pagmamaniplula ng kasarian bilang parte ng lipunan upang atakihin ang kababaihan at/o impluwensiyahan ang mga bunga ng pulitikal.<sup>2</sup> Mayroon itong tatlong pangunahing layunin: mapanatiling nasa labas ng politika ang kababaihan; mabago ang kabatiran ng mga babae at lalaki tungkol sa politikal na pakikilahok ng kababaihan, at partikular dito—ang baguhin ang mga polisiya ng mga grupong pulitikal o mga bunga nito. Samakatuwid, layunin nitong bagbagin ang malaya at pantay na pakikilahok ng kababaihan sa politika upang hamakin ang matatag at inklusibong estruktura ng demokrasya.

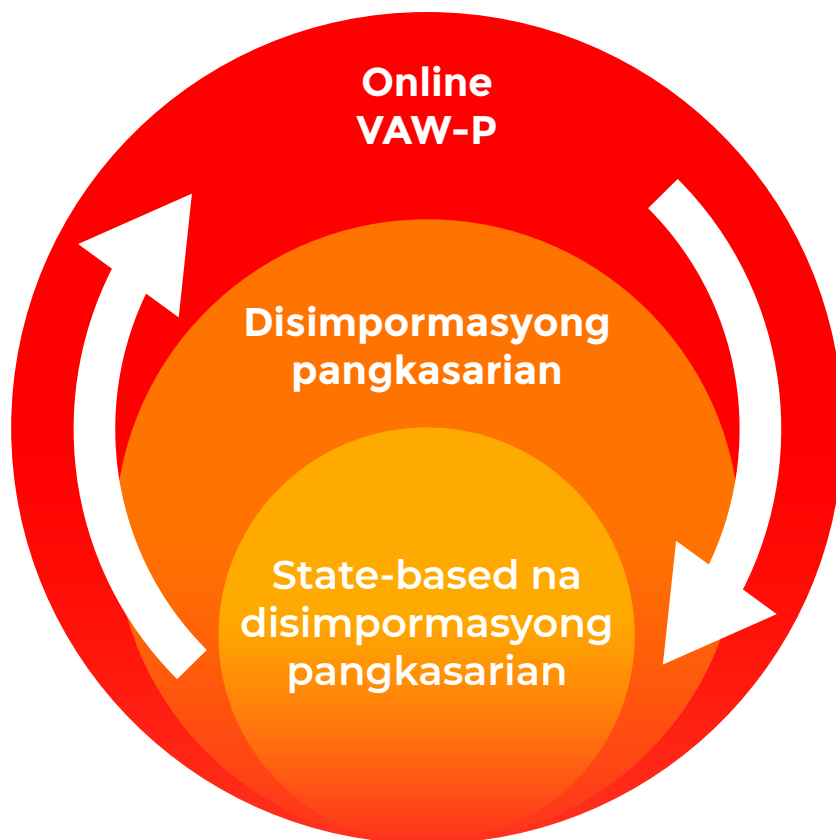
Dalawang pagkakakilanlang pag-aaral na may kinalaman sa Online Violence Against Women in Politics (Online VAW-P) ang inilunsad ng NDI: “Tweets and Chill” (2019), na sumukat ng pagkakaparehas sa tatlong bansa ukol sa pagdanas ng karahasan sa kababaihang nakikilahok online sa pampulitikang usapin; at “Ending the Hate” (2020) na sinusuri ang tungkulin ng disimpormasyong pangkasarian bilang intensyunal na estratehiya ng ilang mga tagapangasiwa nito na maaring walang malay na mapalago at mapalakas ng ibang nasa media at ng masa. Sa naunang usapin, kadalasan itong maituturing na taktikang politikal na may layuning makalikha ng mga espesipikong kinalabasan o bungang politikal. Binibigyang-diin ng mga ulat kung paano dinaranas ng kababaihan ang mga salita at parirala na karaniwang kabilang sa Online VAW-P; binibigyang-pokus ang pakikipag-unayan at pagkadalubhasang panglokal upang tukuyin at tuligsain ang disimpormasyong pangkasarian; at pagpukaw ng atensyon sa mga gumagawa ng mga patakaran na

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2 Base sa CEPPS Countering Disinformation Guide: “pumapaloob sa disimpormasyong pangkasarian ang hindi tunay, nakakalinlang, o nakakapinsalang nilalaman na sinasamantala ang hindi pagkakapantay-pantay ng kasarian o tinatawag ang mga estereotipo at pamantayan ng kasarian, kasama ang pag-asinta sa mga espesipikong indibidwal o grupo; tumutukoy ang deskripsiyong ito sa nilalaman ng mensahe. Sa kabilang banda ng nilalamang pangkasarian ganunpaman, kasama ang mga sumusunod sa iba pang mahahalagang dimensiyon ng disimpormasyong pangkasarian: ang lumilikha at nagpapalaganap ng mga problematikong nilalaman (tagapangasiwa o *actor*); paano at saana naipapakalat at napapalago ang problematikong nilalaman, at kung sino man ang may espesipikong teknolohiya at may kakayahang gumamit ng mga espasyong digital (paraan ng pagpapalaganap o *mode of dissemination*); ang mga tagasubaybay na tumatanggap o kumokunsumo ng mga problematikong nilalaman (interpreter); at kung paano ang paglikha, pagkalat at pagkonsumo ng problematikong nilalaman ay nakakaapekto sa kababaihan, kalalakihan, maging sa bata man o matanda, at mga taong may iba pang oryentasyong sekswal at pagkakakilanlang kasarian, pati na rin ang mga epektong pangkasarian ng mga nilalamang ito sa pamayanan at sa lipunan (panganib o *risk*).

makipag-ugnayan sa kababaihan sa paglutas ng mga suliranin upang makapagtayo ng lugar na positibo, matatag, at makatarungan online.

Higit samang nasasaad, nakikitang NDI ang disimpormasyon bilang isanguring Online VAW-P. Base sa paglalarawan ng balangkas sa ibaba, hindi sa lahat ng instansiya ng hate speech, paninindak, o pag-atake sa kasarian ng kababaihan at mga indibidwal na gender-diverse ay maituturing na kabilang sa disimpormasyong pangkasarian, ngunit lahat ay pumapaloob sa Online VAW-P. Ang mga uri ng VAW-P ay maaring gamitin ng mga tagapangasiwa ng *bad faith* (bad faith actors) sa kanilang hangaring pang-disimpormasyon na nakaiimpluwensya sa pananaw ng kalalakihan at kababaihan ukol sa mga partikular na suliranin at makilahok sa politikal na diskurso at mga pamamaraan upang mabago ang bunga at kinalabasan nito. Sa panahong ginagamit ng mga tagapangasiwang *state-based* (state-based actors) ang karahasan online upang pangasiwaan ang mga kampanya ng disimpormasyon laban sa kababaihang aktibo sa politika, may kamalayan at may sadya nilang pinahihina ang kalayaan at integridad ng espasyo ng impormasyong pampulitika. Sa ganoong dahilan ay isinasapanganib nito ang mga prosesong demokratiko. Sa mga estado na may iliberal o kontekstong pang-awtoritaryan, mayroong layunin ang disimpormasyong pangkasarian na *state-based* na ipagpatuloy ang ahenda ng nasa kapangyarihan. Masasamin mula sa bilis pasukin ng ating *media environment* ang posibilidad na gamitin ang disimpormasyong pangkasarian ng alinman sa dalawa: mga tagapangasiwang non-state-based (non-state-based actors), upang ipagpatuloy ang VAW-P sa kanilang pangsariling kagustuhan; o ng mga propesyonal ng media at ng taumbayan na maaaring wala namang intensyong mapalago ito sa kawalan ng kakayahang mabatid ang kakulangan nito ng integridad.



Ang mga resulta at rekomendasyon na pumapaloob sa gabay na ito ay pangunahing nakapokus sa state-based na disimpormasyong pangkasarian (State-Based Gendered Disinformation o SBGD)—isang penomenang natatangi at pumapailalim sa disimpormasyong pangkasarian bilang uri ng Online VAW-P. Base sa mga konklusyon ng pananaliksik, binabalangkas ng papel na ito ang mga rekomendasyon para sa NDI, ang mga katambal o katuwang nito, at ang mga lumulutang sa mga nakakapinsalang epekto ng disimpormasyon, upang matiyak ang ligtas pakikilahok at pangunguna ng kababaihan sa politika, at matutukan ang social media at information environment sa mga halalan. Kabilang sa mga rekomendasyon ang mga sumusunod:

- Magsilbing mapagkakatiwalaang daluyan sa pagitan ng mga katuwang at mga plataporma ng social media.
- Maging bahagi sa pagprograma ng mga pagsasanay sa pangangalaga ng mga impormasyong personal, at traumang sikolohikal ng isang indibidwal dahil sa disimpormasyon online.
- Magtayo ng mas maayos na estruktura ng pagsasamahan para sa kababaihang naapektuhan ng disimpormasyong pangkasarian.
- Magtatag ng network ng pagtutulungan ng kababaihang naging biktima ng mga nasabing uri ng pangangampanya.
- Magpatibay ng mga polisiyang pang-organisasyon ng yamang tao na sumusuporta sa kababaihan na dumaranas ng abuso at disimpormasyong pangkasarian.
- Mapanatiliang mga database ng pang-aabuso at mga ulat sa kababaihang manggagawa at kanilang mga kaakibat, at regular na maibahagi ang mga ito kasabay ng mga plataporma.
- Sa mga mambabatas, magtaguyod ng mga panuntunan laban sa pagpapalaganap ng disimpormasyon o minanipulang media, at bigyang kalayaan ang mga nahalal na opisyal na makontrol at mapahupa ang mga pag-atakeng pangkasarian sa kanilang *online profile*.
- Maglaan para sa pagsasanay ng pag-uulat ng plataporma at mga kagamitang makakatulong sa pagpapahupa ng disimpormasyong pangkasarian para sa mga kaakibat na nakakaranas nito.
- Maagapan ang pakikipag-tanikala sa kababaihan ng politika at kanilang pangkat, kabilang na ang pagpapangalan ng mga lokal na naatasan sa pakikipag-ugnayan ukol sa isyung pangkasarian sa bawat bansa/rehiyon.
- Maglaan para sa *on-platform* na kampanya ng pagbibigay-kamalayan upang pigilin ang disimpormasyong pangkasarian; at
- Magtatag ng kamalayang panlipinan ukol sa mga kampanya ng disimpormasyong pangkasarian at ang mga epekto nito, kabilang sa media, upang maiwasan ang pakikibilang ng mga indibidwal dito o pagpapalago ng mga kampanyang ito sa hinaharap.

## Executive Summary (Polish)

Internet jest narzędziem, które może mobilizować do demokratycznego zaangażowania oraz je ułatwiać, ale wzrost dezinformacji w Internecie rzuca wyzwanie nawet najsilniejszym demokracjom na świecie. Najbardziej rozpoznawalne kampanie dezinformacyjne są związane z polityką krajową, a w celu zakłócenia demokracji, dezinformatorzy często wykorzystują narracje wymierzone w płciowość i seksualność kobiet. Owe narracje są często wzmacniane przez media i ogół społeczeństwa, które mogą nie działać z bezpośrednim zamiarem wywołania dezinformacji, ale też mogą nie mieć zdolności do jej dostrzegania. Rzetelne badania NDI w tej dziedzinie wskazują, że dezinformacja ze względu na płeć to wykorzystywanie fałszywych informacji w celu dezorientowania lub wprowadzania w błąd poprzez manipulowanie płcią jako podziałem społecznym w celu atakowania kobiet i/lub wpływania na wyniki działań politycznych.<sup>3</sup> Dezinformacja ma trzy główne cele: trzymanie kobiet z dala od polityki; zmienianie poglądów kobiet i mężczyzn na temat udziału kobiet w życiu politycznym; a dokładniej zmienianie polityki partyjnej lub wyników działań politycznych. Krótko mówiąc, dezinformacja ma na celu podważenie wolnego i równego udziału kobiet w polityce ze szkodą dla integracyjnej, prężnej demokracji.

NDI opublikował dwa przełomowe badania na temat Przemocy Online wobec Kobiet w Polityce (Online VAW-P): „Tweets that Chill” [„Mrozące krew w żyłach tweety”] (2019), które mierzyły podobne zjawiska przemocy doświadczane przez kobiety angażujące się w politykę online w trzech krajach; oraz „Engendering Hate” [„Źródło nienawiści”] (2020), analizujące rolę dezinformacji ze względu na płeć jako celowej taktyki niektórych aktorów, która może być nieumyślnie wzmacniana przez inne osoby w mediach i opinii publicznej. Pierwsze badania mówią o częstych taktykach politycznych służących osiągnięciu określonych celów. Raporty uwidoczniają, w jaki sposób niektóre słowa i wyrażenia ogólnie reprezentatywne dla Online VAW-P są odzyskiwane przez kobiety; podkreślają interseksjonalność i lokalną wiedzę fachową w zakresie identyfikowania i wykorzeniania dezinformacji ze względu na płeć; zachęcają decydentów do współpracy z kobietami w opracowywaniu rozwiązań problemu w celu stworzenia pozytywnego, wzmacniającego i sprawiedliwego środowiska internetowego.

Ostatecznie NDI postrzega dezinformację ze względu na płeć jako formę Online VAW-P. Jak ilustruje poniższy diagram, nie wszystkie przypadki mowy nienawiści, gróźb lub ataków ze względu na płeć przeciwko kobietom i osobom płciowo nienormalnym są przypadkami dezinformacji płciowej, ale wszystkie są objęte parasolem Online VAW-P. Formy Online

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3 Zgodnie z Przewodnikiem CEPPS dotyczącym przeciwdziałania dezinformacji: „dezinformacja dotycząca płci obejmuje fałszywe, wprowadzające w błąd lub szkodliwe treści, które wykorzystują nierówności płci lub przywołują stereotypy i normy dotyczące płci, w tym skierowane do konkretnych osób lub grup; opis ten odnosi się do treści wiadomości. Oprócz treści związanych z płcią, inne ważne wymiary dezinformacji związanej z płcią obejmują: kto tworzy i rozpowszechnia problematyczne treści (aktor); jak i gdzie udostępnia się i wzmacnia problematyczne treści oraz kto ma dostęp do określonych technologii i przestrzeni cyfrowych (sposób rozpowszechniania); kto jest odbiorcą, który otrzymuje lub konsumuje problematyczne treści (interpretator); oraz w jaki sposób tworzenie, rozpowszechnianie i konsumpcja problematycznych treści wpływa na kobiety, dziewczęta, mężczyzn, chłopców i osoby o różnych orientacjach seksualnych i tożsamościach płciowych, a także charakterystyczny dla danej płci wpływ tych treści na społeczności i społeczeństwa (ryzyko).”

VAW-P mogą być wykorzystywane przez aktorów działających w złej wierze w celu szerzenia dezinformacji, która wpływa na to, jak mężczyźni i kobiety postrzegają określone kwestie i angażują się w dyskursy i procesy polityczne w celu zmiany wyników działań politycznych. Kiedy podmioty państwowe wykorzystują przemoc w Internecie do prowadzenia kampanii dezinformacyjnych skierowanych do aktywnych politycznie kobiet, świadomie i celowo podważają wolność i integralność politycznej przestrzeni informacyjnej, a ostatecznie zagrażają procesom demokratycznym. W państwach nieliberalnych lub autorytarnych dezinformacja ze względu na płeć ma na celu wspieranie agendy rządzącego reżimu. Ukazując przepuszczalność środowisk medialnych, dezinformacja ze względu na płeć może z kolei zostać wykorzystana przez podmioty (aktorów) niepaństwowe do realizacji własnych celów z użyciem Online VAW-P, albo zostać nieumyślnie wzmocniona przez specjalistów ds. mediów i obywateli, którzy nie są w stanie rozpoznać jej nieprawości.



Wnioski i zalecenia zawarte w tym Przewodniku koncentrują się przede wszystkim na dezinformacji ze względu na płeć realizowanej przez podmioty państwowe (SBGD) – unikalnym zjawisku i podzbiorze dezinformacji ze względu na płeć jako formie Online VAW-P. W oparciu o wnioski z badań, niniejszy dokument przedstawia zalecenia dla NDI, jego partnerów i osób działających na całym świecie w celu łagodzenia szkód dla demokracji wynikających z dezinformacji, zapewnienia kobietom bezpiecznego udziału i przywództwa w polityce oraz monitorowania mediów społecznościowych i środowisk informacyjnych w kontekście wyborów. Zalecenia te obejmują:

- Pełnienie funkcji zaufanego kanału łączącego partnerów z platformami mediów społecznościowych;
- Włączenie do opracowywanych programów szkoleń z zakresu ochrony danych osobowych i łagodzenia traumy psychologicznej wywołanej dezinformacją online;
- Zbudowanie lepszych struktur organizacyjnych dla kobiet dotkniętych dezinformacją ze względu na płeć;
- Utworzenie sieci wsparcia dla kobiet, które były celem takich kampanii;
- Przyjęcie organizacyjnej polityki kadrowej wspierającej kobiety narażone na nadużycia i dezinformację ze względu na płeć;
- Utrzymywanie baz danych o zgłoszeniach i nadużyciach przeciwko pracownikom i współpracownikom oraz regularne udostępnianie ich odpowiednim platformom;
- Przyjęcie w legislaturach przepisów przeciwko szerzeniu dezinformacji lub przeciwko zmanipulowanym mediom i umożliwienie wyłonionym w wyborach urzędnikom moderowania ataków ze względu na płeć na ich profilach internetowych;
- Inwestycje w szkolenia dotyczące platform do raportowania i narzędzi moderacyjnych dla partnerów, którzy mogą być przedmiotem dezinformacji ze względu na płeć;
- Proaktywny kontakt z kobietami w polityce i ich zespołami, w tym poprzez wskazanie konkretnych lokalnych punktów kontaktowych odpowiedzialnych za kwestie płci w każdym kraju/regionie;
- Inwestowanie w odbywające się na platformach kampanie budowania świadomości służące powstrzymaniu dezinformacji ze względu na płeć; oraz,
- Budowanie świadomości społecznej na temat kampanii dezinformacyjnych dotyczących płci i ich efektów, w tym w mediach, tak aby w przyszłości jednostki mogły uniknąć angażowania się w takie kampanie lub ich wzmacnianie.

## Executive Summary (French)

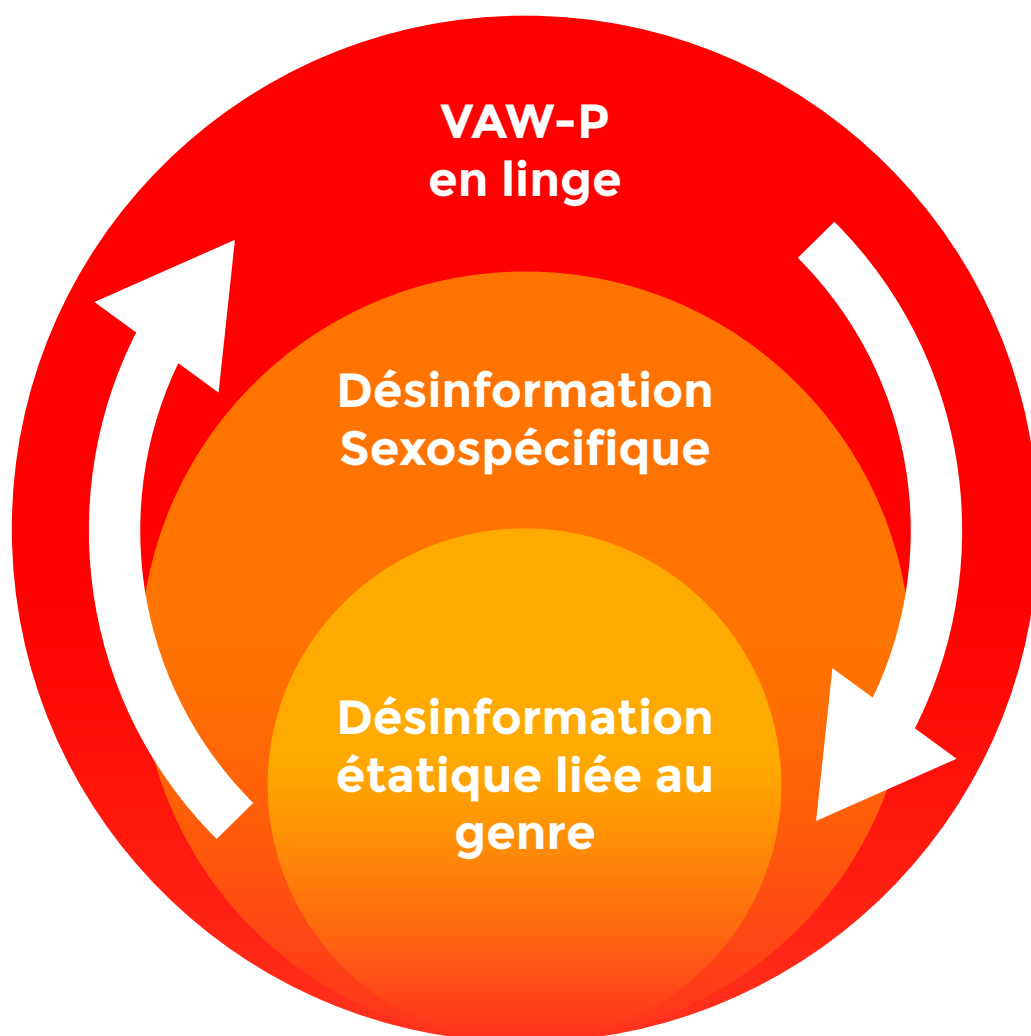
Internet est un outil qui peut simplifier et encourager l'engagement démocratique. Cependant la montée de la désinformation en ligne pose des problèmes, même aux démocraties les plus solides du monde. Bien que les campagnes de désinformation les plus reconnaissables soient liées à la politique nationale, les désinformateurs utilisent fréquemment des narratifs ciblant le genre et la sexualité des femmes afin de perturber la démocratie. Ceci est ensuite souvent amplifié par les acteurs médiatiques et la population en général, bien qu'ils n'aient pas nécessairement l'intention de conduire à la désinformation, ni la capacité de la discerner. Le NDI a mené des recherches solides dans ce domaine qui concluent que la désinformation sexospécifique consiste en l'utilisation de fausses informations pour semer la confusion ou induire en erreur en manipulant le genre en tant que clivage social pour attaquer les femmes et/ou influencer les résultats politiques.<sup>4</sup> Il a trois objectifs principaux : tenir les femmes à l'écart de la politique ; changer le point de vue des femmes et des hommes sur la participation politique des femmes ; et changer spécifiquement les politiques du parti ou les résultats politiques. En bref, il vise à saper la participation libre et égale des femmes à la politique au détriment d'une démocratie inclusive et résiliente.

Le NDI a publié deux études marquantes sur la violence en ligne contre les femmes en politique (VAW-P en ligne) : « *Tweets that Chill* » (2019), qui a mesuré des phénomènes violents similaires vécus par des femmes engagées dans la politique en ligne dans trois pays ; et « *Engendering Hate* » (2020), qui examine le rôle de la désinformation sexospécifique en tant que tactique intentionnelle de certains acteurs pouvant être involontairement amplifiée par d'autres au sein des médias et du grand public. Dans le premier cas, il s'agit souvent d'une tactique politique visant à obtenir des résultats politiques spécifiques. Les rapports soulignent comment certains mots et expressions généralement représentatifs de la VAW-P en ligne sont récupérés par les femmes ; comment mettre l'accent sur l'intersectionnalité et l'expertise locale dans l'identification et l'éradication de la désinformation sexospécifique ; et enfin comment encourager les décideurs à coopérer avec les femmes pour trouver des solutions au problème afin de créer des environnements en ligne positifs, responsabilisants et équitables.

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4 Selon le **Guide de lutte contre la désinformation du CEPPS** : « la désinformation sexospécifique comprend un contenu faux, trompeurs ou préjudiciables qui exploitent les inégalités entre les sexes ou invoquent des stéréotypes et des normes de genre, y compris pour cibler des individus ou des groupes spécifiques ; cette description fait référence au contenu du message . Au-delà du contenu sexospécifique, cependant, d'autres dimensions importantes de la désinformation sexospécifique incluent : qui produit et diffuse le contenu problématique (acteur) ; comment et où le contenu problématique est partagé et amplifié, et qui a accès à certaines technologies et espaces numériques (mode de diffusion) ; qui est le public qui reçoit ou consomme le contenu problématique (interprète) ; et comment la création, la diffusion et la consommation de contenus problématiques affectent les femmes, les filles, les hommes, les garçons et les personnes ayant des orientations sexuelles et des identités de genre diverses, ainsi que les impacts sexospécifiques de ces contenus sur les communautés et les sociétés (risque).»

Finalement, le NDI considère la désinformation sexospécifique comme une forme de VAW-P en ligne. Comme l'illustre le diagramme ci-dessous, tous les cas de discours de haine, de menaces ou d'attaques sexistes contre les femmes et les individus de genres divers ne sont pas des cas de désinformation sexospécifique, mais ils relèvent tous de la VAW-P en ligne. Des formes de VAW-P en ligne peuvent être utilisées par des acteurs de mauvaise foi à des fins de désinformation qui influencent la façon dont les hommes et les femmes perçoivent des problèmes particuliers et s'engagent dans les discours et les processus politiques afin de changer les résultats politiques. Lorsque des acteurs étatiques utilisent la violence en ligne pour mener des campagnes de désinformation ciblant les femmes politiquement actives, ils sapent consciemment et délibérément la liberté et l'intégrité de l'espace d'information politique et menacent à terme les processus démocratiques. Dans les États aux contextes intolérants ou autoritaires, la désinformation étatique liée au genre a pour but de faire avancer le programme du régime au pouvoir. Reflétant la perméabilité de nos environnements médiatiques, cette désinformation sexospécifique peut à son tour être utilisée soit par des acteurs non étatiques pour poursuivre la VAW-P en ligne à leurs propres fins, soit être involontairement amplifiée par des professionnels des médias et des citoyens qui ne sont pas en mesure de discerner le manque d'intégrité de l'information.





Les conclusions et recommandations contenues dans ce guide sont principalement axées sur la désinformation sexospécifique étatique, un phénomène unique et un sous-ensemble de la désinformation liée au genre en tant que forme de VAW-P en ligne. Sur la base des conclusions de la recherche, ce document présente des recommandations pour le NDI, ses partenaires et ceux qui travaillent à l'échelle mondiale pour atténuer les méfaits démocratiques de la désinformation, pour assurer la participation et le leadership des femmes en toute sécurité en politique, et pour surveiller l'environnement des médias sociaux et de l'information lors des élections. Ces recommandations comprennent :

- Servir d'intermédiaire de confiance entre les partenaires et les plateformes de médias sociaux ;
- Intégrer dans la programmation une formation sur la protection des informations personnelles et l'atténuation des traumatismes psychologiques liés à la désinformation en ligne ;
- Construire de meilleures structures organisationnelles pour les femmes affectées par la désinformation sexospécifique ;
- Établir des réseaux de soutien des femmes qui ont été ciblées par de telles campagnes ;
- Adopter des politiques organisationnelles de ressources humaines soutenant les femmes qui sont victimes d'abus et de désinformation sexospécifique ;
- Tenir à jour des bases de données sur les abus et les signalements à l'encontre des femmes employées et affiliées, et les partager régulièrement avec les plateformes ;
- Dans les législatures, adopter des règles contre le partage de la désinformation ou des médias manipulés, et permettre aux élus de modérer les attaques basées sur le genre sur leurs profils en ligne ;
- Investir dans la formation sur les outils de reporting et de modération de la plateforme pour les partenaires pouvant faire l'objet de désinformation sexospécifique ;
- Créer une interface proactive avec les femmes en politique et leurs équipes, notamment en nommant des points de contact locaux spécifiques responsables des questions de genre dans chaque pays/région ;
- Investir dans des campagnes de sensibilisation sur la plateforme pour dissuader la désinformation sexospécifique ; et,
- Sensibiliser la société sur les campagnes de désinformation sexospécifique et leurs effets, y compris dans les médias, afin que les individus puissent éviter de s'engager ou d'amplifier de telles campagnes à l'avenir.

## Executive Summary (Spanish)

El internet es una herramienta que puedes simplificar y fomentar la participación democrática, pero el aumento de la desinformación en línea es un reto incluso para las democracias más sólidas del mundo. Si bien las campañas de desinformación más reconocidas están relacionadas con la política nacional, las personas que la difunden a menudo emplean narrativas dirigidas al género y la sexualidad de las mujeres con el fin de perturbar la democracia. Con frecuencia esto es luego amplificado por los agentes de los medios de comunicación y la población en general, quienes quizás no tienen la intención de impulsar la desinformación ni la capacidad para discernirla. La sólida investigación del NDI en este campo concluye que la desinformación de género es el uso de información falsa para confundir o engañar manipulando el género como división social para atacar a las mujeres y/o para influir en los resultados políticos.<sup>5</sup> Tiene tres objetivos principales: mantener a las mujeres fuera de la política; cambiar las opiniones de las mujeres y los hombres acerca de la participación política de las mujeres; y, específicamente, cambiar las políticas de los partidos o los resultados políticos. En resumen, pretende debilitar la participación libre e igualitaria de las mujeres en la política en detrimento de una democracia inclusiva y resiliente.

NDI ha publicado dos estudios de referencia sobre la violencia en línea contra las mujeres en la política (VCM-P en línea): “Tweets escalofriantes” (2019) [*Tweets that Chill*], en el cual se midieron fenómenos violentos similares en línea que sufrieron mujeres que participan en la política en tres países; y “Generando odio” (2020) [*Engendering Hate*], donde se analiza el papel que desempeña la desinformación de género como una táctica deliberada de ciertos actores que puede ser amplificada involuntariamente por terceros dentro de los medios de comunicación y el público en general. En el primer caso, suele tratarse de una táctica política para obtener resultados políticos específicos. Los informes resaltan la manera en la que algunas palabras y frases generalmente representativas de la VCM-P en línea están siendo reivindicadas por las mujeres; enfatizan la interseccionalidad y la experiencia local en la identificación y erradicación de la desinformación de género; y exhortan a los encargados de formular las políticas a cooperar con las mujeres en la creación de soluciones al problema con el fin de generar entornos en línea positivos, empoderadores y equitativos.

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5 De acuerdo con la **Guía para contrarrestar la desinformación del CEPPS** [*Countering Disinformation Guide*]: “la desinformación de género incluye contenidos falsos, engañosos o perjudiciales que explotan las desigualdades de género o invocan estereotipos y normas de género, incluso para dirigirse a personas o grupos específicos; esta descripción se refiere al contenido del mensaje. Sin embargo, más allá del contenido de género, otras dimensiones importantes de la desinformación de género incluyen: quién produce y difunde el contenido problemático (el actor); de qué manera y en qué lugares se comparte y amplifica el contenido problemático, y quién tiene acceso a ciertas tecnologías y espacios digitales (el modo de difusión); quién es el público que recibe o consume el contenido problemático (el intérprete); y de qué manera la creación, la difusión y el consumo del contenido problemático afecta a mujeres, niñas, hombres, niños y personas con diversas orientaciones sexuales e identidades de género, así como el impacto de género que este contenido tiene en las comunidades y las sociedades (el riesgo).”

En última instancia, NDI considera que la desinformación de género es una forma de VCM-P en línea. Como se ilustra en el siguiente diagrama, no todos los casos de discurso de odio, amenazas o ataques de género contra las mujeres y personas con diversidad de género son casos de desinformación de género, pero todos ellos constituyen VCM-P en línea. Las formas de violencia en línea contra las mujeres en la política pueden ser utilizadas por actores de mala fe con fines de desinformación, lo cual influye en la manera en la que los hombres y las mujeres ven ciertas cuestiones particulares y participan en los discursos y procesos políticos con el objetivo de cambiar los resultados políticos. Cuando los actores del Estado utilizan la violencia en línea para llevar a cabo campañas de desinformación dirigidas a mujeres políticamente activas, socavan consciente y deliberadamente la libertad e integridad del espacio de información política y, en última instancia, amenazan los procesos democráticos. En los países con contextos antiliberales o autoritarios, la desinformación de género basada en el Estado tiene el propósito de promover la agenda del régimen en el poder. Como reflejo de la permeabilidad de nuestros entornos mediáticos, esta desinformación de género puede a su vez ser utilizada por actores ajenos al Estado para continuar la VCM-P en línea para sus propios fines, o ser amplificada involuntariamente por profesionales de los medios de comunicación y ciudadanos que no son capaces de discernir su falta de integridad.



Los hallazgos y las recomendaciones contenidas en esta guía se enfocan principalmente en la desinformación de género basada en el Estado: un fenómeno único y un subconjunto de la desinformación de género como una forma de violencia en línea contra las mujeres en la política. Con base en las conclusiones de la investigación, este documento enumera una serie de recomendaciones para NDI, sus aliados y aquellos que trabajan a nivel mundial para mitigar los daños democráticos de la desinformación, para garantizar la participación segura de las mujeres y su liderazgo en la política, y para monitorear las redes sociales y el entorno de información en las elecciones. Entre las recomendaciones se pueden mencionar las siguientes:

- Servir como un conducto confiable entre los aliados y las plataformas de redes sociales;
- Integrar en la programación la capacitación sobre la protección de la información personal y la mitigación del trauma psicológico provocado por la desinformación en línea;
- Construir mejores estructuras organizacionales para las mujeres afectadas por la desinformación de género;
- Establecer redes de apoyo para las mujeres que han sido objeto de estas campañas;
- Adoptar políticas de recursos humanos organizacionales que apoyen a las mujeres víctimas de abusos y desinformación por razón de género;
- Mantener bases de datos de denuncias y abusos cometidos contra empleadas y afiliadas, y compartirlas de manera periódica con las plataformas;
- En las legislaturas, adoptar normas contra el intercambio de desinformación o medios de comunicación manipulados, y permitir a los funcionarios elegidos moderar los ataques por razón de género en sus perfiles en línea;
- Invertir en capacitación sobre herramientas de moderación y denuncia en plataformas para los aliados que pudieran ser objeto de desinformación de género;
- Interactuar de manera proactiva con las mujeres políticas y sus equipos, incluso nombrando puntos de contacto locales específicos responsables de las cuestiones de género en cada país o región;
- Invertir en campañas de sensibilización en las plataformas para disuadir la desinformación de género;
- Crear conciencia entre la sociedad sobre las campañas de desinformación por razón de género y sus efectos, incluso en los medios de comunicación, a fin de que los individuos puedan evitar participar en dichas campañas o amplificarlas en el futuro.

## Executive Summary (Arabic)

الإنترنت أداة تعمل على تبسيط المشاركة الديمقراطية وتشجيعها. لكن انتشار المعلومات المضللة عبر الشبكة الإلكترونية يشكل تحدياً عسيراً حتى بالنسبة إلى أقوى الأنظمة الديمقراطية وأكثرها صلاباً في العالم. وفي حين ترتبط حملات المعلومات المضللة الأكثر شهرةً بالسياسة الوطنية في بلدٍ بعينه، من الملاحظ أنّ مسرّبها يعتمدون، بشكل متكرر، خطاباً تستهدف النوع الجنسي للمرأة وجنسايتها بقصد تعطيل مسار الديمقراطية. وما تلبث هذه المعلومات أن تنتشر كالنار في الهشيم بفعل الوسائط الإعلامية وعامة السكان، غالباً، الذين قد يحفزون على نشر المعلومات المضللة بغير قصد منهم ومن دون قدرة على تمييزها. في هذا الإطار، خلصت الأبحاث المتعمقة التي أجراها المعهد الديمقراطي الوطني في هذا المجال إلى أنّ المعلومات المضللة القائمة على الجندر هي، في الواقع، استخدام معلومات خاطئة بهدف زرع الارتباك أو التضليل، من خلال التلاعب بمسألة الجندر كطريقة لإحداث انشقاق اجتماعي، بغية التهجم على المرأة و/أو التأثير على النتائج السياسية.<sup>6</sup> أما أهدافها الأساسية، فثلاثة وهي: تحييد المرأة عن العمل السياسي؛ تغيير نظرة النساء والرجال إلى مشاركة المرأة في السياسة؛ وتحديداً تغيير سياسات الحزب أو النتائج السياسية. باختصار، تهدف المعلومات المضللة إلى تقويض مشاركة المرأة في السياسة بشكل حرّ وعلى قدم المساواة مع الرجل، بطريقة تضرب بالأنظمة الديمقراطية الشاملة للجميع والقدرة على الصمود والاستمرارية.

في هذا الإطار، أصدر المعهد الديمقراطي الوطني دراستين رائدتين حول العنف الذي يطال المرأة في السياسة على الإنترنت، إحداهما بعنوان «تغريدات محبطة» (2019) والأخرى «توليد الكراهية» (2020). تقيس الدراسة الأولى الظواهر العنيفة المشابهة التي تعرّضت لها نساء عاملات في السياسة على الشبكة الإلكترونية في ثلاث دول. أما الدراسة الثانية، فتتعمق في دور المعلومات المضللة المتعلقة بالجندر، كتكبير تتقصد جهات معيّنة استخدامه، مبيّنة كيف يتفاقم تأثير هذه المعلومات لدى تناقلها، عن غير قصد، على السنة أشخاص آخرين ضمن وسائل الإعلام والجمهور العريض. في الحالة الأولى، يُستخدم هذا الأمر غالباً كتكتيك سياسي لتحقيق نتائج سياسية محدّدة. في هذا الإطار، تُظهر التقارير كيف تقوم النساء باسترداد بعض الكلمات والعبارات التي باتت تُستخدم لممارسة العنف الإلكتروني ضدّهن في السياسة. كما تشدّد هذه التقارير على أوجه التشابك وأهمية الخبرات المحلية في تحديد المعلومات المضللة المتعلقة بالجندر واستئصالها، وتشجّع صنّاع السياسات على التعاون مع نساء لإيجاد حلول مناسبة بغية نشر بيئة إيجابية ومشجعة وعادلة على شبكة الإنترنت.

في نهاية الأمر، يعتبر المعهد الديمقراطي الوطني أنّ المعلومات المضللة المتعلقة بالجندر هي شكل من أشكال العنف الممارس ضد المرأة في السياسة على شبكة الإنترنت. فكما يُظهره الرسم البياني أدناه، لا تُعتبر كل حالات خطاب الكراهية، أو التهديدات، أو الاعتداءات القائمة على أساس نوع الجنس والموجهة ضد المرأة وبقية الأشخاص المتنوعين جندياً أمثلةً على معلومات مضللة متعلقة بالجندر، لكنها تندرج كلها تحت غطاء العنف الممارس ضد المرأة في السياسة على شبكة الإنترنت. في هذا الإطار، يمكن أن تلجأ بعض الجهات السيئة النية إلى استغلال هذه الأشكال من العنف لغرض نشر معلومات مضللة، مما يؤثر على نظرة الرجال والنساء إلى قضايا معيّنة وكيفية تفاعلهم مع خطابات وعمليات سياسية تسعى إلى تغيير النتائج السياسية. من هنا، عندما تلجأ جهات تابعة للدولة إلى العنف على الإنترنت لإطلاق حملات تضليلية ضدّ نساء ناشطات سياسياً، فهي تساهم،

6 وفقاً لدليل مكافحة المعلومات المضللة الصادر عن الاتحاد المعنى بالانتخابات وتعزيز العمليات الانتخابية: «من أنواع المعلومات المضللة المتعلقة بالجندر المحتوى الخاطيء أو الخادع أو المؤذي الذي يستغل انعدام المساواة بين الجنسين، أو يتحجج بالأفكار النمطية والمعايير الجندرية لاستهداف أشخاص معيّنين أو مجموعات معيّنة. ينطبق هذا الوصف على محتوى الرسالة. أما في ما خلا المحتوى الجندر، فهناك أبعاد مهمّة أخرى للمعلومات المضللة المتعلقة بالجندر، منها: الجهة التي تنتج المحتوى الإشكالي وتنشره (الفاعل)؛ وكيف يتمّ نشر المحتوى الإشكالي وتضخيم أثره وأين، ومن لديه القدرة على الوصول إلى وسائل تكنولوجيا ومساحات رقمية معيّنة (طريقة النشر)؛ ومن هو الجمهور المتلقي أو المستهلك للمحتوى الإشكالي (المحلل)؛ وكيف يؤثر وضع المحتوى الإشكالي ونشره واستهلاكه على النساء، والفتيات، والرجال، والفتيان، والأشخاص ذوي التوجّهات الجنسية والهويات الجندرية المتنوّعة، فضلاً عن الآثار الجندرية التي يخلفها هذا المحتوى على الجماعات المحلية والمجتمعات (المخاطر).

بشكل واع ومتعمّد، في تقويض حرية فضاء المعلومات السياسي وسلامته، وبالتالي تهديد العمليات الديمقراطية. في هذه الدول ذات البيئة اللائبرالية أو الاستبدادية، تهدف المعلومات المضللة المتعلقة بالجندر التي تنشرها الدولة إلى تعزيز برنامج النظام الحاكم. فيعكس هذا النوع من المعلومات الثغرات التي تعاني منها بيئاتنا الإعلامية، ويمكن بالتالي أن تتلقفها جهات غير تابعة للدول لممارسة العنف الإلكتروني ضد المرأة في السياسة بغية تحقيق مآربها الخاصة. في حالات أخرى، قد يساهم العاملون في المجال الإعلامي والمواطنون أنفسهم، عن غير قصد، في تضخيم أثرها، من دون أن يتنبهوا إلى أنها تفتقر إلى الدقة والسلامة.



تركز النتائج والتوصيات الواردة في هذا الدليل، في المقام الأول، على المعلومات المضللة المتعلقة بالجندر التي تنشرها الدولة- وهي ظاهرة فريدة من نوعها، متفرعة عن المعلومات المضللة المتعلقة بالجندر التي تُنشر كشكل من أشكال العنف الإلكتروني ضد المرأة في السياسة. من هذا المنطلق، بناءً على استنتاجات البحث، يوجز هذا العمل التوصيات المرفوعة للمعهد الديمقراطي الوطني وشركائه وأولئك العاملين حول العالم من أجل التخفيف من أضرار المعلومات المضللة على الديمقراطية، بغية ضمان مشاركة المرأة بشكل آمن في العمل السياسي وتنمية حسها القيادي، ورصد وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي وبيئة المعلومات في الانتخابات ومن هذه التوصيات:

- العمل كصلة وصل موثوقة بين الشركاء ومنصات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي؛
- اعتماد تدريب حول كيفية حماية الأشخاص لمعلوماتهم الشخصية والتخفيف من الصدمات النفسية الناجمة عن المعلومات المضللة المنتشرة عبر الإنترنت، ودمجه ضمن البرنامج؛
- إنشاء هياكل تنظيمية أفضل للنساء المتضررات من المعلومات المضللة المتعلقة بالجندر؛
- إنشاء شبكات دعم مؤلفة من النساء اللواتي كنّ هدفاً لمثل هذه الحملات؛
- اعتماد سياسات تنظيمية للموارد البشرية تدعم النساء اللواتي تعرّضن للاستغلال الجندري أو كنّ هدفاً للمعلومات المضللة؛
- الحفاظ على قواعد بيانات بأنواع الاستغلال والتبليغات عن الانتهاكات التي تطل الموظفين والأشخاص المرتبطين بهنّ، ونشرها بشكل منتظم على المنصات ذات الصلة؛
- اعتماد قواعد في الهيئات التشريعية لمكافحة نشر المعلومات المضللة أو التلاعب الإعلامي بها، وتمكين المسؤولين المنتخبين من ضبط الهجمات الجندرية على صفحاتهم الشخصية الإلكترونية؛
- الاستثمار في تدريب الشركاء الذين يمكن أن يكونوا عرضةً للمعلومات المضللة المتعلقة بالجندر وتمكينهم من استخدام أدوات التبليغ والإشراف؛
- التواصل بشكل استباقي مع النساء العاملات في السياسة وفرقهنّ، بما في ذلك من خلال تحديد نقاط اتصال محلية معيّنة تكون مسؤولةً عن النظر في القضايا الجندرية في كل دولة/ منطقة؛
- الاستثمار في إطلاق حملات توعوية عبر المنصات لمنع المعلومات المضللة المتعلقة بالجندر؛
- التوعية المجتمعية بحملات المعلومات المضللة المتعلقة بالجندر وتأثيرها، بما في ذلك في وسائل الإعلام، لتشجيع الأفراد على تجنّب الانخراط فيها أو الامتناع عن تضخيم أثرها في المستقبل.

## Introduction

Authoritative, trustworthy information is the foundation to any healthy democracy. Along with it, civil, inclusive discourse creates the environment necessary for the healthy debates that make democracy work. The internet, the instantaneous access to information and the connection it affords, has empowered people around the world. It allows for citizens to express their opinions and organize around issues important to them. It enables digital citizenship, giving voice to women and marginalized groups that previously may have lacked a platform. But the ubiquity of social media has also given rise to disinformation, creating challenges for even the most robust democracies and leading to violence and unrest around the world.

NDI has long been attuned to the challenges disinformation presents, working with partners around the world to “[disrupt] the sources, [neutralize] the false or inflammatory content, [regulate] the channels it flows through, [build] up the population’s resistance to malign influences, and ultimately, [safeguard] the integrity of the information environment.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, NDI recognizes that disinformation targets the fissures in societies, with both foreign and domestic purveyors of disinformation opportunistically weaponizing weaknesses such as endemic racism and flash points such as elections to achieve greater influence and undermine the functioning of democratic systems.

Though overlooked in most research on disinformation, those who create disinformation frequently employ narratives targeting women’s gender and sexuality in order to disrupt democracy. NDI has been at the forefront of researching, defining, and building awareness around this phenomenon, sounding the alarm about the exigent threat gendered disinformation poses to democratic systems worldwide. NDI concludes that gendered disinformation has three goals: to keep women out of politics; to change the views of women and men about women’s political participation; and specifically change party policies or political outcomes. In short, it aims to undermine women’s free and equal participation in politics to the detriment of inclusive, resilient democracy.

This guide endeavors to provide a digestible overview of this burgeoning field, including NDI’s contributions to it, as well as outline areas where a range of stakeholders, including NDI and partners can focus their work to support women experiencing online gender-based attacks, mitigate the effects of these attacks, and ultimately change the paradigm of women’s political participation both on- and offline in order to strengthen and consolidate a more equitable democratic space.

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7 Laura Jewett, “[Info/tegrity: NDI’s Approach to Countering Disinformation](#),” NDI.org, May 28, 2020.



## Literature Review

Following the launch of the landmark #NotTheCost campaign to stop violence against women in politics in 2016 and renewed call to action in 2020,<sup>8</sup> NDI has published two landmark studies that outline the phenomenon of Online Violence Against Women in Politics (VAW-P) and the ways it “hinder[s] women’s active political engagement.”<sup>9</sup> NDI defines VAW-P as “all forms of aggression, coercion, and intimidation of politically-active women simply because they are women.”<sup>10</sup> *Online* violence against politically-active women—or Online VAW-P—is one form of this global problem. It is a cross-cutting phenomenon that affects women in all sectors of politics, and critically, “undermin[es] democracy in all its key elements..with negative effects on the ambition of young women and new entrants to politics.”<sup>11</sup>

“Tweets that Chill,” released in 2019, provides both quantitative and qualitative data to substantiate that thesis. With its partner, Charitable Analytics International, NDI scraped data from three countries—Indonesia, Colombia, and Kenya—in three bespoke political lexicons—Bahasa, Colombian Spanish, and a mix of Swahili and English, respectively—to develop a “robust topology of Online VAW-P identifying its dominant forms as insults and hate speech, embarrassment and reputational risk, physical threats, and sexualized distortion.”<sup>12</sup> Ultimately, while the frequency of Online VAW-P varied from country to country, the consistent trends within the data about the type of online violence suggests that the research did, in fact, measure “similar violent phenomena experienced by women engaging in politics online across all three countries.”<sup>13</sup>

As Online VAW-P is highly context specific, NDI worked with local civil society partners in each country to compile the bespoke political lexicon used to identify abusive content, compiling “words and phrases in local languages that both characterized gender-based online violence targeted at women, as well as reflected the language and idioms of the political moment.”<sup>14</sup> This cross-sector collaboration was critical to identifying types of VAW-P that women with intersectional identities experience, in particular. For example, “during the Colombia workshop, female representatives from the deaf community shared that the violence they faced was not in text, but through the uploading of violent GIFs and/or video clips in sign-language,” a type of abuse that hearing individuals would not have experienced.<sup>15</sup> The methodology employed in the lexical development for “Tweets that Chill” demonstrates how critical it is for those involved in countering gendered disinformation to actively include representatives of minority communities and intersectional identities.

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8 NDI, “**#NotTheCost: Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics**,” NDI.org, 2020.

9 NDI, “**Tweets that Chill: Analyzing Online Violence Against Women in Politics**,” NDI.org, 2019, 7.

10 Ibid., 12.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid., 4.

13 Ibid, 24.

14 Ibid., 13.

15 Ibid., 22.

“Tweets that Chill” also uncovered several notable quantitative trends. First, in comparing its own Twitter analysis with a survey of women in each target country, NDI found that self-reported levels of online violence—that is, those reported through NDI’s surveys—were higher than what was detected in its analysis. This may be because survey respondents understood the term differently than the definition the researchers used to analyze the dataset, or, more likely, because “many violent tweets did not use [the overt signals in NDI’s lexicon] and therefore slipped past the detection methods used” in the research.<sup>16</sup> This is a trend corroborated by other research, including The Wilson Center’s “Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies are Weaponized Against Women Online.” The Center’s exploration of gendered harassment and disinformation online found that “malign creativity—the use of coded language, iterative, context-based visual and textual memes, and other tactics to avoid detection on social media platforms—is the greatest obstacle to detecting and enforcing against online gendered abuse and disinformation.”<sup>17</sup>

Critically, “Tweets that Chill” demonstrates the impact Online VAW-P has on women’s participation in public discourse online and their political involvement more generally. After identifying instances of Online VAW-P, NDI analyzed “whether each targeted user decreased the number of tweets they were producing immediately after the violence occurred.”<sup>18</sup> In Kenya and Colombia, the research team identified that Online VAW-P has a chilling effect on women’s online engagement, a trend corroborated by survey data across all three countries.

Online VAW-P encompasses the wide variety of attacks women experience when participating in democratic discourse on the internet, a subset of which is gendered disinformation. Gendered disinformation is a particularly virulent strain of Online VAW-P, as it generally aims to discredit and demean women in politics, often with the intent to sway political outcomes. “Exist[ing] at the intersection of disinformation with online violence, such as abuse and harassment, it seeks impact primarily at the political level, though can also cause serious harm at the personal level.”<sup>19</sup>

In 2020, NDI explored disinformation as an Online VAW-P tactic in partnership with Demos, a UK think tank. In “Engendering Hate: The contours of state-aligned gendered disinformation online,” the authors define gendered disinformation as “information activities (creating, sharing, disseminating content) which attack or undermine people on the basis of their gender [and] weaponize gendered narratives to promote political, social, or economic objectives.”<sup>20</sup> The report specifically focuses on state-aligned gendered disinformation, or “disinformation created and shared not only by those who may have been directly coordinated by the government, but also by informal networks of actors who

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16 Ibid., 16.

17 Nina Jankowicz et al, “Malign Creativity: How Gender, Sex, and Lies Are Weaponized Against Women Online,” The Wilson Center, January 25, 2021.

18 NDI, “Tweets that Chill,” 20.

19 Ibid., 11.

20 Demos with NDI, “Engendering Hate: The contours of state-aligned gendered disinformation online,” Demos.org, 2020, 7.

use gendered disinformation to try to shield the state from critique or democratic threat, in particular by women in public life.”<sup>21</sup>

In “Engendering Hate,” NDI and Demos analyzed Twitter data from Poland and the Philippines to examine state-aligned gendered disinformation, and reached several key conclusions. First, while gendered disinformation is shared by state-aligned actors online, it reaches a much broader audience, including well-connected influencers, low-follower personal accounts, and informal networks that share false narratives. Second, gendered disinformation is “parasitic on news events, existing rumors, and underlying social stereotypes, and seeks to reshape the terms of the political discourse in a way that harms women.”<sup>22</sup> It also weaponizes emotion and pre-existing misogynistic tropes in a society, which the report categorizes into six “rules” that govern gendered disinformation:

1. Convince others that women are devious; they are not fit for politics
2. Denounce women as too stupid for public life
3. Make women afraid to talk back
4. Praise women for being sexy, condemn them for being sexual
5. Show everyone that the strong men will save them
6. Demonise the values that women hold

The report also highlights how some words and phrases generally representative of Online VAW-P, including gendered disinformation, are being reclaimed by women, “including targets of gendered disinformation, to call out their attackers and speak up against abuse.”<sup>23</sup> Like “Tweets that Chill,” it emphasizes intersectionality and local expertise in identifying and rooting out gendered disinformation, as platforms’ automated detection tools are neither sufficient nor sophisticated enough to capture the full scope of the problem. Finally, it encourages policymakers to cooperate with women in crafting solutions to the problem in order to create positive, empowering, and equitable online environments.

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21 Ibid., 7.

22 Ibid., 5.

23 Ibid., 33.

## Filling the Gender Gap: How NDI Can Help Partners Address Gendered Disinformation

As evidenced by NDI's research, listening to women and reflecting the obstacles they have faced and experiences they have endured in their own socio-political context and in their own language—whether at the political party, parliamentary, organizational, or platform level—is at the heart of detecting and addressing Online VAW-P and gendered disinformation. NDI developed guidance on tools developed to identify Online VAW-P and gendered disinformation in 2020 including: developing a gendered lexicon and conducting a political network mapping exercise.

The online disinformation research and policy response space is currently quite fractured, in part due to the novelty of the phenomenon, lack of leadership by national governments, competition for grant funds among civil society organizations, and a cross-sectoral shallow understanding of the problem in all its facets. The gender dimension of disinformation is also rarely discussed or acknowledged. NDI not only has deep relationships across all stakeholders in the online information ecosystem, it also has practical delivery experience as a convening and changemaking organization. Therefore, NDI can act as the connective tissue between governments, CSOs, political organizations, policymakers and the private sector. The Institute and its partners can help rebuild an online infrastructure that was built with profit, not democracy—nor women's participation in it—in mind.

To that end, there is still significant work to be done to identify and track gendered disinformation as social media platforms are newly awakened to their responsibility and to develop mechanisms to mitigate this phenomenon. The recommendations below are tailored to solutions that NDI and its partners can enact in the short-term to mitigate the impacts of gendered disinformation according to NDI's Theory of Change for women's political participation. The hypothesis is that in order to create an enabling environment for women's equal and active participation in politics, program and policy interventions need to address barriers at three levels: the individual, the institutional and the socio-cultural.

These recommendations and actions may be used singly, joined in varying combinations or modified to fit each particular political situation, institution or context. A varied host of different actors can and should be engaged in pursuing actions to monitor and mitigate Online VAW-P and gendered disinformation. It appears that across all the types of violence against politically-active women, multi-dimensional approaches applied and monitored over time are necessary to address and reverse ongoing resistance to women's equal political inclusion. While NDI recognizes that systemic change at the platform, legislative, and governance levels must occur to make lasting change, the interventions outlined here can provide women the critical support they need when undergoing gender-based attacks, as well as build broad-based societal awareness of the phenomenon. To that end, the recommendations below are tailored to solutions that NDI and its partners can enact in the short-term to mitigate the effects of gendered disinformation.

## Individual Level

As it stands, much of the onus of identifying, reporting, and challenging Online VAW-P falls to its targets. In order to preserve their psychological and physical safety, some women may disengage from public discourse after being targeted with Online VAW-P, as NDI's own research shows. Other women choose to call their abusers out publicly. The decisions targets make about how to respond are extraordinarily personal. Some targets choose to engage with the content and call it out directly, while others might screenshot and share the content without the abuser's username, so as not to incite further abuse while building awareness. There is no one-size-fits-all policy for how women engage in these conversations, but they should be women-led. That is, if a woman prefers to ignore her harassers, awareness-raising campaigns and direct call outs of abusive behavior should be avoided.

- An unfortunate reality of women's online participation is the threat of personal violence women endure. In addition to the harassment, abuse, and disinformation campaigns with which they are targeted, many women—especially women of color—also endure rape threats, death threats, and threats of violence, sometimes in conjunction with doxxing, the unauthorized release of their personal information online. NDI and its partners should integrate **training on how to protect one's personal information online** into its programming, as well as **how to mitigate psychological trauma from such attacks**.
- It is critical that women in politics have **specific points of contact at social media platforms with whom they can escalate their reports of abusive situations**. Particularly in non-Western, non-white, non-English speaking contexts, this should be someone with intersectional expertise in both Online VAW-P and the local environment, as online abuse often is compounded for women of color and members of marginalized communities. Platform representatives should have a "hotline" to policy teams at headquarters so that action can be taken on psychologically and reputationally damaging content that violates terms of service as quickly as possible, not after it has already gone viral.

## Institutional Level

An important role NDI and similar organizations can play is that of a **trusted conduit between NDI's partners and social media platforms**. Particularly in smaller, non-white, non-English-speaking, less wealthy countries, governments and civil society organizations do not always have responsive points of contact at social media platforms with whom to escalate urgent issues. For example, in Ukraine, after the 2019 election of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, the president-elect's Twitter account went unverified for days, allowing impostors to gain large followings, before outreach from journalists to Twitter's policy team connected the platform with the incoming administration's social media manager. Such a situation could create the opportunity for malign actors to exact significant reputational damage on women in politics.

- As such, local work in country should ensure that partners—including those that might be particularly vulnerable to gendered disinformation—have bespoke points of contact at relevant social media platforms to whom they can reach out in moments of crisis. Partners might also contact platforms when they begin to see campaigns against them and their affiliates percolate, allowing platforms to update their automated classifiers and human policy teams and to remain abreast of the situation.

When platforms are still being unresponsive, social media monitoring and gender experts can vouch for the credibility of individuals or organizations involved, provide important on-the-ground sociopolitical context for platforms, and in general, escalate exigent issues. Finally, **those working to counter gendered disinformation should connect their partners with platforms offering training on how to use on-platform tools to mitigate harassment and disinformation campaigns**. These tools often serve as an important feeder to train platforms' automated detection systems; though these systems are far from perfect and place the onus of the work on targets of disinformation, they are currently the first line of defense against abusive behavior. Properly reporting content—even if it is not later removed—is a step towards a safer online environment for women.

- Institutions working to counter gendered disinformation should also **work with partner organizations' leadership to build better institutional support for women affected by such campaigns**. While some media organizations have policies expressly supporting women employees targeted with abuse, it is rare for civil society organizations, political parties, and other non-media groups to think about such policies. Institutions should consider **creating a standardised organizational policy for partners on responding to online gendered abuse and disinformation** that these partners might deploy within their groups. Such policies might consider benefits available to targets of abuse, such as anti-doxxing services, administrative support cataloguing and reporting threats, and organizational advocacy with social media platforms or law enforcement on behalf of the target.

- Actors in this space should establish private, country or region-based **support networks of women** who have endured or are likely to be subject to gendered disinformation attacks. Use these networks to speak out against and build awareness of ongoing gendered disinformation campaigns. When undergoing online abuse, women often seek out support from other women who have endured similar campaigns, as those who have not tend to underestimate the psychological and professional toll they take on targets. In particular, early-career women or women in patriarchal societies may find it difficult to identify allies; NDI and its partners can create these supportive, safe, and empowering online environments where women can come for moral support from vetted, trusted colleagues. Participants might also choose to use the groups to coordinate responses to attacks and or awareness-raising campaigns.
- CSOs and political parties should consider NDI-developed recommendations to **adopt policies to better support women subject to gender-based abuse and disinformation**. These policies might include, but are not limited to: supporting women’s subscriptions to anti-doxxing services, issuing statements expressing solidarity with women undergoing abuse, interfacing with tech platforms to advocate against abusive and false content targeting women employees or affiliates and broader whole-of-society awareness-raising campaigns on behalf of targets. The policies should be adapted for the local cultural and political context, but must not use endemic local misogyny as an excuse preventing implementation.
- CSOs and political parties should also **maintain databases of abuse and reports against their women employees and affiliates**. This is critical not only in assessing threats, and if necessary, communicating data to law enforcement, but in pressuring platforms to enforce their terms of service and protect women users. Organizations should consider offering this service proactively for the women subject to disinformation campaigns in their organizations, recognizing that while it is easy for large, established organizations like national newsrooms to provide this service, it may be a heavy lift for younger, smaller organizations in the activist space.
- Elected officials play a critical role in stemming the spread of disinformation through leading by example. Rather than endorsing and amplifying disinformation—whether tacitly or overtly—political candidates, parties, and sitting Members of Parliaments should be held to a higher standard. Governments, political parties, and legislatures should **adopt rules against the sharing of disinformation or manipulated media** during campaigns, or for sitting MPs, with risk of censure for those that break the rules. If an official change of rules is not possible, or in campaign environments, political parties should consider adopting a pledge of similar rules. Both changes in rules and candidate pledges should expressly call out and take an active stand against the use of gendered disinformation as a political tactic that prevents women’s equal participation in democracy.

- Lawmakers and their staff should not shy away from **moderating gender-based abuse on their social media properties**. If necessary, policymaking bodies should change rules or laws to expressly permit such moderation.<sup>24</sup> Allowing such abuse to stand does not protect freedom of expression; rather, it tacitly endorses these tactics, and provides an avenue from which abuse can be amplified, creating reputational damage for those targeted and creating potential downstream effects for women considering whether to enter politics.
- In addition to women politicians tracking and reporting gendered disinformation, platforms must **proactively engage with women in politics, their organizations, and their staffs, to discuss abuse and update platform classifiers** that guide automated detection.
- Finally, policymakers and governments should **actively engage with platforms** about the gendered abuse and disinformation they and their staff are observing on government social media properties. In particular, women lawmakers' offices should track the nicknames, narratives, and other instances of "malign creativity" that often signal abuse, including visual memes or coded language that harassers use to avoid detection. This information can be helpful for platforms in identifying and rooting out behavior that violates their terms of service. Finally, offices should also make regular practice of documenting this abuse, as outlined in the section on CSOs and political parties above.

## Socio-Cultural Level

- In addition to critical improvements to social media infrastructure that are suggested in other literature exploring gendered disinformation, social media platforms should **invest in active training and outreach to CSOs, media outlets, academics, political parties and individual women in politics**. Training workshops should ideally help the participants to identify Online VAW-P and gendered disinformation, and be delivered by local platform staff or affiliates with deep knowledge of the sociopolitical context in a particular country or region. This type of training should equip targets of gendered disinformation and their staff to use on-platform reporting and moderation tools that better train abuse detection algorithms and should connect them with platform resources to help them manage the abuse. They should also equip participants with a better understanding of types of content that violate terms of service. Finally, social media platforms should also treat this training and outreach as listening sessions that can feed back into platform policies, informing platforms of the lived experiences of women users in a variety of political and cultural contexts.

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24 The U.S. Congress, for instance, prohibits Members of Congress from deleting abusive comments from their social media properties, even when they contain gendered or ethnic slurs.



- Media organizations and journalists set the tone for how society conceives of and responds to women in politics. Media should consider adopting a **code of conduct for how they cover women candidates** to illustratively include: banishing gendered tropes describing women’s appearance; establishing a higher burden of proof for reporting on gendered allegations in gendered disinformation campaigns; covering policy and substance to a greater degree than “women’s issues” (clothing, family, appearance etc.), and including more women experts in coverage of politics. NDI and its partners should consider running workshops with local media organizations to explain the basics of gendered disinformation, its tools and tactics, and the ways the media tacitly or knowingly amplifies the tropes and allegations that make disinformation successful. In turn, this will raise public awareness about the challenge and lessen individuals’ engagement with and amplification of gendered disinformation.
- Gendered disinformation is propagated due to patriarchal gender norms that normalize the abuse and harassment of women in general, and politically active women in particular. The social expectations, personal attitudes and behaviors related to gender norms are reflected in the online space and, at their worst, are reaffirmed by disinformation campaigns to attack politically active women. Platforms and media organizations have a role in challenging such norms as well. In addition to training to identify VAW-P and gendered disinformation, **training on recognizing patriarchal gender norms and their societal impact** should be mandatory for platform staff and designers, and provided to the other aforementioned stakeholders. Platforms and other media organizations should then hold forums to identify ways their products and activities reinforce such gender inequitable norms, and strategize commitments to action to ensure their operations instead pursue inclusivity and gender equality.
- In **information literacy training, discuss the effects of gender-based online abuse, harassment and disinformation**, including the outsized effects on women of intersectional identities and with unequal access to power. Encourage trainees not only to not engage in or amplify such campaigns, but to be active bystanders, reporting abusive content and offering support and solidarity to targets of abuse.
- Platforms should **invest in on-platform awareness-building campaigns** about the consequences of engaging in gendered abuse and disinformation, in order to educate users about the limits of on-platform speech and encourage equitable and civil discourse. Platforms might consider introducing “nudges” to encourage users not to share abusive or false content.
- Explore **“redirecting” online abusers and misogynists to more civil exchanges**. In the realm of countering violent extremism (CVE), Moonshot and Jigsaw piloted the “redirect method” to nudge users away from searching for extremist content. In the context of gender-based disinformation, the method might interrupt users who are in the process of amplifying disinformation campaigns by warning them about the harms of these tactics before they engage in them.

- There are a variety of excellent awareness-raising tools that already exist in this space. Examples include Paritybot, which sends a positive tweet whenever it detects an abusive message sent to a woman candidate for office, and iHollaback, an online movement to draw attention to and end harassment in all forms. NDI and its partners should feed into and **support these movements and tools where they already exist**, in order to build greater awareness and support behind their missions and not duplicate efforts. These efforts have the potential to denormalize abusive online behavior, but it should also be noted that they can sometimes induce the “Streisand effect,”<sup>25</sup> drawing further attention to and amplifying gendered disinformation. Organizations and individuals highlighting abuse should take extra caution not to amplify nascent campaigns that may not otherwise gain traction.

## Conclusion

NDI occupies a unique role in which it is able to connect its partners with the resources they need to fight gendered disinformation and act as a global convener to support women’s political leadership. NDI’s ethos and implementation methodology are also an excellent fit for these endeavors; the Institute’s long history of Gender, Women and Democracy programming, its in-depth local expertise, and trusted, partner-inspired interventions will generate outcomes that are inclusive, intersectional and based in expertise. The networks NDI already has in place can be activated to achieve immediate effect for women targeted by gendered disinformation. These early efforts can inform the tectonic shifts in platform infrastructure and online discourse that must be implemented to truly stamp out this problem.

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25 T. C., “**What is the Streisand effect?**” The Economist, April 16, 2013.



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