



គណៈកម្មាធិការដើម្បីការបោះឆ្នោតដោយសេរី និងយុត្តិធម៌នៅកម្ពុជា
COMMITTEE FOR FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS IN CAMBODIA

Survey

Women Political Activist's Participation in Politics in Cambodia



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Participation in Politics in
Cambodia

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CPP	Cambodian People's Party
CNRP	Cambodian National Rescue Party
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
COMFREL	Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia
NA	National Assembly
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
VAWIP	Violence Against Women in Politics
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
iKNOW Politics	International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics
LEMNA	Law on Elections of Members of National Assembly
LEMCC	Law on Elections of Members of Commune Council

I. Introduction

The political situation in Cambodia has drastically changed, particularly during 6th legislature of the National Assembly (NA) Elections 2018 period, including shrinking democratic space for citizens, the closure of several media outlets, shrinking and intimidation to human rights defenders and civil society actors are seen as a key constraint in CSO's long term movement for holistic development, and the dissolution of the main opposition party (Cambodian National Recuse Party-CNRP), women politicians and activists of the main opposition party were disempowered and obstructed from engaging in the political process and the elections, ban of women opposition politicians to participate in the 2018 elections, an environment of fear and restrictions to freedom of expression. The result of the NA elections 2018 marked a step backward for Cambodian democracy, shifting from political pluralism to one-party rule (Cambodian People's Party or CPP) from controlling the elections and its result as well as controls the legislature and judiciary. The UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Cambodia called into question the "genuineness" of the general elections in July 2018, in which the ruling Cambodian People's Party won all of the parliamentary seats in the vote. The step backwards in removing political pluralism negatively affects the quality of elected women and women's participation. Political pluralism of gender is an essential element in ensuring the political gender check and balance.

The International Knowledge Network of Women in Politics (iKNOW Politics) reports that women are hardest hit by the current COVID-19 pandemic. Beyond the direct effect of the infection by the coronavirus, women's health and safety are at greater risk as an increased prevalence of domestic violence and abuse is reported and sexual and reproductive health services are reduced. In this time of unprecedented crisis, women also face an increased burden of care and subsequent risk of getting sick because they represent the majority of the frontline healthcare workers and caregivers in homes and communities globally. This is all in addition to the disproportionate indirect impact of the pandemic on women's livelihoods everywhere.¹

Because of these challenges, the Committee for Free and Fair Elections in Cambodia (COMFREL) commissioned a study on "women political activist's participation in politics" in order to know whether women are willing to involve in politics/elections or not in the next 2

¹ E-Discussion on Women's Leadership in the COVID-19 Response, iKNOW Politics, 2020: [iknowpolitics.org/en/discuss/e-discussions/women%E2%80%99s-leadership-covid-19-response](https://knowpolitics.org/en/discuss/e-discussions/women%E2%80%99s-leadership-covid-19-response)

or 3 years. This study is based on the belief of COMFREL that a fair and democratic society requires the social and political participation of all social groups, including women especially women political activists.

II. Objective and Scope of the Survey

The main objectives of the survey are:

- 1) To uncover opinions and perspectives of women to participate in politics in the context of the 6th legislature of the National Assembly Elections 2018 including the post-election situation and impact of COVID-19 pandemic and make projections of the involvement of women in the future political activism;
- 2) To better understand the nature, breadth, and root causes of violence against politically active women in Cambodia;
- 3) To provide a series of recommendations on how political parties, public institutions and CSO can mitigate violence against politically active women;
- 4) To develop an action plan to eradicate this practice so that more women can participate in the political process without fear.

Scope of the survey

There are 100 persons from 20 political parties representing politicians who serve in the government, the opposition, and former main opposition party (CNRP) as well as Civil Society Organization (CSO)'s women leaders volunteered to be part of this survey.

III. Survey Methodology

To achieve the objective of the survey employs both qualitative and quantitative approaches which consist of desk review, survey and key informant interviews (KII) and focus group discussion (FGD).

3.1 Desk Review

It mainly reviews the existing documents such as reports; policies, law and existing projects related to Women Political Activist’s Participation in Politics in Cambodia. The main objective of this review is to map the existing policy, law and relevant studies. This phase in part informed the development of key questions and themes to pursue in the in-depth interviews with stakeholders.

3.2 Primary Data Collection

Primary data collected via Survey, Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussion. The Survey Questionnaires and interview guide were drafted based on the objectives of the study. The samples of the survey were selected and scoped as the following:

Method	Number of Respondents	Location
Survey	55 people (15 men & 40 women) of a target group from 20 parties (3 people from each party) who are male leaders, female leaders, female MPs, female commune councillors, women political activists and NGOs female leaders who are working to promote gender equality and women in politics and decision-making power.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 35 people in Phnom Penh city▪ 10 people in Kampong Chhnang province▪ 10 people in Battambang province
Key Informant Interview (KII)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 11 KIIs with female politicians asked to share their biggest personal success and challenges story during their time in	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ 11 people in Phnom Penh city

	activism within the party, elected position in parliamentary level and sub-national. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 3 NGO leaders and one gender consultant (COMFREL, SILAKA, GADC and gender consultant) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 2 people in Kampong Chhnang province ▪ 2 people Battambang province
Focus Group Discussion (FGD)	8 FGDs (30 people) with female party activists. There are 3 to 6 people in each FGD.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ 4 FGDs in Phnom Penh city ▪ 2 FGDs in Kampong Chhnang province ▪ 2 FGDs Battambang province

The KII focuses on producing a high level of narrative comment and personal perspectives on the topic that is used to highlight the current status of women’s political participation in Cambodia. Interviews were conducted in Khmer. To achieve a high level of reliability and credibility in the results, the questionnaire and interview guide were tested for accuracy, word choice and comprehensiveness before it is employed.

3.3 Data Recording and Analysis

All discussions and interviews were recorded with the consent of the participants. The note taker observed the discussion, taking notes about responses, non-verbal expressions and communication, and the mood and tone of the participants. The interview was transcribed and then the data was imported to MS Excel, coded, cleaned, screened and checked for accuracy, before exporting and analysing it. Results are categorized into themes, topics and priorities.

- Aggregate responses from the survey, focus group discussion, and in-depth interview, pull out key themes and developed individual report and plan of actions of each participating political party;
- Aggregate responses across all parties and serve as a public document which elevates the issues of violence against women in political parties and its impact on equality; and
- Assessment focus on the three-root cause of violence against women in politics: Social-

cultural causes/norm, Legal and Policy causes, and Institutional causes.

3.4 Survey Ethics

All interviewers and fieldwork team members are trained about ethical issues including confidentiality and anonymity. All selected respondents were informed about the study and asked to give their consent to participate in it. To obtain valid consent, the survey used an introductory statement at the start of the interview to ask permission from the interviewee and to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the survey. Respondents are able to skip questions or withdraw from the study at any time. There was no identifying information of the respondent in the data used in the analysis. An ID number was used instead of the participant's name on the data sets. All completed questionnaires will be stored in a secure place during data collection, entry, and analysis. Only those people responsible for data entry and analysis have access to the questionnaire and computer file. The questionnaire is logged in a safe place, and the computer file is kept confidential.

IV. Findings and Analysis

4.1 Finding from Desk Review

Violence against women in politics remains one of the biggest barriers to women's political participation. Women across the globe are routinely threatened, harassed, denied resources, assaulted, and killed just for exercising their right to participate in the political process.²

What is violence against women in politics?

“Violence against women in politics encompasses all forms of aggression, coercion and intimidation against women as political actors simply because they are women.”

• *National Democratic Institute*

Violence against women in politics is rampant in South Asia according to a new study conducted by the Centre for Social Research and UN Women. The study, ‘Violence against Women in Politics’ revealed that the insufficient implementation of laws, lack of support from police and judiciary, the socio-economic divide and current power structures are the major reasons for violence³. According to the National Democratic Institute (NDI), violence against women in politics encompasses all forms of aggression, coercion and intimidation against women as political actors simply because they are women.⁴ These acts – whether directed at women as civil society leaders, 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 dominate and control to exclude women from politics.

The violence against women in politics refer to discrimination against women, lack of specific written policy as a special measure and lack of gender responsive laws, particularly election laws, lack of strict and effective enforcement of existing policies and mechanisms to support

² UN Women's study conducted in India, Nepal and Pakistan, occurred from 2003 to 2013

³ UN Women's study conducted in India, Nepal and Pakistan, occurred from 2003 to 2013

⁴ National Democratic Institute. Stopping Violence Against Women in Politics: Program Guidance.

and provide equal opportunities for women in politics, insufficient implementation the International Convention CEDAW and current power structures are the major reasons for violence⁵.

Violence against women in politics is violence that occurs within the political sphere but that specifically targets women. It is used to reinforce traditional social and political structures by targeting women leaders who challenge patriarchy and the prevailing social expectations and norms. It restricts women's mobility and capacity to participate within the political sphere. Such violence can be perpetrated by political, societal and state actors.

What are the common forms of violence against women in politics?

Manifestations of violence towards politically active women are classified in several common categories – psychological, physical, sexual, and economic – that present distinctive features when applied to political life:

Psychological Violence

Psychological violence refers to verbal and emotional abuse and acts intended to undermine a person's sense of worth and/or personal safety and security. This includes defamation, slander, character attack, harassment by the media, harassment online/social media, name-calling, insults, hate speech, constant criticism and/or focus on physical appearance. Psychological violence may also include acts aimed at instilling fear or creating isolation, such as threats of physical or sexual assault and forms of stalking. For instance, after the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) was dissolved in November 2017, many of the former CNRP Commune Councillors were politically abused including incidents of physical attacks, death threats, loss of economic livelihood, and verbal and psychological abuse.⁶

Physical Violence

Physical violence involves injuries inflicted directly on women, as well as acts of bodily harm against their relatives, such as assault, murder, kidnapping, beatings and even domestic abuse, intended to prevent or undermine their political participation. Here is an example from Bolivia, in 2010, Juana Quispe was elected Councilor and as she assumed her position, suffered ill-

⁵ COMFREL's report on the Empowerment of Women in Politics and Local and National Elections 2017, 2018

⁶ <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/cambodia/beaten-12142020172604.html>

treatment by members of her council. She filed several appeals denouncing physical and verbal abuse, which stated they did not allow her to exercise her political rights and she was removed from office. 32 days after recovering her political right as Councilor, she was murdered. This case, along with many other complaints of women in public office, gave rise to the adoption of the Law against Harassment and Political Violence towards Women (No. 243) in 2012.⁷

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence includes sexual acts and attempts of sexual acts by coercion or force, as well as unwanted sexual comments or innuendo, and sexual harassment. Examples include rape/unwanted sex, sexual harassment, unwanted sexual contact, attempts to force women into sexual acts in exchange for a political outcome, such as securing a nomination, funding or an electoral result. In Australia, the experiences of former Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, symbolize the sexist abuse that women in public life suffer. In her speech on “sexism and misogyny” in the parliament in 2012, Gillard warns that they women “may expect” threats of violence or rape “almost daily.” In 2016, Gillard reflected, “I do think that this issue about sexism – and, particularly, sexism as it confronts women leaders – is now one of the issues in global conversations of our time.”⁸

Economic Violence

Economic violence involves coercive or forceful behaviour to control access to economic resources, using money to control women, denying and delaying resources available to them and property damage. For example, some women voters may be denied funds or other resources to coerce their vote or prevent them from voting. In some other cases, women politicians may be denied access to financial, material or other economic resources to which they are entitled by law, often for either electoral or constituency purposes, and which are available to their male counterparts.

Globally, politically-active women–voters, candidates, local councillors, members of parliament (MPs), community activists, bloggers, and so on – regularly find themselves on the

⁷ Franz Chavez, 2009. “BOLIVIA: Politics, a Risky Business for Women,” *Inter Press Service*, 27 October. For more information, please consult page 35 of the Programming Guide.

⁸ John Morgan, 2016. “Julia Gillard on tackling sexism against female leaders.” *Times Higher Education*. <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/julia-gillard-on-tackling-sexism-against-female-leaders>.

receiving end of acts or threats of violence. Growing acts of violence against women have become strong barriers to women accessing their right to participate fully and equally in politics and public life. There is no denying that over the past decade, the increase in women's political representation has been accompanied by a rise in violence against women in politics (VAWP).

Overview of Women's Political Participation in Cambodia

In Cambodia, women have become more involved in politics, and women have been very active in elections in recent decades, in terms of votes, voice and political activities. On the contrary, there is a lack of opportunity for women to stand as candidates and to be elected as leaders. The number of elected female parliamentarians was decreasing continually from the 5th legislature NA elections 2013 to the 6th legislature NA elections 2018 whereas the number of female candidates is still low, at 25.25% for the 6th legislature.

In this sixth legislature, the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), through the Ministry of Women's Affairs (MoWA), continues to focus on human resource development, especially on women's leadership skills in the political, social, and economic spheres at the national level, as well as the empowerment of women to succeed in business. Gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are set out as both stand-alone and crosscutting of national priorities which notable examples are to be found in the Rectangular Strategies Phases 1, 2, 3 and 4 for Growth, Employment, Equity and Efficiency which is the political platform of the government. Recently, the MoWA took a leading role in formulating a drafted National Policy on Gender Equality based on the lesson learnt and experiences in implementing the key national policies, programmes, and strategies using the finding of the Cambodia Gender Assessment (CGA) of 2019. But the drafted policy is not clearly mentioned in promoting women's political participation. This policy provides a long-term policy framework for and further enhances the principles of gender equality in the national policies, National Strategic Development Plan (NSDP), and sectoral strategic plans in order to achieve the gender equality that aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals, aiming at "leave no one behind", and the principles of CEDAW in the development agenda. Moreover, MoWA has continued to strengthen the implementation of the National Action Plans to Prevent all forms of Violence Against Women and girls (NAPVAW) from 2019 to 2023 and to restore social morality by paying close attention to social education for a change of mindset in order to eliminate the

discrimination against women. According to a COMFREL's report⁹, discriminatory attitudes toward women in commune councils have decreased significantly, with strong support and promotion of women from male commune councillors and village chiefs. There are changed attitudes to value women, understand gender, respect for women's rights, and good cooperation with women. However, discrimination against women in politics, especially women in some commune councils, still persists. In addition, some women politicians who exercise their rights to participate in the democratic process, such as meetings and political discussions in Cambodia, face judicial charges, discrimination, harassment, intimidation and abuses by the authorities. Their activities were also interrupted by the local authorities. For example, politicians, political activists and commune councillors of the former CNRP have been subjected to judicial charges, discrimination, harassment, intimidation and restrictions by the authorities since the party was dissolved by the Supreme Court in 2017. Furthermore, some socio-cultural norms, the lack of good quality education for women and girls, the lack of positive discrimination in a political platform, the lack of financial and political support for women in politics as well as the institutional barriers are the contributing factors to violence against women in politics and preventing them from becoming political leaders. For example, between the beginning of the year and the middle of 2019, female politicians who used their political rights and women's rights to participate in the democratic process in Cambodia are subject to judicial prosecution, discrimination, harassment, intimidation, and restrictions by authorities, even the meetings and discussions on women's politics were also interrupted such as a warning message by the Prime Minister Hun Sen, a former chief of O'Char commune in Battambang province was subsequently summoned to court, a joint gathering of former members and officials of CNRP was disrupted by authorities, and a group of six elected female as commune chiefs, member of the district and provincial councilors of the former CNRP in Kampong Speu province was forced to flee for safety to avoid persecution by Phnom Penh authorities.

The actions of the governments and local authorities were contrary to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in article 3 stated: "In all fields, especially political, social, economic and cultural, the state shall take appropriate action including legislation for ensuring the full development and prosperity of women to ensure that women use and enjoy their human rights and fundamental freedoms in equality with men. It also contradicted article 7 stated that "States parties shall take affirmative actions

⁹ <https://comfrel.org/political-gender-watch-2019-comfrel-official>

to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country...” The above acts also violate the Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, which protects the right to freedom of expression and assembly, as stated in article 41: “Cambodian people have freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of publication, freedom of assembly...”, and also violated the International Covenant on citizen rights and political rights in article 19, paragraph 2 stated that “Everyone has the right to freedom of expression...”

Cambodia continues to maintain a pronounced inequality of representation between men and women in public affairs and political life – including in political parties, being part of the inclusive law-making process, as candidates, elected representatives. The main part of this issue stems from a lack of specific written policies as affirmative actions and lack of gender-responsive laws, particularly election laws for supporting and providing equal opportunities for women and men in decision- making level both the public and political spheres in accord with the CEDAW which Cambodia has ratified and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) commitments Cambodia has taken on. The existence of discrimination, lack of encouragement, and political wills of the political parties with the highest potential to promote women’s participation. Moreover, male leaders want to retain their political power and do not want to step down ...etc. There is a low number of elected females for the elections in both Commune Council Elections 2017 and National Assembly Elections 2018, elected women parliamentarians make up only 20% and women commune councillors only 20% of the fourth mandate commune council 2017 including a low number of women in decision-making levels at both national and sub-national level, while the overwhelming number of male representatives.

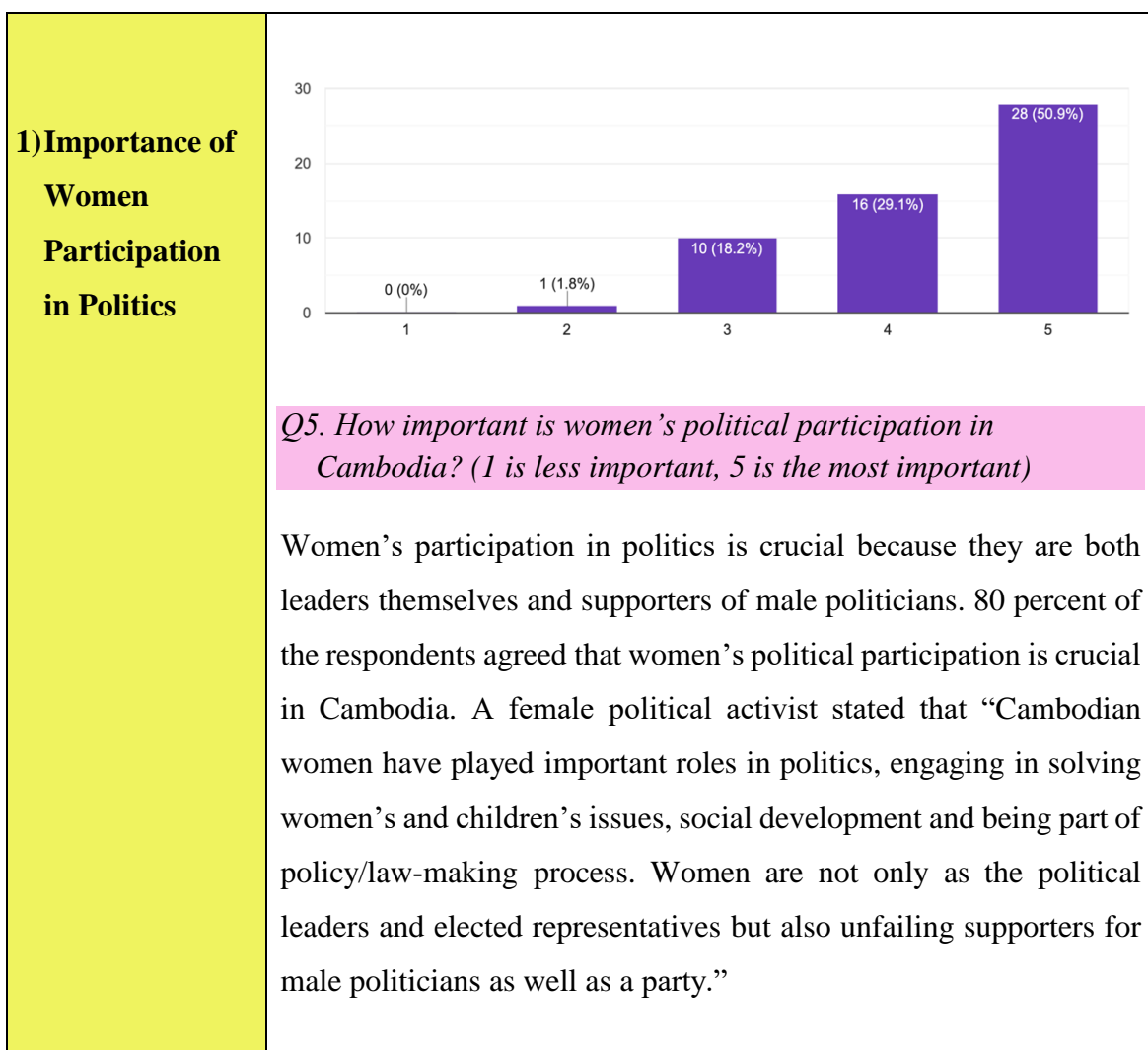
According to a report published by the Secretariat General of the National Assembly¹⁰ in the early 2020, here are some facts and figures about women in leadership and politics:

- ❖ Within two decades, women's representation at the National Assembly has increased significantly from 6 percent to 21 percent, while female senators remained stagnant at 16 percent.
- ❖ Women constitute only 15 percent of judges, 14 percent of prosecutors, 22 percent of lawyers, and 12 percent of the notary public (as of February 2020).

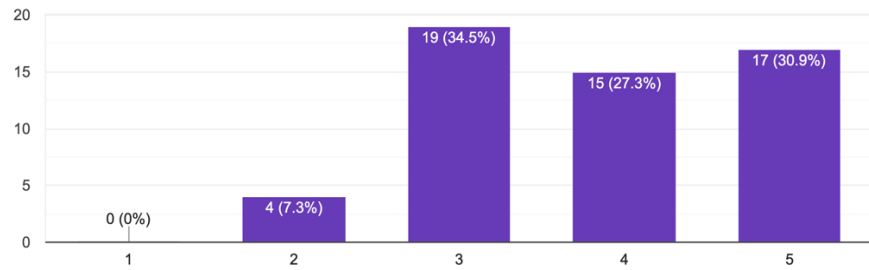
¹⁰ <http://nac.org.kh/Images/Women%20in%20leadership-Eng-Final.pdf?fbclid=IwAR3-zc5x1fNII7fnSKpCoOm4VqSX8v5rVoAXob7WEgdEQbBxoZTxKYv6AHA>

- ❖ Women make up about 16 percent of the government senior position from Under Secretary of State to Deputy Prime Minister (as of February 2020).
- ❖ Women make up only 4 percent of governor positions.
- ❖ Women served as the senior officer is relatively lower than men both at national and sub-national levels. Meanwhile, the majority of women served as deputy heads of office.
- ❖ Women's participation in the judiciary is relatively low within seven years of service (2013-2020).
- ❖ Violence against women is still a pervasive issue in the country. Women aged between 15 and 64 in Cambodia have shown that 30 percent have experienced violence in physical, sexual, psychological, and economic forms.

4.2 Findings from the Survey



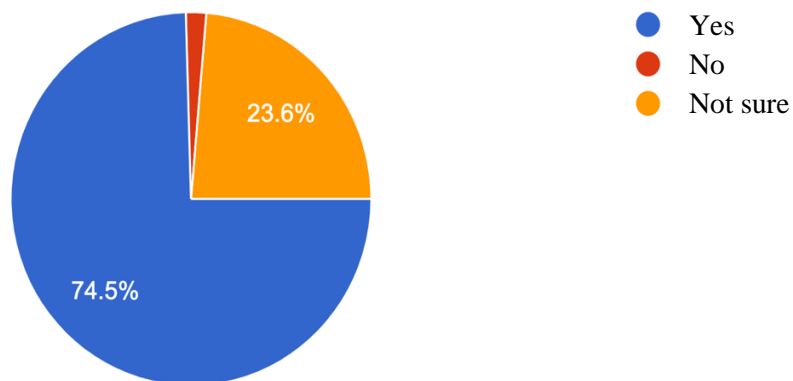
2) Level of Women's political participation



Q6. Could you rate the level of women's political participation in Cambodia? (1 is the lowest, 5 is the highest)

Even though the numbers of women political leaders are still low in Cambodia, Cambodian women in general have been actively engaging in politics. 91 percent of the participants agreed that they are highly engaging in politics as political supporters, political activists, politicians and voters. A former female commune council member said that *“even though political culture in Cambodia is not so favourable for women, they still participate in various activities especially voting.”*

3) Awareness about VAWIP

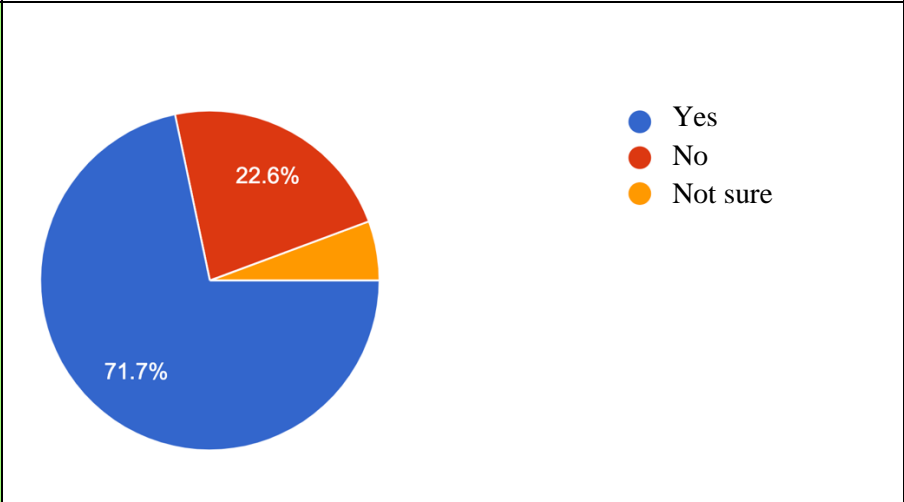


Q7. Are you aware of the form of violence against women in politics?

The violence against women in politics is not widely understood in Cambodia because 23.6% of the respondents are not sure about the VAWIP. Only 74.5% of the participants understand the VAWIP.

Yet, 1.8% of the respondents don't know what VAWIP really is. A woman political activist in Battambang province said that *“I observed that not many people including some male colleagues in the same party and local authority are not well aware of the VAWIP and it has become a bad culture in Cambodia.”*

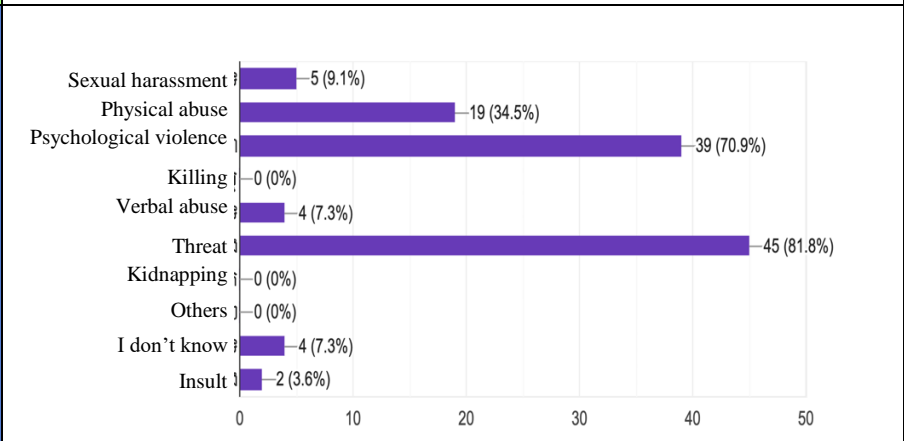
4) Experience of VAWIP



Q12. Did you (women) experience of violence in politics?

The result of the survey showed that 71.7% of the respondents experienced in VAWIP which reflects that violence against women in politics in Cambodia is one of the serious issues. And 22.6% of the participants never experience it. However, 5.7% of the participants are not sure of the VAWIP. Similarly, women from the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) stated that *“most female political activists and politicians from the opposition party experienced VAWIP, while women in other small parties and the ruling party are not really the targets of the VAWIP in Cambodia these days.”*

5) Nature and form of VAWIP

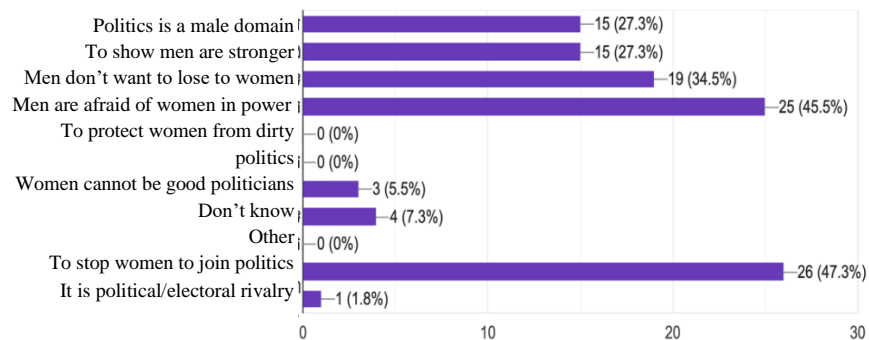


Q10. Rank the following 1-7 from the most common form of violence against women in political party to the least common

The most common form of VAWIP is a **threat** and **psychological** violence. 81.8% of the participants experienced threat and psychological violence at 70.9%. A former opposition party activist said that *“it is hard for me to have a peaceful life these days because I have faced too many threat and psychological violence. The perpetrators have never given me a break to live a simple life even though my party was dissolved long ago.”*

Another serious form of VAWIP is Physical abuse and Sexual harassment. Women experienced physical abuse at 34.5% of participants and 9.1% experienced sexual harassment. It’s not acceptable with these immorality acts and it contradicted with international convention – CEDAW which Cambodia has ratified and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) commitments Cambodia has taken on in order to protect women from discrimination and violence as well as empower women and girls.

6)Reasons for VAWIP

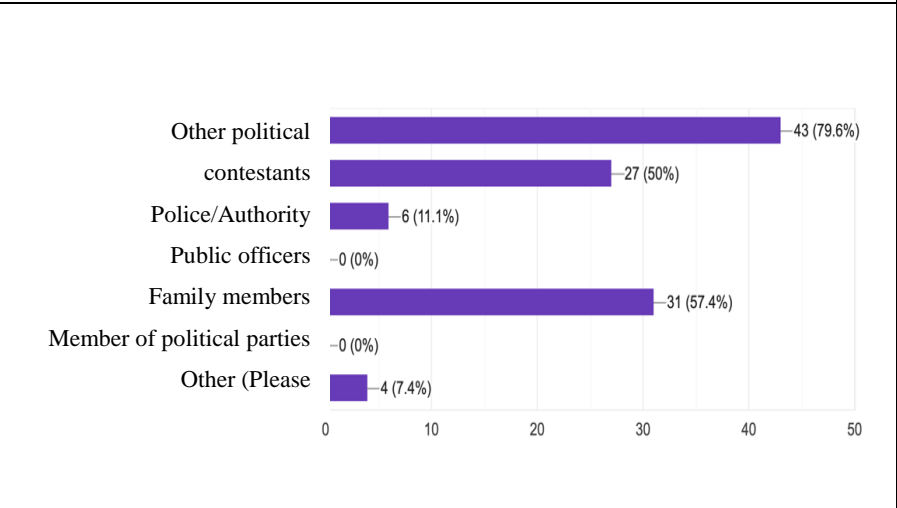


Q11. Why do you think people perpetrate violence against women in politics?

The two main reasons for VAWIP: 1) the politics is not a personal thing but a political party competition for power and 2) men are afraid of women getting more power. 47.3% of the participants agreed that the reason for VAWIP is the politics is not a personal thing but a political party competition for power so they want to stop

women to involve in politics with other reasons such as women cannot be good politicians, men are stronger. A women rights activist claimed that “The nature and process of politics in Cambodia is male-dominated. Therefore, for some reasons men don’t want to lose their power (don’t want to step down their position) to women or they are afraid of women in power.”

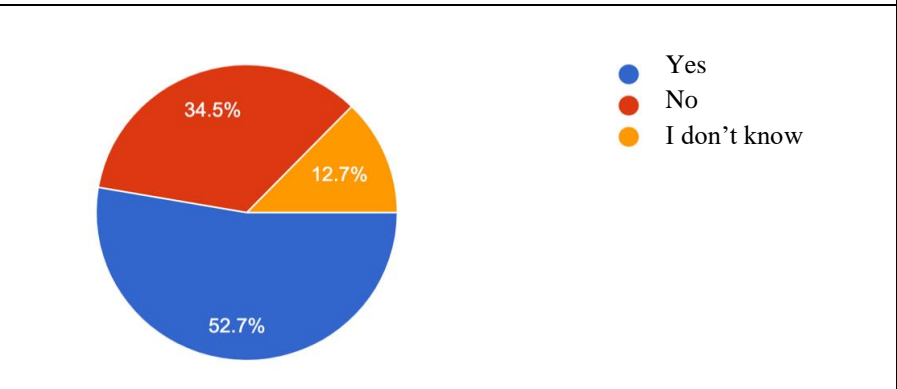
7) Perpetrators of VAWIP

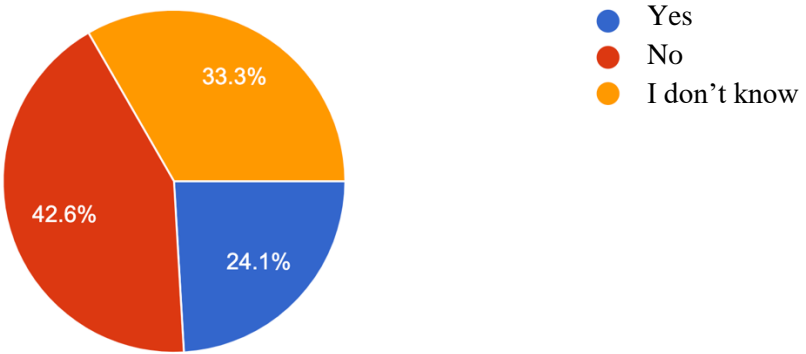


Q9. Who are the perpetrators of violence against women in politics and political party?

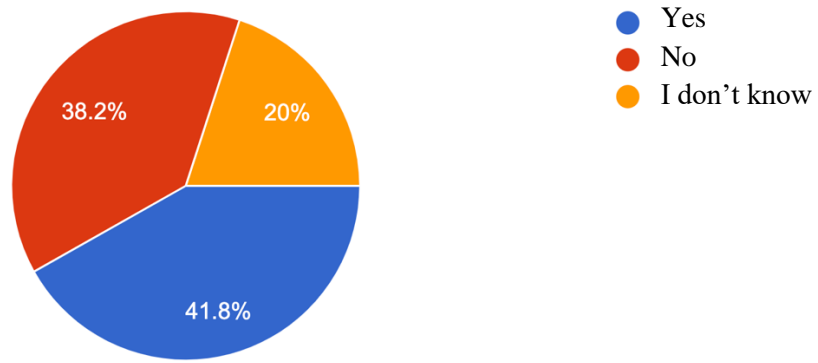
The main perpetrators of the VAWIP are rival political party members, the members in the same political party and the police & local authorities. 79.6% of the participants agreed that perpetrators of the VAWIP are rival political party members. A female political activist stated that “Given the political conflict in Cambodia, some contestants from other political parties especially the ruling party do not regard us as the competitors but enemies that’s why some of them have taken politics personally.”

8) Report about VAWIP



	<p><i>Q13. Did you report the violence against women in politics?</i></p> <p>Only 52.7% of the participants reported having experienced the VAWIP cases. 34.5% of the participants didn't report it and 12.7% of the participants refused to answer. An academic said that, "Some female politicians or activists dare not to report the VAWIP because they fear of their superiors and the ruin of their reputation and dignity once the incident was known publicly."</p>
<p>9) Recognition and Acceptance of VAWIP</p>	 <p><i>Q16. Is there a recognition and acceptance of political violence against women in party?</i></p> <p>Only 24.1% of the participants confirmed that there was recognition and acceptance of VAWIP. However, 42.6% of them responded that there was no recognition or acceptance of VAWIP and while 33.3% of the participants were not aware of any recognition. A women rights activist stated that "Since political violence is somehow a part of political culture in Cambodia, not many people are opened to recognize it as a problem but a challenge to live with and I think both political leaders and politicians need to change their attitude on this issue."</p>
<p>10) Responsibility for preventing</p>	

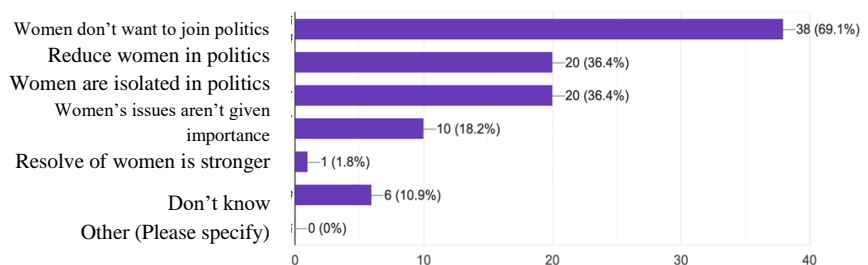
violence against women



Q15. Is there responsible person(s) in solving the violence/discrimination against women in a political party?

Only 41.8% of the respondents confirmed that there are officers in charge of the VAWIP or discrimination in a political party. However, 38.2% of the participants agreed that there are no specific officers in charge of the VAWIP in their parties and 20% of them are not aware of the political party’s mechanism to deal with the VAWIP. A women rights activist confirmed that “from my work with political parties, I found out that most of the parties do not have gender equality policy and code of conduct against the VAWIP in place yet. Even though some parties do, the effectiveness of their work is still limited which needs more attention and commitment, especially their political will and leadership accountability.”

11) Impact of VAWIP

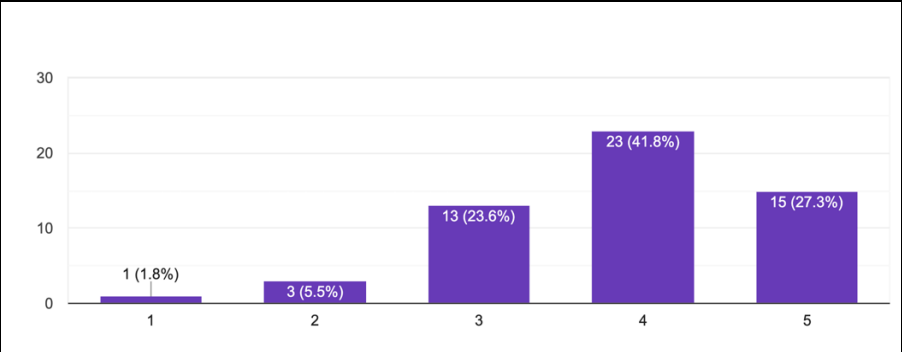


Q18. What is the impact of political violence against women in politics?

The VAWIP discourages women from participating in politics. They feel more isolated. Therefore, their political participation especially

in standing for office and elections has been reduced and narrow. The findings from the interviews showed that some women dared not to disclose or report the violence or discrimination against them in a party because they were afraid that the disclosure could have a negative effect on the reputation of women, the party itself, credibility and image of the party. Consequently, women might be prevented from joining or continuing their participation with the party, lack of opportunities to be equal participation in politics and the exercise their political rights is not in accordance with the CEDAW Convention.

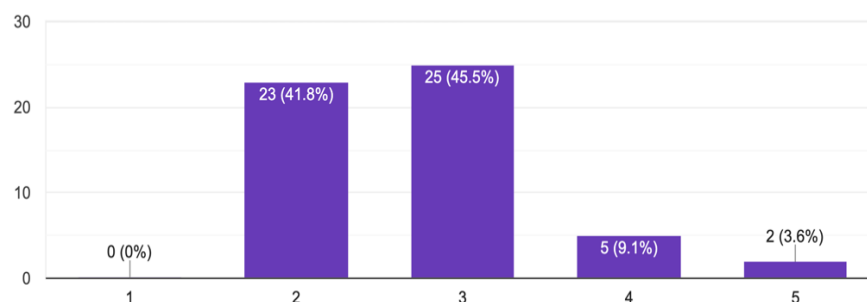
12) Challenges related to the promotion of women within the political parties and in politics



Q20. To what extent do women challenge related to the advancement within political party? (1 is less challenging, 5 is the most challenging)

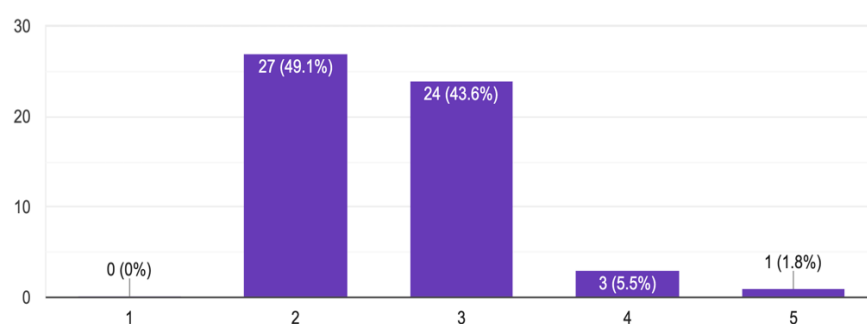
Cambodian women are still facing great challenge to attending leadership positions in the political party. More than 92.7% of the respondents agreed that women have a great challenge in order to become political leaders in their parties. 27.3% of the respondents agreed that women face an extreme challenge in becoming political leaders in a political party. A women rights specialist claimed that “Many female politicians or activists are brilliant but their male colleagues especially the seniors don’t give opportunities for them to take over the leadership positions. I think having gender equality policy in the party and its good implementation will become an effective tool for women to claim their rights and grasp equal opportunities as candidates and elected.”

13) Support for women to overcome the VAWIP



Q23. Do women receive sufficient support to overcome challenge and violence against them? (1 is the less sufficient, 5 is the most sufficient)

More than 86% of the respondents agreed that Cambodian women received insufficient support to overcome the challenges and violence against them in politics. A commune council member said that “The supports for female politicians or activists are limited. Yet, they face more challenges than male politicians because female politicians or activists need to overcome many barriers in order to fully participate in politics especially the demands for their roles as mothers, wives or daughters-in-law in the family are also pulling them back.”

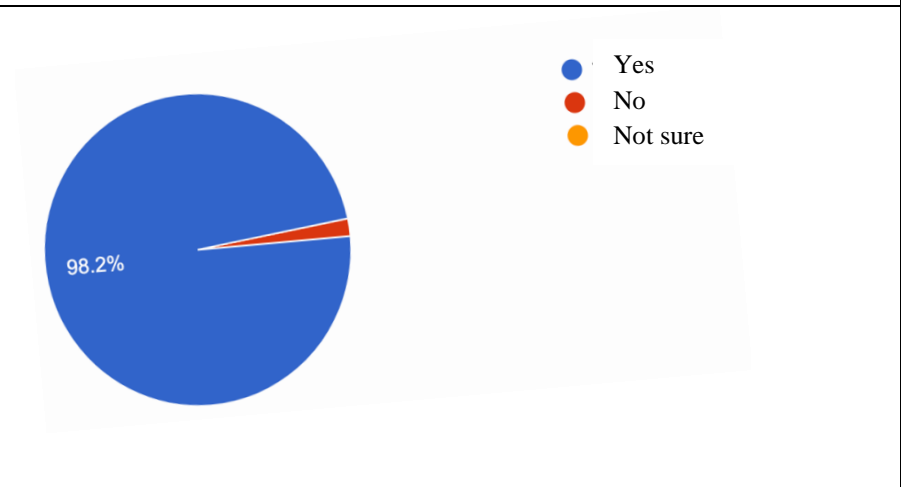


Q24. How supportive is the public institution (educational institution, think tank etc.) and NGOs to promote women's equal participation in politics? (1 is the less supportive, 5 is the most supportive)

There are limited supports from educational institutions, think-tanks, NGOs, and so forth for women to overcome the VAWIP. The level of available support for women is below average. A commune

council member stated that “I am grateful to the capacity building trainings to help women in politics organized by some NGOs. I found them very helpful. However, the chance to learn in once in a blue moon. I am aware that the NGOs project depends on the funding from overseas; therefore, it is hard to request more trainings. Since politics is not widely taught and discussed in schools, NGOs platform is the only channel to raise the public awareness about the importance of women participation in politics and their roles are political leaders.”

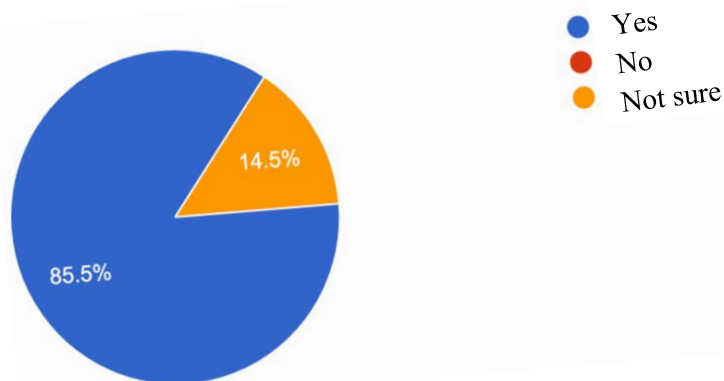
14) The need for political party to adopt gender equality policy



Q26. Should a political party have gender equality policy to promote women's equal participation?

The survey showed that 98.2% of the respondents agreed that a political party should have gender equality policy and its well implementation in order to promote women's equal participation in politics. Each party should adopt a guideline/internal rule of conduct against violent behaviours among party members. An informant from the Key Informant Interview stated that “Technically, there is a need for political party to adopt gender equality policy because it will protect and provide more opportunities to female politicians. However, the demand is not strong enough which requires effective and inclusive lobbying and advocacy for the adoption.”

15) Willingness to continue political participation



Q27. Given the fact that the political situation has drastically changed, particularly during the National Assembly Elections 2018 period, including shrinking democratic space for citizens, the closure of several media outlets, shrink and intimidation to human rights defenders and civil society actors, and the dissolution of CNRP. There were also intimidation and restriction on women politicians and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic, in the next two or three years/next elections, will you [women] participate in political affair?

Even though the political situation in Cambodia has changed dramatically, especially during the 2018 parliamentary elections, including the shrinking of the democratic space for citizens, the closure of some media outlets, the intimidation of human rights defenders and civil society, and the dissolution of the CNRP, especially the intimidation and restrictions on women politicians and the effects of the Covid-19, 85.5% of the participants are still interested and involve in politics/elections in the next 2 or 3 years. However, 14.5% of them are not sure whether they will continue their political engagements. A female politician stated that “I am still interested in politics because I believe that my engagement as well as the participation of other women can make a different to the status of women in Cambodia and for the country as a whole. However, political oppression and structural violence are so serious these days. Therefore, I need to reassess the situation and finding more support in order to continue my future political endeavour.”

V. Conclusion

Cambodian women remain to face different forms of discrimination and violence against them in their political participation and interests; it is a serious issue although their political rights and participation are fully guaranteed by the Cambodian Constitution and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Representation and meaningful participation of Cambodian women in politics and political leadership remains low compared to their male counterparts at all levels. Despite that, 80 percent of the survey participants acknowledged that women's participation in politics is crucial, especially for elections in Cambodia toward equitable and inclusive development of the country.

The findings show that 71% of the participants experienced violence against women in politics (VAWIP). The study showed that women in politics both in the ruling party, opposition party, and other parties face the violence of multiple types, dimensions and at all levels. Both female commune councillors and female parliamentarians experienced violence against them but in different forms and degrees. The violence against female commune councillors and female parliamentarians from the opposition party (i.e., former CNRP) is more obvious, dreadful, and frequent than women in the ruling party or other small parties. In the meantime, the female commune councillors experienced more abusive and direct violence against them than the female parliamentarians.

Gender discriminatory, autocratic, patriarchal and elitist mindsets still prevail within the family, community, political parties, law enforcing agencies and the public. The most common form of VAWIP is threat and psychological violence have been mentioned during the survey by women political activists, members of the commune councillors, and elected representatives of the National Assembly. Another serious form of VAWIP is physical abuse and sexual harassment, which are the main concern it's not acceptable with these immorality acts and it contradicted with international convention – CEDAW and Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) commitments Cambodia has taken on to protect women from discrimination and violence as well as empower women and girls. For sexual violence, it seems that a rule of silence still prevails, as very few mentioned it, whereas it was clearly stated by participants of

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). Consequently, all forms of abuse and violence against women in politics are the main issues and concerns that prohibit active participation and potential of women in politics.

In certain situation, the VAWIP has not widely recognized. The lack of recognition has led to a gap in the report, address, and response mechanism to support women's political participants, particularly those who live in different socio-economic and political backgrounds. Moreover, the VAWIP has a negative impact on women's equal participation in politics especially it isolates and discourages them from engaging in politics. The road for women to become political leaders in a party and elected representative are exceptionally challenging. They need more supports, empowerments and opportunities from the government, political party, public institution, civil society, national election committee (NEC) and so forth in order to overcome the challenges.

Even though, most active political participated women face discrimination and violence against them, the effects of the Covid-19 and the political arena in Cambodia is not women-friendly, 85.50% of the women who joined the survey are still interested in politics especially elections in the next 2 or 3 years around 2022 and 2023 and they remain keep their willingness and activism in political engagement and participation.

Cambodian women and men have been fully and equally guaranteed by the Cambodian constitution on their political participation and interests. However, women-friendly and enabling environment, policies, election laws and operational measurements have not been realistically responsive to the status of women's participation in politics. The gaps of gender-responsive policies and election laws, operational measurements, and investments have strengthened the inequality of women's representation and participation. Therefore, gender equality policy in the party and gender-responsive election laws and it's well implemented will become an effective tool for women to claim their rights and grasp equal opportunities as candidates and elected.

VI. Key recommendations

To increase gender equality and women's political empowerment, the following measures should be taken:

6.1 Political Party

- ❖ Recognize the need to create a safe and enabling secure political environment within a party for women; for example, gender equality policy, persons in charge of VAWIP, and code of conduct against VAWIP in a party.
- ❖ Enable the inclusion of more women party members in the central, selection committees, and parliamentary committees. Also, publish data on women's leadership in political parties.
- ❖ Put in place and respect the law enacted to fight violence against women. Additionally, put in place mechanisms to protect women from all forms of violence against them and penalize the perpetrators, protect women when they file complaints on violence.
- ❖ Ensuring to formulate gender equality policy within the party by political parties and it's well implemented to promote women's equal participation within political parties; being part of the policy-making process, decision-maker and leadership roles, candidates, and elected representatives. The gender equality policy is an effective tool to encourage all political parties to place more women candidates on the party list by using the sandwich system from the top to bottom for ranking between women and men candidates and increase gender equality at all levels within the party.

6.2 National Assembly and Senate

Ensuring to formulate gender-responsive election laws in both LEMNA and LEMCC as affirmative action to promote gender equality and provide opportunities for women's equal participation in politics and its well implemented. Affirmative action is an effective solution to encourage all political parties to place more female candidates on the party list. The political parties should be encouraged to implement reforms to the legal framework by amending electoral laws. The law can be improved establishing criteria to the political party's candidate registration procedure requiring the use of a sandwich system from the top to bottom for ranking on the political party candidate list. There should also be an

amendment to the Law on Elections of Members of National Assembly (LEMNA) *Chapter 4, Article 27 and 28 “the list of candidates in each constituency has to use sandwich system from top to bottom between women candidates and men candidates.”* And the Law on Elections of Members of Commune Council (LEMCC) *Chapter 6, Article 39 “candidate lists of each political party must alternate female candidates and male candidates from the top to bottom ranking.”*

6.3 State and Public Institutions

- ❖ Put in place structures, and formulate policies and laws that combat violence against women in politics. Establish an independent observation body that identifies violence against women in politics and regularly reports on the information to relevant stakeholders and the public.
- ❖ The government (line ministries) should provide all kinds of support such as funding, resources, and human resources to elected women and women leaders, in order to facilitate and increase the efficiency and quality of women's work, political participation and leadership.
- ❖ The government needs to reconsider and pay more attention to the women politicians in the ruling party or other women politicians who have an active voice or are about to enter politics by encouraging, protecting, providing equal opportunities to them and ensuring their full participation in politics.
- ❖ The government must strengthen respect for women's political rights and ensure the exercise of these rights by making it easier for women to exercise their rights to political participation, especially in the political activities of women politicians from the opposition party and other parties to provide more opportunities for them to involve in politics and decision-making in line with the CEDAW Convention and Cambodia's Sustainable Development Goals (CSDG).
- ❖ The Ministry of Interior and relevant authorities for democratic development at the sub-national level shall ensure that all Commune/Sangkat Councilors, especially women, have full access to their roles, duties and powers in accordance with the Law on Commune/Sangkat Administration and CEDAW. For example, setting up a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to oversee their working conditions and challenges.

6.4 CSOs, Educational Institutions and Academies

- ❖ Increase support mechanism for women politicians such as capacity development (self-confident and skill sets needed to participate in politics including developing effective campaign and lobbying strategies), empowerment, and special political funding for women in politics.
- ❖ Increase academic research, debate, and discussions on VAWIP and women's political leadership and facilitate political grooming of potential female politicians in order to raise public awareness about the impact of VAWIP on women and society as a whole.
- ❖ Increase civic and political education in Cambodia (capacity and skill development, how to enter politics, and mindset changes) in order to reshape the way Cambodian society perceives politics including the important roles of women in politics, and supporting them.
- ❖ Utilise both the social media and mass media to campaign on women's rights with emphasis on the importance of women's political participation and leadership role
- ❖ Continue accelerating the elimination of gender disparity at the public and household level

6.5 National Election Committee (NEC)

Ensuring to formulate gender-responsive election/NEC's procedure and regulation for increasing gender equality and providing equal opportunities for women candidates running the elections. The election/NEC's procedure and regulation can be improved by establishing criteria to the political party's candidate registration procedure requiring the use of a sandwich system from the top to bottom for ranking between women candidates and men candidates on the political party candidate list.