



Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

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Parity debate

Women and men parliamentarians united for safe politics online

Thursday, 8 October 2026, 11:30–13:00
Zanzibar Hall, Arusha International Conference Centre

The parity debate aims to promote dialogue between women and men at the IPU and to encourage them to debate issues of common interest together. In line with the principle of a parity debate, the composition of the debating panel will be gender balanced. The order of speakers invited to intervene from the floor will also follow a gender-balanced sequence. Having an equal number of men and women speak in the debate will allow the different and complementary views and experiences of both genders to emerge. Delegations are therefore invited to be represented in this debate by men and women participants.

Concept note

Digital technologies have transformed political life. They allow parliamentarians to reach citizens directly, to be more accountable and to campaign at a scale that was unimaginable a generation ago. However, the same tools have also become channels for harassment, intimidation and violence against parliamentarians. Women and men parliamentarians are confronting a climate of hostility that takes different forms, that is increasingly unfolding online, and that is affecting who feels able to participate in political life by keeping many away from engaging in politics, and those who are already engaged from continuing to do so. As a result, the credibility and legitimacy of democratic institutions are undermined as is democratic participation.

The evidence collected by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) confirms this reality. The IPU's 2026 report, [*When the public turns hostile: Political violence against parliamentarians*](#), found that 71% of parliamentarians surveyed had experienced violence by members of the public, whether online, offline or both. Women are even more targeted – across five national case studies, 76% of women and 68% of men surveyed reported exposure to such violence. Globally, 89% of men MPs and 94% of women MPs surveyed, reported online insults. Most respondents believed that violence against politicians had increased in recent years.

Online violence emerged as the dominant form of intimidation of both women and men, with between 65% and 77% of MPs across the case studies reporting online abuse. Women are disproportionately targeted by gendered and sexualized forms of abuse, including sexist attacks, sexual harassment, threats of rape and death, the non-consensual sharing of intimate images, sexualized deepfakes, doxing and coordinated gendered disinformation. The IPU has underscored that this growing phenomenon pushes women out of office and dissuades them from standing for office, adding a further obstacle to progress on women's representation in parliaments, which stands at 27.4%.¹

The pattern of harassment is different for men who generally report forms of violence linked to political animosity, digital manipulation and public confrontation, including online insults, false or misleading information, threats and, in some contexts, hacking. All patterns are harmful. All undermine democratic participation.

¹ As of 1 August 2026, see : https://data.ipu.org/women-averages/?date_month=08&date_year=2026

This wider picture is consistent with the IPU's global and regional studies on sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliament. The studies also show that online violence is both part of a broader pattern of intimidation against MPs and a distinctly gendered phenomenon affecting women parliamentarians. The IPU's 2025 Asia-Pacific study found that 60% of the women parliamentarians surveyed were the target of hate speech, disinformation, image-based abuse or unwanted disclosure of personal data online. Among them, 38% reported being targeted by online hate speech, 18% by doxing and 17% by image-based abuse, including deepfakes. Certain groups of women, such as younger women, women from minority backgrounds and unmarried women, face higher levels of violence. Also, the rapid development of generative artificial intelligence has made sexualized deepfakes and disinformation faster to produce and spread, adding a new layer of risk.

UN Women recognizes technology-facilitated violence as part of the broader continuum of violence against women. Online violence operates within a wider digital environment in which ideas about gender equality, equal political participation, and women's political leadership are formed and reinforced. This is increasingly visible in anti-feminist hatred and violence directed at women, facilitated by gendered disinformation, algorithmic amplification and the growing reach of misogynistic online spaces. A 2023 research found that digital spaces played an important role in how many young men sought connection, belonging and guidance: 48% of young men surveyed aged 18 to 23 said their online lives were more interesting than their offline ones, while more than 40% of them said they trusted one or more misogynistic voices online.² These dynamics are linked to loneliness, confusion, economic instability and relationship challenges, and also point out the need for positive leadership and alternative narratives that challenge grievance, anti-feminism and narrow models of masculinity.

The evidence shows that these challenges to democracy have a clear gender dimension and that addressing them is a shared responsibility among men and women parliamentarians. The IPU's [*Achieving gender equality, action by action*](#) campaign provides an important action-oriented framework. Action 10 calls on parliamentarians to speak out against gender-based inequality and violence, including by using their voice in public and online spaces. Both men and women parliamentarians are confronting online violence, and both have a responsibility to act. They must work in partnership, as legislators and leaders, to model respectful political spaces, challenge harmful norms and narratives and help make political life safer and more inclusive for all.

It is also a shared responsibility of parliaments as institutions. Parliaments can: adopt, promote and strengthen codes of conduct; establish permanent, independent and neutral support mechanisms; strengthen physical and digital security protocols and targeted training; enact legislation addressing technology-facilitated gender-based violence; engage digital platforms on gendered abuse, disinformation, deepfakes, fast-track reporting and, transparency; and support parliamentary action to prevent and respond to violence in all its forms and manifestations.

This parity debate offers an opportunity for women and men MPs to identify concrete measures and positive examples that can make parliaments lead the way towards a safer political life, more inclusive and more democratic for all.

Participants in the debate are invited to be prepared to share views and experiences on:

- *How political violence operates in digital spaces, including hate speech, threats, gendered disinformation, deepfakes and doxing, and on the harm it does to parliamentarians and to democracy.*
- *National level legal and policy frameworks and practices in preventing and responding to online violence against MPs, including through legislation, parliamentary codes of conduct, reporting and support mechanisms, engagement with digital platforms, and others.*
- *How women and men MPs experience online violence differently, including its gendered forms, and how they can work together to prevent and respond to it.*
- *What strategies and personal commitments can make political life safe for women and men, so that no one has to endure abuse as part of public service.*

² G. Barker, C. Hayes, B. Heliman, and M. Reichert, [*State of American Men 2023: From Crisis and Confusion to Hope*](#) (Washington, DC: Equimundo, 2023).