

Global best practice for equity in financing women in politics

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This study investigates the structural and institutional determinants of gender inequity in political financing and identifies evidence-based mechanisms to promote women's equal participation in democratic processes. Through a comparative analysis of international experiences and regulatory frameworks, it demonstrates that women's underrepresentation in politics is closely linked to unequal access to financial resources, compounded by socioeconomic disparities, unpaid care responsibilities, limited access to credit, and gender-biased party funding practices. The findings highlight a range of effective measures, including the disclosure of gender-disaggregated political finance data, civic monitoring with a gender lens, and conditional public funding tied to parity and training outcomes. Complementary strategies, such as equitable internal resource distribution within parties, fiscal incentives for private contributors, and innovative financial tools like microcredit and crowdfunding, further support women's political engagement. The study also underscores the importance of cultural and legal interventions – such as awareness campaigns and mechanisms to prevent gender-based political violence – in transforming discriminatory norms.

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Global best practice for equity in financing women in politics

Background

This document compiles a set of best practices aimed at promoting equity in women's political financing. Its purpose is to provide concrete, replicable and evidence-based references that can inform the design or adjustment of public policies, regulatory frameworks and affirmative actions to strengthen women's political participation on equal terms.

The work draws on the analysis of five national experiences by Transparency International Colombia in collaboration with the Transparency International Chapters in Indonesia, Madagascar, Panama, Sri Lanka and Zambia. It is further supported by a review of specialised literature, technical reports and international frameworks addressing regulations and good practices in this field.

Among these frameworks, the Transparency International *Global Standards on Political Finance Integrity* are particularly relevant.¹ These provide a set of internationally recognised principles to guide reforms aimed at ensuring fair, transparent and equitable political financing. Principle 4 on Gender Equality specifically calls for the adoption of affirmative measures to close gender gaps in political finance, enhance transparency in the allocation of resources, and strengthen women's leadership. This paper aligns with and reinforces those recommendations, offering practical illustrations to support their implementation.

Introduction

Women's equal participation in politics not only enriches public deliberation and strengthens the quality of collective decision making, but also enhances the legitimacy of democratic systems by more accurately reflecting the diversity of citizenship (Inter-American Commission of Women, 2023).² However, despite advances in political rights and regulatory frameworks promoting gender equality, women continue to face structural barriers that limit their representation and full participation in positions of power and decision making, whether through popular elections or direct appointments.

¹ Transparency International. (2024). *Standards for Integrity in Political Finance: A Global Policy Position*. <https://www.transparency.org/en/publications/standards-for-integrity-in-political-finance-global-policy-position>

² Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM). 2023. *Where is the money for women?*

More than a century has passed since pioneering countries like New Zealand (in 1893) and Finland (in 1906) recognised women's right to vote, yet parity in access to political power remains a global challenge. In this document, parity refers to the end state of equal representation of women and men in public entities responsible for political decision making, generally understood as a balanced distribution (commonly 50/50 or within an accepted range, such as 40/60). It is therefore a result, not a process. When referring to the legal, institutional or programmatic mechanisms designed to achieve this balance, such as quota systems, alternation rules, targeted public funding or capacity-building programmes, the term "parity measures" will be used. This distinction is grounded in international and regional normative frameworks, including the first European Summit for Women in Power (Athens, 1992), the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), the Quito Consensus (2007), the Parlatino Model Law on Parity Democracy (2015) and the Santiago Commitment (2020). The distinction ensures clarity between the normative goal of parity and the tools employed to achieve it.³

According to UN Women, as of 2024, women hold only 27.2 per cent of parliamentary seats worldwide, and just 22.9 per cent of ministerial positions.⁴ Even more concerning, only nine countries have achieved gender parity or a female majority in their cabinets. These figures highlight a persistent contradiction: although women make up over 50 per cent of the global population, they remain underrepresented in public entities responsible for political decision making.

The Global Gender Gap Index 2024,⁵ published by the World Economic Forum and covering 146 countries, confirms this inequality. The index measures gaps in four key areas: economic participation and opportunity; educational attainment; health and survival, and political empowerment. Of these four pillars, political empowerment shows by far the widest gender gap, with a global average score of just 22.5 out of 100. This indicates that, on average, countries have closed only 22.5 per cent of the gender gap in political participation. In other words, there remains a 77.5 per cent gap to reach parity.

When disaggregated by region, the data shows that no region has surpassed the 50 per cent parity threshold: Europe leads, with a score of 36 per cent in political participation, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (34 per cent), North America (26 per cent), South Asia (26 per cent), Sub-Saharan Africa (22.6 per cent), East Asia and the Pacific (14.5 per cent), and the Middle East and North Africa (11.7 per cent). These figures make clear that significant gaps remain in women's political participation, requiring sustained efforts, strong political will, and institutional frameworks that promote genuine equality of opportunity.

³ UN Women. (2017). *Paridad de Género: Política e Instituciones. Hacia una democracia paritaria*. <https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Field%20Office%20Americas/Documentos/Publicaciones/2018/2/Paridad%20Colección%20Guía%20Democracia%20Paritaria%202017.pdf>

⁴ UN Women. (2025) Facts and Figures: Women's Leadership and Political Participation. <https://www.unwomen.org/es/articulos/datos-y-cifras/datos-y-cifras-liderazgo-y-participacion-politica-de-las-mujeres>

⁵ The Global Gender Gap Index annually assesses the current state and evolution of gender parity in four key dimensions: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, health and survival, and political empowerment. It is the oldest such index, tracking the progress of many countries' efforts to close these gaps since its inception in 2006. <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2024/>

In line with these objectives, this paper is framed by the Transparency International *Global Standards on Political Finance Integrity*, a globally endorsed framework designed to guide regulatory and policy reforms for fair, transparent and inclusive political financing systems. In particular, Principle 4 on Gender Equality emphasises that gender equity must be at the core of political finance regulation. It calls for the development of legal and institutional mechanisms that reduce gender-based disparities in access to political funding, and ensure the fair distribution of resources for all candidates. Among its key recommendations, Principle 4 urges countries to:

- include gender-sensitive provisions in public funding schemes, tying financial support to measurable commitments toward women's political participation
- mandate transparent reporting by political parties on how they allocate funds to women and men candidates
- require parties to adopt internal rules that promote equity in financial support, training and candidate selection
- encourage the use of independent oversight and civic monitoring tools with a gender lens, to ensure accountability
- develop partnerships between electoral authorities, civil society and political actors to promote gender-transformative financing practices.

This paper reflects and operationalises these recommendations, offering concrete examples and good practices from around the world that seek to align financial incentives with gender equity principles. It aims not only to document what has been done, but to inspire broader reforms that ensure women's full and equal access to the financial resources necessary to compete in democratic processes on fair terms.

Barriers to access to resources for women in politics

Among the factors that perpetuate inequality in women's access to politics are multiple structural barriers that operate in an interconnected manner. First, socioeconomic disparities, such as wage inequality, labour market segmentation, lack of asset ownership, and limited financial independence directly impact women's ability to finance competitive campaigns. Globally, women earn an average of 77 cents for every dollar earned by men, and have a labour force participation rate that has stagnated at around 53 per cent since 1990 (World Bank, 2023).⁶ This inequality translates into reduced capacity for saving, investment and the accumulation of political capital.

A second structural barrier is the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work, which limits the time, energy and resources women can dedicate to public life. According to

⁶ World Bank Group. (2023). *Consultation draft. World Bank Gender Strategy 2024-2030. Accelerate gender equality for a sustainable, resilient, and inclusive future.* <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099013107142345483/pdf/SECBOS04cf7b650208a5e08b784c0db6a4.pdf>

the United Nations Development Programme (2024),⁷ women carry out 76.2 per cent of this type of work globally, spending an average of 4 hours, 25 minutes per day, compared to 1 hour, 23 minutes for men. This disparity means that women work the equivalent of approximately 201 days per year in unpaid care, compared to just 63 days for men. Such invisible labour represents a substantial economic contribution, equivalent to 9 per cent of global GDP if valued at minimum wage.

Limited access to formal financial products and services is another critical barrier. According to the World Bank (2023),⁸ more than one billion women worldwide lack access to financial services and face greater difficulties than men in obtaining credit, opening bank accounts or using digital platforms. In addition, women farmers, who represent nearly half of the agricultural workforce in developing countries, own less than 15 per cent of the land, which significantly undermines their ability to generate sustainable income and access financial resources.

Another barrier is the lack of economic support from political parties for the financing of women candidates. As documented by the Humanistic Institute for Development Cooperation (HIVOS, 2021),⁹ many women are forced to finance their campaigns through personal means, including the sale of assets, or loans from family and friends, due to insufficient support from their own parties, on top of women's difficulties in accessing alternative sources of funding. This lack of institutional backing, combined with the need to self-finance or resort to high-interest loans from the informal sector, often places women candidates in a vulnerable socioeconomic position, with consequences that may include asset loss, family conflict and even negative impacts on mental health.

The HIVOS report reveals that despite the existence of legal frameworks for public party financing in several countries, women have often been unable to access these resources due to favouritism, corruption and patriarchal practices in fund allocation. The widespread perception within political parties that women represent a weaker electoral option contributes to the view of men candidates as “safer bets” and therefore more deserving of financial support. This structural exclusion forces women to compete under unequal conditions and significantly limits their effective access to popularly elected positions. Even in contexts where gender quotas exist, many women are relegated to the bottom of electoral lists, with little or no access to campaign funding or political training opportunities. This shows that parties often instrumentalise women's candidacies as mere legal formalities, without genuine political will to promote their participation.

Finally, the persistence of gender stereotypes that question women's suitability for leadership discourages support from voters, donors and party structures alike. These

⁷ United Nations Development Programme. (2024). *The Missing Piece: Valuing Women's Unrecognized Contribution to the Economy*. <https://www.undp.org/es/latin-america/blog/la-pieza-faltante-valorando-el-aporte-no-reconocido-de-las-mujeres-la-economia>

⁸ World Bank Group. (2023). *Consultation draft. World Bank Gender Strategy 2024-2030*.

⁹ HIVAS. (2021). *Challenges faced by women candidates in accessing campaign financing*. <https://hivos.org/assets/2021/02/Campaign-Financing-Report-Sothern-Africa.pdf>

stereotypes are not only embedded in social imagery, but are also amplified by the media. Studies such as those conducted by International IDEA (2023)¹⁰ have shown that women in politics often face sexist media coverage that emphasises their physical appearance or traditional gender roles, rather than their proposals or capabilities. This type of representation reinforces perceptions of weakness, indecision or emotionality, with tangible consequences: it discourages other women from running for office, reduces parties' willingness to nominate them and diminishes their electoral competitiveness. As the Inter-American Model Law on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women in Political Life (OAS, 2017) warns,¹¹ "constant trials (...) in the media [are among] the main perpetrators of symbolic violence which, through prejudices and stereotypes, undermine the image of women as effective political leaders". In this way, both traditional and digital media actively contribute to reproducing the gender-based barriers that hinder equal access to political power.

Various studies agree that access to financing is the main obstacle preventing women from competing on equal terms in the political arena (Muñoz-Pogossian & Freidenberg, 2018).¹² This is supported by a study conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union involving 300 parliamentarians from around the world (Ballington, 2008).¹³ Financial exclusion operates as a structural filter that prevents many women from even launching their candidacies. In this regard, political financing has a direct impact on the competitiveness of political actors. When access to resources is unequally distributed, the democratic principle of equal opportunity is fundamentally undermined (Casas-Zamora, 2005).¹⁴

In response, various countries and organisations have promoted regulatory and institutional reforms to address these inequities. From affirmative measures in the allocation of public funds, to the creation of specific financing mechanisms for women within political parties, or partnerships with the private sector and gender-sensitive training programmes, a diverse set of legal, institutional and practical initiatives can be identified, all aimed at promoting equity in political financing.

¹⁰ International IDEA. (2023). *Women in politics and the media*.

<https://hivos.org/assets/2021/02/Campaign-Financing-Report-Sothern-Africa.pdf>

¹¹ OAS. (2017). *Inter-American Model Law to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women in Political Life*. Organization of America States. <https://www.oas.org/en/cim/docs/ViolenciaPolitica-LeyModelo-ES.pdf>

¹² Muñoz-Pogossian, B. & Freidenberg, F. (2018). *How do female candidates get money for their campaigns? Rethinking the interaction between politics, money and gender in Latin America*. Washington, D.C.: OAS – Secretariat for the Strengthening of Democracy / Mexico City: UNAM, Institute of Legal Research Reforms Policies. <https://reformaspoliticas.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Freidenberg-y-Mu%C3%B1oz-2018-Mujeres-Politica-y-Dinero-Reformas-Pol%C3%ADticas.pdf>

¹³ A survey of 300 members of parliament, conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union, found that access to finance is one of the main obstacles to women's political participation (Ballington 2008: 18).

¹⁴ Casas-Zamora, K. (2005). *Paying for Democracy: Political Finance and State Funding for Parties*, p.25.

Best practices for equity in women's political financing

Equity in access to resources is not only a matter of gender justice, but is also a structural condition for strengthening democratic integrity, effective inclusion and the legitimacy of political systems. Ensuring equity in women's political participation is essential for building truly representative, inclusive and sustainable democracies. As UN Women (2021) stresses, gender equality is the essence of the rule of law, and parity and inclusiveness in democratic processes are essential to ensure that governance reflects plurality and safeguards the rights and interests of the entire citizenry.¹⁵

In practice, however, women face structural disadvantages in accessing the resources necessary for political participation. The principle of equity in access to resources therefore requires the design and implementation of affirmative, regulatory and operational measures to ensure a truly level playing field in electoral processes, free from gender-based disadvantages.

Upholding this principle is essential not only to reduce the gender gap in political representation, but also to strengthen democratic integrity, foster public trust and improve the quality of electoral systems. "Democracy without women is not democracy,"¹⁶ states UN Women. The absence of women's equal participation in decision making reflects a long history of exclusion affecting half of the population, underscoring the urgency of building democracies that achieve parity, as defined in this paper, and that go beyond formal equality to achieve substantive equality for all. While multiple parity measures are needed to ensure the effective inclusion of women in politics, one of the most critical remains access to resources for financing their political and electoral activities. The set of good practices presented below offers a clear route to promoting equity in the financing of women in politics.

Transparency and access to information on political financing

1. Institutional transparency through gender-disaggregated political finance data

Electoral management bodies, electoral tribunals, and other relevant oversight bodies have a role in ensuring that information on political finance is not only publicly available but also disaggregated to reflect differences by gender and other relevant categories in the access and use of resources. When such information is disclosed, relevant authorities enable better monitoring, oversight and can better inform policies aimed at closing equity gaps.

¹⁵ UN Women. (2021). *Mes de la Democracia* (Democracy month).

<https://lac.unwomen.org/es/noticias-y-eventos/articulos/2021/09/dia-internacional-de-la-democracia-2021>

¹⁶ UN Women. (2021). Flavia Freidenberg: "La democracia sin mujeres no es democracia" ("democracy without women is not democracy"). <https://lac.unwomen.org/es/noticias-y-eventos/articulos/2021/09/flavia-freidenberg-la-democracia-sin-mujeres-no-es-democracia>

By systematically collecting, processing and publishing gender-disaggregated data on campaign income and expenditures, oversight bodies can provide an official and reliable source of information for researchers, civil society, political parties and the media. These efforts can be implemented through interoperable open data platforms, periodic public reports, or analytical dashboards that enable trend analysis over time and across electoral cycles.

Such practices contribute to evidence-based policymaking; strengthen public trust in electoral institutions and create a baseline for evaluating the impact of affirmative parity measures for women's political participation – such as parity rules or targeted financing.

Example:

- In Mexico, through the National Electoral Institute's Technical Unit for Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination, political parties must submit annual quantified reports on the use of public funds earmarked for women's political leadership training. Published in coordination with the Observatory on Women's Political Participation, these reports provide gender-disaggregated data on political finance, enabling oversight of compliance with affirmative measures. Complementary publications, such as the Gender Report 2020–2021, further analyse trends in women's political participation.

2. Civic monitoring with a gender focus and data visualisation

Civic monitoring with a gender perspective is a key tool for analysing and exposing the degree of equity in the allocation of political resources. It enables the collection, systematisation and dissemination of relevant data on women's access to electoral financing, as well as the monitoring of political parties' compliance with gender regulations and parity commitments.

Civic monitoring with a gender focus is further strengthened through the use of accessible data visualisation tools – such as interactive dashboards, georeferenced maps, gap analyses and periodic reports – that allow citizens to exercise their right to be informed and to actively participate in public affairs. Applicable to any political finance model, this practice contributes to generating evidence, identifying structural inequalities, and fostering a culture of transparency and equity within democratic systems.

Example:

- In Colombia, the platform Cuentas Claras enables public access to campaign finance reports, and includes filters that allow users to track expenditures by target

population, such as women, youth and ethnic minorities, supporting gender-sensitive monitoring of political finance.¹⁷

Affirmative action for equity in women's participation and financing in politics

3. Public funding conditional on gender-balanced electoral lists, alternation and training of women

One of the main barriers to women's effective political participation is the lack of institutional support within political parties and the broader electoral system. To address this, access to public funding can be made conditional on: (i) the effective inclusion of women on electoral lists in a way that ensures both gender balance and a genuine chance of election, through mechanisms such as alternation between men and women in list positions (the “zipper” system), and (ii) the implementation of political training programmes for women. These programmes can target both women candidates and party structures themselves, promoting knowledge sharing and behavioural change within political organisations. Aligning financial incentives with equity principles compels parties to invest in women's leadership development, while also fostering more inclusive, supportive and non-hostile political environments, rather than expecting women candidates to adapt to patriarchal structures that remain unchanged.

Alternation guarantees a fairer distribution of opportunities by ensuring that men and women take turns occupying the most competitive positions. When combined with gender balance in candidate selection, it can help achieve substantive parity in representation, rather than mere compliance with numerical quotas. By making public funding, or even the registration of electoral lists, conditional on compliance with gender balance and alternation rules, authorities can turn financing into a parity measure that advances substantive parity and enforces equality commitments.

However, the mere existence of rules that allocate differentiated resources does not guarantee compliance. Across multiple countries, women face persistent financing gaps¹⁸, and where gender-targeted mechanisms exist, weaknesses in design and implementation mean their impact is uncertain¹⁹; parties often provide little or no direct support to women candidates, so resources frequently fail to reach them or women's party structures²⁰. To ensure funding and allocation measures have real impact, they

¹⁷ Transparencia por Colombia. (n.d.). *¿Cómo funciona Cuentas Claras? Una herramienta para la rendición de cuentas* (How does Cuentas Claras work? A tool for accountability).

https://www.cnecuenciasclaras.gov.co/pdf/Cartilla_rendici%C3%B3n_de_cuentas.pdf

¹⁸ Ask Her. (2025). The Fundraising Gap: understanding financial barriers for women in political leadership. <https://askheryc.org/thought-leadership/campaign-fundraising-gap>

¹⁹ Falguera, E. (2017). Is public funding effectively increasing women's political participation? International IDEA. <https://www.idea.int/news/public-funding-effectively-increasing-womens-political-participation>

²⁰ ACE Project. (n.d.). Gender and Elections. <https://aceproject.org/ace-en/topics/ge/ge3/g33>

must be accompanied by mechanisms for systematic monitoring, independent oversight and effective auditing by the entities responsible for political finance control. It is therefore essential to establish mandatory reporting systems, verifiable indicators, and public information channels that make it possible to evaluate whether parties are fulfilling their obligations to invest in gender equality.

Examples:

- In Kenya, public funding for political parties is conditional on promoting the participation of women and other historically excluded groups, linking financial support to measurable inclusion outcomes, such as gender balance among party leadership (no more than two-thirds of leaders can be of the same gender) and the nomination of women candidates in competitive electoral districts.²¹
- In Mexico, the National Electoral Institute mandates political parties to allocate a specific percentage of public financing for the training, promotion and political development of women. This policy has contributed to improving access to resources and capacity-building opportunities.^{22,23}
- In Burkina Faso, parties that comply with gender quotas receive additional state funding, reinforcing the use of financial incentives to promote women's political inclusion.²⁴
- In Ireland, public funding for political parties is conditional on both gender inclusion and targeted use of resources. Since 2012, parties lose 50 per cent of their state funding if less than 30 per cent of their candidates are women and less than 30 per cent are men, a threshold set to increase to 40 per cent, applicable from the 2024 general election. In addition, the 1997 Electoral Law requires that state funding be used for activities such as political education, training and the promotion of women's and young people's participation. This dual approach, linking eligibility and earmarked use of funds, has incentivised parties to invest in women's leadership

²¹ Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy & International IDEA. (2015). Political party financing and equal participation of women in Kenyan electoral politics: a situation overview.

<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/political-party-financing-and-equal-participation-of-women-in-kenyan-electoral-politics.pdf>

²² National Electoral Institute. (n.d.). Budget for the development of women's political leadership #MujeresPolíticas. <https://igualdad.ine.mx/mujeres-en-la-politica/presupuesto-para-el-desarrollo-del-liderazgo-politico-de-las-mujeres/>

²³ Virgil, W. (2024). INE increases funding for women's political training. The Horizon. <https://www.elhorizonte.mx/nacional/ine-asciende-financiamiento-para-capacitacion-politica-de-mujeres/8426196403>.

²⁴ National Democratic Institute. (2009). "Gender Quota in Burkina Faso Marks Feats Accomplished, Challenges Ahead". <https://web.archive.org/web/20241204060716/https://www.ndi.org/our-stories/gender-quota-burkina-faso-marks-feats-accomplished-challenges-ahead>

development and candidate support structures, contributing to a significant increase in women's representation in parliament.²⁵

- In France, electoral legislation establishes that if a political party nominates more than 2 per cent more men than women, its public funding is correspondingly reduced (up to 1.5 times the size of the gender gap). In proportional elections, such as municipal and regional contests, candidate lists must alternate between men and women (the zipper system), and non-compliant lists may be rejected. This system turns public funding into an effective enforcement tool to achieve parity through alternation in candidate nominations.²⁶

4. Equitable regulation of the internal distribution of resources within political parties

Many countries have adopted legal provisions requiring political parties to implement parity measures, such as quotas on their electoral lists. However, in practice, women candidates often receive significantly less financial support from parties than their men counterparts. This disparity is further exacerbated when the funds allocated to political parties – whether from public, private or mixed sources – are not distributed transparently or guided by equity-based criteria.

Establishing regulatory frameworks that require parties to apply objective, inclusive and verifiable criteria in the internal allocation of resources is key to reducing this gap. Such measures not only promote fairer conditions for women candidates, but also enhance internal accountability and help dismantle informal practices that have historically marginalised women from accessing party funding (UN Women, 2024).²⁷

It is equally important to require political parties to publicly report how they distribute financial resources. Proportional and dissuasive sanctions must be established for non-compliance. These may include reductions in the amount of public funding a party is eligible to receive, the suspension of certain benefits, or even the annulment of candidate lists in cases of repeated or severe violations. Enforcing these sanctions sends a strong message about the institutional commitment to substantive equality. As has been argued, without clear regulations and effective monitoring, public financing

²⁵ Casal Bértoa, F. & Rodríguez Teruel, J. (2017). *Political Party Funding Regulation in Europe, East and West: A Comparative Analysis*. OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

<https://www.osce.org/files/OSCE-ODIHR%20Discussion%20Paper%20on%20Political%20Party%20Finance%20Spain.pdf>

²⁶ International IDEA. (2018). *Gender-targeted Public Funding for Political Parties*.
<https://www.idea.int/sites/default/files/publications/gender-targeted-public-funding-for-political-parties.pdf>

²⁷ UN Women (2024). *Towards the democratization of the financing of political parties and electoral campaigns in Latin America*. https://lac.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/es_financiamiento_partidos_politicos_03.pdf

can become a symbolic gesture rather than a meaningful tool for inclusion.²⁸ Only through oversight, transparency and accountability can public resources be guaranteed to fulfil their transformative role in advancing gender equity.

Example:

- In Indonesia, electoral regulations require political parties to invest at least 30 per cent of their resources in training and promoting women candidates, serving as a benchmark for internal allocation standards.²⁹

5. Fiscal or reputational incentives for private funders of women candidates

In countries where the political financing system is primarily private or mixed, women candidates tend to receive fewer contributions from private donors. This gap in access to resources severely limits their ability to compete on equal terms, undermines their political autonomy, and perpetuates the underrepresentation of women in positions of power.

A good practice to address this disparity is the introduction of tax incentives, such as deductions or other fiscal benefits, for individuals or companies that contribute to campaigns led by women candidates, or for political parties promoting women's electoral leadership. Similarly, establishing mechanisms for public recognition – such as awards, mentions or institutional certifications – for those who support women's political participation can generate a meaningful symbolic and cultural impact, by elevating the status of actors committed to gender equality.

Examples:

- In Indonesia, a voluntary recognition programme (the Politically Equitable Business Seal) has been proposed to acknowledge companies that support gender equality in politics through non-partisan contributions or services. This would include businesses that fund public awareness campaigns, offer in-kind support, or incorporate women's political empowerment into their environmental, social and governance strategies.
- A comparable initiative exists in New Zealand, where civil society efforts such as Gender Equal NZ, led by the National Council of Women, promote public recognition of companies and organisations that support gender equality in politics,

²⁸ Casas-Zamora, K. (2005). Paying for Democracy: Political Finance and State Funding for Parties. Colchester: European Consortium for Political Research Press.

²⁹ Perludem. (2024, May 28). *Electoral system modification to reach 30% women's representation*. Perludem. <https://perludem.org/en/2024/05/28/electoral-system-modification-to-reach-30-womens-representation/>

such as media visibility, inclusion in public campaigns, and symbolic endorsement as being an actor aligned with gender equity.³⁰

6. Access to financial products and alternative financing mechanisms for women candidates

Limited access to formal credit and adequate financial products remains a key challenge that prevents many women from financing competitive political campaigns, particularly in contexts where private funding is decisive, or where political parties fail to provide equitable financial support. A good practice to address this challenge is the development of financial products tailored to the needs of women candidates or political leaders, including low-interest loans, microcredit options, government-backed guarantees, and alternative fundraising tools.

These mechanisms can be implemented through partnerships between the state and financial institutions, or through digital innovations that help women build independent donor networks. Whether through interest subsidies, crowdfunding platforms or access to microfinance, expanding the range of financial options helps level the playing field in electoral competition and reduces women's dependency on traditional party structures.

Example:

- In the United States, women candidates have increasingly turned to crowdfunding platforms to finance their campaigns and build independent donor networks. This alternative strategy enables them to overcome limited access to institutional party funding, and to mobilise support based on shared political values and efforts for visibility.³¹

7. Reduction of economic barriers such as differentiated registration fees

Women face structural disadvantages in accessing economic resources, asset ownership and financing networks, which limits their ability to participate equally in electoral processes. In contexts where candidate registration fees are high or lack differentiated measures, these costs become effective barriers to entry, particularly for women from economically disadvantaged sectors.

Implementing affirmative mechanisms, such as fee exemptions or reduced registration costs for women candidates, helps address these inequalities and promotes more equitable access to electoral competition. This practice can be adopted in public, private or mixed campaign financing systems, and is especially relevant in contexts

³⁰ National Council of Women of New Zealand. (n.d.). Gender Equal NZ. <https://genderequal.nz/>

³¹ Bruhl, E. (2023, September 11). Crowdfunding for political campaigns: Building strong grassroots support. GoodParty.org. <https://goodparty.org/blog/article/crowdfunding-campaigns>

where political parties do not cover registration costs, leaving women candidates to bear the burden directly.

Example:

- In Malawi, ahead of the 2019 elections, the Electoral Commission introduced a 25 per cent reduction in parliamentary registration fees for women candidates. This measure was associated with an increase in women's political representation: women won 23 per cent of parliamentary seats in 2019, up from 16 per cent in the previous legislature.^{32,33,34}

8. Support networks among women for strategic campaign management

Persistent inequalities in access to political networks and strategic resources continue to hinder women's ability to compete on an equal footing. In response, several initiatives have promoted the creation of support networks among women candidates, political leaders, businesswomen and civil society organisations, aimed at providing technical and strategic assistance for campaign planning and management.

These networks serve as collaborative spaces where practical tools are shared, such as budgeting techniques, strategies for targeting digital media spending, low-cost visibility initiatives, gender-sensitive accountability tools (such as simplified reporting formats or peer-review systems) a range of accountability mechanisms, and efficient donation management. They may also include mentoring from experienced women politicians, as well as specialised guidance on political communication, negotiation and leadership. Such initiatives not only strengthen the technical skills of women candidates, but also enhance their autonomy, credibility and visibility among parties, voters and donors. By operating outside traditional party structures, these networks offer a safer, more supportive environment, particularly for independent or politically marginalised women.

Examples:

- In Bangladesh, the non-governmental organisation BRAC has implemented mentoring programmes for women in politics, helping them grow within party structures through strategic support and peer learning.³⁵

³² Pensulo, C. (2018). "Malawi makes it cheaper for women to run in 2019 election". Thomson Reuters Foundation News. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/malawi-makes-it-cheaper-for-women-to-run-in-2019-election-idUSKBN1I522B/>

³³ Malawi Electoral Commission. (2019). Report on tripartite elections. <https://mec.org.mw/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2019-TRIPARTITE-ELECTIONS-REPORT-V2.pdf>

³⁴ The Commonwealth. (2019). "Malawi election is big win for women, says gender expert". <https://thecommonwealth.org/news/malawi-election-big-win-women-says-gender-expert>

³⁵ BRAC. (n.d.). "National perspective on SDG 5". BRAC. <https://www.brac.net/SDGs/goal-5.html>

- In the Philippines, the Angat Bayi programme provides funding and training for women candidates through a civil society-managed support fund, offering both technical guidance and visibility strategies.³⁶
- In Rwanda, the Forum of Women Parliamentarians offers ongoing training and mentorship for emerging women leaders, strengthening their strategic capabilities and political resilience.³⁷
- In Senegal, the civil society organisation Groupe de Recherche sur les Femmes et les Lois has developed networks to promote women's political leadership and facilitate access to campaign resources through strategic alliances.³⁸

Cultural transformation for women's leadership

9. Awareness campaigns on women's equity and leadership

Gender stereotypes continue to shape public perceptions of political leadership, negatively impacting women's electoral viability, access to financial resources, and support from political parties. These prevailing narratives undermine confidence in women's leadership among voters, private donors and party leaders. Implementing awareness campaigns, led by electoral bodies, political parties, media outlets or civil society organisations, is key to transforming these perceptions. By highlighting examples of women leaders, challenging biases and promoting narratives of equality, such campaigns help improve both the symbolic and material conditions for women's political participation, particularly in the realm of campaign financing. This practice becomes especially necessary and urgent in contexts where traditional views of gender roles persist, or where countries face wider gaps in women's political representation. In these settings, awareness campaigns can act as catalysts for cultural change, helping to foster diverse women's leadership and promote a more equitable distribution of resources in electoral competition.

Examples:

- In Australia, the Australian Institute for Women's Leadership has led awareness campaigns addressing gender bias in politics and campaign financing. These initiatives aim to transform public perceptions of women's leadership, highlight

³⁶ Angat Bayi Programme. (n.d.). "Our story". <https://angatbayi.com/home-page/our-story/>

³⁷ Republic of Rwanda, Sweden Sverige & United Nations Rwanda. (n.d.). *Empowering women to participate in leadership and benefit from economic opportunities*.

https://www.migeprf.gov.rw/fileadmin/user_upload/Migeprf/Publications/Reports/Key_Achievements_of_The_Joint_Programme_on_Advancing_and_Sustaining_Gender_Equality_Gains_in_Rwanda_.pdf

³⁸ Our Bodies Ourselves. (n.d.). "Senegal: Research Group on Women and Laws". <https://ourbodiesourselves.org/global-projects/senegal-research-group-on-women-and-laws-in-senegal/>

structural barriers to resource access, and promote cultural shifts toward gender equity in political participation.³⁹

10. Measures against gender-based political violence

Gender-based political violence constitutes a direct and persistent barrier to women's full participation in political life. It can take physical, psychological, digital or economic forms, all of which seriously undermine the safety, visibility and freedom of expression of women candidates, often discouraging them from accessing campaign resources, running for office or continuing in electoral contests.

Establishing specific regulatory frameworks to prevent, sanction and eradicate political violence against women is essential to ensuring equitable conditions of competition, as are institutional mechanisms for reporting political violence and providing support and protection. These measures may include penalties for political actors and financial contributors who engage in, encourage or enable such violence.

Example:

- In October 2016, the Organization of American States' Inter-American Commission of Women adopted the Inter-American Model Law to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women in Political Life.⁴⁰ Published in 2017, this model law provides definitions of political violence against women, along with preventive measures, reporting mechanisms and sanctions. It includes specific obligations for political parties, financial contributors and the media, and has become the main regional benchmark for harmonising legislation. Based on this framework, 12 Latin American countries have approved laws or reforms to define and sanction violence against women in politics: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.⁴¹

Conclusions

Ensuring equitable access to political financing for women, and fostering a level playing field in elections more broadly, is not only a matter of justice, but a fundamental requirement for democratic legitimacy. The best practices compiled in this document demonstrate that promoting financial equity requires a combination of regulatory

³⁹ Women's Leadership Institute Australia. (2024). 2024 Women for Media Report: "An Unfinished Story". <https://wlia.org.au/levers-for-change/media/women-for-media-research-reports/2024-report/>

⁴⁰ This was done through the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention, a consensual and independent peer review system to examine the progress made by states parties in fulfilling the objectives of the convention. The mechanism is funded by voluntary contributions from the states parties and other donors, and the Inter-American Commission of Women of the Organization of American States (OAS) serves as its technical secretariat.

⁴¹ The Inter-American Commission of Women of the OAS, the Inter-American Model Law to Prevent, Punish and Eradicate Violence against Women in Political Life (2017). <https://www.oas.org/en/mesecvi/docs/LeyModeloViolenciaPolitica-ES.pdf>

reform, institutional commitment, civic oversight and cultural change. Political finance systems must be designed to actively dismantle the structural barriers that exclude women from electoral competition and political leadership.

Policymakers, electoral authorities, political parties and civil society actors can translate these lessons into action by adopting legal provisions that guarantee transparency; establishing effective oversight mechanisms, and ensuring that public and private resources are distributed in a gender-equitable manner.

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