Bangladesh Report on
Violence Against Women in Elections

Violence against women in elections (VAWE) can be any act of violence that is unduly directed at someone because of her gender, and that seeks to influence her engagement in the electoral process.

Institute of Informatics and Development (IID) conducted a study between October 2018 and March 2019 in eight constituencies around the country to assess VAWE in Bangladesh.

The study revealed a general lack of understanding and recognition of violence, which is generally considered only as physical harm or murder.

Violence around elections affects people regardless of their gender identity. Nonetheless, women's experience of violence differs to that of men's. VAWE can both be gender based violence (GBV) and electoral violence. Yet, political and partisan narratives of election-time violence often overshadow the gender perspective of VAWE.
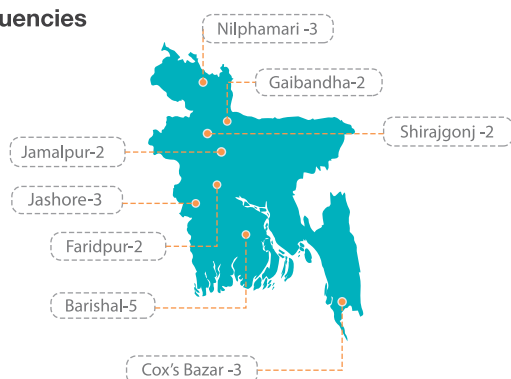
However, VAWE that occurred in Subarnachar Upazila during the national election 2018 and local elections 2019 further emphasized the importance of countering violence against women during election time.

3 major observations:

1. During National Election 2018, fear of violence was predominant, than incidence of actual violence

2. Violence against women gets overlooked or not perceived as electoral violence because of the normalization of gender based violence and ignorance among electoral stakeholders about VAWE

3. Only 69 out of 1,848, that is **1 in 27 candidates were women** during the National Election 2018 . Such lower participation of women in politics can also result in seemingly lower number of recorded violence.

Study Location

8 Constituencies

- Nilphamari -3
- Gaibandha-2
- Shirajgonj -2
- Jamalpur-2
- Jashore-3
- Faridpur-2
- Barishal-5
- Cox's Bazar -3

Total interviews 2350

	Pre-election	Post-election
Voter	510	584
Party activists	255	283
Candidates	27	24
Election observer	5	15
Election officials	61	41
Media person	210	290
Total	1068	1237

Highlights from the
Study Findings

Obstacles to voter registration

What are the obstacles women face for voter registration?

41%
Finding transport to the registration center

36%
Hiding actual age for early marriage

34%
Not visiting door to door for registration

Family pressure

6 out of **9** respondents who faced are women

Most of the voters face psychological pressure

48% **72%**

Psychological pressure

The potential for VAWE impact men's desire to allow their female family members to participate as voters, candidates, election workers etc. Since women stay at home and have less access to information about politics, men decide whether women can vote or whom to vote.

Labeling as 'safety concern' men either accompany their women household member along with them or do not let them cast their votes in case there is any fear of unrest.
(Media consultation, FGD-Male voters).

Voter Intimidation
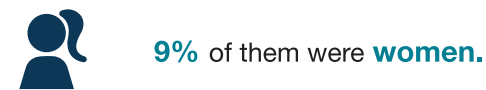
15% women reported that they faced intimidation

Type of Intimidation women face most frequently-

69%
Threat/coercion

31%
Psychological

26%
Arrest/Legal charges

Women's lack of education triggers political parties to manipulate women's voting decisions. Women are often threatened by the campaigners not to vote or vote the candidate they are suggested to. (FGD-Gazipur, Cox's Bazar)

Character defamation of candidates

Candidates who faced character attacks;

9% of them were **women.**

1 out of 6 candidates who faced character defamation reported it happened to female candidate by member of the same party. Given the low representation of women candidates in National Election 2018, this still remains a matter of concern. (KII of candidates)

A female MP was told by her party members to give more time to party. But when she started being busy to solve party issues, the same people talked ill of her since she had to return home late hours. (In-depth interview with former female MP)

Hate speech against candidate

During interviews, one female MP said that she was slandered by her own party members that intended to disempower her because of gender identity.

In KIIs, 2 voters from different constituencies reported that they have heard hate speech against female candidates on social media. In both cases the perpetrators were male and were members of the same party of those female candidate's.
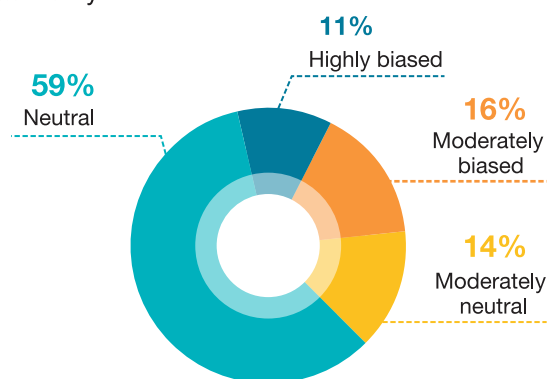
Restriction on campaign activities

17% **30%**

Restriction on campaign activities

One woman campaign worker from Gazipur reported that she had to face intimidation before and after city corporation election that was held in 2018. Activists from the competing party intimidated by throwing stones and projecting light inside her home at night (just to give her the vibe that she is being watched). But she mentioned this in the FGD, other women argued that it doesn't constitute as violence, since she was not physically assaulted! (FGD-Gazipur)

Gender bias in administration

11 % sees EC as a highly gender biased authority.

11%
Highly biased

59%
Neutral

16%
Moderately biased

14%
Moderately neutral

During the political consultation at Barishal, a female mayor candidate mentioned that she filed written complaint against another party's activists who threatened people because they raised funds for her electoral campaign. But the EC or security force did not take any action.

Voting statistics

Lesser women went to cast vote

77%   **63%**

Voting statistics

Women who went to cast vote, among them **29%** said they could not cast their own vote.

Violence on Election Day

10% voters reported there were violence on the National Election Day 2018 inside the polling center.

Women who reported violence, mentioned the

71%
Creating fear
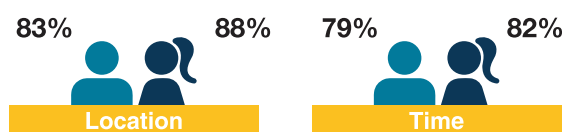
57%
Physical violence

43%
Violating ballot secrecy

In the city corporation election, people of one party did not let the female polling agent of another party enter into the polling centers.
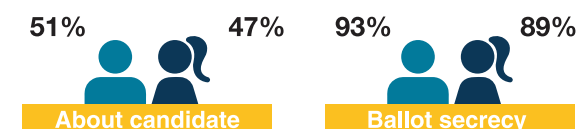
A female mayor candidate were physically harassed inside the center on election day because she protested against stuffing ballots by other party activists. But even upon filing complaints, election official, police or magistrate did not take any action. (Political consultation meeting)

Voter awareness

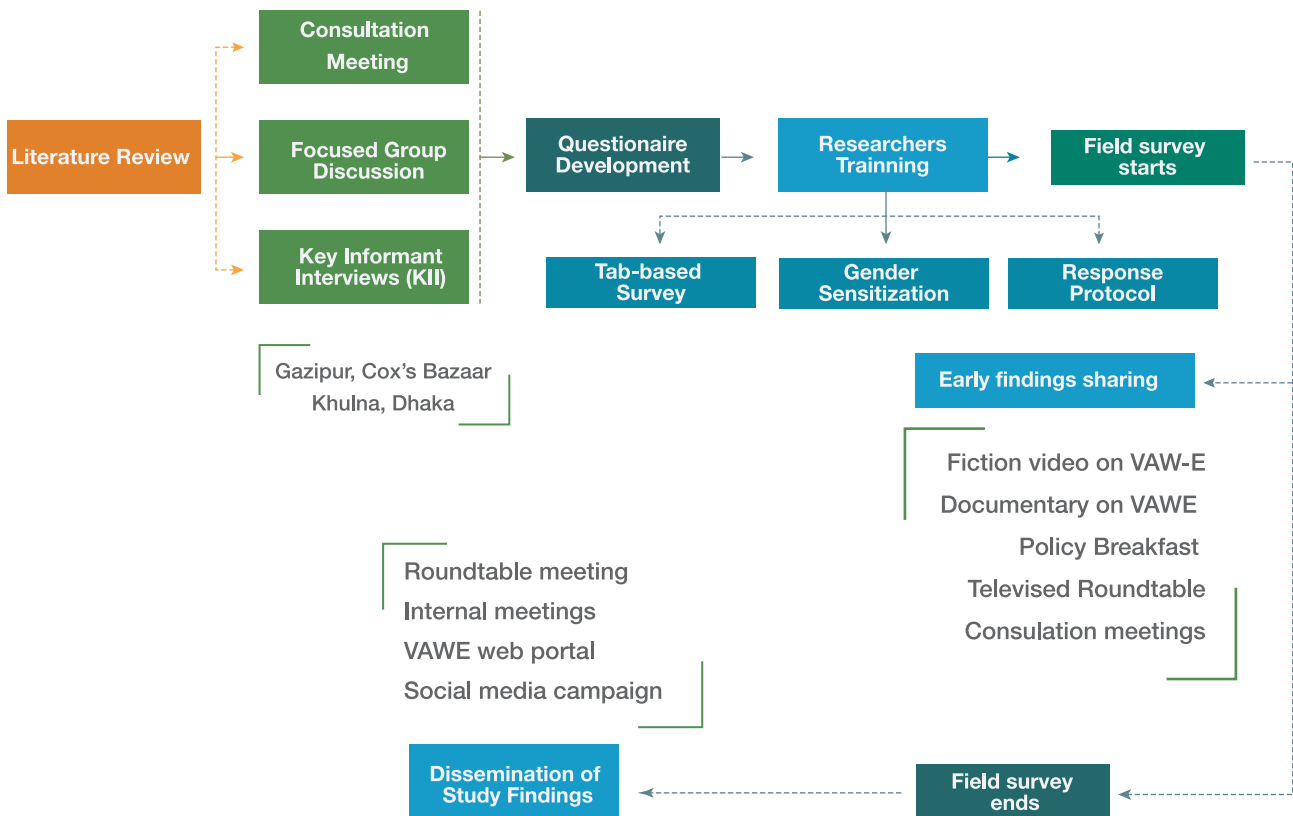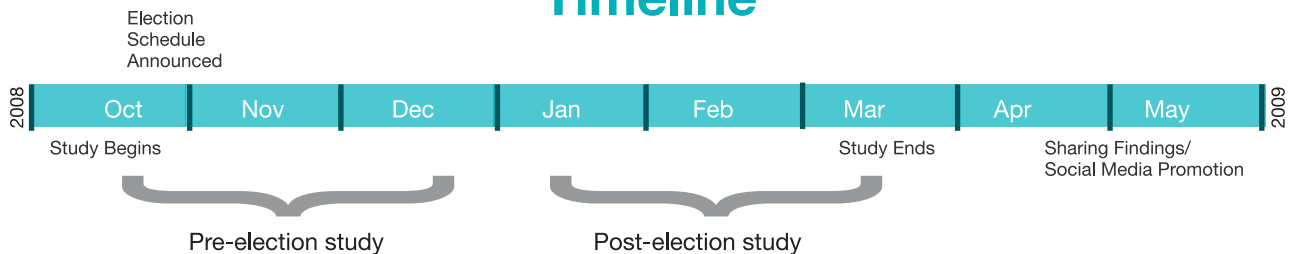Women found to be more aware of generic information-

83%   **88%**
Location

79%   **82%**
Time

Men found to be more aware of specific information-

51%   **47%**
About candidate

93%   **89%**
Ballot secrecy

IID

Study Approach

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Literature Review ──→ Consultation Meeting
              ──→ Focused Group Discussion ──→ Questionaire Development ──→ Researchers Trainning ──→ Field survey starts
              ──→ Key Informant Interviews (KII)
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Gazipur, Cox's Bazaar
Khulna, Dhaka

Tab-based Survey

Gender Sensitization

Response Protocol

Early findings sharing

Fiction video on VAW-E
Documentary on VAWE
Policy Breakfast
Televised Roundtable
Consulation meetings

Roundtable meeting
Internal meetings
VAWE web portal
Social media campaign

Dissemination of Study Findings

Field survey ends

Timeline

Election Schedule Announced

| 2008 | Oct | Nov | Dec | Jan | Feb | Mar | Apr | May | 2009 |

Study Begins

Study Ends

Sharing Findings/
Social Media Promotion

Pre-election study

Post-election study

About IID

IID is a public policy institute that promotes informed public participation in the public policy process.

IID is registered as a nonprofit organization in Bangladesh under Section 28 of the Companies Act 1994. IID's vision is making policy public for an informed, inclusive and democratic society.

IID seeks to achieve its vision with its 3i missions—

Inquire evidence for policy
Inform people and policy makers
Involve public in public policy