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# Increasing the Civic and Political Participation of Women: Understanding the Risk of Strong Resistance

Research and Innovation Grants Working Papers Series

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**UNIVERSITY**  
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**INSTITUTE OF  
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# **Increasing the Civic and Political Participation of Women: Understanding the Risk of Strong Resistance**

Research and Innovation Grants Working Papers Series

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## PREFACE

In 2016, USAID's Center of Excellence on Democracy, Human Rights, and Governance launched its Learning Agenda—a set of research questions designed to address the issues that confront staff in USAID field offices working on the intersection of development and democracy, human rights, and governance. This literature review, commissioned by USAID and the Institute for International Education, addresses one of those questions:

**What are the most effective ways to encourage women's civic (*e.g.*, volunteer, advocacy, *etc.*) and political (*e.g.*, voting, running for office) participation? What are the risks to women of these strategies in contexts where resistance to changing gender norms is strong?**

The resulting literature review, conducted by graduate students and faculty at the University of Virginia, will help to inform USAID's strategic planning, project design, and in-service training efforts in the democracy, human rights, and governance sector. For more information about USAID's work in this sector and the role of academic research within it, please see <https://www.usaid.gov/who-we-are/organization/bureaus/bureau-democracy-conflict-and-humanitarian-assistance/center>.

## ACRONYM LIST

DFID	Department for International Development
IIE	Institute of International Education
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
JBI-QARI	Joanna Briggs Institute's Qualitative Assessment and Review Instrument
LGBTQI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MP	Member of Parliament
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NDI	National Democratic Institute
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
RCT	Randomized Controlled Trial
SE Asia	South-East Asia
SHG	Self Help Group
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency of International Development
UVA	University of Virginia
VAW	Violence Against Women
VAW-E	Violence Against Women in Elections
VAWIP	Violence Against Women in Politics
WHO	World Health Organization
WHRD	Women Human Rights Defenders

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Widespread agreement exists among scholars and activists that women’s civic and political participation is crucial for democracy and development. Nevertheless, obstacles to women’s participation persist. Given these obstacles, how can agencies like USAID most effectively encourage women in the developing world to participate in civil society and politics? When agencies effectively intervene, what level of risk do women face as a result of strong resistance to that intervention? And where that risk is high, how can it best be mitigated? USAID commissioned a review of the evidence-based literature to answer these questions.

This literature review begins with a discussion of multidisciplinary approaches to resistance, often referred to as backlash. ***Because the literature on resistance is under-theorized, the reviewers compare and contrast theories and claims about backlash in different disciplines. This leads to a series of insights about different forms of resistance. Specifically, the reviewers:***

- Distinguish between social and individual forms of resistance.
- Differentiate backlash from entrenched resistance.
- Explain the likelihood of and pathways to violence at times of backlash and entrenched resistance.
- Highlight three manifestations of backlash.
- Explain the policy implications of these insights for agencies like USAID.

The comparison definitively demonstrates that resistance is not simply a response to changing gender norms but is a multi-faceted and complex phenomenon that not only offers risks but also opportunities to those challenging the status quo. Indeed, resistance is shaped by a variety of factors, including the willingness of activists to provoke violence; the partisan appeal of threat narratives; and the extent to which individual women exhibit “agentive” characteristics, such as aggression and competitiveness. Few, if any, of these insights guide the evidence-based literature in the review, underscoring the need for concept building and theory-development in the field.

***The literature review next identifies seven strategies for effectively encouraging women’s civic and political participation.*** These strategies are elaborated in the United Kingdom’s (UK) Overseas Development Institute (ODI)’s report on “Women’s Voice and Leadership in Decision-Making: Assessing the Evidence” (2015). According to the ODI (2015, p4), the “key areas where international actors may best be able to support and strengthen women’s voice and leadership in decision-making” are:

1. Attend to the specific context.
2. Require field agents to think and act politically.
3. Encourage diverse women’s organizing and mobilizations.
4. Work with multiple stakeholders.
5. Target participation in both formal politics and civil society.
6. Build women’s political and leadership skills.
7. Take a multidimensional rather than a silo approach.

The literature review builds on these seven strategies. Using a flexible systematic review process that included defining and operationalizing strong resistance, the reviewers find limited evidence-based research on strong resistance in response to these seven strategies. Moreover, the literature that does

exist focuses almost exclusively on female politicians. ***With these limitations in mind, the reviewers find that strong resistance in response to these seven strategies is not pervasive but does occur, and that it can discourage women's participation.*** The reviewers further find that low to moderate resistance is ubiquitous, but generally has less deleterious effects. Importantly, the sites where strong resistance occurs vary within countries and even among local areas within a single country. ***This suggests that a country-level analysis of gender norms is inadequate and ineffective for assessing and understanding women's risk of strong resistance.***

The implications of these findings are that ***risk assessments should be:***

- Routine and done prior to engaging in any intervention, and require information extending far beyond local gender norms.
- Focused on low to moderate forms of resistance in situations of backlash, and attentive to the possibility of strong resistance in situations of entrenched resistance.
- Designed for the specific site where the intervention occurs, while remaining attentive to national- and individual-level factors that shape resistance.

Given the limits of the literature on resistance, particularly in response to the seven effective interventions that encourage women's civic and political participation, ***the reviewers recommend the following research priorities:***

- Concept-formation and theory-building about resistance, and the development of methodologies for studying it and assessing its incidence and prevalence.
- Empirical research on resistance to women's civic participation, as the existing literature focuses almost entirely on women politicians.
- Multidisciplinary, context-based studies, including cross-comparative research that is not solely at the country-level, as well as multi-method studies, all of which should target understudied geographical areas.
- Men's and women's movements that fuel or engage in resistance to women's civic and political participation.
- The disaggregation of women, not only by class, ethnicity, race, and religion, but also by age, gender identity, and sexuality.
- The role of media in shaping the emergence, persistence, and/or dissipation of resistance to women's participation.
- Positive cases, *e.g.*, sites where strong resistance dissipated quickly, to learn more about mitigation of risks to participation.
- Positive spillover effects of women's civic and political participation.

Finally, the reviewers recommend that multidisciplinary scholarly teams advance this research agenda, and that those teams not only share their findings with agencies like USAID, but that they study the experiences and concerns of development workers to ensure a more complete understanding of resistance to effective interventions that encourage women's civic and political participation.



## INTRODUCTION

### A. Approach

This review approaches women’s civic and political participation, and resistance to it, through a feminist, intersectional lens. The review critically analyzes gender from disciplinary perspectives that include anthropology, history, political science, religious studies, and sociology. While the approach is feminist, the researchers are aware of the body of literature that has rightly critiqued mainstream feminism for focusing primarily on the concerns of women in positions of relative privilege and for its complicity in neo-imperialist projects that justify themselves in terms of “saving” or “liberating” women who are “oppressed” (e.g., Abu-Lughod 2013, Riley *et al.* 2008). For this reason, the researchers emphasize that those who wish to upgrade the status of women must respect the agency of the women whom they seek to help, and that they act in solidarity with local women’s goals and initiatives that aim to end women’s subordination. Further, the researchers emphasize that a non-imperialist feminist approach to research, activism, and development must be sensitive to the ways in which women’s experiences vary greatly across the world, and even within relatively small countries, and are always shaped by a multitude of contextual factors.

The approach taken here shapes the reviewers’ understanding of how to think about women’s risks of strong resistance when interventions encourage them to engage in civic and political participation. For example, **resistance**—which may include physical and sexual violence; social and familial censure; ostracization by the religious community; and various overt or subtle forms of restriction, deprivation, and exclusion—**varies according to multiple factors, including but not limited to gender norms, the broader cultural context, regime type, local power structures, economic opportunities, and the form of participation sought**. Moreover, all women do not experience the same levels of risk, nor are they vulnerable to the same types of resistance. For example, even within a single socio-cultural context, women who are marginalized (economically, racially, linguistically, religiously, or otherwise) are likely to bear greater burdens of risk than women who have social protections by virtue, for instance, of their family relationships. Furthermore, while women in one country may face few risks when they engage in formal politics through quotas, those same women may face greater risks while advocating in civil society for the right to divorce.

### B. Key Findings

**Research on resistance that aims to limit or end challenges to the status quo is under-theorized and is in need of concept building.** The field requires multidisciplinary engagement, as institutional- and structural-level research, coming mostly out of the disciplines of political science and sociology, does not appear to engage with individual-level research (*i.e.*, psychology). As a result, much remains to be learned about resistance. The reviewers take several steps to address these limitations through a discussion of multidisciplinary theories and empirical findings on backlash. **Our discussion suggests that making analytical distinctions is critical for assessing resistance, but that these distinctions are rarely theorized or even acknowledged in the literature:**

- Social and individual forms of resistance are distinct, but share some commonalities.
- Backlash is distinct from entrenched resistance.
- The pathways to violence during backlash are distinct from the pathways to violence during entrenched resistance.

- Backlash has at least three possible manifestations.
- Individual women who engage in “agentic” behavior (*e.g.*, aggressiveness, competitiveness) are at a higher risk for backlash than women who do not.

The review then turns from the literature on backlash to the evidence-based literature on how to effectively encourage women’s civic and political participation. This discussion draws on ODI’s report on “Women’s Voice and Leadership in Decision-Making: Assessing the Evidence” (2015). The report follows the feminist, intersectional, and context-based approach taken in this review; uses the same systematic review guidelines followed here; highlights many sources familiar to the reviewers; and adopts an approach to women’s participation akin to that developed by the lead reviewer (Walsh 2010).

ODI’s approach to participation targets what the authors refer to as “women’s substantive voice and leadership *looking beyond women’s presence and the number of women participating to address the politics of influence*” (2015, p8, italics in original). The ODI Report thus focuses on how international agencies can best encourage women’s empowerment, voice, access to decision-making, and leadership; it does so by analyzing the literature on both civil society and formal politics.

***The seven effective strategies that the reviewers adapt from ODI are:***

1. Attend to the specific context.
2. Require field agents to think and act politically.
3. Encourage diverse women’s organizing and mobilizations.
4. Work with multiple stakeholders.
5. Target participation in both formal politics and civil society.
6. Build women’s political and leadership skills.
7. Take a multidimensional rather than a silo approach.

The reviewers then use a systematic, flexible review process to locate sources investigating the risk of strong resistance in response to these seven strategies. The findings were few:

- The sources concentrated primarily on quotas and violence against women politicians.
- Most sources lacked a broad base of empirical evidence.
- Regional gaps meant nearly one-third of all sources focused on South Asia.
- Few comparative analyses exist.

With these caveats in mind, ***this review finds low to moderate levels of resistance to effective interventions are far more common than strong resistance.*** Strong resistance, including arson and murder, does emerge in several sources, and, not surprisingly, has a deleterious effect on women’s participation. But, it is not as widespread as moderate resistance (such as sexual harassment and physically blocking women’s access to spaces of decision-making) or low resistance (such as stereotyping or the enforcement of women’s invisibility), both of which limit women’s civic and political participation, but rarely discourage most women from entering political and civic spaces altogether. Even these lesser forms of resistance, however, sometimes discredit not only the intervention but also the people associated with it, diminishing their standing in the community. ***The sources also reveal widespread regional variations not only across countries but within them too, thereby making it difficult to offer national-level generalizations.*** Resistance to women’s participation was reported within all possible sites: the family, society at large, political parties, governmental agencies, and within

developmental agencies themselves, as well as across multiple social domains at once. The most optimistic finding from the literature is that initial resistance, even if it manifests as strong resistance, does not always portend a complete failure of the intervention: resistance in some sites might decrease over time.

Until field agents are skilled in distinguishing between backlash and entrenched resistance (discussed below), ***low to moderate resistance should be expected when implementing the ODI strategies, and agents should be prepared for occasional incidents of strong resistance***. Given the evidence-based findings, USAID might consider doing risk assessments at the specific site(s) where the intervention is to occur prior to undertaking any action. This assessment should engage with people in the local communities about possible reactions to proposed interventions, after which, in conversation with local participants, USAID could weigh the possible costs and benefits of those interventions.

## RESISTANCE

### A. Do No Harm?

It is laudable to aim to avoid strong resistance against women when agencies like USAID encourage women to participate in civil society and politics. It is possible, however, that ***the principle of “do no harm” is an inappropriate guiding principle in this case, particularly if it is interpreted to mean that all interventions must avoid harm of any kind or else cease***.

Rubenstein (2015) explains that international agencies cannot do significant good while also avoiding every negative effect, as they are “embedded in political dynamics beyond their control” which ensures that “they regularly have unintended negative effects” (p94). She adds that if international agencies have “mostly good intentions, some good effects, and contribute knowingly but unintentionally to injustices perpetrated primarily by others,” then they “sometimes have a responsibility to allow their hands to be spattered—that is, they sometimes have a responsibility to grudgingly accept contributing to injustices perpetrated primarily by others” (p103, italics in original). This decision need not always rest with international agencies, but rather, with those who are most at risk. ***The policy implication is that it is crucial for international agencies to learn more about risks to women who participate in civil society and formal politics, and that agencies and the women themselves must carefully weigh this knowledge against the likely benefits of their participation.***

### B. Backlash and Entrenched Resistance

Resistance, in the feminist literature on women’s civic and political participation, commonly refers to the actions that women take to challenge their subordination, including but not limited to gender subordination. As women’s resistance to their subordination gains traction and women’s presence in politics and civil society grows, scholars across a range of disciplines note that a backlash against these gains might ensue.<sup>1</sup> In this review, resistance does not refer to women’s challenges to their

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<sup>1</sup> Women’s organizing, however, is not always progressive; right-wing women’s activism such as the examples documented by Basu (1998) and Bacchetta and Power (2013) might challenge progressive reform. Thus,

subordination; ***rather, as prompted by USAID, resistance refers to actions and attitudes ranging from unintentional hostility through physical violence in response to women’s political and civic participation.***

Resistance to women’s equality in the feminist literature is commonly referred to as backlash (*e.g.*, Faludi 1991). Social scientists and historians also refer to backlash to discuss conservative reactions to racial progress and immigrant rights in the US (*e.g.*, Abrajano and Hajnal 2015, Anderson 2016, Kimmel 2013). However, the concept has not been fully theorized (*e.g.*, Bishin, Hayes, Incantalupo, and Smith 2016; Mansbridge and Shames 2008). Backlash generally refers to attitudes and actions by those who feel threatened by changes in the status quo, and who take action to secure or reinstate it. As Mansbridge and Shames note (2008, p625), although backlash involves force to uphold the status quo, “many, if not most, forms of force are not violent;” further, those engaging in backlash generally avoid violence as it makes force visible (also see Anderson 2016). The findings of Kanthak and Krause (2012) on the US Congress underscore this point. In their study, reports of overt resistance were rare and most women reported low levels of harassment that would be invisible to outsiders. The invisibility of force, however, is disadvantageous for challengers. Activists, such as civil rights protesters, thus sometimes provoke opponents to use violence and make force visible to demonstrate the credibility of their claims and to win public sympathy (Mansbridge and Shames 2008). Backlash, even violent backlash, therefore offers opportunities as well as threats to challengers of the status quo.

Opportunities extend beyond gaining credibility and public sympathy. In her analysis of post-feminism and backlash, Jordan (2016) argues that backlash does not signal a rejection of all change, but instead selectively labels some change as going too far. Thus backlash validates innovations to the status quo even as it rejects others. Further, Jordan finds that backlash “repoliticizes” feminism in contexts where it has been presented as “inherently unreasonable and/or irrelevant” (p28). While this repoliticization threatens feminist goals, it rallies dormant advocates of women’s rights to enter the political arena and counter defenders of the status quo. Thus, backlash can secure some achievements and provide an incentive for feminists to mobilize, even as it threatens women’s emancipation.

Many questions about backlash remain. How, when, and where does backlash as a social phenomenon occur? Why does it occur in some places and not others? What constitutes backlash (including its range and types)? How, when, and why does the public endorse backlash and public policies to buttress the status quo? When backlash occurs, when is it effectual? Bishin, Hayes, Incantalupo, and Smith (2016) agree that the literature on backlash is under-theorized and elicits confusion. They argue that it often refers to two different things: 1) a sudden, negative shift in public opinion in response to a policy change, and 2) negative actions by groups that had always opposed policies threatening the status quo. The authors suggest that the term backlash be reserved for the former, and define it as a “large, negative, and enduring shift in opinion against a policy or group that occurs in response to some event that threatens the status quo” (p626). Although both forms of resistance are likely to work together at times, they are distinct and might require different responses by change agents. While both types of resistance are evident in the literature reviewed here, scholars rarely note the distinction.

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“increasing women’s civic and political participation” as a goal in and of itself does not always result in the kind of progressive reforms that USAID might wish to promote.

Bishin *et al.* (2016) also warn that claims of backlash are often made “without considering that the outcome may have occurred regardless of the supposed backlash-inducing event” (p639). Careful causal analysis is essential to avoid this mistake, but it is often lacking (particularly in the grey literature reviewed here, see below). Indeed, Bishin *et al.* (2016) and Flores and Barclay (2014) find no evidence of public opinion backlash *in response to* the expansion of gay rights policies over several decades in the US. Hence, they conclude that the frequency of backlash in public opinion as a response to policy change is overestimated.

In contrast, Abrajano and Hajnal (2015) find evidence of a backlash in public opinion and policy in response to recent immigrant groups arriving in the US. They argue that the conditions for this backlash included a sizeable demographic change and an immigration threat narrative promoted by political entrepreneurs and the media that gained credence among a majority of Whites and, most importantly, took on partisan characteristics. As a result, a nativist backlash shaped not only public opinion but also voting patterns and public policy. Ayoub’s (2014) study of backlash against lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender rights also points to the salience of threat narratives. He finds that a threat narrative succeeded in Poland but failed in Slovenia, given the different symbolic role played by the Catholic Church in the national imagination of each country.

***This research on backlash in public opinion and policy suggests that:***

- Backlash in public opinion in response to policy change occurs less frequently than assumed.
- Causal analysis examining the link between backlash and the presumed trigger is rare.
- A backlash may not have an effect on elections or public policy unless a majority of the voting population subscribes to the threat narrative, and political parties respond to that narrative along partisan lines.
- The effect of threat narratives on popular mobilization varies with media publicity, political competition, and the symbolic role of powerful opponents.
- Backlash is distinct from entrenched resistance.

***How might analysts distinguish between entrenched resistance and backlash?*** The successes of the international women’s movement in many developing countries since the 1990s—including near universal ratifications of the Convention on the Elimination and Discrimination Against Women; the tremendous participation of governments and NGOs at international women’s conferences like the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing 1995; and the adoption of quotas and gender mainstreaming by many states—suggest that concerns about backlash are most appropriate when interventions to encourage women’s civic and political participation are made at the national level. Concerns about entrenched resistance are appropriate when intervening among corporate groups, often powerful at the local level, that rely on patriarchal forms of rule to maintain their power and survival.

Backlash occurs in different forms. ***Violent backlash, a backlash in public opinion, and a public policy backlash are each distinct from the other.*** The research suggests that those concerned about limiting backlash of any kind must first identify the political actors and groups who believe that encouraging women’s participation will go too far because it will challenge the status quo. Those concerned about

preventing **violence** must then assess whether these individuals and groups are likely to use violence against individual women or their organizations, if provoked. Those concerned about a backlash in **public opinion** will need to assess the capacity of the opposition to mobilize and win popular support from a powerful voting majority (in liberal democracies) and powerful elites (in liberal democracies and authoritarian regimes). And those concerned about containing a backlash in **public policy** should assess 1) whether voter and elite resistance falls along partisan lines, since partisan support for public policy initiatives intensifies the salience of an issue and can become a litmus test for party success, and 2) the symbolic power of entrenched resistance. Finally, it is possible that some of the factors that shape one of these forms of backlash also shape others.

***Similar factors are relevant when assessing the likelihood that corporate groups expressing entrenched resistance to women's participation, such as clans, will use violence and be able to shape majority public opinion and public policy.*** Charrad (2001) in her comparative study of women's rights in Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, finds that tribes in Tunisia were unsuccessful in opposing advancements in women's rights. She argues that the tribes were not institutionalized in the post-colonial state, and instead competed with nationalizing elites. State leaders thus approved sweeping policy reforms in women's rights to undercut their competitors. Htun (2003), Walsh (2010), and Hudson, Bowen, and Nielsen (2015) confirm this pattern of elites using women's rights to thwart their opponents, indicating that partisan competition is crucial when assessing resistance to women's political and civic participation.

Hudson *et al.* also observe that clans "are characterized by extreme subordination of women effected through marriage practices" (2015, abstract). This is because marriage practices are essential for the group's longevity and vitality; they are what Htun and Weldon (2010, p210) label "doctrinal issues." When women's participation challenges doctrinal issues, corporate groups expressing entrenched resistance are likely to resist strongly and even violently. Indeed, corporate groups such as clans often have norms condoning violence against women when their behavior threatens doctrinal issues, *e.g.*, honor killings. Violence is thus likely if women's participation in politics and civil society threatens doctrinal issues, for example, if women attend late-night meetings with men outside their kinship group. That violence, however, is likely to be checked by capacitated states led by elites who aim to undermine patriarchal corporate groups like clans. Violence is likely to be condoned or tacitly accepted by states where ruling elites rely on these groups for support, or when states lack the capacity to challenge them successfully.

***Therefore, in addition to identifying contexts where resistance to changing gender norms is strong, attending to the likelihood of violence also requires the following:***

- Identifying whether potential resistance is entrenched or is a backlash.
- Knowledge of elite interests and competition among elites.
- Attentiveness to doctrinal issues and norms that sanction violence when resistance is entrenched.
- Attentiveness to coercive force that is not violent, and attentiveness to activists who might instigate violence to make force visible during a backlash.

***If concerns about resistance include not only violence, but also public opinion and policy outcomes, analysts must also assess:***

- Factors that facilitate mobilization in civil society and the state against women’s participation.
- The potential appeal of threat narratives regarding women’s participation among majority voting blocs and/or elites.
- Factors that shape public policy outcomes, such as partisanship.

***Resistance to women’s participation in civil society and politics can also occur at the individual level; moreover, resistance can shape individual women’s willingness to participate.*** In a comprehensive psychology review article on backlash research, Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Glick, and Phelan (2012) find that individuals who do not conform to gender and racial stereotypes invite backlash, by which they mean punishment that has social and economic costs. (This definition does not distinguish between entrenched resistance and backlash.) Rudman *et al.* (2012) also find that individuals participate in backlash behavior only when they believe it is appropriate, namely, when gender and racial non-conformity threatens what the authors refer to as status hierarchies.

The authors also suggest that individuals defend the status quo for a variety of reasons. To be sure, some individuals intend to protect their power and authority, or their personal self-worth. Some members of marginalized groups, however, also act to perpetuate the status quo. Some do so to stave off hopelessness about their group status. Others value existing stereotypes about their group, even when those stereotypes relegate them to second-tier status. For example, some women may insist that they are naturally better caretakers than men, and therefore insist that no woman should participate in civil society or in politics when she has young children at home. Indeed, the authors find that women are just as likely as men to uphold gender stereotypes and punish other women for gender deviance (Rudman *et al.* 2012, p173, p186).

In masculinist institutions like legislatures, Kanthak and Krause (2012) contend that women who have been “tokens” and rewarded with special treatment by men are also likely to defend the status quo. Kanthak and Krause argue that token women, in an effort to maintain their special treatment, are unsupportive of incoming women. As a result, increasing numbers of women in a legislature does not automatically create a woman-friendly environment; on the contrary, increasing numbers can make legislatures more hostile as men withdraw special treatment for token women who now are no longer tokens, and token women neglect or even oppose newcomers. Kanthak and Krause also find that resistance by token women can hobble the capacity of women legislators to organize as women and challenge masculine norms and male dominance.

***Rudman et al. (2012) find that many individuals engage in backlash avoidance because of its social costs, and contend that this avoidance also has costs.*** The authors confirm that most individuals seek to conform to gender norms rather than challenge them in an effort to prevent negative reactions, rejection, and social ostracism. Indeed, the authors cite studies that find “the mere threat of becoming a social outcast will suffice” to trigger backlash avoidance (p172). Rudman *et al.* add that this avoidance also has costs. First, individual women pay a cost as they police their own behavior by not pursuing the full range of opportunities formally available to them. Second, society pays a cost as vanguard role models remain rare and talent takes a backseat to gender stereotypes. The authors thus conclude that backlash avoidance leads to a vicious cycle that reinforces stereotypes at grave social cost.

We note, however, that when individual women vanguards embrace agentic behavior over “communal” behavior such as compassion, they reinforce the primacy of agentic behavior and masculinity, which also has social costs. While individual women vanguards can challenge gender stereotypes by transgressing them, individual transgressions alone are unlikely to dismantle the hegemony of masculinity or increase the social worth of communal behavior that has been devalued as feminine. Instead, as Kanthak and Krause (2012) underscore, organizing as women is the most effective means for enhancing women’s power and has the added benefit of not requiring women to become honorary men.

Importantly, Rudman *et al.* (2012) also note that not all deviations from the status quo are equally threatening and thus equally punished. Drawing on gender stereotypes that are “cross-culturally consistent” (p177), the authors find that the problem is not simply that women leaders trigger individual censure. Indeed, they note that women leaders in masculine domains can compensate for bias. For example, women can address concerns about their competence by emphasizing their accomplishments. However, when a woman extolls her competence she must do so without being as aggressive, competitive, or otherwise agentic as men, or she will be disliked and punished (p178). As the authors note, “women are proscribed from exhibiting high-status signs of dominance” (p185). ***This suggests that a woman who exhibits high-status signs of dominance triggers backlash, regardless of whether she is a leader in a masculine domain or not.***

Insights from Rudman *et al.* (2012) on backlash have not, to the reviewers’ knowledge, been integrated with the social science research on backlash discussed above. Doing so would bring valuable insights to the field. For example, one might imagine that women tokens in the US Congress, as described by Kanthak and Krause (2012), were hostile to newcomers and women’s caucuses not only because they aimed to preserve their special status but also to avoid backlash from dominant men. Or consider the possibility that agentic behavior is reserved for men across much of Morocco, where clans retain some influence with the monarchy. If this is the case, analysts might expect that a female politician who exhibits agentic behavior, and who also advocates marriage reforms, would be a prime target for an individual act of violence, that the clans would be likely to condone that violence, and that many Moroccans would be unsympathetic toward the victim.

Several policy implications flow from the literature on backlash at the individual level. ***When organizations like USAID seek to avoid resistance by individuals in response to women’s civic and political participation, they should expect that:***

- Resistance will be perpetrated by women as often as men, although its form may vary.
- Resistance will occur when a woman exhibits agentic behavior.
- Many women, especially tokens, will be reluctant to exhibit agentic behavior for fear of repercussions or because they aim to secure special treatment.
- Curtailing women’s civic and political participation out of fear of resistance will contribute to a vicious cycle that further entrenches gender stereotypes.
- Women who organize as women will face low-level resistance, but organizing can improve their participation.



Finally, the reviewers suggest that, in light of this discussion, scholars and international agencies refer to opposition, rather than resistance or backlash, reserving the latter two terms for specific forms of opposition to women's civic and political participation.

### C. Life Cycle of Resistance

**What is the life cycle of resistance to women's political and civic participation?** Some scholars have found that resistance to women's participation in civic and political life declines over time (e.g., Ochs 2007, Carreiras 2006, Duncanson and Woodward 2016). In the case of Israel, for example, women's participation is now routine, even though it was initially resisted on the grounds that this participation either was of a foreign source, having been "imported" from the US, or was perceived to be incompatible with religious law (Ochs 2007). However, gender scholars in comparative politics looking across an array of cases find that women's participation, and resistance to it, ebbs and flows over time. In this research, the factors that most affect women's participation are regime type, type of electoral institutions, the strength of the women's movement, and masculinist norms in institutional bodies like legislatures, trade unions, and social movements (e.g., Walsh 2010, Waylen 2007). While the first set of case studies suggests that resistance to women's civic and political participation is a normal aspect of politics that diminishes in intensity as women become routine participants, the latter body of research suggests that while resistance may diminish within each cycle over time, it can reemerge with renewed intensity at the beginning of a new cycle.

A third body of research offers insights as to how the above two trends might work in tandem (or that at least three trends are possible under a range of circumstances). In some cases, improvements to women's civic and political participation in one site can prompt a backlash in another. Consider women's political participation at the village level in much of South Asia (Bhatla and Rajan 2003). In response to women's participation, *khap panchayats* (all-male, unelected village councils) have emerged to punish women for putative gender transgressions in the social sphere, such as owning cell phones and listening to music (Bharadwaj 2012, Kaur 2010, Yadav 2010). This trade-off between participation in formal politics that is offset by greater gender policing in another site is not isolated to South Asia (e.g., Burnet 2008). **The concept of a "vicious spiral" illuminates how resistance can ebb and flow within a site but can also move across them;** it might therefore be a promising avenue for future research that seeks to assess the trajectory of women's civic and political participation over time.

### D. Violence Against Women Politicians and Voters

Women's presence in formal politics is often secured through quotas, not only in South Asia but also in many regions across the globe. More than 100 countries have adopted quotas, dramatically increasing the number of women in national legislatures (Krook 2010). **As women's presence in formal politics has increased over the past 20 years, organizations and scholars are beginning to investigate violence against women in politics (VAWIP).** In April 2016, for example, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) launched the international campaign [#NotTheCost, Stopping Violence against Women in Politics](#), which includes an online incident report form. Engaging in original research, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) sponsored a qualitative study of 55 women politicians from 39 countries (2016). That study finds that although sexual, physical, and economic violence are relatively rare, psychological violence against women politicians frequently occurs. The IPU notes 65.5% of respondents reported humiliating sexual or sexist remarks; 44.4% reported threats of violence (often made online) such as death, rape, beatings, or abduction. The leading aggravating factor was belonging to the opposition party, followed by youth

or minority status. The report thus suggests that male members of parliament (MPs) and voters treat different female politicians differently, and that partisan politics can be psychologically abusive for women (whether it is similar for men is a pressing question if researchers are to disentangle political norms from violence against female politicians).<sup>2</sup>

The discussion of VAWIP is in its infancy in academia, with conceptual and methodological questions driving initial debates.<sup>3</sup> Scholars argue, for example, about the importance of local context (*e.g.*, extensive civilian insecurity in weak and predatory states), whether VAWIP occurs because the targets are women, because they are politicians, or because they are women politicians, and how researchers might be able to parse the difference (*e.g.*, Krook and Sanín 2016, Piscopo 2016[b]). It also remains unclear what the intent of perpetrators is and how this violence affects women politicians and their political behavior. Organizations determined to redress VAWIP tend to avoid these thorny problems.

Developmental agencies, NGOs, and other organizations seeking to foster women’s participation in politics do grapple with conceptual and methodological issues when developing guidelines for field agents. Hubbard and DeSoi (2016) of NDI, for example, take a feminist approach to electoral violence against women (VAW-E), which offers guidelines for election monitors. They define VAW-E; operationalize it; and insist upon the integration of local knowledge and participation, the centrality of women’s experiences, and the importance of comparing women’s experiences with men’s. The authors also suggest distinct observation methodologies to be used at different stages of the electoral cycle according to resource availability and the aims of the assessment. This foundational work is a critical resource for all those concerned about the risk of resistance that might occur in response to women’s civic and political participation.

However, grey literature justifications for a focus on VAWIP and VAW-E tend to equate both with a deliberate intention to prevent women from participating in politics *because* they are women. In these cases, organizations such as NDI make arguments that outstrip their evidence. Claims such as the “phenomenon of violence against women in politics is one of the most serious barriers to women’s political participation around the world, regardless of country or context” (Hubbard and DeSoi 2016, p12) cannot currently be proven. Doing so would require, among other things, a systematic investigation of causality and ranking of other barriers to women’s participation, both of which are lacking in the sources reviewed here. While claims like these may provide organizations with a powerful justification for monitoring and advocacy, they also obfuscate important questions that the field must address if it is to gain credibility and succeed in its aims to reduce resistance to women’s civic and political participation.

***The extent to which violence against women is preventing women from participating in civil society and politics, and the extent to which this violence is deliberately being used to prevent this***

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<sup>2</sup> Research by Kanthak and Krause (2012) suggests that women politicians might be able to counter some of this abuse by creating a woman’s caucus. However, their research also indicates that an infusion of a large number of women into the legislature at one time (*e.g.*, via a quota) antagonizes the majority group by threatening its dominance while also creating cooperation challenges for women.

<sup>3</sup> Momsen (2001), however, does investigate resistance to women’s economic success from successful development programs that sometimes led to their increased political power and strong resistance, *e.g.*, a witch-hunt.

***participation, will remain uncertain for some time.*** A fruitful way forward would be for organizations that have spearheaded this field of inquiry to work more closely with scholars, ensuring that both groups draw upon one another's expertise to investigate rather than assume the causal effects and intentions of violence in politics that women experience.

## FINDINGS: WOMEN'S CIVIC AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

### A. Research Question

The 2015 ODI Report finds that the most effective intervention strategies for encouraging women's civic and political participation are contextually informed interventions where field agents think and act politically, encourage diverse women's organizing and mobilizations, work with multiple stakeholders, target participation in both formal politics and civil society, build women's political and leadership skills, and take a multidimensional rather than a silo approach. This literature review draws on these findings by asking: ***When the seven effective interventions to encourage women's participation are implemented, what are the risks to women of strong resistance? Where strong resistance exists, what factors mitigate it?***

### B. Key Terms<sup>4</sup>

**Resistance:** Any conduct that maintains the status quo in the face of pressure to alter it (Duncan 1977, p63, cited in Waddell and Sohal 1998). In this review, resistance refers to the disruption, refusal, and prevention of changes to gender norms, specifically women's political and civic participation resulting from the intervention strategies itemized above.

"Strong resistance" here refers to violence, meaning the actual use of physical force or power against oneself, another person, group, or community that leads to (or is likely to lead to) injury, psychological harm, maldevelopment, deprivation, or death. Its sources include self-directed violence; interpersonal violence (committed by family, intimate partner, community); and collective violence (social, political, economic) (WHO 2002).

***Strong resistance is manifest, for example, as:***

- Suicide
- Homicide
- Intentional physical injury and/or mental abuse
- Sexual assault
- Trauma

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<sup>4</sup> Whereas USAID conceived of "strong resistance" as a country-level variable of general cultural attitudes that restricted the possibilities for women's civic and political activities, we conceptualized resistance as violence that could occur to varying degrees across a range of contexts in any given country. The literature we studied, and our own experience as researchers, did not support an interpretation of "strong resistance" as a variable that could be said to be either present or absent at a country level. Our concept of risk addressed women who might be affected by intervention efforts in the contexts where USAID works. The literature we reviewed did not address the possibility of risk to US interests.

- Torture
- Malnutrition
- Impoverishment
- Social/familial condemnation or ostracization
- Withholding of access to goods and services essential for wellbeing and self-determination (e.g., health care, education, voting rights)

**Moderate resistance** operates at a lower threshold of violence; it includes verbal intimidation, sexual harassment, and physically blocking women’s access to spaces of decision-making.

**Low levels of resistance** are behaviors that silence, stereotype, enforce invisibility, exclude, and challenge the epistemic authority of women but do not involve physical acts of violence (Hawkesworth 2003).

**Risk:** The likelihood that (some) women will be exposed to threats and the danger of strong resistance when agencies implement the strategies identified above and successfully encourage women’s civic and political participation.

Risk is evident when, for example, an MP threatens a woman MP with violence *because she is participating in politics* and this woman gained access to parliament through one of the effective interventions itemized. If the woman is threatened with violence for other reasons, e.g., she plans to vote against her party on a bill, this would not be labeled “risk,” as it is not an indicator of a problem with the specific intervention but, in this case, with some other factor or factors such as regime type, party control, norms of violence in politics, etc.

**Mitigation:** a lessening or diminishment of the risk (or experience) of strong resistance. Mitigation may be evident, for example, in improved government legislation on violence against women in response to a backlash, or in community forums dedicated to discussing strong resistance and to devising and implementing context-appropriate solutions.

While the researchers primarily sought evidence-based policy solutions, as the literature on this was small, the review includes sources with suggestions for future research and policy recommendations that stem from analyses of strong resistance.

### **C. Seven Effective Strategies Identified by the ODI Report**

**Contextual Expertise:** Having deep knowledge of the site where the intervention is to occur is critical as gender norms, civic and political institutions, and practices vary significantly by time and place. These variations will influence the potential for interventions to succeed or fail in specific sites and for specific women (and men). Local knowledge is critical. Interventions that are context-based are typically shaped and implemented by local actors.

**Agents who think and work politically:** This requires the redistribution of power and resources by facilitating, say, trust and alliance building within political parties, forging strategic political coalitions, or planning campaign strategies. Agents do not avoid politics; instead, they help women do the hard work

politics requires. Most commonly, in this literature review on resistance, these interventions were quotas that redistributed power by catapulting women into political office.

**Encouraging diverse women’s organizing and mobilizations by helping women in different groups become ready and capable of action:** This requires the provision of resources—such as leadership skills that are context appropriate, networks, and money—to facilitate organizational/movement autonomy for a variety of women’s movements while also promoting linkages among them.

**Working with multiple stakeholders and investing in long-term relationships with change agents, building partnerships between women’s organizations and power brokers in both civil society and politics:** These interventions help different women’s groups gain influential allies by, for example, persistent networking that forges strong bonds between the powerful and women’s groups.

**Simultaneously increasing women’s participation both in formal politics and civil society:** Developing strength in civil society can aid women’s organizations in political participation. Examples include providing logistical and networking support to women’s movements so they might make demands for greater political participation. This enhances women’s participation in civil society while also promoting it within the state.

**Building women’s political and leadership skills:** Women can hone these skills in a range of sites. Interventions target sites that most frequently lead to greater power both in civil society and in formal politics, and to the skills that are critical for success once women have accessed those sites. Examples include leadership and negotiation training in civic as well as political organizations.

**Taking a multidimensional approach to tackle practical and structural obstacles to women’s participation:** This includes coordinating programs and activities that engage in consciousness-raising and developing women’s social capital and capabilities, all of which are intended to change gender norms. One example would be microfinance groups that include gender training for both women and men, with the latter provided by local women’s organizations.

## FINDINGS: RISK OF RESISTANCE

### A. Strong Resistance

The literature indicates that in situations in which resistance against women’s civic and political participation is highly likely (Cerva Cerna 2014, Madhok and Rai 2012), an intervention to encourage women’s participation may not generate strong resistance or backlash. That is to say, resistance does not always occur in situations where it might be expected (Bishin *et al.* 2016), and what appears to be resistance may in fact not be resistance at all (Iyer *et al.* 2012). ***The policy implications are that a general assessment of gender norms or even empirical research about earlier episodes of resistance to women’s civic and political participation may not accurately predict responses to future interventions.***

With this caveat in mind, the reviewers find some evidence-based research that suggests strong resistance might occur in response to the effective strategies identified by ODI. Women’s Human Rights Defenders, meaning women activists and NGOs working to promote women’s rights, experience strong

resistance when their activism challenges repressive state machinery and raises demands for freedom of opinion and expression from authoritarian states. For example, women’s human rights defenders are exposed to or targeted for gender-based violence and gender-specific attacks (including threats to their families); they also are charged with negligence and immorality. In authoritarian, and particularly in authoritarian religious fundamentalist regimes, sexual harassment and assault, violence, or rape are used to “recast” women activists back into conventional gendered roles (Asoka 2012), and this makes it harder to convince communities that women’s participation in civil society is beneficial in the long run (Bhattacharya *et al.* 2013).

***The research suggests that even the most effective strategies are likely to trigger strong resistance and high risks for women where women’s participation violates not only gendered religious norms but also state control.*** This finding dovetails with that of Htun and Weldon (2015). In a survey of 70 countries, the authors find that family law is resistant to reform when religion is institutionalized in the state. As Htun and Weldon conclude, “the state, not religion, thwarts advances in women’s rights” (p471). Regime type is likely to be a critical (although not determining) factor shaping women’s risks when participating in politics and civil society.<sup>5</sup>

In liberal democracies, strong resistance appears to be more frequently located at the community level, particularly in rural communities. In India, for example, archaic models of enforcing patriarchal will through communitarian discipline counter emerging feminist community justice models. The recent rise of *khap panchayats*—where local village councils control and extra-judicially punish members of minority communities for transgressing class, caste, gender, and religious boundaries—is a challenge to women’s political participation. The village councils created to empower women are now being subverted by patriarchal forces that use the local community model to punish and limit women’s socio-cultural autonomy. This serves as a useful caution that justice at the local level can be less friendly to women than at the level of centralized states, and that it requires oversight to ensure it is not usurped and hijacked by regressive forces (Bhatla and Rajan 2003).

While we might expect strong resistance to vary within India given its tremendous heterogeneity and large geographic and demographic size, variation is also evident in smaller nation-states, such as Bangladesh, where strong resistance varies among rural communities. In culturally conservative areas, women’s short-term membership in savings and credit groups was associated with significantly elevated risks of violence. In less culturally conservative areas, the risk of strong resistance to their participation was significantly lower. This lowered risk did not vary by the social status of individual women, suggesting that the savings and credit groups were “reinforcing nascent normative changes in gender relations” (Koenig *et al.* 2003).

***The evidence-based literature suggests that strong resistance to women’s civic and political participation varies by regime type, geographic locale, and gender norms in these geographic locales.*** However, no rigorous, evidence-based studies exist that compare strong resistance in response to the ODI strategies across regions. At best, reports such as “Combatting Violence Against Women in Politics”

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<sup>5</sup> Indeed, as Asoka (2012) points out, resistance to women’s participation is evident in secular states where fundamentalist actors—meaning those who strategically deploy monolithic cultural, religious, ethnic, or nationalist discourses for the purpose of securing hegemonic political power—have power over some women.

(2008) offer broad country-level generalizations, in this case on challenges in South Asia. This report notes that VAWIP is high in Sri Lanka; that the issue has not yet come to the fore in Pakistan, despite the assassination of Benazir Bhutto and a woman minister in 2004; and that VAWIP in India is more structural than physical, that is, at the national level the absence of a quota means that there are few women politicians.

***Contrary to the logic of the research question posed by USAID, numerous sources indicate that interventions to encourage women's political participation can reduce strong resistance.*** For example, sex workers in India organized and claimed their rights from the police and judicial administration, decreasing cases of harassment against them in the slums of Bangalore (De Souza 2008). Similarly, a development program that mandated women's participation in local government in Afghanistan via a 50% quota received "no serious resistance" in the communities evaluated, and improved outcomes specific to female participation in some economic, social, and political activities, including increased mobility and income generation (Beath *et al.* 2013).

The research points to several sites where high levels of violence do obstruct women's participation, for example in post-conflict reconstruction sites such as Palestine (Farr 2011). Scholars have definitively established that post-conflict reconstruction and periods of political transition offer singular opportunities for women to increase their participation in formal politics (Burnet 2008, 2012; Ranchod-Nilsson 2008; Corrin 2000). Indeed, quotas have been adopted in much of sub-Saharan Africa during post-conflict negotiations and transitions to democracy (Tripp, Casimiro, Kwesiga, Mungwa 2009). Women's exclusion from post-conflict reconstruction would thus be of serious concern for organizations intent on increasing women's public participation, particularly via quotas.

Quotas not only increase the number of women in politics, they also may have positive spillover effects in other sectors. South African women MPs in the early years of the post-apartheid regime, for example, not only secured substantial numbers of women in the national legislature through a 30% quota, they organized as women within the legislature and spearheaded the passage of numerous gender equality policies, including the right to abortion and customary marriage reform (Walsh 2010). Or consider the 50% quota for women in local government in Afghanistan that not only improved women's participation in income generation and social and political activities, but also increased their mobility and financial output absent any evidence of strong resistance. Contrary to findings in Rwanda, however, the Afghani quota generated no alterations in entrenched female roles or in attitudes toward women's role in society (Beath *et al.* 2013, Burnet 2008). The Afghani spillover effects across sectors nonetheless appear impressive when juxtaposed against other cases, including South Africa, where civic institutions such as trade unions and social movements were slow to bring women into leadership positions (Walsh 2010).

***While quotas improve women's presence in politics and sometimes have positive spillover effects, they do not secure women's effective exercise of political power.*** For example, in Bangladesh, Panday (2008) has described a situation of "representation without participation" in which women are guaranteed presence at both the national and local levels of government while their ability to seriously participate in government is severely constrained (also see Kanthak and Krause 2012). As Arat (2015, p684) explains, "having access to some sources of power does not necessarily mean that one holds power and uses those sources to exercise power either over others or to claim autonomy." Arat's observation not only invites scholars to unravel the effects of quotas on women's meaningful civic and political participation,

it also invites development agencies to assess whether increasing women's participation in existing institutions, without changing those institutions or attending to women's capacity to shape institutional norms, can meaningfully empower women, and if so, which ones and with what consequences.

### **B. Moderate to Low Resistance**

**Interventions to encourage women's political and civic participation are far more likely to generate moderate or low resistance than strong resistance. This lower level resistance is pervasive across sites.**<sup>6</sup> Political parties, for example, may tolerate sexual harassment within their ranks or establish women's wings that segregate women supporters and prevent them from shaping party policy (Cerna 2014, Waylen 2007). Male politicians also may disrespect their female colleagues by failing to refer to women politicians by their correct titles, by remarking on their appearance or dress in ways that demean or sexualize them, or by ignoring women when they raise their hand to speak in committee meetings (e.g., Geisler 2004, Walsh 2010).

In civil society, many groups, including NGOs, generate resistance to women's participation when they harm the women they aim to empower or when they lack local legitimacy. For example, microcredit schemes in Bangladesh pull poor women into a moral economy where "pre-existing coercive norms [...] have become institutionalized as part of the NGO technologies of loan recovery," (Grewal and Bernal 2014, p208). Failure to repay the loan results in humiliation and loss of assets. NGO dependence on donors' diktats also contributes to low through medium levels of resistance to women's participation in these organizations. Indeed, women's NGOs can easily be accused of implementing the "foreign ideas" of their international funders who have no local authority or accountability. This can lead to the discredit of the organization and its goals (Jasor 2016). In these cases of low to moderate resistance, women rarely abandon civic and political participation entirely (only one source [Gottlieb 2016] reports this outcome). As Ranchod-Nilsson (2008) argues, resistance in one arena does not mean resistance occurs in all others, which leaves the door open for women's participation elsewhere.

### **C. Sites of Resistance**

**Strong resistance to women's political and civic participation occurs both in the family** (where that resistance will not necessarily be publicly tolerated or condoned), **as well as in society** (where that resistance might be publicly tolerated or even condoned). In some cases, women may gain political power (even if it is relatively little power compared to men) from interventions focused on formal politics, but they may experience resistance in other spheres of their life (e.g., domestic) (Burnet 2008, Ranchod-Nilsson 2008).

**Resistance often occurs across multiple sites at once.** For example, in the case of a women's self-help group (SHG) in an indigenous Mexican community, resistance to women's participation in SHGs occurred at three sites. The first was intra-familial—expressed through the direct prohibition of partaking in collective action, events, and/or travel through manipulation and sometimes violence, and justified on

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<sup>6</sup> This finding suggests that much of the resistance in the evidence-based literature is backlash as opposed to entrenched resistance, or that women's civic and political participation did not threaten doctrinal issues of powerful corporate groups.



the basis that the action violated gender norms. The second, intra-organizational, insisted women compromise by shirking on organizational responsibilities, causing tensions that affected the organization's development. Finally, resistance from external actors such as external clients and suppliers, led to exploitation, as women were perceived as being vulnerable and uneducated (Arias *et al.* 2016).

#### **D. How to Mitigate Resistance**

**The literature offers several strategies for mitigation, but most are not evidence-based, hence they should be treated as suggestions only.** For example, the report "Combatting Violence against Women in Politics" (2008) recommends:

- Zero-tolerance declaration.
- 33% quota adoption.
- Direct elections for women in all elected positions.
- Repeal of all discriminatory laws.
- Improving election codes and commissions.
- Harmonizing national laws with international instruments.
- Data gathering on VAWIP.

While the IPU (2016) report on VAWIP endorses some of these top-down mechanisms, such as data gathering, it also recognizes the importance of working through existing institutions and oversight bodies to reform norms. It thus recommends:

- Reporting and calling attention to online threats and insults.
- Creating parliamentary standing orders and codes of conduct against VAWIP.
- Creating policies against sexual harassment and complaint settlement procedures.
- Improving security in parliament.
- Referral to the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians.
- Women organizing to change the political culture.

**Indeed, most analysts favor bottom-up as opposed to top-down initiatives to minimize strong resistance.** For example, in response to VAW-E, Hubbard and DeSoi (2016, p40) recommend that citizen observation groups:

- Adopt early warning systems.
- Identify the root causes of VAW-E.
- Document early warning signs and incidents of VAW-E.
- Develop a rapid response platform to communicate findings to stakeholders (*e.g.*, police, media) who can and will act.
- Continue data collection, education, and awareness raising post-election.

The political and social context, as detailed in the overview on resistance above, would shape which approach is most feasible as well as most likely to generate the best results. The reviewers caution, however, that feasibility and positive results may sometimes be at odds. Research confirms, for example, that when authoritarian leaders advance women's rights by fiat from above, which in some contexts may be feasible, those rights may become associated with the regime and therefore rejected by pro-democracy movements (*e.g.*, Al-Ali 2000, Gilman 2007, Walsh 2010). Further, research like that

of Kanthak and Krause (2012) indicates that women’s organizing is the most effective mechanism for increasing their power and challenging resistance to their participation.

Bottom-up strategies suggest that agencies like USAID should work with multiple indigenous women’s groups that have extensive local knowledge. Partnerships like these are also more likely to incorporate the shared priorities of women on the ground, which could help to minimize objections about “Western” intervention (Jasor 2016). Clearly, this must be done with sensitivity to the intersections of power and privilege that exist in communities so as not to reinforce inequalities among women. Further, some studies suggest that instead of focusing on a single outcome, such as economic self-sufficiency or mitigation of VAW-E, agencies would do better to work with local women to define the agenda (Rozario 2006, Schild 1998). This would require listening to an array of local women about their priorities before agencies endorse a specific outcome. At the very least, the literature suggests that steps must be taken to inform the community of the positive effects of an intervention, as in these cases people are more likely to believe that the intervention was justified (Arias *et al.* 2016).

Finally, it is important to turn a critical gaze to development agencies and NGOs themselves, and acknowledge the ways in which their practices might heighten the possibility of resistance. The research suggests that redressing gender bias among employees in these organizations and ensuring that these organizations are credible and accessible to the community they aim to serve is vital. Further, excessive bureaucratization and professionalization alienates these organizations from local actors. Unfortunately, these problems can be difficult to ascertain if auditors and their consultants are committed to the goals these organizations endorse and believe in the initiatives these organizations undertake, rather than critically evaluate these organizations and their initiatives (Grewal and Bernal 2014). Encouraging and rewarding critical evaluations and improvements rather than stellar reports may be helpful in this regard; recognizing that most institutions grapple with these challenges may also open a space for more revealing internal evaluations and equitable practices that minimize local resistance.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. Lessons for USAID

Any intervention carries risk. Assessing which risks are likely involved and weighing those potential risks against the benefits that an intervention might secure are not easy tasks. Further, given the limited research on strong resistance to women’s civic and political participation as a result of implementing ODI strategies, the policy recommendations generated by this review are tentative at best.

***The strongest conclusion that can be drawn is that the social and political context matters.*** This suggests that if USAID field agents carry out a risk assessment, they should follow the policy recommendations set out above in the overview on resistance. They would also do well to work with the people who know the context best to ascertain what they think the likely risks might be, their intensity, who would be the most and least likely to experience risk, who would be most likely to resist, what local strategies women are already using to minimize their risks, and how to minimize risks for all. They might also use various combinations of the effective strategies identified by ODI depending on the context.

***Conversations with local actors in a variety of different social positions about the risk of resistance would invite a methodology closely linked to the seven interventions recommended by the ODI Report.***

Indeed, conversations like these would help field agents develop context-based knowledge and get them thinking politically by recognizing that interventions bring shifts in power that are highly likely to generate some form of resistance, meaning powerful allies are essential. One way to win those allies is to demonstrate that women seeking greater participation have some power, which can be achieved by helping women to organize, develop leadership skills, and forge networks with a diverse array of powerbrokers both in civil society and the state. All of this work would help to make women less vulnerable to strong resistance by providing them with a support network that has ties to those who exercise authority in the community. The seven effective strategies thus should help mitigate strong resistance. That is, even though the relationship between women's participation and resistance in the literature appears to be recursive (meaning that each one calls up the other), the literature concurs that women's organizing is unlikely to generate strong resistance and can effectively increase women's power. Yet, the existing research is much too thin to explain precisely the dynamics between women's participation and resistance across geographic locations, or for different interventions, women, or even institutions in civil society and politics.

***The reviewers also suggest that USAID consider religion an important contextual factor for women's civic and political participation.*** In many cases, gender roles are shaped and maintained through religious belief and practices that extend across the spheres of social life. Religious participation can also be closely linked to women's political and civic participation; for example, see Sen (2006) for a case study of Hindu nationalism and political mobilization among women living in Bombay slums. Drawing an artificial distinction between the religious and secular realms of life, and analyzing civic and political participation only with reference to the latter, is likely to limit our understanding of resistance (*e.g.*, Mahmood 2016).

### ***B. Priorities for Future Research***

Resistance to women's civic and political participation requires further research. The vast majority of scholarly research does not study resistance against women's civic and political participation, but instead documents how women's organizations resist different systems of power arrayed against them and evaluates how and why women succeeded.

***Given the interests of USAID, the reviewers therefore suggest the following research priorities:***

- Concept and theory building about all types of resistance, how to operationalize and investigate them, and a careful delineation of their constituent processes. For example, Asoka's "Global Report on the Situation of Women's Human Rights Defenders" (2012) points out that resistance is sometimes ignored or misrecognized because of its entanglement with other aspects such as class, race, or legal status.
- Examining resistance as both an independent and dependent variable.
- Careful causal analysis.
- Multidisciplinary, multi-method, and single studies attentive to context.
- Comparative studies within and across countries and regions that seek some generalizable findings while remaining attentive to context. Some should focus on regions where analysis is sparse, such as Latin America.
- Resistance to women's mobilization. This mobilization is crucial for the passage of sex equality policies, particularly legislation regarding violence against women (*e.g.*, Htun and Weldon 2012).

- Groups and politicians (including women’s groups and politicians) that promote “men’s rights” discourse and movements (Taylor 2008, Jordan 2016, Minaker and Snyder 2006). These actors have the potential to undercut efforts to encourage women’s participation by claiming reverse discrimination against men.
- Resistance that disaggregates women by multiple categories of disadvantage and privilege, and that analyzes how resistance produces and maintains those differences. Given recent research funded by USAID, this research would include disaggregating women by age, gender identity, and sexuality.
- Impact of media on risk of resistance to women’s political and civic participation. All media outlets are under-represented in the research surveyed here. Social media, in particular, has played a key role in offering marginalized populations and social movements a space to share common concerns and mobilize, but it also has become a notorious space for resistance to women’s participation online, particularly for feminists. Applying a gender perspective to USAID’s work with social media might be one avenue for advancing this agenda.
- Cases where resistance has been lacking, was mitigated relatively easily, or dissipated quickly. Researchers might examine, for example, the role of support networks in these cases or if opportunities for participation developed organically within these communities.
- How and why women’s participation persists over time, despite resistance. This might be investigated through inter-generational studies of communities, or through work documenting multiple election cycles of a political constituency.
- Positive spillover effects of women’s civic and political participation that occur without backlash in other sites, as in Afghanistan (Beath *et al.* 2013).

## CONCLUSION

It is vital for USAID to be concerned with strong resistance to women’s civic and political participation. While this review brings the best available scholarly resources to light and derives recommendations from them, ultimately it reveals that there is limited evidence-based literature or scholarly analysis that can offer dependable information about the risk of strong resistance to women who benefit from the intervention strategies highlighted by ODI. Therefore, the reviewers suggest that scholars of diverse disciplines, sometimes working in multidisciplinary teams, conduct research using the full array of methods available and in different contexts to better understand resistance to women’s civic and political participation.

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## APPENDIX A: REVIEW PROCESS

### A. Protocol

**The reviewers designed a protocol to enhance the rigor, transparency, and replicability of this evidence-based literature review by making it systematic.** The protocol served a dual purpose: it required the reviewers to conduct a pilot study that led to greater efficiency, and it ensured that all reviewers met consistently high standards. The reviewers developed the protocol following initial research on how to build a comprehensive literature review about development. Dr. Richard Handler, the director of Global Studies at the University of Virginia (UVA), provided research guidance. Useful, as well, were the bibliographies of reports written for developmental agencies (Isserles 2003, Mahmud 2003, Hickey and Mohan 2004, Mosse 2004, Bateman 2012, DFID 2014, Hagen-Zanker and Mallet 2013, Harrison 2013, Mosse 2013). The process chosen by the reviewers followed Hagen-Zanker and Mallet’s (2013) systematic but flexible review strategy that adheres to the central principles of a systematic review while also being sensitive to time constraints and reflexivity. For Hagen-Zanker and Mallett, (2013) a research protocol requires: 1) establishing research collections for use, 2) generating search strings, 3) an explicit exclusion criteria, and 4) the evaluation of individual sources.

Drawing on a range of interdisciplinary specializations, researchers collected recommendations of databases, search engines, and journals from UVA librarians, and grey literature sources from practitioners and area experts. In consultation with the USAID team, the researchers generated inclusion/exclusion criteria for the project. These inclusions/exclusions clarified which populations, methodologies, sources, and countries would be the focus of the review. For instance, stemming from an approach emphasizing intersectionality, the researchers debated the exclusion of privileged/elite women in developing countries, given that they would not necessarily be the focus of USAID interventions or face the same barriers that women members of marginalized communities face.<sup>7</sup> However, the researchers chose to include elite women given the centrality of resistance to the review and the likelihood that even elite women might be at risk as they are more likely than marginalized women to occupy leadership positions in both civil society and politics.

The reviewers designed search strings according to the seven interventions specified in the 2015 ODI report. The team created a word bank that provided a wide range of synonyms for key terms; each author searched for strong resistance generated in response to a specific intervention identified by ODI. The team used the online data repository Zotero to store sources and organize them by intervention. Team members identified sources by restricting search string words to abstracts, titles, and keywords rather than entire texts, thus ensuring that resistance was a key element of the text. Additionally, bibliographies of exceptionally rich sources were consulted and mined for sources.

### B. Crosschecks and Annotations

All sources found in the initial search were allotted to a team member for the first round of assessment. The allocation was determined by the division of labor as proposed in the protocol, and congruent with

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<sup>7</sup> Research on South Asia and Southeast Asia, for instance, has illustrated that women can rise to power and even national executive office through the “Widow’s Walk,” their familial proximity to men in power. These women therefore face considerably fewer barriers to their political participation, while the “Queen Butterfly” effect ensures that their coming to power does little to benefit other women.

individual areas of specialization. Each team member then assessed initial sources according to the inclusion/exclusion criteria. Excluded sources were reserved for the final bibliography; those retained were then assigned to another team member for a crosscheck. Again, area of expertise informed allocation. Efforts were made to complement these checks as opposed to duplicating them. For example, if a team member fluent in the intervention conducted the first check, someone familiar with the method or region conducted the second check. This ensured that each source was read twice, but from complementary angles. The crosschecks therefore exploited the team's range of disciplinary and thematic expertise. The secondary crosscheck documented brief insights on each source to facilitate efficient annotation, such as notes on methodology or applicability of findings to regions beyond those surveyed.

### *C. Evaluating Sources*

To ensure reliability, the reviewers adapted Joanna Briggs Institute's Qualitative Assessment and Review Instrument (JBI-QARI) to inform their evaluation of qualitative sources and adapted DFID 2013 to inform their evaluation of quantitative sources. Studies that were indeterminate on whether they met the evaluation criteria were excluded from the annotations. Several sources failed to meet the second crosscheck (they were reserved for the final bibliography), thus further winnowing the sources to only the most relevant. The sole exceptions were sources that provided insights into how key concepts—such as risk, resistance, and intersectionality—are treated in the literature. In short, these sources helped guide our overall approach to the project and our conceptual understanding. Team members then drafted annotations, initially by the person whose thematic expertise matched those of the source. The author consulted the notes generated during the crosschecks, and also provided key words identifying the intervention, region, and method for each source. The latter information became the basis for surveying the entire project and evaluating the general state of the field.

### *D. Disagreements and Resolutions*

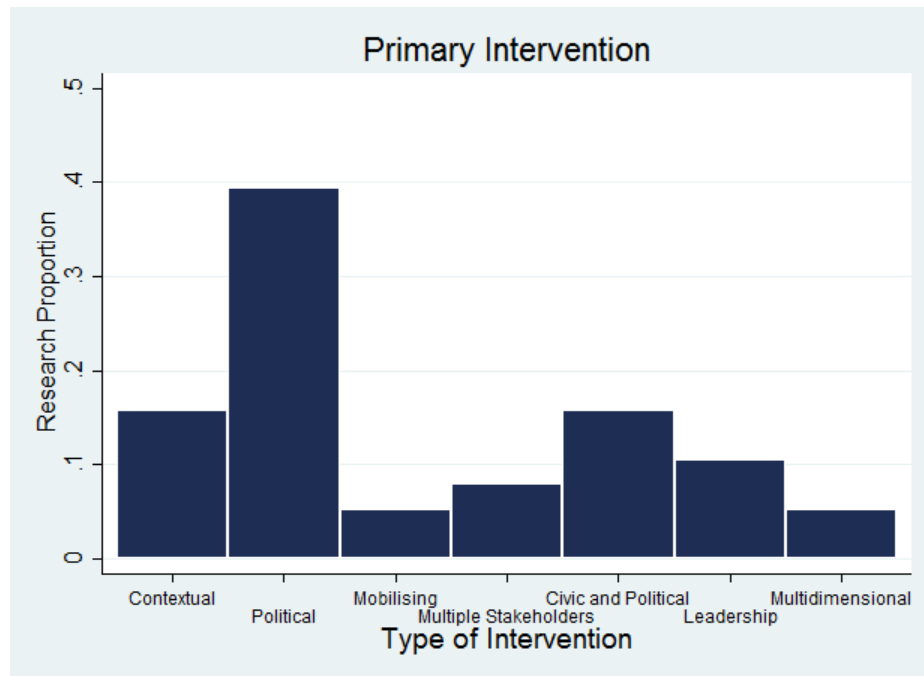
Overall, the reviewers were largely in agreement about the objectives of the review and how to fulfill these objectives. Having met regularly to discuss the progress of the review, any differences that emerged were readily resolved through democratic discussion. To give one example of how the minor differences that arose were resolved: as reviewers were creating the checklists for evaluating each article, one of the anthropologists was concerned that ethnography as a method does not lend itself well to such a technocratic form of evaluation as a checklist. However, another anthropologist maintained that it was still possible to ascertain the criteria the two used to judge the quality of ethnographic research. This list was refined through discussion and eventually finalized in a checklist. This is one example of how multidisciplinary work pushes scholars to make explicit their implicit understandings of what constitutes good scholarship and to convey those understandings to those inside as well as outside the discipline.

At the conclusion of the search, when only a very small body of literature met the search criteria and addressed the research question, the reviewers discussed whether a systematic, flexible search had yielded the results that a less systematic search would have provided. The reviewers were also concerned the list of search terms might not have been exhaustive, and sources that would be relevant to the research question might not have appeared in the results. The word bank was expanded to address this, and the reviewers also drew on their multidisciplinary expertise to think of all possible iterations of a concept. Two of the team members expressed concern that the systematic search did not

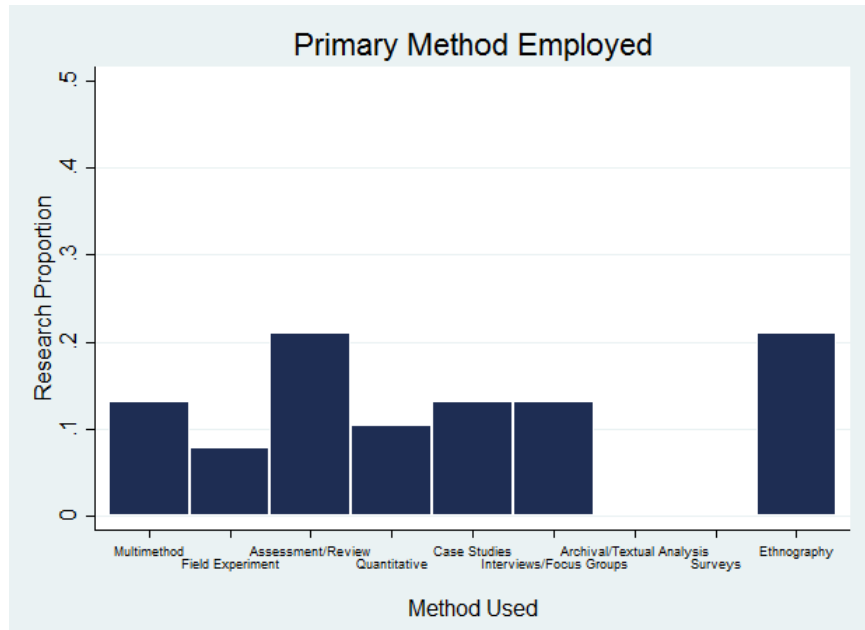
generate works by some of the scholars whose work they had expected to be included in the search. They noted that one alternative to a systematic search would have been to draw on each team member's disciplinary and regional expertise, and consult the footnotes and bibliographies of the work of relevant scholars within each of their fields, to see whose work they cite, and to follow up on the bibliographical trail (a less systematic but nonetheless common method used by many scholars). Ultimately, however, the researchers agreed that the reviewers would have reached the same conclusion: little research has been done and little scholarship has been written on resistance to the effective strategies recommended by ODI.

### E. Types of Sources

Existing research primarily addresses instances of political interventions (quotas almost exclusively), followed by interventions targeting both formal politics and civil society and women's leadership roles; research on contextual, multidimensional, and mobilization interventions comprised only a small portion of the literature we examined (10% or less).



Further, little of this research has a broad base of empirical evidence. About one-quarter of the sources reviewed were themselves reviews of existing (largely theoretical) literature, followed by a predominance of ethnographic, case-study, and interview-based pieces, with only a handful based on quantitative analysis, field experiments, and multiple methods.



Regional gaps were also evident. South Asia alone accounted for one-third of all sources; sub-Saharan Africa close to one-fifth; Central America comprised only 10%; and Latin America, the Middle East and North Africa less than 10% each. Only one-fifth of all literature surveyed made global comparisons and offered some generalizable conclusions.

