



**Report to Congress on Women’s and Girls’
Civic and Political Participation
Section 7019(e) of the Department of State, Foreign Operations, and
Related Programs Appropriations Act, 2023 (Div. K, P.L. 117-328)
and House Report 117-401**

Introduction

With more than half the world’s population under the age of 30, empowering and inspiring all girls and young women to serve as civic and political leaders is an important vehicle for positive change. Worldwide, only [26.5 percent](#) of parliamentarians are women and only [2.6 percent](#) of political representatives are under the age of 30, showing significant gaps in representation of girls and young women’s voices in civic and political spheres. The obstacles that girls and women face when taking on leadership roles are numerous, interlinked, compounding, and rooted in gender inequality.

As [early as age six](#), girls’ levels of ambition and self confidence in their abilities are impacted by gender discrimination, ableism, and harmful stereotypes. Adolescent girls commonly face gender-based violence (GBV), including but not limited to: technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV); child early, and forced marriage and unions (CEFMU); lack of access to quality education; and lack of established pathways, mentors, or role models, amongst other barriers, which collectively limit their ability to engage in civic education or take on leadership roles. At the current rate of progress, it would take [145.5](#) years to achieve gender balance in political participation.

Research shows that countries that provide a safe and enabling environment for women and girls to participate equitably in politics and public life have more inclusive and effective policy outcomes, are more peaceful and stable, and have higher economic growth. The ability of women and girls to participate safely, freely, and equally in political life and in society is a prerequisite for democracy and a cornerstone of U.S. foreign policy. This report articulates U.S. global priorities related to the engagement of adolescent girls in civic and political processes across policy, public diplomacy, and programming efforts.

Coordination: As directed by the U.S. Congress, this strategy has been developed by key stakeholders from offices and bureaus across the Department of State in coordination with USAID. The strategy has also been informed by civil society, adolescent girls from around the world, and members of Congress.

Policy Alignment: The promotion of democracy, human rights, and good governance is deeply integrated into U.S. foreign policy and national security. To empower adolescent girls specifically, and to encourage their safe, full, equal, and meaningful civic and political participation, the United States has integrated cross-cutting democracy and governance, youth, and gender equality priorities into several landmark strategies, policies, and initiatives:

- The [U.S. National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality](#) commits to advancing women and girls' meaningful participation and inclusion in bilateral and multilateral dialogues and processes, with a goal of achieving gender equality.
- The [U.S. Global Strategy to Empower Adolescent Girls](#) tackles barriers that keep adolescent girls from engaging in civic and political life through education, economic activities, skills building, and addressing harmful norms.

- The [**U.S. Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally**](#) identifies “girls and young women” as an at-risk group that will be prioritized in U.S. efforts to address GBV, including child, early, and forced marriage; and acknowledges GBV as a barrier to girls’ and women’s participation in civic, social, and economic life.
- The [**U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security**](#) seeks to promote women and girls’ safety in conflict and crisis, and their meaningful participation in political and security decision-making processes at all levels.
- The [**U.S. Government Strategy for Advancing Protection and Care for Children in Adversity**](#) is a whole-of-government strategy that outlines the U.S. government’s approach to investing in the development, care, dignity, and safety of the world’s most vulnerable children and their families.
- [**The USAID Policy Framework \(2023\)**](#) calls for advancing equitable societies, increasing economic security for women and girls, and empowering women in the political arena.
- [**USAID’s Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Policy**](#) seeks to expand the pipeline of civic-minded and/or politically interested women and girls and create a favorable environment for girls’ representation, leadership, and agency.
- [**USAID’s Youth in Development Policy**](#) aims to increase the collective voice and meaningful participation of youth in local and national systems, including for often marginalized and underserved groups such as adolescent girls and young women ages 10-29.

Strategic Objectives

- 1) **Increase** girls’ and young women’s access to quality, safe, inclusive, and participatory civic education, mentorship, leadership, and skills development opportunities.
- 2) **Address** the unique barriers that prevent girls and young women from participating in civic and political life by promoting an enabling

environment where they can safely exercise their rights, representation, and leadership.

- 3) **Elevate** the voices of girls and young women as agents of change and leaders in their communities, countries, and on the global stage.

Guiding Principles

The Department of State and USAID commit to the following approaches:
Intersectional: Address how aspects of an individual's identity intersect to create different experiences of discrimination and privilege. Consider the historic, sociocultural, and systemic disadvantages and power imbalances members of different groups face; and recognize their strength, resilience, and leadership in developing tailored solutions.

Locally Led/Informed: Build partnerships with local stakeholders, including individuals, communities, networks, organizations, private entities, and governments, and enable them to set their own agendas and co-create solutions. This includes prioritizing meaningful engagement with women and girls themselves; as well as women-led, youth-led, and women's rights organizations, activists, and community influencers; marginalized and underserved communities; and men and boys to achieve lasting change in addressing democratic and peace and security challenges, and advancing gender equality for all.

Safeguarding and Do No Harm Assessments: Commit to principles of safety, respect, confidentiality, and non-discrimination in all our work and regularly assess efforts to not put GBV survivors, program participants, staff, and community members, including those from underserved communities at physical or emotional risk.

Participatory: Partner with girls and young women in a way that is respectful, inclusive, and intentional, whereby power is shared, their respective contributions are valued, and the ideas, perspectives, skills, and strengths of all girls and young women are integrated into the design and delivery of programs, strategies, policies, funding mechanisms, and organizations that affect their lives and their communities, countries, and the world.

Priority Actions

Policy, Diplomacy, and Outreach (PDO):

PDO1: Promote the rights and empowerment of girls and young women in multilateral fora — including the United Nations Security Council, General Assembly and its committees, Human Rights Council, Commission on the Status of Women, and other multilateral institutions at the global and regional levels. Advance political commitments that promote the health, well-being, and human rights of girls and young women.

PDO2: Prioritize high-level, sustained bilateral and regional diplomatic engagement on barriers to the civic and political participation of women and girls, including discriminatory laws and judicial systems, lack of access to or availability of services, and the prevalence of GBV, including CEFMU and TFGBV.

PDO3: Create opportunities for safe, inclusive, ongoing, and meaningful dialogue with girls and young women on democracy, peace and security, human rights, and governance to inform U.S. foreign policy and programming.

PDO4: Continue robust reporting on girls and young women's civic engagement and leadership in social movements, and the issues that limit the civic and political participation of women and girls, including through the Department of State's annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices (Human Rights Reports), Trafficking in Persons Reports, and cables.

Programming (PRG):

PRG1: Invest in comprehensive, multi-sectoral programming that addresses harmful gender norms, and the unique vulnerabilities of girls and young women which prevent them from participating in civic and political life, including investments in prevention and response to GBV, such as school-related gender-based violence (SRGBV), CEFMU, and TFGBV; and investments in the care economy, and tackling related issues such as discrimination in the workforce.

PRG2: Prioritize the ethical and systematic collection of age-, disability- and sex-disaggregated data in U.S. foreign assistance programs, including data collection on violence and exploitation of girls and young women in politics and public life, including in its online manifestations, and efforts to center the lived experiences of all girls and young women.

PRG3: Promote civic education, engagement, and skills building opportunities for girls and young women as part of the cross-sectoral, holistic positive youth development (PYD) approach.

PRG4: Integrate rights awareness, confidence building, networking, safe spaces for girls and young women, media literacy, political knowledge building, and other foundations for civic engagement into new and existing democracy and governance programming.

PRG5: Train girls and young women in core leadership competencies and introduce them to diverse examples of democratic principles through multicultural leadership training and exchanges.

PRG6: Increase intergenerational support and mentorship opportunities for girls and young women interested in engaging in public service and political processes.

PRG7: Work to challenge harmful norms and dynamics that underpin the gap in political empowerment of girls and young women through efforts to help men and boys understand power and privilege, and the impact inequality has on themselves, their families and their communities.

Implementation and Accountability

Implementation and accountability for this *United States Strategy on Women's and Girls' Civic and Political Participation* will be achieved through two reporting channels, coordinated by the Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues and counterparts at the U.S. Department of State: (1) Formal updates will be provided through established reporting processes for relevant U.S. government strategies noted above; and (2) Regular interagency meetings will be established to ensure coordination between USAID and the Department of State.

APPENDIX: Select Examples of United States Government Efforts to Advance Women's and Girls' Civic and Political Participation

Advancing Women's and Girls' Civic and Political Leadership Initiative.

During the 2023 Summit for Democracy (S4D2), the United States committed to expanding the [Advancing Women's and Girls' Civic and Political Leadership initiative](#), which is a USAID-led initiative working to dismantle barriers to the political empowerment of women and girls by building the pipeline of women leaders and facilitating their safe and meaningful participation in political, peacebuilding and transition processes. USAID has identified eight initial focus countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Nigeria, Tanzania, Colombia, Ecuador, Honduras, Kyrgyz Republic, and Yemen. (PRG 1, PRG4).

Co-Chairing the Women, Peace, and Security Focal Points Network. The United States, in partnership with the government of Romania, is the 2023 Co-Chair of the UN Women-led Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network (WPS-FPN), a cross-regional forum to share best practices and experiences to advance the WPS agenda globally. As co-chair, the United States hosted the WPS-FPN Capital Level Meeting in June 2023, bringing together representatives and leaders from over 95 different countries and organizations, including members of Congress and the Administration. (PDO1, PDO2).

Transform Digital Spaces (TRANSFORM). Through TRANSFORM, USAID is piloting practical approaches to preventing, mitigating, and responding to TFGBV in Georgia, Guatemala, and Kenya, with a focus on violence experienced by women in politics and public life. Data collected through this activity will improve our understanding of how TFGBV targeting women in public and political life manifests in a broad variety of local contexts and what strategies can successfully be used to address this global problem.

Transform will use a whole-of-system approach with the understanding that this issue not only impacts individual survivors but is also a tool for repression by anti-democratic actors. The activity will also seek to enable groups working in the civic technology, GBV, democracy and human rights, and women's rights sectors to create bridges among their disciplines and work effectively together to advocate for changes to laws, policies, and norms governing technology and digital spaces. (PRG1, PRG2, PRG4)

USAID-USIP Joint Research on Nonviolent Collective Action. This research, completed in 2022, is one of few studies that have explored the impact of women's and youth participation in the success of nonviolent campaigns. USIP conducted case studies of women's and youth participation in social movements and online survey experiments in Nigeria, India, and South Africa to assess how women's and youth participation influenced how audiences perceive protest events. (PDO4, PRG2)

CREDIBLE. USAID's CREDIBLE activity works in partnership with youth-serving and youth-led local organizations in the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, and Peru by building resilience to manipulative narratives through energizing local media and the broader information space with youth and women's voices and perspectives. By improving these populations' media consumption behaviors (demand) and the capacity of actors to produce youth relevant media content (supply), CREDIBLE and its partners leverage their ability to impact the information ecosystem in an integral way (PDO3, PRG3, PRG4).

Youth Democracy Network. At S4D2, the United States announced the [global Youth Democracy Network](#), in collaboration with the Community of Democracies. With the launch anticipated in early 2024, the Network will develop and strengthen intergenerational ties and increase peer-to-peer connections so that the next generation of leaders can work together to foster strong democracies and respect for human rights. This flagship initiative, along with many others, reflects the U.S. Government's deep commitment to advancing the civic and political participation of girls and young women in democracy, human rights, and governance. (PDO2, PDO3)

Support Her Empowerment – Girls’ Resilience, Enterprise, and Technology Initiative (SHE’s GREAT!). SHE’S GREAT! is the Secretary’s Office of Global Women’s Issues (S/GWI) flagship girls and youth program, currently implemented by IREX in six countries (Georgia, Guatemala, Jordan, Kyrgyz Republic, Saint Lucia, and Ukraine). It seeks to challenge and overcome harmful gender norms imposed on youth to counter the potential lifelong negative impacts on individual education, income, health, physical safety, and well-being. It engages girls, youth allies, families, schools, and communities to support an empowering “safe space” curriculum on gender equality, access to STEM skills, mentorship, youth-driven projects to realize healthy empowerment, and an alumni “ambassadors” program. (PRG1, PRG3, PRG6)

The Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse (Global Partnership): Recognizing the tremendous impact of TFGBV on adolescent girls, the US has prioritized collaboration with other partner governments, UN agencies, and civil society to drive action to address TFGBV. In the Global Partnership’s 2023 roadmap, the Global Partnership acknowledges the direct effects of TFGBV on youth and the leadership role they play in finding solutions to address it. The Global Partnership seeks to integrate youth voices, expertise, and experiences across its strategic objectives on policy, programs, and data. The Roadmap also describes and seeks to address the intergenerational effect of TFGBV and how witnessing or experiencing gender-based online harassment and abuse can discourage political and other ambitions of girls and young women. (PDO2, PDO3).

Global LGBTQI+ Inclusive Democracy and Empowerment (GLIDE) Fund. The GLIDE fund is a new program under the Global Equality Fund that will facilitate the participation and leadership of LGBTQI+ community members in democratic institutions. (PRG4)

Powered by the People Initiative. USAID recently launched the Powered by the People initiative, which will assist nonviolent social movements by providing direct and accessible support that addresses the needs, opportunities, and challenges identified by activists and other civic actors engaged in nonviolent collective action. Through this support, PxP will increase coordination, exchange, and strengthen the agency, resiliency, and efficacy of activists and people-powered social movements that advance human rights, social justice, democracy, and inclusive development. (PRG 5, PRG 6)

Inter-Community Girls Empowerment Activity. USAID is partnering with the Government of Egypt to implement awareness-raising activities related to issues of women's empowerment, including changing attitudes toward gender-based violence, such as CEFMU, female genital mutilation/cutting (FGM/C). The activity is being implemented in 12 villages in Upper Egypt, where CEFMU is notably the most prevalent. Young women from different social and cultural backgrounds participate in awareness-raising sessions on key issues such as age of marriage, education, health and wellbeing, violence against women, and sexual harassment. (PRG3)

Prevention and Protection of Adolescents from Child Marriage in Mauritania. CEFMU threatens the futures of all children, particularly girls, by depriving them of their rights to make decisions about their relationships and lives and increases their vulnerability to violence, discrimination, and abuse; poor sexual, reproductive, maternal, and mental health outcomes hinder human development, violate international laws and treaties, and affect girls' security. USAID's activities are building a protective environment for adolescent girls (10-19 years old) at risk of early marriage or already married, and intentionally building their agency so that they are empowered to promote peace and social cohesion in their communities. The project reinforces girls' life skills, facilitates access to GBV skills, reproductive health services, and psychosocial support, and promotes access to socio-economic opportunities. (PRG 1, PRG3)

Reducing Conflict through Indigenous Women and Youth Activity:

Honduras is beset by multiple, overlapping forms of conflict, primarily around natural resource management (NRM), marginalization, human rights violations, and violence against indigenous groups. Indigenous women, girls, and boys are disproportionately affected because they often lack full recognition, protection and enjoyment of their rights to ancestral lands or environmental protection. They also face the gendered impacts of NRM, stemming from patriarchal norms, which perpetuate discrimination, harassment, and stigmatization. To address these issues and support a safe and secure environment, USAID is empowering indigenous women and youth to understand and advocate for their rights; building their capacity in conflict resolution and early warning to more effectively mitigate NRM-related and other types of conflicts; and is bolstering women's and youths' leadership to support holistic and inclusive policy responses. (PRG4, PRG8)