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Violence Against Women in Politics[1]

Abstract

This chapter addresses various aspects of this emerging research area, exploring concepts, theories, and data related to the study of violence against women in politics. It occurs within the political sphere but specifically targets women. It is used to reinforce traditional social and political structures by aiming women leaders who challenge patriarchy and the prevailing social expectations and norms. In many societies, such practices are marginalized, naturalized, depoloticized and remained invisible. When female politicians are attacked for their political views alone, therefore, this is not a case of violence against women in politics. Ambiguity emerges, however, due to the fact that the means for attacking female politicians often relies on gendered scripts, focusing on women's bodies and their traditional social roles, primarily as mothers and wives, to deny or undercut women's competence in the political sphere. Symbolic and semiotic violence in politics can be effective in sustaining women's oppression because it is subtle, euphemized, invisible. Even if women recognize these acts as exercises of power, they still do not name it as violence, even in societies with greater levels of gender equality. The concept of semiotic violence refers to the use of language, images and symbols as a means in purpose to marginalize and disqualify women as political actors. Often normalized, these dynamics serve to maintain gender hierarchies, undermining democracy and eroding the possibilities for women's political empowerment.

Key Words: Women, Politics, Semiotic Violence, Symbolic Violence, Sexism, Misogyny

Introduction

Opportunities for women to participate in politics, as voters, activists, and politicians, have been viewed as a positive development for women and for democracy. Recent gains, however, are challenged by a growing number of reports of physical attacks, intimidation, harassment, semiotic violence directed at politically active women, often with the aim of deterring their participation or rendering them less effective as political actors. This chapter will address various aspects of this emerging research area, exploring concepts, theories, and data related to the study of violence against women in politics.

Researchers recently have focused on the intersecting phenomena of political and election violence, repression of citizen's political participation, and discrimination and even violence against women in the public sphere. The resulting set of academic and policy papers have been prolific and provocative, yet characterized by numerous conceptual and methodological contradictions and gaps.

Violence against women in politics can deteriorate political selection and politician quality and the damaging impacts might be particularly relevant for women's representation (Dal Bó, Dal Bó, Tella 2006; Čičkarić, 2016). It serves to reproduce and maintain patriarchal values, hegemonic masculinity, undermine democracy and eroding the possibilities for women's full political empowerment.

The key factors that have to be invovlved in systematic research on violence against women in politics are:

- the context of violence against women in politics
- the nature and extent of violence against women in politics, the motive behind such violence, and the effect of this violence
- the awareness of violence against women in politics by identifying and disseminating best practices in combating it.

The worrying rise in aggression and violence against women in politics is correlated with the increased number of women engaged in political and public life. The questions are - does violence against politicians occur in response to political

empowerment and activity of women, and does more women in politics lead to a reduction in discrimination and inequality? As a misogynistic phenomenon, violence against women in politics has deep roots in the domination of hegemonic masculinity and toxic masculinity in patriarchy.

Definition of the Concept

Violence against women in politics occurs within the political sphere but that specifically targets women. It is used to reinforce traditional social and political structures by targeting women leaders who challenge patriarchy and the prevailing social expectations and norms. Being female explains both why violence occurs and the particular forms that it takes, with violence against women being used as a mechanism to keep women out of politics and activism, to limit opportunities to learn and work, and to hamper their capabilities to organize and claim their rights. In many societies, such practices are naturalized, including through gender stereotyping, leading them to be viewed as non-political and to remain largely underreported. Yet violence against women in politics is a problem in all countries, affecting women in every socio-economic group and life stage.

In 2011 The United Nations General Assembly first called for zero tolerance for violence against female candidates and elected officials. In 2012, Bolivia became the first country in the world to criminalize political violence and harassment against women, in response to a more than decade-long campaign by locally elected women to document the numerous injuries and abuses they confronted. In 2016 and 2017, global action on this issue began to accelerate and The National Democratic Institute launched the NotTheCost campaign to stop violence against politically active women. The Inter-Parliamentary Union undertook the first global study of sexism, violence, and harassment against women parliamentarians (IPU 2016). UN Women together with the United Nations Development Programme released a programming guide on preventing violence against women in elections (UN Women/ UNDP 2017).

Political gender equality is not guaranteed by parity in positions of power or influence over policy: equally central are the conditions under which politicians work. Being able to carry out political functions free from fear of violence and threats is a fundamental prerequisite for political representation. Researchers have raised the concern that political violence and intimidation seems to be targeting women more intensively than men, hence posing a severe yet still largely understudied obstacle to political gender equality (Krook, Restrepo Sanín 2016).

Jennifer Piscopo orients her research agenda towards greater conceptual clarity and methodological sophistication (Piscopo 2016:445). First, she argue for analytically distinguishing violence from discrimination and political and electoral violence from societal and domestic violence. Though incidents may overlap in practice, this distinction drives more effective policy interventions. Second, she intends to sharpen distinctions among violence's motivations and objectives, insisting upon differentiating between political violence that is gender-differentiated versus political violence that is gender-motivated. The former captures political violence that men and women experience differentially for reasons of gender (i.e., voter intimidation in which male citizens are physically threatened while female citizens are sexually assaulted) whereas the latter conceptualizes political violence that aims to remove certain participants from the public sphere because of their gender. Third, she use these distinctions to delineate a forward research agenda defined by conceptual precision and appropriate methodological approaches and indicators. Her conceptual schema indicates how scholars can investigate questions, such as whether violence against female politicians indicates a backlash to women's political empowerment, or a longstanding phenomenon previously overlooked by researchers' focused on male violence (Piscopo 2016).

The fast-growing literature on gender aspects of political violence has highlighted that different tactics of intimidation and forms of attacks are used against female and male politicians. Krook and Restrepo Sanín have made important theoretical contributions by conceptualising female politicians' gendered experiences of political violence (Krook, Restrepo Sanín 2016: 463). Up until now, studies have been based on self-recruited surveys and narratives from women

without comparison to men's experiences. A cross-national research project in the UK, New Zealand, Australia, and Norway found that between 80 and 95 per cent of parliamentarians had experienced some form of violence from citizens at some point, hence underlining the urgency of the issue (James et al. 2016). Measuring life-time victimization, however, does not shed light on how frequ. ently politicians experience violence. Furthermore, these studies have not thoroughly analysed differences between women and men.

Research on the gendered nature of political institutions have connected sexist treatment of female parliamentarians, including micro aggressions and belittlement as well as sexual harassment and violence, to masculinised culture being informally institutionalised in political organisations (Collier, Raney 2018; Erikson, Josefsson 2018; Krook 2017; Čičkarić 2016). While these studies offer important insights to inequalities in politicians' immediate environments, this does not necessarily capture the majority of experiences of political violence since many perpetrators are located and act outside of these structures.

Previous research on gender aspects of violence against politicians has demonstrated that perpetrators use different forms of violence against women and men. Krook and Restrepo Sanín maintain that gendered scripts influence the way female politicians are attacked by adversaries: perpetrators focus on women's bodies and traditional roles as mothers and wives to undermine women's roles as competent politicians (Krook, Restrepo 2016). The sexualised dimension of attacks against female politicians is evident in online environments (Bardall 2011; Bjarnegård 2017). The few studies that have compared women's and men's experiences have established that sexual and psychological violence is more commonly used against female voters and candidates, whereas men experience more physical violence and property damage (Bardall 2011; Bjarnegård 2017). The existing body of research has largely focused on how, rather than how much, politicians are attacked. It relies on data that consists of convenience samples and a mixture of voters, candidates and political activists. However, the impact of politician's gender for the propensity to be targeted with political violence is not necessarily equal across different roles or hierarchical levels.

Bias Against Women in Politics

Gender biased attitudes and beliefs have been identified as principal obstacles for women in power spheres such as politics. In essence, stereotypes about desirable leaders are inconsistent with stereotypes about women (Bohnet 2016; Brescoll, Uhlmann 2008; Rudman et al. 2012). Many studies find that women have to be more qualified and skilled than men in order to be perceived and treated as viable political candidates (Fox, Lawless 2010; Hayes, Lawless 2015). The fact that female politicians worry more than male about making mistakes seems to be related to a lower tolerance for women's mistakes and higher standards for female politicians' conduct (Erikson, Josefsson 2018; Hayes, Lawless 2015).

The finding that women who demonstrate important leadership qualities such as confidence, assertiveness and ambition are seen as unlikeable, in contrast to men who are rewarded for demonstrating the same qualities and behaviour, is well-established (Rudman et al. 2012). Similarly, women are conferred lower status if they express anger, whereas the same behaviour gives men higher status (Brescoll, Uhlmann 2008). The disadvantage of psychological gender bias for women in politics is also evident in voters' treatment of candidates: there is a general tendency to dislike leaders if they are perceived as power-hungry but only female candidates are punished for appearing to be power-seeking (Smith et al. 2006). This literature review indicates that women in politics are evaluated less favourably when isplaying similar characteristics as men, and spur particularly negative feelings and reactions when they behave in ways pertaining to exercising leadership.

When female politicians are attacked for their political views alone, therefore, this is not a case of violence against women in politics. Ambiguity emerges, however, due to the fact that the means for attacking female politicians often relies on gendered scripts, focusing on women's bodies and their traditional social roles, primarily as mothers and wives, to deny or undercut women's competence in the political sphere. When adversaries rely on gendered imagery or stereotypes to attack female opponents, the act blends into a case of violence against women in politics, as it suggests that women per se do not belong in the political realm. These

actions can have a powerful impact, because they are not directed solely towards one woman. They also seek to intimidate other female politicians, deter women who might consider a political career, and even more insidiously, communicate to society as a whole that women should not participate (Krook, Resetrepo Sanin 2016:136).

In this respect, violence against women in politics shares important points of contact with hate crimes, using mechanisms of power and oppression against people with a particular identity as a means to reaffirm what are perceived to be threatened hierarchies. Like hate crimes, acts of violence against women in politics are message intended to deny equal access to rights and to create a ripple effect that heightens the sense of vulnerability among other members of the community. Yet a key challenge arises, in both cases, from the fact that victims may not experience the same sense of harm. Indeed, some female politicians may have naturalized these types of behaviors as simply the cost of doing politics, or they may deny the problem, concerned to deflect charges that they are not coping, in fear of justifying claims that women do not belong in politics.

Symbolic and Semiotic Violence

Symbolic violence operates at the level of portrayal and representation, seeking to erase or nullify women's presence in political office. Such behaviors are only peripherally theorized as violence in existing NGO reports on violence against women in politics. Yet recent studies on misogyny and sexist media coverage lend support for conceptualizing certain activities as forms of aggression, harassment and outright discrimination (Mršević 2016; Sawer 2013). These acts, we argue, cannot be reduced to healthy media criticism or rude behavior by colleagues and opponents. Negative treatment becomes violence when it entails fundamental disrespect for human dignity, like producing and distributing highly sexualized and derogatory images, using social media to incite violent acts, or not recognizing, or explicitly denying the existence of a female politician for the simple fact of being a woman.

Symbolic violence was theorized by Bourdieu as discipline used against another to confirm that individual's placement in a social hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1984). As such, symbolic violence can be more powerful than physical violence because it is culturally embedded, making these forms of violence look or feel right. Symbolic violence can be effective in sustaining women's oppression because it is subtle, euphemized, invisible, such that even when some women recognize these acts as exercises of power, they may not be believed, even in societies with greater levels of gender equality. Symbolic violence is most evident when it involves sexual objectification, like highly sexualized media and social representations. The form and content of symbolic violence vary more widely than other types, physical, economic and psychological, but it is present in all types of society. While physical violence may be most appropriately addressed through legal channels, the other three forms may require different types of interventions, alongside or separately from legislative proposals.

Furthermore, Mona Lena Krook has developed the concept of semiotic violence, arguing in favor of recognizing a fifth type of violence against women in politics and referring to the use of language, images, and other symbols as a means to marginalize and exclude women as political actors (Krook, 2017:79). Drawing on research in a variety of disciplines, she has developed the concept of semiotic violence and illustrate how it operates in practice using examples from around the world. Often normalized, these dynamics serve to maintain gender hierarchies, undermining democracy and eroding the possibilities for women's full political empowerment. Semiotic violence comprises images and language render women incompetent and/or invisible. This phenomenon is connected with taken-for-granted constructions which naturalize and rationalize violence against women in politics. There are two types of semiotic violence, everyday treths for women in public life and rendering women incompetent and invisible in politics. Silences women's vices in politics is structural (stratify opportunities by group), cultural (justify inequality, maltreatment), and simbolic (restore hiyerarchy of domination, acceptance/complicity of dominated) (Krook, 2017:80).

It is important to make a difference between genderd political violence and sexism in institutions. Violence is forceful act

used to disrupt regular political process – carried out with explic-
ite intent to affect politics – targets political actors (polititions,
candidates and voters). Everyday sexism enforces mail domi-
nance and perpetuate gender inequality which occures in most
arenas, not exclusive in politics, happens not just to disrupt polit-
ical process and targets women, because they are women not
political actors.

**Are Sexism and Misogyny
the Cost of Doing Politics?**

The first comprehensive empirical analysis of gender pat-
terns in violence against politicians, based on three waves of
survey data on 8000 local-level politicians, has showed that the
most pronounced gender gap in violence exists among politi-
cians high in the political hierarchy (Hakansson 2019). Female
mayors experience far more violence than any other politician.
Further, women receive a higher penalty than men for media vis-
ibility and for supporting minorities. This suggests that perpe-
trators of political violence are biased towards targeting wom-
en, particularly more powerful and visible women. The findings
have important implications for understanding the personal
price paid for holding positions of political power, and how it
differs by gender.

While women experience only marginally more violence
than men as politicians in general, in the group of politicians
highest in the political hierarchy women experience substantial-
ly more violence than men. The risk of violence exposure in-
creases with the level of power for both women and men, but
more dramatically so for women: the higher the level of power,
the greater the gender gap in violence exposure (Hakansson
2019). Much in line with these findings, furthermore visibility in
media is more highly correlated with violence exposure for fe-
male politicians than male, and indications that women are pe-
nalised more than men for substantively representing minori-
ties. This suggests that perpetrators of political violence are
biased towards targeting women.

Why women are still such a threat to men in power? Is it because women may change the way politics is done? Or, is it because men have too much invested in their own dominance of the public sphere both financially and culturally? A global survey from the Inter-Parliamentary Union found that 81.8% of the responding women parliamentarians had suffered some form of psychological violence, including 44.4% who said they had received threats of death, rape, beatings or abduction during their parliamentary term (IPU 2016). Such is the phenomenon that United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/73/148 (17 December 2018) explicitly puts the bonus on legislative authorities and political parties to adopt specific measures stating zero tolerance for violence against women in politics.

Sexism and misogyny are tools to keep in check the masculine image of political leadership. The more women there are in politics, the greater the threat to his traditional understanding of decision-making. The fundamental view is that white, heterosexual, economically privileged men should make all decisions, on behalf of all people. When women also become decision-makers, this worldview is challenged. The easiest way to return things to normal is to discredit and delegitimise those women. Sexists and misogynists have made an art form of shaming women in politics.

The same Inter Parliamentary Union Report found that over 60% of those who had been subjected to sexist behaviour and/or violence believed those acts had been intended primarily to dissuade them and their female colleagues from continuing in politics. There are similar strains in the discussion on 'merit' and the under-representation of women in politics, particularly among conservative politicians. When men consciously ignore the significant barriers that exist to women's entry in the political arena, whether they are financial, cultural, or political, they are rationalising their own disproportionate power. Political violence operates involving verbal and physical challenges to create an atmosphere of fear in order to achieve political goals. It is employed in authoritarian regimes as a tool of repression, and in democratic ones, it challenges core values of the political system.

New Research Directions

Existing research primarily examines dynamics of violence and harassment in relation to citizens, voters, and activists. Most of this work is conducted at the aggregate level, focusing on countries rather than on individual experiences, with a strong bias towards reporting on physical acts of violence taking place in the public sphere (Gillies 2011; Opitz, Fjelde, Höglund 2013). The rise of social media has also been identified as a key factor in an upsurge of abuse levelled at female politicians on platforms like Twitter and Facebook. The new area of research focuses on violence and harassment against marginalized groups in politics, with the perceived aim of depressing their political participation. Most of this literature is related to the case of women. This work first emerged from the observations of practitioners, noting a troubling rise in reports of assault, intimidation, and abuse directed at female political actors.

A 2011 report by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems found significant gender differences in experiences of electoral violence: while male victims typically experienced physical violence taking place in the public sphere, female voters most often reported intimidation and psychological abuse (Bardall 2011). Data from the IPU confirms the importance of looking beyond physical abuse as an indicator of political violence: while 25% of female MPs had experienced some form of physical violence in the course of their work as parliamentarians, more than 80% had suffered psychological violence, more than 30% had been targets of economic violence, and more than 20% had experienced some form of sexual violence (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016). Research by Amnesty International on Twitter abuse against women MPs in the UK finds that women across the political spectrum are targets of online violence and intimidation. Female MPs of color, however, receive 30% more abuse than their white counterparts (Dhrodia 2017). Together with IPU's finding that young women in parliament are particularly targeted for harassment, these results indicate a need for both a gendered and an intersectional perspective on violence against politicians.

There is a need to develop and expand new directions in research on violence against female political actors. Institutional

responses to violence gainst women in politics is very important question. For example Canada and the United Kingdom, both countries have developed relatively new rules that deal explicitly with harassment in politics. In 2014, the Canadian House of Commons became one of the first legislatures in the world to do so when it introduced a new sexual harassment protection policy for parliamentary staffers of MPs. The next year, it adopted a new MP-to-MP Code of Conduct on Sexual Harassment and in 2018, the legislature passed a law extending sexual harassment protections to all federal employees (Collier, Raney 2018). In July 2018, the UK Parliament adopted an Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme to address bullying and harassment in British politics and a few months later, a report on bullying of House of Commons staff is released. This legislative action taken on violence against women in politics varies across spaces and time particularly in its effectiveness and substantive responsiveness to women. It also reveals how pre-existing power hierarchies and gendered rules embedded within political institutions can work to undermine efforts to make legislatures safer workplaces for women across parliamentary contexts.

To answer the question how interpret, prevent and punish abuses suffered by women political actors, there is a need to disaggregate political violence into motives, forms, and impact (Bardall, Bjarnegård, Piscopo 2017). Gendered motives appear when perpetrators use violence to preserve hegemonic men's control of the political system: here, the motive is misogyny, and the targets are usually women. Yet gendered roles and beliefs can shape the forms and impact of political violence, without misogyny motivating the violence itself. Gendered forms emphasize how gender structures the means through which men and women commit and experience political violence (for instance, women are targeted sexually and men are targeted physically). Disaggregating forms, motives, and impacts offers theoretical and methodological improvements over prior approaches. It comprises the separation of the structural violence of misogyny, indignities and attacks women experience because they are women, from political violence, the abuses women suffer because perpetrators wish to disrupt politics, elections, or governance.

Conclusion

To generate public awareness and support for change, women's organisations and groups have to create partnerships and networks to monitor, document and address violence against women in politics. Mobilizing mainstream and social media may be a powerful means for exposing and combating violence against women in politics. Social media can be an especially powerful to expose acts of violence and garner support for projects to empower women in politics. Programming funded by international organizations provides gender training for journalists and recruits female reporters to engage in political reporting as a double-pronged strategy to enhance gender-sensitivity in media coverage, including heightened attention to acts of violence against female politicians. Training programs for female candidates can also address how to decrease vulnerability and respond effectively to on-line attacks. In addition to working to secure public pledges from political elites to ensure women's safety during elections, gender equality concerns can be integrated into electoral observation missions.

Political parties can also take a number of concrete steps to tackle this problem. One is by issuing declarations of principle and revising internal party regulations to introduce a zero-tolerance policy for perpetrators of sexual violence and harassment of women in politics.

Other initiatives include rules against sexism, racism, and bullying in party meetings, as well as brochures and handbooks produced and distributed by women's party organizations that offer strategies for recognizing and counteracting techniques used against women in politics. And finally, all actors at the global, national, and local levels should take steps to prevent, treat and punish violence against women in politics.

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Sažetak

U ovom poglavlju se govori o različitim aspektima relativno novog područja u kome se istražuju koncepti, teorije i praksa koja se odnosi na nasilja nad ženama u politici. Ova vrsta nasilja se događa unutar političke sfere i posebno je usmerena na žensku populaciju. Koristi se za jačanje tradicionalnih društvenih i političkih struktura i vrednosti i usmerena je pretežno na liderke i žene na vodećim pozicijama u upravljanju i odlučivanju. U mnogim društvima takve se prakse neutralizuju, uključujući rodnu stereotipizaciju, depolitizuju i najčešće ne prijavljuju. Kada se političarke napadaju zbog svojih političkih stavova, ne može se govoriti o nasilju nad ženama u politici. Međutim, problem nastaje kada se političarke diskvalifikuju, vređaju i omalovažavaju korišćenjem i zloupotrebom obrazaca rodnog identiteta, ženskog tela i tradicionalne uloge majke i supruge, kako bi potkopale kompetencije i efikasnost ženskog aktivizma u političkoj sferi. Simboličko ili semiotičko nasilje vrlo uspešno reprodukuje žensku opresiju jer je suptilno, eufemizirano, nevidljivo, tako da čak i mnoge žene ne prepoznaju ovu vrstu nasilja i to u društvima sa višim stepenom rodne ravnopravnosti. Koncept semiotičkog nasilja uključuje upotrebu jezika, slika i simbola kao sredstava za margalizaciju i diskvalifikovanje žena kao političkih aktera. Često normalizovana i opšteprihvaćena, ova dinamika nasilja služi održavanju rodne hijerarhije, potkopavajući temelje demokratskog društva i umanjujući mogućnost za političko osnaživanje žena.

Ključne riječi: žene, politika, simboličko nasilje, semiotičko nasilje, seksizam, mizoginija