

How is Political Violence Gendered? Disentangling Motives, Forms, and Impacts

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Abstract

How is political violence gendered? We connect the traditional political violence literature's emphasis on categorizing attacks to the gender and politics literature's analysis of the barriers to women's political participation. Our framework separates gendered political violence into three elements. *Gendered motives* appear when perpetrators use violence to preserve hegemonic men's control of politics. *Gendered forms* emphasize how gender roles and tropes differentially shape men's and women's experiences of violence. *Gendered impacts* capture the subjective meaning-making processes that occur as different audiences react to political violence. This approach offers researchers and policymakers greater analytic precision regarding how political violence is gendered.

Keywords

gender, political violence, political participation, elections, conflict studies

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The dramatic expansion of women's political participation during the last decades has pushed scholars to consider how women's presence (or absence) alters the form, nature, and content of politics (Baldez, 2010; Beckwith, 2010; Franceschet et al., 2012). Yet many topics within political science still lack a gender perspective, particularly the relationship between political participation and violence. Political violence violates human rights, impedes democracy from developing, consolidating or flourishing, and undermines the relationships of fairness, transparency, and trust upon which good governments are built. Studies of political violence traditionally took a narrow view, privileging physical assault and focusing on conflict settings or regime transitions. Yet if political violence circumscribes women's participation in ways not previously understood—because studies of

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political violence traditionally measure men's experiences or because the barriers women face do not always register as violence—then conclusions about democratic quality and integrity may be biased.

Certainly, scholars in the area of feminist security studies have documented the gendered effects of civil war (e.g. Cohen, 2016) and the roles played by women as combatants, survivors, and peacebuilders (e.g. Davies and True, 2019). Similarly, comparative politics scholars applying a gender lens have recognized that violence differentially affects men's and women's participation in new democracies (e.g. Hadzic and Tavits, 2019; Tripp, 2015). But until recently, researchers have paid less attention to the gendered aspects of political violence in more "mundane" settings—meaning violence that disrupts the regular practices of holding elections and governing, disruptions which occur in both unstable and stable regimes. By contrast, gender and politics scholars have analyzed the resistance and backlash to women's political participation that occurs *because* they are women (Sen et al., 2019). Some have labeled this phenomenon violence against women in politics, or VAWIP (Krook, 2017; Krook and Restrepo Sanin, 2016, 2019), a term that has become increasingly popular among practitioners (e.g. Ballington et al., 2017; Hubbard and DeSoi, 2016; Huber and Kammerud, 2017; Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), 2016; ParlAmericas, n.d.). Yet whether these approaches constitute competing or complementary frameworks remains poorly understood. When politically active women face barriers to their participation, is it political violence, violence against women, or both—and how do we know? If political violence encompasses a larger set of harms in a wider set of places, how is such violence gendered? This article brings together two separate strands of scholarship: work on political violence that seeks to categorize discrete attacks, and work from gender and politics that focuses on documenting the barriers to women's political participation. In doing so, we offer a new framework for identifying the gendered dimensions of political violence, broadly understood as any violence that impedes the regular unfolding of political processes.

Recent high-profile cases demonstrate how the choice of frameworks affects the explanation of the event. British Member of Parliament Jo Cox was murdered by a white supremacist in June 2016. Was her attacker motivated by outrage at Cox's pro-immigrant views (political violence) or her temerity to enter a man's space as a woman (VAWIP)? The answer matters for the policy response. Activists and policymakers focusing on violence against women will look to end the mistreatment women face in political spaces (as seen in the National Democratic Institute's #NotTheCost campaign). By contrast, those concerned with political violence might establish security measures that take more comprehensive views of risk (as exemplified in the British Parliament's new task force to investigate on-line threats against all MPs). Yet both responses might be necessary, suggesting that the political violence approach and the VAWIP approach cannot remain in their siloes. We link the two, arguing that the VAWIP approach shows how gender can *motivate* attacks, while the political violence approach identifies how gender could further appear in the *form* or *impact* of violence.

Our framework thus argues that political violence can be gendered in multiple but distinct ways. *Gendered motives* appear when perpetrators use violence to preserve hegemonic men's control of the political system. Across the globe, men who belong to their country's structurally dominant cultural, ethnic, or religious group hold most political offices (Hughes, 2011). Actors who use violence to resist devolving political power to those outside the hegemonic male group (meaning women, but also non-dominant men and gay, queer, non-binary, and trans individuals) are committing political violence for

gendered reasons. In the case of women, their political activity defies traditional gender roles and norms, and those committing violence in response to this transgression have misogyny as their motivation (Manne, 2017).

Yet gendered roles, beliefs, and attitudes can shape the forms and impact of political violence, even if perpetrators are not centrally motivated by preserving hegemonic men's control of political power. *Gendered forms* show that gender structures how men and women perpetrate and experience political violence, regardless of whether gender appears in the motive. Both women and men experience violence specifically designed to inhibit their participation. Yet when women are more likely to be attacked sexually and men physically (Bardall, 2011, 2013), beliefs and attitudes about gender—what Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2016) call “gendered scripts”—shape the form of the attack, even if the motives are something else, such as repressing dissent or intimidating the opposition.

Gendered impacts capture how audiences understand the gender dimensions of political violence, even if these understandings differ from motivations and forms. Jo Cox's assailant expressed his intention to defend white (British) supremacy, but “a substantial portion of the community perceived that the incident was motivated by gender bias” (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2019: 12). Cox's colleagues and the broader public located her assassination on the spectrum of abuses that women MPs endure in person and online. Separating impact from motive and form reminds researchers that violence has subjective as well as objective interpretations, and that effective solutions depend on responding to collective processes of meaning-making around violence.

Our framework rests on two fundamental points of departure. First, following feminist contributions to international relations, we posit that most political violence is gendered. However, traditional approaches to conflict have not always examined how. Revealing what is gendered about political violence depends on comparing women and men, as gender usually appears in the differences between what men versus women experience. Furthermore, by focusing on gender, and not just women, our framework encompasses the gendered ideas about masculinity and femininity that place hegemonic men not just above women, but also above non-hegemonic men and non-heteronormative individuals. At the same time, academics and practitioners thus far have emphasized women's experiences, and our analysis likewise prioritizes the gendered hierarchy that places men over women.

Second, we connect the political violence literature to literature from comparative politics concerned with gendered differences in political participation. In order to do so, we separate political violence from structural violence. Attacks designed to disrupt the daily unfolding of political processes are different from the ever-present institutions, behaviors, and practices that enforce gender hierarchies (Sen et al., 2019). Norms that render women subordinate and “less-than,” and the misogynistic desire to punish women who violate these norms (Manne, 2017), fuel the countless harms that befall women in public and private spaces, from dirty jokes to sexual assault. Similarly, non-dominant men and others oppressed by gender hierarchies also experience discriminatory practices designed to keep them subordinate. In this (and other ways), gender saturates the political and social world, creating systems of power that are inherently harmful.

Yet gender does not operate uniformly and consistently. Establishing *how* gender operates within political and social structures requires careful empirical scrutiny (Baldez, 2010). We focus on obtaining greater analytic precision over how gender shapes one aspect of politics: attacks and harms designed to disrupt the political process. The policing of the gendered order can motivate political violence just as it motivates structural

violence. However, our distinction between gendered motives, on the one hand, and gendered forms and gendered impacts, on the other, indicates that not *all* political violence that depresses women's (and others') political participation happens for structural reasons. Not all political violence occurs because actors wish to enforce or reinforce women's (and others') subordination.

To build our argument, we proceed as follows. First, we review the literature from international relations and comparative politics that connects gender, politics, and violence. We highlight the strengths and limitations of the traditional political violence approach and the VAWIP approach, showing how each generates different interpretations. Second, we present our schema of gendered political violence, demonstrating how separating among forms, motives, and impacts yields a more comprehensive, nuanced, and usable framework. Third, we map each element and propose how to conceptualize and research it. A framework of gendered political violence that accounts for motives, forms, and impacts improves analytic precision; is well suited for studying the myriad contexts where violence shapes political contestation; and allows scholars and policymakers to design responses that more effectively protect citizens' security and women's rights.

Violence, Gender, and Politics: Concepts and Approaches in Debate

Our definition of the "violence" in "political violence" aligns with the World Health Organization, as related by Krug et al. (2002: 5). This definition stresses intentionality and counts acts that "either result in or have a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment or deprivation." Intentionality matters for political violence, because violent actors deliberately seek to disrupt civic engagement, citizen mobilization, and elections and government. Regardless of what perpetrators use political violence to accomplish—for example, manipulating election outcomes or fighting to liberate oppressed peoples—the attacks themselves remain intentionally disruptive.

Traditionally, international relations and comparative politics scholars researching political violence focused on intentional acts, but considered primarily men's experiences, such as political assassinations, bombings, and violent public protest. This approach disregarded how such assaults affected women or overlooked whether women exercising their political rights might experience different kinds of violence (Bjarnegård et al., 2015). In international relations, feminist security scholars pushed researchers to consider how gender shaped armed conflict, highlighting women's experience with sexual assault, for example (e.g. Cohen, 2016; Goldstein, 2001; Hudson et al., 2009). In comparative politics, gender and politics scholars emphasized how gender shaped women's participation during and after democratic transitions (e.g. Baldez, 2010; Rai, 1994; Tripp, 2015). A more recent strand of research from gender and politics has drawn attention to the obstacles, hostility, and violent attacks faced by women politicians around the world (Sen et al., 2019). Development experts, domestic and international policymakers, and academics—often working in collaboration—have used different terms, but most commonly VAWIP (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016, 2019).

These distinct strands of research often have remained unconnected. However, the recent turn in the comparative politics literature to analyzing VAWIP indicates the need for dialogue with the international relations literature on political violence. By taking different conceptual and thus epistemological points of departure, the traditional political

violence approach and the VAWIP approach each have blind spots for understanding the link between gender, politics, and violence. On their own, neither approach generates policy solutions that adequately address the whole problem.

The Traditional Political Violence Approach

Scholars typically define political violence by looking to motives as well as timing, actors, and activities (Höglund, 2009). First, researchers separate incidents of political violence from other forms of violence, such as criminal violence. Second, they distinguish among types of political violence, such as election-related violence or post-election violence. These distinctions help scholars better understand political violence's particular causes and consequences. For instance, motive (such as affecting the electoral process) and timing (during the electoral process) separate election violence from other forms of political violence (Höglund, 2009; Opitz et al., 2013). Scholars also categorize variations in forms of violence (e.g. homicide versus rape) and each form's targeting, frequency, and technique (Gutierrez-Sanín and Wood, 2017). Precise categorizations especially matter given political violence scholars' increased focus on coding events for large databases, such as the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED), the Correlates of War, and the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP). These efforts demonstrate the importance of conceptual clarity for cross-national work. Political violence scholars' use of specific criteria to conceptualize and classify political violence informs our framework, which uses motives, forms, and impacts as criteria for distinguishing among types of gendered political violence.

At the same time, traditional work on political violence privileges men's experiences. Several definitions of political violence do go beyond physical assaults and include threats of physical harm as well as different forms of coercion and intimidation (Höglund, 2009; Opitz et al., 2013; Straus and Taylor, 2012). Yet data collection strategies often rely on sources that predominantly record public and physical forms of violence, thereby capturing men's experiences (e.g. Collier, 2009; Fischer, 2002; Gillies, 2011). For example, incidents of election violence involving men victims are more frequently documented in police reports, hospital records, and the media, whereas incidents involving women victims are primarily reported through community contacts and interviews. The latter sources are not typically used by those compiling databases (Bardall, 2011). Moreover, the experiences of female victims—even when counted—are often not counted as *political* violence, because of the gendered forms. Researchers, practitioners, activists, and jurists worked for years, for instance, before sexual violence was recognized as political violence (Cohen and Nordås, 2014).

Overall, feminist contributions to international relations have generated a large and significant body of work demonstrating how political violence differentially affects men and women (see Davies and True, 2019 for an overview). For our purposes, a gendered lens illuminates how gender works differently in specific instances. For example, elections in Pakistan are beset by political violence, but women are targeted for certain reasons. In 2008, extremists opposed to women's political participation torched polling places, and in 2013, they circulated literature decrying women's suffrage as "un-Islamist" (McVeigh, 2013). These perpetrators wished to preserve politics as a male domain, but perpetrators of other election violence in Pakistan—such as those killing candidates and bombing campaign offices—were seeking to intimidate or eliminate the opposition, not prevent women's political participation. In Myanmar, efforts to intimidate political

candidates targeted men and women in gendered ways. Perpetrators took advantage of widespread Islamophobia and Burmese nationalism to accuse men candidates of having connections to Muslims and thus being terrorists, whereas women were portrayed as having loose morals (Bjarnegård, 2018). In Bosnia, over 20 years after the civil war, recalling violence made women less politically engaged than men (Hadzic and Tavits, 2019). We consider how these examples reveal that gender can appear in the motive (Pakistan), in the form (Myanmar), and in the impact (Bosnia).

The Violence against Women Approach

The traditional political violence approach starts with contentious politics. By contrast, the VAWIP approach starts with women's experiences of abuse in public life, and treats VAWIP as a subset of violence against women (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016: 128). The VAWIP approach adopts violence against women's central tenets: first, women are abused *because* they are women, and second, this abuse takes multiple forms, including physical, sexual, psychological, economic, verbal, and symbolic attacks (Kelly, 1988). Violence against women creates, sustains, and reinforces women's subordination. VAWIP scholars translate this insight into politics, offering a new way to understand the obstacles faced by women politicians. In severe instances, women politicians across the globe are being beaten and killed (Restrepo Sanín, 2018). And in the quotidian practice of politics, gendered attitudes and beliefs circumscribe women's political participation. These include a masculine, adversarial style of politics that enables and foments sexual harassment in legislative chambers (Collier and Raney, 2018); gendered media coverage that trivializes, objectifies, or insults women politicians (Biroli, 2016); and the exclusion of women from important committees and meetings (Cerva Cerna, 2014). In defining both severe and quotidian abuses as VAWIP, scholars conceptualize VAWIP as a continuum (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016, 2019).

VAWIP's point of departure thus emerges from an epistemological standpoint very different from that found in scholarship on political violence. VAWIP scholars argue that the common thread linking the abuses experienced by politically active women is perpetrators' resistance to them because they are women *and* in politics (Archenti and Albaine, 2013; Krook, 2017; Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016, 2019). The "because they are women in politics" suggests a motive based on the victims' sex and role: if sexism lays out the gendered roles and traits women "must" have, and misogynists seek to punish women who transgress these boundaries (Manne, 2017), then the mechanisms driving VAWIP are sexism, misogyny, or both. Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2016) thus liken VAWIP to a hate crime. They further characterize VAWIP as resisting social change, noting that "acts of violence against women in politics thus embody a form of backlash to women's greater inclusion in the political sphere, resisting the gains made possible by gender quotas and other mechanisms to empower women in decision-making" (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016: 137).

Krook and Restrepo Sanín's (2019) recent work attempts to separate gendered hate crimes from other types of political violence that politically active women might experience. However, the tendency remains to take any manifestation of gender in the assault as evidence of VAWIP. Therefore, for VAWIP scholars, motives need not be explicit. The "because they are women in politics" could emerge from perpetrators' conscious intention to combat women's political inclusion, or from their unconscious or opportunistic use of gendered scripts. For instance, targeting women for their political views by using

sexist language counts as VAWIP (Krook, 2017; Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016). For some, VAWIP also appears when political institutions and practices favor men over women, such as when adversarial debate norms lead to harassment (Collier and Raney, 2018) and when women receive fewer nominations, media appearances, or leadership opportunities when compared to men (IPU, 2016; ParlAmericas, n.d.). VAWIP thus departs from political violence researchers' concerns with counting expressed motives, individual offenses, and identifiable perpetrators and victims. Rather, VAWIP considers that the gendered distribution of political power, and both the conscious and unconscious means of preserving it, is itself violence.

In making this conceptual leap, VAWIP scholars make critical contributions to academic and policy debates. Their work reminds scholars from international relations and comparative politics that women may be uniquely victimized because their political participation threatens hegemonic men's political dominance. They call attention to attacks that women political actors experience, and that men actors do not seem to experience, from the kidnapping and forced resignations of women candidates in Latin America (Restrepo Sanín, 2018) to the onslaught of rape and death threats received by politically engaged women worldwide (Amnesty International, 2018; Bardall et al., 2018). They offer advocates and policymakers new vocabulary for denouncing and combating assaults, harassment, and intimidation, and also for criticizing the forms of subordination more akin to structural violence, such as the systematic denial of equal opportunity and resources.

Different Approaches, Different Lenses

The traditional political violence approach and the VAWIP approach conceptualize phenomena differently, leading to divergent understandings about the interface between gender, politics, and violence. Political violence scholarship identifies the discrete attacks that fuel conflict, whereas scholarship on violence against women illuminates how violence maintains the gendered distribution of power throughout society. Each approach has advantages, but also blind spots.

For instance, the harassment of politically active women could occur because perpetrators resent women's political participation—or because perpetrators live in societies that normalize abusing women. A traditional political violence approach might ignore both instances of harassment, because harassment is not always public and visible, and because harassment appears in both conflict and non-conflict settings. The VAWIP approach would count both, because VAWIP infers gendered motives not just based on expressed reasons (preventing women's political participation), but also based on the use of gendered scripts (deploying sexual language) and overall gender subordination (denying women equal opportunity to participate in politics). As such, the traditional political violence lens risks overlooking violence aimed to preserve politics as a male domain, while the VAWIP lens risks portraying all violence that politically active women experience as related to the combination of their sex and political role. Yet, if perpetrators are habituated into abusing women, then their harassment of politically active women is unrelated to their victims' particular status of *women in politics*.

Moreover, by viewing all abuses of politically active women through the lens of violence against women, VAWIP isolates gender from the broader contexts of conflict and strife central to the study of political violence. For example, VAWIP activists and researchers frequently reference high-profile cases, such as the assassinations of women politicians

in Mexico (Krook, 2017). Yet of the 132 politicians killed in the nine-month period before Mexico's 2018 elections, only about 20 were women (Etellect, 2018). Drug cartels commonly extort, threaten, and assassinate local officeholders and candidates in Mexico, operating with high levels of impunity (Ley, 2018). If researchers and policymakers only saw these crimes through the lens of VAWIP, they would misstate the perpetrators' central motives and ignore the underlying security threat posed by criminal cartels' insertion into Mexican politics (Piscopo, 2016). At the same time, women experience political violence not only in conflict settings: they receive hate-filled attacks on social media in established democracies like Sweden and Canada, for instance (Håkansson, in press; Rheault et al., 2019). VAWIP's applicability to all political systems reminds scholars and practitioners that political violence also unfolds in consolidating and established democracies.

Finally, insofar as certain acts of political violence could indeed be about keeping politics as a male domain, the logic of preserving the gendered distribution of political power indicates that not only women will suffer attacks. Gender establishes "proper" notions about what are masculine and feminine roles, and these ideas are policed not only through the political exclusion of women and women's bodies. Death threats have forced gay and trans politicians in the United States to suspend their campaigns or move their offices to more secure locations (Stack, 2018). Gay, trans parliamentarians in Poland were told to sit outside parliament, because of their sexuality (Ayoub, 2016: 196). Whereas traditional political violence scholars too often have privileged men's experiences, VAWIP researchers risk ignoring how non-hegemonic men (ethnic minority men) and LGBTQ+ individuals may also experience political violence motivated by preserving gendered hierarchies of political power.

Gendered Political Violence: Separating Motives, Forms, and Impacts

The fact that different approaches generate different understandings of what phenomena count as violence underscores an urgent need for conceptual clarity and better methodological approaches. To introduce greater analytic precision, we build on classifications from Bardall (2016) and propose a framework for identifying gendered political violence, which, following feminist understandings of violence against women as a continuum, recognizes a range of acts. For each act, our framework distinguishes between three distinct but equally important elements: motives, forms, and impacts.

We begin by (1) parsing expressed motives from the gendered scripts that influence forms and (2) by separating motives and forms from outcomes. First, political violence can have *gendered motives*. Such violence targets victims primarily in order to keep political power in the hands of hegemonic men, and affects women (as VAWIP scholars argue) as well as non-hegemonic men and LGBTQ+ individuals. Second, political violence can have *gendered forms*. This violence could also have gendered motives, or could have other aims related to disrupting the state or government; either way, this violence is carried out by exploiting the gendered roles and norms at work in each context. Third, political violence can have *gendered impacts*. Political violence may or may not be motivated or formed by gender, but gender can influence its interpretation. The sex of the victim can shape how media and community members narrate the incident, and how men and women think about their own political roles and the risks they are willing to bear as political actors. If political violence causes women to retreat from politics more than men, then reinforcing women's systematic exclusion from politics is an impact, even if it was not the motive.

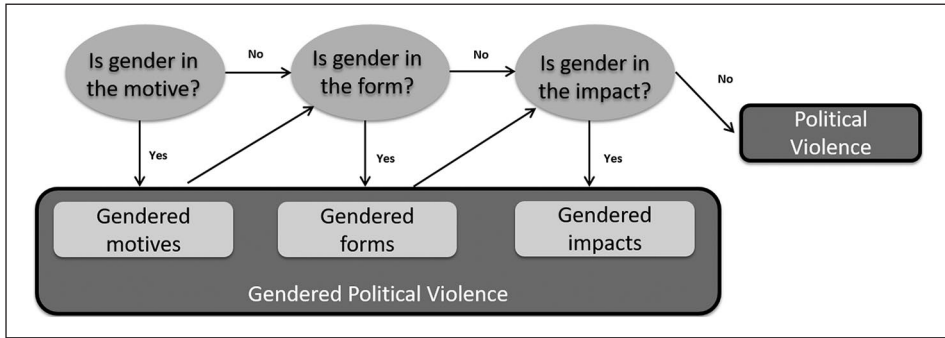


Figure 1. Gendered political violence: motives, forms and impacts.

Figure 1 presents our framework for conceptualizing whether and how political violence is gendered. Keeping the focus on discrete acts rather than structural violence, we ask if gender appears in the motive, then the form, and then the impact. These possibilities are by no means exclusive, as a single incident could manifest gendered dimensions in one or more elements, as indicated by the arrows that go from the “yes” answer on motives and forms back to the next element. As such, we recognize that motives, forms, and impacts exist in relationship to each other (Hubbard and DeSoi, 2016) and are all part of gendered political violence, albeit in distinct ways. It is also theoretically possible that gendered aspects are observable in neither motive nor form nor impact, in which case the analysis would follow the “no” arrows and the incident would be considered “just” political violence.

This schema urges scholars to identify motive, form, and impact by explicitly comparing men and women as victims of political violence, while remembering that men also experience gendered political violence. For example, in order to identify *gendered* motives when political violence targets politicians outside the hegemonic male group, scholars should offer a plausible and even convincing argument that a hegemonic male politician in the same position and under the same circumstances would not be targeted. Similarly, to determine gendered forms, scholars should make the case that a hegemonic male politician in the same position and under the same circumstances would not be targeted in the same *way*. Finally, to determine gendered impact, researchers should ask whether the meanings, interpretations, and consequences would be the same if a hegemonic man had been attacked.

Returning to our earlier examples illuminates how comparing women to men reveals distinctions between motive, form, and impact. It shows, for instance, that most politicians killed by drug cartels in Mexico are men (Etellect, 2018)—but that most politicians coerced into resigning their posts in Bolivia are women (Restrepo Sanín, 2018). Such comparisons allow policymakers to determine whether these attacks constitute violence designed to maintain criminal groups’ influence over politics (Mexico), in which case gender does *not* appear in the motive, or the coordinated efforts to keep women from politics (Bolivia), in which case gender *does* appear in the motive. Likewise, this approach separates the violence that constitutes resistance to women’s political participation (Pakistan) from violence designed to intimidate opponents, regardless of their sex (Myanmar). This precision matters for public policy. If women politicians experience violence because hegemonic men reject their political participation (as in Pakistan and

Bolivia), then policymakers must establish more effective measures to protect women's political rights. By contrast, if women endure attacks because violence disrupts their countries' political processes (as in Mexico and Myanmar), then policymakers must improve the rule of law and combat assault, libel, and harassment in elections.

Identifying Gendered Motives

Gendered motives for political violence mean perpetrators commit violence to preserve the gendered order of political power, because the existing gendered order—where hegemonic men hold the vast majority of offices—is seen as natural, just, and inviolate. Our concept of gendered motives builds on VAWIP scholars by recognizing that perpetrators may use violence to keep politics as a male domain, but we extend their focus beyond women. When women are targeted, these crimes are indeed undergirded by sexism, misogyny, or both. Yet policing politics as a male space also affects non-hegemonic men (e.g. ethnic minority men), gays and lesbians, and trans and gender-nonconforming individuals. Recognizing that gendered motives drive political violence toward actors other than women offers scholars a more holistic understanding of how gender hierarchies motivate attacks.

Identifying gender in the motive requires thinking about the counterfactual: would a similarly situated hegemonic man be assaulted? If the answer is “yes, and in the same way,” gender does not appear in the motive. If the answer is “yes, but in a different way,” then gender may appear in the form, rather than the motive. If the answer is no, keeping women and others out of politics may indeed motivate the attack. Returning to the Bolivian case, women municipal councilors began reporting harassment, physical threats, and even kidnappings after Bolivia passed a landmark parity law that mandated gender-balance in all national and subnational offices. The law applied across the country, including in predominantly indigenous areas where traditional beliefs hold that men and women occupy separate spheres (Htun and Ossa, 2013). That this form of political violence was uncommon in Bolivia prior to the parity law, that parity clashed with strongly held beliefs against women taking on public roles, and that no evidence exists of men councilors being similarly targeted, either before or after parity, indicates that keeping women from exercising political authority indeed motivates perpetrators in this case (Restrepo Sanin, 2018).

We identify motive by the attackers' *intention* to keep women and others from politics, and not merely by their position atop a gender hierarchy. In seeking to understand motive, we adopt traditional political violence scholars' focus on discrete acts, while taking a broader view about the peaceful and non-peaceful settings in which acts occur. Political violence motivated by gender separates the structural, everyday enactment of gender oppression from identifiable acts of political violence. Quotidian injustices, such as having few women's bathrooms in some parliaments, scheduling formal meetings at hours that conflict with domestic responsibilities, and overlooking or diminishing women's contributions, characterize how political institutions and practices operate to produce and reproduce gendered hierarchies. These ways of doing politics perpetuate male homosociality, impose significant barriers for women's political participation, and may well constitute structural violence. However, the men—and even the women—reproducing these practices do not necessarily intend to commit violence against women because they are women in politics (Sen et al., 2019).

Separating political violence from structural violence offers more analytic precision. Gender infuses both structural violence and political violence, but focusing on

how gender expressly motivates acts better informs research and policy. For instance, policymakers cannot address resistance and backlash to women's political empowerment unless they know *when* political violence has developed or intensified because of this empowerment. Using intentionality to identify gender motivated political violence distinguishes changing security contexts from everyday gendered injustices.

Accounting for Gendered Forms

Gendered forms call attention to women as victims of political violence, often in ways and places not accounted for in traditional studies of conflict. Political violence is gendered in its form when actors use gendered roles or tropes to carry out the attack. Typically, perpetrators rely on gendered scripts, such as sexualized language, imagery, or content. Attacks that are gendered in their motives may also be gendered in their form, but attacks *without* gendered motives may use gendered forms, because perpetrators strategically use gendered tropes to maximize the effect.

Every act of political violence has motive and is carried out in some form. Information about one may offer clues about the other. When the motive is disgust for or resistance to women's political participation, the form may mirror this misogyny. Gendered motives can therefore coincide with gendered scripts, as illustrated by the "Bros Before Hoes" t-shirts worn by those opposing Hillary Clinton's 2008 US presidential run (Schwedel, 2016). Yet, gender can appear in the motive without appearing in the form. The kidnapping of women candidates in Bolivia aimed to obstruct the gender parity law, but kidnapping itself follows no particular gendered scripts. Finally, gender can also appear in the form, but not the motive. Preventing women's political participation does not drive attacks that have the main purpose of intimidating and repressing political opponents, but can follow gender norms. Gendered forms but not motives appeared in Myanmar, where perpetrators targeted men and women candidates, but with different gendered tropes.

On the one hand, the use of gendered forms, in relying on notions of masculinity and femininity, may not even be conscious. Importantly, the forms of attack used for men as well as women emerge from societal norms about hegemonic masculinity: physically assaulting men undercuts their manliness in parallel fashion to how sexually assaulting women devalues them as objects. On the other hand, the gendered form of violence may be premeditated, based on the perpetrators' cost-benefit analysis. Sexualized online attacks are especially common against women political candidates (Amnesty International, 2018; Bardall, 2013; Rheault et al., 2019). The anonymity of the online forum reduces accountability and implies less risk that perpetrators will get caught. As Bjarnegård (2018) notes in the case of the Maldives, sexualized online attacks are a gendered form of political violence that is highly "efficient": they cause significant damage to the victim, while coming with a relatively low cost for the perpetrator.

Understanding Gendered Impacts

Gendered impacts draw attention to how victims and survivors, activists, and the community might understand, report on, and respond to violence in ways that differ from acts' motives and forms. Establishing motives and forms entails objectively determining why and how political violence occurs, whereas understanding impact means uncovering the subjective meaning attributed to political violence. Research on wartime rape shows the importance of not confusing consequences with motives: demoralization, unwanted

pregnancies, traumatization, and fractured families often result from wartime rape, but these outcomes do not necessarily constitute the strategic reasons perpetrators acted in the first place (Eriksson Baaz and Stern, 2013; Gottschall, 2004). Yet outcomes do shape the gendered impact.

Focusing on impacts recognizes that audiences' interpretations matter, regardless of whether gender appears in motive or form. Attacks that harm or kill women may generate significant outrage, escalating a conflict, and they might also discourage women from participating in public life. For instance, in the 2010 Burundian elections, terror groups looking to disrupt the election bombed public markets, killing more women than men, because women traditionally sell housewares and foods in markets (Bardall, 2011). Although the bombers' motives were unlikely related to gender and the form appears indiscriminate, the impact for women was higher, in terms of both the body count and the message sent. Similarly, the 2017 bombing of Ariana Grande's concert in Manchester, UK, triggered debate about whether the Islamic State had deliberately targeted women: Grande enjoys a fanbase comprised largely of young women, promotes girls' empowerment, and provides women and girls the opportunity to be joyous in public (Gilbert, 2017). Certainly, the terrorists might not have considered whether and how performers and audience members differed across nights. What matters when analyzing impact is not the attackers' actual intention, but that *many understood* the assault as aimed at women and girls.

In both the Burundi and the Manchester case, as in many others, perpetrators do not leave reliable accounts of their motives. Yet no matter their motive, when anger or fear about the disproportionate targeting of women emerges, these responses count as gendered impact. For many observers, attacks that harm women send the message that women should not participate in politics (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016). Likewise, when Polish MPs refused to sit near their gay and trans colleagues (Ayoub, 2016), their behavior signaled that LGBTQ+ individuals did not belong in parliament. These assaults have deleterious consequences on women and minorities' participation in politics. Recognizing that these attacks hurt a larger community, and not just the individuals injured in the attack itself, acknowledges broader feminist claims that gendered violence occurs even when intentionality is not proven (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2019).

The subjective narratives created around political violence further influence the recourse that citizens demand from their governments. Jo Cox and Gisela Mota—a Mexican mayor assassinated by drug cartels—both became cause célèbres for feminist activists looking to demand redress for VAWIP. Mexico's Federal Electoral Court even highlighted Mota's case in their protocol for preventing VAWIP (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación (TEPJF), 2016: 13). The existence of gendered motives in either case remains indeterminate, but activists used Cox's and Mota's deaths strategically: in linking politically active women's victimization to their sex and political role, activists could demand the state act on its obligation to protect women from violence (Piscopo, 2016). For this reason, our framework avoids the pitfall of conflating outcome—that women in politics are harmed—with motive—that women are harmed *because* they are women in politics. Examining impact as distinct from motive reveals how differentially situated actors repackage political violence. This meaning-making process occurs whether gender exists in the motive, the form, or neither.

Both the objective truth and subjective understandings of political violence are critical for shaping policy responses. For example, cartel violence in Mexico looks to undermine the electoral process (Ley, 2018), so focusing solely on the gendered impact—that women are deterred from political participation—could lead scholars and policymakers to

overlook the cartels' threat (Piscopo, 2016). At the same time, understanding that women may find cartel violence especially threatening calls attention to the gendered political opportunity structure: if women cannot take the same risks as men to participate in politics, because they feel more vulnerable and because their families depend on them being alive, then political processes carried out amid violence privilege the political engagement of certain social groups over others.

Designing Gender Sensitive Research on Political Violence

We have argued that distinguishing among motives, forms, and impacts matters for analytical reasons. At the same time, gendered motives, gendered forms, and gendered impacts may overlap or interact empirically, creating observational equivalence. To tackle these challenges, we need data collection strategies that include a gendered perspective, which pushes both political violence scholars and gender and politics scholars to account not just for women, but for all possible victims. We take inspiration from large research and data collection projects, such as the UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset (Gleditsch et al., 2002), the WomanStats Project database (n.d.), the Sexual Violence in Conflict Project (SVAC) (Cohen and Nordås, 2014), the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) (Raleigh et al., 2010), and the National Elections Across Democracy and Autocracy dataset (NELDA) (Hyde and Marinov, 2012). Researchers on these projects carefully determine and apply their criteria for categorizing incidences of political violence. Their best practices include strict definitions, with acts identified from stringent lists of acceptable secondary sources, such as victim and witness reports. We add practices that incorporate qualitative methods and use more creative data sources.

Identifying Political Violence

All data collection efforts use definitions as their point of departure. Before we can assess if an incident is gendered, we must count the incident *as* political violence. In political violence studies, such definitions are conservative, meaning scholars prefer to disregard cases where the connection to politics remains unclear, even if that means undercounting incidences (e.g. Sundberg and Melander, 2013). We concur, believing our analytic framework looking at gendered motives, forms, and impacts applies to acts that clearly aim to disrupt political processes, whether in conflict or non-conflict settings and whether in democracies or non-democracies. Types could include physical violence (including armed violence), sexual violence, and psychological violence.

Our emphasis on intentionality distinguishes political violence from structural violence, meaning we separate discrete acts from the ever-present institutions, behaviors, and practices that enforce gender hierarchies. In order to establish that attacks constitute political violence, we should look at perpetrators' stated aims (e.g. Raleigh et al., 2010). In the absence of these, we follow scholars who use the timing and location of the incident, as well as the identity of the involved actors (perpetrators and victims), to infer political violence (e.g. Höglund, 2009; Raleigh et al., 2010). Here, timing combined with identity might give the most evidence. Individuals attacked while carrying out their political roles (e.g. delivering a speech or traveling to polling places) may well be victims of political violence. Location may also provide evidence, though a gendered perspective expands the kinds of locations scholars should consider. Beyond attacks that target classically political spaces—parliaments, campaign offices, political rallies, and

polling stations—are those that happen in virtual spaces and in the home. Though not all cyber-harassment and domestic violence constitutes political violence, on-line attacks and assaults at home *do* constitute political violence when in response to individuals' political participation.

Documenting incidents of political violence in traditional and non-traditional spaces raises the question: what sources count? Data collection on political violence typically use secondary sources, such as media sources (e.g. Gleditsch et al., 2002; Hyde and Marinov, 2012; Raleigh et al., 2010; WomanStats Project database, n.d.), human rights reports (Cohen and Nordås, 2014), and reports from governmental and non-governmental organizations (Hyde and Marinov, 2012; Raleigh et al., 2010; WomanStats Project database, n.d.), or expert interviews (WomanStats Project database, n.d.). A gender perspective illuminates how these sources are all biased toward publicly observable incidents, usually ones that cause maximum upheaval and have many witnesses. For instance, the Urban Social Disorder dataset counts strikes, demonstrations, riots, terrorism, assassination, coups, and battles—but not the harassment of politicians or poll workers.

In order to capture less readily observable events, including those that observers and victims may treat as normal and thus underreport, data collection strategies must become more creative. Researchers can employ qualitative methods, such as interviews with carefully selected groups of respondents, or adopt different strategies to count incidents. For instance, some election observation missions now use community observers and hotlines, which allow bystanders and survivors to report less visible forms of violence, such as psychological intimidation and threats. In other examples, researchers examined Twitter handles and hashtags, determining that both men and women politicians were targeted for uncivil speech and hate speech (Rheault et al., 2019; Bardall et al., 2018). Other methods include directly surveying certain vulnerable groups, such as candidates, parliamentarians, and their staff (e.g. Håkansson, in press).

Assessing Motives, Forms, and Impacts

Once political violence has been identified, then gendered motives and forms can be assessed. Importantly, gendered motives and forms often emerge through patterns in the data, rather than through the analysis of individual events. Patterns appear by documenting incidences cross-sectionally or longitudinally, and then dividing the data by certain groups, such as comparing women to men or examining gay individuals compared to straight individuals. Data can include quantitative counts of incidents, or qualitative descriptions about incidents' unfolding and aftermath.

Some data collection efforts, like the new ACLED dataset on political violence targeting women, still focus on public and physical violence, but go beyond merely disaggregating their data by sex. ACLED codes whether the attack targeted women, counting incidents where all or a majority of victims were women (e.g. an Uzbek suicide bomber killed some military officials, but mostly schoolgirls) or the direct targets were women (e.g. Philippine rebels kidnapped a politician's daughter and ex-wife) (Kishi et al., 2019: 9–12). ACLED crucially identifies instances of political violence shaped by gender, but does not determine whether gender influenced attacks' motives, forms, or impacts. For instance, did the Uzbek assailant—like his Manchester counterparts—intentionally target schoolgirls?

To separate motives, forms, and impacts, we encourage researchers to analyze patterns in these and other data. Even where gendered motives seem obvious, as in Bolivia,

perpetrators did not say they attacked the women *because* they were women. Their desire to undercut women's political participation appeared as more attacks occurred: only women candidates and elected officials were the victims, and women were targeted following the implementation of a gender parity law. Studies in on-line spaces have shown that, in the case of high-profile politicians, women more than men are targeted with uncivil speech (Rheault et al., 2019) and with more aggressive and sexualized speech over longer periods of time (Bardall et al., 2018). Similarly, as politicians become more prominent, powerful and visible women are targeted more frequently than similarly powerful and visible men (Håkansson, in press). These trends all provide circumstantial, but persuasive, evidence for gendered motives. Comparisons can also show when gender is not present. For instance, demonstrating that both men and women candidates are assassinated in Mexico, and showing that women candidates are neither more frequently nor uniquely targeted, indicates the absence of gendered motives as well as gendered forms.

Documenting incidences that occur in traditional political spaces as well as virtual and domestic spaces, and comparing the experiences of different groups, means that scholars can generate and test hypotheses *ex-ante*. Rather than inferring gendered motives *ex-post* (e.g. determining that gender mattered merely because women were present), scholars can predict who falls victim to which type of violence, and under which circumstances. Stating hypotheses does require some knowledge of case background, though the depth required varies depending on the project (e.g. coding events cross-nationally requires less country-specific knowledge than a qualitative case study). Context matters, but non-experts can grasp essential information quickly. For example, even novices would rapidly become familiar with the cartel presence in Mexico.

Yet in rare incidences of political violence, as in the case of Jo Cox's murder, patterns are not discernible and the context may not provide much information. Here, investigators turn to understanding the attacker: he had decades-long ties to white nationalist groups, suggesting a political motive. At the same time, seeing *a woman* express support for immigration and multiculturalism may have pushed him from blogger to killer. The counter-factual—that he would have killed Cox had she been a white (straight) man—cannot be proven. Yet the possibility of a tipping point suggests that attackers motivated by something other than disgust for women's political participation might begin lashing out at politically active women. For those resisting progressive social change, women's political participation could be seen as one outrage too many (Piscopo and Walsh, 2020). For those seeking easy targets, women appear as weaker and thus more vulnerable (Bjarnegård, 2018). Political violence that is gendered in motive, form, or both may increase when discontented individuals feel pushed to violence. Though Cox's case remains indeterminate, accounting for gender generates hypotheses (in this case, about tipping points), which can be tested as data collection strategies on women and political violence improve.

Developing more creative data collection strategies also matters for documenting the gendered impacts of political violence. Precise understandings of impact can emerge from asking varied community members about how they interpret the incidents they endure or witness. Here, scholars should consider how respondents are differentially positioned with respect to experiencing violence, interpreting violence, and pursuing their own policy goals. For example, international organizations remained committed to the narrative that three-quarters of women were raped during the Liberian civil war, even when the empirical evidence contradicted this statistic (Cohen and Green, 2012). This

statistic stuck because it generated the outrage necessary for international organizations to raise the donor funds that sustained their work (Cohen and Green, 2012). These “ghost statistics” are especially common in the field of gender and development (Moeller, 2019). International organizations need marketable facts, but how such “truths” are generated and reproduced can overlook and even obscure the multifaceted lived experiences of women and girls (Cookson and Fuentes, 2019). Attending to respondents’ positionality shows how political violence is understood, but also who has stakes in which understandings.

Identifying gendered impacts thus means treating respondents’ viewpoints with respect—but also with caution. Impact requires recognizing not just that political violence takes on different meaning for different groups, but that the *creation* of this meaning is itself a political act. The perpetrator, the victim, and the audience are respondents whose meaning-making activities need to be investigated and contrasted. Rather than adopt others’ (often simplified) narratives, scholars and policymakers should unpack why certain stakeholders articulate certain narratives. Doing so may prove time-consuming, but also highly rewarding: achieving peace may well require policies that repair perceptions of harm, even when harms cannot be objectively proven or quantified.

Conclusion

Recent efforts to conceptualize the barriers and resistance to women’s political participation (Bardall, 2016; Krook, 2017; Piscopo, 2016; Piscopo and Walsh, 2020; Sen et al., 2019) offer new opportunities for dialogue with scholars working on political violence. This article connects comparative politics scholarship from gender and politics—which has focused on resistance to women’s political participation—with the literature on political violence from international relations. We look beyond conflict, incorporating the less dramatic and more mundane manifestations of political violence, meaning acts that intentionally disrupt processes of governing, from political assassinations that occur outside of war (e.g. cartel violence in Mexico) to the on-line abuse of those performing their political roles (e.g. any politicians with Twitter accounts). We argue that a gender perspective reveals how discrete incidences of political violence can be gendered in their motive, form, and impact. Our framework thus responds to calls for the “systematic empirical scrutiny” about how gender operates (Baldez, 2010: 200), offering scholars more precise ways to understand and categorize individuals’ experiences with the varying types and locations of political violence. We make gender, rather than women, central to motives, forms, and impacts because gender remains central to individuals’ identities, to the organization of social life, and ultimately to political processes and outcomes (Beckwith, 2010).

Our distinction among motives, forms, and impacts brings clarity and parsimony to understandings of gender and political violence. A focus on gendered motives identifies those attacks aiming to preserve men’s hegemonic power, expanding “violence against women in politics” to include non-hegemonic men, gay, trans, and gender non-conforming individuals, while offering a cleaner statement of motives. A focus on gendered forms recognizes that gendered roles and norms shape how violence unfolds, thus enriching and diversifying traditional approaches, which may have minimized sexualized forms of political violence. A focus on gendered impacts recognizes that the objective labels and subjective interpretations of political violence will diverge, with consequences for policy responses. Placing boundaries around how gender shapes political violence also

acknowledges that some political violence harms women without gender playing any role at all. Women can be victims of happenstance or when generalized political violence harms men and women in roughly equal proportions and in the same way.

Our conceptualization of gendered motives, gendered forms, and gendered impacts still leaves open avenues of theoretical and empirical debate. We have proposed that any harms or attacks count as political violence, so long as perpetrators intend to disrupt political processes. This approach excludes structural violence, which identifies the institutions, behaviors, and practices that, in their totality, subordinate women and other marginalized groups. Of course, discrete acts of political violence could also contribute to structural violence, raising further questions. Is all political violence that affects women or other subordinate social groups inherently structural in nature? If gender subordination is understood as continuously enacted through individuals' conscious and unconscious actions, political violence and structural violence will be difficult to parse in practice. Research agendas aimed at understanding political violence's gendered impact could begin tackling this question, examining what happens when communities interpret violence as a design feature of the political and social world, rather than as a tool for influencing political processes.

Further, do motives, forms, and impacts vary in theoretically relevant ways when considering different types and contexts of political violence? Future work might parse our framework's observable implications when comparing physical violence to psychological violence, for example, or when studying different contexts, such as conflict settings versus established democracies. Our framework provides a useful starting point for scholars seeking to incorporate best practices from international relations scholarship on political violence with the insights raised by pioneering gender and politics scholarship on the barriers to women's political participation.


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