

**The Cost of Doing Politics?
Analyzing Violence and Harassment against Female Politicians**

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Abstract

Following a troubling rise in reports of assault, intimidation, and abuse directed at female politicians, violence against women in politics is increasingly recognized around the world as a significant barrier to women's political participation. Yet conceptual ambiguities remain as to the exact contours of this phenomenon. In this article, we seek to strengthen its theoretical, empirical, and methodological foundations. We propose that the presence of bias against women in political roles – originating in structural violence, employing cultural violence, and resulting in symbolic violence – distinguishes this phenomenon from other forms of political violence. We identify five types of violence against women in politics – physical, psychological, sexual, economic, and semiotic – and three methodological challenges related to under-reporting, comparing men's and women's experiences, and intersectionality. Inspired by the literature on hate crimes, we develop a contextual approach for identifying cases of violence against women in politics, offering six criteria to ascertain whether an attack was potentially motivated by gender bias. We apply this framework to analyze three cases: the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, and the murder of Jo Cox. We conclude with the negative implications of violence against women in politics and survey emerging solutions around the globe.

Recent years have witnessed a troubling rise in reports of assault, intimidation, and abuse directed at female politicians. The United Nations (UN) General Assembly recognized this problem in 2011, calling for zero tolerance for violence against female candidates and elected officials.¹ In 2012, Bolivia became the first country to criminalize political violence and harassment against women. In 2016, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) launched the #NotTheCost campaign, developing tools to observe violence against women in elections, address violence inside political parties, and document violent incidents against politically active women.² That same year, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) undertook the first global study of sexism, violence, and harassment against female members of parliament (MPs). In 2017, the Inter-American Commission of Women published a model law to combat violence against women in political life and, in 2018, sexual harassment allegations led to the suspension or resignation of male MPs and cabinet ministers in North America and Western Europe.

While data is scarce, available statistics indicate that violence against women in politics is not uncommon. The IPU brief finds that 81.8% of MPs had experienced psychological violence in the course of their parliamentary work. Approximately one-third stated that they had suffered economic violence, one-quarter some type of physical violence, and one-fifth some form of sexual violence.³ These patterns are confirmed at country and local levels. Out of the 425 women who ran for office in the 2009 elections in Malawi, 225 quit before it was over due to harassment and intimidation.⁴ In Afghanistan, nearly all of the female candidates interviewed in the 2010 elections reported receiving threatening phone calls.⁵ In Peru, 41% of female mayors and local councilors have been subject to acts of violence.⁶ Data from Bolivia indicates that 70% of women have been victims more than once.⁷

Despite emerging global attention, conceptual ambiguities remain as to the contours of this phenomenon. First, definitions used by NDI and the IPU focus on women, bracketing the question of how their experiences compare to those of men, but suggest that these acts target women because of their gender to discourage women from participating in politics.⁸ Second, terminology varies. UN Women and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) highlight violence against women in elections, rather than in political life, while debates in Latin America distinguish between political violence and harassment. Finally, sources diverge in terms of forms of violence: the Bolivian law names two, IFES identifies three, and the IPU lists four.

This article seeks to resolve these ambiguities, laying the foundations for improved research and programming. To make the concept of “violence against women in politics” more theoretically, empirically, and methodologically robust, we draw on literatures in multiple disciplines; a large collection of new items and practitioner reports; and original interviews conducted in Asia, Latin America, North Africa, Western Europe, and Sub-Saharan Africa between 2014 and 2018. In the first section, we propose that the *presence of bias against women in political roles* distinguishes this phenomenon from political violence and violence against politicians. *We argue that violence against women in politics originates in structural violence, is carried out through cultural violence, and results in symbolic violence against women.*

The second section maps empirical manifestations, emphasizing continuities across a broad range of behaviors falling under the umbrella of violence against women in politics. Recognizing that definitions of “violence” are contested, however, we also introduce a distinction between *violence*, the use or threat of use of force, and *harassment*, the creation of a hostile work environment. We combine research and practitioner work on political violence and

violence against women to outline four types: physical, psychological, sexual, and economic. Based on trends in our news and interview data, we theorize one further type: semiotic.

The third section addresses methodological challenges in studying this phenomenon, focusing on the problem of under-reporting, the value of comparing men's and women's experiences, and the need to take intersectionality into account. Seeking to resolve these issues, the fourth section proposes a contextual approach for identifying and analyzing cases of violence against women in politics. Inspired by work on hate crimes, we present six criteria to help to ascertain whether an attack was potentially motivated by bias.

To illustrate how these elements might inform empirical analysis, the fifth section applies our framework to three cases: the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff, and the murder of Jo Cox. Based on our framework, we determine that the Bhutto case does not, but the Rousseff and Cox cases do, constitute examples of violence against women in politics. A deeper look, moreover, shows why a contextual approach – versus attention to single incidents in isolation – is crucial for judging the broader significance of a given case. The final section concludes with the negative implications of violence against women in politics and surveys emerging solutions around the globe.

Theorizing the Phenomenon

Political scientists have long been troubled by political violence, defining it as the use of force – or threatened use of force – to achieve political ends.⁹ It undermines the integrity of elections when used as a means to disturb voting outcomes.¹⁰ Political harassment consists of “persistent verbal or physical collective challenges” that seek to create “reasonable fear” in order to achieve political goals.¹¹ Violence and harassment are central to the toolkit of repression

employed by authoritarian regimes. They pose a challenge to democracy when one side gets “its way through fear of injury or death,” rather than “through a process in which individuals or groups recognize each other... as rational interlocutors.”¹² Emerging studies on violence against politicians and violence against women in politics extend this research agenda to consider threats and intimidation towards those who run for and hold political office. Similar to existing work on political violence, this literature shows how violent tactics seek to distort the collective will, with added implications when they specifically target members of particular groups.

Violence against politicians

Violence against politicians has recently captured the attention of practitioners as well as scholars working in a variety of disciplines. Although created in 1976, the IPU Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians has gained visibility over the last several years, pressuring governments to investigate murders and disappearances and achieving redress for MPs unduly excluded from their mandates.¹³ In 2015, the Italian parliament commissioned a survey of Italian politicians killed since 1975. In 2017, British Prime Minister Theresa May called for a review on abuse and intimidation of candidates, and the Swedish government launched a plan to tackle threats and hate directed at officeholders.

Most academic research on this topic has been conducted by forensic psychiatrists studying “aggressive/intrusive” behaviors towards public figures. These may entail physical attacks; threats; unwanted approach; stalking; loitering; property interference; spurious legal action; distribution of malicious materials; and inappropriate letters, emails, phone calls, and social media contacts. Between 80% and 90% of MPs report experiencing at least one of these forms of harassment.¹⁴ More than one-quarter of Canadian politicians described these intrusions

as “frightening” or “terrifying,”¹⁵ and more than 40% of British MPs increased security at home and work as a result.¹⁶ For these scholars, intrusive behaviors “stand apart from what might be seen as the MP’s working role” when they “interfere with his or her function, or cross the border into what is perceived as threatening.”¹⁷

Political scientists and economists have taken a different angle on these questions, seeking to explain when, why, and how groups might employ violence against politicians – and with what effects. Evidence from Italy indicates that it is most likely to occur after elections to influence policy, rather than before elections to affect electoral outcomes. Violence is often used against municipal level politicians, primarily mayors, and most commonly takes the form of arson and threatening letters.¹⁸ The aim is generally to provoke their removal or render them less effective in pursuing agendas that the group dislikes.¹⁹ Country factors may facilitate such violence, as in Mexico where narco-assassinations have risen since 2005 as a result of growing criminal fragmentation and political pluralization.²⁰

Forensic psychologists thus focus on deviant individuals, whereas social scientists stress the importance of context in motivating violence against politicians. Gender features in only a marginal way in both literatures. This is despite observations made in passing that that the majority of perpetrators are male.²¹ Due to gender inequalities in access to political office, murdered politicians also tend to be male.²² Yet incorporating a gender lens into the study of violence against politicians does not only highlight the gendered identities of victims and perpetrators. It also points to a related but distinct phenomenon, whereby the origins, means, and effects of violent acts specifically aim to exclude *women* from the political sphere, disrupting the political process as a means to reinforce gendered hierarchies.

Violence against women in politics

In September 2017, British MPs held a debate on abuse and intimidation of political candidates, agreeing that the problem affected all parties and posed a serious problem for democracy. Yet, numerous interventions noted that women and ethnic minorities are often specifically targeted. Work on online abuse makes a similar observation: while “generic trolls” aim to annoy, upset, or anger people, “gender trolls” engage in harassing and threatening behaviors – often using graphic sexualized and gender-based insults, including explicit rape and death threats – to inspire fear and drive women to withdraw from online discourse.²³ While the technology is new, maligning a woman’s character, often by reference to her sexuality, has been a recurring strategy historically to discredit women’s ideas and inhibit their participation in traditionally male-dominated spaces.²⁴

Violence against women in politics thus entails violations of both electoral and personal integrity.²⁵ It stems from misogyny, a system policing and enforcing patriarchal norms and expectations. Informed by sexism, an ideology justifying and rationalizing patriarchy, misogyny distinguishes between “good” and “bad” women, punishing the latter for perceived violations of appropriate gender roles.²⁶ Political scientists have largely overlooked this phenomenon because they tend to define violence in a minimalistic way, as an act of force. Sociologists and many feminist theorists, in contrast, tend to define violence more comprehensively, as an act of violation,²⁷ uncovering behaviors that otherwise remain hidden or “naturalized.” Inspired by this work, we propose that violence against women in politics originates in structural violence, is perpetrated through cultural violence, and results in symbolic violence against women.

Violence against women in politics begins with structural violence, the stratification of access to basic human needs based on ascriptive group membership. Built into the social

structure, it enacts harm in the form of unequal life chances,²⁸ “leav[ing] marks not only on the human body but also on the mind and the spirit.”²⁹ The structural origins of women’s political exclusion stem from early political theories associating men with the public sphere and women with the private.³⁰ This divide limits women’s mobility even in countries where women’s movement in public spaces is not legally restricted.³¹ Structural violence rationalizes hostility against women leaders stemming from perceived status violations.³²

Cultural violence constitutes the “how” of violence against women in politics. It refers to cultural norms used to justify mistreatment, “changing the moral color of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable.”³³ Through a double standard, it tolerates violence when perpetrated against members of particular groups. Rape myths are a form of cultural violence: blaming survivors of sexual assault, they suggest rapes are provoked by women’s personal choices in clothing and behavior.³⁴ Sexist jokes are another form, expressing antagonistic attitudes towards women under the guise of “benign amusement.”³⁵ Sexual objectification is a third common vehicle, reducing women to physical attributes, and in turn, denying their competence and full emotional and moral capacity.³⁶

Symbolic violence is the intended outcome of violence against women in politics. According to Bourdieu, masculine domination is the quintessential form of symbolic violence, seeking to put women who deviate from prescribed norms back “in their place.”³⁷ What makes symbolic violence so powerful is “misrecognition,” whereby the “dominated apply categories constructed from the point of view of the dominant to the relations of domination,”³⁸ becoming complicit in their own domination.³⁹ These dynamics can be seen in cases of sex-based harassment: men and women alike may punish individuals who deviate from gender norms to

defend their own status in the existing system of gender hierarchy.⁴⁰ Backlash maintains stereotypes and rewards perpetrators psychologically, increasing their self-esteem.⁴¹

Mapping Empirical Manifestations

A minimalist conception of violence as *force* focuses on the intentional infliction of physical injury, highlighting the intentions of agents committing acts of violence at single moments in time. In contrast, a more comprehensive view of violence as *violation* recognizes a wider range of transgressions, privileging the experiences of victims and the temporally indeterminate “ripples of violence” affecting survivors, their families, and society.⁴² Reflecting the latter approach, research and activism on violence against women go beyond physical violence to emphasize a continuum of violent behaviors.⁴³

International and national frameworks thus enumerate various forms of violence against women. Article 2 of the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993) names physical, sexual, and psychological violence, to which Article 3 of the Council of Europe’s Istanbul Convention (2011) adds economic violence. World Bank data from 189 countries indicate that all four appear in national laws, albeit with varying degrees of recognition: physical violence is criminalized in 137, psychological violence in 134, sexual violence in 106, and economic violence in 86.⁴⁴

We propose two adaptations to these prevailing frameworks. First, recognizing that political scientists without a foundation in gender studies may hesitate to adopt a similarly broad concept of “violence,” we propose retaining the umbrella concept of *violence against women in politics*, under which we can distinguish between acts of *violence*, involving the use of force, and *harassment*, actions creating a hostile work environment. Second, we theorize a fifth form of

violence against women in politics, semiotic violence, which captures dynamics not reducible to the four other types.

Physical Violence and Harassment

Physical violence involves efforts to inflict bodily harm and injury. In 2004, a Mexican mayoral candidate, Guadalupe Ávila Salinas, was shot dead in broad daylight by the sitting mayor while holding a meeting with women from the community.⁴⁵ Other women have been kidnapped, like Afghan MP Fariba Ahmadi Kakar, who was abducted by Taliban rebels in 2013,⁴⁶ or severely beaten, as occurred to Kenyan parliamentary candidate Flora Terah in 2007.⁴⁷ Female candidates in Mali reportedly faced physical violence from their husbands and family members to deter them from running for office.⁴⁸

Physical harassment entails touching, jostling, or other forms of unwelcome physical proximity, as experienced by an activist in Uganda stripped naked by police at a party rally in 2015. It might also involve involuntary confinement, as in the case of a candidate in Tunisia who was locked in her home by her husband to prevent her from attending a campaign event.⁴⁹ The tangible nature of physical acts makes them the most widely recognized and least contested forms of violence against women. They tend to be relatively rare, however, with perpetrators opting for “less costly” means of violence and harassment before escalating to physical attacks.

Psychological Violence and Harassment

Psychological violence inflicts trauma on individuals’ mental state or emotional well-being. More than 80% of women parliamentarians have experienced some form of psychological abuse, according to the IPU.⁵⁰ Examples of psychological violence include death and rape

threats, carried out in person or online. Laura Boldrini, speaker of the Italian parliament, received bullets in the mail, saw “Death to Boldrini” scrawled on city walls, and was burned in effigy.⁵¹ Rape threats against British MP Jess Phillips on Twitter became so common that she was forced to block some accounts and even to report some of the abuse to police.⁵²

Psychological harassment occurs inside and outside of official political settings. Malalai Joya, an Afghan MP, was called a prostitute and had water bottles thrown at her in parliament, and in 2007 she was ejected from her seat by a show of hands, violating official procedures for suspending an MP.⁵³ Ayaka Shiomura, a local councilor in Japan, was taunted by male colleagues yelling “Go and get married” and “Can’t you give birth?” while making a speech on increasing the number of women in the labor force.⁵⁴ In Sierra Leone, men in secret societies sought to scare off female candidates when intimidation in party meetings did not work.⁵⁵

Sexual Violence and Harassment

Sexual violence comprises sexual acts and attempts at sexual acts by coercion. Stigma prevents many women from coming forward. It was only in 2014, during debates on sexual violence in Canadian politics, that former Deputy Prime Minister Sheila Copps disclosed she had been sexually assaulted by a male provincial parliament colleague in 1980.⁵⁶ In 2016, Monique Pelletier revealed she was assaulted by a male senator in 1979 while she was the French Minister of Women’s Rights.⁵⁷

Sexual harassment entails unwelcome sexual comments or advances. In recent years, political men who have lost their positions due to such allegations include Mbulelo Goniwe, chief whip for the African National Congress party in South Africa in 2006; Massimo Pacetti and Scott Andrews, Liberal MPs in Canada in 2014, followed by a third Liberal MP, Darshan Kang,

in 2017; Silvan Shalom, interior minister of Israel in 2015; and Denis Baupin, vice president of the French National Assembly in 2016. The rise of the #MeToo movement in 2017 accelerated similar disclosures in countries as diverse as Britain, Canada, Korea, Russia, and the U.S.⁵⁸

Economic Violence and Harassment

Feminists theorize economic violence as abuse seeking to deny or control women's access to financial resources.⁵⁹ Common definitions of electoral violence also mention injuries inflicted on "person or property at any stage of the long electoral cycle."⁶⁰ Combining these perspectives, economic violence involves property damage. In Iraq and Libya, extremists defaced and tore down women's campaign posters.⁶¹ British MP Anna Soubry found that people had urinated and written graffiti on her campaign billboards; her colleague Angela Eagle had a brick thrown through the window of her constituency office.⁶² In India, a local councilor came home after the election to find her land and crops destroyed.⁶³

Economic harassment involves other forms of economic manipulation rendering it difficult, if not impossible, for women to perform their political functions. In Bolivia, local officials refused to pay the salaries of elected women,⁶⁴ and in Peru, the husband of a local councilor prevented her access to the family's money after she was elected.⁶⁵ In Costa Rica and Peru, women were denied offices and telephones, while their male colleagues received these resources – and even cars – as members of local councils. Similarly, women's travel claims for expenses were repeatedly rejected in in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Mexico, and Peru.⁶⁶

Semiotic Violence and Harassment

Semiotic violence is perpetrated through degrading images and sexist language. Different from the other types, it is intended to be consumed primarily by the general public, rather than by political women *per se*. Sexual objectification is one strategy. After Croatian President Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović was elected in 2015, national newspapers published stills from an alleged sex tape, and in 2016, photos supposedly of her in a bikini (but in fact of American celebrity Coco Austin) went viral.⁶⁷ Former Texas state senator Wendy Davis observed: “photoshops of me in very suggestive sexual positions were inviting people to view me as a sexual being and not someone who had a lot to offer in terms of my policies.”⁶⁸

Symbolic annihilation is a second approach. Developed in media studies, this concept proposes that excluding or trivializing particular groups in media representations transmits a message about the societal value of group members.⁶⁹ Symbolic annihilation may occur in politics in at least two ways. First, opponents may seek to erase women as actors in the political imagination. In 2009, two ultra-Orthodox newspapers in Israel altered photos of the new cabinet, replacing two women with men, in one case, and simply blacking the women out, in the other.⁷⁰

Second, rules of language and grammar may be deployed to resist gendered transformations. In 2014, a conservative male MP in France repeatedly addressed the president of the National Assembly as “Madame le Président,” despite her correcting him multiple times to say “Madame la Présidente.”⁷¹ In 2017, the Royal Spanish Academy, guardian of the language, deemed it “artificial and unnecessary from a linguistic standpoint” to say “diputados y diputadas” (male MPs and female MPs),⁷² despite growing use of this convention across many countries in Latin America. While semiotic violence does not involve the use of force, it fosters a hostile work environment, framing women as illegitimate interlopers in the political world.

Interrelated Violence

Analytically distinguishing these five types does not mean that they are clearly distinct in practice. Sexual assault, for example, may have both physical and psychological components. Similarly, when distributed to a larger public, photoshopped images constitute semiotic violence; when sent to the woman in question, it becomes psychological and sexual harassment. These overlaps do not undermine our classification, we argue, but rather bolster the case for thinking about these acts as part of a shared field of practices. Interrelations are best illustrated by cases where different forms of violence appear in an escalating pattern over time.

For Juana Quispe, a local councilor in Bolivia, psychological and economic harassment culminated in physical and semiotic violence. Quispe and her male party colleagues were critical of the mayor, who specifically singled her out for mistreatment. The mayor, his supporters, and various local councilors first pressured her to resign. When she did not, they changed the meeting times and refused her entrance to the sessions. They then falsely accused her of corruption, suspending her from her position. She undertook a seven-month legal battle, which resulted in her being reinstated, but the council then denied her the salary for those seven months, arguing that she had not attended sessions. One month later, she was found murdered. Erasing the gendered political motivations, local police insist she was killed in a robbery, and more than five years later, the crime remains officially unsolved.⁷³

Tackling Methodological Challenges

Documenting violence against women is notoriously difficult. Many women hesitate to report violence due to feelings of shame and stigma, fear of retaliation, and perceived impunity

for perpetrators.⁷⁴ Normalized in many societies, violence against women is often framed as a male or familial prerogative, rather than as a “problem” in need of intervention. Studying violence against women in politics is complicated by political dynamics that further disincentivize speaking out. Additionally, calls to incorporate gender and intersectionality raise questions about the robustness of research if men are not included as subjects and how diversity among women might be recognized and taken into account.

Reporting Instances of Violence

Perhaps the number one barrier to studying this phenomenon is the tendency to dismiss it as “the cost of doing politics.”⁷⁵ While some of this resistance appears to stem from a hesitance to be viewed as “victims,” many political women openly acknowledge that female colleagues have been targeted for gender-based violence.⁷⁶ A best practice strategy for collecting statistics on violence against women is to avoid the word “violence,” giving rise to varied subjective interpretations, in favor of asking a list of questions about specific acts.⁷⁷ Using this approach, the IPU finds that violence and harassment against women parliamentarians is widespread.⁷⁸

Silence on these issues is not merely a cognitive question, however. It may also be a strategic decision. In interviews, women are frank about the fact that speaking out would be a form of “political suicide.”⁷⁹ One reason is that most perpetrators are members of a woman’s own political party.⁸⁰ Insiders may justify suppressing women’s accounts out of concerns about negative publicity that could be exploited at election time. Another is that women may believe that doing so will reflect badly on themselves, as in Tanzania where sexual favors for political positions is widespread.⁸¹ Silence may also be the result of staff decisions to read and delete abusive correspondence, such that MPs are not fully aware of the extent of harassment.⁸²

In cases where women are willing to speak out, finally, it is rarely clear to whom they should report. In 2014, sexual harassment allegations among Canadian MPs from different parties led to the discovery that there were no procedures in place to handle such claims.⁸³ In the wake of the #MeToo movement, women in several countries have created anonymous reporting mechanisms to fill this gap.⁸⁴ In Mexico, where the problem is well-recognized but no legal framework yet exists, women have lodged complaints with diverse state institutions.⁸⁵ Opening up may backfire, however, leading female politicians to be portrayed as overly emotional, as occurred following Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s misogyny speech in parliament in 2012.⁸⁶ Women may also simply not be believed: when Kim Weaver stood down as a candidate in an Iowa congressional race against incumbent Steve King, citing “very alarming acts of intimidation, including death threats,” he tweeted in response that “Death threats likely didn’t happen but a fabrication.”⁸⁷

Comparing Men’s and Women’s Experiences

A second challenge in studying violence against women in politics stems from calls to take “gender” seriously in political research. Scholars argue that it is vital to study men and women together, recognizing that men are gendered beings and that comparison is essential for ascertaining whether or not gender plays a role.⁸⁸ Bolstering the case for this approach, a review by IFES of its electoral violence data finds that men are more often victims of physical violence while women are more likely to face psychological violence.⁸⁹ Some male politicians have also been targeted for gender-based attacks. Harvey Milk, the first openly gay man to hold public office in the U.S., was assassinated in 1978 by one of his colleagues who was rumored to be anti-

gay. Anwar Ibrahim, a key opposition leader in Malaysia, was put on trial several times on charges of sodomy in an effort to destroy his reputation.⁹⁰

Emphasizing that gender-based political violence also occurs to men, however, risks falling down a slippery slope into theorizing a false symmetry between men's and women's experiences. Within the broader violence against women field, emphasis on the fact that most victims of gender-based violence are women gave rise to a counter-narrative claiming that men and women were equally victims – and perpetrators – of domestic violence. This equivalence perspective is easily disproved when types and severity of violence are taken into account.⁹¹

In the political world, some male politicians do claim to be equally or more abused than their female counterparts.⁹² Yet many male MPs largely reject the notion of equivalence, with British MP Martin Whitfield stating: “I fully accept that my experience... is but a mere toe in the water compared with the vile abuse received by other...Members, especially women.”⁹³ Absent a gender perspective, focusing on mere numbers, further, can distort perceptions of gender and political violence. A study of mafia assassinations of Italian mayors observes that all victims were male – without noting that women are severely under-represented in these positions.⁹⁴

Taking Intersectionality into Account

The emphasis on violence against *women* in politics, finally, seems to suggest that gender is the only source of abuse. One of the most important theoretical contributions of recent feminist research is the concept of intersectionality, theorizing the ways in which different facets of identity interact to shape life opportunities and experiences.⁹⁵ While intersectionality has not yet been incorporated widely into theorizing about violence against women in politics,⁹⁶ it is present in news coverage and emerging data on this phenomenon. An analysis of Twitter abuse against

female MPs in the UK finds that nearly half of the abusive tweets were directed at Diane Abbott, the first black woman to be elected to the British parliament; when Abbott is taken out of the sample, black and Asian women still receive 30% more abuse than their white counterparts.⁹⁷

These interactions are not limited to gender and race. In the UK, sexism has combined with anti-Semitism against Luciana Berger, a Jewish MP, and homophobic slurs against Angela Eagle, the first open lesbian MP.⁹⁸ Poor and lower caste women are more vulnerable than other groups in India, Nepal, and Pakistan,⁹⁹ while younger women are more prone according to global data from the IPU.¹⁰⁰ Women who challenge gender roles in multiple ways – being outspoken feminists¹⁰¹ or ascending to prominent leadership positions¹⁰² – also appear to be targeted for more numerous and more vitriolic attacks. The intersectional nature of this violence, however, does not undermine bias against women as a key driver. Rather, it substantiates the intuition that structural, cultural, and symbolic violence – against women and members of other marginalized groups – lie at the heart of this phenomenon.

Developing a Contextual Approach

The nature of structural, cultural, and symbolic violence – deeply rooted in everyday habits, expectations, and interactions – means that bias against particular groups is often highly naturalized. As a result, perpetrators may not even be aware of their prejudice, and targets may accept mistreatment as simply the normal course of affairs. This creates serious challenges to identifying acts of violence against women in politics. To get beyond this impasse, we draw on the hate crimes literature to conceptualize violence against women in politics as “bias events.” Pulling from existing legal guidance, we outline six indicators that could be used to establish whether or not, on balance, evidence would support a finding of bias against women in political

roles. We describe this as a contextual approach, because it requires going beyond viewing incidents in isolation, situating them instead in relation to other data to help determine the broader meaning of these events.

The Concept of Hate Crimes

The concept of hate crimes offers guidance for thinking in more concrete terms about the origins, means, and effects of violence against women in politics. Hate crime laws impose a higher class of penalties when a violent crime targets a victim due to perceived social group membership. These violent crimes are deemed to be more severe because they involve group-based discrimination. Used to reassert privilege on the part of dominant groups, their impact “goes far beyond physical or financial damages. It reaches into the community to create fear, hostility, and suspicion.”¹⁰³ These “message crimes” thus aim to deny equal rights to group members and heighten a sense of vulnerability among other members of the community.¹⁰⁴ Failing to reaffirm equality among citizens in the wake of hate crimes, therefore, can be viewed as tacit endorsement of violence directed towards group members.¹⁰⁵

One critique of hate crime legislation is that it punishes “improper thinking,” violating the right to free speech.¹⁰⁶ Yet the aim of these laws is to ensure that all members of society are free to exercise their civil rights without public or private interference.¹⁰⁷ Perpetrators’ actions seek to diminish free speech on the part of the harassed and other members of their group.¹⁰⁸ Women have not fully benefited from existing hate crime laws, however, due to frequent exclusion of gender as a category.¹⁰⁹ This partly stems from structural and cultural violence naturalizing the mistreatment of women. It may also be justified due to the existence of other laws on violence against women.¹¹⁰ A further challenge relates to the concept of “hate,” given

that perpetrators rarely, in fact, hate all women. Manne critiques this “naïve conception” of misogyny, focused on individuals, in favor of thinking about it as a property of social systems, in which women face hostility “*because they are women in a man’s world.*”¹¹¹

Weisburd and Levin advocate using the term “bias crime,” arguing that it more accurately captures this discriminatory, group-based hierarchical component. As civil rights violations, the hateful intent of the perpetrator is less important than discriminatory use of violence against those who are seen as “transgressors” against their “proper role” in society.¹¹² Focusing only on “crimes,” we argue, is also too limited. We expand our focus, therefore, to include what police in England and Wales label “hate incidents,” or “any non-crime perceived by the victim or any other person, as being motivated by prejudice or hate.”¹¹³ With these modifications, we propose the umbrella concept of “bias events” as the broader category drawing lines around what does – and does not – constitute an act of violence against women in politics.

We argue that a bias event approach has numerous advantages over a hate crime framework for analyzing violence against women in politics. First, it avoids unduly restricting the focus to criminal behaviors, recognizing that legal standards vary across countries, as does state capacity to enforce laws. Second, this approach decenters the state and the police as the only actors relevant to tackling violence against women in politics, opening up opportunities for other actors, like international organizations, political parties, and civil society, to be active on this issue. Third, it displaces a focus on perpetrator intentions – which can be misunderstood or denied – to privilege the perspectives and experiences of victims and society at large.

Criteria for Ascertaining Bias

To develop criteria for identifying bias events, we start with the guidelines presented in the FBI's *Hate Crime Data Collection Guidelines and Training Manual*. The FBI notes that because it is difficult to ascertain an offender's subjective motivation, a crime should be deemed to be motivated by bias "only if investigation reveals sufficient objective facts to lead a reasonable and prudent person to conclude that the offender's actions were motivated, in whole or in part, by bias."¹¹⁴ On its website, the FBI is clear to state that hate itself is not a crime.¹¹⁵ Consequently, the "mere fact the offender is biased against the victim's actual or perceived race, religion, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, gender, and/or gender identity does not mean that a hate crime was involved."¹¹⁶ Rather, the evidence must show that bias was an integral component in committing the crime itself.

The FBI guidelines list various types of evidence that – particularly when combined – might support a finding of bias. We focus on five of these, fleshing out how they might be applied to establish the presence – or not – of bias against women in political roles. First, *the offender made oral comments, written statements, or gestures indicating bias*. This might include using sexist or sexualized language – whether in-person, in print, or online – objectifying or otherwise denigrating women. Second, *the offender left bias-related drawings, symbols, or graffiti at the scene*. Perpetrators, in this case, might post or send photoshopped images degrading female politicians, or spray paint sexist insults on campaign posters, homes, or constituency offices.

Third, *the victim was engaged in activities related to his or her identity group*. Political women in this scenario might be outspoken feminists, but they may also simply have sought to speak up for women. Fourth, *the offender was previously involved in a similar incident or is a*

hate group member. The perpetrator might have harassed other female politicians, or might participate in men's rights networks or other groups – like white supremacist organizations – seeking to defend patriarchy. Fifth, *a substantial portion of the community where the event occurred perceived that the incident was motivated by bias*. Evidence for this might include speeches, opinion pieces, or demonstrations – especially by other women – which explicitly attribute the attack to a woman's gender.

Not all acts of bias are so transparent, however. One reason is unconscious bias, whereby people believe that they are not prejudiced – but nonetheless think or act in biased ways. Unconscious bias may manifest itself in the form of microaggressions: everyday indignities that, often unintentional, may communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative views towards members of certain groups.¹¹⁷ A more purposive approach masks prejudiced views by claiming other forms of wrongdoing. One example is “judicial harassment,” whereby individuals are targeted with baseless legal charges that divert time, energy, and resources away from their work – and, in the worst case scenario, may lead to lengthy prison sentences.¹¹⁸ To detect these forms of bias, we simplify these dynamics into a final criterion: *the victim was evaluated negatively according a double standard*. This might include attacking female politicians in ways and for reasons not used for male politicians.

This hate-crimes-inspired approach goes far in resolving the three methodological challenges above. First, the analysis does not require that the perpetrator or victim recognize the act as an instance of violence against women in politics. A third party can weigh the evidence and make an independent assessment. Second, this approach is case-based, and thus does not require comparisons with other populations to establish that sexism and misogyny played a role. Third, attention to bias as a larger category enables intersectional experiences to be taken into

account, whether this involves acts that are simultaneously sexist and homophobic, for example, or collection of events that are individually sexist and racist. By emphasizing the need for analysis, finally, this approach opens up the possibility that some incidents against female politicians may *not* be attributable to bias.

Applying the Framework

According to a bias event approach, ascertaining the meaning of particular acts requires placing them in their broader context, using information about their content, targets, perpetrators, and impact. It thus reserves judgment until further investigation, rather than assuming that every aggression against a female politician does – or does not – stem from bias. Our attention to structural and cultural violence, further, suggests that analysis must go beyond the immediate act to consider aspects of the spatial and temporal setting, which may affect how a particular event is interpreted in relation to gender bias. To illustrate how to gather and weigh evidence through this lens, we analyze three cases from different parts of the world to determine whether they constitute violence against women in politics.

Benazir Bhutto

Benazir Bhutto served as prime minister of Pakistan between 1988 and 1990 and 1993 and 1996. After years living abroad, she returned in October 2007 to contest parliamentary elections. Upon her homecoming, she survived an assassination attempt when her motorcade was bombed on its way to a campaign rally in Karachi, killing hundreds of bystanders. On December 27, after months of a tense political and security situation, she was killed as she waved from her car while leaving a rally at Liaquat Bagh park in Rawalpindi. The next day, the Ministry of the

Interior announced the cause of death and identified who was responsible for the attack. This quick resolution raised more questions than it answered. In 2008, her widower, Asif Ali Zardari, the new Pakistani president, requested support from the UN for a fact-finding mission to establish the circumstances surrounding her assassination.

Conducting more than 250 interviews over the course of nine months, the UN team noted the distinct lack of data available for evaluation: the crime scene was hosed down within an hour of the attack, only 23 pieces of evidence were collected, and an autopsy on the body was refused. It found this “inexplicable in terms of the basic principles of effective police work,” ultimately concluding that these failures were deliberate.¹¹⁹ After their initial arrests, police abandoned their efforts to identify the suicide bomber, leaving his motives unclear. As a result of these gaps, we lack evidence regarding (1) comments, statements, or gestures, or (2) drawings, symbols, and graffiti, which might support a finding of gender bias. Evidence that is available, however, strongly points to political drivers behind the attack, including Bhutto being placed under house arrest prior to the assassination, curious security lapses on the day, and suspicious behaviors by government officials in the wake of the attacks.¹²⁰

The longer trajectory of Bhutto’s career, nonetheless, provides ample testimony of hostility to her leadership due to the fact that she was a woman. When she returned to Pakistan in the late 1980s, she was constantly asked in media interviews why she was not married, leading her to consent to an arranged marriage in order to continue her political activities. In 1988, her party won the elections, but religious leaders opposed her leadership, arguing that a woman could not serve as head of an Islamic state.¹²¹ Empowerment of women formed a key part of her party’s manifesto, and one of her first actions as prime minister was to free many female prisoners, symbolically releasing women from the “social prisons” they had suffered during the

military dictatorship.¹²² While this suggests she (3) was engaged in activities related to her identity group, her government subsequently failed to overturn some of the most discriminatory laws.¹²³ By 2008, her focus on women's issues was much reduced, appearing in the second half of her party manifesto in a mere half page of a 22-page document.¹²⁴

Due to the botched police investigation, many theories flourish regarding her assassins and their potential motivations. Government officials attributed the attack to Al-Qaeda. The UN team noted that Bhutto did have concerns that Al-Qaeda and members of the Pakistani Taliban might seek to harm her, based on her strong stance against religious extremism, as well as her support for the U.S. approach for combatting terrorism. During her last months in Pakistan, however, she developed the view that then-President Pervez Musharraf was the main threat to her safety, fearing that the government might use radical Islamists to hide its role in any attack.¹²⁵ She was also deeply suspicious of the military and intelligence communities, naming three senior Musharraf allies that she believed were out to kill her.¹²⁶ Threat warnings passed to her by the government, she was convinced, aimed to intimidate her to stop campaigning.¹²⁷

While Al-Qaeda and the Taliban were (4) previously involved in similar incidents as well as hate group members, these additional considerations indicate that all potential suspects were driven overwhelmingly by questions of policy and political power.

In terms of (5) reactions of the community to the question of gender bias, commentary to this effect was relatively minimal. The Al-Qaeda leader accused of planning the assassination strongly denied it, explaining: "Tribal people have their own customs. We certainly don't strike women."¹²⁸ Similarly, in an otherwise extremely detailed single-spaced, 65-page report, the UN team devoted only one line to gendered motivations, stating that "Ms. Bhutto's gender was also an issue with the religious extremists who believed that a woman should not lead an Islamic

country.”¹²⁹ Among the three Musharraf allies identified by Bhutto, only one was explicitly said to “not like women meddling in politics.”¹³⁰ Finally, the response of international leaders largely focused on violence as a threat to democracy, with gendered content restricted to noting she was a woman or calling her Ms. Bhutto.¹³¹

Regarding whether Bhutto (6) was punished according to a negative double standard, evidence again points to lack of gender bias. She was not the first political figure in Pakistan to die in an untimely fashion. Her father, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who served as president and as prime minister, was executed in 1979. Even more tellingly, Pakistan’s first prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, was assassinated in 1951 – in the same park Bhutto was leaving as she was killed. When she arrived at the hospital after the suicide bombing, the staff was busy treating victims of a shooting at a rival candidate’s rally earlier that day.¹³² The only discriminatory treatment uncovered by the UN team was a letter in which the Interior Ministry instructed provincial governments to provide stringent and specific security measures for two male ex-prime ministers; no similar directive was issued for Bhutto, also an ex-prime minister. The reason, however, appears to be political: both men were members of the ruling party and close allies of Musharraf.¹³³ Based on this analysis, we conclude that Bhutto’s assassination entailed political violence and violence against politicians, not violence against women in politics.

Dilma Rousseff

Dilma Rousseff was elected as the first female president of Brazil in 2011 and re-elected in 2014. Her re-election was challenged by the main opposition party, which alleged improprieties related to electronic voting and campaign finance. In May 2015, anti-government groups presented the party with a petition to impeach Rousseff, which senior leaders hesitated to

accept – but made clear they intended to search for grounds of alleged wrongdoing.¹³⁴ In December 2015, the President of the Chamber of Deputies, Eduardo Cunha, accepted a formal denunciation claiming administrative infractions related to the presentation of government accounts and budgeting practices. The Chamber voted in April 2016 to move ahead with the proceedings. Four weeks later, the Senate voted to suspend Rousseff’s powers during the trial, and her vice president, Michel Temer, became the acting president. In August 2016, the Senate removed Rousseff from office, finding her guilty of breaking the budget law.

On their face, impeachment proceedings do not appear to constitute a form of “violence,” as traditionally understood, nor do they seem like a particularly gendered form of attack. A deeper probe into this case, however, reveals patterns consistent with a bias event. Those who promoted the process and voted in favor of impeachment made numerous (1) comments, statements, or gestures indicating bias. From the outset, Rousseff indicated her preference to be referred to as *presidenta* (the feminine form of the word “president”). Latin American news outlets outside of Brazil overwhelmingly called her *presidenta*, as did female politicians and members of her own party. In contrast, those who voted for impeachment – as well as conservative media outlets – persisted in calling her *presidente* (the masculine form).¹³⁵ This semiotic violence was accompanied by less gendered but clearly violent language. Deputy Jair Bolsonaro dedicated his vote to Colonel Carlos Brilhante Ustra, who tortured political prisoners – including Rousseff – during the military dictatorship. His son, also a deputy, mimicked the firing of a machine gun as he voted for impeachment.¹³⁶

From the time that she first entered the political scene, Rousseff’s appearance – her age, short hair, and professional attire – were seen as an affront to traditional Brazilian standards of femininity.¹³⁷ Emphasizing these differences, the magazine *Veja* published an article a day after

the Chamber vote, praising Marcela Temer, the 33-year-old wife of the vice president, as “beautiful, maidenlike, and ‘of the home.’”¹³⁸ A cover story in *Isto É!* magazine portrayed Rousseff as hysterical, drawing parallels with Queen Mary I of Portugal and Brazil, or *Maria a Louca* (Mary the Crazy).¹³⁹ In July 2015, members of the general public began to place stickers showing Rousseff with her legs spread apart around their gas tank openings, sexually violating her image every time they filled up.¹⁴⁰ A final set of (2) bias-related drawings and symbols include signs reading *Tchau, Querida!* (Bye-Bye, Sweetheart!) held up on the Chamber floor by mainly male legislators, taunting Rousseff as they voted for her impeachment.

On the day she was inaugurated, Rousseff proclaimed: “My greatest commitment, I repeat, is to honoring our women, protecting our most vulnerable people, and governing for everyone.”¹⁴¹ Actions during her presidency confirm that she (3) was engaged in activities related to her identity group. She continued policies for women implemented under her predecessor and expanded the government’s work to end violence against women and support women’s financial autonomy. She appointed far more women to cabinet positions than previous presidents and elevated the secretariat on policies for women to a full-fledged ministry.¹⁴² The interim government moved immediately to reverse these gains. Temer appointed the first all-white, all-male cabinet since the military dictatorship. He collapsed the work of the women’s ministry into the Ministry of Justice, and between 2016 and 2017, he discontinued the majority of policies for women initiated under Rousseff and her predecessor.¹⁴³

The two other main protagonists of impeachment, Cunha and Bolsonaro, are well-known for (4) their sexism and misogyny. Cunha sponsored a bill in 2013 to restrict access to abortion in cases of rape and increase penalties for abortion. In 2015, he criticized the inclusion of “gender ideology” in the national plan of education, seeking to prohibit the use of terms like

“gender” and “sexual orientation” in the classroom in favor of emphasizing “natural sexual roles” and the “natural family.”¹⁴⁴ Bolsonaro was described by journalists in 2014 as “the most misogynistic, hateful, elected official in the democratic world.”¹⁴⁵ In response to Congresswoman Maria do Rosário, who denounced the military dictatorship for using sexual violence against dissidents, he took the floor and stated: “I would not rape you. You don’t merit that.” The Supreme Court ruled in her favor when she filed a complaint for libel and slander, which she argued was tantamount to promoting rape culture.¹⁴⁶

The reaction of women suggests that (5) a substantial portion believed the impeachment was motivated by bias. In a piece published in the *Guardian* in July 2016, one activist wrote that “almost all feminists agree that her impeachment was sexist and discriminatory,” observing that thousands of women have come together to express solidarity with Rousseff in a “confrontation with the patriarchy, with male chauvinists.”¹⁴⁷ The head of UN Women in Brazil made a similar statement condemning the “political violence of a sexist nature directed against President Dilma Rousseff.”¹⁴⁸ Female politicians echoed this message. Senator Gleisi Hoffman stated that it was undeniable that misogyny played a role in the impeachment process,¹⁴⁹ while Senator Regina Sousa remarked during the trial that “The message they are sending in this process is also directed at all women. With their blocking actions they are telling us: women cannot.”¹⁵⁰ Rousseff acknowledged this support during her speech in the Senate: “Brazilian women have been, during this time, a fundamental pillar for my resistance... Tireless companions in a battle in which misogyny and prejudice showed their claws.”¹⁵¹

Finally, ample evidence indicates that Rousseff (6) was punished according to a negative double standard. Her stated offense was to use funds from the central bank to conceal a budget deficit before the 2014 elections, which she later reimbursed. This budgetary practice, known in

Brazil as *pedaladas fiscais*, was made illegal in 2000, but had been employed by two previous presidents without penalty. Moreover, many legal experts agreed that it did not amount to a “crime of responsibility,” the only type of crime that justifies removing an elected president.¹⁵² Magnifying these inconsistencies is the fact that most governors and many mayors engage in *pedaladas*, including a former governor who served as the rapporteur for the Senate’s special commission on impeachment. Further, over 100 of the 513 deputies were themselves under formal investigation for some kind of criminal activity at the time of the impeachment vote, including Cunha.¹⁵³ Corruption probes were eventually ordered against more than one-third of the members of Temer’s cabinet.¹⁵⁴ Rousseff, in contrast, stands out as one of the cleanest politicians in Brazil.¹⁵⁵ Together with the other evidence, this leads us to classify her impeachment as an instance of violence against women in politics, with psychological, sexual, and semiotic components.

Jo Cox

Jo Cox became a member of the British House of Commons in 2015, representing the Labour Party. On June 16, 2016, she was fatally shot and stabbed while arriving at a routine constituency surgery (a weekly walk-in session for constituents to meet with their MPs) in Birstall, West Yorkshire. The last sitting British MP to be killed was Conservative MP Ian Gow, who was assassinated by the Provisional Irish Republican Army in 1990; the last politician to die in an attack was county councilor Andrew Pennington in 2000. Cox’s murder occurred one week before the contested Brexit referendum, in which she was a vocal advocate for Britain to remain in the European Union. She also spoke positively about immigration and campaigned on behalf of refugees from Syria.

Witnesses reported that the assailant, Thomas Mair, yelled out during the attack: “Britain first, keep Britain independent, Britain will always come first. This is for Britain.”¹⁵⁶ The constituency was a place where anti-European views ran high, with Leave posters and English flags everywhere. The UK Independence Party leader, Nigel Farage, among other politicians, made immigration into one of the central issues of the Brexit campaign. Adding to these tensions, in May 2016 the extremist Britain First political party pledged that it would target Muslims holding elected office in the UK, not stopping until all the “Islamist occupiers” were driven out of politics.¹⁵⁷ This context indicates that Mair (1) made comments, statements, or gestures indicating bias. However, the bias in this case appears to be race- rather than gender-driven. His “death to traitors” outburst during his first court appearance provides further insight that he viewed Cox as betraying her own race through her policy stances.

A search of Mair’s house and computer records following the attack uncovered (2) bias-related drawings and symbols. He had books on the Nazis, German military history, and white supremacy, which he stored on a shelf topped by a Third Reich eagle with a swastika. He also kept newspaper clippings about Anders Breivik, who murdered 77 members of the Norwegian Labour Party in 2011. Mair’s internet searches included information on the British National Party, apartheid, the Ku Klux Klan, white supremacy, and Nazism.¹⁵⁸ These clues, again, point to racial prejudice, rather than gender bias, as a motivating factor behind the crime. This interpretation is bolstered by the statement given by Cox’s husband on the day she was killed that she would have wanted that “we all unite to fight against the hatred that killed her. Hate doesn’t have a creed, race, or religion, it is poisonous.”¹⁵⁹ In his sentencing, however, the judge did make brief mention of a potential gender element when addressing Mair: “You even researched matricide, knowing that Jo Cox was the mother of young children.”¹⁶⁰

Cox herself was (3) was clearly engaged in activities related to her identity group. On Twitter, she had shared a picture of herself and a group of Labour MPs holding up signs saying #Imafeminist in a campaign to end online abuse against women. She disclosed to friends that she was concerned about the “increasing nature of hostility and aggression” towards female MPs.¹⁶¹ She was personally forced to contact police after being harassed by a stream of malicious messages over the course of three months, which led to the arrest of a man who was given a warning in connection with his conduct in March 2016. Due to this online harassment, at the time of her death police were considering implementing additional security both at her constituency surgery in Birstall and at her houseboat in London. They found no links between this individual and Mair, however. Based on the first three criteria of the bias event approach, it thus appears that Cox’s murder is best understood as a case of violence against politicians.

Considering the next two criteria shifts the picture somewhat. Based on the evidence outlined above, Mair was (4) a supporter of hate groups. Police found that he attended gatherings of far-right political groups like the National Front and the English Defence League and purchased publications from extremist groups in the U.S. and South Africa. Ideas about white supremacy and male supremacy are inextricably linked, according to prominent anti-hate organizations like the Anti-Defamation League and the Southern Poverty Law Center. The white male supremacist worldview of “naturalized and hierarchized differences”¹⁶² along lines of both race and gender generates particular rage at the prospect of a white woman challenging racism,¹⁶³ with elements of misogyny as integral as racist beliefs.

Following the attack, (5) a substantial portion of the community perceived that the incident was motivated by gender bias. Female MPs clearly viewed the murder through a gender lens. The next day, Diane Abbott stated: “It is hard to escape the conclusion that the vitriolic

misogyny that so many women politicians endure framed the murderous attack on Jo.”¹⁶⁴ Cox’s friend, Jess Phillips, published numerous editorials in the ensuing months, writing at the time of Mair’s sentencing that “for me and for many of my colleagues – particularly female MPs – fear has also become real and present.”¹⁶⁵ These perceptions were echoed by male politicians. Labour MP Chris Bryant, vocal in calling for these threats to be taken more seriously, remarked: “I think women MPs, gay MPs, ethnic minority MPs get the brunt of it.”¹⁶⁶ This perception is borne out by data: while women are 32% of MPs, the Parliamentary Liaison and Investigation Team, established after Cox’s murder, estimates that approximately 60% of the cases it received concerned female MPs.¹⁶⁷ Viewing her murder in terms of challenges to women’s political presence, the Labour Party launched the Jo Cox Women in Leadership Programme.¹⁶⁸ Drawing parallels with suffragettes who “had to contend with open hostility and abuse to win their right to vote,” Prime Minister Theresa May, a Conservative, opted to make her first public statement on a review of abuse and intimidation of candidates on February 6, 2018, the centenary of women’s right to vote.¹⁶⁹

Evidence that (6) the victim was evaluated negatively according a double standard is less clear. The police review of Mair’s internet search history revealed that he had looked at the Wikipedia page of William Hague,¹⁷⁰ a Conservative politician also from Yorkshire who had served as an MP, party leader, and leader of the opposition before being appointed to the House of Lords in 2015. Like Cox, Hague was a supporter of the Remain campaign. Based on insights from the work of the Fixated Threat Assessment Centre (FTAC), Mair most likely targeted Cox because she was his local MP. FTAC seeks to “assess and manage risks from lone individuals who harass, stalk, or threaten public figures.”¹⁷¹ According to FTAC staff, every MP has a group of resentful constituents who channel their frustrations toward their local MP.¹⁷² In light of the

evidence presented above, however, it may also have simply been a coincidence that Mair's local MP turned out to be a young woman with pro-immigration views.

Given the mixed evidence, we find this case to be the most challenging of the three in terms of classification. A bias event approach does not require that all six criteria be met, however. Each simply provides potential clues as to the presence and significance of bias informing commission of the event. Weighing each piece of information and how they fit together as a whole, we determine that the discussion in relation to criteria (4) gives new meaning to the evidence considered under criteria (1) and (2), indicating that racist language and symbols also have an underlying misogynistic component. The reactions mapped under criteria (5) also lend greater substance to the evidence presented under criteria (3), and vice versa, by explaining why female politicians, particularly feminist ones, might experience a heightened sense of vulnerability to violence and harassment. On this basis, we argue that the murder of Jo Cox is a case of violence against women in politics, containing physical and psychological elements.

Conclusions

Violence against women in politics is increasingly recognized around the world as a significant barrier to women's political participation. This article seeks to strengthen its theoretical, empirical, and methodological foundations. Interest in this topic is likely to grow, making shared concepts and language vital for building a cumulative research agenda. Conceptualizing it in terms of structural, cultural, and symbolic violence, moreover, lays bare what is at stake by allowing violence against women in politics to continue. First, accepting abuse as "the cost of doing politics" raises questions about the robustness of democracy. Even

without equality concerns, interfering with election campaigns, or preventing officials from fulfilling their mandates, violates the political rights of candidates as well as voters. Second, tolerating mistreatment of someone due to their ascriptive characteristics infringes on their human rights, undermining their personal integrity and sense of social value. Third, normalizing women's exclusion from political participation relegates them to second class citizenship, threatening principles of gender equality.

Acknowledging the varied manifestations of violence against women in politics, in turn, points to the importance of developing multifaceted solutions. Adopting new legislation, or revising existing laws, is one approach that has been particularly prevalent in Latin America, focused on combating physical, psychological, and economic violence. Guidance for electoral observers to detect and report violence against women during elections, especially physical, psychological, and sexual, has been piloted in Africa and Latin America. In North America and Western Europe, parliaments are considering improved codes of conduct and procedures for reporting sexual harassment. To track and respond to online abuse of politically active women, social media companies are partnering with civil society organizations, addressing psychological, sexual, and semiotic violence. The effectiveness of these strategies is not yet known, highlighting the need for further research and the continued development of counter-measures. A crucial task for both academics and practitioners is to begin raising awareness that violence and harassment should *not* be the cost of women's engagement in the political sphere.

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Notes

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