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Violence Against Women in Politics and the Instruments to Fight

Abstract

Violence against women in politics attracts more and more attention from political actors and the scientific community. Along with the increase in the number of politically active women around the world, the frequency of violence against women in politics and the extent of its manifestation has increased. Although the representation of women at the decision-making levels, especially at the legislative level, has increased dramatically in recent years, at the same time, the cases of violence against women in politics have increased. As a rule, women have to pay a much higher price for political participation than male politicians.

Violence against women in politics is a result of incomplete democratic consolidation. Some researchers consider violence against women to be a kind of category which is related to weak state capacity and criminal justice systems. This phenomenon emphasizes not only the existence of violence against women in the country but also points to the shortcomings of the existing legislation and the syndrome of impunity in the country, to solve which the activation of both state and non-state actors and policy changes are essential.

Today, violence against women in politics is common all over the world, although this problem is pervasive in developing countries. Violence against women in politics is a form of gender-based violence against women (GBVAW). VAWP is any act or threat of physical, sexual, or psychological violence that prevents women from exercising and realizing their political rights and a range of human rights, which poses a severe challenge to democracy, human rights, and gender equality (UN Women, 2021).

The concept of violence against women in politics requires constant attention and study from researchers and scientists to give men and women equal opportunities to participate in politics without any fear or violence.

Keywords: Violence against women, Gender violence, Gender equality.

Introduction

Traditionally, international relations and comparative politics scholars who have studied political violence have tended to focus on intentional acts; however have largely considered only the experiences of men. These approaches have entirely neglected to consider how such attacks have affected women or whether women exercising their political rights may experience different forms of violence.

Feminist international relations scholars have pushed scholars to examine and discuss how gender has shaped armed conflict while also emphasizing the importance of peace processes and women's experiences of armed conflict (Cohen, 2016 & Hudson, 2009). Scholars of gender and politics in comparative politics have demonstrated how gender shaped women's participation during and after democratic transitions. Recent research on gender and politics has focused on the obstacles, hostility, and violent attacks faced by women politicians around the world.

Gender equality in political participation and representation is considered one of the most important pillars of modern democracy. While gender quotas may be seen as a step forward in achieving equal representation, quotas can never be a long-term solution. If improving gender equality statistics becomes the only goal in political life, systemic changes will fail. Fundamental systemic changes in the political representation of women in European societies to achieve true gender equality first require a detailed study of the reasons for women's under-representation when it comes to political participation. Although the causes of such a complex problem are multi-layered, gender-based violence is often identified as one of the main issues preventing women from participating in politics. Violence against women in politics (VAWP) is a specific form of gender-based violence, which in turn includes a range of attacks on women politicians that aim to undermine women as political actors and exclude this said group from public life (Krook, 2020).

As we have already mentioned, achieving gender equality is among the main declared priorities of a democratic society. In this regard, politics is one of the most central and challenging areas, especially in developing countries. According to a study conducted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Council of Europe, 85.2% of the interviewed female parliamentarians experienced psychological violence during their work, 46.9% were threatened with death, rape, or beating, 58.2% were the target of online sexual attacks on social networks, 24.7% experienced sexual violence (Inter-Parliamentary Union 2016, p. 3). Based on the results of existing studies, in 2016 and 2017, global and regional organizations began to raise awareness and take active action: the National Democratic Institute (NDI) launched the #NotTheCost campaign to stop violence against women in politics; The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) conducted a global survey of sexism, violence and harassment among women parliamentarians; In 2018, the #MeToo movement led to the suspension or resignation of

several male MPs and cabinet members in North America, Western Europe and beyond. The existing statistics clearly show that violence against women is not a rare phenomenon in politics.

Anyway, what does violence against women mean in politics? When women take their place in politics, their presence, opinions,, and legitimacy is often questioned in order to maintain men's privileged position and power. Violence against women is not based on their political views but on the fact that they are women and aims to hinder their political activities (OSCE, 2022).

Bolivia turned out to be the first state in the world to respond to violence against women in politics with legal reforms. Bolivia passed a law prohibiting political violence and harassment of women. Bolivia's legislation to combat political violence against women resulted from tireless advocacy by the Association of Women's Council (Acobol) and its allies. They documented thousands of cases of political harassment across the country, especially against women in rural areas. The Bolivian law aims to prevent and eliminate both harassment and physical and psychological violence, which provides a precise definition of violent acts and establishes specific administrative, penal, or constitutional sanctions (Krook et al. R, 2016).

In Policy Against Violence Against Women, UN Women has developed a unique guide that develops gender-sensitive indicators to measure violence against women in elections, focusing on the formation of opportunities for women's political participation and discrimination. The concept of violence against women is gaining ground in politics globally, especially among activists and practitioners. Nevertheless, it is interesting that the academic work on the mentioned problem is still relatively new, and that is why most of the existing scientific research focuses on developments in Latin America (Cerva C, 2014).

Literature Review

Violence against women in politics is a problem in all regions of the world. The mentioned problem in politics is so new in the academic space that it can often be considered unfair to discuss their "flaws." Much of the existing scientific literature, written by scholars and practitioners, conceptualizes theories and examines empirical forms and cases of violence in different regions (Krook, 2017; Krook & Sanín R, 2016). They distinguish between types of political violence, such as election-related or post-election violence. These differences help researchers better understand the specific causes and consequences of political violence. For example, motive (such as influencing the electoral process) and timing (during the electoral process). In addition, they also categorize forms of violence, targeting, frequency, and techniques of each form.

Crook's "Violence Against Women in Politics," published by Oxford University Press in 2020, can be considered the first academic book written on the topic of violence against women. However, a few years earlier, Krook and Restrepo Sanin, like other researchers, tried to consider violence against women (VAWIP) as a form of violence against women (Krook & Sanin; R. 2016). In their work, the mentioned crime is identified as a continuum of violent acts, ranging from physical aggression to psychological aggression. Violence against women perpetuates traditional gender roles and maintains

and reinforces the gendered distribution of economic, political, and social power. Therefore, violence against women in politics includes those actions aimed at maintaining male dominance in the public sphere, the so-called "VAWIP", which is defined as hate crimes against women in politics, the driving purpose of which is solely the fact that the women are represented in politics. Accordingly, Crook and Restrepo Sanini consider the maintenance of gender order as the main reason for the motivation of violent attackers. Although violence against women in politics has gained global attention, several conceptual issues remain unclear regarding the terminology and typology of violence itself. UN Women and the International Fund for Electoral Systems (IFES) focus on violence against women during elections, not in political life. For example, Bolivian law identifies two types of violence against women in politics, IFES defines three, and IPU identifies four types of violence.

Feminist research often begins by reflecting on women's lived experiences, and their experiences and perspectives are typically considered the starting point for theory (Harding, 2004). It is, therefore only natural that scholars writing about violence against women in politics in Latin America are primarily inspired by activist debates and explanations. Indeed, some academics, especially Cerva Cerna, have played an essential role in bringing together politicians, activists, and academics to outline the nature of the phenomenon in question (Cerva Cerna, 2014).

Piscopo offers an interesting critique of women's activism and violence against women in existing and current scholarly research in Latin America (Piscopo, 2016). Piscopo harshly criticized the work of Crook and Sannini, well-known researchers working on this problem, who responded to Piscopo's criticism and found part of his assessment incorrect due to an inaccurate interpretation of their argument, including an exclusive emphasis on developments in Latin America. Crook and Sannin believe that the purpose of their paper was to develop a theory in the scholarly literature that examines what violence against women in politics is and why it occurs; while activists focus mainly on physical, sexual, and psychological violence, the scope of which should be expanded and also to include concepts of economic and symbolic violence. Crook categorically disagreed with Picasso's opinion, which asserts that violence against female politicians occurs only in the context of imperfect democratic consolidation. The nature of these actions - which fundamentally limit women's participation - cannot be accounted for or explained by violence against politicians in general, or even violence in society, as Piscopo believes, caused by the absence of the rule of law. Since violence against women in politics is not limited to Latin America, the Bishop's assertion that political violence and harassment of women originates more from incomplete processes of democratic consolidation in the region than from patriarchal nature is questioned. Piscopo makes the case that violence against women in politics is a problem and is mainly confined to developing countries where state capacity is weak. The mentioned approach is naturally less likely to be considered a solid argument, because violent acts against women in politics happen not only in developing but also in developed, consolidated democracies. Violence is not routine ,and therefore state institutions are strong enough in terms of law enforcement mechanisms.

Crook and Sanini argue that violence against women in politics is a separate phenomenon in contrast to violence in society, which focuses on clear motivations for limiting women's political participation, making it a distinct form of violence. Therefore, they emphasize the clear message of the motive of violence, which aims to exclude women as a group from political participation. Existing research confirms that female candidates and politicians face unique risks in politics today because of their gender identity. For example, women politicians, especially those who pose severe obstacles to powerful opponents or interest groups, are routinely threatened with rape, harassed with sexist comments, or accused of sexual or moral impurity.

Conceptual Framework of Violence Against Women in Politics

Violence against women in politics includes all forms of aggression, coercion, and intimidation aimed at excluding women from political participation in such roles as voters, political party members, candidates, elected representatives, appointed officials, or election administrators. Women politicians are constantly subjected to violence and threats of violence in the course of their political activities, which violates fundamental human rights, including the obligation that many countries have signed to promote the full, free, and safe participation of women in the political life of their country (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1966 International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, 1955 Convention on the Political Rights of Women, International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966), 1995 CEDAW Convention and the Beijing Declaration and platform for action).

Gender-based violence is the most severe manifestation of discrimination against women. When women's equality became an issue of interest to international political decision-makers in the 1970s, the United Nations developed the first initiatives on the issue of violence against women (VAW) at the first women's conference in Mexico in 1975. Guarantees of women's right to political participation are included in several international conventions and national legal frameworks. Article 7 of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (United Nations, 1979), for example, States Parties shall take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right: (a) To vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies; (b) To participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government;

Similar statements can be found in the UN Beijing Platform for Action (United Nations, 1995), the Millennium Development Goals (UN, 2000), and the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), all calling for women's full and effective participation and equal leadership opportunities. At the same time, in more than 150 countries, the constitution guarantees equal rights and political participation of men and women (UN Women, 2016).

The concept of violence is a complex problem; First of all, violence against women in politics undermines democracy. Banning female voters from entering the polling stations violates the integrity of the elections, as a part of the population is systematically excluded from exercising their political rights. Threats or harassment of women activists and party members prevent women from contributing to political debate and identifying policy priorities. Intimidation and coercion, pressuring women to resign after being elected to office, or making it too difficult or at least impossible for them to do their work, violate both women's right to participate in politics and voter rights, as election results are effectively nullified in favor of specific forces and fail to reflect the will of the people, the will of the people as the source of government. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948) defines "human rights" in terms of "human dignity and worth". Article 21 of the Declaration of Human Rights states that "Everyone has the right to take part in the government of his country, directly or through freely chosen representatives. Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in his country. The will of the people shall be the basis of the government's authority; this will shall be expressed in periodic and genuine elections, which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures. In addition, violence against women in politics is also a manifestation of sexism and gender discrimination. Article 1 of CEDAW, signed by 189 state parties, defines the term "discrimination" as " any distinction, exclusion or restriction made based on sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field " (UN, 1979). The International Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (United Nations, 1993) unequivocally defines violence against women as a form of gender-based discrimination, as "a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between men and women" that results in "dominance by men over women, discrimination and the complete subjugation of women." From this point of view, violence against women in politics can be understood as a form of discrimination against women in the political sphere, which limits and hinders access to rights and freedoms based on gender and tries to maintain unequal power relations.

Violence Against Women Politicians

Although women in politics have long faced the problems of aggression, coercion, and intimidation, the concept of violence against women is relatively new in politics, and it is only in the last fifteen years that it has been researched in different contexts. Research on "political violence and harassment against women" in Latin America first appeared in 2000, when the local council of women organized a workshop in the Bolivian Chamber of Deputies to discuss special reports on violence against female candidates and elected officials in municipalities. Over the next twelve years, the Women's Association of Bolivian Local Councilors, along with other women politicians and activists, worked to study and expose the phenomenon. Accordingly, they have identified and identified numerous acts of

violence and harassment against women in politics, the purpose of which was to reduce, hinder, or limit women's political participation or to force women to accept membership against their will.

Although violence against women in politics as a concept is a relatively new phenomenon, it is clear that it is not a new phenomenon in politics. Suppose the concept focuses more broadly on women as political actors. In that case, historical precedents abound for the violence still faced by women suffragists, especially radical suffragists who assaulted, imprisoned, or forcibly removed their children (Harrison, 1978). Similar precedents occurred when women decided to enter spaces completely monopolized by men at the time, such as the armed forces, where they experienced high rates of sexual violence and harassment from their colleagues.

A clear example of the manifestation of violence against women in politics is the murder of a member of the British Parliament - Jo Cox, in 2016, a British Labour Party politician and Member of Parliament (MP) who was shot outside Birstall Library. This murder shocked the whole of Europe and the rest of the world, revealed severe flaws in the existing prevention mechanisms and the low level of awareness about VAWP, which once again exposed and convinced the scientific community that scientific research in this direction is not enough, because violence as a phenomenon is still needs extensive study.

It is interesting to note a study conducted by the "European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights," which shows that higher rates of harassment (primarily in-person harassment compared to online harassment) were observed among people who were not born in any of the EU member states (migrant origin), (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights Rights, 2021). Also, the risk of various forms of gender-based violence, especially sexual violence, is greater among women with disabilities. The mentioned data once again confirm the necessity of developing an inclusive policy regarding gender-based violence, which takes into account the different contexts and hate motives of the crime committed by both the victims and the perpetrator.

A direct result of violence against women in politics is the fact that in addition to an environment vulnerable to attacks, women may also face threats in spaces that are usually completely safe for men, such as political meetings, official events, party offices, and even their residence, of which the Prime Minister of Pakistan is a direct example. The murder of a female minister - Benazir Bhutto, who is still considered the most famous female politician after Margaret Thatcher. Brought up in liberal traditions, Bhutto spearheaded the struggle for women's rights, which was naturally opposed to the traditional culture of Pakistan. During his time in power, he allowed women to choose between wearing the headscarf, staying at home, and working, even though he respected Islamic traditions. During his premiership, Pakistan's primary education deficit was reduced, children received free medical care, and water was pumped into mountainous regions (Feminists For Life of America). Bhutto returned from exile to contest the 2008 parliamentary elections after she signed a power-sharing agreement with then-President Pervez Musharraf. After one failed assassination attempt, Bhutto was

finally removed from the political scene when the prime minister was shot twice in the throat and chest while on his way to a rally.

The elections held in Afghanistan in 2004 are also interesting. Several women's rights were violated during the elections, and there were several incidents of violence against women as political actors, with female politicians being intimidated while registering to vote. In some areas, under pressure from religious authorities, directives prevented women from entering the voter list. Moreover, according to a survey, almost 90 % of Afghans believed that women needed the permission of their husbands or families to vote. Interestingly, a bus carrying female election workers was bombed, killing and injuring several women on board, and those women who came to vote often found women's polling stations unmanned or closed due to threats made against them (Human et al., 2004). In all of these incidents, the actual and threatened violence was aimed at limiting women's ability to participate as a group, making it a clear case of violence against women in the political sphere.

It is interesting to note that violence against women is a problem not only in developing countries but also in consolidated democracies. In Sweden, for example, there have been several precedents of pressure on female local politicians to withdraw their candidacy in favor of male politicians (Creasy, 2014). In Australia, 60% of women aged 18 to 21 and 80% of women aged 31 and over said they were less likely to vote after seeing the adverse treatment of their country's Prime Minister (Shepherd, 2014). In Great Britain, more than 75% of participants in the Women Leaders Program refused to participate in politics after a video of gender based violence against politicians went viral (Campbell & Lovenduski, 2016). In Italy, the Speaker of the Parliament published graphic photos and threats he received after taking office (Davies, 2014).

Strategies and Approaches to Prevent Violence Against Women

In the 1990s and 2000s, pressure from feminist movements and their supporters affected many states. Their goal was to reform the legal system in order to prevent and suppress violence against women. Even in countries with progressive legislation, civil activists face severe challenges in forcing state authorities to enforce the law and allocate appropriate resources to social services.

Enacting legislation against violence against women in politics is often a time-consuming process that requires ongoing efforts and support from donor organizations. In order to fight the mentioned problem, the role of the media is vital in terms of raising the awareness and consciousness of civil society. In order to overcome the problems of violence against women in politics, it is necessary to involve the media; the media sector should ensure the organization of a training cycle for journalists in order to increase their gender sensitivity in the process of media coverage. It is also necessary to use social media as an essential tool to publicize and condemn cases of violence against women in politics, using public control as a tool to put pressure on the perpetrators.

Since the elimination of violence against women in politics is a rather time-consuming process, it requires a complex approach, the best means of which is, first of all, the development of legislation on violence against women or sexual harassment and its practical implementation. Nevertheless, efforts to combat violence against women in politics are not limited to legal reforms. In this regard, it is also essential to develop an appropriate code of conduct for the members of the legislative body to organize mandatory trainings for them, who are often the organizers of crimes. In addition, it is necessary to publicly recognize this problem in the political parties themselves in order to develop an appropriate legal framework for its prevention and elimination. It is essential that political parties develop a code of conduct for executive and rank-and-file members to prohibit sexism or bullying at meetings, as well as sexual harassment at all levels of party work. It is essential to reform party constitutions and policies in general to develop and impose sanctions on party members who commit violent acts against women in politics. In order to overcome this problem, it is necessary to form a relevant party body, which will be responsible for receiving complaints from affected members and imposing sanctions against the abuser. At the same time, it is essential to develop an inter-party declaration to which other political parties will join. For example, it is interesting that the "British Labor Party" has developed and approved relevant rules for preventing sexism, racism, and bullying at party meetings, which clearly shows what standards of behavior Labor expects from party members and their leaders (Cooper, 2015). Such approaches can contribute to establishing a broader normative framework that condemns such behavior and raises the awareness of politicians.

Violence against women in politics is a problem that has many dimensions, involves different behaviors, requires a complex approach, and affects women who play different political roles. Violence against women in politics cannot be solved using only one strategy. However, it requires a more holistic and comprehensive approach, which implies intervention at different levels, in which both governmental institutions and representatives of the non-governmental sector will be actively involved.

Summary and Conclusion

The normalization of violence against public figures and the denial of sexism and misogyny in the political world have devastating consequences for the quality of democracy. Violence against women in politics is increasingly recognized around the world as a significant barrier to women's political participation, undermining women's civil and political rights and thus threatening broader prospects for inclusion and democracy. Thus, tackling violence against women in politics can play a crucial role in developing democratic culture, institutions, and practices.

Legal reforms alone cannot address and resolve all acts of violence against women in politics, which requires additional strategies from both state and non-state actors to rehabilitate victims of violence against women in politics, develop appropriate services and protocols to help them, punish perpetrators, and impose appropriate sanctions. Activists and scholars should not stop working on the concept of violence against women in politics. Moreover, further conceptual work, as well as empirical

research and data collection, should be undertaken and encouraged. In this direction, academics and practitioners must work together to create and shape new norms and standards of behavior that make this violence unacceptable in the political establishment.

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