WORLD WIDE WRONGS: DISCRIMINATION AND ONLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN

POLITICS

By

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

World Wide Wrongs: Discrimination and Online Violence against Women in Politics

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The concept of violence against women in politics, VAWIP, grew out of women's experiences with violence in the public sphere and around the world. This project expands on existing empirical and conceptual understandings of VAWIP by focusing primarily on (i) online violence and (ii) multiple forms of discrimination. I argue that to more effectively understand VAWIP online and against multiply-marginalized women, we need to develop new conceptualizations that center the unique considerations of these spaces and groups. Using a multi-method approach that includes grounded theory from interviews and qualitative analysis of Twitter data, I develop a typology of online VAWIP that includes target, form, and response. I then apply this typology comparatively to understand online VAWIP in Mexico and the United Kingdom. I use supervised machine learning and qualitative, thematic analysis to examine an original dataset of 1.3 million tweets that include the usernames of 77 national-level women politicians. I find that women in the U.K. receive a higher proportion and higher number of abusive posts than Mexican women politicians under analysis during the same period.

I also find that online and offline violence are related and are not experienced as separate phenomena by political women. Discourses of online violence are correlated with offline forms of violence, including societal discriminations. Furthermore, online VAWIP is intersectional, in target and in form. Women politicians are more likely to be targeted with violence that affects or is related to an identity they hold. However, this finding is not identical or consistent across Mexico and the United Kingdom. Some, but not all, multi-marginalized women are targeted with greater online violence than their colleagues. Some salient discriminations are pervasive in online VAWIP posts, while others are absent or limited. Despite the complexity of these results, I find that overall, perpetrators of online violence have a broader toolbox of discriminatory rhetoric to draw from when targeting women with multiple, marginalized identities. These tools, though they vary across individuals and between contexts, serve to render women invisible and incompetent in politics and in the online space. By focusing exclusively, or even primarily, on sexism, research is discounting the forms and types of VAWIP experienced by multiply-marginalized women and viewed by multiply-marginalized audiences. In seeking to better understand the forms of violence used to delegitimize women's access to the public sphere, patterns and shared experiences are illuminative, but so too are differences.

it was an honor to learn about gender and politics from Mary Hawkesworth, Cynthia Daniels, and Sue Carroll.

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My grandmother, Bea Levin, has always been one of my most influential teachers, including modelling lifelong, intellectual curiosity. I love you to the second sky. My siblings, Ben and Jeremy, and their families, are an endless supply of love and laughs. It's your turn next, J!

Mom and Dad, I share this accomplishment with you. Your love of learning and commitment to justice are imprinted on these pages and on my life. Thank you for being my

staunchest advocates, supporting my goals, helping me through challenges, and celebrating my achievements. Despite what I may have said as a teenager, you are phenomenal parents.

To Penny, whose smiles light up my days (and, at the moment, most of my nights): our lives are so much sweeter because of you.

Last but not least, Tom. You are a great partner and the best dad. Thank you for trying to make sense of my work, asking good questions, and giving me the tough love I needed to finish this dissertation. I can't wait to see what the next six, and sixty, years will bring. I love you.

DEDICATION

For my family. I am a feminist for, and because of, you.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Feminist political scientists have long been aware of the obstacles affecting women's

entry and achievement in the public sphere. Scholars have written about the challenges—and

occasional successes—facing women in becoming candidates (Carroll and Sanbonmatsu, 2010),

in attaining positions of relative power once in office (Heath, et al. 2005; Krook and O'Brien

2012), and in presenting and passing legislation (Franceschet and Piscopo 2008). In addition to

these researched challenges, women's participation in the public sphere has been accompanied

by violence and backlash since some of the earliest written records (Beard 2013). And yet, until

recently, few scholars had explicitly theorized and analyzed the impact of violence—from the

political arena, one's family, and the public—on women politicians, contributing to a "problem

with no name"(Krook 2020). Those that have begun to address this topic, including both

scholars and practitioners, have conceptualized various forms of harassment and violence as

violence against women in politics (VAWIP).

VAWIP consists of acts, or threats, of physical, psychological, economic, sexual, and

semiotic violence that result in harm or suffering to women involved in politics including, but

not limited to, political candidates and elected political leaders. Violence against women in

politics differs from other concepts of violence, including political violence, violence against

politicians, and broader violence against women because it (i) emphasizes the political arena; (ii)

centers survivors of violence, in this case women in politics, rather than perpetrators of

violence; (iii) is a form of gender-based violence; and (iv) has implications for democracy and

gender equality.

A 2016 survey by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) finds that violence against women

politicians is far from uncommon: more than 80% of those surveyed reported that they had

experienced some form of psychological violence and more than 25%, physical violence

("Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians" 2016). Among forms of

violence, online violence is the most pervasive.[1] In a follow-up study focused on European

parliamentarians in 2018, the IPU once again found that online violence is the most common

form of violence; nearly 60% of the 123 women parliamentarians and staff members

interviewed had experienced online violence ("Sexism, harassment and violence against women

in parliaments in Europe" 2018). Survey research in the U.K. (Collignon and Rudig 2020) and

Sweden (Håkansson 2020) confirms that social media is the most common location for violence

against women in politics, with online violence increasing over the last decade. The Covid-19

pandemic, which has moved much of the activities of political governance online, has only

exacerbated this trend (Gichanga and Orembo 2020; Van Sant, Fredheim, and Bergmanis-Korāts

2021, 38). Yet, there is little agreement on definitions of online violence against women in

politics, hindering efforts to mitigate this pressing issue.

Researchers have explored the gendered dimensions of online violence (see, for

example, Citron and Franks 2014; Filipovic 2007; Jane 2014; Mantilla 2013), yet these analyses

often include politicians only as an example, rather than the central subject. On the other hand,

though the IPU and other organizations have investigated online violence against politicians,

academic scholarship remains nascent and has largely been conducted by computer scientists or

communications scholars, limiting the insight into political structures and consequences of

abuse. Existing research (Ward and Mcloughlin 2017; Rheault, Rayment, and Musulan 2019)

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[1] I use the internet, online, and social media somewhat interchangeably, though social media is the narrowest of these. Social media platforms are "web-based services that allow individuals to (i) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (ii) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (iii) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (boyd and Ellison 2008, 211). Social media is often used broadly, to refer to networks as well as the content shared and interactions generated on these networks.

importantly considers violence against politicians online, focusing largely on the differences between men and women. While this research helps contextualize women politicians' experiences online, it casts a broad net, from incivility to violent threats, and emphasizes gender differentiation rather than gender-based violence.

Analyses of VAWIP, on the other hand, explore gender-based violence directed at women politicians, arguing that women are targets of violence because they are *women* and *in politics*. However, women are not monolithic, and neither is the abuse they face. In the six months prior to the summer 2017 British elections, Amnesty International analyzed the accounts of 177 women Members of Parliament (MPs). This analysis revealed not only the sheer volume of abusive tweets levelled at female MPs—25,688 tweets over the six-month period— but also racial dimensions of the abuse. Diane Abbott received just over 45% of tweets coded as "abusive" by the study. Even excluding Diane Abbott from the analysis, Black and Asian Members of Parliament "received 35% more abusive tweets than white women MPs" (Dhrodia 2017a). Data on U.S. candidates in the 2020 election similarly finds that not only did women receive more harassment and threats online than men, but that women of color were especially targeted (Guerin and Maharasingam-Shah 2020, 3). As evident from these data, women in politics are not only facing violence because of sexism, but because of multiple, overlapping forms of oppression.

It is clear theoretically, from theories of intersectionality, and empirically, from the above studies and others (Erikson and Josefsson 2019; Kuperberg 2018; Zeiter, et al. 2019), that the quantity and quality of abuse against women politicians is not predicated exclusively on their gender, nor motivated entirely by sexism. VAWIP scholars and researchers have noted the role of antisemitism, ableism, and racism (Krook and Restrepo Sanin 2019) in violence and have called for greater attention to the intersectional dynamics of violence (Alanis 2018; Di Meco

2019, 56; Restrepo Sanín 2018; Šimonović 2018). Still, there are no largescale, academic studies on VAWIP that consider sexism as well as other salient forms of discrimination and thus, significant questions remain unresolved. How is violence against women politicians informed by not only by sexism but by intersecting axes of discrimination? Who is impacted by intersectional, online violence against politicians? What does this abuse illuminate about violence, politics, and power?

In this dissertation, I seek to fill crucial gaps in knowledge about VAWIP by (i) theorizing the concept of online VAWIP, resulting in a specific typology of online manifestations; (ii) expanding the focus from gender to intersectionally-based violence, with greater attention to multiple salient structures of discrimination; and (iii) conducting an analysis and comparison of two cases, Mexico and the United Kingdom, broadening empirical knowledge on online VAWIP. First, I conceptualize and typologize online VAWIP as a continuum of violence, distinguished by target, form, and response. Second, I explore how sexism interacts with racism and other forms of discrimination to target certain groups of women in amplified ways. Third, I investigate two countries where women's representation is relatively high and the issue of VAWIP has reached the national political agenda[2] but where levels of societal and political violence, as well as salient structures of discrimination, vary in important ways.

The comparison of these two cases reveals the complexities of intersectional VAWIP. It also produces vital insights about the relationships between offline and online violence.

Given the prevalence of online abuse globally, I focus my analysis on the digital sphere. That said, online violence is not only virtual (Henry and Powell, 2016). Abuse on the internet is

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[2] In Mexico, laws and political actors commonly utilize the following concepts: "political violence against women," "political violence against women for reasons of gender," or "gender-based, political violence against women." In the U.K., policymakers use the language of "intimidation in public life" and further specify the unique forms of intimidation that women and other historically underrepresented groups face.

informed by societal power structures and discriminations as well as offline political and societal

violence. Further, virtual violence has offline implications, especially as the online and offline

worlds become increasingly entangled (Citron, 2014; Daniels, 2008; Eckert, 2018; Stevenson,

2018). By elaborating on the theoretical and empirical dimensions of online VAWIP, this

dissertation seeks to expand the conceptualization of VAWIP, broaden our empirical knowledge

of online VAWIP, and generate knowledge about the theoretical tools and methods that can be

utilized to better understand, and hopefully mitigate, VAWIP both on and offline.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

Starting with discussions and reports generated in the Global South, politicians and

practitioners have argued that violence against women in public life merits a unique

conceptualization of violence, VAWIP (Krook 2020, 13). These violent acts are directed at

women because of their direct political engagement, with the goal of limiting women's visibility

and mobility in the public space. Unlike the partisan and ideological motives of political violence,

perpetrators of VAWIP are engaging in violence with the explicit or implicit goal of "excluding

women from political life" (ibid, 89). Like violence against women (VAW), violence against

women in politics occurs all over the globe.

I define online VAWIP as acts, or threats, of violence directed at women involved in

politics including, but not limited to, political candidates, appointed political officials, and

elected political leaders, which occur partially or entirely online, and are—or are perceived to

be—identity-based. This violence targets or includes women politicians because of their gender

and/or other marginalized identities. I recognize that online VAWIP can cause economic,

physical, and psychological harm and is most often semiotic in form. However, in line with

maximalist understandings of violence and the unique qualities of the online space, violence

does not have to cause tangible harm, particularly harm of the intended target,[3] to be classified as VAWIP.

Though sexual violence is included as a category of violence against women in international legal documents (e.g. CEDAW- the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women), alongside physical, psychological, and economic violence, I have argued (Kuperberg 2017) that sexual violence is a key element to each of the other categories of violence. Often sexual violence is both physical and psychological in nature and has physical, psychological, and economic implications for the target-survivor. As I will discuss in Chapter 3, in order to distinguish violence against politicians from VAWIP in text-based online posts, I incorporate identity-based language into the definition of online VAWIP. Sexual violence is a form of identity-based violence and as such, is implicitly incorporated into this definition.

Studies of on and offline violence against politicians emphasize the role of gender and sexism in contributing to violence. Several studies have also, importantly, identified the impact of other forms of discrimination on VAWIP (Dhrodia 2017; Krook and Restrepo-Sanín 2019; Krook 2020). However, there has been minimal *theorizing* of how VAWIP is intersectional and no comparative intersectional studies across countries. In order to more fully describe and classify forms of VAWIP given our understanding that structures of oppression and privilege intersect, an analysis of VAWIP will benefit from a framing that not only mentions, but centers, multiple forms of discrimination.

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[3] I will expand on this in further chapters and recognize that this definition deviates from established scholarly and international definitions of VAWIP. An online platform, such as Twitter, can use algorithms to block the publishing of a post instantly. Alternatively, an individual who is not harmed by a post but recognizes its violent contents, may report it, leading to its removal. In these cases, a post can still be a violation of rights and can still intend harm, without succeeding in causing harm or causing harm to the directed target.

METHODOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION AND SCOPE

I previously wrote that the field of violence against women in politics is so new, it is unfair to describe its gaps; we should instead map its uncharted territory (Kuperberg 2018, 685). Despite the rapid increase of work on VAWIP since 2015, new research has made it clear how much we still do not know about VAWIP. Scholars have made most progress is theorizing and measuring *forms* of violence, while the *motivations* and *impacts* of violence remain relatively understudied. Nonetheless, work on VAWIP's forms remains theoretical in nature or focused on a single country, generally relies on survey or big data, and isolates offline or online violence.[4] By contrast, in this dissertation I will compare two countries, use both interview and big data, combine qualitative and supervised machine learning methods, and bring together discussion of offline and online violence. I will briefly justify these decisions in turn.

The U.K. and Mexico are unlikely partners for a case comparison. "Most similar" and "most different" case designs may be ideal types (Levy 2008; Nielsen 2016)—particularly when countries serve as the unit of analysis—and these cases resemble the latter more than the former. On the key independent variables of interest, salient forms of discrimination and offline physical violence, Mexico and the U.K. are substantially different. What can be gleaned from their comparison? A single-case study of intersectional VAWIP, which will only be able to measure a fraction of all social media violence,[5] risks idiosyncrasy. Yet, an intersectional study of women in politics requires deep case engagement. I do not claim that this dissertation will be

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[4] Survey research (Håkansson, 2020; Herrick et al, 2019) asks questions about both online and offline abuse but does not link politicians' experiences with both forms of violence. Practitioner studies have largely focused on one form of violence or the other.

[5] As I will discuss, publicly available social media data does not include any private messages or removed posts; violent messages are more likely to be removed than non-violent posts as the most virulent violent or discriminatory posts are in violation of social media companies' terms of service rules.

generalizable to the universe of cases. Still, in order to draw out patterns that can justify future research, a most (or mostly) different case selection is valuable. Further, this project is better described as a series of situated comparisons within two different countries, Mexico and the UK. Because I am comparing corpuses of tweets directed at individual women, rather than electoral systems or institutions, the primarily comparative work of this project sees the individual as the unit of analysis, not the country. I will, however, expand my scope for Chapters 7, 8, and 9 of this dissertation, aggregating the findings across individuals in Mexico and the UK, engaging in cross-case comparison.

Existing scholarship has either utilized survey data (Collignon and Rüdig 2020; Håkansson 2020; Herrick, et al. 2019) or big data[6] (Greg-Obi, et al. 2019; Rheault, Rayment, and Musulan 2019; Zeiter, Pepera, and Middlehurst 2019) as primary sources. Both data sources answer different questions. Survey data does not reveal how much abuse is levied at a politician, but how the politician *experiences* abuse. Politicians, in some countries more than others, employ staff to manage their social media accounts (Cohn 2012; Leston-Bandeira and Bender 2013). Interviews with politicians and media reports underscore that politicians are not always aware of the online abuse they receive.[7] Big data—in this case, social media data that tags or includes the handle of a politician—does not effectively answer questions about how a politician experiences the online space. Instead, public data better reflects how an online user, not necessarily even a constituent, views posts about a politician. In short, this data provide a

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[6] In Zeiter, et al. (2019) as well as other practitioner reports, big data is informed by interviews and focus groups.

[7] In a tweet from June 8, 2020, Dawn Butler (UK Labour MP) tweeted: "Today my office is trawling through all the abusive and racist comments and reporting them to the police. They hide as much of it from me as they can. I know it affects them reading all the vile stuff so I want to publicly say thank you." Diane Abbott responded, "A couple of years ago my staff stopped me opening my own mail in order to hide from me most of the racist & abusive stuff. But I know they have been reduced to tears by some of the stuff they have seen."

snapshot of the information that exists online but tells us very little about how that abuse is experienced, particularly by a politician who receives both private and public messages of abuse.

Feminist researchers have been wary of clear-cut classification as well as algorithms, including those used by machine learning methods (Criado Perez 2019; Noble 2018). Particularly as this is a study of violence, it is not acceptable to view this data as abstract, merely a series of patterned words without meaning and emotion attached to them. To balance the need to draw conclusions from large amounts of data alongside recognition of the violent and abusive nature of the data—which can only be understood in relation to human beings, not exclusively by a computer program—I utilize a combination of qualitative and quantitative[8] methods. I began this project with expert interviews in the U.K. and Mexico, focusing on national level politicians, judges, and bureaucrats as well as NGO researchers. The data gleaned from interviews guides the big data analyses. To direct the big data analyses, I first hand-code and qualitatively analyze 15,000 posts. Following the machine learning analysis, which illuminates broader patterns within the data, I once again engage in close reading and text analysis. Mixed method research generally refers to two interrelated studies, one qualitative and one quantitative. In this research, my methods are more fluid, moving from qualitative, to big N, and then back to qualitative. In line with mixed method methodologies, the outcomes of each analysis inform the methodological decisions made in the next (Brookes 2017).

With insights from feminist digital scholarship, maximalist understandings of violence, and intersectionality theories, I will investigate the relationships between offline structures of

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[8] There is some debate over what is included, and excluded, by "quantitative" methods. Here, I mean that I use supervised machine learning to classify approximately 1 million tweets. This machine learning incorporates some statistical assumptions, but I am not running statistical analyses on the data. I also utilize the term "big data" to refer to this portion of the analysis.

violence and online VAWIP. Research on VAWIP has not rejected the claims that offline and online violence are linked or that women in politics are targeted with intersectional forms of abuse. However, multiple marginalization has not been theorized, or centered, in the VAWIP literature. There are also no cross-national comparative studies looking at the intersectional dimensions of VAWIP. Furthermore, offline and online violence are often separated in VAWIP research; survey and interview respondents are asked whether they experience offline violence or online violence with their responses reported separately. Here, VAWIP scholarship can learn from online violence literature. Cyber scholars have demonstrated the offline implications of online violence as well as the ways that online violence emerges from offline abuse (Citron 2009; Posetti, et al. 2021, 33; Williams, et al. 2020). Critical race digital scholars and researchers have explored similar relationships between offline racism and racism online (Daniels 2008; Jakubowicz 2017). I apply these theoretical and empirical insights to women politicians.

To do so, I theorize intersectional online VAWIP, considering the ways in which offline structural violence and forms of discrimination impact online violence. I limit the scope of this project to formal, women[9] politicians at the national level. In doing so, I reject the claim that it is challenging or impossible to make inferences about women's "unique" experiences in politics without comparing those experiences to men (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2019). When presented with a similar critique, Dale Spender (1982) wrote:

> I do not want to study women in relation to men, partly because most of the women who are quoted in these pages refused to see themselves in relation to men. That I choose to follow in their footsteps, rather than the socially sanctioned ones of my forefathers, appears to me in good sense. Objection over-ruled (17).

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[9] I use "women" more often in this dissertation than "female." Female references sex while women references gender. In this dissertation, the subjects of analysis utilize both female and women to describe themselves; there were also no out, genderqueer or transwomen in national-level political positions in either Mexico or the U.K.

In addition to this feminist and normative argument, I focus on women because I am expanding on the concept of VAWIP; using this concept, researchers have established theoretically and empirically that women face unique obstacles in politics because they are women. Of course, sex identification[10] does not explain the uniqueness of women's experiences. Rather, because women live and work in societies marked by sexism and misogyny—that is because of their gender and processes of gendering—they face unique challenges in the public space (Hawkesworth 2003). Second, arguing that a comparison between men and women is necessary to explain women's experiences assumes (i) men are a control group, unaffected by gender, that serve as a neutral basis from which women's experiences can be differentiated; (ii) women are a primarily homogenous group; and (iii) relatedly, gender is the primary identity of interest. Instead, using McCall's intracategorical approach (2005) I am anchoring gender to understand how other identities and forms of discrimination interact *with* gender and sexism.

I am not only limiting the scope of this project to women, but to women who are formal politicians. Scholars (Biroli 2018; Krook 2020) and practitioners ("Data and Violence against Women in Politics: Expert Group Meeting Report & Recommendations" 2020) have made a compelling case for defining politics broadly, and with it, women in politics. Women journalists and human rights defenders, for example, face abuse and harassment as a result of their gender and political activity. Like formal politicians, the abuse of other political women has consequences for democracy and gender equality. Political women who are *not* formal politicians may even face greater precarity than many "formal"[11] politicians; they may not have

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[10] Research on sex and gender previously understood these concepts as separate, the former being based on biology and the latter on self-identification. Contemporary research shows that sex is not as essentialist as previously described (Sun 2019).

[11] I use "formal" politicians do describe individuals elected or appointed to political office. This does not mean to suggest that other political women are "informal" politicians. However, I use this distinction to recognize other forms of political engagement.

the protection of government institutions or the social and economic capital of their formal

political peers.

Under an intersectional-type analysis, which centers questions of power and privilege,

the choice to study national-level, formal politicians may therefore be met with criticism. Why

have I chosen to study the most privileged group among women in politics and public life? First,

though an intersectional analysis may be particularly generative and important when applied to

the most marginalized members of a society,[12] its usefulness is not limited only to the study of

those groups. Intersectionality asks us to be attentive to power inequities and complexities;

women in politics, though privileged in numerous regards, are still subject to power inequities.

Using intersections, as García Bedolla (2007) advocates, asks researchers to consider both

privilege and marginalization. Second, scholars have used intersectional analysis to understand

women in politics, illuminating new facets of politics and intersectionality in the U.S. (Brown

2014; Dittmar 2019; Evans 2015; Holman and Schneider 2016) and globally (Celis, et al. 2014;

Hughes and Dubrow 2018; Ward 2017). Third, though I recognize the parallel experiences

shared by representatives, judges, human rights defenders, and other political women (Krook

2020, 36), political representatives serve a unique function. They represent constituents, in the

case of this project, at the national level directly, substantively, and symbolically (Pitkin 1967;

Verge and Pastor 2017). Relatedly, due to their national profile and visibility, they often garner

more attention in the online space.[13] Finally, violence against these representatives may be

interpreted more clearly and frequently as violence against a broader group, given their

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[12] A designation which itself may be problematic to determine

[13] I have found (based on previous data pulls—this has not been formalized into a research paper) that
the public interacts less with women in politics in Costa Rica and at the subnational level in Mexico than
with men. Though an interesting finding with many implications, this is outside of the scope of this
project. I am not comparing the overall amount of engagement online, but comparing amounts and forms
of VAWIP.

representative functions. Women politicians are thus a crucial group in considering the role of the public in VAWIP as well as the implications of VAWIP for democracy.

LITERATURE REVIEW: INTRODUCTION

In this section, I review existing literature on violence against women in politics and gender-based violence. In exploring these literatures, I make several claims. First, no single, existing conceptualization of VAWIP is optimized for an analysis that centers intersectionality or the online space. Second, research on VAWIP utilizes many different definitions of violence and abuse, some of which conflate violence against politicians and VAWIP. Third, researchers using different methodologies generate different data, which answers different questions about VAWIP. Specifically, survey data can illuminate how violence is perceived while big data can demonstrate how much, and what types, of online violence exist as well as how the public interacts with online violence against politicians.

This chapter will proceed as follows. First, I review the primary approaches scholars and practitioners have used to categorize VAWIP. Second, I identify how these approaches have been applied to the work most closely linked to this dissertation, work on online violence against politicians and online VAWIP. Third, bringing together these literatures, I finish this chapter with the research questions that guide this project.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS: OLD PHENOMENON, NEW NAME?

Violence has been a part of women's participation in the public sphere and public life since some of the earliest historical records (Beard 2017). And yet, VAWIP as a concept only developed recently, a result of the organizing efforts of women in politics and practitioners in the Global South (Krook 2020, 13).

There has been some debate over the distinctiveness of VAWIP as a concept. Krook and

Restrepo Sanín (2016) distinguish VAWIP from gendered, electoral violence or violence against

women in elections (VAWIE). Women are targets of violence due to their participation in a

number of political acts, including and beyond elections (Krook and Sanín 2016a, 136), but are

also targeted specifically and deliberately *as women*. Piscopo (2016a) raises valid concerns that

not all cases of violence against female politicians should be classified as VAWIP, arguing for the

importance of context. Rather than always "something new," some events labelled VAWIP may

actually be better classified as "politics as usual," an outgrowth of Latin America's "social fabric"

(Ibid, 442). In response, Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2016b) rightly underscore that VAWIP does

not exclusively occur in Latin America. VAWIP is a global phenomenon which occurs in countries

where impunity is high, such as Mexico or Bolivia, but also in states with comparatively low

levels of societal violence, low impunity, and adherence to rule of law, such as the United

Kingdom. The debate between Piscopo (2016) and Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2016b) informs

my research questions and case selection. Though each side of the debate uses different cases,

an explicitly comparative approach can provide a new perspective to the relationship between

physical violence, structural violence, and VAWIP.

Over time, these approaches have been clarified and this disagreement has been, to an

extent, resolved. Scholars still disagree about where to draw the line between incivility,

violence, and 'normal' politics but nearly all agree that not *all* violence against women

politicians is gender-based, gender-related, or gender-differentiated and thus, not VAWIP

(Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2019; Krook 2020, 104). We can and should continue to clarify

the concept of VAWIP and apply the concept empirically to new cases. But I take as a starting

point for this dissertation that VAWIP exists, is distinct from policy-based disagreement and

other forms of violence against politicians, and is not simply the cost that women must bear for

engaging in political life.

There are three primary approaches that have been used to conceptualize, typologize,

and operationalize VAWIP. Each of these approaches starts from a different field, or subfield.

These approaches are the motives/forms/impact approach (from political violence), the

categories of violence approach (from international law on violence against women), and the

bias event approach (from criminology).[14]

The approaches are not mutually exclusive; they can—and have been—combined.

Further, each approach has some insight on online violence against political women, but none

can be directly applied to the online or political spaces without modification. When focused on

the online space and utilizing and intersectional lens, these approaches to understanding and

measuring VAWIP suffer from two distinct challenges: at the conceptual level, a challenge

incorporating intersectionality; at the level of operationalization, a challenge adapting to the

online space.

Motives, Forms, and Impacts

In their 2019 article, Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo present a framework for

understanding political violence using gendered motives, gendered forms, and gendered

impacts. They use this framework as a means of gendering existing political violence literature

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[14] Researchers have also used the continuum approach to violence (from feminist theory) and online misogyny (from media and communication studies, linguistics, and sociology) to frame VAWIP. I explore these two theoretical approaches in the next chapter.

and bridging the political violence and VAWIP fields of research. Gendered motives exist when

"perpetrators use violence to preserve hegemonic men's control of the political system" (2).

Gendered forms refer to the different scripts that shape violent acts when directed at men and

women (3). This includes, for example, that women are more likely targeted with sexualized and

sexual violence than their male colleagues. Finally, gendered impact refers to the audience

response to an act of violence (Ibid).

Though the authors recognize the connections between these elements—not

sufficiently as I would argue that all are deeply linked, perhaps even mutually constitutive—they

seek to disaggregate them, arguing that an act gendered in impact, for example, may not be

gendered in form or motive. They acknowledge that forms may elucidate motivations but clearly

state that gendered forms do not assume gendered motive. Though seemingly a small

difference, Bardall, et al. (2019) are in effect disagreeing with the classification of violence with

unclear motive as gender-*based* violence.

There are four primary disadvantages of this approach, particularly for a feminist

analysis of the online space. First, as mentioned, this categorization prioritizes disaggregating

forms, motives, and impacts over understanding their linkages. Second, in upholding gender

difference as a primary means of determining whether something is *gendered,* this

categorization puts emphasis on the gender binary and assumes gender significance vis-à-vis

men's experience. I will expand on this "what about men" perennial question towards the end

of this chapter. Third, as I will expand upon below, this approach conflates VAWIP and violence

against politicians. Unlike Krook (2020) who argues that violence against politicians and VAWIP

are distinct categories, Bardall, et al. suggest in this framework that violence is similar, gendered

in some instances and supposedly non-gendered in others.[15] Finally, this categorization

underscores the value of motive, independent from other indicators.

Online violence scholars, on the other hand, minimize the role of motive in their research.

The sociological and criminological origins of the field encourage a different focus, particularly in

comparison to psychology which emphasizes personal pathology rather than structural causes

of violence. In addition, motive is challenging to determine in many instances, but particularly in

the online space due to anonymity and other information deficits. Finally, an overreliance on

motive necessitates a move away from the victim's experience. I, in line with most feminist

criminologists, adopt a victimological approach in research of online violence, emphasizing the

(potential) experience[16] of the victim-survivor of violence over the intention of the perpetrator.

As with the next framework, categories of violence against women, the

motives/forms/impact framework is not optimized for the study of online violence against

women in politics. It can provide a useful vocabulary for some components of analysis, but

ultimately, its usefulness as a primary frame is limited. This framework does, however, enable

the researcher to conceptualize gendered form and impact in different, beneficial ways. A

researcher may, for example, demonstrate that women of color are subject to more or

qualitatively different racism, enabling an intersectional analysis of gendered *form*. This

potential use of the framework is not elucidated by the authors but is not prohibited by their

framing.

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[15] They do not use the term "non-gendered" though it can be assumed that if not all acts are gendered in form, motive, or impact, that posts are either neutral or non-gendered. In both cases, this framing is problematic. Gender is not a condition that either applies or does not apply.

[16] Due to the methods and data for this project, I cannot adopt a fully victimological approach, which is more common in survey and interview-based projects. However, as a woman and internet user, I am a member of the public that views online abuse. As such, I can not only infer a target's experience from online abuse, but I can also use my own reactions as a guide to determine the potential impact of online violence.

Categories of Violence against Women

Early conceptualizations of VAWIP largely adapted the existing United Nations typology on violence against women, outlined in the 1993 *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women* (Krook 2020, 17). This defined violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women."

Many have followed suit, using the above categories as well as economic violence to categorize both VAW and VAWIP. Scholarly research on VAWIP has incorporated and expanded on this existing typology. In the first English-language scholarly article on VAWIP, Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2016a) argue for a conceptualization that includes physical, psychological, economic, and symbolic violence (138). Later, Krook replaced "symbolic," a category which has been critiqued for use and applicability to VAWIP (Bardall 2020) and added "sexual" violence to the typology. These resulting forms of violence—physical, psychological, economic, and sexual— are now the standard for most scholarly *and* practitioner research on VAWIP, including online VAWIP (e.g., Zeiter et al. 2019; *Violence Against Women in Elections Online* 2019).[17] However, in their recent work, Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2019) and Krook (2019) argue that we should consider a new category—semiotic violence—in analyses of VAWIP. Semiotic violence "is

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[17] These categories are also commonly included in laws on VAWIP, such as Bolivia's landmark Law 243 that was the world's first national-level legislation on VAWIP. Most laws do not include social media or online violence specifically, though these forms of violence can be included under "psychological" violence. However, Catalonia's Act 17/2020, passed in December 2020, adds VAWIP to an existing act on women's right to a life free of gender-based violence (Verge 2021, 1). This Act incorporates "digital violence" as a form of VAWIP (ibid).

perpetrated through degrading images and sexist language" and serves to render women incompetent and invisible (Krook and Restrepo Sanín 2019, 5; Krook 2020, 187-190).

I value the importance of keeping this categorical framing to parallel international norms as well as link violence against women (VAW) to VAWIP (*Data and Violence against Women in Politics* 2019). However, there are two major obstacles to the use of this classification system: first, the distinctiveness of the categories is overemphasized; second and relatedly, this typology is limited in its direct applicability to the online space. For the former, as I have previously argued (Kuperberg 2017), these categories of violence are underspecified. Specifically, do they refer to the act or harm?

An "economic" act of violence is not necessarily economic in nature, but economic in impact. For example, throwing a brick into the campaign office—an act of property destruction—could be classified as economic VAWIP (Krook 2020, 178). However, the act itself is physical and the harms can be economic, physical, and psychological. Sexual violence, on the other hand, is defined by its form and *not* its impact. Rape and threats of sexual violence fall under this category due to their sexual form, both having physical, psychological, and possibly economic impact. Scholars and practitioners have clarified in numerous instances that these categories are not mutually exclusive; an act of violence can encompass multiple categories simultaneously (ibid, 120-121). However, the conflation of harm and form is not often clarified. In the case of the online space, overlapping and non-exclusive categories challenge the success and reliability of algorithmic analyses. Further, online violence can occur without a subsequent harm, questioning the usefulness of a harm-based framing of violence.

As a result, these categories are useful conceptually, but are not empirically or methodologically suited for the online space. Nonetheless, practitioner organizations in their

analyses of online VAWIP, including IFES and NDI, have applied these categories to the online

space, noting how online violence can be physical, sexual, psychological, and economic in

nature. For example, in IFES's "Violence Against Women in Elections Online: A Social Media

Analysis Tool," the authors[18] distinguish between physical (or bodily), sexual, socio-

psychological, and economic violence with examples from the offline and online spaces (2019,

7):

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[18] As an aside, and despite my disagreements with this framing, I wrote much of the report though I am not credited as a full author.

Table 1.1

Forms of VAWIE-ONLINE

Categories	Physical		Non-Physical	
	Bodily Harm	**Sexual**	**Socio-Psychological**	**Economic**
Online threats pertaining to:	• Murder / attempted murder • Physical assault and injury • Battery • Maiming • Wounding	• Rape / attempted rape • Sexual assault • Intimate partner sexual assault	• Intimidation • Threats to individual or individual's family • Verbal harassment • Shaming defamation	• Denial / constant threat of denial of resources / services • Unlawful control and monitoring of the use and distribution of monies and access to services (healthcare, employment, etc.)
Cyber-specific terms	• IRL attacks ("In Real Life") • Swatting[12] • Trafficking	• Cyber-exploitation • Nonconsensual photography or leaking nudes or other	• Cross platform harassment • Deadnaming[15] • Defamation • Doxing[16] • False accusations of blasphemy	• Distributed denial of service (DDoS) • Electronically enabled financial abuse • Identity theft and online impersonation

However, as they find in country-specific case studies, such as Sri Lanka (Bardall et al. 2018), most violence online falls into the socio-psychological. In using this system of classification, algorithms have been skewed away from psychological violence, biasing the findings.

NDI, in the 2019 "Tweets that Chill" report (Zeiter et al. 2019, 14), offer a different means of applying the VaW concepts to VAWIP:

MAPPING TYPOLOGIES

VAW-P TYPOLOGY	ONLINE VAW-P TYPOLOGY
Psychological	Insults and hate speech
Psychological / Threats & coercion / Economic	Embarrassment and reputational risk
Physical	Physical threats
Sexual	Sexualized distortion

Table 1.2

Unlike IFES's typology, this online VAW-P typology can be employed for text-only studies.

However, it may create false equivalences in quantity or quality between these various forms of

violence. For example, Bardall, et al. (2018) find that psychological violence overwhelms other

forms of violence in their empirical data. In utilizing the above typology, differences between

forms of psychological violence are not emphasized as they are part of the same classification.

The algorithms used struggled to identify accounts of sexual, physical, and economic violence

(Bardall, et al. 2018). Finally, there are other forms of online VAWIP missing from the above

typology, as I will articulate in the next chapter.

Distinguishing between form and harm, online violence is semiotic and psychological in

nature but can cause physical, psychological, and economic harm.[19] Here, I push back on the

assumption that online violence should and can mirror offline violence in all respects. Instead, if

we consider the online space as but one location of VAWIP, part of a broader collection of

violent acts, it does not need to be understood using the entire typology of VAWIP or VaW.

Instead, we can recognize that depending on our research aims and questions, we may be more

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[19] I do not include sexual violence as a harm or form, as I consider it an adjective more than a type in of itself. The inclusion of sexual violence by the United Nations underlines the importance of sexual violence and encourages analysts to recognize sexual violence as violence. Sexual violence will often, though not exclusively, be a form of discriminatory rhetoric or a threat of physical violence in the online space.

interested in some forms of violence than others. In order to understand and classify, rather than presume the form of online VAWIP, I use alternate classification systems and typologies. I see this project, and others like it, as illuminating particular facets of violence that are psychological and semiotic in form and that take place predominately in the online space. This does not, however, suggest that economic or physical forms of violence are not crucial types of (predominately offline) violence.

Bias Event

Krook (2020) and Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2019) outline a bias event approach that can be used to distinguish violence against politicians from VAWIP, violence "directed at women for their political views" as opposed to violence which "aims to exclude women as women from participating in public life" (Krook 2020, 104). With recognition that analytical and theoretical clarity between the concepts does not necessarily translate to empirical ease in disaggregating acts of violence—particularly as women in politics often experience both forms of violence, sometimes simultaneously (154)—Krook proposes using hate crimes literature and in particular, a bias event approach, to isolate acts of VAWIP. The bias event approach distinguishes group-based discrimination from other forms of violence.

The bias event approach, like many definitions of VAWIP, is focused on motivation, with Krook even writing that acts of violence "need not take obviously gendered forms: gender motivation, not gender differentiation, is the defining feature of this phenomenon" (94). However, this does not imply that a motive is professed. Empirically, when outlining the six elements of a bias approach, Krook recognizes that motivation is rarely clear. In fact, because VAWIP arises from structural and cultural violence—violence that is effective through its

normalization, silence, and silencing—perpetrators of violence may not even be aware that they are motivated by sexism and acts of violence will not always be recognized as such.

Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2019) identify gendered bias as a means of classifying an event as VAWIP. However, the language of this approach, as Krook (2020) elucidates, "enables intersectional experiences to be taken into account" (113). "Bias" is not limited to sexism nor is it limited to a single form of sexism or sexism on its own. As such, I continue in this section to utilize "bias" without necessarily describing this bias as sexism or misogyny.

A bias event does not require that the perpetrator or victim "recognize the act as an instance of violence against women in politics" (ibid, 164), which would require both that perpetrators understand and are honest about their motivations and/or that women recognize that they have faced violence and desire to come forward. But, it does require that an investigation find sufficient evidence to suggest that an offender was motivated by bias.[20] Some of the features of a bias event approach are particularly useful for the study of online, intersectional violence while others are prohibitive. Importantly, scholars and institutions (including Krook and Restrepo Sanín 2019) that utilize similar approaches do not require the presence of all possible indicators of a bias event to classify an act of violence as such.

The bias event approach includes the following components: (i) the offender indicated bias in verbal or written remarks; (ii) the offender left symbols or images of bias at the scene of the event; (iii) the victim was involved in activities related to their identity group; (iv) the offender is a member of a hate group or has been involved in similar incidents in the past; (v)

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[20] Even where women feel safe, or protected by institutional rules, to describe incidents of abuse, many recognize that it is not socially or politically beneficial to do so. These informal obstacles to reporting and publicly discussing violence would hinder the recognition of VAWIP and significantly underreport the existence of the abuse.

community members perceive that the act was motivated by bias; and (vi) the victim was evaluated negatively by a double standard (Krook 2020, 111-113). In the online space, this approach can help us distinguish rudeness, violence against politicians, and online VAWIP.

The first two indicators—on bias in verbal/written remarks and images of bias—apply directly to the online space but call for a disaggregation of broad hostility (including profanity) and discriminatory, or biased, language, images, and video. As I will argue in the next chapter, analysts should classify posts as online VAWIP if they include bias, explicitly sexist and/or otherwise discriminatory words or images. This approach differs from those that classify posts based on profanity or sentiment (Rheault, Rayment, and Musulan 2019; Ward and McLoughlin 2020). It also calls into question the applicability of other studies on online violence in understanding online VAWIP, particularly those that conflate abuse based on "what you think" as opposed to "who you are" (Nadim and Fladmoe 2019, 4).[21]

The third component, involvement in activities related to one's identity group, is an important consideration for online violence against women in politics.

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[21] Perhaps not surprisingly, these studies tend to find that women and men are subject to similar amounts of online abuse, but that women are targeted more frequently, or with great impact, with identity-based violence while men are more often targeted with abuse related to their expressed opinions.
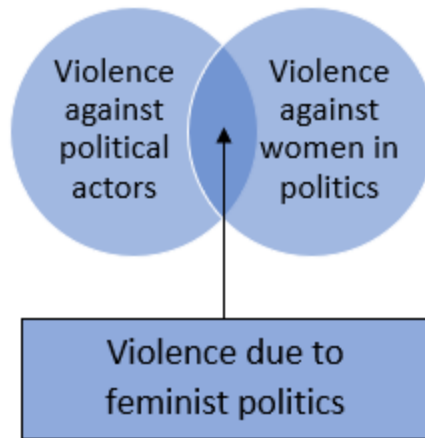
Figure 1.3

Scholars (Schneider 2019; Krook 2020) have used this and similar diagrams to theoretically

understand VAWIP and its distinctiveness from violence against politicians.[22] Acts of violence

against women in politics are understood as being part of a continuum, sharing patriarchal

underpinnings, that is distinct from violence against politicians (Krook 2020). These forms of

violence blur in the middle category, in which feminist activists or women who advocate for

feminist policies, are targeted with violence.

For example, women politicians and journalists have described that when they support

feminist policies or write feminist articles, they see increased quantity and severity of online

abuse (Krook 2020, 101). Pérez-Arredondo and Graells-Garrido (2021) find that pro-choice

Chilean politicians experienced online abuse while Chile's abortion bill was being legislated from

2015-2017. However, in this context, abusive rhetoric largely sought to render women

incompetent through claims of corruption and criminal links, rather than utilizing sexualized or

psychological threats more common in other contexts of VAWIP (145). It is in these cases that a

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[22] Sometimes also referred to as "violence against political actors." I use these categories instead of "political violence," which is a broader and more conceptually-stretched term.

clear set of criteria, such as the bias event approach, are particularly useful. Does the act of violence indicate that it is a bias event or is aggression motivated from policy disagreement?

Though this overlap creates a grey-area category, scholars have thus far retained a dichotomous division and contend that violence against feminist political actors should be classified as either violence against politicians of violence against women in politics, based on the details of the act including the perpetrator, language used, and response. However, qualitative data indicates that this dichotomy can be challenging to enforce in practice (Krook 2020, 95-97). For example, in describing a counter-campaign for her framing of abortion rights as a human rights issue, Stella Creasy explains that she was targeted not only for her policy position, but also as a woman and at the time, a pregnant woman (Gillard and Creasy 2019). In Mexico, Rodríguez Calva and Fría (2020, 375) include discrediting the gender policy agenda as a form of VAWIP, alongside sexist commentary and minimizing the contributions of female policy makers. These examples indicate the difficulty of classifying violence related to feminist policymaking.

Women politicians have reported that they receive more, and more severe, abuse in response to their support of policy issues, including but not limited to "feminist"[23] issues. Kristi Cole (2015) describes social media violence as a form of discipline with a goal to "silence the women participating in public as feminist" (356). Former Liberal Democrat Leader Jo Swinson (2018) writes that social media backlash against feminism serves to "attack individuals instead of ideas" (333). Due to virality and semi-permanency in the online space, women may be targeted for their support of a feminist issue long after the initial activity; online violence can circulate abuse by continuing to share a speech from years prior. Support of feminist policies is

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[23] I use quotations here to indicate that a policy or issue only need to be perceived as feminist.

an important consideration for VAWIP, but the *timing* may not be. For a researcher, this

indicator calls us to recognize that abuse is often in response to a post, video, or news article in

which the target is engaging in or professing support for an identity group.[24]

Lastly, indicator 5—"community members perceive that the act was motivated by

bias"—can also inform the classification of online abuse. Due to the nature of the online space,

public violence can be quickly viewed by thousands of users. When violence is directed towards

politicians, the political woman may not even see the post directed at her, but her constituents

and supporters may. This indicator reflects what I refer to in the typology as the community

response. Internet users use numerous mechanisms to call out violence on online platforms

including calling on others to report. Not all public posts of abuse have a response; some are

quickly removed from the platform and others, while public, may not receive a lot of viewer

traffic.[25] As mentioned, the bias event approach does not require that all six indicators be met.

However, community response can—when it is present—add support to a classification

decision.

The other two indicators of a bias event—the offender is a hate group member/has

been involved in similar incidents and the victim was evaluated negatively by a double

standard—are more challenging to apply to the online space. When offenders[26] post other

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[24] This is complicated in text-based algorithmic classification as the text of the response, but not the original, is used to classify. It is for this reason, and numerous others, that I use qualitative methods alongside big data machine learning.

[25] Twitter, for example, does not remove all negative or hostile posts from the platform, especially when they do not clearly violate terms of service policies. However, the platform will put those posts at the bottom of the comment thread or after a "more replies" button. These mechanisms have allowed the platforms to continue to espouse free speech values while reducing the visibility of hostile posts (Interview, Twitter UK).

[26] Unless they are bots or using burner accounts- In the case of a burner account, a user may create an account for the sole purpose of sending a single or small number of messages. A bot is an automated account or one that derives its messages from algorithms; though set up at some point by a person, this account's day-to-day messaging is entirely computer-generated.

offensive, prejudiced, or uncivil posts on related themes, the former indicator can be applied. While this indicator can therefore be useful, particularly in criminal cases or in response to particularly offensive and impactful posts, investigating online offenders is not possible in many circumstances due to the anonymity of users, technological knowledge, and time involved. Furthermore, bots can be the source of online VAWIP or can be instrumental in amplifying online violence (Di Meco 2019, 32-33). Bots are not sentient[27] and their intent is irrelevant.

Finally, the application of a double standard is more pertinent to offline VAWIP acts. Online posts can reference those double standards or apply a level of scrutiny that is disproportionate, but this indicator of bias is likely only determined in conjunction with offline VAWIP or at a macrolevel, comparing online engagement across a large corpus of online posts.

In summary, the bias event framework can be applied—with some alterations—to the online space. But I propose a further consideration. Occasionally, a single post, video, or image is sufficiently violent that it constitutes online VAWIP in of itself. However, like offline violence against women in politics, violence is a continuum and individual acts do not exist in a vacuum. The impact of online abuse on the target, the public, and on particular individuals who share their group identification cannot be accurately measured from a single event. Posts may differ in severity, relevance for criminal prosecution, form, specificity, and time on platform prior to removal (if applicable). Though the bias event approach is based on cases, rather than individuals, for the online space it may make more sense to discuss violence as a pattern, not a pattern of acts instigated by the perpetrator, but a pattern of acts as experienced by the target or audience. A maximalist definition of violence—one that centralizes the impact of violence over the motivation of the perpetrator and emphasizes that violence is not discrete or

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[27] Though, where possible, one can take the intentions of bot creators under consideration.

exclusively physical—allows for better incorporation of online violence, as I will explore in the next chapter.

ONLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS: HOW HAVE THESE FRAMEWORKS BEEN USED?

Existing frameworks, alone and in combination with each other, have been adopted for understanding online VAWIP. There are two primary ways to distinguish studies on online VAWIP: methods used and conceptual focus of analysis. Both academics and practitioners have contributed to studies of each type. These studies use different concepts and speak to different questions on violence against politicians and VAWIP.

There are two primary methods that have been utilized: interviews/surveys[28] and large-N or big data analysis. Analyses using these two methods purport to respond to the same questions and study the same phenomenon, though I disagree. Surveys capture how women in politics experience online violence, capture both private and public data, and can reveal the *impact* of violence on female politicians and their acquaintances. Big data analyses, on the other hand, reveal the *forms* that online violence can take in public online spaces.[29]

Within both methods, usually applied exclusively but occasionally in combination, researchers have investigated (i) violence against politicians incorporating gender or (ii) VAWIP. As mentioned, following Krook (2020), I recognize these as separate concepts though they can be difficult to disentangle. In the subsequent studies, it is not always clear whether researchers are studying one or both of these concepts. Generally, those studying VAWIP focus their analysis

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[28] I recognize that these are not the exact same method, but they can achieve similar data on how politicians experience and perceive their experiences of violence.

[29] Several studies, though on tangential topics such as electoral campaigning online, have used semi-public data sources, such as WhatsApp groups in Brazil (Belli 2018).

on women and non-men and incorporate feminist theory and assumptions, though this is neither proscribed nor universally the case. Research on violence against politicians, on the other hand, tends to include gender as a variable or look for difference based on gender. This research often has some feminist markings, including differentiating idea-based and identity-based violence.

Surveys

Researchers have used surveys to better understand and measure violence against politicians. Survey research that incorporates VAWIP has largely found that violence is gendered—women report more violence and greater impacts of violence—and that a significant proportion of violence occurs online. However, survey design and analysis can conflate the categories of VAWIP and violence against politicians. Some researchers do not seek to isolate violence that is gender-based or gender-motivated from that which is politically-motivated violence. Still, this research importantly measures how violence is perceived by politicians themselves, the direct targets of violence. This method gives researchers a window into various mediums of violence including private emails and messages, as politicians are asked to reflect on all violence they experience. That said, some politicians may not (i) be aware of all violence they receive and (ii) classify their experiences as violence, potentially limiting comparability across and within populations.

Survey research has primarily used the categories of violence against women in politics—physical, psychological, economic, and sexual—to understand forms of online violence. In 2016, the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) interviewed 55 women parliamentarians from 39 countries about their experiences with sexism and harassment. They asked if respondents had

experienced, either personally or witnessed against female colleagues, psychological, sexual, physical, and economic violence. 81.8% had personally been subjected to psychological violence while respondents had either personally experienced or witnessed physical, economic, or sexual violence at a rate of 20-33%. This study confirmed that "social media have become the number one place in which psychological violence […] is perpetrated against women parliamentarians" (6).

In their 2018 study, focused on European parliamentarians, IPU report authors interviewed 123 women, including both MPs and staff members. Once again, the analysts used the category framework to structure their interviews and subsequent data. They found that 85.2% of MPs experienced psychological violence, 24.7% sexual violence, and less than 15% physical and economic violence (5). The study also used the language of "form" and "impact" but did not gather or present data on intent or motive. Though online violence constituted a significant proportion of their results, the study authors did not utilize cyberviolence categories, such as trolling or doxing. They did, however, include a discussion on anonymity, free speech, and online violence in support of feminist issues, citing Amnesty International's (2017) study on online VAWIP as well as the UN Special Rapporteur's 2018 report on online violence against women using a human rights perspective.

Additional surveys have used the IPU reports as inspiration. Herrick et al. (2019) modelled their survey of violence against U.S. mayors on the 2016 IPU study using the categories of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse (2). Psychological abuse includes "disrespectful comments in social media" and threats of physical violence (2). Herrick, et al. found that social media was "the most cited conveyers of violence/abuse," with 71.72% of all mayors indicating that they experienced violence on social media platforms (8). Though a survey on violence against politicians, including both male and female respondents, the authors found

a clear gender difference in response. Disaggregating the 71.2% of mayors that experienced social media violence, three-quarters of female mayors experienced online violence while two-thirds of male mayors did (9).

Collignon and Rüdig (2020) utilize a survey of 1,495 candidates from the 2017 U.K. election but do not ask or disaggregate their results by category. Instead, they simply ask the broad question— "if they personally experienced any form of inappropriate behavior, harassment, or threats to their security in their position as parliamentary candidates during the campaign"—as well as "where" and "impact" (2). They did not ask about intent or motive. Similar to the Herrick, et al. (2019) analysis, Collignon and Rüdig (2020) include both men and women in their survey and find that party, gender, and age are statistically meaningful. They find that 38% of respondents experienced "some kind of aggression during the 2017 election campaign" (7), considerably lower than the other studies. This could be a result of the broad question they ask as well as the short period under analysis. However, like the others, abuse most frequently takes place on social media (4).

Håkansson (2021) utilizes a Swedish government survey (The Politicians' Safety Survey) that asks respondents to self-report their experiences (3). Like the other survey analyses, Håkansson finds that threats and attacks are most prevalent on social media, with psychological violence more prevalent than physical violence (ibid). She uses the World Health Organization definition of violence, violence as "actions intentionally designed to cause physical or psychological harm" (3), thus using a modified category-based analysis, largely removing economic, sexual, and symbolic/semiotic violence from her analysis. Importantly, Håkansson finds that women and men receive similar amounts of violence overall, but that a greater share of women executives are targeted with violence (9). This "gender gap," as she describes, persists even when controlling for party, age, and "intersectional identities" (10).

Big Data Analyses

Unlike survey analyses, big data analyses do not measure perceptions and experiences with violence. Big data analyses instead identify patterns and quantify abuse in online, public data. Here, researchers consider what types of abusive and violent messages appear on the platforms, who they target, and when they are used. However, these analyses cannot illuminate how the direct targets of abuse, politicians, receive the violent messages. More so than survey analyses, big data research tends to utilize a broader understanding of violence, possibly with specific word or sentiment constraints; these methodological choices make algorithms more accurate. Therefore, though this research can provide some information on VAWIP, it does not generally disaggregate violence and other forms of incivility, let alone VAWIP and violence against politicians.

Rheault, Rayment, and Musulan (2019), using over two million public social media posts targeting female politicians in the US and Canada, reach a similar finding as Håkansson (2021) above: women in influential political positions experience greater abuse. Rheault et al. (2019) offer a useful framework for comparative analysis. They compare men and women's experiences with incivility, across the US and Canada, finding that women in highly visible positions experience more incivility than their male colleagues. This gender gap collapses for women who are not in highly-visible positions. However, this piece defines incivility broadly to include, among other things, any profanity.[30]

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[30] Disagreements over what constitutes abuse, incivility, and violence online are mirrored in the computer science literature as well (Waseem, et al. 2017).

Other pieces that use a broad definition of incivility (Theocharis, et al. 2020) do not find that the public targets women politicians more than men but, instead, that party and ideology make a difference (2). The breadth of "incivility" as a category likely improves algorithmic specificity; it is easier for an algorithm to detect any instance of profanity than to determine the contextual differences between rudeness and gender-based violence. I, on the other hand, am specifically interested in VAWIP and do not categorize all rudeness or profanity as gender or identity-based violence. Though the resulting findings of this study may be instructive, the methods used are more limited in their applicability to this project.

McLoughlin and Ward (2020) also compare male and female politicians but investigate "abuse," a term that is more specific than incivility but less targeted than VAWIP. They define abuse as targeted, abusive, and profane language directed at an MP that includes hate speech, profane, or derogatory language (56). Using a dataset of nearly 300,000 tweets including usernames of all U.K. MPs, the authors find that male MPs in the UK receive more abusive messages than women, but women receive more hate speech (63).

Sobieraj et al. (2020) question Mcloughlin and Ward's (2020) finding—that men receive more abuse than women—"as it runs counter to both anecdotal and scholarly evidence" (6). However, Southern and Harmer (2019), employing four coders to hand code nearly 120,000 tweets directed at "everyday"[31] male and female MPs from a two-week period in the UK, also find that men receive more overall violence but women are more often targeted with identity-based posts (7-8).

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[31] Here, the authors were responding to scholarship that women leaders are particularly targeted with abuse, aiming to determine if such patterns hold across standard national-level politicians.

Oates et al. (2019), using a narrower sample of Democratic presidential nominees for the 2020 election, arrive at a slightly different finding: women are more likely to be tagged in attacking, as opposed to supportive, posts. In line with McLoughlin and Ward (2020) as well as Southern and Harmer (2019), Oates, et al. (2019) also find that women are more likely to be targeted with identity or character-based attacks, while users are more likely to engage with men on policy. These conclusions once again demonstrate the conflation of violence against politicians and VAWIP in online violence literature; "general" or policy-based abuse is combined with, but not the same as, identity-based violence. Using more specific definitions of violence, I suspect women in these studies are subject to more VAWIP, while men are targeted more frequently with general abuse, or violence against politicians.

Other studies have used machine learning to understand gendered dimensions of online political violence. Hunt, Evershed, and Liu (2016), with assistance from a social media data firm, engaged in paired comparisons of male and female candidates for executive office in the U.S., U.K., and Australia. They searched for "abusive words," and found that Julia Gillard and Hillary Clinton were subject to especially large amounts of abuse—both absolutely and relative to their challengers—and that abuse targeting women was "more personal, vitriolic, and sexual."[32]

The International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) has similarly used supervised machine learning in a variety of global contexts including Sri Lanka and Zimbabwe to understand the gendered components and cultural specificities of online electoral violence (Bardall et al. 2018). These projects stress gender "balance," investigating the differences between men and women, but highlighting gendered slurs in the analyses (ibid).

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[32] This was specifically in reference to Australia's Julia Gillard but similarly found in posts targeting Carly Fiorina and Hillary Clinton.

Alongside these works, computer scientists have explored some of these same questions writing increasingly complex algorithms to isolate sexist and racist violence on digital platforms. In some cases, in part due to their virality and online presence, these computational analyses include or even focus on politicians (Gorrell et al. 2018; Gorrell et al. 2020). Some of these pieces provide useful methodological guidance and support (Cheng et al. 2017; Kim, et al. 2020). However, overall, they lack the theoretical basis, political knowledge, and focus on gendered abuse to illuminate the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of this research.

Mixed Methods

In fewer instances, research has combined methodological approaches, using both interview and survey data alongside big data or large-N analysis. The most significant studies that have utilized mixed methods, with a focus on women in politics, come from practitioner reports, though recently, academics have also utilized qualitative and mixed methods approaches to study women in public life. These include Calasanti and Gerrits (2021) on online, intersectional VAWIP against public health officials during the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as Fuchs and Schäfer (2020) on online violence against women politicians in Japan.

Mixed methods research, generally a combination of big data with interviews, focus groups, or surveys, responds to some of the critiques above. By speaking with those affected by online violence, researchers can shed light on how violence is experienced. Simultaneously, researchers can use standard classification metrics to categorize online data and thus compare amounts of online violence across individuals. Particularly when analyses involve qualitative analysis of online violence, researchers can investigate violent discourses, which can better differentiate between violence against politicians and VAWIP. Mixed methods research, largely

conducted by non-profit organizations and think tanks, has also sought to incorporate some intersectional dimensions into study design and analysis. However, some of these studies have not been fully transparent about their methods, particularly the validity of their big data findings.

Las Luchadoras, a group of feminist digital "fighters" in Mexico, compiled reports on online VAWIP, prior to and during the electoral period of 2018. Using media reports, self-reporting mechanisms, and observations as participants and observers of online exchange, *las luchadoras* reported on the state of online VAWIP in Mexico, including prevalence statistics, case studies on individual women, and broad, national-level findings. Like Krook (2020), they draw parallels in their report between journalists, politicians, and activists.

Lucina Di Meco, for the #ShePersisted report (2019), interviewed 85 women leaders in politics, civil society, journalism, and technology and presents this data alongside a publication content review and big N analysis of coverage of the major Democratic party candidates between December 2018 and April 2019. This report specifically illustrates the role of media, traditional and new, in creating, perpetuating, and amplifying biased, sexist, and misogynistic violence against women in public life. Di Meco writes that online violence is "used to delegitimize, depersonalize and ultimately dissuade them [female politicians and political activists] from being politically active" (31). In using multiple methods, the report finds support in the Twitter data analysis for the more general claims made by expert interviewees. Social media narratives are predominately negative for female candidates, as opposed to the largely positive narratives surrounding male candidates,[33] and are "mostly concerned with [women's] character as opposed to their policies" (35).

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[33] Incidentally, Joe Biden is an exception.

Amnesty International and the National Democratic Institute's recent works on online

VAWIP also utilize a combination of interviews, focus groups, and supervised machine learning.

In Amnesty International's "#ToxicTwitter: Violence and Abuse against Women Online" report,

researchers conducted 86 interviews with women and non-binary individuals in the UK and US,

conducted focus group discussions, ran a qualitative survey with 162 responses, and analyzed

close to a million tweets directed at parliamentarians in 2017 (2018, 4-5). This report

importantly highlighted the intersectional nature of online violence against political women,

particularly emphasizing the intersections between sexism and racism, homophobia,

Islamophobia, transphobia, and ableism (20-21).

The National Democratic Institute (2019)'s "Tweets that Chill: Analyzing Online Violence

against Women in Politics" utilizes three case studies—Indonesia, Colombia, and Kenya—to

better understand online VAWIP. The report authors utilize surveys, focus groups, and social

media data analysis. In defining online VAWIP, the authors develop an "Online VAW-P Typology"

that parallels the traditional, or offline, typology of psychological, economic, physical, and sexual

violence. In the online VAW-P typology, the authors include insults and hate speech,

embarrassment and reputational risk, physical threats, and distortion (Zeiter, et al. 2019, 14).

The authors recognize the links between offline and online violence but felt it necessary to

create a parallel typology to "reflect the character of the digital space" (ibid).

In this report, unlike the others, the authors used qualitative methods to inform their

big N analysis, particularly in creating lexicons of sexist and violent words that were used to

structure the analysis of social media data. This report offers an important comparative study,

finding that online violence differs across contexts and, importantly, demonstrating that survey

data and Twitter analysis are not identical, though broad trends are consistent (18). Like

Amnesty's report, "Tweets that Chill" describes the unique violence that multiply and

historically marginalized communities face, including LGBTQ and disabled communities, underscoring that this intersectional discrimination changes with country context (22). However, the lexicons of violent words they used to analyze social media data focused on sexist and gender-based harassing language, thereby limiting possible intersectional analysis (4).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES
Developing a Revised Approach

Work on gendered, online political violence and online VAWIP provides foundation for this project. Existing research on the forms of VAWIP offers a variety of complementary approaches for cataloguing violence including: disaggregating motives forms and impacts; distinguishing physical, psychological, economic, sexual, and semiotic violence; evaluating bias; and understanding violence as a continuum. Some research has also incorporated components of an intersectional analysis and online misogyny theoretical framings; both prompt new questions and offer tools for better understanding online VAWIP. But several key features are missing from this literature.

First, despite using different methodologies, there is limited acknowledgement that surveys/interviews and big data capture related, but ultimately distinct, data. Academic research that uses survey data is more upfront about the strengths and limitations of that data source, in part because such admissions conform to the methodological norms of survey research. While big data analyses use public information, from websites, Twitter, blogs, and sometimes Facebook and Instagram,[34] researchers often conflate the target of violence—usually

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[34] For example, Crimson Hexagon, an expensive but user-friendly platform that both academics and practitioners have used to collect and analyze data, pays for access to Facebook and Instagram. Access to these sources of data is expensive and limited for most academic research.

politically-active individuals on whom they have focused the analysis—with the audience of violence, which can range from nobody at all to a vast public. I argue that the role of the public needs to be considered as well as theorized. What does it mean when representatives, under the watch of their constituents, supporters, and various publics, are targeted with violence? How is this different from offline, private violence—not worse or better, but different? And how do those differences require modifying, possibly overhauling, concepts and theories?

Second, much of this research reflects the concerns voiced by Krook (2020) and Schneider (2019): violence against politicians and VAWIP have been conflated when they really are separate measures. I perhaps contribute to this conflation here by presenting research on online violence against politicians alongside online VAWIP. Within this work, there has been limited theorizing about how online VAWIP differs from *online* violence against politicians, despite the near-universal findings that women politicians receive a greater number and higher proportion of violence that is sexualized, identity-based, and gender-based.

Third, comparative research is relatively limited, though scholars and practitioners have called for more cross-country comparisons (Spinks 2018). Most comparative analysis has focused on paired or group comparisons, comparing female executives and male executives (Barboni and Brooks 2018) within and across countries, leaders in similar contexts (i.e., Rayment et al.'s comparison of Canada and the U.S.), electoral periods across distinct countries (see IFES's work in Bardall et al. 2018), intraregional similarities (Restrepo Sanín 2020b), and global patterns in media coverage (Di Meco 2019). These comparisons have usefully underscored the ubiquity of online violence against political women and recognized some of the regional, cultural, and country-specific differences around the world. But fewer insights have been drawn from the *differences* between individuals and contexts. Even when research has highlighted the differences in violence based on gender, age, and leadership, these conclusions are largely

drawn from statistical analysis, thus suppressing an understanding of how difference on one axis might illuminate another.

Fourth, research on formal politicians does not often incorporate feminist research on cyberviolence. Practitioner research, particularly that which considers violence against a diverse array of women political actors, incorporates more of these insights, likely because political journalists and activists have written many of the prominent analyses on online misogyny.

Fifth, most research on online VAWIP does not sufficiently link offline and online abuse. Online violence is one form of abuse, the most prevalent across existing survey data. But it is treated as a distinct category of violence. Some research on online violence against politicians has linked offline and online violence, but research on online VAWIP largely keeps them separate. As such, we still have many unanswered questions concerning the extent to which online and offline violence intersect.

Finally, scholars and practitioners have called for an emphasis on intersectionality and multiple-marginalization (Di Meco 2019, 56; *Data and Violence against Women in Politics* 2019, 26). Amnesty International and NDI have been leaders in responding to this call with specific empirical data that illustrates the unique quantity and quality of online violence targeting multiply-marginalized individuals and communities, including Diane Abbott in the UK and deaf activists in Colombia. Additionally, a UNESCO-sponsored 2021 report on women journalists and online violence finds that Black, Indigenous, Jewish, Arab, and LGBTQ women journalists experience "both the highest rates and most severe impacts of online violence" (Posetti, et al. 2021, 12). Still, most research specifically on online VAWIP is focused on the sexist form of technological violence, either as understood by the targets through interview data or as revealed through social media analyses. Several recent academic pieces (Esposito and Zollo

2021; Fuchs and Schäfer 2020; Rasulo 2021) have incorporated intersectional frames in the study of online VAWIP, focusing on a single, or small number, of women in politics. Through my previous work (Kuperberg 2018; Kuperberg 2021) and this project, I respond to these calls for intersectional scholarship and build from the work of practitioners and scholars who have centered multiply-marginalized subjects and used intersectional framings.

I have integrated numerous findings from this research into my research questions, design, and methods. However, despite the diversity of these approaches and the various literatures they expand upon, several unexplored and underexplored questions remain. These questions serve as the basis for this dissertation.

How can—and should—we conceptualize online VAWIP? How does it differ from violence against politicians? How can online VAWIP best be measured, given the information gaps and methodological challenges of online research? The unique features of the online space must be considered not only in the study of VAWIP, but in its conceptualization. For example, many acts of online violence—particularly those that are subject to the most research and have the widest viral spread—are public. This requires that public viewership and impact be incorporated into our understanding of the phenomenon. Though this dissertation specifically seeks to theorize, analyze, and compare *forms* of online violence, the potential *impact* of violence informs both the concept theorization as well as the methods used.

This project is limited by what can be studied, both ethically and practically. This can be understood as a necessary limitation but also frames the contribution this project makes. My interview data illuminates how political women experience violence themselves and how they frame violence against their colleagues. But the social media data analysis I conduct, though targeting some of these same political women, tells us comparatively little about women's

perceptions of violence. Instead, this data reveals what supporters, constituents, and/or the

general public views about political women online. Online VAWIP impacts democracy not only

because political women leave the public space in response to violence, but also because

citizens perpetrate, engage with, debate, and are themselves impacted by public violence.

The primary objective of this dissertation is to develop a typology of online VAWIP—that

offers conceptual and methodological clarity while prioritizing the use of an intersectional

analysis—and apply this typology to the United Kingdom and Mexico. More specifically, I will

consider the implications of multiple structures of discrimination on the quantity and rhetorical

quality of online violence. In building this typology, centering multiple marginalization and the

online space, I can contribute to the *conceptualization* of VAWIP. In applying this typology, I will

collect data on the *forms* of online violence, across and within cases.

The above questions, and the resulting typology in the next chapter, allow me to

respond to the broader question of this project: **How do structures of societal violence impact**

online VAWIP? More specifically: (i) **how are offline and online VAWIP related**? And (ii) **how**

does online VAWIP incorporate intersectional discriminations?

How are offline and online VAWIP related? Feminist online violence scholars, including

Citron (2009) and Jane (2015, 2016), have argued that offline and online violence are

intertwined, with each reinforcing the other. Gendered online violence increases vulnerability to

offline violence (Citron 2009) and vice versa (Jane 2016). This, along with findings that online

and offline crimes are correlated (Williams, et al. 2020) suggests that online violence and offline

violence are mutually reinforcing or, at a minimum, two spuriously correlated outcomes of the

same confounding factor. However, much of this literature is based on everyday crimes or

visible internet users, not necessarily political actors.

There are at least two potential expectations, or hypotheses, about the relationship between offline and online VAWIP, particularly as they apply to the cases of Mexico and the U.K. The quantities of online and offline violence could be linearly correlated, with higher amounts of offline, physical violence reflected in higher amounts of online violence. In this case, Mexico, a country with higher offline violence and impunity for violent crimes should have a higher amount of online violence. Conversely, higher amounts of offline, physical violence and impunity may be associated with lower amounts of offline violence; in this case, Mexico should have a lower amount of online violence compared to the U.K.

- o **Expectation 1*: Higher offline violence does not correlate with increased online VAWIP. In countries with a greater amount of offline violence (operationalized here using physical violence) and great impunity for violent crimes, online violence will be less prevalent and/or less significant.**

First, where offline violence and high levels of impunity intersect as they do in the case of Mexico, individuals seeking to target women politicians with violence do not need to resort to the online space to evade consequences for their actions. Second, some acts of offline violence may be a "repertoire of contention," a concept repurposed here from social movement theory to describe recognizable actions of dissent (Tilly 1986, 2; Tarrow 1996). Though drug cartels—a significant source of violence in Mexico—are not a social movement, they have repertoires of violence such as the public display of a severed head following an assassination that carry meaning beyond the act of violence itself (Bunker, Campbell, and Bunker 2010). The meanings attached to acts of offline violence and their aftermath do not have parallels in the online space, though these may be developed over time.

Third, in contexts in which offline violence constitutes an immediate and bodily threat, legislators and law enforcement may focus on that threat rather than the perceivably fewer tangible threats from online violence. This does not mean that online violence is not occurring,

but that its place in public discourse, in policy, and in interview or survey data will be less

pronounced. Fourth, a lack of technological knowledge, documented in diverse contexts[35]

around the world, may contribute to avoidance of the problem. Electoral officials and judges

may not know how to grapple with online violence and have fewer regional and international

models to follow relative to offline violence (Interview 1 2018).

Finally, as a complementary corollary to the first expectation, online violence may be

more prevalent or more significant in countries with a lower amount of offline, physical

violence. In line with the continuum of violence literature (Kelly 1988, Kelly 2012, Gillett 2018) a

focus on physical violence can "distract us" from normalized incidents of abuse (Boyle 2017).

Acts of online violence, particularly those that do not constitute physical threats, are often not

considered "violence." In countries with less physical violence against women in politics,

legislators and researchers may focus on online violence and set up pertinent norms and

institutions.

- o **Expectation 2***:* **There is a linear relationship between offline and online violence. Specifically, higher offline violence is correlated with increased online VAWIP. In countries with a greater amount of offline violence (physical violence), online violence will be more prevalent and/or more significant.**

This expectation presumes that the same impunity that protects perpetrators of offline violence

will protect online violence incidents. Feminist scholars of online violence recognize that the

clean division between offline and online violence is problematic; violence spills over from one

into another. Further, dividing these spaces often serves to downplay the impact and threat of

online violence. When women experience offline and online violence, they see these as

connected.

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[35] This includes the U.S. when a police officer responded to Amanda Hess's death threat on Twitter by asking: "What is Twitter?" (Hess 2014).

Relatedly, women may not be targeted with more online violence as an absolute quantity of abusive posts or a percentage of posts overall but acts of online violence may be more impactful. Where offline violence is more common, online threats are likely to be, and perceived to be, more credible, imminent, and severe. Due to the anonymity of the internet, targets do not know when this violence will occur or by whom. As psychologist Elizabeth Cargill explains, when "someone is harassed online, it feels like the perpetrator is everywhere" (Citron 2016, 10).

How does online VAWIP incorporate intersectional discriminations? Regardless of the validity of the first two expectations, I expect that offline violence impacts who and how violence is used to target specific individuals. Here, I am moving away from an understanding of just "violence as force" and more clearly including structural violence.

I anticipate that online VAWIP will incorporate intersectional discriminations in several overlapping ways, impacting both *form* and *target* of violence. Previous research and theoretical insights coalesce more clearly in this area than on the relationship between offline and online violence. In addition to the above expectation, that *forms* of violence will incorporate intersectional discriminations, I anticipate that *targets* of violence will experience unique violence.

- o **Expectation 3: Offline violence primarily impacts the *forms* of online violence, including discourses of violence. Salient discriminations will be particularly prevalent in online VAWIP.**

I hypothesize that predominantly or originally offline structures of violence, including discrimination, influence online VAWIP. Across geographic contexts, women in politics experience different types of online discrimination, such as context-specific language, rhetoric, and slang. Salient discriminations help determine what we should study when conducting an

intersectional or intersectional-type analysis (Townsend-Bell 2011) and I anticipate that salient

discrimination will be overrepresented in the data relative to other forms of discrimination.

- o **Expectation 4: Women who identify (or are perceived to identify) with multiple marginalized groups will experience quantitatively and/or qualitatively different violence than their colleagues.**

Research shows that women politicians, as well as other individuals, are targeted with

identity-based violence pertaining to their affiliations (#ToxicTwitter 2018; Kuperberg 2021). In

some cases, these findings are pre-determined methodologically: if researchers are using a word

bank that includes antisemitic slurs to study violence against Jewish individuals, they are likely to

find those rather than Islamophobic posts in their sample. Nonetheless, women in politics

describe violence as taking the form of the "lowest hanging fruit," attacking their most salient or

marginalized identities, even if the perpetrator's intent is to express policy-related

dissatisfaction.

Sobieraj et al. (2020) find that political women at the intersections of multiple structures

of discrimination are more violently targeted than their colleagues online, with implications for

those women, their staff, and the public (13). While several scholars have echoed this point—

multiply marginalized women are targeted with vitriol and harassment that is "qualitatively

different than those faced by dominant groups" (ibid, 7)—few scholarly studies have utilized an

intersectional frame alongside big N data to study VAWIP specifically.[36] None, to my knowledge,

have done so in a comparative study.

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[36] As mentioned Amnesty International employs intersectionality in their 2018 study, but the methods of their large- N dataset are not transparent. Further, they do not explicitly study VAWIP, but instead abuse and harassment. Other studies similarly look at the gendered or racialized components of political violence online (Joseph 2011, Parks and Heard 2009, Nadim and Fladmoe 2019) but do not study VAWIP or use a clearly intersectional lens.

In addition, intersecting discrimination does not only include reference to multiple

identity-based stereotypes but asks us to consider how discriminations are mutually constituted.

Rather than assume that sexism operates homogenously across my sample, I will be attuned to

the co-constitution of multiple forms of discrimination, predominately how sexism takes

different form when directed at different political women.

- o **Expectation 5: Multiple discrimination will be evident not only in individual posts, but across the corpus of tweets.**

Some VAWIP posts will contain multiple forms of discrimination in a single tweet

(Kuperberg 2021). However, due to the constraints of 280 characters, intersectional

discrimination cannot be solely understood through a single unit or post, but in analyzing a

broader collection, or corpus, of posts. I am not only interested in dissecting instances of

violence, but in analyzing forms of violence within and amidst a broader landscape.

Finally, the Covid-19 pandemic has altered many facets of social and political life. Since

March 2020, political women are conducting more of their political work online. Even where

online violence was previously not a focus of attention, this is changing as political women are

turning to the internet as their place of work. This shift is not limited to political women (Chair

2020; "The Ripple Effect" 2020).

Data for this dissertation was generated during the pandemic, from June-August 2020.

This may alter the project and impact both the expectations for the data as well as their

generalizability. Alternatively, some of the digital changes that originated during the pandemic

will set the course for online engagement for the foreseeable future.

To respond to the above research questions, I first need to conceptualize online VAWIP

and identify how I will measure it. I start, in the next chapter, by identifying the theoretical

framework I use in this project. This theoretical framework combines theories of violence, online

violence, and intersectionality.

OUTLINE OF DISSERTATION

This dissertation proceeds as follows. In Chapter 2, I clarify the theoretical framework

for this project. I argue for a comprehensive definition of violence, including structural and

online violence, and an intersectionally-inspired approach to VAWIP. Research on online

violence, particularly online misogyny, provides important definitions and empirical insights that

can inform a study of online VAWIP. I also ask whether and how VAWIP, a concept grounded in

gender-based violence, is compatible with an intersectional analysis.

In Chapter 3, using grounded theory, I develop a typology of online VAWIP that

considers the role of target, form, and response. In centering intersecting discriminations and

the unique elements of the online space, I broaden the target of violence, beyond just women

politicians, and consider the potential disconnect between those targeted and those harmed.

On form, I adopt a spectrum of aversive speech approach (Chen 2017) to distinguish VAWIP

from spam, rudeness, and violence against politicians. Finally, I briefly discuss responses to

online violence to incorporate the relational communication of the online space, particularly the

relationship between those explicitly targeted by violence and the audience of online violence.

In Chapter 4, I detail the methodology used for the remaining chapters, including data

collection and analysis. This project integrates multiple methods, beginning with expert

interviews and qualitative analysis. These data inform a big N supervised machine learning

analysis, which in turn informs a qualitative, thematic discourse analysis of abusive posts.

In Chapters 5 and 6, I utilize interview data, laws, and public statements to identify salient discriminations in the U.K. and Mexico as well as outline efforts to mitigate VAWIP, particularly in the online space. Mexico has passed laws directly addressing VAWIP and has considered intersectional discrimination in affirmative action measures. Furthermore, political officials who are perpetrators of VAWIP have faced judicial sanctions. In the U.K., existing communication and anti-discrimination laws have been used to prosecute (primarily) members of the public for acts of VAWIP. Debates and public speeches in the U.K. have incorporated the online space and, to a lesser extent, intersectional violence.

In Chapter 7 and 8, I present the results of the qualitative and big N analyses, including applying the typology developed in Chapter 3 to classify online VAWIP in original Twitter corpora containing a total of 1.3 million tweets. I find that women MPs in the U.K. are targeted with more violence that Mexican women deputies in the samples, both as an absolute number and a proportion of posts in the corpora. In both cases, qualitative analysis demonstrates that target and form of violence is intersectional in nature.

In Chapter 9, I briefly compare the findings from the previous empirical chapters. generating comparative insights on the relationships between offline and online violence in distinct geographic and political contexts. I find that greater impunity and incidents of in-person violent crime in Mexico do not correlate with higher levels of online violence compared to the U.K. In Mexico, younger and LGBTQ+ women receive a higher proportion of violent tweets; in the U.K., BAME women received a higher percentage of violent tweets compared to their colleagues. Qualitative analysis uncovers ageism (gendered references to old age), homophobia, sexism, anti-feminism, and intersections of discrimination as prominent themes of violence in the Mexico corpus. In the U.K., violence includes tropes that incorporate ageism (mostly references to youth), Islamophobia, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and their intersections.

Though qualitative and quantitative analysis shows that online violence is intersectional in form and target, it is not uniformly intersectional; women within and across multiply-marginalized groups, and across contexts, are not targeted in identical—or even similar—ways. Perpetrators of online violence appear to have an expanded toolbox of rhetoric to use against multiply-marginalized politicians but use some of these tools more sparingly than others, depending on target and context. These tools serve to render women in politics incompetent and invisible, using violent tropes that incorporate multiple forms of discrimination to target women's multiple, marginalized identities.

In Chapter 10, I gesture towards the impact of online VAWIP on gender equality and democracy. I survey research on the impact of online violence on political aspirants, women in public life, and those connected to women in politics, including family members and staff. In Chapter 11, I present some solutions to mitigate online VAWIP. Finally, in Chapter 12, I conclude by identifying some methodological contributions of this project, revisiting my research questions, and identifying areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

Conceptualizing and understanding online violence against women in politics utilizing an intersectional framework involves working for conceptual clarity on three fronts: violence against women in politics, online violence, and intersectional gender-based violence. More specifically, adding online and intersectional as additional qualifiers to the concept VAWIP requires reconsidering certain components of VAWIP, as it is currently understood.

First, can and should online violence be considered violence? Second, how can existing conceptualizations of online and gender-based violence be applied to online VAWIP? Third, how do the forms and our means of analyzing VAWIP change when we focus our lens on the online space? Fourth, is the emphasis on women and sexism inherent in the VAWIP concept incompatible with an intersectional framework? In short, narrowing focus (predominately) to online violence[37] and expanding our understanding of VAWIP to better incorporate intersectional discriminations prompts reconceptualization of what we mean by *violence against women* in politics.

VIOLENCE

At the root of violence against women in politics is "violence," a concept both widely studied and contested. VAWIP encompasses a continuum of acts that range from microaggressions to political femicide (Restrepo Sanín 2018). Despite critiques of this framing, VAWIP scholars have defended a broad definition of violence.

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[37] A central question of this dissertation concerns the relationship between the offline and online spaces. As such, I am not focusing exclusively on the online space.

Political science is primarily concerned with violence as physical force and/or harm, including political violence (Collignon and Rüdig 2020). Political scientists often only consider an act "violence" if it intends, or succeeds, to kill (see Marshall 1999; Valentino 2014). Krook (2020), invoking Bufacchi's (2005) definition of violence, argues for a comprehensive understanding of violence in the study of VAWIP: violence as violation rather than an act of force (2005, 193). Bufacchi specifies that violence as violation means to "infringe, to transgress, or to exceed some limit or norm" (196). These acts violate human rights, the "right to ourselves," and even acts that do not result in a right being violated (196-197). The danger of this definition is its breadth; is any "social wrong" an act of violence (197)? Despite this concern, feminist theorists often err on the side of maximalism, noting that we can both understand violence as a broad continuum of acts (Kelly 1987) while still distinguishing between acts of violence, noting the specific severity of acts that end in death.[38]

Bufacchi's "violence as violation" definition makes space for the consideration of structural violence. The concept of structural violence is attributed to John Galtung and his 1969 piece, "Violence, Peace, and Peace Research." To theorize peace more broadly, Galtung disaggregates violence into personal and structural violence. He critiques definitions that limit violence to personal, physical violence or a "narrow" definition. Here, violence is limited to "somatic incapacitation, or deprivation of health, alone (with killing as the extreme form), at the hands of an actor who in- tends this to be the consequence" (168). Even when we include psychological violence in our definition of personal violence, a move Galtung supports, we can end up with "highly unacceptable social orders" that are technically devoid of violence (ibid). Instead, Galtung argues, we need to understand violence as both personal and structural.

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[38] Though Bufacchi (2004) problematizes the equation of violence and death, noting that we need to understand violence as negative without relying exclusively on the "badness" of death.

Structural violence is generally indirect; "violence is built into the structure and shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances" (171). All violence, whether personal or structural, is defined by Galtung as the "difference between the potential and the actual, between what could have been and what is" (168).

Like Bufacchi, Galtung's definition has been critiqued for its breadth (Bufacchi 2007; Coady 2008; Tronto 2010). It is important to note that while Galtung views a broad array of acts and structures as "violence" he also notes multiple ways to disaggregate violence. In addition to "personal" and "structural" violence, we can distinguish between physical and psychological, negative and positive influence, whether or not there is an object hurt due to violence, unintended or intended violence, and manifest and latent violence. These subtypes do not necessitate the existence of the other. Nonetheless, we can study the relationships between multiple types of violence. In this project, I will be investigating the relationship between structural violence, specifically discriminations; personal physical violence; and personal, online violence.

In the 1960s, Galtung was understandably not concerned with online or digital violence. Bufacchi's 2005 piece similarly does not mention computer-mediated violence. However, their theorizing can illuminate facets of online violence that cannot be sufficiently understood with a narrow conception of violence, particularly one that emphasizes direct physical harm. As mentioned, online violence is the most common form of violence affecting formal politicians globally ("Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians" 2016; "Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe" 2018; Collingnon and Rüdig 2020; Håkansson 2020), yet some scholars, practitioners, and even victim-survivors do not always consider abuse and harassment in the online space "violence." This is in part because the

physical harm caused by online violence is often indirect, causing anxiety and mental health

issues that can have physical effects, including heart attacks (Cramer 2021).[39]

While it is important to recognize and draw attention to the physical and psychological

harms caused by online violence, however, a harm-based metric for classifying violence

constrains research.[40] Due to the nature of the online and political spaces, women politicians

targeted with violence may not be the individuals reading or engaging with violent material.

Political staff in many contexts are the primary individuals who read, screen, report, and/or

reply to private online messages directed at political elites. As for public and highly visible online

violence, constituents and members of the public may be the primary audience of violent posts,

potentially harmed by their content. Finally, social media companies have refined their

algorithms in the face of increased pressure to respond to online abuse. Some violence,

particularly the clearest and more virulent violence,[41] is never published but instead, moderated

by an algorithm[42] before reaching the politician, her staff, or a member of the general public.

This presents a philosophical quandary: if a violent post is never read by human beings,

is it violent?[43] If a violent post is not read by its intended target, can it still violate? These not-so-

infrequent dilemmas illustrate the value of a maximalist definition of violence. A concept of

violence that emphasizes violation over force allows for the consideration of violent acts that do

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[39] Online violence causes physical harm, including panic attacks among victim-survivors (Adams 2018, 856; Citron 2010, 36). In some cases, online violence can lead to suicide (Baggs 2021).

[40] This is quite clear in cases of online violence, but also applies to offline violence.

[41] In 2018, Facebook algorithms identified more than 50% of abusive posts through algorithms, including 97% of "violence and graphic content" though only 14% of bullying and harassment (Wagner 2019). In 2021, Facebook reported that 97% of hate speech was removed through algorithms before the content was flagged by users (Schroepfer 2021).

[42] In some cases, this abuse will go to a social media company contractor or employee to conduct manual content moderation. Research on content moderation explores the trauma inflicted on employees, their economic precarity, and the increasingly transnational nature of content moderation (Roberts 2019).

[43] Though it is worth noting that most of the data used in this project *has* been read by a human.

not have physical components and/or are disconnected from the intended target. Through

Galtung's conceptualizations of violence, we can ask how online violence and offline violence—

including personal, physical violence as well as structurally violent discriminations—are

connected.

Continuum of Violence

Feminist scholarship on VAWIP (Kuperberg 2016; Restrepo-Sanín 2018a; Krook and

Restrepo-Sanín 2019; Krook 2020; Bjarnegård and Zetterberg forthcoming) has largely adopted a

comprehensive definition of violence. This work is grounded in Liz Kelly's (1987) continuum of

violence approach on sexual violence and continuum thinking (Boyle 2019). The goal of the

continuum is to bring together "the wider range of forms of abuse and assault which women

experience," from the everyday to the extreme (Kelly 1987, 48). Continuums are not linear,

though they are often presented as such, because a linear spectrum presents acts as discrete as

well as assumes an increasing severity. Kelly rebukes this reading of sexual violence, writing that

the continuum "should not be seen as a linear connection, nor can inferences be made from it

concerning seriousness or the impact on women" (59). Every woman responds to acts

differently and can have a different relationship with a single act over time.[44]

Some components of Kelly's 1987[45] framework are limited in their contemporary

applicability due to the heteronormativity and lack of diversity in her analysis. For example, she

indicates that all perpetrators of sexual violence are male and all victims/survivors are female.

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[44] This both refers to women being impacted differently by two nearly-identical acts of violence, like cat-calling, as well as women having a different understanding of a single act of violence over time.
[45] Kelly's chapter is sometimes cited as having been published in 1988. I use the author's own self-citation (in a 2016 piece) as a guide.

To her credit, in her later work, Kelly recognizes the need for intersectional analysis in studying

violence (Kelly 2012). As Vera-Gray (2017) adds, though all women and girls are subject to

sexism and gender-based violence in some way, "all women and girls are not discriminated

against in the same way."

Continuum thinking (Boyle 2019), building from Kelly's continuum of sexual violence,

reaffirms the necessity of (i) naming women's lived experiences with violence; (ii) recognizing

the commonalities underlying violence across a lifetime, individuals, and communities; while (iii)

resisting the conflation of categories of violence, such as femicide and online slurs.[46] Boyle raises

concerns over the gender-neutral framing of categories of violence which she argues, reduces

the focus on female victims and male perpetrators.

I disagree with Boyle (2019) in her emphasis on violence against women rather than

gender-based violence and instead, I utilize an international legal approach that understands

violence against women *as a form of* gender-based violence. However, I and other VAWIP

scholars (Krook and Restrepo Sanín 2019, 746) share Boyle's focus on women as key subjects of

analysis. Boyle (2019) justifies a focus on women by arguing that women are distinctively

targeted with unique forms of violence. I am not suggesting that men do not face gendered,

political violence. However, VAWIP centers the experiences of women conceptually and as a

policy priority.

There are two necessary points of clarification. First, I unequivocally recognize that

transwomen are women and thus experience VAWIP.[47] Second, non-binary individuals and

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[46] The continuum frame is not meant to conflate all categories of violence but instead, to offer an "analytical tool that allows us to connect sex, male violence and gender inequality" (Boesten 2017, 514).
[47] An intersectional analysis also asks us to consider how transphobia intersects with sexism to structure transwomen's experiences online.

individuals perceived as women may be targets of VAWIP. Just as racism can target individuals

of minority races and those perceived to belong to minority races—see, for example, the UK

definitions of antisemitism and Islamophobia that include perceived group membership—

VAWIP can impact women as well as those perceived as women.[48] Expanding the class of

potential victims and perpetrators does not "dilute" this concept.

Scholars have also used continuum thinking to frame women's experiences online.

Lewis, Rowe, and Wiper (2017) write that there is "no single pattern of experiences of online

abuse" but instead, "a continuum of online abuse ranging from concentrated, frequent, highly

threatening and hateful to, at the other end of the spectrum, comparatively sporadic and less

inflammatory, unpleasant, non-threatening messages" (1469). Using surveys, the authors were

able to gather data on prevalence and threat level. Similarly, Masullo Chen (2017) describes a

continuum of aversive speech, language which I adopt in this project. McGlynn, Rackley, and

Houghton (2017) adopt Kelly's continuum for image-based sexual abuse, primarily focusing on

the online space. Finally, Restrepo Sanin (2018b) and Rodríguez Calva and Frías (2020) have also

described VAWIP as a continuum, identifying related acts of violence women experience

through interviews in Bolivia and Mexico, respectively.

Despite the widespread use of the continuum of violence to describe VAWIP and online

VAWIP, there is not yet a clearly defined continuum for online VAWIP, with discussion of the

commonalities underlying various forms of violence. I use the continuum both to describe a

spectrum of aversive online speech, of which online VAWIP is one form, as well as to typologize

online VAWIP, itself a continuum of related acts.

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[48] There are no individuals in my direct sample who are transwomen or non-binary. As such, I occasionally use "female" in place of "women" when discussing my data.

The boundaries of violence, as understood in this project, are informed by Bufacchi's understanding of violence as violation, Galtung's explication of structural violence, and the feminist understanding of violence as a continuum (Kelly 1987). This violence, when targeted at women in politics due to their identities and public activities, constitutes VAWIP.

ONLINE MISOGYNY

Literature on online misogyny is not focused on women politicians. Researchers have used the *examples* of political women to illustrate online misogyny, but theoretical insights on democracy or representation are peripheral if not absent. Nonetheless, research on online misogyny can inform our understanding of VAWIP, particularly online VAWIP. This literature encourages us to consider the unique qualities of the online space, the relationship between offline and online violations, and more general responses to women in public space. Women have been excluded and subject to violence online, particularly for speaking their minds and standing up for feminist issues. For these, and other reasons, research on online misogyny can illuminate patterns of digital exclusion, suppression, and violence that women politicians experience on and offline.

What is Online Violence? Is it "really" violence?

Feminists writing about online abuse, sexism, and misogyny have categorized these broad experiences using different words and delimitations. I focus here on gendered, online violence or online misogyny/sexism, rather than broader patterns of hate speech or trolling. Lewis, Wiper, and Rowe (2017) utilize the concept "gendered online abuse," rather than the various other terms—flaming, trolling, and ebile—that have been used by other scholars. I agree

with their broad argument: it is necessary to be conceptually clear when discussing this multifaceted issue and yet an obsession with distinguishing definitional terms distracts researchers from the important questions at hand (Jane 2015). "Gendered online abuse" serves as a broader category that encompasses various forms of "abusive, threatening, and violent communication towards women" online (Lewis et al. 2017, 1465).

Disputes over what "counts" as violence in the online space is one primary reason for these conceptual disagreements. Even using a maximalist definition—violence as violation, including but not limited to physical violence—some do not see online violence as a violation; online violence is not in the "real world." Targets of online violence have regularly been discredited and their experiences, trivialized. Violence has been described as harmless fun or "innocuous teasing" as well as a fundamental part of the Internet (Citron 2009b, 395). This parallels women's experiences reporting sexual harassment and sexual violence (Ibid, 392) and underscores the necessity to declare that VAWIP is "not the cost" of political engagement (Albright et al. 2021).

Researchers and non-profit organizations have documented that targets of online violence *are* impacted by the abuse they receive. Targets change their social media activity and settings (Kennedy and Taylor 2010), stop posting as frequently (Zeiter et al. 2019)[49], take breaks from online spaces (Citron 2016; Eckert 2018), and even go offline or change careers permanently because of online hostility (Adams 2018, 857; Erikson, Håkansson, and Josefsson 2019, 17). In some cases, women not only withdraw from online spaces, but also from engagement in the offline public space (Jane 2014, 536). Women are regularly told that if they cannot handle it, they should leave the platform.

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[49] From the "Tweets that Chill" report from NDI (2019).

Yet, for politicians, particularly those in countries with high social media usage, going

offline might not be an option. Indeed, researchers have posited that for younger and

historically-underrepresented politicians, going offline can be even more costly. Since the Covid-

19 pandemic moved representational activity online, it has become impossible for politicians to

simply "log off," even though violence has perniciously followed them into online spaces

(Gichanga and Orembo 2020). Further, if democratic discourse is increasingly taking place

online, and constituents are looking to online spaces for political engagement and information,

online harassment not only impacts an individual politician, but the democratic process.

In addition to the online consequences, online violence can have significant offline

implications. Emma Jane (2016) writes that women who have been targets of online abuse

experience "significant, tangible, and embodied" suffering (Jane in Berry 2019). Targets suffer

from panic attacks, nervous breakdowns, and mental illness because of online attacks (Adams

2018, 856). Online violence can thus be "just as destructive as offline violence" (Berry 2019). Of

course, scholars of online violence—once again spearheaded by feminists—reject the complete

separation of online and offline violence. Still, comparing online violence to offline, physical

violence has been a strategic tool to illustrate the gravity of online violence. Online harassment

and violence are still "real" even if they take place in the virtual space.

The trivialization and discrediting of abuse can increase, moreover, when women

publicly discuss their experiences of abuse. Jill Filipovic, for instance, reported that harassment

increased after she publicly shared the online abuse targeting her (Citron 2016, 112). As Citron

(2016) explains, "This suggests that the purpose of some harassment is to force victims off the

Internet" (Ibid, 113). When women's experiences of violence are discredited, this too is a form

of violence, particularly semiotic violence that seeks to invisibilize women through testimonial

quieting (Kuperberg 2021). This can also lead target-survivors to spend time and effort on

"credibility work," to demonstrate that "they are people whose ideas are worth hearing" (Sobieraj 2020, 73).

Thus, though definitions of violence remain contextual and contested, online violence can constitute a violation and cause significant physical, psychological, and economic[50] harm to targets of violence as well as members of the public.

Cyberbullying

While research on online misogyny and violence focuses on the experiences of adults, cyberbullying research is centered on the experience of children. There are key differences between adult and child perpetrators and victims of online abuse. However, we can learn from the theoretical debates and conceptual challenges of defining cyberbullying as they directly apply to online VAWIP.

First, researchers of cyberbullying emphasize the importance of geographic context (Ojanen et al. 2015). Second, offline and online bullying researchers define bullying by three measures: "intent to harm, power imbalance between victim and perpetrator, and repetition" (Ibid, 160).[51] While the first of these criteria may apply to women in politics, the second and third seem prohibitively narrow. Not all women have power vis-à-vis all perpetrators of abuse, but formal politicians usually do have considerable power in relation to citizens.

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[50] There is less research on the economic harm of online violence. However, Kimberly Peeler-Allen (2019) described that victim-survivors of online violence (in this case Black women running for office) responded to online threats by spending more financial resources on security.

[51] Although, importantly, as Vivolo-Kantor, et al. (2014) note, these components are not uniformly included in operationalizations of cyberbullying across academic studies.

Cyberbullying scholars have responded to this concern—though applied to children rather than political elites—in understanding power more complexly. Smith, del Barrio, and Tokunaga (2012) argue that power imbalance online can refer to "differences in technological know-how between perpetrator and victim, relative anonymity, social status, number of friends, or marginalized group position" (36). Through this framing, we can specify that perpetrators of online abuse have contextual power over their targets due to their technological know-how, relative anonymity, and in many cases, group positionality.[52] This understanding of power also requires a consideration of marginalization and the multifaceted privilege differentials between perpetrator and target of online violence, urging an intersectional analysis.

Researchers on cyberbullying have also studied the drawbacks of the third definitional component, requiring repetitive acts to classify abuse as "bullying." Due to the nature of the online space, a single act can have significant implications, particularly when it remains on a platform, is shared, and/or is viewed by many individuals. Though cyberbullying research does not employ the feminist continuum thinking (Boyle 2019), the literature's recognition that impact varies by context and target falls in line with continuum logics.

Finally, the first criteria of cyberbullying—intent to cause harm—is accompanied by "the victim's report of experiencing harm" (Vivolo-Kantor et al. 2014). The tension between these measures, one which favors the intent of the perpetrator regardless of the victims' experiences and the other which emphasizes the experience of the victim regardless of perpetrator intent, is evident in the broader criminological literature. With recognition that online violence causes harm beyond its intended target, and that reliance on motive centers the perpetrator of violence over the target, I adopt a victimological approach, explored in greater detail below.

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[52] Social status and number of friends are more applicable to studies of youth cyberbullying.

Motive in the Online Space

Many feminist scholars and researchers argue that online gendered violence is motivated, at least in part, by men's loss of power. Jessica Megarry describes the internet as a "new public space" and that, like street harassment, which serves to punish women in public spaces, online harassment threatens women who are visible online (Megarry 2014, 51-52). At the launch of the Reclaim the Internet campaign in April 2016, Labour MP Yvette Cooper said:

> Forty years ago women took the streets to challenge attitudes and demand action against harassment on the streets. Today the internet is our streets and public spaces. Yet for some people, online harassment, bullying, misogyny, racism or homophobia can end up poisoning the internet and stopping them from speaking out (Saner 2016).

Megarry and Cooper's arguments are echoed by many other feminists, similarly describing online abuse as backlash or punishment for women taking up public space (Lewis, Rowe, and Wiper 2017; Mantilla 2013, 568; Penny 2014, 163). This online violence can be exacerbated for women of color, who experience intersectional backlash for violating multiple hierarchies of public power (Calasanti and Gerrits 2021, 5; Banet-Weiser and Miltner 2016, 172-173).

If perpetrators of violence are motivated, even implicitly, by marking (or remaking) the internet as male and masculinist space, it makes sense that "norm-violators"—including feminists and politicians, not to mention feminist politicians—are frequent targets of violence (Eckert 2018; Herring et al. 2002; Jane 2018; Sarkeesian 2012). Studies of online political violence have found that the most visible and prominent women politicians are targeted more often and more violently than their less visible female peers and their prominent male peers (Rheault, Rayment, and Musulan 2019; Håkansson 2021). It also stands to reason that women inhabiting two masculinist spaces, the internet and politics, are especially targeted with online violence. Finally, as I will explore in more detail below, women of color or at the intersection of

multiple forms of discrimination are targeted not only with sexism, but racism, homophobia, and other forms of prejudicial violence. Particularly as the alt-right gains prominence in online spaces, individuals at the intersection of violent, nationalistic discrimination are targeted in uniquely virulent ways (West 2017).

Despite this articulation of motive for violence broadly, determining the perpetrator motive for a single act of online violence, or even a series of actions, is challenging. Scholarly frameworks for classifying gendered online abuse take this account, either excluding intent all together or including it as one of a series of indicators. Lewis, Rowe and Wiper (2017) separate the study of online violence into forms, impact, and responses, removing intent or motivation from their typology. Jane (2014), on the other hand, recognizes that motivation may be one component of identifying and classifying gendered, online violence. She writes that "e-bile" is marked by hostility "located in authorial intent, rhetorical construct, audience reception, and/or contextual impact" (541), but she does not prioritize authorial intent over rhetoric, reception, or impact.

Motive is challenging to determine in the online space for several reasons. Users are often anonymous and when they are not, information about them is often incomplete. Particularly on Twitter, the platform used in this dissertation, information about offenders of online abuse is limited. Even where motive is expressed in a 280-character post, criminological researchers and psychologists share some doubt that offenders are fully aware and can comprehensively express motive; motive and intent is therefore determined by contextualized patterns and circumstances (Cornwell 1999, 126). Perpetrator motives are rarely single-dimensional.

The naming of revenge porn, a form of image-based sexual violence (McGlynn et al.2017) illustrates these challenges. Scholars, activists, and journalists have critiqued the law's narrow definition of "revenge porn" and similar crimes due to the focus on intentionality. For example, in the United Kingdom, prosecutors must prove that the perpetrators had "intent to cause distress." Huber (2018) writes, that the "requirement to prove 'intent to cause distress' is fundamentally problematic because any case of revenge porn is 'always going to cause distress whether intended or not.'" Samantha Bee, et al. (2019), in response to Representative Katie Hill's resignation, said: "The name itself, shows you the problem: revenge porn. In many states, the law forces a victim to prove that the person who released her nudes did so maliciously and that is a very high bar." Bee continues, "Intent should be a factor but what's more important is what nonconsensual pornography can do to the victims." In other words, impact is more important than motive.

These critiques have led to a renaming of this problem—nonconsensual pornography, nonconsensual image sharing, or cyber exploitation—all of which are victimological framings of violence focused on the consent given or exploitation experienced by the victim-survivor. Yet even as she named her own experience with violent cyber exploitation, Katie Hill, in her resignation speech, recognized the larger motivations and impact of the semiotic violence targeting her: "The forces of revenge by a bitter jealous man, cyber exploitation, and sexual shaming that target our gender and a large segment of society that fears and hates powerful women have combined to push a young woman out of power and say that she doesn't belong here" (Hill 2019).

The Relationship between Online and Offline Violence

Individuals advocating technological determinism generally argued that there was something fundamental about technology and the internet that encouraged harassment qualitatively and quantitatively different than that offline. This first wave of harassment literature (Jane 2014, 532) was primarily located in social psychology at its start, but the notion of a "unique" internet culture spread to other disciplines and is still a prevalent viewpoint. Those who believe the internet uniquely promotes violence and harassment often draw on anonymity to support their claim. Though individuals are rarely *truly* anonymous, users *feel* anonymous on the Internet. Without being face-to-face with their target, perpetrators are less inhibited (Suler 2004).

Some recent studies (Fox, et al. 2015), though methodologically dubious,[53] cast doubt on the disinhibition thesis. Or, as Shaw (2014) writes, "[..].] people are jerks not only when they are in anonymous Internet spaces, but also when they are in spaces where they can get away with being jerks" (274). More recently, this sentiment has been corroborated by political psychologists who find that online hostility is not motivated by the distinctive features of the online space, including anonymity. Instead, those hostile in offline and other contexts are more likely to be hostile online *and* more likely to self-select into political discussions (Bor and Petersen 2021).

Feminist scholars and writers, Adrienne Shaw included, tend to downplay the deterministic nature of the Internet,[54] noting the parallels between online violence and the

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[53] This article is often cited as a counterpoint to those arguing that anonymity encourages greater hostility. However, it only involved 172 individuals and it does not appear that those individuals are representative of a broader population.

[54] This is not to say that feminists do not address how internet culture, or specific internet cultures, as well as anonymity can be problematic for women online. Citron (2009) for example argues that anonymous abuse has discouraged women from remaining online, often impacting their livelihoods.

abuse women receive in person and through other mediums.[55] Further, though anonymous

threats are common, individuals are also stalked and harassed by people that they know.[56]

Feminists have been more interested in drawing parallels between the offline and virtual spaces

rather than assuming their clear distinction. As Laurie Penny (2014) writes: "The Internet

recreates offline prejudices and changes them, twists them, makes them voyeuristic" (174).

Several studies have quantified the links between offline and online violence. Online

violence increases "vulnerability to offline sexual violence" (Citron 2009). Some forms of online

violence, such as doxing or swatting, start online but quickly move offline (Posetti, et al. 2021:

33; Scheff and Schorr 2017, 32), while in other cases, offline violence is followed by online

violence. This is illustrated by UK's Women's Aid research finding that women who leave offline

domestic violence situations are more likely to report online abuse following their departure

(Jane 2016, 287). Cardiff University's HateLab has even found a correlation between online

violence and offline crimes against minorities in the same location Williams, et al. 2020).[57] The

link between online and offline violence exists both in form and impact; women are more likely

impacted by online, sexual violence because the threat of offline violence is more proximate

than for men (Jane 2015, 77). This research and these data underscore the need for research

that links online and offline violence.

Though online violence transcends the internet, Citron (2016) defends referring to this

violence as "cyber harassment" as it "captures the different ways the Internet exacerbates the

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[55] These include threatening phone calls and letters to women. Katz (1994) finds that, among the public, young, single women are particularly impacted. Further, the target populations of obscene phone calls and sexual assault are similar.

[56] Lewis, et al. (2017)'s study found that nearly a quarter of victims knew their online abuser offline (1473). Those surveyed were not political officials.

[57] This illustrates the connection between the offline and online spaces, but is not particular to women as it focuses on violence against members of minority races and religions.

injuries suffered" (4). Though my research is interested in the relationships between offline structures of discrimination and online violence, and recognizes these forms of violence as interrelated, I refer to violence that takes place predominately online as "online violence" for this same reason.

Intersectionality Online

Online and offline violence are not only linked because acts of violence permeate both spaces, but because—contrary to early techno-optimists who believed the internet would usher in a utopia free of sexism and racism—internet users live in societies and bring their prejudices from the offline world into the online space (Vickery 2018, 36). The online space both reproduces, and newly constitutes, discrimination.

As with VAWIP literature, gendered online abuse research has emphasized sexism and misogyny in crafting concepts, understanding forms of violence, and identifying appropriate legal and political responses. Research on online racism has explored similar questions with a focus on racism, white supremacy, and racial minorities (for example, Daniels 2008; Jakubowicz 2017; Munger 2017). Cyber-racism research focuses primarily on online racism from white supremacist individuals and organizations in Europe and North America (Daniels 2008, 4).

However, as Shaw (2014) laments, despite a rich academic and activist embrace of intersectionality, "decades of feminist scholarship are often overlooked as researchers make sense of new technologies" (273). Safiya Noble, in *Algorithms of Oppression* (2018), seconds this concern writing that scholars have contributed to our understanding of bias online, but an intersectional power analysis is still missing (50).

A small but growing pool of researchers has heeded these concerns. Theoretically and conceptually, scholars have argued for the necessity of an intersectional approach in understanding online violence (Hackworth 2018). Lewis, Rowe, and Wiper (2017), for example, indicate that for some of their survey respondents, sexism intersected with racism and homophobia to inform the content of the online abuse they received (1473). Chen (2017) incorporates hate speech into her discussion of online violence, including multiple forms of discrimination. In other cases, analysts center multiply-marginalized individuals, particularly women of color and trans people (Haimson 2016), in their analyses. Citron (2010), for example, included accounts of racist, sexist attacks by online mobs against Black and Latina women in the U.S. (36).

Finally, researchers have also considered the ways that algorithms and platforms— supposedly "objective" and data-driven—are intersectionally discriminatory. Kim et al. (2020) find that posts penned by Black men were 77% more likely to be labelled abusive compared to other users, which leads to unequal censorship. Noble (2018) in her qualitative assessment of Google results, also finds that algorithms are not only racist and sexist, but that racism and sexism intersect to promote uniquely problematic results for Black women and girls. Finally, Calasanti and Gerrits (2021) find racialized and gendered discriminatory discourses used to undermine and silence women of color public health officials in Canada and the U.S.

I build on this research in this dissertation by putting forward a typology and concept of online VAWIP that incorporates intersectional discrimination and encourages intersectional analysis. Further, I select and center political women for analysis who hold multiple marginalized identities and ask how these women experience intersectional discriminations in the online space. Finally, existing research informs my methodological approach, including critically engaging in big data analysis.

Online Continuum and the Limits of "Add Internet and Stir"

Finally, feminist researchers of online violence recognize that like offline violence, acts of online violence can be best understood as part of a continuum that incorporates different forms of online violence as well as offline violence. However, the details of the continuum— which acts and how they relate to each other—are not always defined. Those who have used continuum logic often include all recognized forms of online violence against women (e.g., the Women's Media Center's Online Abuse 101 wheel).

In short, online VAWIP can and should incorporate both online violence typologies and VAWIP typologies, but simply "copying and pasting" without alteration—or "add online and stir"—does not contribute to a deeper theorization of the continuities and dissimilarities between online violence against politicians (VAP), VAWIP, and online VAWIP.

Instead, and to summarize the contributions discussed, I adopt the following insights from the online violence literature in this project. First, online violence is violence with offline impacts on targets and audiences, including physical and physiological impacts. Second, women are especially targeted with gender-based and sexual abuse online. Third, motive in the online space is difficult to determine and a victimological, feminist approach encourages us to prioritize the experience and impact on victim-survivors over perpetrator intent. Fourth, despite the privilege women politicians hold in society, power in the online space is determined by a variety of factors, including relative anonymity and group membership. Fifth, context—geographic, temporal, histories of violence, ongoing news events, etc.—matters for defining violence and classifying violent events. Sixth, the internet has unique features which can magnify violence; some of these same features, including anonymity, complicate the study of online violence.

Patricia Hill Collins wrote that "Violence provides an especially rich entry point for studying the theoretical and political contours of intersectionality" (2017, 1460). In this project, I reverse this analytical direction, using intersectional analysis to study violence, particularly online VAWIP, but with the hope that the empirical focus of this dissertation illuminates some facet of intersectional discrimination.

Intersectionality, described as the "most important contribution" of women's studies to date (McCall 2005, 1771) has been defined as a paradigm, buzzword, analytical frame, and embodied experience. Named and developed by Black feminists in the United States, intersectionality recognizes that multiple forms of discrimination are not "merely additive" but instead, function as simultaneous and interrelated oppressions (King 1988, 47). Kimberlé Crenshaw developed the term "intersectionality" in her exploration of legal cases in which judges treated race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of identity, to the detriment of Black women whose identities place them at the intersection of multiple axes of discrimination (1989). Crenshaw's naming of intersectionality draws from ideas expressed by Black feminists for decades, if not centuries. As Tormos (2018) writes, "the notion behind the term had already been articulated in Maria Stewart's writings in the 1930s and Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio and enacted by Savitribai Phule's advocacy in India"(708). Scholars also note the contributions of the Combahee River Collective, Frances Beale's notion of "double jeopardy," and Deborah King's "multiple jeopardy," in reference to multiple discrimination of Black women due to race, gender, class, and sexuality (King 1988, 46).

Debates in naming intersectionality, and identifying its origins, emerge from a primary discussion in the literature over the appropriateness of translating intersectionality to contexts outside of the United States, as well as to illuminate the dynamics of groups other than Black American women. Alexander-Floyd (2012) notes that some influential research on intersectionality "disappears black women by enhancing the subjugation of their knowledge" (13). This project, though not focused on Black American women, does not aim to do that. Instead, I hope to better understand the "changing politics of belonging and inclusion" (Bassel and Lépinard 2014), build on international legal frameworks that incorporate intersectionality (Yuval-Davis 2006, 196), and further an understanding of power that centers how "difference is constituted" (Smooth 2013, 12).

However, cognizant of Alexander-Floyd's critique as well as the critiques of others, I adopt Dhamoon's (2010) "intersectional-type" language. Dhamoon develops this concept, "intersectional-type" research, to describe work that takes the many intersectionality-related concepts—including race-gendering, multiple marginalization, double jeopardy, and mestiza identity—as a starting point. Intersectional-type can be seen as an umbrella for this broader collection of scholarship and one that draws on, instead of disappears, the role of intersectionality in motivating this reaserch. With this concept, Dhamoon recognizes the debates and contestation within feminist theory surrounding the definition of the term and its applications, while "also providing a recognizable framework" (231). Due to my own positionality as a researcher, the number of discriminations I can engage with simultaneously, and the limits of big data research in deconstructing exhaustive and exclusive categories, I am describing this analysis as "intersectional-type."

An intersectional-type approach will allow me to focus on particularly salient forms of

discrimination and study a range of women politicians.[58] I will recognize the ways in which

online VAWIP reinscribes power hierarchies, centering power in my analysis. In addition,

retaining other components of an intersectional frame, I dehomogenize the category woman

and the concept of sexism as well as theorize the mutually-constitutive nature of the categories.

I utilize categories of both identity and discrimination, investigating differences among women

and between forms of discrimination though quantitative and qualitative comparisons

(Dhamoon 2010, 236). In doing so, I seek to destabilize a homogenous treatment of gender

(Simien 2007, 267). I am "anchoring" women[59] in my analysis, using an intracategorical analysis[60]

(McCall 2005), so as to theorize and consider the diversity of women's experiences while still

utilizing the existing concept of VAWIP. To do so, in each empirical chapter, I will briefly explore

salient discriminations (Townsend Bell 2011) relevant to each case, such as the intersections of

sexism and indigenous discrimination in Mexico.

VAWIP as Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence (GBV) implies a motive; individuals are targeted with violence

because of their gender or perceived gender. Gender-based violence is not levied at women

alone,[61] but disproportionately targets women as they are particularly harmed by gendered

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[58] Here I will adopt the approach identified by Townsend-Bell (2010) in looking at categories of analytic importance as well as those identified by on-the-ground actors, in this case, politically-active women.

[59] As opposed to anchoring gender broadly, which would call for an intercategorical approach.

[60] Referring to McCall (2005), I will be identifying diverse experiences within the category woman, rather than engaging in an intercategorical—comparing men and women across various dimensions—or anticategorical analysis. I will expand on this decision, and its implications, in the methodology chapter: Chapter 4.

[61] LGBTQ+ men and non-binary individuals are among the groups significantly targeted with gender-based violence.

power inequalities. The Declaration of the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993)

defines VAW as "an act of gender-based violence," a subset of GBV rather than a separate form

of violence. Unlike intersectionality which understands forms of oppression as mutually

constitutive, GBV is firmly rooted in sexism or gender-based discrimination.[62]

Though shorthanded as VAW, instead of gender-based violence against women, this

distinction is important. When women are accidental victims of an attack, such as 50% of victims

of a roadside explosion, this likely does not constitute VAW. Here, women were not victims of

violence because they were women; they were unfortunate, incidental victims. If, however,

such as in the case of the Isla Vista shooter in 2014, women are intentionally targeted due to the

expressed misogyny of the perpetrator, this is a clear case of gender-based violence and, as

such, VAW. This distinction is muddied when a clear motivation is not expressed or cannot be

determined. If the roadside bomb was set to explode in an outdoor market, and women

disproportionately staff and visit this market, then we can classify this act as VAW, even if the

perpetrator or their motive remains unknown.

In her role as United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Dubravka

Šimonović defined VAWIP in 2018 as the following: "Such violence, including in and beyond

elections, consists of any act of gender-based violence, or threat of such acts, that results in, or

is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering and is directed against a

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[62] Though often used interchangeably, sexism refers to discrimination on the basis of sex where gender-based discrimination is on the basis of gender. Just as VAW incorporates gender-based violence, most understandings of sexism implicitly incorporate gendered discrimination; women experience inequality not due to physiological differences, but structural and social norms. For the remainder of the dissertation, I will use sexism to mean gender-based discrimination. Here, however, where I am parsing out the differences between terms that use gender and those that use sex, I differentiate between these forms of discrimination. This should not suggest that international legal bodies are not interested in intersectional violence and intersectional approaches. But the concept of GBV centers a single axis of discrimination.

woman in politics because she is a woman, or affects women disproportionately"(5). This definition incorporates sexism within VAWIP acts; violence either has a known sexist motive or disproportionately impacts women in form.

Understanding the role of motivation gets to the heart of the conceptual distinctiveness of VAWIP. As I discussed earlier in this chapter, Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2016, 128) argue, and Krook (2020) later stresses, VAWIP is not only violence against politicians who happen to be women, but violence against female politicians *because* they are women. This is further developed through the bias event approach (Krook and Restrepo-Sanín 2019) and the motivation/form/impact framework (Bardall, Bjarnegård, Piscopo 2020).

VAWIP, as a form of violence against women and thus a subset of GBV,[63] goes further than a focus on gender-based discrimination to classify violence that is perpetrated against *women* as a result of *gender norms*. Given the emphasis on gender and gendered motivation, is VAWIP, particularly its focus on gender and sexism, too restrictive for an intersectional or intersectional-type analysis? Can acts of racism or homophobia against women in politics be included in classifications of VAWIP even if sexism and gender discrimination are not clearly present?

Post-second wave feminist researchers of VAW have considered these questions, though many retain that VAW or domestic violence are forms of violence that result primarily from sexism, illustrating the inequalities between men and women (Krantz and Garcia-Moreno 2005, Walby et al. 2017). For others (see Crenshaw 1991 and Choudhry 2016) an intersectional analysis of VAW requires a researcher to consider how women are subject to multiple forms of discrimination as well as how sexism changes form.

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[63] As VAWIP does not include the words "gender based violence" in the title, this can still be a cause for confusion, such as that which prompted Rodríguez Calva and Frías (2020) to argue for a new name for VAWIP, gender-based violence against women in politics (359).

Is the emphasis on women and sexism inherent in the VAWIP concept incompatible with an

intersectional framework?

As I hope to clarify here, I start with a broader definition, one that does not emphasize motivation nor motivation on the basis of sex alone: acts, or threats, of violence directed at women involved in politics […] which occur partially or entirely online and are—or are perceived to be—identity-based. This violence targets or includes women politicians because of their gender and/or other marginalized identities.

However, utilizing the "violence against women" concept I am still recognizing that VAWIP is a form of gender-based violence and thus, that women are targeted with gendered violence. In some cases, the absence of "gender-based" online violence signals that perpetrators of abuse are levying other forms of discrimination against a woman politician. If a Muslim female politician is targeted with comparatively less sexist rhetoric than her non-Muslim female colleagues, but is targeted with a much larger quantity of Islamophobic rhetoric, can we conclude that she encounters less VAWIP? It is important to note that not all violence or uncivil language directed at women politicians constitutes VAWIP (Krook 2020; Piscopo 2016).Women are targets of abuse because of their political work and policy opinions, just as non-female politicians are. If these acts of political violence do not belong under the umbrella of VAWP, can the same be said for Islamophobic violence? What if it is part of a daily or weekly barrage of hateful messages that span the spectrum of violence and incorporate multiple discriminatory tropes, including but not limited to sexism?

For women in politics, slurs often take the form of the "lowest hanging fruit" or the lowest hanging *fruits.* For a heterosexual white woman in politics,[64] violence regularly incorporates sexist slurs like "bitch" and sexist tropes regarding anger, hormones, or sexualized references (Levey 2018). While multiply-marginalized politicians are targeted with similar tropes and slurs, the "lowest hanging" abusive fruit may take the form of antisemitism, anti-indigenous discrimination, or homophobia, in conjunction with, *but also in the place of,* sexism. Sexism and gender-based slurs may be largely[65] absent. However, this neither means that the violent act was entirely unmotivated by sexism nor that it does not have distinct consequences for women.

If we do not include these forms of violence as VAWIP, we are centralizing the experiences of otherwise-hegemonic women and naming the problem of VAWIP but relegating others to "a problem with no name." And though this approach may be inviting critique by those who are aiming to clarify VAWIP's negative pole, or refer to such instances of discrimination as racism, placing all instances of violence into neatly defined, non-overlapping categories like racism and sexism is the problem originally critiqued by the intersectionality framework (Crenshaw 1991).

Existing research is not immune to these insights and recognizes that women in politics are not *just* women. In particular, multiply-marginalized individuals face unique violence in the public space. This research often applies existing typologies to multiply-marginalized women or groups such as Black female politicians in the U.K. or deaf female human rights defenders in Colombia (Dhrodia 2017; Zeiter, et al. 2019). However, like research on online VAWIP that uses existing conceptualizations inductively developed from accounts of offline violence, there are

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[64] This is highly context-dependent, but I am assuming for this hypothetical example that this is a woman who holds largely privileged identities.

[65] It is important to recognize that no violent online post takes place in a vacuum. In a corpus of thousands of tweets against a multiply-marginalized woman, violence is likely to incorporate multiple forms of discrimination in single posts as well as in the broader corpus (Kuperberg 2021).

limitations to work that transposes understandings of a phenomenon onto new subjects without reconsideration.

To conceptualize online VAWIP assuming an intersectional analysis, rather than permitting one after the fact, we must center considerations of the unique qualities of the online space as well as intersecting and overlapping structures of discrimination. This involves expanding the rhetoric and discrimination included in VAWIP from *just* sexism to other forms of hate speech as well as recognizing that sexism does not operate unilaterally; multiply-marginalized women may be targeted with sexist rhetoric and stereotypes that are different from sexism targeting other women. These intersectional dimensions of discrimination should not be added as an afterthought but must be considered from the start.

What about men?

Finally, it is worth mentioning that gender-based violence, as defined by international legal instruments, is not limited to violence against women alone.[66] Men can be targeted with gender-based violence.[67] Some scholars (i.e. Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020) have suggested that we need to compare men and women's experiences of violence in order to justify the claim, implicit in VAWIP's conceptualization, that VAWIP is distinct from "everyday" political violence. Others, most notably Krook (2020), disagree. Krook argues that researchers have been conflating two related, often overlapping, concepts: VAWIP and violence in politics.

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[66] Violence against Women, however, is limited to gender-based violence against *women.*

[67] This has not been emphasized in studies of VAWIP, perhaps given that VAWIP is not *only* gender-based violence, but also GBV *against women.* Instead, researchers have argued that VAWIP is determined by differences between men and women's experiences, as opposed to a recognition that gender-based political violence can also target men.

Krook draws a parallel between these two forms of violence and Johnson (1995)'s distinction between patriarchal terrorism and "common couple violence." While these concepts are often conflated, categorized as "domestic violence" (or in Johnson's work, "couple violence"), the experiences of women are distinct, and policies should account for these differences. Though patriarchal violence has been critiqued as insufficient by queer and post-structural feminist scholars (see Cannon, et al. 2015), for its inability to adequately capture same-sex violence, the distinction between common couple violence and patriarchal terrorism can be used to distinguish between VAWIP and violence against politicians.

Violence against politicians, which affects both men and women, can be studied using a sample of both men and women, particularly if our research question asks about the differences between men and women's experiences with violence (Krook forthcoming). I am building on the work of other scholars who have found that women's experiences in politics are unique from men's experiences, using a variety of methods including interviews and survey data. As opposed to research on violence against politicians, which asks whether women are targeted with more or different violence in the online space, this project starts with the assumption that women politicians are uniquely targeted online and is interested, then, in the "how."

Like patriarchal terrorism, studies of VAWIP are *more* accurate when they survey and study the population in question: women. I will take this line of reasoning even further: existing research suggests that women from underrepresented groups and highly visible women experience more, and more virulent, violence. To study intersectional VAWIP online, we should center women who belong to salient identity groups as well as those who have high online visibility in our analyses. This supports using intracategorical analysis (McCall 2005) for the study of VAWIP with an intersectional frame. As one of goals of this project is to theoretically and empirically "de-essentialize" VAWIP by identifying the diversity of female politicians'

experiences with online violence, I am using gender as an anchor point and identifying how VAWIP can be understood using an intracategorical approach. By dehomogenizing women's experiences with VAWIP, we can better understand the ways that "sexism and," not just sexism, influence VAWIP. Despite the emphasis on women and women's experiences, adopting a *more* intersectional analysis is possible.

As with contemporary scholarship on intersectionality, the process of defining and operationalizing online VAWIP are closely linked. In developing online VAWIP, I consider the unique qualities of the online space, alongside their challenges, to develop a typology that is both theoretically sound and empirically usable.

CONCLUSIONS

In this dissertation, I draw on theoretical insights from literature on violence—including violence as violation, structural violence, and online violence—and intersectionality. A comprehensive definition of violence, a continuum approach that sees acts of violence as related, and an intersectionality-inspired framework are in line with feminist commitments and provide the basis for a more thorough investigation of online VAWIP. Together, these frameworks center target-victim-survivors of violence and questions of power in understanding violence. In the following chapter, I present an original typology for online VAWIP that uses these theoretical frameworks and builds on the literature introduced in the previous chapter.

CHAPTER 3: TYPOLOGY OF ONLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS

INTRODUCTION

A theoretical concept of online VAWIP needs to not only be conceptually sound, but also useful for analysis. Feminist political science has emphasizing being grounded in empirical reality with the goal of responding to problems with active transformation. My aim is not only to operationalize this typology for the study of online text[68] but also, to provide a framework for others to analyze online violence. As argued in the previous chapters, existing studies on online violence, online violence against politicians, and online VAWIP suffer from inconsistent definitions, particularly on the scope of violence. Some researchers, for example, draw conclusions based on all uncivil speech, including profanity, regardless of hostility or discriminatory rhetoric (Rayment, Rheault, and Musulan 2019). In this chapter, I propose a typology that, in keeping with theoretical claims about the distinctiveness of VAWIP, differentiates between different forms of uncivil speech, isolating VAWIP.

To distinguish VAWIP from violence against politicians and rudeness online, I develop a typology that places online VAWIP, itself a continuum of related acts, on a spectrum of aversive speech (Chen, 2017). Adopting the bias event approach indicators (Krook and Restrepo Sanín 2019) for the online space, we can distinguish between VAWIP and other forms of aversive speech through the identity of the target, the content of the post, and the perceptions of community members.[69]

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[68] Aspects of this typology can be useful for images and videos. However, studies of text, images, videos, and other mediums are largely separate, in large part because these require different methodological tools.

[69] As described in the previous chapter, this leaves out several components of the bias event approach (Krook 2020, 160-163) due to the features of the online space.

To build to a theoretical understanding of online VAWIP, defined by all three of these dimensions, I start by exploring the **target** of violence, then **forms** of aversive speech, and finally, the **response** to online violence. I argue that in centering the online space and intersectional dimensions of online VAWIP, we should use an expansive notion of target. Here, I refer not only to women in politics outside of the formal political sphere—a broad definition of target established by other scholars (Biroli 2018)—but also the inclusion of family members, staff, and a consideration of the public audience, given the often-diffuse nature of online violence. I simultaneously argue for a narrower focus of form, differentiating between spam and nonsense, rudeness, violence against politicians, VAWIP, and harassment. Rather than include all forms of rudeness or abuse as online VAWIP,[70] I differentiate between these forms and advocate a narrower scope for online VAWIP, in line with theoretical understandings of VAWIP more broadly (Krook 2020). Finally, I consider response, particularly the public response to online violence, given the diffuse and relational nature of online harms.

TARGET

In acts of offline violence, there is usually a perpetrator—even if the identity is not known—and a target. For some acts of violence, like the dropping of a bomb, there can be an intended target and unintended casualties. In the case of violence against women in politics, or violence against politicians, the target of harm is often the politician themselves, but others can be harmed as "collateral damage," whether intended or unintended. For example, 19 people were shot—of whom six were killed—during the constituent meeting attack on Gabrielle

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[70] Though this can make machine learning classification easier.

Giffords, a sitting U.S. Congresswoman. The police investigation into the crime found that the perpetrator specifically targeted Giffords (Wagner 2018).

Because research into violence against politicians focuses on political actors, analyses are often focused on the politicians themselves rather than the broader communities they represent or those viewing the abuse they receive. Scholars of VAWIP, however, recognize that women are not only targeted as individuals, but as representatives. Semiotic violence in particular, a category of violence that encapsulates the vast majority of online VAWIP due to its emphasis on text and images, recognizes that "while perpetrated against *individuals*, [violence] seeks to send a message that the *person's group* is unworthy, aiming to affect how the *public at large* views membership of that group" (Krook 2020, 273-274; emphasis in original).

As I have found through qualitative assessment of Twitter data, violent comments addressing a politician are generally targeted to that person. But posts also incorporate violence against others, including allied or rival politicians and slurs that demean entire groups. In many, but not all, cases, the included politician is a member of that demeaned group. Perpetrators may thus instrumentally use the prominence of the politicians' platforms to more visibly spread discrimination. And while this abuse does not necessarily constitute violence against women in politics, it serves a similar function: demeaning entire groups and indicating that they are not welcome in the public space.

The target-perpetrator-harm relationship varies according to location and medium. Generally, though not exclusively, violence in the halls of parliament is more likely to be conducted by colleagues, perpetrators who are fellow politicians. This violence can take place publicly, such as during a recorded session, or privately such as in one's office. Research indicates that public abuse is less explicit than private abuse (Och 2019, 15) but can have a viral

impact.[71] Violence in the home, on the other hand, is more likely to involve a relative as a

perpetrator of violence and is more likely to be private, though women sharing and publicizing

their experiences has brought these private acts of violence to light.

Unlike parliamentary and domestic spaces, online violence against public figures is

predominately perpetrated by individuals unknown to the target,[72] though colleagues, family

members, and acquaintances can perpetrate, instigate, or magnify online violence.[73]

Furthermore, the internet spans public, semi-public, and private spaces. Public spaces include

comment sections of public pages and public tweets. Private spaces include private messages

and emails. These may not be fully private, as staff or trusted third parties may be the primary

viewers of this material. However, they are not automatically viewable by a public audience.

Finally, semi-public messages include private groups with many members or open WhatsApp

groups.

My intention in delineating these online spaces is not to reestablish the public/private

divide, but instead to recognize that the online space is not homogenous and access to these

spaces, and the content within them, differs. When violence occurs online, where it occurs, and

the public nature of the online violence all impact who is harmed. This dissertation relies on

social media posts exclusively from public domains. Because of the nature of the space in which

this violence is disseminated, I consider that the targeted or tagged public official is not

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[71] See, for example, Representative Ted Yoho calling Representative Alexandria Ocasio Cortez a "fucking bitch" on the steps of the Capitol building.

[72] Data on social media users and perpetrators of online violence is not very reliable. However, due to the quantitative amount of abuse and anecdotal data from targeted women, the majority of perpetrators appear to be anonymous and/or unknown to the target.

[73] See, for example, former US representative Katie Hill, whose ex-husband nonconsensually shared intimate images of Hill to a conservative news site. Those images were then spread by numerous other individuals.

necessarily, and certainly not exclusively, harmed by this content. In fact, the public official may not even be the intended recipient of harm.

Particularly, though not exclusively, in the case of high-profile individuals, the relationship between target of harm and victim of harm is not always in sync. In the case of women in politics, some women politicians rarely read tweets directed at them personally; they may have staff who write and respond to social media posts on their behalf. For example, the parliamentary staff of Diane Abbott, the UK's first Black female MP and the recipient of large amounts of online violence,[74] described their practice of deleting and reporting abuse sent to Abbott every morning (CSPL 2017).

When these posts cause harm, the perpetrator (the internet user writing or sharing the violence) and target (the woman politician) remain the same, yet the individual who is harmed in the act of violence is a third party (a staff member who views the post). In cases of public posts, constituents, supporters, or the general public may view and report violent posts prior to an MP or a staff member doing so. Even in cases in which a highly-visible politician does not have a staff member who manages her social media presence, the politician may receive so many comments or "mentions"[75] that it is impossible for her to see everything that is posted about her. In other cases—more likely to occur when the post is especially violent—an algorithm utilized by the social media company may suspend the account or remove the post immediately after it is posted. In this case, nobody views the post and therefore, no one is

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[74] According to Amnesty International's 2017 study on online abuse targeting candidates in the 2017 election, Diane Abbott received 45.14% of all abusive tweets in a sample of 177 female MPs.
[75] A "mention" is a post that "tags" another user, meaning that it uses their username.

harmed;[76] there is no victim of violation. However, the act of violence, perpetrator, and intent are identical to the previous case.

Finally, though the violent post may target a public figure, the audience of that post is the wider public. This is likely part of the intention of the post. Perpetrators of online violence have multiple options for conveying abuse, including sending an email or private message, posting in a private group, or posting publicly. It is naïve to assume that most who choose the final option—posting publicly—are unaware of the public nature of their post. Instead, it is more likely that the perpetrator chose to make their abuse public, whether to share their thoughts with a wider group, gain notoriety for the post, go viral, or harm a greater number of people. Furthermore, whether or not this is the motive, diffuse harm is a consequence of public abuse. As Levey (2018: 5) writes:

> Online misogynist terms can be likened to ambient or passive sexual harassment, in which the harassment is not directed toward a specific person but is experienced by others and can lead to fear and a hostile environment. Social media made harassment considerably more efficient because these outlets can reach millions of people in seconds and harassers can remain anonymous.

Individuals who come across a violent post may be harmed by the content of the post, even if they are not the direct target. We can assume that some individuals will be more harmed than others. For example, violence that targets an individual due to the groups they are members of, such as online violence on the basis of race or gender, is more likely to be harmful to those who share membership of those same groups (Citron 2010, 36)

Still, most researchers restrict their scope to posts that individually, specifically, and directly target politicians (e.g., Rheault, et al. 2019; McLoughlin and Ward 2020). To limit the

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[76] Though, importantly, a content moderator may view the post. Though content moderation remains understudied, journalists have reported that violent content has a significant psychological impact on moderator (Newton 2019).

scope of their analyses, scholars have further distinguished between direct and non-direct abuse

or incivility (Papacharissi 2004; McLoughlin and Ward 2020). This approach separates abuse

targeted at politicians, or the targets under analysis, from abuse targeting other internet users,

public figures, and associates—including family members—of the targets in question. This

research also does not often include many social media posts that are part of larger message

chains.[77]

However, politicians are tagged in posts that are abusive to *other* individuals, including

family and staff members or colleagues.[78] The author of the post may be trying to harm the

tagged politician through harm to someone close to them, in the case of family or staff, often

someone who is more vulnerable and has not chosen a public career in politics. Users also abuse

other politicians, including those the tagged politician is politically or personally aligned with,

another means of indirectly causing harm to the politician by warning the politician or making

claims to a wider audience. In some cases, these posts can qualify as violence against women in

politics when they utilize sexist and/or otherwise discriminatory language to derogate either

politician(s) referenced in the post. These posts serve similar functions as directed,

individualized abusive posts: to send a message to a larger group that the political, public space

is not equally theirs.

For example, we know from practitioner analyses of VAWIP that violence directed at

family members is common and has significant impacts on women in politics; interview data

demonstrates that women politicians are *more* impacted by abuse targeting their children or

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[77] Often including multiple usernames

[78] Sociological literature further differentiates between abuse that is directed towards an individual compared to generalized abuse (Waseem, et al. 2017: 79). Abuse against other individuals, not the politician in question, would still be "direct," as it would apply to an individual. However, in the case of online VAWIP, this abuse is not directly aimed at the woman in politics under analysis.

family members than posts targeting them individually (Interview with Jess Phillips 2018). These

attacks, like those directly targeting female MPs, can be related to policy disapproval as well as

descriptive representation. For example, Yvette Cooper, Labour MP, came forward when a

Twitter user threatened to "kill her kids and grandkids" due to her support for remaining in the

European Union (Quinn 2016). Yet, scholarly research has not yet focused on violence and

harassment against the family members and other associates of female politicians.

To address this missing component in academic studies on online violence as well as

VAWIP, I recognize multiple layers of targets. For a post to be classified as online VAWIP, a

woman politician must still be the primary target and/or involved in some capacity, either as the

focus of the content or as the individual tagged in the post. However, I do not limit VAWIP to

only posts that directly target a politician in content. I classify posts as online VAWIP under the

above conditions *and* when violence is directed at family members, staff, colleagues, and

associates of the politician alongside or as proxies for the woman in politics. In addition,

violence targeting constituents, members of the public, and entire identity groups may classify

as VAWIP. In all cases, the content/form of the post and context are key to categorizing posts

effectively.

To give examples from the training set[79] of posts for the United Kingdom, a directed

post includes: (i) "@jessphillips Shut up Phillips. Vile woman." This post is directed at Jess

Phillips—the intended target of one dataset—in two ways: first, the post includes her

username[80] and further calls her out by name in the content of the post. By writing, "Shut up,

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[79] The training set refers to the 10,000 UK posts and 5,000 Mexican posts that were hand-coded and qualitatively analyzed to instruct the big N algorithm. I provide qualitative analysis on these posts in Chapter 7 and further explanation in Chapter 4.
[80] As I will also expand and justify in the methods section, I only pull data that includes the username or Twitter handle of a woman MP.

Phillips," the post author is specifically directing the violent post at Jess Phillips. As I will discuss, by incorporating sexist language— "vile woman"—this post is categorized as online VAWIP. Directed posts can also include the usernames of other individuals and groups. For example: (ii) "@PAlienationuk @jessphillips @patel4witham She doesn't. @jessphillips is one of the worst guys.. borderline Misandrist.. she also worked for @womensaid before becoming an MP.. You're wasting your time." Post 2, though tagging Jess Phillips alongside Priti Patel and an NGO account, retags Jess Phillips to directly abuse her. The author also provides biographical data specific to Jess Phillips, including her work for Women's Aid, clearly indicating that the post is directed at Phillips. In other cases, however, the post tags multiple users and it is not clear who is targeted by the abuse. For example: (iii) "@JuliaHB1 @jessphillips Don't ask her to many questions, she'll get flustered." Here, the content of the post alone makes it difficult to determine the directionality of the tweet. However, depending on the platform and methods used, the researcher can collect more information to determine the directionality of the post.

In other posts, though Phillips is the only politician tagged, the violence is directed elsewhere: (4) "@jessphillips It's nice to see that the New Zealand prime minister is not only easy on the eyes 👁👁 but she has got a great sense of humour 😂." This tweet illustrates that violence is not always "negative." By emphasizing Jacinda Ardern's physical attractiveness, in response to a post in which Phillips commends the work of Ardern, this response highlights the ways in which "positive" language can still have violent effect. Neutral or positive gendered stereotypes, such as describing women as emotional or sensitive, can have a negative impact on voter support for women (Bauer 2015).

In an experimental study, stereotypes of women as beautiful or pretty are not selected as traits to describe women politicians, even though they are used to describe non-political women (Schneider and Bos 2014: 255). This suggests that "positive" gendered comments about

beauty can mark women as non-agentic. Women are more likely to receive comments based on their appearance and are more likely to experience disempowerment as a result (Ilie, 2018: 605). Other supposedly positive, gendered forms of address, like "love" or "dear," indicate condescension rather than compliment (ibid: 606). These patterns of parliamentary speech are "strategies of sexism" which objectify, stigmatize, and reduce the standing of women MPs (ibid: 613).

Importantly, the violence in this post is not directed at Phillips. However, Phillips authored a post in support of Ardern and they are both prominent, leftist, women in politics, albeit in different countries. By posting this message about an ally *and* responding directly to Phillips's original post, Phillips can still be considered one of the targets of this content. In posts in which users express violence towards family members of politicians, the boundary between non-directed and directed violence becomes even more blurred. For example, in a post tagging Diane Abbott, a user writes, "Was Diane Abbott's son tasered when he assaulted a police officer the other day? I certainly hope so." Violence that seems to target children of MPs may intend to, and certainly succeeds to, cause the MP herself harm.

Relatedly, women MPs are tagged in posts that incorporate discriminatory hate speech towards a group, including those they are part of. One example is: (5) "@jessphillips Brummie fishwives." Brummie refers to Birmingham accent, which includes Jess Phillips' accent, and is a geographic descriptor with some class connotations. "Fishwife" is a derogatory word for a "nagging" woman. Even where Jess Phillips is not indicated as the "Brummie fishwife" in a post, the user is posting sexist rhetoric and tagging Phillips, whose identity as a woman (and in this case, even more specifically, as a woman from Birmingham), is demeaned by this rhetoric.

Finally, women in politics are tagged in posts, either individually or as part of a larger group, that incorporates discrimination about *other* groups, groups that do not match their

perceived or actual identification. Women politicians may be tagged in these posts because they

are allies of the group, their constituents are members of the group, and/or they support

policies that benefit the group. Alternatively, they may just be tagged for visibility or because a

constituent wants to share a derogatory statement with their MP. These are not targeted posts

but are discriminatory hate speech. Where the MP has been a supporter of the group, this

discrimination may reflect policy disapproval as well as a means of offending the MP directly.

Bringing these together, I visualize targets of online violence as a series of concentric

circles rippling outward from political women.

Figure 3.1
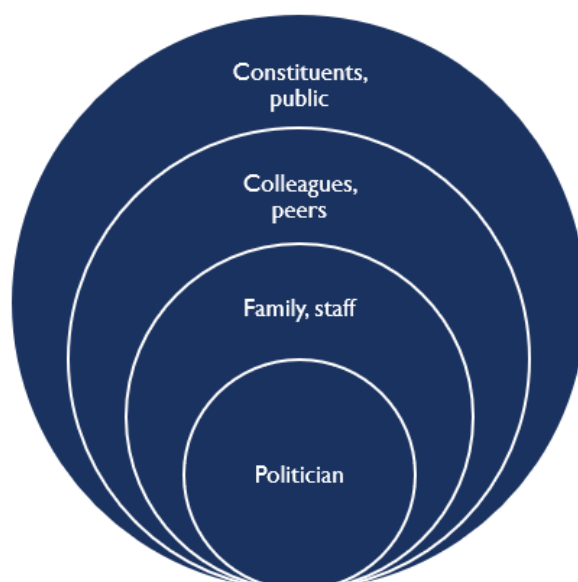
I expand my analysis to include colleagues, staff, and associates—with contextual consideration

for constituents and the public—to recognize that family members are not the only individuals

who (i) can be targeted as a direct result of their affiliation with a political woman and (ii) whose

victimization can have impacts on a woman's political actions. Furthermore, these groups (iii)

experience harm (and therefore can be classified as victims of violence) as a result of violence targeting a political woman. This recognizes that the relationship between target and harm can vary in the highly public online space. Posts intending to harm women in politics may not target women politicians directly with abuse and posts targeting women in politics directly may indirectly harm constituents and/or other group members.

FORM

Violence against women in politics is often understood as a continuum of violence in and of itself, with acts ranging from microaggressions to interruptions to threats of physical assault to assassination (Restrepo Sanín 2018b; Krook 2020, 122-123). All these acts share a common thread: they are acts of gender-based violence that seek to, appear to, or succeed to exclude women from the public sphere. To better distinguish *online* violence against women in politics, which encompasses many targets and levels of severity, from other forms of online behavior, I place online VAWIP along a spectrum of aversive speech. I use "aversive speech," following the research by Gina Masullo Chen (2017) on incivility and the public sphere, rather than "harmful," "hostile," or "negative" speech to recognize that (i) in continuum[81] thinking the impact of various acts of violence is not objectively known or constant and (ii) sometimes seemingly positive speech still constitutes online VAWIP.[82] Chen defines a continuum of aversive

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[81] In this chapter, I replace the word "continuum" with "spectrum" to refer to aversive speech as I use continuum to describe to VAWIP based on the continuum of sexual violence literature (Kelly 1987), referenced throughout this dissertation. However, where referring to "continuum thinking" or authors that use the term "continuum," I utilize "continuum."

[82] Previous analyses have used sentiment analysis as a tool for separating online violence from non-violent posts. However, this can mistakenly classify "I'm so happy to see you suffer" as positive and "I'm so sad to see the abuse on this platform- we support you" as negative. Further, as I describe below, posts that discuss the attractiveness of a female politician or related sexual desire, though ostensibly positive, still constitute violence.

speech as speech "that both violates what is considered normal in conversation and also has the potential to cause harm" (2017, 6).

To clarify and expand what is meant by a spectrum of aversive online speech, I develop the following categories: spam/nonsense, rude, violence against politicians (VAP), VAWIP, and harassment. The categories I identify may not be exhaustive. These categories apply especially to public text, though images and video are mediums for violence online (Khosravinik and Esposito 2018). Several key logics of conceptualizing on a continuum (Kelly 1988; McGlynn, Rackley, and Houghton 2017) include: the common character of the categories on the continuum, the need for "discrete analytic categories" (Kelly 1988, 76) to define forms of violence, and the recognition that acts of violence may fall between these distinct analytic categories. In the case of this spectrum, the common characters of aversive posts are: (i) they can negatively impact targets and members of the public, as individual posts and as part of a group of posts; and (ii) they are not productive or positive, in the sense of providing factual information or support.
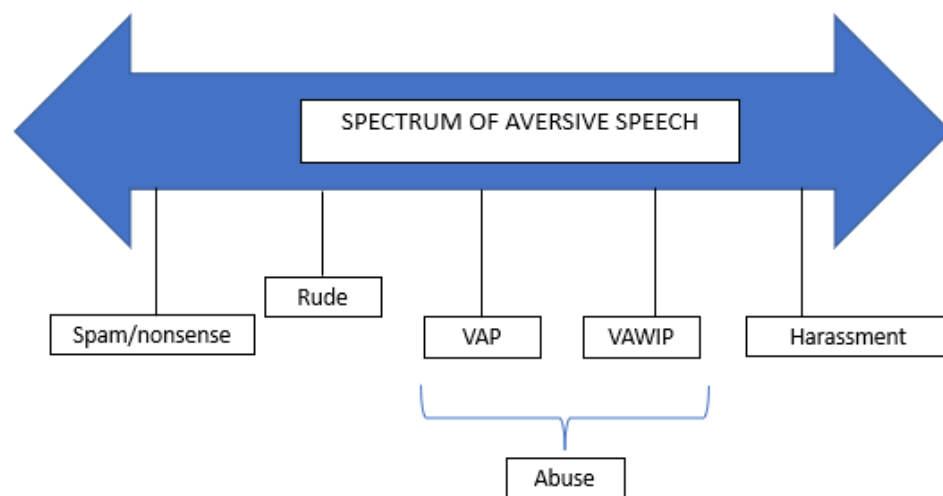
Figure 3.2

Spam/Nonsense

I refer to spam or nonsense posts as those that do not contain hostile content but are (i) annoying or even harmful in their quantity or (ii) nonproductive but not actively hostile and (iii) often marked by senselessness. Spam or nonsense posts seem innocuous and may not cause immediate or direct harm to a tagged politician, the target, or a broader public, and are often brushed off as the product of bots or just gibberish. However, these posts are not necessarily innocuous. First, though incomprehensible to an outside observer, they may be violent to the intended recipient. For example, sign language abuse targeting deaf women in Colombia had a significant impact on the recipients; they testified that the abuse affected them particularly because it was clearly targeting them and meant for their community (Tweets that Chill 2019). To a non-sign language speaker, the abuse in this post would not be comprehensible, though it is far from nonsense.

Second, spam and nonsense take attention away from positive online interactions and constituent concerns, particularly in large numbers. Users can be inundated with spam such that they cannot see the "real" messages from their constituents or colleagues. If the inundation with spam does not stop,[83] a user may decide that they need to delete their account and start a new one, not dissimilar to a computer overloaded with viruses. For women in politics, with verified and highly public accounts, it is not feasible to leave the internet nor start over with a new account.

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[83] Women in public life also describe cybermobs or coordinated, large group attacks of abuse. In those cases, the abuse is individually harmful and often highly targeted. Here, I am simply describing an overload of posts that are not abusive, positive, or factual.

Finally, even though spam and nonsense are usually just that, in other contexts users may deliberately disguise their abusive words to appear nonsensical. In a number of cases, this "disguise" is not really a disguise at all, such as using W ⚓ rather than the word "wanker." These means of evading moderation detection are not quite the same as posts that are deliberately nonsensical. This second tactic, deliberate nonsense, is not a common abusive strategy; users that want to inflict harm, want the harm to be clear. Offenders are publicly posting abuse for a response and disguising their post too well will not achieve the intended goal. But in other cases, users may be aiming for their post to be construed as spam, which is more likely to remain on the platform where clear abuse may be removed. In this grey area of presumed spam, deep case knowledge and context can help classify seemingly spam posts as rudeness, abuse, or part of broader harassment.

Rude

Scholars of online incivility in political science have recognized that not all "bad" speech is equal; some speech is rude or impolite while other speech is undemocratic. Papacharissi (2004, 274) for example, distinguishes between politeness and civility using the following indices:

> For incivility: does the discussant "verbalize a threat to democracy," assign stereotypes, or threaten individual rights (speech, personal freedom)
> For impoliteness: name-calling, hyperbole, non-cooperation, vulgarity, pejorative speech.

Gina Masullo Chen (2017) similarly distinguishes between incivility—insulting language and name-calling, profanity, and hate speech—and rudeness. She argues that disagreement is essential to "vigorous public debate that is the hallmark of a democratic society" (30) and that

some uncivil speech still allows deliberation to occur. However, hate speech does not allow for

deliberative moments; instead, hate speech causes individuals to leave deliberation and thus is

not democratically productive.

Violence against women in politics also has democratic implications and researchers can

take some inspiration from the literature of incivility, particularly the recognition that not all

negative or problematic speech is part of the phenomenon under investigation. However,

VAWIP and incivility are not identical concepts and I do not describe online abuse as "incivility"

for several reasons. First, one of the primary goals of this typology is to disaggregate what other

political science scholars have classified as "incivility." Namely, I am seeking to separately define

online VAWIP and VAP, both of which would be categorized as incivility by previous studies.

Second, incivility, with its etymological roots in civilization, carries a lot of conceptual

baggage and has been weaponized to silence the voices of marginalized individuals and groups.

In this project using "civilized" language as a category will do more harm than explanatory good.

As Rebecca Traister (2018) writes: "[…] Calls for civility almost always redound positively to the

oppressors. Because incivility against the oppressed is not only so normalized, it is also so

comforting that it can barely be detected as oppression while even the most trivial challenge

from the less powerful sets off alarms" (197). Karen Grigsby Bates (2019) echoes this sentiment,

writing that for people of color and particularly Black Americans in the U.S., "civility isn't so

much social lubricant as it is a vehicle for containing them, preventing social mobility and

preserving the status quo."

However, building from discussions on incivility, I recognize that some negative and

aversive speech helps, rather than harms, democracy. Traister (2018) argues throughout her

book that anger can be productive, positive, and necessary particularly when expressed by those

with less social and political power. Philosopher Myisha Cherry, centering Black rage, further

emphasizes the power in anger. Drawing on Audre Lorde, she argues that Black rage is productive and an appropriate response to injustice. As opposed to selfish anger, it "does not violate other people's rights and […] desires change" (2015). This recognition that some anger is productive, while other anger violates the rights of others, maps on to debates in online violence literature: aggressive, hostile, negative, or angry speech can be justified and important, particularly when we consider relative power and content. When posts include hate speech and threats, they are violations.

I distinguish rudeness from abuse as follows: rude speech references political groups or policy, rather than outgroup and individual identity. Posts can be offensive, negative, or just impolite in this category but democratic discourse necessitates conversation about policy and political action, including negative and emotional conversation. Feminists have critiqued the dichotomizing binary separating rationality or intellect and emotion. Jagger (1989) writes that the "emotional women" stereotypes "bolster the epistemic authority of the currently dominant groups, composed largely of white men" and discredit the "observations and claims of many people of color and women" (164-165). By classifying all emotional, and in particular angry or critical, discourse as abuse, violence, or simply inappropriate, we are marginalizing the very voices and perspectives that this project seeks to center. Individuals have a right to feel angry and direct that anger at their political representatives, particularly when those representatives are not substantively representing them or worse, supporting policy that actively harms them.

A post is classified as rude if it is offensive, vulgar, profane, or hostile and directed at a party or ideological group[84] or policy. Examples from the U.K. training set[85] include: "Govt is

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[84] As opposed to a geographic region, gender, race, religion, etc.
[85] As I will expand upon in my methods section, supervised machine learning requires that an algorithm be trained with posts that are different from those the algorithm is used for or tested on. I trained 10,000

lying as bloody usual," and "@HackneyAbbott @haroldcurran How are you to deal with the B-LIARITES who opposed socialist agenda, Will they now be rooted from the fing party? If not, tell us how you propose to achieve what you say." These posts include rude or profane language, language that violates norms of conversation, and/or are hostile and negative. However, this hostility is not directed at an individual, as an individual,[86] or non-ideological group of individuals and as such, does not constitute abuse.

This is not to say that this rudeness cannot have a harmful impact or that rudeness cannot border on abuse. The following post, for example, is not directly personalized to an individual or group (such as class, ethnicity, race, religion, etc.) and relates to a set of political actions: "You still here @HackneyAbbott ? I would have thought you, @jeremycorbyn and @johnmcdonnellMP would have slunk off in shame after getting things so wrong and selling the country down the river. Johnson didn't have a majority and you still all fucked it up!" According to this typology, this post would be considered rudeness and not abuse. However, it is more hostile and individualized than the former posts, in a slighter greyer area[87] between rudeness and the next category in the spectrum of aversive speech: violence against politicians.

This grey area, as VAWIP scholars have described, is particularly defined by hostility directed at politicians for their support of feminist issues, such as access to abortion (Pérez-Arredondo and Graells-Garrido, 2021). Here, it can be difficult to parse out whether negativity, offensiveness, and hostility is gender-motivated or policy-motivated. Part of this complexity emerges from research linking descriptive and substantive representation, in particular noting

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posts, meaning I classified 10,000 posts by hand, in order to develop the algorithm that was tested on data collected for this dissertation. The test data was pulled from Twitter prior to the dissertation data.

[86] If this hostility is targeting an individual but clearly focused on the policy, I will classify as rude.

[87] Linguists also distinguish between explicit and implicit abuse (Waseem, et al. 2017: 79). Explicit abuse is unambiguously abusive, while implicit abuse can be more challenging to detect, both by human coders and machine learning algorithms.

that women support feminist measures twice as often as their male colleagues from Argentina to the U.S. (Och 2019; Chaney 2008; Piscopo 2011; Swers 2005). Black American women representatives have also been targeted with threats and violence due to their support of racial justice measures (Norwood, Jones, and Bolaji 2021); these threats include and are motivated by intersecting discriminations, often racism and sexism.

In addition, feminist policies and progressive policies that underscore the rights and equalities of historically and presently marginalized groups cannot so easily be separated from individuals who hold those identities. An internet user criticizing a bill for trans rights, for example—depending on the content, rhetoric, and context of the criticism—may be implicitly arguing against trans equality. This policy disagreement is fundamentally different than criticizing a generic financial policy. Case-by-case review, researcher guidelines, and the context of a social media post is the only way to appropriately classify these "grey area" posts.

Still, I maintain that posts focused directly on policy and political action are almost always "rude" where posts that direct hostility and offensiveness at an individual or group are almost always abuse, including "violence against politicians" or "violence against women in politics." To compare similar posts, rudeness includes: "Labour's anti-semitism policy is just a way to quash anti-Israel sentiments." On the other hand, abuse, and depending on the target VAWIP, includes posts such as, "Labour's anti-semitism policy is a farce; Jews have way too much power, in Israel and across the UK," using racial and anti-religious stereotypes and placing the emphasis on the group, rather than the policy itself.

Violence against Politicians[88]

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[88] I occasionally refer to this category as "general" abuse, as opposed to identity-based abuse.

The line between rudeness and violence against politicians (VAP) gets to the heart of how to define online violence. Where incivility might include obscenities, be angry or hostile, and portray negativity, it is rooted in the political choices an individual makes, not their identities.

Examples of VAP posts include: "Selfish, vile Tory scumbag discovers the consequences of Toryism. I don't give a shit what they do to you, @SayeedaWarsi." Where policy disagreements and broad hostility towards a party would largely be classified as rude, here the hostility is directly targeting Tory Peer Sayeeda Warsi. Though the emphasis of the VAP is centered on partisanship, specifically Warsi's identification with the Conservative party, the offender's language is not focused on political actions or policies. Instead, in describing Warsi as a "selfish, vile scumbag" and writing "I don't give a shit what they do to you," the user is engaging in abuse, rather than rude or neutral policy disagreement.

Though other research has focused on the line between rudeness and abuse, particularly in political science on the difference between tense democratic discourse and undemocratic speech, the interest of this typology is in situating online violence against women in politics and distinguishing this violence from VAP and rudeness. Krook (2020) argues that *violence against politicians* and *violence against women in politics* are conceptually separate forms of violence, the latter gender-motivated and the former politically motivated. However, the online space does not often offer the level of information needed to establish the motivation behind problematic messages.

An accurate determination of whether a post is truly violent requires investigation, including identifying the poster, reading surrounding posts to understand context, and in some cases, identifying how the post is perceived. But the ubiquity and breadth of online posts does

not allow this level of investigation and even where/when a researcher is able to conduct this type of investigation into the context, meaning, and impact of a post, details will likely be unavailable due to features of the internet (i.e. anonymity). The purpose of this typology is not to eliminate the need for and appropriateness of detailed, in-depth data gathering on individual posts. And while concept and theory building should not be constrained by data or methods, concepts that cannot be effectively operationalized and empirically disaggregated are inherently limited.

Because of the inability to definitively differentiate the motivations of most forms of aversive speech, I conceptualize these various forms on a spectrum and recognize that online VAWIP is a distinct concept—in fact, its own distinct continuum of acts—that shares common attributes with other forms of aversive speech. What distinguishes online VAWIP from online VAP are: target, form, and response. While I have already detailed the targeted nature of VAWIP and will discuss response in the next section, here I focus on the form that differentiates VAP and VAWIP. In particular, VAWIP is similar to VAP in that it is often directly targeted and hostile, but it incorporates sexist and/or otherwise discriminatory hate speech targeting (directly and indirectly) a woman politician. To illustrate the differences in form between online VAP and VAWIP, I identify paired comparisons, tweets directed at the same female politician on a similar topic, from the training set.

Table 3.3	VAP	VAWIP	Explanation
Jess Phillips	"Nice and constructive"....words few intelligent people would ever associate with you.	@jessphillips You're never nice and constructive. Just a bitter shrew.	Both of these posts are in response to a tweet by Jess Phillips related to being "nice and constructive." The first is not only hostile and unkind but targeted directly at Phillips. The second carries many of the same sentiment, but adds "bitter shrew," language not only negative, but gendered. Calling a woman "bitter" is a means of diminishing her and her emotions. A "bitter shrew" more specifically attempts to show role incongruity between women and leadership by suggesting that women are nagging, scolding, and emotional, qualities that are not consistent with stereotypical leadership (read: masculine) qualities.
Sayeeda Warsi	"@SayeedaWarsi She has never been a parliamentarian. No one has ever voted for her.. She doesn't have an opinion that anyone respects	@SayeedaWarsi You are not a parliamentarian..No one has ever voted for you ? You have only ever achieved anything because of quotas.. Based on your ability, you would be at home..with your 16 children...	Both posts reference Warsi's position in the house of Lords, an unelected political position. In the first, the post author seems to insinuate that Warsi should not be respected because she is unelected and has never won a democratic race. This shifts in the second post. Here, the author builds on the content and tone of the first post related to Warsi's unelected position, adding that she is only in her position because of her identity and quotas. This argument, that quotas usher in unqualified individuals (particularly women) has been disproven, but still reinforces the opinion that Warsi's position is only a result of her identity and affirmative action Finally, the author suggests that Warsi's only use is being at home with 16 children, which is not only gendered, but

			also racialized and classed (not to mention untrue).
Diane Abbott	@CarolineLucas @Plaid_Cymru Labour and especially two mainstays Commie Corbyn and Diane Abbot are a disgrace[89]	RT @MikeHun96992029 : @carolecadwalla I heard @jeremycorbyn humped the mighty @HackneyAbbott at least once...does that count?!	In the first post here, Jeremy Corbyn and Diane Abbott are mentioned together as "disgraces." This targeted and rude language is abusive but does not incorporate identity or discrimination. In the second post, however, the author refers to a supposed brief romantic relationship between the two politicians in the 1970s. The romantic history between the two politicians has been used to discredit Abbott's merits through a common trope, that her accomplishments are rooted not in her ability but her sexual relationships. Further, as Palmer (2019) writes, the idea of their relationship as abject and contaminating is rooted in misogynoir and anti-miscegenation ideologies historically present in the U.K. (515). The crude description of "humping" and describing Abbott as "mighty" also indicates that the author is trying to minimize Abbott's power.
Diane Abbott	@HackneyAbbott Rich coming from someone who FAILS routinely to stay awake in Houses of Parliament , at her place of work, during the day, where she's elected by voters to be. Don't preach about failure of duty when you fail	@KitsunesTails @HackneyAbbott You could put a red rosette on a chimp in Hackney North and it would get elected.	In the first post, the author is expressing anger over a statement Abbott made about failure of duty. This post goes beyond democratic disagreement and discourse by adding that Abbott fails "routinely" to stay awake in Parliament (based on one video in which Abbott appears to be closing her eyes during a parliamentary debate). In

[89] Studies have shown that Diane Abbott receives a disproportionate amount of online abuse (Dhrodia 2017)- this and the following pair of posts are more dissimilar due to the limited number of sample posts directed at Abbott that *did not* include racist, sexist, or ableist discrimination.

	regularly enough yourself.		writing "you fail regularly enough yourself," the author is expressing hostility towards Abbott personally and not only on the basis of her political statements and actions. In the second post, the author expresses their disapproval of Abbott's political role with a longstanding racist trope. Though this post is somewhat indirect, the racist message and targeted inclusion of Abbott by Twitter handle and constituency (Hackney North) is clear. Comparing Black people to primates is racist and this trope has been levied publicly and specifically against several high-profile Black women, including Michelle Obama in the US and Gina Miller in the UK (Lancaster 2018). This second post demonstrates one way in which sexism and racism intersect uniquely when directed at Black women and in this case, Black women in the public sphere.
Priti Patel	@heeney77 @mcgibbond @EmmaKennedy @Deanna_Wroe You want evidence of being too stupid for the job? About @patel4witham ? Intelligence communities can't trust someone too stupid to keep a secret. Geddit?	RT @heeney77: @ovinepolitic @mcgibbond @Deanna_Wroe @patel4witham Nobody has said a word about her stupidity. Even stupid people can get a job and hold it down (you even). We are talking about her being a foreign agent working against the interests of this country. Geddit?	Some scholars (e.g. Southern and Harmer, 2019) have argued that references to intelligence and stupidity constitute ableism against women in politics. Due to the ubiquity of this language across rude and abusive posts, directed at politicians of all identities, I do not consider references to stupidity, targeted at politicians who have not publicly disclosed a disability, to constitute ableism in most contexts. However, these posts can, as in the case of this first post, constitute VAP. Here, the user is describing Priti Patel as "too stupid to keep a secret," both targeted and negative language. In the second post,

			the user is adding to this discussion of Patel's "stupidity" by adding that she is a foreign agent. As I have argued (Kuperberg 2021), racial and religious minority MPs are described as untrustworthy, foreign agents, which is a form of semiotic violence against women in politics.

As with all the categories in this typology, there are posts that fall into the grey area between VAP and VAWIP. Though I created this typology—informed by theoretical insights from feminist, online violence—specifically to classify posts as VAWIP compared to other forms of violence, it is worth acknowledging that these classifications will be imperfect. Online abuse is beset by information gaps. The researcher, tagged political actor, and even the platform itself may not know the identity of the perpetrator. The direction and intended target of a post may not be determinable. The impact of abuse is unknown for a potentially large number of post viewers. Thus, while discriminatory form, context, and response (where applicable) can help a researcher classify a post, aversive posts will not always be classified appropriately and some, despite detailed classification measures, will still fall into a grey area, between rudeness and abuse, VAP and VAWIP.

Rather than see these imperfections and grey areas in empirical research as disqualifying or paralyzing, there must be a space for them. If there is no space for this grey area, research on social media violence against women in politics will be incomplete and immobilized. This is one of the primary benefits of a spectrum or continuum approach,

recognizing not only underlying similarities, but also fuzzy boundaries, interpreted differently by targeted individuals, viewers, acquaintances, staff, and researchers. Though the goal of this typology is to allow studies to better speak to one another and to encourage validity of measurement—to ensure that we are, in fact, measuring violence against women in politics—this does not mean that a single objective standard is possible, or even desirable.

It would be easier to only include posts that definitively illustrate the category under analysis. However, this overlooks numerous posts that are more complicated to classify. For example, one user writes: "@jessphillips Screeching from the sidelines with nothing constructive. Not a massive surprise. Just shut up and let the adults get on with it." This post does not include hate speech but does include more implicitly sexist language. Describing Phillips as "screeching" as opposed to yelling or similar verbs, has distinctly sexist undertones. Screeching is defined as a "shrill and high pitched" (Merriam Webster 2020); women have, on average, higher registers than men and their higher-pitched voices have been described as unprofessional and incompatible with the "appropriate" voice for leadership (Klofstad, Anderson, and Peters 2012). In addition, this user infantilizes Phillips in writing "shut up and let the adults get on with it." Individuals commonly infantilize women in politics and public life as a means of highlighting the supposed role incongruity between women and "legitimate" public officials. Though this post does not include explicit hate speech, it does incorporate gendered hostility. Given this context, I would classify this post as VAWIP.

In another example of a "grey area" post, a user writes: "@HackneyAbbott Diane you truly are one stupid cow." As mentioned in Table 3.3, due to the ubiquity of words insulting intelligence, including "stupid" mentioned here, I do not automatically classify insults to intelligence as ableism and thus, discriminatory rhetoric. However, in calling Abbott a "cow," the user is tapping into a common gendered, racist, and fatphobic insult, one that has particularly

been used to target Abbott (Esposito and Zollo, 2021). Due to this context, I would classify this post as VAWIP as well. I continue to explore grey area posts throughout the qualitative analyses, continued in Chapter 7.

Violence against Women in Politics (VAWIP)

Politicians, particularly historically-underrepresented politicians, do their work against a backdrop of hostility. Further, the internet, despite its many important functions to achieve positive change, is often a hostile environment. Nonetheless, we can distinguish between appropriate (even positive) democratic discourse, general abuse (VAP), and targeted violence (VAWIP or identity-based violence).

Women politicians are direct representatives of constituents, but also symbolic representatives. Targeted violence differs from general abuse because its impacts go beyond the individual politician to the communities they represent. Efforts to undermine women politicians, and multiply-marginalized women in, targets what and who they stand for.

Krook (2020) argues that not all sexist forms of violence against women politicians are, in fact, VAWIP as gendered slurs can be motivated by political, rather than gendered, aims. Violence against politicians affects men, women, and non-binary political actors "with gender playing a relatively small role even when women are specifically targeted," in contrast to VAWIP, which seeks "to exclude members of certain demographic groups from participating in the political process" (Krook 2020, 130-132).

However, as articulated by theories of victimological criminology, online violence, and psychology, motivation cannot always be trusted, determined, or centered in our analysis of

violence, *particularly* online violence. As such, I argue that we should classify discriminatory

posts targeting, directly and indirectly, women politicians as VAWIP unless we can determine

that it should not be classified as such. When the motivation cannot be determined, as is true in

the majority of online cases, and the presumed impact goes beyond the individuals directly

targeted, then we must use the content of the post—or the *form*—to classify posts as abusive or

not.

Online VAWIP can be distinguished from, as well as understood in relation to, other

forms of aversive speech. And yet, online VAWIP is best conceptualized as its *own* continuum,

with posts including directly targeted hate speech, sexualized comments on women's physical

appearance, and threats. Like cyber-misogyny, online violence against women in politics is

"polythetic rather than a monothetic class" (Jane 2014, 541), better understood using a family

resemblance model. Acts of online VAWIP contain the following, common features: (i) posts

incorporate discriminatory tropes/rhetoric, encourage violence, or include threats; (ii) posts

target a woman in politics, either directly or by proxy[90] (iii) discrimination in online posts seek to

exclude women and more specifically, marginalized women, as well as other marginalized

groups from public life; (iv) posts may increase in quantity or severity in response to feminist

policy support or policy support related to "protected classes"; (v) responses to the post indicate

not only its abusive qualities, but its discriminatory nature.

Violence against women in politics includes the following categories of online violence:

insults/defamation/name calling, comments on physical appearance, dehumanization, group

discrimination, purposeful embarrassment, direct and indirect threats of offline violence

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[90] Posts do not necessarily include usernames of public women because the perpetrator is seeking to
harm the public woman. Though intent can only often be inferred, numerous posts in the sample tag
multiple high-profile politicians. It seems, therefore, that the user may be intending to gain visibility for
their post rather than intending to cause harm to the tagged political woman.

(including inciting others to commit violence), sexualization, outing and deadnaming, claiming

incompetence, sexual harassment,[91] silencing, posting of intimate images (also known as

nonconsensual image sharing, revenge porn, and image-based sexual abuse), doxing,[92] and the

creation and dissemination of fake and photoshopped images and videos. This list is likely not

exhaustive and will change over time as technology changes. Importantly, not all instances of

these acts, when targeting a woman in politics herself or her proxy(s), constitutes VAWIP. Again,

the target, form, response, and context come together to distinguish what I define as online

violence against politicians as opposed to online violence against women in politics.

Though the online space may be considered, by some at least, to be the "new public

sphere" (Papacharissi 2002), all internet users are not automatically active political actors (UN

Women 2019). To constitute online VAWIP, instead of broader gendertrolling, gendered

cyberviolence, cyber-misogyny, or e-bile, the user must be targeting—whether directly or

indirectly—a female politician. Indirect targeting, when it is focused on a colleague, family

member, staff member, or other acquaintance, can be understood—context depending—as

"proxy" targeting of the female politician. Further, even when a woman in politics is not directly

targeted, when violence takes place in a reply to her post or a user tags a female politician in a

discriminatory post, the user is involving the politician either to impact them or to impact

individuals and groups that support and/or follow them. For example, researchers analyzing

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[91] Sexual harassment does not fit in with the other categories of violence because it is more location and perpetrator bound, with a focus on the workplace. Other forms of sexist violence are captured by discrimination/hate speech. However, in recognizing that for some political women—not always formal politicians—the online space may be their workplace and their colleagues or superiors may be creating a hostile work environment for them. Further, women experiencing sexual harassment may be targeted both on and offline. It is important to note that sexual harassment differs from online harassment, which will be explored as the next form of abuse.

[92] Doxing, from the slang of "documents" refers to the unauthorized publishing of personal information, including phone numbers, addresses, and financial details ("Online Abuse 101"). This practice can lead to both online and offline harassment.

VAWIP against Finnish cabinet ministers (Van Sant, Fredheim, and Bergmanis-Korāts 2021: 51)

and European heads of government (Kopytowska 2021) found that women were targets of

racist, sexist, and xenophobic Twitter violence due to their political support for refugees.

Indirect discrimination can have a similar impact as targeted VAWIP: to signal that women and

marginalized groups do not belong in the public sphere.

Table 3.4 illustrates each category of online VAWIP with an example drawn from the UK

testing set. The categories are not mutually exclusive, as shown by the illustrative posts meant

to exemplify each category. For example, I used the following tweet to illustrate sexualization:

"@HackneyAbbott Most Labour MPs are boot faced hairy arsed feminists. I still can't believe

Corbin stuck his meat up the rollypolly harridan Abbott." However, this post incorporates

gendered and fatphobic insults and defamation, comments on physical appearance, group

discrimination, purposeful embarrassment, and claiming incompetence. This post underscores

the continuum quality of online VAWIP; not only are posts related through common

characteristics, categories are not discrete, exclusive, and entirely separable. I have also, where

applicable, chosen examples that illustrate how multiple forms of discrimination, including

homophobia, racism, and Islamophobia intersect in online VAWIP.

As previously argued, though existing conceptualizations of VAWIP focus on sexism, in

the online space—where researchers are faced with a relative dearth of information—multiply-

marginalized women are not only targeted with sexism.[93] Focusing exclusively on sexism

inadvertently prioritizes the experiences of relatively privileged women, who are less likely to be

targeted with discrimination related to sexuality, class, ethnicity, race, ability, etc. This is not to

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[93] Although centering sexism is not unwarranted. Individuals coded sexism at a lower rate than racism and homophobia, more often categorizing sexist posts as "offensive" rather than "hate speech" (Davidson et al., 2017). Davidson, et al. (2017) also encourage the disaggregation of offensive language and hate speech, which this typology also seeks to address.

say that sexism should not be considered, but also that sexism targeting multiply-marginalized

women may take a different form, use different tropes, and focus on other identities or

stereotypes.

Table 3.4: Categories of online violence against women in politics		
Form of online VAWIP	Examples	Examples
Insults/Defamation/Name Calling	@JessPhillips CUNT	@LaylaMoran Bang a pan babes.
Dehumanization	@LaylaMoran Rat droppings is not a breakfast of champions.	Accompanying a picture of an ape: Forget the London look, get the Diane Abbott look
Comments on physical appearance	@jessphillips It's nice to see that the New Zealand prime minister is not only easy on the eyes 👁👁 but she has got a great sense of humour 😂👏	Amber Rudd, you are the most useless thoughtless, hopeless woman. I can't believe you're back in the Cabinet. It is only because you look good.
Group discrimination	Sayeeda, are you going to raise this with Dominic about the Pak Islamofacist state oppressing minorities and wanton pedophilia against young children? Or do you approve such? acts or keep mum re Pak pedophilia gangs in UK?	@patel4witham Who the hell do you think did it before the 90s??? We were a functioning country of hard workers and still are if we can just get a job over BAME ppl
Purposeful embarrassment	@LaylaMoran It wasn't vague you're just deaf n dumb	Is Abbott in a position to judge others. She's been asleep in the HOC, been wearing 2 odd shoes, had disastrous interviews & after sending her son to an expensive private school(going against all her preaching)he has now been charged by the police with 11 offences
Direct and indirect threats	If I could I would kill you[94]	
Sexualization	@ukhomeoffice @patel4witham Milf	@HackneyAbbott Most Labour MPs are boot faced hairy arsed feminists. I still can't believe

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[94] From Saner (2016).

		Corbin stuck his meat up the rollypolly harridan Abbott
Claiming incompetence	@LaylaMoran is frantically trying to get noticed - Ramadan sharing, pan-sexualty (?), EU adherence - how about doing her MP job? You, the taxpayer, work so she doesn't need to.	@patel4witham Even stupid people can get a job and hold it down (you even). We are talking about her being a foreign agent working against the interests of this country. Geddit?
Silencing	Some people use their religion or ethnicity to stir up the shit and play the victim, you are certainly one of that type and should be ashamed, but of course you won't be.	@SayeedaWarsi No, I think he just wants you and your kind gone!
Delegitimizing experiences of violence	@jessphillips When were you ever nice or constructive about anything to do with the opposition? […] And it's a bit rich to bleat about abuse when your tone is one of bullying.	Sayeeda- Some people use their religion or ethnicity to stir up the shit and play the victim, you are certainly one of that type and should be ashamed, but of course you won't be
Discriminatory conspiracy theories	The @ukhomeoffice has decided not to release its findings on [largely] Pakistani street grooming gangs as they say it is "not in the public interest". @patel4witham why is it not in the public interest to know why 100s of 1000s of British girls were raped?	@HackneyAbbott Hip! Hip!..... (Makes up for the thousands of girls groomed over 40 Yrs! by Pakistanis!!!)

The posting of intimate images, creation and dissemination of faked and photoshopped images, and sexualized distortion categories often or exclusively include photos and videos, rather than text, and as such are not included in the above table. Sexual harassment and

outing/deadnaming have also been excluded from the table because they are more contextual and infrequent in public data.[95]

Denial of service, hacking, and impersonating a woman politician are also potential sources of abuse unique to the online space. These are often included as forms of online violence. However, I did not include them here because they do not fit into the above categorization. These acts are abusive and/or violent, but the means of studying them differ. The above spectrum is content-based where the latter categories are generally not; information about denial of service, hacking, etc. are usually garnered from interviews, surveys, or content created in the aftermath of these acts.

I have distinguished threats of violence as constituting a form of online VAWIP even when these threats are not otherwise discriminatory in nature. Though there are few threats in the corpora—these more clearly violate terms of service agreements and thus, are more likely to be removed from the platform—several are present in the data. Though a continuum logic advocates against an objective measure of severity, as a reader and audience member of these posts, I find threats jarring and impactful. Where doxing and defamation can encourage individuals to commit offline violence, threats of offline violence are more immediate.[96] Automatically classifying threats as online VAWIP may lead to some acts of *violence against politicians* being categorized as *online VAWIP*, despite my goal of disaggregating these forms of violence. However, feminist cyberviolence scholars have cautioned researchers of the pitfalls of

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[95] Political sexual harassment is used to describe sexual assault and harassment allegations against high profile public figures (e.g., Roy Moore and Brett Kavanaugh) (von Sikorski and Saumer 2020). But it can also be used to describe sexual favors and sextortion within political parties within political parties, for example. Practitioner reports indicate that this does, on occasion, migrate into the online space ("No Party to Violence" 2018).

[96] Here, I mean that doxing is one step removed- publishing an address to encourage others to harass an individual at that address. A direct threat is more proximate.

an obsession with misclassification. Jane (2014) in particular notes that the risks of "overcoding"

"are far outweighed by the dangers involved in a small degree of e-bile undercoding ("the latter,

of course, being the situation which is closest to the status quo given that, for the most part, e-

bile is not being coded at all)" (542). Due to the limited number of threatening posts that remain

on moderated platforms, as well as the disturbing nature of these posts, I follow Jane's logic for

this category and choose not to let the danger of overcoding invisibilized these forms of

violence.

In addition to threats, online VAWIP is classified as such due to its discriminatory form.

Hate speech and discrimination, present in the above categories when applied to group

discrimination, are not singled out as a form of violence against individuals. For online VAWIP,

identity-based discrimination *is* a defining feature of the online phenomenon, rather than a

single category among others. Relatedly, some of these categories are commonly or implicitly

gendered, such as sexualized distortion, while others, such as reputational risk, are not always

discriminatory and as such, are more likely to span both VAWIP and violence against politicians.

Harassment

The cyberviolence literature, in particular the cyberbullying literature, distinguishes

harassment from other forms of abuse due to its sustained frequency. As Sobieraj (2020) writes,

"although specific tweets, emails, and comments are disturbing, the true weight of online abuse

emerges in its cumulative impact. The culture is so risk-prone and pervasively toxic that the

hostility constrains women even in its absence […]" (38).

I define harassment as abuse and/or VAWIP in significant numbers over a short period

of time and/or moderate amounts over a longer period of time. This is intentionally vague to

allow for considerations of target and context. Harassment also includes cyberstalking, which

reflects personalized violence over time including extreme surveillance, and cybermobs, which refer to abuse from a large number of users, generally in a short period of time and often across social media platforms.[97] In this dissertation, I will be classifying individual posts as rude, VAP, or violence against women in politics. However, in studying a much larger corpus of thousands of posts, I may be able to identify harassment, either harassment around a particular issue, at a particular time, or over the course of the period under study.

For example, in my test sample, users bombarded political women to respond to a conspiracy theory that alleges the existence of Pakistani grooming gangs that were raping young white girls with impunity. Priti Patel, due to a combination of her role as Home Secretary, her race, and her party identification, was tagged or targeted with many posts containing this conspiracy theory, sometimes close to 50% of tweets in a short period. This qualifies as harassment.

Distinguishing between single acts of abuse and harassment is particularly helpful for determining the appropriate data source for analysis. Abuse can be classified from a single post, though an understanding of the context in which that abuse/violence occurs requires a broader analysis. In order to classify harassment, a corpus of posts—both above a certain amount, dependent on possible sample size,[98] as well as over a period of time—is necessary. Qualitative and survey research, including focus groups and interviews, illuminates other facets of

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[97] One means of studying harassment is multi-modal abuse- abuse that crosses platforms and is both off and online. Though this dissertation will be limited in its ability to identify this type of harassment, future research should incorporate, track, and understand the effects of cross-platform abuse.

[98] In some cases, particularly highly visible women in countries with higher numbers of internet users and political engagement online, politicians may be tagged in thousands of tweets per day; a corpus of one thousand tweets from one day may not be sufficient to determine harassment in those cases. On the other hand, individual perpetrators may target political women numerous times in a short period (Stella Creasy experienced this after supporting the placement of Jane Austen on the ten-pound note). In targeted analyses, a shorter timespan or smaller set of posts may be sufficient.

harassment, including cross-platform abuse, public and private messages, contextual factors, and the unique impact of harassment.

What is sustained frequency, significant number, or moderate amount? This is a key challenge in identifying harassment and determining a "tipping point" for harassment. Because of the violent and abusive spaces of both the internet and politics, especially for visible women in the public sphere, it can be difficult to distill an exceptional pattern of abuse from an already-problematic landscape. However, as practitioners and activists have already articulated, violence is not the cost of women's political participation in politics, no matter how violent the internet or political spaces are. In addition, continuum thinking does not presuppose, or assume an objective measure for, how impactful one category of violence will be vis-à-vis another. Though harassment refers to a greater amount of abuse, in quantity or over time, a single targeted and individualized threat could be more harmful than a series of abusive posts.

RESPONSE

An important criterion of the VAWIP bias event approach, and one that has been used to classify an event as VAWIP, is that community members recognize it as such. Although some abuse is not widely viewed, offenders are posting in such a way to encourage views of their abuse. As such, in some cases, users—women politicians, constituents, supporters, and other members of the public—respond to the abuse. These posts range from trying to change the views of the offender, to identifying a post as abusive, to encouraging others to report the abuse to the platform administrators. Efforts to report and remove violent posts are sometimes successful. In previous studies, I have found that after abuse is removed from the platform, responses to the abuse (such as "reported!") remain. I describe this as "residual abuse." Residual responses sometimes indicate the abuse was sexist and/or otherwise discriminatory in

nature (i.e., a response of "You are racist- report this account!") and other times do not (i.e.

"You are awful- report this account!"). Though *responses* are not abusive in of themselves, and

often refer to posts that have been removed from the platform,[99] they provide another means

of recognizing not only abusive posts, but the public nature and impact of online violence.

One example of a response to online VAWIP is as follows:

User A: *@jessphillips Instead of screaming like a hysterical schoolgirl, propose a workable   solution then*
User B: *@UserA @jessphillips Do you ever call men hysterical schoolboys or are you just a   misogynist?*

Describing Phillips using sexist language—gendering and infantilizing Phillips's disagreement—

already qualifies the first post as online VAWIP. However, User B's response both supports this

classification choice and exemplifies the relationship between targeted violence and a public

audience. It appears that User B is empowered to call out User A in this exchange, which may

reflect broader patterns of political mobilization as a result of anger (Valentino, et al. 2011).

Critical for this project, this user intervened in a public act of violence and underscored the

discriminatory elements of that violence.

CONCLUSION

Violence against women in politics is part of a spectrum of aversive speech and can be

distinguished from violence against politicians as well as rudeness and spam. Classifying a post

as VAWIP should incorporate context, target, form, and/or response. These factors are not all

relevant, or capturable, in the analysis of each standalone post. For example, though I maintain

that response is an important component of VAWIP, I do not capture response effectively in my

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[99] These posts are not commonly part of big data projects. According to terms of service agreements, researchers must remove these posts from their data as they are no longer "public." In addition, if a post is removed quickly, automated data retrieval may not capture it, as these methods pull data about every hour. I will expand on this further in the methods section.

analysis as these posts are not abusive in of themselves.[100] However, to center intersectional

discrimination as well as incorporate key features of the online space, such the broad audience

of public posts, I emphasize these three features.

      To apply this typology, which itself is a product of grounded theory generated from the

training samples from the U.K. and Mexico as well as interview data, I scraped an original

Twitter dataset of posts that include the usernames of British and Mexican political women. I

describe and justify the methodological steps taken to collect and analyze data in the following

chapter.

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[100] Thus, my supervised machine learning analysis is not optimized for the identification of these posts.

CHAPTER 4: METHODS

I utilize mixed methods to explore the intersectional nature of online VAWIP, as well as how offline and online VAWIP are related. From a methods standpoint, this dissertation has five major components: typological development, expert interviews, big data machine learning, qualitative social media data analysis, and case comparison. These are not separate, but instead, interconnected steps in a non-linear process. First, in the previous chapter, I build off existing VAWIP, intersectionality, and online violence research to develop a typology of intersectional, online VAWIP. This typology uses inductive, grounded theory from empirical data which I coded for the supervised machine learning analyses, the results of which are explored in the remaining chapters. Applying this typology empirically and cross-nationally requires a descriptive understanding of the forms of violence impacting women in politics.

In subsequent chapters, I draw on expert interviews, participant observation, and secondary research in both Mexico and the UK to gain contextual knowledge to set up my big N analysis. The big N analysis, which consists both of supervised machine learning as well as qualitative thematic analysis, yields further descriptive data on forms of intersectional, online VAWIP. To respond to the primary research questions of this dissertation, I engage in case comparison utilizing interviews, mixed method social media analysis, government and nongovernmental reports, and legislation.

As described in Chapter 1 and elaborated on below, big data analyses have some major strengths and drawbacks. Social media data is vast and constantly being produced. For a subject such as VAWIP, which suffers from data limitations, social media data provides access to data and can illuminate not only political women's experiences online, but the messages seen by a broader public. That said, big data identifies patterns and can exacerbate researcher biases,

applying one poor coding decision to millions of posts. Furthermore, big data is limited in

illustrating how multiple forms of discrimination interact. Finally, big data and large-N studies

cannot delve more deeply into discourses of abuse. These issues are mitigated, though not fully

resolved, with the inclusion of qualitative methods. Qualitative methods enable me to use

experts to guide the identification of salient discriminations and subjects of analysis, map how

conversations on VAWIP and online violence have changed over time, identify patterns of

discriminatory discourse within the Twitter corpora, and identify where supervised machine

learning has been adept at classifying VAWIP.

I start this chapter by revisiting the theoretical commitments that guide my

methodological choices: a feminist research ethic and intersectionality. Second, I expand on the

benefits and challenges of big data analysis alongside feminist, intersectional commitments.

Third, I justify the selection of Mexico and the U.K. as cases. Fourth, I detail the methodological

choices made in interviews and the social media analysis, including the selection of subjects for

analysis. Finally, I explain the processes used to analyze the social media data used for this

project, including both supervised machine learning and qualitative, discourse analysis.

METHODOLOGICAL COMMITMENTS: FEMINIST RESEARCH ETHIC AND INTERSECTIONALITY
Feminist Research Ethic

This research and its methods are informed by a feminist research ethic (Ackerly and

True 2010): an attentiveness to power, boundaries, intersections, normalization, and the role of

the researcher (12). Many elements of this ethic are implicit, baked into the research questions

and epistemological assumptions of this project. However, it is worth articulating these implicit

assumptions here as they have methodological implications.

First, this research is motivated by questions of power and its complexity. In this project, I study women who have power: women who have won an electoral contest and ostensibly hold political and social power vis-à-vis other citizens. In doing so, I ask questions about other power inequities in the political and online spaces, informed by discriminations and visibility (Kuperberg and Restrepo Sanin 2020). Second, in emphasizing intersectionality, particularly focusing on the experiences of women at the intersections of multiple marginalized identities and forms of discrimination, I ask how power is variable among elected women.

Third, building on the research of practitioners and scholars, I dispute efforts to normalize violence both online and against women in politics. Instead, I aim to name, classify, and de-naturalize violence. As True writes, "Feminist methodology continually asks: *what violence can we not see? And what forms are neglected, silent, and/or marginalized in public and scholarly accounts?*" (2015: 556). A main goal of this project is to make visible a form of violence that has been naturalized and delegitimized, violence that has significant implications for target-survivors and political institutions.

Finally, I recognize my subjectivities and privileges as a researcher. I chose cases, as I will explain below, for several reasons, one of which is my familiarity with both cases and languages. To conduct classification and discourse analysis, I require more than simple language sufficiency in Spanish and English, including familiarity with slang, humor, and sarcasm in both contexts.[101] I have studied and lived in both the UK and Mexico for extended periods but remain an outsider in both contexts. I am not an insider-expert on the lived experiences of women in politics in Mexico or the UK but can illuminate some patterns and differences between these cases.

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[101] This also follows the guidance of feminist researchers who argue for the importance of context in understanding gendered violence, including in overcoming some of the biases of quantitative data (Boesten 2017).

Further, as a viewer of online violence, I use my own positionality to consider the role of *audience* to online violence.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality has been described as a buzzword, lived experience, framework for analysis, tool, and even as a method (Choo and Ferree 2010, 129; Chang and Culp 2002, 485; Parmar 2016, 40; Dhamoon 2011, 230; Brown 2020; MacKinnon 2013, 1019). I understand, and utilize here, intersectionality as a framework for analysis, informing not only the theoretical frame, methodological choices, and analysis of this project, but also the very basis of the project itself. This dissertation, and the research questions that guide it, are driven by an intersectional outlook: the acknowledgement that structures of oppression are co-constituted and that centering those at the intersections generates new understandings of power.

Though described by some as a method, intersectionality does not claim fidelity to a single, exclusive research method (Collins 2007, 599-600). This, and the related fact that intersectionality has no clear methodology, has been the subject of critique by those who say that operationalization of intersectionality is therefore limited (McCall 2005, 1771; Nash 2008, 4; Chang and Culp 2002, 485). These controversies indicate that intersectionality is conceptually and theoretically complex, with its contours still debated (Brown 2020). It is not surprising then that efforts to definitively operationalize intersectionality are "not easy" (Cuádraz and Uttal 1999: 158).

Nonetheless, as intersectionality has been increasingly adopted and accepted, the need for methodological best practices and guidance has grown. Contemporary theorization of intersectionality has become enmeshed in methodological advancement. To not only

understand, but also utilize, intersectionality, methodological debates have taken center stage. For the purposes of this project, I draw on contributions from intersectionality scholarship to guide my case selection, subject selection, and analysis.

Overarching Intersectional-type Approach

I understand intersectionality as a dynamic framework rooted in understanding and transforming power inequities. As Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) describe: "what makes an analysis intersectional […] is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power" (795). Further, I adopt Hancock's multi-part definition of intersectionality as a paradigm: more than one category of difference informs political and social problems; intersections of categories are not merely additive; "categories of difference" are "dynamic productions" of individuals and structures; and categories are diverse, not homogenous (2007: 251).

As mentioned in Chapter 1, I describe my project as using an *intersectional-type* framework. I seek to recognize the development of intersectionality by Black American women and the fact that intersectionality theories have inspired this project (Alexander-Floyd 2012). Referencing this work while using the modifier, 'intersectional-type,' (i) gives space to the debates among intersectionality scholars; (ii) understands the critiques over intersectionality travelling to different contexts and populations; (iii) recognizes my limitations as a scholar due to my positionality; (iv) identifies the similarities and differences among concepts such as interlocking systems (Razack 1988), discrimination-within-discrimination (Kirkness (1987-1988), multiple jeopardy (King 1988) and others' and (v) tries to be upfront about the limitations in analyzing big N data with a more fully intersectional approach. To engage with, rather than

sideline, these complexities, I adopt Dhamoon's (2010) intersectional-type framework. As

Dhamoon writes of "intersectional type": "This term signals the contestation within feminist

work while also providing a recognizable framework" (231). An intersectional-type approach

contends with processes such as gendering and racialization as well as systems of domination,

including racism and sexism (232). This project engages more closely with the latter (structures)

than the former (processes) and asks what "the interaction reveals about power" (Ibid).

SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

Data on violence against women is notoriously unreliable. In 1975, Susan Brownmiller

wrote, regarding violence against women, that "underreported crime […] remains beyond the

magic of computers" (Brownmiller, 1975: 173). Over two decades later, Garcia-Moreno (2008)

lamented that though violence against women and intimate-partner violence are widespread,

possibly affecting up to half of the world's women, data is limited when it exists at all. These

data concerns also affect VAWIP (Bardall 2013; Kuperberg 2016). VAWIP encompasses many

forms and there are few domestic reporting bodies that collect accounts of violence.[102] While

women politicians are increasingly coming forward about their experiences, reports still vary

nationally and regionally.

Social media studies of violence experienced by politically active women have remedied

some of these issues. Social media data is constantly growing and is not beset by the challenges

of too few datapoints. Still, analyses of online VAWIP by international organizations, while

helpful in raising awareness and calling for policy change, are not always methodologically

transparent. In addition, many studies on online violence analyze violence against politicians,

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[102] International NGOs, such as NDI, have started collecting incident reports more systematically.

rather than VAWIP. Furthermore, the usefulness of big N studies is limited due to questions of

bias as well as difficulties conducting intersectional research. Recent work on algorithmic bias,

particularly emphasizing gender (Criado Perez 2019), race (Kim et al. 2020), and their

intersections (Noble 2018), illustrates the limitations of both machine learning and big N

analyses. Rather than mitigating bias, big N analyses may thus be reproducing biases in the data

(Kuperberg 2021).

In addition, quantitative and big N methods are particularly limited in illuminating how

axes of oppression intersect. As Hawkesworth (2003) writes, techniques "devised to reveal

uniformities of behavior are by design insensitive to difference, treating anything that deviates

from the norm as an outlier or anomaly" (532). This critique, levied at statistical analysis, applies

also to supervised machine learning, in which researchers "train" the software by categorizing

posts or developing linguistic rules (Rheault and Rayment 2019; Gorrell, et al. 2020). These tools

are most effective when categories are exclusive and exhaustive. An intersectional framework

relies on assumptions that run counter to the notion of exclusive categories and one-size-fits-all

rules, complicating empirical research on online VAWIP (Kuperberg, 2021).

Even though it resolves some data limitation issues, social media data is thus an

imperfect substitute for incident reports and qualitative data. Further, missing information is

not random, thus biasing available data. In this project, I use public Twitter data, which does not

include private messages or posts that have been removed. Platforms generally remove posts

only when they violate their terms of service agreements or policies. Posts that have been

removed are likely to be disproportionately violent and disproportionately classified as VAWIP.

For example, in the case of Twitter, posts can be removed if they are classified as "hateful

conduct," defined as posts that promote, attack, threaten, or incite harm against people on the

basis of an identity such as gender, race, age, or disability ("Hateful conduct policy").

As a result of these constraints, I start my analysis with expert interviews, including women in politics, judges, non-profit professionals, and social media platform administrators. I approached these interviews not with the goal of determining the quantity of online violence, but to ask experts their thoughts on salient structures of discrimination, the role of social media in violence, and the impact of violence on democracy.

These interviews structured the big N study, which utilizes supervised machine learning to reveal patterns in public Twitter data. I supplement this big N study with discourse analysis of Twitter posts. I approach this data asking: how is structural violence, specifically societal discrimination, present in online violence against women in politics?

Causal and Descriptive Inference

This dissertation investigates intersectional, online VAWIP in Mexico and the United Kingdom. A comparative case analysis will allow me to make inferences about the relationship between intersectional online violence and offline violence, including discrimination (structural violence) and physical violence (personal violence). Considering multiple axes of discrimination and identity requires deep engagement with the data. However, this approach also makes it difficult to draw more general conclusions, given the specificity of the data. Through case-level comparisons, I will be focusing on broader trends by looking for similarities and differences between cases, as well as between individuals.

The majority of this dissertation does not identify causal processes. Theorizing and classifying forms of online violence is more descriptive than causal, though this project is more than simply descriptive analysis. By theorizing online intersectional violence and applying (as well as refining) existing theories of VAWIP to the online space with an intersectional lens, this

dissertation also engages in typology development and employment, drawing inferences to illustrate the impacts of online, intersectional VAWIP for both political women and the communities they represent.

Even though I select on the dependent variable to an extent, selecting two cases with published and publicized acts of VAWIP including online VAWIP,[103] this methodological choice is acceptable when the goal is "developing insights" and illuminating "anomalies that certain theories cannot accommodate" with the goal of both "building and revising theories" (Geddes 1990: 149). I do not accept that existing VAWIP typologies cannot accommodate intersectionality nor that intersectional violence is an "anomaly." Nonetheless, this dissertation emphasizes the process of building and revising theory with the aim of centering complexity.

As causal inference is not the primary goal of this dissertation's comparative analysis, protocols for case selection are less rigid. Still, I approach case selection with intentionality and purpose and explain the basis for my decisions below.

CASE SELECTION: MEXICO AND THE U.K.

Theories of intersectionality recognize that forms of oppression intersect. Despite this insight, we cannot feasibly study *all* axes of oppression simultaneously. How, then, do we determine which identities and/or discriminations to focus on?

Townsend-Bell (2011) and Yuval-Davis (2006) address this issue and advocate for researchers to prioritize several, contextually-salient axes of discrimination. Townsend-Bell

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[103] That said, VAWIP is a "global issue" (Krook 2020) and while the particulars differ across contexts, there are no evident null cases. VAWIP, including online VAWIP, takes place in all countries in which the phenomenon has been studied. As such, this research project asks what form violence takes, not whether it exists. Similarly, violence against women (VAW) is understood as a global problem that impacts women across different sociocultural contexts (Watts and Zimmerman 2002)

(2011), employing her work in Uruguay as a model, uses activist interviews to illuminate pertinent structures of discrimination for analysis. She argues that researchers should chose "relevant categories of difference" that "have been shown to be analytically important" and/or "those categories that activists consider relevant" (187).

Comparison is not a necessary condition of good intersectionality scholarship; deep engagement with a limited number of individuals in a single case has produced crucial insights on intersectionality (Bowleg 2008; McCall 2005: 1782). Indeed, some researchers raise concerns over the comparability of structures of discrimination across geographic contexts. For example, racism in the U.K. and U.S. share some similarities, with both including discrimination against ethnic minorities, but dimensions of racism in the U.K. also extend to anti-religious discrimination such as antisemitism and Islamophobia (Kuperberg 2021). Unique histories and context, such as a history of colonialism in the U.K., can also limit comparability.

Despite these challenges, many researchers emphasize the relevance and importance of intersectional, comparative analysis (Weldon 2008, 208; Bassel and Lépinard 2014, 117). Scholars promote comparative analysis, not only within cases, but across cases (Choo and Ferree 2010, 146). Cross-case comparison can shed light on the relationships between VAWIP and inequality, political culture, and societal violence (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020; Spinks 2018). Building on these insights, I chose to conduct not only comparative analysis, but also cross-regional comparison. Though trans-regional comparisons remain rare in comparative politics, gender and politics scholars have noted the importance of this work (Schwindt-Bayer 2010). VAWIP scholars and practitioners have compared cases of violence across countries, yet much of the existing literature has not been explicitly comparative.[104] Focusing only on women

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[104] NDI's "Tweets that Chill" report, authored by Zeiter, et al. (2019) is an exception, comparing Indonesia, Colombia, and Kenya. Other comparative research, such as Rheault, Rayment, and Musulan (2019)'s

in national-level, elected political office, I use a modified intracategorical analysis (McCall 2005) in this project. I focus on women "at neglected points of intersection" (1774), the definition of intracategorical analysis, but also look at a broader group of women, constituting a partially intercategorical approach. As McCall notes, intersectional research often belongs "partly to one approach and partly to another" (ibid).

The comparative method, as used in this project, aims to "facilitate thick description" and "achieve analytic depth of a case-oriented approach" (Collier 1993, 109). Of Skocpol and Somers' three logics of comparison (1980), this project—though not a comparative history— fulfills two logics: parallel demonstration of theory and contrast of contexts. This study considers similarities between cases to show patterns of online, intersectional VAWIP, but also identifies differences between cases and their impacts on different processes and outcomes (176-178). In engaging with the latter logic, I "place limits" on a somewhat generalized theory of VAWIP through an intersectional as well as predominately online study. However, I also engage with the former logic as I "aspire to generate new explanatory generalizations," in recognizing cross-case similarities (181).

I generate insights both through broader case comparison as well as through a series of situated comparisons, within and across cases. Dhamoon (2010) advocates for "situated comparisons" in intersectional-type analyses to respond to complexities of power, in particular "how interactive processes of racialization and gendering function in a specific context and how these compare to interactive processes of racialization and culturalization, racialization and disablism, and racialization and class differentiation in similar contexts" (236).

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comparison of Canadian and American political women, does not investigate VAWIP specifically, though some of their data would be classified as VAWIP.

Situated comparisons require their own selection criteria. Similar to Yuval-Davis and

Townsend-Bell's insights, few projects can study *all* national politicians or even all women

politicians, particularly with the depth required of an intersectional-type analysis. McCall (2005)

intervenes here, responding to the both the need for operationalizing intersectionality as well as

the "etc." problem, in identifying three methodological approaches for intersectionality

research: anticategorical, intracategorical, and intercategorical. For an intersectional study, the

categories "men" and "women" are problematic, too large and often reductionist. Still, taking an

anticategorical approach, which deconstructs the existence of a priori analytical categories, is

not useful as a primary approach for studying VAWIP. VAWIP, with women in the name of the

concept, implies a certain adherence to category.

An intracategorical approach, on the other hand, focuses "on particular social groups at

neglected points of intersection" (McCall 2005, 1173). This approach centers marginalized

identities within a broader category, such as focusing on Black women, rather than women

more generally. Finally, an intercategorical approach, "focuses on the complexity of

relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories and not on

complexities within single social groups" (Ibid: 1786). McCall, citing Glenn (2002, 14), notes that

for intersectional analysis, rather than move beyond all categories, race and gender can be used

as "anchor point[s]" (McCall 2005, 1785), adopting more of a gender+ model, to explicitly

ensure a focus on gender while still understanding the co-constitutive nature of categories

(Lombardo, et al. 2016). In this project, I use a modified intracategorical[105] approach, using

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[105] As I explain below, I both randomly and non-randomly selected women for analysis. Had I only selected women non-randomly, this would be a more typical intracategorical analysis. Had I also included men in the study, this would have been a more typical intercategorical analysis.

gender as an anchor point, while focusing primarily on salient structures of discrimination informed by interviews.

Analyzing two, diverse cases and comparing data from each will generate new insights and lay the groundwork for future studies of intersectional, online VAWIP. I have selected both cases because they have (i) a sufficient number of women and politics, (ii) relatively high social media usage to allow for the study of this topic, and (iii) had national conversations on VAWIP but (iv) differ on levels of in-person, societal violence and (v) salient identities for analysis. These similarities and differences are summarized in Table 4.1 below.

TABLE 4.1	Mexico	United Kingdom
Government type	Federal with bicameral legislature	Unitary parliament (with devolution)
% Women in National Parliament	48.7 (as of 2021)[106]	34 (as of 2019)[107]
Quota	Legislated candidate	Voluntary party
Social Media Users (all Platforms)	77 million[108]	45 million[109]
Active Twitter Users	10.4 million	14.5 million[110]

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[106] Data from the Inter-Parliamentary Union: women are 48.2% of Lower House (Camera de Diputad@s) and 49.2% of the Upper House, the Senate. These data are corroborated by Inmujeres statistics. These data apply to the legislature prior to the seating of those elected in June 2021. The legislature achieved parity.

[107] A House of Commons research briefing (published February 2020) also indicates that 47% of the Welsh assembly, 36% of Scottish Parliament, and 34% of the Northern Ireland Assembly are women (Uberoi, Watson, and Kirk-Wade 2020).

[108] Data from Statistica from 2019. Projected figure for 2020: 80.88 million (https://www.statista.com/statistics/260709/number-of-social-network-users-in-mexico/).

[109] These numbers are estimates. Statistics on social media users have been critiqued as they often do not accurately account for users with multiple accounts, "listeners" or those who do not have an account but "lurk" in conversations, and bots (boyd and Crawford 2011, 7).

[110] Average provided by two metrics: Statistica as of July 2020 (15.25) (https://www.statista.com/statistics/242606/number-of-active-twitter-users-in-selected-countries/) and Omnicore agency (13.7) in February 2020 (https://www.omnicoreagency.com/twitter-statistics/#:~:text=The%20total%20number%20of%20Twitter,are%2030%2D49%20years%20old.).

Global Ranking for Twitter Use (as of July 2020)	9th globally Highest in Latin America per capita[111]	5th globally Highest in Europe
Active Twitter Users as % of Adult Population	11.9%[112]	27.9%[113]
Law against VAWIP?	13 April 2020: national reform decree published on gendered political violence which both added to and amended existing laws. VAWIP was made an electoral crime. These reforms went into effect in 2021 (Mercado Ramirez 2020). Mexican electoral and judicial institutions previously published a non-binding Protocol on VAWIP in 2016. Political parties also addressed VAWIP in party protocols and regulations.	None, though legal cases against perpetrators have been successful. These cases have utilized existing legislation, such as the Racial and Religious Hatred Act pertaining to hate speech (2006); Public Order Act 1986 which includes written materials that intend to or serve to "stir up racial hatred;" and the Communications Act of 2003 that details offences pertaining to the improper use of public electronic communications networks. These laws are not specific to politicians or women in politics. Parties have also incorporated rules and member pledges that address abuse in their codes of conduct.
Reports on VAWIP (selected)	Instituto Electoral Ciudad de México: Evaluación de la Incidencia de la violencia política contra las mujeres en el contexto del proceso electoral 2017-2018 (2018)	Intimidation in Public Life A Review by the Committee on Standards in Public Life (2017)
Physical Violence (intentional homicides per 100,000)[114]	29.1 (2018)	1.2 (2018)

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[111] This data is from Statistica (as of July 2020). The leading countries based on number of Twitter users are as follows: U.S., Japan, India, Brazil, U.K., Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Mexico, Philippines (https://www.statista.com/statistics/242606/number-of-active-twitter-users-in-selected-countries/). Though Brazil has more Twitter users than Mexico, Mexico has a higher number of users per capita.

[112] Based on World Population Review's estimate that there are 87.4 million adults in Mexico. Data from Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía (National Institute of Statistics and Geography) is only up-to-date until 2015.

[113] Based on adult population of about 52 million per UK's Office of National Statistics. This assumes that all UK Twitter users are over 18, which may be inaccurate. Twitter has an age requirement of 13.

[114] Data on intentional homicides (general and female) from UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC-2020). The average global rate for intentional homicides is 6. The UK's homicide rate is approximately average compared to that of Western Europe (1.2 to 1) and Mexico's rate is higher than the average in Latin America (22).

Physical VaW (intentional homicides of females per 100,000)	5.8 (2018)	0.7 (2018)
Impunity (access to justice V-Dem; scale from 0-1, with 1= greatest access to justice)	.35	.92
Salient identities (based on interview data)	- Age - Gender identity and sexual orientation - Ideology- visibility, feminist - Race - Religion	- Age - Ethnicity (indigenous ethnicity) - Geography (rural) - Ideology- visibility, feminist - Sexual orientation and gender identity[115]

Women in Politics

Elected women make up 49% of Mexico's and 34% of the U.K.'s Lower Houses. These are both significantly above the world average, about 26%.[116] In order to study diverse women in politics, there must be women in politics. Mexico has a legislated candidate quota and the United Kingdom has voluntary party quotas; these quota types are regionally typical for Latin America and Western Europe, respectively. In both contexts, quotas have been instrumental in the increased number of women in politics over the last 25 years. In 1994, women made up 14% of the Mexican Chamber of Deputies; following the 2021 election, women make up 50% of

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[115] Mexico has few LBTQ elected officials and had no trans federally elected officials prior to 2021. Interviewees described that homophobic slurs are, however, used against women in politics.
[116] Mexico is ranked 5th and the U.K. was tied for 39th for the number of women in national parliaments as of April 2021 (IPU).

deputies (IPU Parline 2021). In January of 1997, women constituted 9.5% of all Members of

Parliament; in 2021, women are 34% of MPs in the House of Commons (ibid).

In both countries, women are leaders of parties (U.K.) and governing institutions

(Mexico). When data was gathered for this project, both of Mexico's legislative chambers, the

Chamber of Deputies and Senate, were led by women. The president, however, is (and has

always been) male. The two major parties in the UK did not have a female leader at the time of

data collection, though the Scottish National Party's Nicola Sturgeon was—and still is—party

leader. The Conservative Party has had female leadership while in power, and thus two female

Prime Ministers, while Labour has only had "acting" female leadership and there have been no

Labour women Prime Ministers.

Social Media Use

Second, I chose these cases based on the social media use of their populations. As a

medium by which members of the public interact with their representatives, social media has

also become a channel for the transmission of gendered violence against women in politics

(Bardall 2013).

I use Twitter as it is possible—and permitted by the platform's terms of service—to pull

relatively large amounts of public data in a format that can be analyzed with relative ease. Other

social media platforms, such as WhatsApp, used by politicians across the world,[117] contain a

larger amount of private data. It became apparent through fieldwork research that I could only

include cases in which a population sufficiently utilizes social media, particularly Twitter. If I

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[117] WhatsApp is more commonly used by women politicians in Mexico.

were primarily interested in measuring levels of social media engagement and violence—a potential future project—it would be important to study cases with varying social media use. Still, even when choosing two cases with relatively high social media use, I do encounter some issues in comparing Mexico, where several politicians receive very limited engagement, with the U.K., where users engage more frequently with politicians online.

Information on Twitter usage is not entirely reliable (boyd and Crawford 2011, 7). However, based on all available information, the U.K. and Mexico have a relatively high number of Twitter users, including as a proportion of their internet-using population. Statista reports that in 2019, both Mexico and the U.K. were in the "top ten" countries based on active Twitter users. The U.K. has the largest number of active Twitter users in Europe and Mexico is the leading country in Spanish-speaking Latin America. Despite these relatively high numbers, Mexico's economic inequality drives a socioeconomic "digital divide" that affects internet use.[118] All the same, in both countries politicians utilize Twitter as do political journalists, making this focus appropriate for the purposes of this specific study.

National Conversations on VAWIP

In addition, both the U.K. and Mexico are international "outliers" due to national-level conversations around political violence and gendered political violence. This distinction, joining a small but growing group of countries that are turning their attention to VAWIP, makes these countries ideal for conducting interviews and doing field research on VAWIP. I pull data from

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[118] There is a socioeconomic digital divide in the U.K. as well, though it is much smaller and affects fewer individuals. This divide is predominately age-dependent, with older Brits having less access to consistent online communication.

reports, speeches, and debates on this topic, data that do not exist in other contexts. For example, in the United Kingdom, Teresa May commissioned a Committee on Standards in Public Life report, published in December 2017. In response to the report's findings, MPs have held debates on VAWIP and intimidation in public life and discussed related legislation.

In Mexico, the federal government has assembled conferences on the topic of violence at the national and state levels (including a conference that I attended during my fieldwork). In addition, the National Electoral Institute alongside the Federal Electoral Tribunal presented a protocol on VAWIP as a step to define and prevent future acts of violence (Talamás Salazar and Sánchez de Tagle 2016). The discussion of VAWIP intensified following the 2018 elections, which were marked by hundreds of acts of political violence. In the spring of 2020, after several states passed laws on VAWIP—at least two of which were subsequently dismissed by Mexico's Supreme Court[119]—the Chamber of Deputies amended numerous laws in passing federal legal reform on VAWIP, declaring gendered political violence an electoral crime.

The above selection criteria could prompt critique, particularly that I am selecting on the dependent variable. But I am not asking whether online VAWIP exists; existing data suggest that online VAWIP is present in nearly all cases with social media engagement and women in the public space. Instead, I am asking which forms it takes. Therefore, I have selected cases in which social media is relatively prevalent, where women have achieved significant descriptive progress in politics, and where VAWIP is already a topic of national conversation.

Physical Violence

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[119] The Supreme Court struck down Chihuahua's state law stating that the federal Congress is the only body with the authority to establish electoral crimes (Zorrilla 2020).

Despite some shared factors, Mexico and the UK differ in numerous ways. In particular, homicides are more prevalent in Mexico than the UK. Piscopo (2016a) argues that VAWIP is an extension of existing impunity and violence; women in politics in Latin America experience violence, at least in part, because large numbers of women experience violence. This logic suggests that in countries that are more violent, violence against all citizens, including women in politics, is more likely. In Mexico, levels of physical violence and impunity are high; in Table 4.1, I use intentional homicides by population and access to justice as proxies for these variables. In the UK, societal violence and impunity are comparatively low. The strength of rule of law in the UK, including access to civil and criminal justice, also provides another key difference between these cases.[120]

Salient Axes of Discrimination

Finally, the U.K. and Mexico differ on salient axes of discrimination which most impact women in politics. Htun and Weldon (2010) write that "Most societies have historically experienced conflict across multiple axes of social difference" (212). Rather than speculate, based on my knowledge of the cases and their histories, which factors will be most salient, I prioritize the expertise of politicians and activists in country (cf. Townsend-Bell 2011). My interviews suggest that race, sexuality, and religion are especially salient in the UK while ethnicity, particularly indigenous identity, and geography[121] are salient in Mexico. Experts in

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[120] Utilizing data from the World Justice Project from 2010, the U.K, adheres more strongly to rule of law measures than Mexico. On a measure from 0 to 1, with 1 signifying stronger adherence to rule of law, the U.K.'s score is .8 and Mexico, .52. This takes into account measures including corruption, security, regulatory enforcement, and access to civil and criminal justice (Botero and Ponce 2010, 33).

[121] In Mexico, geography can also serve as a proxy for a number of other variables. Rural areas tend to have less formal education, more poverty, and a higher indigenous population. Indigenous populations are also poorer than the national average; nearly twice as many indigenous Mexicans live in poverty

both countries described age and ideology as impactful characteristics. Interviewees describe

young women, highly visible women, and women with strong ideologies—particularly feminist

or leftist political ideologies—as especially vulnerable to violence. In both Mexico and the U.K.,

many MPs identify as a collage of these factors.[122] I use this interview data to guide my selection

of politicians and broader social media analysis.

EXPERT INTERVIEWS

Ackerly and True (2013), writing on feminist methodologies, describe interview data as

particularly useful in studying previously unexplored questions. Due to the challenges of

researching "a puzzle that has yet to be approached by scholars," interviews provide an entry

point and identify areas of future research (150). This dissertation does not investigate an

entirely new phenomenon but does ask new questions of and about VAWIP. As such, interviews

provide a crucial entry point. In addition, as Evans and Reher (2020) write in their work on

disability in UK politics, citing Norris and Lovenduski (1995), "Semi-structured interviews are

particularly effective for exploring people's experiences and perspectives and are routinely used

to investigate the barriers to elected office for under-represented groups" (3).

From June to December 2018, I conducted approximately 20 semi-structured interviews

with experts, including current and former female politicians, electoral judges, in-country non-

profit practitioners, and academics. I reached out to politicians via email in the months prior to

travelling to the UK and Mexico. Most interviews were conducted in the fall of 2018 with only a

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compared to the rest of the population (Global Americans, 2017). Thus, these factors and forms of
discrimination are often overlapping.

[122] For example, Reyna Celeste Ascencio Ortega—a Morena Deputy—is young and indigenous,
representing Michoacán, which is a relatively rural, low population density state.

few interviews conducted the summer prior. Once in country, I used snowball sampling to reach more interviewees.

I also draw on insights from interviews conducted for my master's thesis.[123] In addition to interviews I conducted personally, both as a masters and doctoral student, I am utilizing publicly available interviews conducted by other academics, organizations, and news media. During and following my 2018 fieldwork, I also conducted participant observation in the United Kingdom[124] and attended a conference on violence against women[125] in the 2018 Mexican election.

After two interviews with politicians who experienced violence but had not been involved in legislation or practitioner efforts to combat VAWIP, I recognized "expert" interviews would be more generative. I asked interviewees to speak not only about their own experience, but (where possible) about the experience of their colleagues. In seeking to understand VAWIP more broadly, and particularly online intersectional VAWIP, experts—those who had worked on VAWIP at the political, judicial, and civil society levels—were able to place their experiences in context of other acts of violence, describe broader trends and anecdotes from colleagues, and/or contribute to the conceptual debates surrounding VAWIP. Appendix A contains an anonymized list of interviewees.

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[123] I conducted the majority of these interviews in the summer of 2015, with the help of the Winihin Jemide research grant. The focus of my master's thesis was slightly different, emphasizing the sexual nature of violence against politicians and considering both offline and online abuse in South Africa and Mexico.

[124] I attended a weekly PMQ session in the House of Commons alongside two parliamentary detectives who investigate crimes that occurs within the walls of Parliament, including VAWIP.

[125] This conference featured women in politics and government (primarily femocrats) and took place in Mexico City. The primary focus of the conference was on VAWIP at the state level.

I spoke with these experts about their experiences and knowledge of VAWIP, online

violence, and their opinions on the causes and consequences of violence. I also used interviews

to better understand the salient forms of discrimination present in both contexts, in part to

structure the big N social media analysis. I also asked interviewees to describe any temporal

components to VAWIP—did they notice an increase in violence at a particular time or following

a particular event—as well as identify any politicians who experienced particularly virulent

abuse online. As I selected the politicians for the social media study, I used interview data to

identify salient identities and individuals who might be particularly vulnerable to online violence.

A list of sample questions can be found in Appendix B.

Finally, interview data also illuminates some consequences of online violence. I utilize

interview data to understand the impact of axes of discrimination on violence, which I explore in

the concluding chapter of this dissertation. Interview data on links between offline and online

violence, including the intersectional elements of violence, influenced the theoretical

framework and typology developed in the previous chapter.

To categorize and analyze social media posts, however, I use big N supervised machine

learning analysis with qualitative text analysis, both described below.

SOCIAL MEDIA ANALYSIS
Intersectionality and Analysis

An intersectional analysis "demands studying the unmarked categories where power

and privilege 'cluster'" (Nash 2018, 133). I consider power in all stages of this project, including

in the analysis stage. Following other work on violence against politicians as well as VAWIP, I use

supervised machine learning to generate descriptive statistics, namely: how *much* abuse targets

each politician in my sample? Noting the quantities of violence is instructive. This project—

which uses a narrower definition of violence to distinguish VAWIP from other forms of violence

against politicians—can generate new information about online violence. Still, *quantities* of

abuse tell only a partial story.

This project asks which *forms* violence takes against multiply-marginalized politicians

and how those forms incorporate structural and personal violence. To make claims about how

power operates, I need to do more than aggregate data. To address these questions and to

engage with the complexity of intersectional discriminations, I use thematic and feminist critical

discourse analysis to qualitatively hand-classify and analyze 1,000 abusive tweets. Given the

difference in tweet quantity between the UK and Mexico, I analyzed 700 tweets from the UK

and 300 tweets from Mexico. I combine feminist critical discourse and thematic analysis, the

"method for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a

dataset" (Nowell et al. 2017, 2). I then build on the thematic analysis in the chapters that follow.

Thematic analysis identifies patterns within a dataset (Braun and Clark 2008), rather

than in an individual unit of analysis, which makes it an ideal method for analyzing a corpus of

tweets. Thematic analysis and related methods, including grounded theory, are not

incompatible with intersectionality (Daley et al. 2007; Kassam et al. 2020). However, a narrow

set of themes can be at odds with an intersectional approach. For example, if an analyst

classifies data only as racist, sexist, etc., this analysis reinforces the notion that identities and

discriminations are analytically separate and separable.

Despite critiques that Twitter posts are too short or too hastily composed for a

researcher to effectively engage in discourse analysis, linguistics and communications scholars

have utilized this methodological approach to successfully analyze social media data (Baum and

Groeling 2008; Dyer and Hakkola 2020; Evans Davies 2015; Klein 2019). I not only use discourse

analysis here, but more specifically, critical discourse analysis. That is to say, I am interested not

only in describing or classifying discourse, but also in better understanding how power operates

through discourse. In particular, I utilize feminist critical discourse analysis, which illuminates

"the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted

gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained,

negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities" (Lazar 2007, 142).

Discursive approaches are especially suited to investigating multiple forms of

discrimination, separately and simultaneously (Esposito 2021, 3). I recognize that discourse does

not only reflect power inequities but reinscribes these hierarchies (Kuperberg 2021). This is true

for discourse broadly as well as online discourse, which reproduces and expands discrimination

in the hyper-visible online sphere (Esposito 2021, 2).

Data Collection

Following qualitative interviews, I scraped—meaning I used an automated process to

collate—data from Twitter. I used Twitter here as other platforms are "closed" to data gathering

and analysis of this type (Van Sant, Fredheim, and Bergmanis-Korāts 2021, 17).[126] I had planned

to scrape data from both Facebook and Twitter. Facebook has not always been clear about the

legality of automating retrieval of data on their platforms, though they did restrict data access—

including for academic use—in the spring of 2018 (Bastos and Walker 2018).[127] Other means of

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[126] This does not include all social media platforms. Some, like Reddit, are accessible but are less relevant
for this research project as they are used less frequently by political figures.
[127] Facebook has made some data available to researchers, but these data do not include messages
(including public messages). Though networks and URL engagement (how many people clicked on a given

obtaining data through web scraping, pulling all data on a website, have also recently been

disabled on Facebook. As such, I am focusing this analysis on Twitter. This has limitations. In

Mexico, there are an estimated 77 million Facebook users, with only 10.4 million Twitter

users.[128] In the U.K., this disparity is also present, but not as dramatically as in Mexico;

compared to 14.5 million Twitter users, there are approximately 44.8 million Facebook users in

the U.K.[129]

Furthermore, Twitter users are not necessarily representative of their country's

population in terms of age, ideology, and partisanship. Data on representativeness is context-

dependent, but Pew Research Center data from 2018 and 2019 show that American adult

Twitter users are younger and more progressive than the wider public (Wojcik and Hughes

2019). Furthermore, only 10% of Twitter users, "the most prolific users" generate 80% of Twitter

posts. These prolific users are generally focused on politics and are disproportionately women;

65% of the top 10% of users are women, compared to 48% of the bottom 90% of users (Ibid,

4).[130] Sloan's (2017) research from the U.K. finds that UK Twitter users are younger, but

distinctly, disproportionately male compared to the country as a whole. Mellon and Prosser

(2017) similarly find that Twitter and Facebook users are younger, better educated, more liberal,

and more politically engaged than the average Brit. However, like work on the U.S., they find

that Twitter users are disproportionately female (2). This is all to say that (i) Twitter is not

representative of an entire country's population; (ii) the extent to which Twitter is

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URL) might be useful in other contexts, these data are not as useful for answering this dissertation's
research questions.

[128] Data from Statistica 2019-2020.

[129] Data from Statistica 2020.

[130] Overall internet users, however, are more likely to be men. According to the Web Foundation, "men
remain 21% more likely to be online than women, rising to 52% in the world's least developed countries"
(Iglesias 2020). Though they do not offer country-disaggregated data, in Europe, 77% of women are online
compared to 81% of men while in Latin America, 60% of women are online compared to 64% of men.

representative on gender, race, age, and other factors differs by geographical context; (iii) data

on Twitter representativeness is not consistent; and yet (iv) researchers agree that Twitter users

are more politically-inclined than users of other platforms in the UK and the US.

Nonetheless, this lack of representativeness may not be a disqualification, or even a

limitation. I am using public social media for several reasons. First, it is a very useful source of

data on a subject with significant data limitations. Second, though not a perfect data source,

politicians are increasingly engaging with their constituents online. Social media activity is no

longer optional politics, particularly for groups historically marginalized from the political space.

Third, research shows that social media is a common location of online violence (Duggan 2017;

"Sexism, harassment and violence against women in parliaments in Europe" 2018). Fourth,

social media data does not only tell us about the digital space, but about society (Rogers 2013,

38). Though it may not be a perfect reflection of offline society, social media does shed light on

societal problems and inequities. Finally, due to the potential audience of social media posts,

abuse is amplified. The potential audience witnessing and (potentially) harmed by abuse is

significantly larger than the potential audience of in-person abuse.

If VAWIP has negative implications for democracy and equality—as I will argue it does—

the amplification of online violence is significant. Despite its limitations, public data reveals the

information most users have when they look at the platform; this is important in understanding

how the general public engages with online data that references political women. Public data

should be understood as public and relational. Public posts are not necessarily a reflection of the

innermost thoughts of their authors, but instead, projections of a public image intentionally

shared by the author (McGregor in Caplan et al. 2021). Unlike survey data, however, public,

social media data does not provide information about how online violence is received by those

targeted.

Why, specifically, Twitter? As Siegel, et al. (2018) write, of the U.S. primarily, "Twitter is

an ideal platform on which to study changes in the prevalence and popularity of online hate

speech over time as it is widely used by journalists and political elites [and] helps shapes

conventional media reporting" (4). Levey (2018) also finds that Twitter has a greater number of

public shaming and silencing posts directed at women, compared to Instagram and Facebook

(160). She posits that Twitter's character limit and ease of anonymity fuel the higher number of

slurs on the platform. In addition, in their UK study based on survey data and in-depth

interviews, Lewis, Rowe, and Wiper (2017) find that abuse is most common on Twitter, where

88% of regular users have experienced abuse, followed by Facebook (1469). This finding may

not extend entirely to Mexico, where WhatsApp and Facebook are the most common social

networks used ("Violencia Política a Través de las Tecnologías contra las Mujeres en México"

2017, 31). However, las Luchadoras notes that Twitter and Facebook are the two primary

locations of violence against Mexican journalists (ibid, 34) and a study on electoral violence in

Mexico found more abusive messages on Twitter than Facebook over the same period

("Subordinadas y bellas" 2020, 13).

In terms of my approach, I utilize #TAGS (on Google Drive) to scrape Twitter data

through a streaming API, application programming interface. I use separate data pulls for

different individuals and groups, pulling anywhere between 500 and 1,000 tweets per hour.[131]

Search APIs do not capture all, or a perfect sample, of tweets but mitigate some biases in

historical data samples; in historic data samples, posts have likely been non-randomly removed

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[131] As I explain below, I separated users with a higher number of followers so that their posts did not drown out those of other women politicians. For individuals, I pulled fewer tweets per hour than for clusters of individuals. Due to different online engagement, I did not anticipate being able to pull even numbers of tweets for all sampled individuals. However, I wanted to avoid (i) reaching my limit of data pulls per day and (ii) pulling as much data for one high profile individual as for a group of less visible individuals.

from dataset due to violating terms of service (Tromble 2021, 5). I use separate data pulls, rather than single large data pulls, to ensure that high volume users do not overwhelm the dataset. If, for example, I pulled data on Laura Rojas—then President of the Chamber of Deputies—who has over 50,000 followers in the same dataset as Dorheny García Cayetano, a young female legislator from Veracruz with 5,076 followers, data for Cayetano would likely be near-nonexistent, overshadowed by a much larger volume of data including Laura Rojas's Twitter handle. To avoid this, I separated Mexican legislators below 8,000, between 8,000 and 10,000, and over 10,000 followers. In the UK, where politicians have more followers than in Mexico on average, I ran separate data streams for politicians with more than 30,000 followers. Though followers are not a replacement for activity or visibility (Kuperberg 2021), users with more followers tend to be referenced in a greater number of posts.

I began pulling data between June 7 and 10, 2020, for both the UK and Mexico. The start dates are not consistent because Twitter's Developer API allows a researcher to pull data from the current minute until about 6-8 days prior. I set up the data streams on June 10. However, for politicians with little engagement, a completed request to pull 500 tweets may have necessitated going back further in time than for politicians tagged in many tweets. Data collection ended between August 9 and 10, 2020, after two months of data collection.

Subject Selection

I focus on women in formal politics but recognize that my conclusions may be generalizable to a larger group of experiences. Elected women at the national-level are frequent subjects of VAWIP research but rarely centered in work on gendered online violence. Many VAWIP researchers take a broad view of politics, including activists and voters (Biroli 2018).

Taking on a very broad scope, the internet is a public space and everyone on the internet,

particularly posting public comments, is "public" to an extent. To work explicitly within and add

to the VAWIP literature, contribute to the online violence literature, and delineate manageable

scope conditions, I limit my analysis to formal women politicians at the national-level.

Though women politicians are a relatively elite group and do not descriptively represent all

salient axes of discrimination in each society,[132] politics is becoming increasingly diverse.

Further, in understanding online intersectional violence, I am interested not only in diverse and

intersecting identities but in the discourses of violence present. These discourses are used in

communication with members and non-members of marginalized groups. Though certain

groups of women will not be studied in this dissertation, I will be considering abusive rhetoric

that goes beyond the identities in my sample.

As mentioned above, I engage in a comparative study of Mexico and the U.K. However,

this dissertation is also—and perhaps more importantly—a series of situated comparisons

between Twitter posts and corpuses of posts directed at different female politicians. To ensure

that women politicians with salient, multiply marginalized identities were represented in my

sample but to avoid presupposing all relevant factors, I combined two approaches of unit

selection: random and non-random. Though I could have theoretically pulled data for all

national-level women legislators in both the U.K. and Mexico, I was concerned that this would

be an overwhelming amount of data and that I would be restricted from gathering a sufficiently

wide spread of data from Twitter due to data gathering limitations. There were several

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[132] For example, those with disabilities are not often, or proportionately, represented in politics.

occasions, in fact, in which my Twitter stream was temporarily halted due to too much

activity.[133]

Thus, I both randomly and non-randomly selected women politicians to include in this

analysis. I randomly selected women to incorporate data from those who did not publicly self-

identify with the salient identities determined through expert interviews. However, to ensure

that multiply-marginalized women were well represented in my data sample, I also non-

randomly selected political women. In addition, with this non-random population, I selected

individuals who are members of groups—such as members of particular parties or young

women—underrepresented in the random sample.

First, I created a spreadsheet with all women in the House of Commons (UK) and

Chamber of Deputies (Mexico). I included party, state constituency (in Mexico), and salient

identities of interest. In the UK, I noted if MPs were new to parliament (elected in 2019), BAME

(Black, Asian, and minority ethnic), LGBTQ, minority-religion (Jewish and Muslim), and young

(under 40). I used a random number generator to select 24 random women in the UK. After

failing to identify the Twitter handle of several MPs, I ended up with 22 "random" MPs, listed in

Table 4.2. In addition to these, I selected 23 non-random female MPs who were either BAME,

LGTBQ, minority-religion, young, or a combination. Because random selection occurred first,

some randomly selected MPs fulfilled the non-random selection criteria. I also aimed to have

some diversity of experience (not include in Table 4.2) and follower count, ranging from Mhairi

Black's 185k followers to Sara Britcliffe's 2,800.

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[133] Researchers can only mine 1% of the total volume of tweets and #TAGS has daily limits in server time. This is not an issue specific to me or the subject of this research.

I followed a similar pattern for Mexico, although I also had information about the political women's legislative commission roles. I noted in particular those who were members of the following committees: Gender Equality, Indigenous Communities, and Youth and Sexual Diversity.[134] I selected 25 politicians randomly. However, nearly half did not have clearly-identifiable, public, official Twitter accounts. As such, I ended up with 13 random Mexican Deputies for analysis, ranging from 60 followers to 33.8k. I selected 20 non-random Deputies based on indigenous affiliation or legislative portfolio, youth, leadership in the Chamber, and LGBTTTIQ[135] identity. Five did not have Twitter accounts so they were removed from analysis. Due to these limitations, I selected an additional four high-profile women politicians: Laura Maria de Jesus "Jesusa" Rodríguez Ramirez, a Morena Senator and one of the few publicly LGBTTTIQ national-level politicians; Martha Lucía "Malu" Mícher, a Morena Senator and perhaps the most well-known feminist presently serving in elected Mexican politics; Mónica Fernández Balboa, the head of the Senate during the data-gathering period; and Laura Rojas Hernández, the Head of the Chamber of Deputies during the data-gathering period. Details on all politicians chosen for analysis are listed in Table 4.2 below. Those politicians that were also used in the qualitative analysis are bolded.

Table 4.2: Subject Selection	Politicians	Twitter Followers	Party	Identities and Leadership Roles
UK: Random	Rushanara Ali	381.k	Labour	BAME, Muslim
	Caroline Ansell	5.3k	Conservative	
	Sarah Atherton	4.6k	Conservative	
	Suella Braverman	28.3k	Conservative	BAME; Attorney General for England and Wales

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[134] Members of these committees are not necessarily members of the named groups.
[135] LGBTTTIQ is the acronym used in Mexico that corresponds to LGBTQ or LGBTQ+. This refers to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, transvestite, intersex, queer.

	Sara Britcliffe	2.8k	Conservative	Young[136]
	Dawn Butler	116.6k	Labour	BAME; former Women and Equalities Shadow Minister
	Lisa Cameron	13k	SNP	
	Feryal Clark	9.7k	Labour	
	Thangam Debbonaire	25.5k	Labour	BAME; Shadow Housing Secretary
	Florence Eshalomi	17.7k	Labour	BAME; young
	Margaret Ferrier	14.7k	SNP	
	Helen Hayes	20k	Labour	Shadow Minister for the Cabinet Office
	Kate Hollern	7.5k	Labour	Shadow Minister for Local Government
	Carla Lockhart	7.5k	DUP	Young
	Julia Lopez	5.3k	Conservative	Young, Parliamentary Secretary for the Cabinet Office
	Rachel Maclean	9.3k	Conservative	
	Layla Moran	59k	Lib Dem	BAME, LBTQ, Young, Lib Dem Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs
	Kate Osamor	31.7k	Labour	BAME
	Marie Rimmer	11.3k	Labour	Disability
	Jane Stevenson	3k	Conservative	
	Liz Truss	82k	Conservative	Secretary of State for International Trade
	Nadia Whittome	42.5k	Labour	BAME, Young
	Total Tweets in this category:			544,075

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[136] Under 40 at time of data collection.

UK: Non-Random	Rosena Allin-Khan	167.1k	Labour	BAME, Muslim, Shadow Minister for Mental Health
	Kemi Bandenoch	18k	Conservative	BAME, Exchequer Secretary to the Treasury
	Hannah Bardell	23.7k	SNP	LGBTQ, Young, SNP Shadow Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
	Apsana Begum	9.6k	Labour	BAME, Muslim, Young, first hijab-wearing MP
	Mhairi Black	184.9k	SNP	LGBTQ, Young, SNP Shadow Secretary of State for Scotland
	Joanna Cherry	96.6k	SNP	LGBTQ, SNP Spokesperson for the Home Department and Justice
	Claire Coutinho	4k	Conservative	BAME, Young
	Angela Crawley	13.6k	SNP	LGBTQ, Young, SNP spokesperson for Women and Equalities
	Angela Eagle	75.3k	Labour	LGBTQ
	Lucy Frazer	7.5k	Conservative	Jewish, Minister of State for Prisons and Probation
	Nus Ghani	17.5k	Conservative	BAME, Muslim
	Nia Griffith	17.1k	Labour	LGBTQ, Shadow Secretary of State for Wales
	Louise Haigh	41.9k	Labour	Young, Shadow Secretary of

				State for Northern Ireland
	Rupa Huq	42.9k	Labour	BAME, Muslim
	Shabana Mahmood	20.6k	Labour	BAME, Muslim, Young, Shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury
	Lisa Nandy	174.7k	Labour	BAME, Shadow Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs
	Yasmin Qureshi	20.2k	Labour	BAME, Muslim, Shadow Minister for International Development
	Naz Shah	42.1k	Labour	BAME, Muslim, Shadow Minister for Community Cohesion
	Tulip Siddiq	143.5k	Labour	BAME, Muslim, Shadow Minister for Children & Early Years
	Cat Smith	39.6k	Labour	LGBTQ, Young, Shadow Minister for Young People and Voter Engagement
	Chloe Smith	17.7k	Conservative	Young
	Zarah Sultana	57.6k	Labour	BAME, Muslim, Young
	Munira Wilson	8.3k	Lib Dem	BAME, Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Health, Wellbeing and Social Care
	Total Tweets in this category:			632,507

	Total UK Tweets			1,176,582
Mexico: Random	Maribel Aguilera Cháirez	721	Morena (Durango)	
	María Ester Alonzo Morales	1794	PRI (Yucatan)	Igualdad de Género
	Rosalinda Domínguez Flores	728	Morena (Oaxaca)	
	Dorheny Garcia Cayetano	3,755	Morena (Veracruz)	Secretary of Igualdad de Género; Juventud y Diversidad Sexual; Young
	María Libier González Anaya	536	MC (Jalisco)	
	María Eugenia Hernández Perez	212	Morena (Mexico)	Igualdad de Genero
	Nelly Maceda Carrera	1356	PT (Puebla)	
	Sarai Núñez Cerón	2144	PAN (Guanajuato)	
	María Geraldine Ponce Méndez	33.8k	Morena (Nayarit)	Young
	Verónica Ramos Cruz	301	Morena (Jalisco)	Young
	Erika Mariana Rosas Uribe	763	Morena (Sinaloa)	Young
	María Luisa Veloz Silva	60	Morena (San Luis Potosi)	
	Mirtha Iliana Villalvazo Amaya	589	Morena (Nayarit)	
	Total Tweets in this category:			28,371
Mexico: Non-Random	**Ma. Guadalupe Almaguer Pardo**	1248	PRD (San Luis Potosi)	Secretaria-Igualdad de Género,
	Mónica Almeida López	3270	PRD (Jalisco)	Presidente-Marina
	Reyna Celeste Ascencio Ortega	3230	Morena (Michoacan)	Young, Presidente de Juventud y Diversidad

				Social, indigenous, LGBTTIQ
	Mary Carmen Bernal Martínez	225	PT (Michoacan)	Young, Presidente-Seguridad Social
	María Wendy Briceño Zuloaga	8211	Morena (Sonora)	Presidente-Igualdad de Genero
	Clementina Marta Dekker Gómez	177	PT (Chiapas)	Secretaria-Igualdad de genero
	Martha Hortencia Garay Cadena	6369	PRI (Coahuila)	Presidente-Atención a Grupos Vulnerables
	Laura Martínez González	448	Morena (DF)	Igualdad de Genero
	Beatriz Dominga Pérez López	216	Morena (Oaxaca)	Pueblos Indígenas; Indigenous
	Ximena Puente De La Mora	20.6k	PRI (Colima)	Igualdad de Genero
	Ana Lucia Riojas Martínez	33.7k	No party (DF)	Young, LGBTTTIQ, Igualdad de Género; Secretaria-Juventud y Diversidad Sexual
	Beatriz Rojas Martínez	4158	Morena (DF)	Secretaria-Igualdad de Genero
	Verónica María Sobrado Rodríguez	4991	PAN (Puebla)	Secretaria-Igualdad de Genero
	Olga Patricia Sosa Ruíz	8324	PES (Tamaulipas)	Igualdad de Género
	Julieta Kristal Vences Valencia	829	Morena (Puebla)	Igualdad de Género; Presidente-Asuntos Migratorios, Young

	Total Tweets in this category:			36,318
Additional Mexico	Mónica Fernández Balboa	17.7k	Morena (Senadora Electa por el Principio de Mayoría Relativa) (Tabasco)	Head of Senate
	Martha Lucía Mícher Camarena ("Malu Mícher")	27.6k	Morena (Electa por el Principio de Primera Minoría) (Guanajuato)	Senator; Presidenta Igualdad de Genero
	Laura María de Jesús Rodríguez Ramírez ("Jesusa Rodríguez")	30.7k	Morena (Lista Nacional-Representatcion Proporcional)	Senator, LGBTTTIQ
	Laura Rojas Hernández	50.3k	PAN (Mexico)	Head of Chamber of Deputies; former Chairwoman of Foreign Affairs Committee
	Total Tweets in this category:			134,324
	Total Mexico Tweets			199,013
	Total Tweets UK and Mexico			1,375,595

Data Analysis

As hand coding over 1.3 million tweets would be unrealistic, I use supervised machine learning to identify potentially violent posts. I refer to this part of the analysis as "big N" or "big data." "Big Data" analysis references both the large amount of data as well as the computational component of analysis (boyd and Crawford 2011, 3).

There are three primary ways in the literature to "instruct" (or construct) a big N algorithm to classify violent posts using natural language processing (Siegel 2020, 59). First, researchers develop a dictionary of terms that they associate with violent posts (see Bardall et al. 2018). The second method (Gorrell et al. 2020) involves developing a list of multilayered rules

about language (e.g., "woman" is not abusive but "evil woman" is). Despite its higher levels of

accuracy, this approach—like the first—is limited in the opportunity to classify new or

unexpected violent tropes. Uncomfortable with this level of determinism and seeing these

approaches as less coherent with feminist research ethics, I use a third method. Third,

researchers train some data, meaning coding a sample of posts individually, and use that sample

to instruct the algorithm how to proceed on the remaining data using supervised text

classification (see Rayment Rheault, and Musulan 2019; "Troll Patrol" 2019). This allows the data

to "speak" and to uncover new or unexpected classifications rather than assume that broad

rules or words, chosen by the researcher, should take priority.

Training an algorithm requires a separate set of data; an analyst must train an algorithm

on separate data than that used to test the algorithm (Lhessani 2019). Though researchers are

encouraged to train a large sample of data, sometimes up to 50% of the size of a testing dataset,

that is unrealistic in this case as it would involve individually coding around 600,000 posts.

Instead, I trained—hand-coded and classified—10,000 posts from the U.K., which is only 1% of

the testing dataset size. I used data collected between December 2019 to May 2020—just prior

to the collection of the primary (test) sample—that included the Twitter handles of Diane

Abbott, Priti Patel, Jess Phillips, Layla Moran, and Sayeeda Warsi. Of these political women, only

Layla Moran is part of both the training and testing sample, selected randomly for the test

sample. I chose these individuals to represent salient identities identified by interviews:

feminist, BAME, LGBTQ women who are members of different parties and have varying, though

overall higher than average, levels of leadership. I coded 2,000 posts mentioning each political

woman, 10,000 in total, as either abusive/VAWIP or not.

I utilize a similar approach in Mexico, training 5,000 posts, or 2.6% of the Mexico test

dataset size. The training posts for Mexico were collected from September 2019 through

February 2020 and include the usernames of Laura Rojas Hernández and Monica Fernández

Balboa, the Presidents of the Chamber of Deputies and Senate, respectively. These women hold

leadership positions but do not represent groups identified as particularly vulnerable through

interviews. However, due to their leadership roles, these women receive more Twitter

engagement than any other Mexican political women. Both Rojas Hernández and Fernández

Balboa are also part of the Mexico test dataset.

To apply the training corpora—the hand-coded samples—to the test corpora, the non-

coded 1.38 million tweets, I used Python, a programming language commonly used for natural

language processing (NLP).[137] First, I evened out the abusive and non-abusive posts in my

training samples using minority oversampling. Prior to this, my training samples were about 10%

abuse, 90% non-abuse. Because algorithms use statistical methods to classify uncoded data,

using an unbalanced training dataset would encourage the algorithm to code all new posts

"non-abuse." Second, I cleaned my data to optimize the performance of the algorithm. I made

several iterative changes: first, I made all text lowercase;[138] second, I removed special

characters; third, I removed "stop words."[139]

To build the most accurate model, I split my coded (training) data into test and training

sets. I then ran through several models to determine which best "fit" the data. Here, I ask the

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[137] R is also a commonly used language for NLP. But, where R relies more heavily on statistical modelling, Python is a "multi-purpose language" (IBM Cloud 2021).

[138] This is a common tool for natural language processing as the program is case sensitive. In order for the algorithm to see "stupid" and "Stupid" as the same word, I made all letters lowercase. There are other commonly used modifications for data analysis, including lemmatization and stemming, which transform words into a basic root (modifies and modification would both be transformed into "modify"). However, as the nature of the word can change its meaning, I chose not to lemmatize or stem the data. I was particularly reluctant for data in Spanish, where these processes would likely transform all words into neutral, or masculine.

[139] Stop words are common words that can overwhelm the data, making it more challenging to find patterns. These words include "it," "a," and "do." In Spanish, stop words include *de, la, una, estamos.*

algorithm to use half of the coded data to predict the other half. I then request data on how well

the model did or what percentage of the predictions were correct, including details such as how

accurate or precise the algorithm is. I ran several models, which assume different distributions

of data. For example, Gaussian Naïve Bayes assumes data is normally distributed, with a

Gaussian bell curve (Gupta 2019); Decision Tree, by comparison, identifies decision rules and

uses those rules to predict whether a post is abusive or not. Other models include linear

regression and logistic regression. The goal with this step—building and running multiple

models—is to identify which model is most accurate at coding the posts in the coded dataset, to

apply this same algorithm to uncoded data to "predict" whether or not the posts are abusive.

I also utilize TFIDF to optimize the models above on this data. TFIDF, which stands for

term frequency- inverse document frequency, is a measure of how often a word is used in a

corpus. The logic of TFIDF is that words used infrequently should be weighed more significantly

than words used infrequently. Though one of the data-cleaning steps I use, stop words, removes

common words—such as "the"—from the corpus, other words show up frequently in the data.

For example, the following words are common in the test datasets: public, government, Labour,

Morena, PRI, México, and Cámara (Chamber). These words are not stop words identified by the

Natural Language Toolkit, meaning that they are not basic words across many different

documents and corpora. However, in my samples, these are common words and do not have a

high impact on the likelihood that a post is abusive, given that they are primarily descriptive.

TFIDF weighs these words as less significant, though not entirely insignificant, given their

ubiquity in the corpora. TFIDF "assumes that the most discriminative features are those that

appear frequently in the current document [in this case, post] and rarely in other documents"

across the corpora under investigation (Zong, Xia, and Zhang 2021, 35). In a 2016 survey of

articles on research-paper recommender systems, TFIDF was the most common content

weighting measure (Beel et al. 2016).

After several iterations, I found that the best models were logistic regression for the UK

data and linear regression for the Mexico data. The logistic regression model was 94.24%

accurate at predicting the abuse classifications from the training set of UK data. The linear

regression model, used on the Mexico data, had an accuracy score of 97.65%. I have provided

the code used to conduct the analysis in Appendix C. I then applied these models to predict the

classification of the 1.3 million uncoded posts.

After obtaining this data and drawing out descriptive statistics, I use additional, hand-

coded thematic analysis to judge algorithmic accuracy.[140] I instructed Python to randomly select

500 tweets from the entire UK test corpus, posts that were classified by supervised machine

learning.[141] I then hand-coded those tweets to get my own measure of accuracy.[142] Of the 500,

465 were correctly labelled by the algorithm for a 93% accuracy. Though lower than the 94.24%

classification accuracy score generated by the machine learning algorithm, this is still a relatively

high accuracy score. Unfortunately, of the 34 tweets classified as abusive[143] by the sample, only

11 were abusive, a 32% precision for abusive posts. The Mexico sample did slightly better, with

34% precision for abusive posts. Importantly, three of the 34 UK posts were about abuse but

were not in-of-themselves abusive. By contrast, of the 466 posts coded non-abusive, 13 were

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[140] Utilizing some of the methods outlined by Ward and McLoughlin (2017), I calculated algorithm accuracy by hand-checking individual posts to determine whether they should be classified as abuse.
[141] It is worth stating the perhaps obvious caveat that though these posts are randomly selected, they represent only .049% of the automatically-classified UK data and may not reflect the entire corpus.
[142] As mentioned, the 94.24% accuracy score reflects the algorithm's ability to predict already-classified, training data. To measure the accuracy of the algorithm's ability to predict *new* data, I have to go through the predicted classifications myself.
[143] This includes posts that are VAP and VAWIP. I distinguish between VAP and VAWIP, as described in the typology, in the qualitative analysis.

miscoded or "false negatives." Thus, of the 24 true abusive posts in the sample, 46% were identified by the algorithm.[144]

For example, the algorithm correctly classified the following post, tagging Mhairi Black, as abusive: "No one should ever vote for the likes of this woman again imho. Anyone who disagrees with her extremist views is a c*nt. She is same sex attracted apparently but does not condone the abuse lesbians get for refusing to say they would have sex with a man claiming he is a lesbian." However, the following non-abusive post was also classified as abusive: "I Naz Shah MP call on the Indian government to end the siege and ask everyone to raise their voices for the people of #Kashmir." In addition, this post, also targeting Naz Shah, was classified as non-abusive despite its Islamophobia and targeted violence: "Loyal to the party that ignores the RAPE of CHILDREN? Why don't @UKLabour care about #children? "@NazShahBfd really? You disgusting wretch! #Labour is finished in the North so you haven't got a hope in hell #Rotherham."

Though the overall accuracy of the algorithms is quite high, the challenges in identifying abusive posts are particularly challenging for this project and other efforts to identify, classify, and analyze online abuse. These challenges are less significant for projects with a more limited definition or scope, such as those classifying all profanity as incivility. As I am interested in differentiating between violence, sarcasm, and hostile policy disagreement, it is perhaps less surprising that the algorithm is less successful at correctly identifying violence. In the UK, the algorithm appears to incorrectly classify some transphobic and racist posts as non-violent, while successfully identifying sexist posts as violence.

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[144] As a point of comparison, Amnesty International's 2017 study had a slightly lower accuracy. Only 44% of abusive tweets were detected by the algorithm (Stambolieva 2017, 1). Other studies either do not verify the accuracy scores with hand coding and/or do not share the accuracy of their algorithms.

Given the complexity of language and the fuzzy lines between rudeness, VAP, VAWIP, and other posts, I did not expect the algorithm to be highly effective at validly classifying posts. Therefore, and to understand not only the quantity of online violence, but the rhetoric targeting female politicians, I engage in qualitative discourse analysis: classifying and analyzing the rhetoric of social media posts. In this smaller study, I (i) correct for some challenges in the big N study; (ii) consider context; (iii) identify multidimensional and intersecting-discriminatory rhetoric; (iv) critically analyze how power affects and is reinscribed through online discourse; and (v) distinguish between VAP and VAWIP. Discourse analysis and expert interviews are not regularly paired with large N social media studies; by bringing these methods together, I hope to contribute to the growing methodological possibilities for social media analysis.

Following the big N analysis, I compiled descriptive statistics, identifying both how many and what percent of tweets were abusive for each political woman. I selected 10 women from the UK sample and 15 from the Mexico sample to qualitatively analyze, based on the number and/or percent of abusive posts they received. I then identified 700 true abusive posts from the UK sample and 300 from the Mexico sample, identifying 1000 posts in total that were *both* coded by the algorithm as abusive and verified as abusive through hand coding. In the Mexico sample, five women did not have a sufficient number of truly abusive posts to remain in the qualitative analysis, leaving the datasets from ten women from each case. In Chapters 7 and 8, I explore the patterns that emerge using thematic discourse analysis, informed by a critical, feminist lens.

CONCLUSION

In summary, to gather and analyze data for this project, I engage in a combination of qualitative thematic analysis and supervised machine learning, informed by expert interview

data. I first "train," or classify, 15,000 tweets from training samples on Mexico and the UK as

"abusive" or "non-abusive." I then use supervised machine learning to apply the training set to

the remainder of the data, separating English and Spanish language analyses. I then engage in

thematic, discourse analysis of 1,000 posts identified through the supervised machine learning

analysis. From this multi-part analysis, I am left with multiple sets of data and analytical findings:

(i) expert interview data; (ii) descriptive statistics on 1.3 million tweets across two cases; (iii)

qualitative analysis and classification of 15,000 posts in the training set; and (iv) thematic,

discourse analysis of 1,000 posts both machine-classified and hand-verified as abusive. The

interviews and training set inform the typology and big N analysis. The big N analysis

subsequently informs the discourse analysis. Together, these data illuminate how individuals are

differently targeted by discriminatory tropes online, providing a multi-faceted window into

intersectional, online violence.

CHAPTER 5: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Introduction

Jo Cox, Labour Member of Parliament, was assassinated on June 16, 2016. Her murder is best understood using a multidimensional and intersectional frame. Her death also prompted a national conversation in the UK, one that continues to this day, on violence in politics.

Cox was entering a public, constituency meeting at a library when a far-right extremist shot, stabbed, and ultimately killed her. The murderer was heard saying, "'Britain first, this is for Britain, Britain will always come first," while attacking her (Cobain 2016). "Britain First" is the name of Britain's far-right, fascist party formed in 2011. This party is ultra-nationalistic, Islamophobic, and xenophobic. The prosecutor litigating the case described the act as "premeditated murder for a political and/or ideological cause" (ibid). The murderer collected Nazi memorabilia, wrote a magazine letter noting his "faith that the white race will prevail," and had previously made racist comments to local taxi drivers (Cobain, Parveen, and Taylor 2016). As such, "the bias in this case appears to have been driven by race rather than gender" (Krook and Restrepo Sanín 2019, 12). During his court case, the murderer yelled "death to traitors," reflecting a belief that Cox was a traitor or "collaborator" for her defense of immigration and European integration (Cobain, Parveen, and Taylor 2016). Though her murder may not have had a clear gendered motive, Cox had been subject to sexist violence before. Prior to her death, Cox received "communications of a sexual nature" and harassing messages that prompted increased security (Crockett 2016). Furthermore, while racism and related political ideologies appear to have motivated the assassination, gender has been central to the response.

In the five years since Cox's murder, acts and experiences of violence—including online violence—are often described in light of the assassination. When Labour MP Tulip Siddiq received online death threats in June 2016, she commented: "I felt I could handle it and not let it

get to me. What I do know is that what happened to Jo has changed the environment" (Saner 2016). Diane Abbott also described the changing credibility of potential threats after Cox's murder, saying: "I've always said it'll never happen […] but when Jo Cox was killed, that was really shocking to me because I had to face the fact that it could happen" (Reeves 2019, 223). These parallels are not only perceived but also voiced by perpetrators. Stella Creasy, for example, was targeted with politically-motivated online violence due to her support for abortion access. In one message, a user said that she would "die like Jo Cox" (Proctor 2017).

Cox's murder encouraged debates and discussions around violence, including online violence, against women in politics in the United Kingdom. Her assassination remains the backdrop on which these conversations are held. In the years since her murder, women MPs have publicly shared their experiences of violence, Parliament has commissioned and released reports on gendered political violence, and a series of organizations have added VAWIP to their mandates. Interview data and an analysis of public debates underscores the role of sexism in violence against women in politics, the prominence of online abuse, and the intersectional dimensions of this violence.

(A VERY BRIEF) HISTORY OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women have had a relatively long history of formal political representation in Westminster, with the first woman, Nancy Astor, taking her seat as a member of parliament in 1919 soon after the success of the 1918 campaign for women's suffrage (Reeves 2019, 11). Nonetheless, women made up a small proportion of MPs, less than 10%, until the 1990s following the Labour Party's implementation of all-women shortlists and its reintroduction[145] in

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[145] A tribunal found that men's exclusion from some candidate lists violated the Sex Discrimination Act but the Act was amended in 2002, leading to the reestablishment of all-women shortlists (ibid).

2002 (Childs and Krook 2012, 89). By 1997, women constituted nearly 20% of all MPs. As of

March 2021, there are 220 women MPs in the House of Commons, the highest proportion of

women in the history of the House, at 34% (Uberoi et al. 2021, 3). In the 2019 General Election,

87 Conservative women (24% of all Conservative MPs), 104 Labour women (51% of Labour

MPs), 16 SNP women (33% of SNP MPs), and 7 Liberal Democrats (64% of all Liberal Democrats

MPs) were elected to the House of Commons (Duncan and Busby 2019). Nonetheless, a greater

proportion of the Welsh Parliament, 47%, as well as the Scottish and Northern Irish

parliamentary bodies, 36%, are women (ibid).

Paralleling other countries, the growing number of women MPs has contributed to the

increased visibility of violence against women in politics (Restrepo Sanín 2020, 303). It is not

clear from existing data if increased attention to VAWIP is a result of new actors or a new

phenomenon. However, it is likely to be some combination. Women have experienced sexism,

backlash, and violence since their entry into the political space, including in the U.K. (Reeves

2019; Swinson 2018, 38). Still, many women describe that abuse and intimidation and have

become worse due to highly partisan and aggressive politics as well as due to the internet

(Stewart 2018b; Specia 2019). In particular, as a more diverse cohort of women has been

elected to parliament, violence has increasingly targeted LGBTQ and BAME women MPs

(Stewart 2018). In interviews with women politicians and activists these same patterns

emerged: violence is gendered, intersectional, and increasingly virulent in the online space.

INTERVIEWS AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS

I utilized interviews, both those I personally conducted as well as those published in

news articles, podcasts, and op-eds, to map how VAWIP is understood by experts. In interviews

and statements, activists and MPs spoke about the following topics related to VAWIP: their

experiences, online dimensions, gendered dimensions, the relationship between violence and feminism, intersectional components, and the impacts of violence.

Experiences

A growing number of female Members of Parliament are speaking openly about their experiences with violence, especially online violence. Ruth Davidson, LGBTQ and Leader of the Scottish Conservative Party, explained that "the sheer volume" of abuse "can sometimes make you feel a bit hunted online" (2018). Paula Sherriff, Labour MP through 2019, told the Guardian, "I have had so many, too many, threats to detail" and described abuse as "virtually constant" (Hill and Davies 2019). Luciana Berger stated, "The threats come all the time" and classified them further as "never-ending" and unavoidable (ibid). And though more women are coming forward about their experiences of abuse, online violence appears to have a "silencing effect," according to Seyi Akiwowo, founder of Glitch UK (Crockett 2019). Furthermore, publicly discussing one's experiences of violence can prompt more abuse (Kuperberg 2021), as I will discuss in the final chapter of this dissertation.

In interviews and public statements, women discussed their own experiences. However, some seemed reluctant to focus on the abuse they had received, preferring instead to talk about other MPs, the environment broadly, or to draw links between VAWIP and violence against non-political women. Many reinforced their strength and capacity to deal with violence, describing their "thick skin" and underscoring that they could handle abuse.

Online Dimensions

Similarly, many MPs describe the pervasiveness of online violence. Intimidation and

abuse against women in British politics did not begin with the internet. In *Women of*

Westminster: The MPs who Changed Politics, author MP Rachel Reeves describes violent letters

sent through the post, including a death threat sent to Barbara Castle and a bomb to Judith Hart

(Reeves 2019 110, 143). Yet, those who have been in politics for multiple decades, including

Harriet Harman and Dianne Abbott, have spoken on the changes in abuse resulting from the

proliferation of social media. In a Westminster debate in July 2017, Dianne Abbott commented

that when she first became an MP in the 1980s, "if someone wanted to attack an MP, they had

to write a letter—usually in green ink—put it in an envelope, put a stamp on it and walk to the

post box. Now, they press a button and we read vile abuse that, 30 years ago, people would

have been frightened even to write down" (Kwiatkowski 2020). In an online talk, MP Margaret

Hodge similarly noted the overwhelming nature of social media abuse and the resulting changes

compared to when she entered politics (Hodge 2021). She specifically mentioned the anonymity

and lack of platform responsibility as deterministic factors.

Even in the online era, violence appears to have changed over time. Stella Creasy

describes that since she first began receiving death threats in 2013, online abuse has gone from

"bad to worse" (Creasy 2021). In 2021, *The Guardian* published an article releasing guidelines

from a content moderator handbook from Facebook (Hern 2021) that, among other things,

showed that Facebook permits death threats against MPs and other "public figures." Creasy

responded that women of color and non-binary people are particularly targeted in this "worse"

online environment (Creasy 2021). Indeed, it has become unusual for MPs to describe their

experiences of violence and *not* mention the online space.

Increasing violence takes place both on and offline. In 2019, the Metropolitan police

reported that threats against Members of Parliament had increased significantly, a 90% rise

from 2018 which saw more than a doubling in reported crimes against MPs from 2017

(Fitzpatrick and Grierson 2019). According to Cressida Dick, Metropolitan police commissioner,

"people from minority communities and women" were disproportionately affected by abuse

(Sabbagh and Syal 2019).

Most contemporary cyberfeminisms push back against techno-deterministic narratives,

recognizing that there are features of the internet that make abuse more impactful and wider

spread but resisting the argument that it is *because* of the internet that harassment and abuse

takes place. Nonetheless, technological determinism is a prevalent discourse in interviews, op-

eds, and public speeches. Baroness Prashar, a crossbench member of the House of Lords, spoke

on the floor of the House of Lords on this issue. She raised concerns over online abuse against

women in public life, "especially women and the LGBT and BAME communities. Emboldened by

the mask of anonymity, people feel free to say what they like, no matter how harmful or

distressing" (2019). She also laid blame at the internet's echo chambers which "leave people

unprepared to deal with views other than their own" (Ibid).

However, like cyberfeminists, MPs recognize the links between offline and online

violence, even as they acknowledge the added challenges of anonymity, volume, speed,

transnationality, and virality of online violence. MP Tulip Siddiq, for instance, noted that "just

because it's online doesn't make it any more acceptable than if it was in print or said verbally"

(Saner 2016). Luciana Berger, recognizing online violence as part of a continuum of violence she

experiences, said: "It has presented itself in lots of different ways, via email, online, on Twitter,

on social media, on blogs, in person, to my face, abusive phone calls to my office —

unfortunately you name it, I have seen it" (Hawley 2019). The application of offline violence laws

to the online space, including the Communications Act of 2003, further encourages the linking of

offline and online violence crimes as I will explore later in this chapter.

Gendered Dimensions

Since the early discussions of intimidation and public life, lawmakers have emphasized

the gendered dimensions of violence, in part because these issues have been understood in

relation to the murder of Jo Cox. In academic work, as mentioned in Chapter 2, research on

violence against politicians often compares the experiences, or amounts of abuse, between men

and women. This research has contributed to our understanding of violence against politicians

as well as violence against women in politics, but often conflates the two. By contrast,

journalistic and non-profit reports on VAWIP have explored the phenomenon of violence

empirically, letting the experiences of women politicians speak for themselves rather than place

meaning on women's experiences only as they compare with those of men.

Taken together, research on violence against politicians in the U.K. has primarily focused

on women's experiences, online and offline. More women MPs have come forward to discuss

their experiences with abuse and several perpetrators against women MPs have faced criminal

charges for online and offline threats.[146] In a *Stylist* article on women leaving politics, Teresa

Pearce—a Labour MP who stood down in the December 2019 election in part due to the anxiety

and panic attacks she suffered from abuse—commented on the gendered nature of political

violence. She said, "One of the problems is that there are people who hate MPs, and there are a

lot of people who hate women, so women MPs get it worse […] People "don't like women with

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[146] That is not to say that charges have not been filed against those who assault men in politics. In 2019, a Brexit supporter was sentenced to a month in prison for hitting Jeremy Corbyn with an egg and a separate man was sentenced in 2021 for spitting on Corbyn (Badshah 2019; CPS 2021). In other cases, offenders have sent threats to multiple MPs, including a case in which a prisoner sent threats to Boris Johnson, Teresa May, Jess Phillips, and Rosie Cooper (Rodger 2020b). The prisoner threatened to kill Johnson as well as rape MPs Phillips and Cooper.

voices. So they try and silence you" (Crockett 2019). Caroline Spelman, a Conservative MP who

also decided to leave Parliament in 2019, wrote about the explicit and gendered nature of

online violence against women in an op-ed for *The Times*. She wrote, "Sexually charged rhetoric

has been prevalent in the online abuse of female MPs, with threats to rape us and referring to

us by our genitalia." Spelman continued, "it is therefore not surprising that so many good

female colleagues have decided to stand down at this election" (Spelman 2019).

Sexist violence also takes the form of anti-feminist violence. Many female MPs in the

U.K. identify as feminist. Unlike in the U.S. where conservative politicians are less likely to self-

identify as feminists (Schreiber 2018), Conservative MPs—including high-profile politicians such

as former Prime Minister Teresa May and Home Secretary Priti Patel—describe themselves as

feminist[147] (Spratt 2019; Joseph 2020). Supporting policies related to women's rights, including

women's increased representation and abortion rights, appear to prompt perpetrators to

engage in violence. This is consistent with research that finds that feminist women are targeted

with violence with the goal of silencing feminist perspectives and, by extension, the women that

vocalize them (Cole 2015; Krook 2020).

Jess Phillips, for example, described that in response to speaking about "the rights of

women," she received daily online attacks, including rape threats and death threats directed at

her children (Intimidation in Public Life 2017, 27). Even advocating for women on British

currency—hardly a feminist issue as a woman, the queen, is currently on all banknotes—was

viewed as a feminist stance. Peter Nunn sent MP Stella Creasy violent rape threats in response

to her support of the campaign to put Jane Austen on the ten-pound banknote (Press

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[147] It's worth noting that not all feminists agree with these characterizations.

Association 2014). In his messages to Creasy, Nunn referred to her and fellow campaigners as feminists as well as "witches" (ibid).

Abortion, and the abortion in Northern Ireland specifically, is an issue that has prompted greater violence for feminists. Creasy was specifically targeted with online threats in response to her support of abortion rights (Proctor 2017). In June 2018, in a speech in the House of Commons on reproductive rights in Northern Ireland, Creasy said, "I make no apologies for putting the safety and dignity of women first as part of equality between the sexes. I know the abuse I will get online for saying so […]." In the fall of 2019, she was harassed offline by anti-abortion campaigners who placed a photograph of her face next to an image of an alleged aborted fetus (Wood and Duncan 2019). Creasy said that she was being targeted not only for her views on abortion rights, but also "explicitly for being pregnant" at the time of the harassment (ibid).

Heidi Allen also spoke at the emergency debate in 2018 on abortion in Northern Ireland. In response to Allen sharing her personal experience of terminating her pregnancy, she received "absolutely vile" abuse. She later described a "particularly nasty" email referencing her abortion (Jarvis 2019). Soon after, she resigned her seat stating that she was "exhausted by the invasion into my privacy and the nastiness and intimidation that has become commonplace" (ibid).

Intersectional Dimensions

In 2017, Amnesty International released findings from a study of online abuse against women MPs. Collecting and analyzing almost one million tweets in the six months prior to the June 2017 General Election, researchers found that (i) Diane Abbott received over 45% of all abusive tweets classified; (ii) even excluding Abbott, BAME women MPs received more abusive

posts than their white women colleagues; and (iii) abuse was at its highest levels right before

the election, nearly doubling right before Election Day (Dhrodia 2017).[148] Amnesty's research

made an impact, with politicians, activists, and organizations amplifying the findings.

Due in part to Amnesty's study, widely read and referenced in public documents,

politicians—in discussions of online violence and violence against politicians—reference

multiple forms of discrimination and, to an extent, intersectional discriminations. Still, violence

is more commonly classified as gendered than any other form of discrimination or any other

combinations of discriminations. The nature of violence is echoed in multiply-marginalized MPs'

descriptions of the abuse they face. Diane Abbott, on online VAWIP, says: "I get a double

whammy. I'm abused as a female politician and I'm abused as a black politician. And also the

volume of abuse is much greater. It's the volume of it which makes it so debilitating" (2018).

Margaret Hodge, speaking both to intersectional discriminations and context, described

a flood of abuse after the October 2020 release of the Equality and Human Rights Commission

investigation on antisemitism in the Labour Party. The investigation found evidence of "unlawful

acts of discrimination and harassment" according to the 2010 Equality Act. Hodge, who turned

over her social media access to Community Security Trust,[149] shared that in October and

November 2020 she received 90,000 mentions on Twitter and Facebook, largely negative. These

included "endless death threats," so many that "you almost start to get used to it" (Hodge

2021). She also noted the findings of a report comparing antisemitism against John Bercow, Ed

Miliband, Luciana Berger, and herself. Even though Bercow and Miliband are more visible

political actors, Berger and Hodge received 15% more abuse (ibid). This is likely due to

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[148] As of February 2017, despite providing police with "email addresses and postcodes," no perpetrators had been apprehended for the sexist and racist violence targeting Abbott.
[149] CST is a Jewish organization that focuses on combatting antisemitism in the U.K.

intersecting sexism, anti-feminism, and antisemitism. Hodge described that far-right groups, including the U.S.'s Daily Stormer site, were perpetrators of a significant amount of online violence against her. Users made claims that "Jews are responsible for feminism" and used similar arguments to intersect sexism and antisemitism (ibid).

Notably, multiply-marginalized MPs are not the only political leaders speaking out about the multiply-discriminatory nature of violence. Nicola Sturgeon, Leader of the Scottish National Party, described that abuse crosses a line when it becomes threatening or discriminatory, including sexist, homophobic, and racist (Sturgeon 2018). Catherine Mayer, who founded the UK's Women's Equality Party ties violence facing women and in particular, women of color, to "bias, hatred, [and] inequality" that has been elevated by Conservative leadership (Specia 2019). In parliamentary debates, as I will analyze later in this chapter, the role of racism and homophobia are regularly—though not as frequently as sexism—included in discussions of violence and intimidation against public officials.

SALIENT DISCRIMINATIONS

Interviews, non-profit reports, and public statements identify the following salient discriminations in the U.K.: racism, with an expansive definition that also includes anti-religious discrimination including Islamophobia and antisemitism (Kuperberg 2021); homophobia and transphobia; and ageism. Women are also targeted due to geography, which is often aligned with class and classism, as well as feminist ideology. As with Mexico and other cases, context matters. Contentious political events and statements can set off perpetrators of online violence, both domestically and internationally.

Racism

Studies on online VAWIP have shown that BAME women are especially and uniquely

targeted (Dhrodia 2017). Women leaders of color state that they experience both racism and

sexism, in addition to other forms of discrimination. Events in recent years, including Black Lives

Matter protests (2020), backlash to those protests, and the 2018 Windrush scandal[150] illustrate

that racism is present and salient in the British context.

Racism, in the U.K. context, includes discrimination on the basis of ethnic identity as well

as religious affiliation. The term BAME—Black, Asian, Minority Ethnicity—parallels the term

"people of color" used in the United States, though previously, the term "Black" had been

applied to all BAME people in the U.K. Despite the broad definition of racism in the U.K., anti-

Black racism and misogynoir retain a particular salience in the British case. As Palmer (2019)

explores, understanding violence against Black women in politics requires a consideration of

race, gender, class, and nation. Misogynoir in the British class has deep historic and imperial

roots, underpinning the erasure and violation of Black women in public space but also serving

the "processes by which the nation is making sense of itself" (514).

In the 1965 Race Relations Act, the government made discrimination "on the ground of

colour, race, or ethnic or national origins" unlawful in a public place. The act was repealed by

the Race Relations Act of 1976 and then further replaced by the Equality Act. The 2010 Equality

Act further established age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage, pregnancy and maternity,

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[150] The Windrush scandal refers to a political scandal in which individuals were fired due to immigration standing, denied health care, deported, and threatened with deportation. Those affected were disproportionately of, or children of, the "Windrush generation" which refers to the Empire Windrush ship that arrived from the Caribbean to the U.K. in 1971. Many of those affected were born in the U.K. The Home Office review of the incident identifies the role of institutional racism ("Windrush scandal: Home Office showed 'ignorance' of race" 2020).

race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation as "protected characteristics." In this

legislation race includes color, nationality, and ethnic or national origins.[151] The Equality Act

defines direct discrimination as discrimination against another person because of a protected

characteristic when an individual is treated less favorably than others. Indirect discrimination

includes the application of discriminatory provisions, criteria, or practices that put individuals

with protected characteristics at a disadvantage.

According to the British Social Attitudes Survey, since the 1980s respondents have

reliably indicated that racial prejudice has increased or stayed consistent over time (Kelley,

Khan, and Sharrock 2017: 5). As of 2017, 44% of those surveyed responded "yes" to the

question of whether or not some races or ethnic groups "are born harder working," indicating

ongoing racist attitudes (ibid, 9). A YMCA study from 2020 found, moreover, that 95% of Black

British people surveyed between the ages of 16 and 30 have experienced and witnessed racist

language in educational settings (Merchant 2020).

Racism has also proliferated on the internet, affecting BAME Brits. Written from the U.S.

perspective, but applicable to racism and hate groups in the U.K. (as well as transnational groups

that operate across both contexts), Klein (2012) shows how the features of the online space

have allowed for recruitment and concealment of hate speech into more mainstream internet

culture (429). Hateful misinformation has transformed into just "information" or even

"research."[152] Klein calls this "information laundering," illustrating how racist information is

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[151] In the Equality act, religion is distinct from race as a protected characteristic, though the Act recognizes that individuals can be members of multiple protected groups simultaneously.
[152] This can be seen in conspiracy theory group QAnon's call for potential followers to "do their research," which often leads individuals to online misinformation.

"laundered" into seemingly mainstream online information and then into public knowledge

(435).

In addition to ethnic racism, anti-religious discrimination is considered a form of racism

in the U.K. The All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on British Muslims as well as the APPG

against Antisemitism have both invoked understandings of race in defining antisemitism and

Islamophobia. The APPG's definition of antisemitism uses language from the 1976 Race

Relations Act, while the 2018 APPG on British Muslims defines Islamophobia as "rooted in

racism" (Kuperberg 2021). Similarly, British intersectionality scholars identify antisemitism and

Islamophobia in the U.K. as forms of racism (Knapp 2005; Prins 2006).

Antisemitic and Islamophobic violence against women in politics is relatively well

documented. Jewish women MPs have been some of the most frequently and violently targeted

formal politicians. Research shows that Jewish female MPs are subject to a greater amount of

far-right violence than Jewish male MPs (Stephens-Davidowitz 2019). In particular, Luciana

Berger—former Labour MP who was highly visible and vocal opponent of Jeremy Corbyn's

leadership—received such significant sexist and racist threats that she required police

protection. Six people have been criminally convicted and two imprisoned as a result of the

antisemitic hate crimes and death threats levied at Berger (Guardian News 2019). In a speech on

the floor of the House of Commons, Berger said that she has been sent messages that she is a

"parasite," has "two masters," to "go back to Israel," and "suggesting that she is a traitor."

Jewish and Muslim MPs are subject to violence that includes sexist and racist rhetoric,

both separately in distinct social media posts as well as together (Kuperberg 2021). Using

Twitter data on seven political women from 2018, I show that Jewish MPs are more likely to

receive sexist violence while Muslim MPs are more likely to receive racist violence. Both groups

are targeted with violent posts that incorporate multiple forms of discrimination, primarily

sexism and racism, including references to disloyalty. Furthermore, I argue that both groups are

subject to semiotic violence when their accounts of their experiences with abuse are

delegitimized (ibid).

Just as VAWIP is not consistent across different political actors, it is not consistent

across time. Existing research shows, and interviews support, the notion that violence increases

in response to contentious political moments and public statements (Van Sant, Fredheim, and

Bergmanis-Korāts 2021: 37). In the wake of Black Lives Matter protests in the U.K., for example,

and after coming forward with their support, Black female MPs were "condemned a deluge of

racist abuse and death threats" (Oppenheim 2020). In Northern Ireland, journalist Patricia

Devlin, a crime reporter who writes on paramilitary groups, was sent an online rape threat

targeting her baby, signed off by a neo-Nazi group affiliated with some sectarian groups (Clinton

2020; Posetti, et al., 2021: 24-25). Finally, parliamentarians and police also describe the

contentious context around Brexit as a mobilizing force for online hate (Travis 2017).

Homophobia

The U.K. has a long history of homophobia, with male homosexuality only partially

decriminalized with the passage of the Sexual Offences Act of 1967.[153] Lesbians, on the other

hand, were invisible, "ignored" by the law (Shariatmadari 2017). As Tatchell (2017) writes, full

de-criminalization in England and Wales was only achieved in 2003, with the updated Sexual

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[153] The law de-criminalized acts in private only and for consenting adults above the age of 21. The law also did not go into force immediately; prosecutions went up after the law was put into place (Tatchell 2017). Furthermore, the law only applied to England and Wales and was not adopted in Northern Ireland and Scotland until the 1980s.

Offences Act. Scotland's law did not come into effect until 2013. The first out LGBTQ+ Member

of Parliament was Chris Smith, who came out in 1984 after being elected in 1983 (Magni and

Reynolds, 2021: 12). Over the last four decades, a total of 62 out LGBTQ+ MPs have been

elected and 24 Lords appointed (ibid).

Throughout the last decade, social norms on LGBTQ+ rights have been changing, with

"seismic" shifts on gay rights (Magni and Reynolds 2018: 714). Until the New Zealand general

election in 2020, the U.K. held the title of the "gayest parliament," with 45 LGBTQ+ MPs in

Westminster (Reynolds 2019). Magni and Reynolds (2018) find that LGBT identity does not have

a negative, statistically-significant effect on vote share (716). By contrast, in several of their

models being a woman or BAME does have an effect on vote share. As the authors summarize,

the results show that "the electorate did not punish LGBT candidates because of their sexual

orientation" (717). In a 2021 piece using experimental methods, however, the authors find that

respondents penalize transgender, HIV positive, and gay candidates (Magni and Reynolds 2021,

19). Women, by contrast, are advantaged by respondents.

Despite political progress on several fronts, homophobia is still a present and salient

discrimination in British society. In their 2017 report based on YouGov polling data, Stonewall

UK found that 20% of LGBT people "have experienced a hate crime or incident because of their

sexual orientation and/or gender identity in the last 12 months" (Bachmann and Gooch 2017).

Homophobia is also present in discourses of violence against Members of Parliament,

particularly online. In February 2021, after posting a Valentine's Day message about his

boyfriend on Instagram, MP Luke Pollard received a torrent of homophobic abuse (Padgett

2021). Out women MPs have also shared experiences of gendered homophobia online. Joanna

Cherry, in a 2021 podcast interview said, "The abuse I receive is because I'm a woman and

because I'm a lesbian and because I'm a woman and lesbian who speaks her mind" (Rhodes and

Cherry 2021).[154] Mhairi Black, a young lesbian MP for the SNP, has spoken in the House of

Commons about the regular misogynistic and homophobic violence she receives (Young 2020).

She shared, "There is just no softening how misogynistic and sexist the abuse is."

MPs are also subject to homophobia from their colleagues in Parliament. In January

2020, Lord Maginnis said the following about lesbian MP Hannah Bardall: "Queers like Ms

Bardall don't particularly annoy me." Maginnis denied the allegation until a recording was

published. Bardall, after filing a complaint about the abuse, received death threats, one by letter

and one by email (Rodger 2020a).

I separate homophobia and transphobia here, despite their links. With the rise of trans-

exclusive radical feminists[155] some have constructed lesbians and transwomen as adversaries,

specifically asserting that increased trans rights would be harmful to lesbians and ciswomen. By

separating these forms of discrimination I do not intend to validate that perspective, but instead

to give space to the unique challenges faced by trans people in the U.K., incorporating but also

unique from forms of homophobia. It is important to mention that there are many LGBTQ

and/or cis-feminists who stand up for trans equality, including political women. Mhairi Black, for

example, has publicly defended trans rights, stating, "In this debate, I'm the person with the

power and I'm not leaving trans people behind" (Powys Maurice 2020b).

Transphobia

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[154] Cherry had received rape and death threats from party members prior to the interview. She was sacked from the front bench for opposing reform of the Gender Recognition Act, though she states that she simply wanted to debate the act.
[155] While TERFs have been around for a while, they have risen in prominence over the last decade.

Contemporary trans rights in the U.K. have been discussed in relation to—among other things—policy change, particularly around the Gender Recognition Act. LGBTQ activists and allies assert that currently, the Gender Recognition Act "amounts to a medical intervention" because it requires trans people to wait two years, "reflecting" on their "acquired gender" in order for a legal change to be granted (Rizvi 2018). Trans people must also be medically diagnosed with "gender dysphoria" to be granted legal recognition. These processes medicalize trans identity and treat "trans identity as akin to mental illness" (Ibid).

In September 2020, the government did not adopt a plan that would have enabled trans and nonbinary people to change official documents through self-identification. Instead, medical diagnosis remains a requirement. Stonewall, a leading LGBTQ+ organization in the U.K., condemned the decision as falling "far short of its promise" ("What does the UK Government announcement on the Gender Recognition Act mean?" 2020). Despite the government's initial intention to reform the Act, there was significant resistance including, perhaps surprisingly, from supposed feminists. This group, also known as trans-exclusive radical feminists (TERFs)[156] are a vocal and not-so-small minority that claim women's equality and empowerment requires exclusively cis-women spaces.

The trans-exclusive discriminatory ideology expanded significantly in recent years and has been sustained through the internet. As sociologists Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent (2020) explore, these discourses not only seek to conflate gender and sex in outdated and problematic ways, but they also have racist undertones (168). Importantly, not all feminists advocate

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[156] Some prefer not to use this term as it has been described as misogynistic. However, it is descriptive and truthful, perhaps with the exception that my understanding of feminism is not compatible with trans-exclusion. As Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent (2020) explain, these groups prefer to refer to themselves as "gender critical" (681) while trans-inclusive feminists, which I consider myself to be, use the term TERF (ibid, 683).

transphobic policies (Rizvi 2018), but many self-identified feminist politicians have adopted a "both sides" approach to this issue, with harmful implications for trans and nonbinary people (see Rhodes and Cherry 2021; Hodge 2021). Particularly visible, Liz Truss, the Women and Equalities Minister since 2019, has made a series of public statements echoing trans-exclusive rhetoric (Powys Maurice 2020a).

Transphobia is a significant and salient discrimination in the U.K. which has become differently visible with TERF social (and traditional) media presence. According to a report by Stonewall in 2018,[157] 40% of trans people have been involved in a hate crime or discriminatory incident because of their gender identity in the previous twelve months (Bachmann and Gooch 2018, 4). Young trans people, 18 to 24 years old, are especially likely to experience violence (ibid, 8). 79% of victim-survivors do not report crimes to the police; some raise concerns that reporting will lead to additional discrimination (ibid). As Chief Executive of Stonewall Ruth Hunt writes, "The situation is not acceptable and it has been made worse by increasingly frequent attacks in the media and on social media from a vocal minority" (ibid, 4). In a study by NGO Ditch the Label, analyzing 10 million social media posts over multiple years across the U.S. and U.K., researchers found that transphobia is widespread on social media, with at least 15% of all posts on transgender issues and identity classified as transphobic (Hunte 2019). Alongside transphobic rhetoric, users in the U.K. were most likely to mention politics (33% of posts) and race (24%), particularly directed at black transwomen ("Exposed: The Scale of Transphobia Online" 2019).

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[157] While TERFs have been a vocal group in the UK for some time, their presence has been more pronounced since 2017 and public consultancies around the Gender Recognition Act (Pearce, Erikainen, and Vincent 2020, 678).

Though there are 12 LGBQ women MPs (compared to 44 male LGB+ MPs) there are no openly trans or non-binary MPs in the House of Commons (Duffy 2019; Reynolds 2020). However, trans issues remain visible and contentious. Cisgender (or "cis") MPs are targeted with online violence when they express support, and opposition, for trans rights. Nadia Whittome, a queer MP who has supported trans rights, explains that she receives more violence from transphobes than from the far right (Reynolds et al. 2021). That said, just as with other groups, public transphobic violence directed at cis MPs is likely not as threatening or targeted as similar violence against trans people. However, the public and visible nature of this violence can harm trans and nonbinary people as well as deter them from political activities

Age and Ageism

As with the Mexican case, age and sexism intersect to form unique barriers for women politicians. Though I focus primarily on the vulnerability of younger women, older women also face specific constraints in the political sphere. Ageism and sexism intersect to construct women as differently incompetent: older women are portrayed as senile and younger women as childish. Older women can be invisibilized, where younger women are hyper-visible or "girled" in their treatment in parliament (Cherry 2021: 127, 158).

Though invisibility is not neutral, and can have negative implications, younger women are especially vulnerable to online prejudice and abuse. Cara Hunter, member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, explained: "My very existence as a young 24-year-old woman in politics is personal and insulting to them [her abusers]" (Dawson 2020). Labour and BAME MP Nadia Whittome, the "baby" of the House after her election in 2019 at the age of 23, has described receiving racist violence and death threats, including hate mail and online violence (Oppenheim

2021). In a podcast interview in March 2020, Whittome shared that a fellow MP had called her

"chicken," which she attributed to being a young parliamentarian (Brand and Whittome 2020).

Age, race, and gender shape discrimination for young women but also intersect in perpetrators.

Young BAME MP, Zarah Sultana, who receives significant racist and Islamophobic violence, said

that "the recurring theme I've identified is that they're generally older white men" (ibid).

Young women in the U.K. general population experience more online abuse and

harassment than women in other age brackets. According to a poll of British women, 22% of

women said that they had experienced online abuse at least once (Dhrodia 2017). 33% of young

women, ages 18 to 35, had experienced online abuse ("Online abuse of women widespread in

UK" 2017).

Youth may also be tied to ideology, and to feminist ideology in particular. As Childs

(2004) finds, young Conservative MPs were described by their Labour colleagues as "more

feminist" than older members of their party and perhaps more open to a feminized politics (8).

As I will now discuss, feminist identification is associated with greater violence for women in

politics.

Ideology and context

Feminist ideology, geography, and contentious debates and public statements do not

intersect as discriminations, but do matter in terms of contextualizing women's experiences.

Intersectionality scholars, especially those researching cases outside of the U.S. and comparative

cases, emphasize the role of context in situating intersectional research (Bowleg 2008; Choo and

Ferree 2010; Solanke 2009; Dhamoon 2011; Yuval-Davis 2006; Jhappan 1996; Townsend-Bell

2011). As Chang and Culp (2002) write: "Oppression or subordination cannot be understood

outside of the context in which it occurs" (489). As with other cases, the U.K. is geographically

heterogeneous, with differing class and education in different areas. These differences

correspond with different political and social identities. Many scholars separate London and the

greater London area from the rest of the U.K. but there are also differences between larger and

smaller towns as well as different nations within the UK: Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and

England (Denham 2018; McKay 2018). Historic industries and party presence, such as Labour

allegiance in Northern English towns with histories of mining and union membership, also play a

role. Geography may impact online VAWIP based on where perpetrators live, where MPs'

districts are located, and where MPs are from. For example, Jess Phillips explained that physical

threats against MPs are worse not only for religious minority MPs, but specifically those from

Northern England (Interview 2018). In a report for Atalanta, Phillips also shared that her regional

accent impacts the gendered abuse she receives (Barboni and Brooks 2018, 35).

In addition to geographical and temporal contextualization, feminist ideology impacts

women's experiences with online violence. Ideology and political viewpoint functions differently

than identity, identity-based discrimination, and contextual variables. As mentioned in Chapter

1, feminist ideology represents a "grey area" between violence against politicians and violence

against women in politics. Democracy should involve the exchange and critique of ideas, but this

differs from identity-based discrimination. Yet, ideologies become more salient in different

contexts, including increased political polarization related to Brexit, and may be more prone to

backlash depending on the identities of the personal wielding them.

The data for this dissertation was gathered while the U.K. was negotiating its exit from

the European Union following the 2016 referendum. I collected social media data in 2020,

during the covid-19 pandemic. There is likely *never* a period in which context does not matter,

but these events have been correlated with larger proportion of Twitter abuse by other scholars

(Farrell et al. 2021).

DEBATES, EDMS, AND PUBLIC STATEMENTS

As mentioned, the assassination of Jo Cox served as a catalyst for discussions on

violence against politicians. The Committee on Standards in Public Life, in response to then-

Prime Minister Theresa May's request in July 2017, produced a report on intimidation against

candidates in the 2017 General Election entitled "Intimidation in Public Life." This report

developed a standard understanding of intimidation, based in part on a roundtable discussion

by former parliamentarians and academics. In the House of Commons, abuse and harassment

have been incorporated into this broader classification of "intimidation in public life."

Social media abuse was central to discussions of intimidation in the report. Lord Bew, in

his introductory letter to the report, writes: "The widespread use of social media platforms is

the most significant factor driving the behaviour we are seeing" (7). The report authors find that

social media has changed the scale and anonymity of communication, pace and tone of debate,

and volume as well as ease of communication (32). Thus, even though hostility is not a new

phenomenon, social media has "shaped a culture in which the intimidation of candidates and

others in public life has become widespread, immediate, and toxic" (31). The report also

describes the unique targeting and impact of intimidation underrepresented groups. The

authors note that female, LGBT, and BAME candidates are "disproportionately targeted in terms

of scale, intensity, and vitriol," importantly adding that "this problem is even worse for those

who fit into multiple categories" (54).

Parliamentary records consist of several sources: early day motions (EDMs), debates, written statements, urgent questions, and other references. Each of these sources differs in level of formality, spontaneity, length, and role of political leaders, such as the Speaker or a Cabinet Minister. EDMs, for example, are limited to one sentence of up to 250 words. As such, like Twitter posts, inclusion of nuance or additional detail is often limited and notable when it occurs.

From November 2015 through November 2020, Hansard—the official report of parliamentary debates—recorded two references to "violence against women in politics" as well as 4 written statements, 2 debate titles, and 24 references to "intimidation in public life" in both the House of Lords and House of Commons. Most of these mentions are in 2018 and 2019, with some early references in 2017. The role of sexism, unique targeting of women politicians, and social media are frequently mentioned in written questions, debates, and responses to intimidation in public life. The role of multiple discriminations is discussed but is less often the primary subject of an MP's remarks.

The two references to "violence against women in politics" come from Andrea Leadsom (October 2018) and Vicky Ford (June 2019), both in reference to the Cox Report: "The Bullying and Harassment of House of Commons Staff Independent Inquiry Report," compiled by Dame Laura Cox and commissioned in July 2018. This report focuses on bullying and harassment within parliament, by and against staff and MPs. The report itself does not mention VAWIP. However, in response to an urgent question posed to Andrea Leadsom, MPs engaged in a broader discussion of gender-based violence. Following Dame Cheryl Gillan's mention of the 2018 IPU report on sexism and harassment against European parliamentarians, Andrea Leadsom responded that she had attended a Commonwealth meeting of women politicians "to talk about violence against women in politics, and the numbers are shockingly bad."

Months later, in the 2019 debate on implementing the policy suggestions of the Cox

Report, Conservative MP Vicky Ford contributed: "Everyone is entitled to work free from

harassment and abuse in an environment that promotes dignity and respect, yet sexual

harassment and violence against women in politics is a long-standing phenomenon in the UK

and in many other countries." Interestingly, in both official mentions of VAWIP, the

phenomenon is stated in reference to a regional and global phenomenon rather than violence

specific to the UK or Parliament. In neither case did the speakers, or other Members of

Parliament present, incorporate a discussion of technology or the role of other forms of

discrimination, including racism and religious discrimination, in violence against women in

politics.

There were 24 references to "intimidation in public life" on public, parliamentary record

between 2016 and 2021. These references occur over 15 separate debates. As shown in Table

5.1 below, social media and women are most commonly discussed in relation to intimidation in

public life.

TABLE 5.1: "INTIMIDATION IN PUBLIC LIFE" IN PARLIAMENTARY RECORD						
Date	Debate	House	Social Media	Impact on democracy	Women/ Gendered	Multiple discriminations
14 Dec 2017	633: Business of the House	Commons				
18 Dec 2017	633: Harassment in Public Life	Commons	X	X	X	X
11 Jan 2018	788: Social Media: News	Lords	X	X	X	
5 July 2018	644: Equal Franchise Act 1928	Commons			X	
5 Feb 2019	788: Role of Women in Public Life	Lords	X		X	X

Date	Debate	House				
6 Feb 2019	654: Public life: Intimidation	Common	X	X		
14 Feb 2019	795: Combined Authorities (Mayoral Elections)	Lords				
7 March 2019	796: International Women's Day	Lords	X		X	
13 March 2019	656: Intimidation in Public Life	Commons		X		
24 Apr 2019	658: Topical Questions	Commons	X			
9 May 2019	797: Conduct of Debate in Public Life	Lords	X	X	X	X
16 May 2019	660: Business of the House	Commons			X	
21 May 2019	660: Intimidation in Public Life	Commons	X	X	X	X
30 Oct 2019	800: Early Parliamentary General Election Bill	Lords		X	X	X
10 Feb 2020	671: Topical Questions	Commons	X			
Total		**Commons: 9 Lords: 6**	**9**	**7**	**9**	**5**

These numbers cover the entire debate and do not take into account that some debates have multiple counts of each of these topics. The emphasis on the gendered and online nature of violence is mirrored in media and non-profit reports.

Online Space

The online space is central to discussions of political violence, including VAWIP, in the UK. Politicians discuss their own experiences with online abuse on the parliamentary record and cite non-governmental reports on online violence.

In addition to debates on intimidation of public officials, MPs have sponsored and signed EDMs—one of the primary opportunities for politicians in the UK's party-dominant system to reflect individual policy preference (Nugent 2019)—on online violence. Two EDMs on cyberbullying, which are identical in content but tabled twice, in the 2015-16 and 2016-17 sessions, describe the multi-discriminatory nature of online violence. Both EDMs note that "much of this bullying is sexist, racist or homophobic in nature." However, these motions emphasize the primary target of cyberbullying—young people—and do not incorporate online violence against politicians. 38 EDMs mentioning social media have been tabled from 2015 to 2020, most of which are not relevant to online VAWIP. Of these, eight EDMs discuss social media and violence and over half of these (5 of 8) recognize the prevalence of racism, Islamophobia, and antisemitism online directed at celebrities, immigrants, and the general public. Two of the eight EDMs discuss online hate and abuse generally.

Some of these discussions are included in the Online Safety Bill, previously named the Online Harms Bill. The bill, first proposed in April 2019 by the May government, seeks to limit harmful content online including terrorist material, content related to children, and online misinformation (Hern 2020). In December 2020, following a consultation period, the Home Secretary and Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport published an updated Online Harms White Paper. This white paper proposes an independent regulator that defines hate crimes and offensive material online and guides both social media companies as well as users to flag, report, and remove this material. The regulator would be "responsible for setting and enforcing rules prohibiting speech that is illegal (think: child porn and hate crimes) or socially damaging (think: cyberbullying and intimidation)" (Haggart and Tusikov 2019).

The government seeks, through the proposal, to establish a "duty of care" on social media and other online services (Tinsman 2020). The white paper describes the gendered

nature of online harassment, incorporating research that women experience online violence

that is more often sexual in nature. It does not, however, include mentions of racism (except

broadly when discussing hate crimes), intersectional discriminations online, or online violence

against politicians. After the Conservative government pledged that the bill will be introduced

during the 2020-2021 parliamentary session, a draft of the legislation was published on 12 May

2021 (Norris 2021).

Some academics and activists have raised concerns over the proposed bill, arguing that

the government's proposed policy lacks clarity and will reduce free speech (Tinsman 2020). For

example, as Stanford Cyber Policy Center's Daphne Keller explains, the drafted legislation

requires platforms to remove "harmful" content while leaving up "democratically important"

content, without offering a detailed distinction of the two (Keller 2021). This gets at the heart of

debates over what is abusive or violent speech. Though governments can play an important role

in defining these differences, as I discuss in this dissertation's final chapter, defining online

violence is challenging. Unfortunately, passing the responsibility to tech companies to define

these terms and develop these distinctions is unlikely to lead to resolution. Other aspects of the

bill have more support, including the duty of care approach which brings together platforms and

users through external regulation (Woods 2018).

Gender

Most research—academic, practitioner, and journalistic—on violence against politicians

in the U.K. includes the role of gender on violence (Dhrodia 2017; Ward and McLoughlin 2020;

Collignon and Rüdig 2020). As mentioned, in public debates, the impact of violence on women

is emphasized as often as social media and the consequences of violence on democracy. Some

research shows that women receive more violence than their male colleagues or than their similarly-situated male colleagues.[158] Other research indicates that men are subject to more online incivility than women. However, these studies often use a broad definition of abuse (see Ward and McLoughlin 2020). These results may be mixed, but there is consensus that women and women politicians are subject to unique, often sexualized, violence.

Though this dissertation focuses on public, online violence, largely from anonymous or unknown members of the public, this gendered violence online is part of a broader landscape of violence for women in politics. More visible since #MeToo, women also face misogyny and sexual harassment from male politicians but do not feel that legal and party mechanisms will lead to resolutory justice (Morgan 2020). Helen Jones, Labour MP until 2019, in the 2019 debate on intimidation in public life in the House of Commons, stated: "We should never, ever accept this behavior as normal, in the same way that in the same way that we should never accept threats of violence as normal. It is part of a continuum aimed at women MPs. It is time it stopped […]."

Multiple Forms of Discrimination

Perhaps the most influential research emphasizing the impact of multiple forms of discrimination on VAWIP comes not from a government report, but from Amnesty International's 2017 piece, "Unsocial Media" (Dhrodia 2017). The report is mentioned several times on the floor of the Commons and incorporated into reports on online violence and intimidation in public life, underscoring the intersectional dimensions of online violence. For

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[158] See, earlier in this chapter, that prominent Jewish, women MPs were targeted 15% more than their male counterparts.

example, Joanna Cherry summarized the report in a Commons debate and emphasized, "There is a real issue about discrimination against women discouraging young women, women of colour, women of religious or ethnic minorities, LBTI women, and women with disabilities from entering politics."

Glitch UK, founded by Seyi Akiwowo, brings together intersectional violence, violence against women in politics, and the online space. The Centenary Action Group, established to mark the centenary of partial suffrage to women in the U.K., has partnered with Glitch UK to push for legislation to combat online harassment as well as harassment in the House of Commons under the hashtag #ThisIsNotWorking. Despite the prominence of intersectional discrimination for non-profit organizations, and consensus that sexism is not the only discrimination impacting women politicians, multiple, intersecting discriminations are discussed considerably less in public debate than sexism or the online space. This omission has ramifications for mitigation strategies, including laws, that emphasize one form of discrimination. Acts of violence directed specifically at Black women, such as a fellow MP telling Dawn Butler she did not belong in the lift as it "isn't for cleaners" (Oppenheim 2016), cannot be adequately understood without an intersectional framing.

LAW AND COURT CASES
Regional Laws and Policies

Throughout the period of data gathering for this project, the U.K. was negotiating its exit from the European Union. Even prior to Brexit, the U.K. was an outlier for its Euroscepticism and lack of European pride relative to other European nations (Risse 2010, 43). However, even with

Euroscepticism, the U.K. has been bound to European regulation, part of conversations at the

regional level, and even after Brexit is still a member of the Council of Europe (COE).[159]

While European regional organizations have not been as active on the issue of VAWIP as

Latin American and pan-American organizations, they have raised awareness and called for

action across several bodies. For example, the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers

adopted CM/Rec(2019)1 in March 2019 which works to prevent, combat, and condemn sexism.

The recommendation has a subsection on online hate speech, references intersectional

discriminations, and includes a mention of women in politics. The recommendation describes

that women in positions of power are "particular targets for sexism as they are perceived to

have deviated from social gender norms that exclude women from public spaces or authority"

(12).

Resolution 459 (2020), from December 2020, focuses specifically on violence, sexual

harassment, and sexist violence against women in politics, building off of previous COE

recommendations and conventions. This resolution offers guidance for governments and

parties, particularly at the local level; it does include social media but does not mention

intersectional discriminations (Drenjanin 2020). Unlike the stated influence of regional

recommendations on Mexico's VAWIP legislation, COE initiatives are not referenced in

parliamentary discussions on intimidation and abuse but may still impact U.K. politicians and

policy.[160]

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[159] Importantly, unlike the European Union, the Council of Europe's recommendations are not binding on member states.

[160] Reponses to #MeToo were also concurrent in the British parliament and the European parliament (Krook 2018b; Berthet and Kantola 2021).

Domestic Laws and Policies

The U.K. currently has no laws against VAWIP or online VAWIP. Despite finding

significant abuse against women MPs, particularly marginalized women, parliamentarians have

expressed reluctance over passing legislation that applies specifically and exclusively to

politicians. However, existing laws have been employed against perpetrators of online VAWIP.

In the Intimidation in Public Life Report, the authors stress that laws pertaining to

communication are "indifferent to the mode of communication," applying equally to online

posts, in-person speech, and physical letters (57). Submissions to the report authors "urged the

Committee not to recommend the introduction of new criminal offences relating to the

intimidation of MPs and candidates," though the report did not specify the justifications for this

position (60). Legislators have been wary of establishing criminal laws that apply to them and

not their constituents, particularly given that non-politicians are also subject to online violence

(Miller 2020b). While existing communications law has been applied to the online space, the

Committee "heard concerns about the sufficiency of the current law to deal with intimidatory

behavior on social media" (59). In a 2019 floor debate on online homophobia, MP Angela Eagle

cited a Law Commission report that "only 3% of malicious communication offense are ever

prosecuted." Between 2017 and 2019, the first two years of the UK's police unit on online

harms, only 1% of investigated cases led to charges (Vaughan 2019).

Despite these challenges, there have been several prosecuted cases of online violence

against female politicians. The Communications Act of 2003 and Crime and Disorder Act 1998

have both been applied to cases of online VAWIP, the former for online abuse broadly and the

latter for religiously and racially-motivated harassment or stalking. The Communications Act of

2003 states that a "person is guilty of an offence" if he[161] "sends by a means of a public

electronic communications network a message or other matter that is grossly offensive or of an

indecent, obscene or menacing character; or causes any such message or matter to be so sent."

This provision was used to charge Peter Nunn for his abuse of Stella Creasy, which included

threats to rape the MP ("Peter Nunn jailed for Twitter abuse of MP Stella Creasy," 2014).

Racially or religiously aggravated harassment and stalking are offences enumerated in the 1998

Crime and Disorder Act as well as the 1997 Protection from Harassment Act. The Racial and

Religious Hatred Act of 2006 enumerated additional offences including acts intended to stir up

religious hatred. In 2014, Joshua Bonehill-Paine sent former MP Luciana Berger antisemitic

threats while out on bail for other antisemitic crimes. His messages to Berger included

messaging that she would "get it like Jo Cox" (Harpin 2018b). Bonehill-Paine was charged with

racially-aggravated harassment (Harpin 2018b; Oliver 2016).

In another case, John Nimmo, a separate harasser of Creasy and Criado-Perez (Laville

2017) was subsequently charged for violence against Berger. Nimmo sent multiple online

threats, including a death threat to Berger three weeks after Jo Cox's murder and a threat to

blow up a mosque (Harpin 2018a). Nimmo pled guilty to charges brought under the

Communications Act of 2003, sending "grossly offensive," threatening, and false

communications (Laville 2017). In this case, the court increased Nimmo's sentence to 27

months; an increase was applicable because of the racial motivation underlying the charges

(ibid).[162] This was not the only case of a multiple-offender. A neo-Nazi member was charged

with "intention to commit terrorism," an offline criminal offense, for buying a weapon to

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[161] Note: the law itself says "he."

[162] Though this case is an example of justice for target-survivors of VAWIP, the judge did not employ a gender-sensitive lens. As Barker and Jurasz (2021) explain, the judge described the harm as serious but "entirely predictable." The judge also did not engage with the sexualized nature of the online posts.

murder Rosie Cooper, an MP for West Lancashire (Grierson and Greenfield 2017). He was also

charged for sending offensive online messages to Luciana Berger (*Intimidation in Public Life*

2017, 6). These patterns of violence, targeting multiple high-level female politicians, follows

patterns of violence and stalking of public figures described by psychologists in the U.S. context

(Fein 2018).

It is noteworthy that offenders have been charged not only with grossly offensive online

communication, but with racially and religiously aggrieved harassment. Online violence against

women, where it meets the grossly offensive standard, is prosecutable under the law. However,

it was not until March 2021, in the wake of the murder of Sarah Everard, that police pledged to

record misogyny as a hate crime, one step closer to classifying misogyny as a hate crime in the

judicial sphere. It remains to be seen what this will mean in practice. The Law Commission, an

independent commission that recommends legislation and legal changes proposed in

September 2020 that sex or gender should be considered a protected characteristic, added to

existing hate crime understandings (Grierson 2020). A consultation on the topic ended in

December 2020 and legislation on police tracking of misogyny will be added to final

recommendations (Walker, Wolfe-Robinson, and Elgot 2021).

Stella Creasy, who has campaigned for misogyny to be a hate crime for years, stated,

"this [recording misogyny by police] does not create any new crimes […] this recognizes when

people are motivated by their hatred of women to attack people [so that] we can better detect

those crimes and change the culture" (Creasy 2020). However, as sexism is not specified in

existing law, online violence against women and VAWIP cases do not benefit from additional

legal consideration unless racial or religious discrimination is present.[163] Homophobic attacks are

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[163] There is no hate crime law for England or Wales, but judges have "enhanced sentencing powers" for crimes that are on the basis of race, religion, sexual orientation, disability, or transgender identity (Scott

similarly not specified, though the House of Commons has debated adding homophobia to legal

provisions on communications (Macdonald, Holland, and Jap 2019).

The House of Commons has worked to implement proposals from the Intimidation in

Public Life Report. In line with the report's recommendations, Twitter, Facebook, and Google

are publishing broad trends on reported content. Furthermore, Facebook has a dedicated

channel for MPs to report abuse (ibid). The government has committed to putting forward

legislation making intimidation of candidates and campaigners an electoral offense ("Summary

of Progress Made against the Report's Recommendations" 2020). However, the government has

yet to do so and has also not committed to introducing legislation that will make social media

companies more liable for hate on their platforms. As of February 2021, some MPs have

advocated for an Online Harms Bill, building off the Online Harms White Paper (May 2019;

December 2020) aiming for greater regulation of online violence and specifically, more

accountability from tech companies for the abuse published on their platforms. Legislation on

online harms will not be limited to violence against politicians or VAWIP but would likely be

applicable to online violence against politicians.

Finally, all political parties with elected members in Westminster have codes of conduct

which prohibit harassment ("Summary of Progress Made against the Report's

Recommendations" 2020). The Liberal Democrats specifically have an online code of conduct for

members, which apply to its online events; hate speech, intimidation, harassment, and bullying

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2021). Scottish law recognizes hate crimes and expanded its Hate Crime Bill in March 2021 to include "stirring up hatred" of protected groups. However, Scotland's law does not include sex, sexism, or misogyny (Clements 2021). Northern Ireland has no hate crime law but does have official definitions and police do record hate crimes. In addition to the categories listed above, Northern Ireland considers sectarianism a hate crime. Since 2016, the number of racist hate crimes in Northern Ireland has overtaken the number of sectarian hate crimes ("Northern Ireland: Police report reveals 'worrying' rate of hate crime" 2020).

are identified in this code of conduct and violators will have their responses removed. In cases of significant violation, members can be expelled from the party and reported to law enforcement authorities. The Labour Member's Pledge includes conduct "both on and offline" and a pledge to "stand against all forms of abuse." The Labour Party additionally has social media and gender discrimination codes of conduct for members.

Unlike the above codes of conduct, the code of conduct for Conservatives applies to those formally representing the Party. This code does not mention social media. However, the party does have social media complaints rules, established in 2018, which apply to members of the Conservative Party. The Plaid Cymru code of conduct include anti-harassment policies, which identifies sexism and racism as forms of harassment and recognizes that harassment can take place online. The Green party and SNP do not include substantive mention of the internet in their codes of conduct; both do however have anti-discrimination policies.

CONCLUSION

Violence against women in politics—though more commonly referenced as a subset of the gender-neutral "intimidation in public life"—is a topic of relative prominence in the U.K., particularly since the death of Jo Cox and the publishing of the Intimidation in Public Life report (2017). Within these conversations, the online space and the unique targeting of women are central. Not surprisingly, these same themes were repeated in my interviews with political women and civil society leaders. To a lesser extent, though still present, some laws, public statements, and interviews also recognize the increased vulnerability of multiply-marginalized women. Though the U.K. has not passed a law on VAWIP, existing laws have been used to charge perpetrators of online and offline violence. Efforts continue to codify social media policy, with a particular focus on online harms, that could also be used to tackle online VAWIP.

CHAPTER 6: VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS IN MEXICO

INTRODUCTION

Ana Gabriela Guevara, an Olympic silver medalist for track and field, served in the

Mexican Senate from 2012-2018, losing her seat at the age of 41. In 2016, in the middle of her

Senate term, she was beaten by four unknown assailants while riding her motorcycle on the

highway. The motive of her attack remains unknown. She described her assault in a press

conference on Facebook Live, during which users targeted Guevara with misogynistic hashtags,

including #GolpearMujeresEsFelicidad, or "to hit women is happiness," and

#SiNoTeGolpeaNoTeAma, "if they don't hit you they don't love you" (Barrera and Rodríguez

2017, 42). Jenaro Villamil, the president of Mexico's public broadcasting system, described the

social media attacks against Guevara as a second act of violence; first, she was attacked

physically and then, attacked by the discourse of hatred that followed (Villmail 2016). Following

her assault, she spoke at the Senate with physical markers of her injuries, including a black eye,

declaring: "I want people to see me. This mark is a reminder that I will do whatever it takes to

combat violence against women" (Beauregard 2016).

Elected officials are more commonly—or at least more publicly—targeted with offline

VAWIP, as in the case of Guevara's physical assault, in Mexico than in the UK. FEPADE (the

Special Prosecutor's Office for Electoral Crimes) registered over 200 cases of VAWIP in 2016,

including attempted attacks, realized attacks, aggression, and assassinations as part of the 2016

elections. This included the assassination of 17 women candidates ("17 candidatas asesinadas

en el actual proceso electoral" 2016). In the lead-up to the 2021 election, 14 of the 91

assassinated political individuals were women (Redacción Animal Político, 2021).[164]

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[164] These data are somewhat contested. According to the Observatoria Ciudadana Todas MX, 21 of 35
candidate (as opposed to all political) assassinations were committed against women ("Han asesinado a
21 candidatas: es el proceso electoral más violento contra mujeres" 2021).

But acts of violence span the online and offline spaces, changing shape across contexts and platforms. As in Guevara's case, an offline assault can be accompanied by online violence. Furthermore, though her initial attack may or may not have been gender-based, online attacks mobilized misogynistic tropes against her. Guevara also responded to the incident by connecting her assault to other experiences of violence against women. In her subsequent time in the Senate, Guevara presented proposals and spoke publicly about developing a "national crusade against violence against women" (Arvizu and Morales 2016).

In 2019, Deputy Nayeli (Nay) Salvatori, a young Deputy who gave birth during her electoral campaign, spoke on the floor of the Chamber about online sexism with her child in her arms. In the session dedicate to International Women's Day, Salvatori described receiving online violence that invoked gendered stereotypes, including calling her a bad mother for her work in politics (Ramírez 2019). In a 2015 interview with ParlAmericas, Deputy Alicia Ricalde also spoke about her experiences with violence, specifically an electoral challenger who denigrated her, used misinformation and false gossip against her, and harassed her family members on social media (Ricalde 2015). She is now working with other legislators and regional organizations to stop VAWIP.

These incidents echo online violence experienced by other women in Mexican politics. According to a National Electoral Institute (INE) report on VAWIP in the press and on social media, 52% of local candidates experienced VAWIP on social networks and 80% were subject to violence by the press (Humphrey 2021). Luchadoras, a Mexican feminist organization working on cyberviolence, determined that 62% of online assaults against female politicians during the 2018 election were gender-based (Paredes 2018).[165] Mexican parties and governments also have

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[165] It is worth noting that 18% had no gender component and 20% did not have information to classify; the overall percentage of gender-based assaults could thus be higher than 62%.

a history of using bots and paid trolls to (i) engineer a fake community of support online, (ii) defame opposition candidates; (iii) sabotage anti-government protests; and (iv) target activists with abuse and death threats (Orcutt 2012; Treré 2016, 131-132)

Political women in Mexico, and across Latin America, have observed that as political governance activities have increasingly moved online—both because of developing technologies and the Covid-19 pandemic—VAWIP has also moved online. For example, during a Zoom video call in May 2020, Senator Malú Mícher began to change her clothes, not realizing her video camera was on. Before she was alerted by her colleagues, her nude torso was displayed on camera. Mícher apologized for the unprofessional conduct, noting that she was acclimating to the technology. A screenshot of the call was later leaked, possibly by one of her colleagues, and shared over social networks, "unleashing mockery and comments" from internet users (Grupo Zócalo 2020). Violence pertaining to this event, several months later, is present in the big N test corpus that I analyze in the following chapters.

In November 2020, an online forum on violence against women—online due to Covid-19 restrictions—conducted by state and local women politicians in Durango was interrupted by men who showed their genitals, began masturbating, and insulted those at the forum ("Mostraron sus genitales e insultaron" 2020). One of the counselors present, Paulina Monreal Castillo, said following the attack: "Today I was a victim of gender-based political violence [...] The insults were not only for me, they were for all of the women who have the determination to leave the [private] sphere where men believe we should remain" (Monreal Castillo 2020). Comments below Monreal Castillo's recorded statement included users writing "the kitchen is that way," "great, fucking old bitches, they want equality and this is discrimination against men," and "feminazi, fragile feminist, you think everything in your life is violence against you."

Thus, despite the continued visibility of offline violence against women politicians,

women in Mexican politics are subject to online VAWIP across a variety of settings. These acts of

violence cross over to the offline space and offline violence is replayed and remade visible

online. With the growing use of online platforms, to connect with constituents and conduct

governance activities, online VAWIP appears to be becoming more prominent.

(BRIEF) HISTORY OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Mexico's first quotas were voluntary political party quotas. The first party quota was

established by PRD, Mexico's historic left party, in 1993 (Krook, Denham, and Gurrolla Bonilla

2014, 6). At that time, Mexico was nearing the end of 71 years of hegemonic party rule under

the Industrial Revolutionary Party (PRI). The 1997 and 2000 elections, in which the PRI lost its

legislative majority and presidential power, are considered the culminations of regime change,

from a competitive authoritarian regime to a democracy (Levitsky and Way 2010, 160).

In the wake of this democratic transition, feminists mobilized for gender equality in

politics. The legislative quota, established in 2002, required that no more than 70% of

candidates on candidate lists were of the same sex (Krook, Denham, and Gurrolla Bonilla 2014,

6). The quota was altered in 2008 to no more than 60% candidates of one sex and again, in

2014, to parity at the federal and state legislative levels (ibid, 7).

Gender quotas, and related affirmative action measures, have been strengthened by the

legislature, government bodies, and the courts. First, the legislature increased the quota from

2002's 30% to a "parity" in 2014 (Alanis 2020, 37). Second, the electoral tribunal (TEPJF) and

National Electoral Institute (INE) have regularly closed loopholes exploited by political parties to

thwart women's representation. For example, parties could send women to knowingly

unwinnable districts or pair female candidates with male alternates[166] while still complying with

the quota but effectively undermining women's political advancement (Hinojosa and Piscopo

2018). Parties could also avoid quotas through "democratic election processes", or primaries,

within the party (Alanis 2017, 159). These loopholes were struck down by the court, leading to

successive increases in women's descriptive representation.

Third, the electoral tribunal has expanded the initial quota's applicability, from the

national legislature to the subnational level. In 2019, parity was extended to "parity in

everything" with a constitutional reform (Alanis 2020, 37). The success of these reforms was

demonstrated in the 2021 elections, in which women made up 43% of gubernatorial candidates

and 51.5% of all candidates (Piscopo and Vázquez Correa, 2021). After the Electoral Court

(TEPJF) made several adjustments to plurinomial groupings, the LXV Chamber of Deputies

legislature, based on the 2021 election, achieved total parity, 250 women and 250 men ("TEPJF

ajustó asignación de curules para lograr paridad en Cámara de Diputados" 2021).

In the last several years, the commitment to parity has been refined and renegotiated.

In a recent ruling, government bodies established that parity guidelines extend to candidacies

for governor (García 2020). This extension went into effect for the June 2021 elections, which

included the elections of 15 governorships. Women won and were elected governor in six of the

fifteen states (Piscopo and Vázquez Correa, 2021). As with other Latin American contexts,

feminist civil society mobilization (Krook, Denham, and Gurrolla Bonilla 2014, 10), as well as

critical actors in the legislature and judiciary (Peña and León Ramos 2017, 63), have been

integral to women's increased political representation. In particular, *Mujeres en Plural*, a group

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[166] In this latter strategy, women serve as candidates and win elections, thus complying with the quota.
They then resign and their male alternate takes their place. These women are disparagingly referred to as
Juanitas.

of feminist politicians, activists, and journalists, has pushed for political gender equality. *Mujeres en Plural*'s activism contributed to changing legislation[167] and has raised awareness of violence against women in politics.

Mexico is the first country to institutionalize gender parity in all formal governance positions but, as Alanis (2020) writes, "women's increased access to elected office has had the unintended effect of increasing violence against them" (37). The 2021 election has been described as the electoral process "most violent against women" ("Han asesinado a 21 candidatas" 2021). Political actors, academics, and activists have drawn attention to the link between women's increased presence in politics, especially women serving in higher office, and VAWIP (Martínez 2016).

INTERVIEW DATA

During the fall of 2018, I conducted expert interviews in Mexico. I also attended a forum on state-level VAWIP in Mexico that coincided with my interview fieldwork. In addition to this trip, I conducted several interviews with non-profit practitioners and politicians as part of my master's thesis research in 2015. This dissertation also uses interviews conducted and published by other organizations, including the National Election Institute (INE) and Luchadoras. Interviewees shared insights on the following topics: the role of the online space in political life, the relationship between online and offline violence, and salient axes of discrimination.

The Role of the Online Space

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[167] In 2009, the network class-action lawsuit before the TEPJF, the Federal Electoral Tribunal, which at the time was led by María del Carmen Alanis (Piscopo 2021).

Experts in Mexico described the negative factors of the online space as well as the limitations of existing laws and policies around online abuse. However, they also recognized the positive contributions of social media; social media is a resource for women to gain access to a broader public with minimal cost. The benefits of social media apply not only to formal political candidates, but also to women in the broader political, public arena. For example, for feminists seeking to connect and increase awareness on femicide, social media has been an indispensable tool (Coronado Contreras 2020).

Hashtags, including #UnDíaSinNosotras (a day without us) and # UnDíaSinMujeres (a day without women) were used to mobilize support for a nation-wide women's strike on March 9, 2020, the day after International Women's Day. As Coronado Contreras writes, social networks serve as a means "to express ourselves freely" and to develop "sisterhood" (ibid). Women have also used the internet to create defense networks and to organize complaints (Interview 5 2018). As I will discuss further below, organizations have developed online tools, including leveraging existing social media platforms such as WhatsApp, to efficiently collect VAW and VAWIP complaints (Lovera 2020; Camacho et al. 2021). Finally, women who have less support from parties and/or fewer financial resources can especially benefit from social media (Maccise interview 2018).

However, social media networks have not been exclusively positive for women. Women suffer harassment online, including sexual objectification, doxing, and non-consensual image manipulation and video distribution (Interview 5 and 6 2018). In other cases, internet users create fake profiles with likenesses of women politicians, spreading misinformation that is then misattributed (Interview 6 2018). Furthermore, despite social media providing some low-cost access to women candidates and political leaders, these benefits can be unattainable for those

with the fewest socioeconomic resources (Pérez de Acha 2018). Those with the fewest

resources, and the communities they represent, may have limited access to the online space.

At the time of my interviews, several interviewees expressed some reluctance to talk

about online violence, saying that (i) they were not technological experts; (ii) offline violence

was a more pressing concern; and (iii) the law did not offer enough guidance about internet-

specific violence. In reports on VAWIP, social media is sometimes mentioned only in passing; in

other reports, it is not mentioned at all. Since 2018 however, due to the increased proliferation

of the internet as well as the Covid-19 pandemic, political actors have spent more time

governing online and have raised new concerns about abuse on online platforms.

Relationship between Online and Offline Violence

Interviewees largely agreed that the online and offline spaces are closely connected. Las

Luchadoras, framing online violence as a violation of women's human rights, write: "It is

important to recognize that violence online is real and transcends the 'virtual sphere,' impacting

victims personally, emotionally, professionally, and experientially" (Barrera and Rodríguez 2017,

38). Mónica Maccise, the executive secretary of INMUJERES (the National Institute for

Women),[168] explained that online and offline violence are "completely connected" (Interview

2018). In particular, online violence impacts offline actions, including campaigning, because

"online threats turn into offline threats."

One interviewee was less convinced of this link, pointing out that many acts of physical

violence against women in politics are better described as criminal violence, political violence, or

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[168] Maccise previously served as the head of the Gender Equality and Non-Discrimination Unit of the INE until 2019 and was the founder of the Supreme Court's Gender Equality Unit.

violence against politicians than VAWIP. She explained that organized crime, such as narcotrafficking networks, are responsible for many of the assassinations of women politicians. These groups target men and women and do not act out of a gendered motivation to suppress women's political rights, but instead target actors that are "not favorable to their interests" (Interview 5 2018). Her insights, while adding important complexity to this link between online and offline violence, centered on assassination rather than the broader spectrum of violence.

The feminist consensus in Mexico follows cyber-feminist literature discussed in Chapter 2: online violence is (i) real and (ii) part of a spectrum of violence experienced by women (Barrera and Rodríguez 2017; *Violencia Política a Través de las Tecnologías contra las Mujeres en México* 2018). A campaign run by Luchadoras and La Sandía Digital, an audiovisual feminist collective, declares that #EsVirtualyEsReal, or "[online violence] is virtual and is real." Their other hashtags include #NoEsTuCulpa, "it is not your fault," and #JuntasSomosMasFuertes, "together we are stronger." As part of their digital library, the organizations write: "*Amiga* [friend], if someone uses any technological means of communication or a social network to attack you or cause you harm, this is called violence."

In Mexico, at least 9 million women have experienced cyberbullying, particularly young women under the age of 30. Unlike cyberviolence statistics in other cases, and more in line with VAWIP, 86.3% of perpetrators of cyberbullying were strangers and only 11.1% were acquaintances ("¡Es virtual y es real!" 2021). The authors underscore the connection between online and offline violence in explaining that the internet is a "new public space" and that the same millions of internet users are "in the streets, schools, squares, and in our homes" emphasizing that "*machismo* online is an extension of *machismo* in everyday life" (ibid).

Salient Axes of Discrimination

Lagunas Huerta, a Mexican journalist specializing in the social condition of women in Mexico, wrote in 2014 that "being a woman, young, and indigenous and wanting to become a leader is not easy, but with determination it is possible" (75). Violence is an obstacle to women's political progress; sexism in conjunction and intersecting with other forms of discrimination, does not impact Mexican women uniformly. Interviewees described sexuality and gender identity, age, disability, and ethnicity as particularly impacting women's experiences with violence. For example, both Maccise and Havila noted that indigenous and trans women, though there have not been many, are subject to unique forms and quantities of violence (Interview Havila 2018; Interview Maccise 2018).

Like in the U.K., experts also note the role of age and visibility on violence. However, unlike in the U.K. and other case studies, interviewees in Mexico drew attention to less visible, and therefore less protected, politicians. Politicians who are "*más grande*," or more visible, are subject to more harassment yet the impact of violence can be mitigated in ways it cannot be for women who have less experience and knowledge of the political system (Interview Maccise). Visibility is also subjective. Though federal deputies have a national-level visibility in Mexico, local leaders, particularly multi-marginalized local leaders, may be hyper-visible and particularly vulnerable within their communities.

In expanding women's access to the political space through gender quotas, the courts have contended with the further exclusion of other groups. Teresa Havila, an electoral judge, explained the challenge in enforcing existing quotas for women due to overlapping and occasionally conflicting experiences of marginalization. In our interview, she described a disabled man who brought a case to the court when he was replaced as a candidate by a woman

due to the gender quota. Though the quota law referred to women's political rights, the Court

sided with him, recognizing the exclusion of people with disabilities from political life. As laws

have expanded recently to increase the number of LGBTTTIQ, disabled, indigenous, and Afro-

descendent individuals in politics,[169] the tension between inclusion of some and exclusion of

others will likely remain relevant.

LGBTTTIQ

Discrimination against LGBTQ+[170] people is widespread and significant in Mexico. In

2019, 117 LGBTQ+ people were killed in Mexico, the highest number since 2015 (Lopez 2020).

The nature of the murders is particularly and intentionally violent. Transwomen have been

especially targeted, constituting half of 2019's LBTQ+ murders (ibid). In a 2019 article, LGBTI

groups were described as "the most mistreated and discriminated" in the country (Correa 2019).

Mexico has only had a small number of out LGBTTTIQ politicians serve at the national

level. Notably, Mexico was the first country in Latin America to elect an openly gay legislator,

Patria Jiménez elected in 1997. However, in the years since—prior to affirmative action in the

2021 election—Mexico has only elected a handful of LGBTTTIQ representatives at the state and

national levels.

Data on LGBTTTIQ Deputies and Senators is not officially published by the government.

However, according to news reports, as of June 2021, there were three LGBTQ politicians in the

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[169] Legislation increased existing affirmative action policies for indigenous Mexicans and implemented new affirmative action policies for Afro-descendent, LGTBQ+, and disabled Mexicans. This legislation came into force for the June 2021 election.

[170] In this chapter, I interchangeably utilize LGBTTTIQ, the Mexican acronym, as well as LGBTQ and LGBTQ+, more commonly used in English-speaking countries.

Senate and Chamber of Deputies: Jesusa Rodríguez, Lucía Riojas, and Temistocles Villanueva

(Baldenea 2020). There are additional out politicians who have previously served or serve at the

subnational level. Benjamín Medrano Quezada, for example, was a Deputy from 2010-2013

before being elected the first openly gay Mexican municipal president in Zacatecas.

An INE report from 2020—" Subordinadas y bellas," described in further detail below—

focused on the media coverage and violence against young and LGBTQ+ candidates. The report

authors found little media coverage of LGBTTTIQ candidates. But, when they were covered in

the media, they often received sexualized and homophobic coverage. For example, after an

LGBTTTIQ candidate lost their electoral race, journalists used sexual double-entendres to

describe their defeat, including that they "doubled over" in loss (*Subordinadas y bellas* 2019,

34). The report authors also describe the limited amount of coverage as "making invisible"

LGBTQ+ candidates. Though a lack of coverage may seem positive, or at least neutral, this can

signify a "data void" which is a "vastly under-appreciated liability" online (Golebiewski and boyd

2018; Thakur and Hankerson 2021). In a data void, or where there is little to no online

information on a topic,[171] information can be more easily manipulated (Golebiewski and boyd

2018, 3).

Though they are relatively few, LTBTTIQ politicians in Mexico are subject to significant

violence, including online violence. Ana Lucía Riojas Martínez (Lucía Riojas), a young (aged 32)

Deputy for Mexico City, has been subject to misogynistic and homophobic online violence. In a

2018 report on online violence and harassment against women in politics, compiled by

Luchadoras, Riojas describes being attacked online for "her image, for having tattoos and

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[171] The term can also apply to seemingly value-neutral search terms that are only used by or used most frequently such that search engine algorithms prioritize, hate groups, trolls, and other sources of unhealthy information.

piercings, for being a woman, young and lesbian" (*Violencia Política a Través de las Tecnologías contra las Mujeres en México* 2018, 57). The violence is also political, intending to "control, silence, and attack the voices that speak, opine, and do not shut up" (ibid).

Online violence against Riojas increased following her participation in a feminist protest. In one case, violence directed at Riojas was sent to her mother; the message read, "Your daughter should be exterminated" ("La diputada federal Ana" 2019). Other users, targeting Riojas and her fellow activists, wrote: "Gross, only lesbians at these protests;" "just kill them already I don't care," "gather all those crazy women who rioted the city and kill them to stop them from doing their shit," "#feminazis," "rape them," "please rape and kill each one of them." In her response, filmed and disseminated on social media, Riojas said that she was going to initiate an investigation into those who threatened her and other activists because "they are not going to intimidate me, I will not be silent, and I will continue alongside many feminist partners" (Riojas 2019). In comments on Riojas's YouTube video in which she described this violence, users continued to spread violence, writing, "More massacres of *femilocas*," "she is a liar," "of course you hate men as a radical, feminist lesbian," and "you are a misandrist and a bitch."

Politicians and existing studies also note that homophobic violence is levied at non-LBTTTIQ politician. In some cases, this language is not abusive—notably when a heterosexual politician or individual is described as LBTTTIQ—but can be perceived as such. When descriptors such as "gay" or "lesbian" are meant as insults, perpetrators are both making a comment about the targeted individual as well as asserting heterosexism. This shares similarities with, but is not identical to, cisgendered men being called a "girl." Though "girl" in other contexts is merely descriptive of age and gender, in these contexts it becomes an insult, both serving to demean the man targeted as well as assert masculine superiority.

Powerful and visible women are more frequently described as "lesbians," which aims to delegitimize their role in politics and contributes to homophobic discrimination (Interview 5 2018). In some cases, women in politics are targeted because of their leadership roles, independence, and lack of reliance on men. In our interview, one political expert told me that when women are attacked, "everything has to do with sex" whether to accuse them of having lovers or, conversely, for being "bad in bed." According to one interviewee, these attackers claim that "women are lesbians even though they are not, with the intention to disqualify them. This is double violence because saying someone is a lesbian should not be grounds for offence or disqualification" (ibid). This interviewee underscores the point above that "accusations" about sexual orientation should not be offensive or disqualifying. When sexual orientation is weaponized in an offensive manner it is thus "doubly violent," harming both the LGBTQ+ community and the woman directly targeted.

Freidenberg (2017a) and Vázquez García (2011) also note women are subject to rumors regarding their sexual orientation as a means of discrediting them. For Latin American women candidates with husbands and children, opponents may circulate rumors of their infidelity or claim that they are bad mothers (Freidenberg 2017, 17). Women who are not married are more often subject rumors that they abandoned or aborted their children and/or that they are lesbians (Vázquez García 2011, 152). Though both of these pieces refer to violence offline, the online space has made the dissemination of misinformation easier and much more widespread.

Age

Existing Mexican laws on violence against women outlaw age-related discrimination, recognizing that women can be victims of violence at any age (General Law of Women's Access

to a Life Free of Violence 2007, 2021). The law further specifies that measures to combat

discrimination must consider age, language, social condition, sexuality, and other conditions

(Article 35). The average age of legislators in the Mexican Congress is 51, 24 years older than the

average Mexican citizen (Téllez del Río and Bárcena Juárez 2019). This age gap is not unique,

with the IPU reporting in 2018 that the global average age for legislators is 53 (ibid). At the

federal level, 6 of the 10 youngest deputies and 8 of the 10 youngest senators are women (ibid).

Among the general public, young people are more vulnerable to online violence than

their older counterparts. National statistics reported by CELIG, the Center of Legislative Studies

for Gender Equality, established by the Mexican Congress in 2018, shows that 67.6% of digital

harassment is experienced by Mexican internet users ages 12-29[172] ("Violencia digital" 2020).

Turning back to politics, expert interviewees near-uniformly described the relationship

between youth and vulnerability to violence. According to a report by Mexico's National

Electoral Institute (INE) on online violence during the 2018-2019 electoral process, young

candidates—both men and women—were often described as "unqualified" ("Subordinadas y

bellas" 2020, 3). For young women, the effect was magnified: young female candidates were

considered both inexpert and subordinate (ibid, 36). The report authors find that candidates

with intersecting vulnerabilities are exposed to more violence (ibid, 52). The report focused

specifically on young and LGBTTTIQ candidates, but recognized that other marginalized groups,

including Afro-Mexican, indigenous, and disabled women, are vulnerable to both VAWIP as well

as invisibility (ibid).

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[172] The report does not specify whether these data from the National Institute of Geography and Statistics (INEGI) refer to young women only.

Disability

People with disabilities face extraordinary hurdles in Mexico: 54% live in poverty and

20% cannot neither read nor write (Ríos Espinosa 2019). There are no data on politicians with

disabilities in Mexico, though it appears that there are relatively few politicians who have

disclosed a disability. Hugo Ruiz, a former boxer elected in 2018, is the first federal deputy with

a visual disability (Canchola 2018).

A new policy, announced in late 2020 and in effect for the June 2021 elections, calls on

parties to institute quotas for disabled, as well as for LGBTQ+ and Afro-Mexican candidates.

Some parties had previously worked to incorporate and support people with disabilities. By

2018, the PRI established an internal party quota for people with disabilities to hold

management positions within the party. As of 2018, three parties included disability in their

statement of principles and two (PRI and PRD) had a disability agenda as part of their party

platform (Carreón Castro 2018). Most disability political rights discussions and policies have

centered on voting, ensuring that Mexicans with disabilities are given the accommodations they

need to vote freely and, where possible, independently (Romero Guerrero 2021).

Due to the limited number of deputies with disabilities, and the absence of women

deputies with public disabilities, I do not include disabled deputies in the sample. Though I

looked for disablist discourses in the corpora, I found relatively little the big N sample, except for

posts that questioned women's rationality and referred to them as "crazy."

Ethnicity

Indigenous women often contend with multiple layers of discrimination in Mexico,

particularly as indigeneity, poverty, linguistic minoritization, and rural geography are correlated.

However, as one interviewee explained, indigenous women may be *less* exposed to online

VAWIP "because the internet and virtual networks are less 'active' in their communities"

(Interview 5 2018). As a result, she continued, "violence for rural and indigenous women is more

direct and is often related to gossip; they suffer first-hand from the community rather than

more broadly through social networks" (ibid). Though online violence against other women

politicians and public figures appears to be primarily perpetrated by strangers, experts

suggested that in indigenous communities, those known to the target primarily perpetrate

(predominately offline) violence.

In other interviews, and in reports on the topic, the multiple marginalization of

indigenous women is often mentioned, even if intersectionality is not named. This emphasis

may be explained by two factors: the size of the indigenous population relative to other

minoritized groups and the role of international organizations. According to the International

Working Group on Indigenous Matters (IWGIA), there are about 17 million indigenous people in

Mexico, amounting to 15.1% of the total population. The National Institute of Statistics and

Geography (INEGI), on the other hand, calculates that 25.7 million people, 21.5% of the

population, describe themselves as indigenous and about 7% of the population speak an

indigenous language. Mexico has the largest number, though not the largest proportion, of

indigenous people in the Americas ("Los pueblos y comunidades indígenas frente al Covid-19 en

México" 2020, 2).[173] International organizations have emphasized indigenous economic and

sociopolitical rights, providing data as well as developmental aid. Within regional bodies,

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[173] The next largest countries, Guatemala and Bolivia, have about 8 and 5.5 million indigenous citizens respectively, though indigenous people make up over 45% of the populations of both countries.

including the OAS, officials emphasize the unique needs and historic marginalizations of indigenous peoples.

Despite a domestic and international drive for indigenous rights, indigenous discrimination persists, alongside other related and intersecting discriminations. Nearly 70% of the indigenous population in Mexico live in poverty; 27.9% in extreme poverty. 43% of indigenous language speakers do not finish primary school. These numbers are stark in of themselves, even more so relative to national averages in Mexico. In 2010, for example, 40.2% of the indigenous population lived in extreme poverty compared to 10.4% of Mexicans as a whole (Global Americans 2017).[174] The majority of indigenous people in Mexico live in rural areas, but a higher percentage, compared to non-indigenous Mexicans, migrate within Mexico and to other countries due to limited socioeconomic opportunities ("Los pueblos y comunidades indígenas frente al Covid-19 en México" 2020, 2).

Furthermore, indigenous women are not only affected by indigenous discrimination and concomitant forms of discrimination such as classism and linguistic discrimination; indigenous women also face sexism and intersecting discriminations. According to INEGI statistics from 2007 and 2013, Oaxaca—the state with the largest proportion of indigenous people in Mexico— saw the most crimes committed against women. The TEPJF notes that indigenous women face obstacles in reporting gender-based violence including cultural, institutional, and linguistic barriers.[175] TEPJF's report, like other research, links gender-based violence in society with

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[174] I attribute the discrepancy between these figures and those in the previous sentence to (i) different data sources and (ii) different years. It is also possible that both define "extreme poverty" with different metrics, particularly as the World Bank changed the metric from those living under $1.25 USD per day to $1.90 per day in 2015 (Hoy 2015).

[175] Of these, linguistic discrimination—the court not having an appropriate translator—is the most specific to indigenous communities, as underreporting due to normalization and institutional weakness is endemic in all populations.

VAWIP, describing that "once [indigenous] women [in Oaxaca] assume public office, they suffer

harassment, are violated, and receive death threats" ("Violencia política contra mujeres de

comunidades indígenas," 2016, 13).

TEPJF researchers find that Oaxaca is one of the states "with the highest number of

cases of political violence against women and, especially, against women that belong to

indigenous communities" (ibid, 1). The electoral and political rights of indigenous women are

"doubly complex" as they must be guaranteed outside of the community as well as within it

(ibid: 4). Like other communities in Mexico, politics in indigenous communities is largely

considered the domain of men. Several high-profile cases, including the attempted assassination

of activist Elisa Zepeda Lagunas, in which her brother was killed and mother was injured,

highlight the intersections of sexism, feminist ideology and policy positions, and indigeneity

(Alanis 2020, 42).

Due to the unique concerns of indigenous peoples in Mexico, and indigenous women's

experiences with VAWIP, some have proposed using intercultural lenses in the judicial space,

ensuring that both indigenous legal systems and national or state law can be used in "dialogue"

with one another (ibid, 10). Previously, indigenous laws—according to the Mexican Constitution,

indigenous communities can use their own *usos y costumbres*, or customs and traditions—had

been the basis for self-determination. As a result, however, some indigenous communities were

not electing women. The Electoral Court ruled that indigenous customs "do not require the

exclusion of women" (Alanis 2017, 161) and thus cannot be used to deny women's

constitutional rights to attain political office (Bonifaz Alfonzo in Martínez de Castro León, et al.

2020).

Some public work on the multiple marginalization faced by indigenous women in Mexico discusses discrimination in reductionist ways, suggesting that indigenous community norms are not progressive enough to allow for indigenous women's successes. Others push back on this framing, recognizing that (i) not all indigenous women, just as is the case with majority-ethnic women, will not necessarily want to participate in political life and (ii) in some communities, community political work by women is already valued and recognized ("Violencia política contra mujeres de comunidades indígenas" 2016).

GOVERNMENT REPORTS AND LAWS

Violence against women in politics has been discussed and reported in Mexico for over a decade. Lucero Saldaña Pérez, a senator for the PRI party, presented the first legislation on VAWIP in 2012. Despite being reintroduced in 2014, due to a lack of consensus between the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, the proposal stalled. However, Saldaña Pérez's initial legislation was the basis for the eventual legal amendments that address VAWIP, introduced in 2019, approved in 2020, and effective as of April 14, 2020 (Vázquez Correa and Patiño Fierro 2020:4-5). Before 2020, even in the absence of formal legislative change, the Congress adopted a protocol[176] to attend to political violence against women. Non-profits, both domestic and transnational, as well as government bodies also began to collect and analyze data on VAWIP in Mexico and in the wider region.

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[176] The protocol was non-binding but still consequential. According to an expert involved in its preparation, the protocol especially had an impact on electoral institutions, generating a new view of jurisprudence, on encouraging political parties to elaborate their positions in party protocols, and in raising awareness (Interview 5, 2018).

Regional and Domestic Reports on VAWIP

The Organization of American States (OAS), and its Inter-American Commission of Women (CIM) and Follow-Up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI), have disseminated a model law, with definitions and empirical information on VAWIP (MESECVI 2017). Inspired by Bolivia's Law 243 as well as discussions with politicians and experts across the Americas, these documents have helped drive the region forward on the issue of VAWIP (Restrepo Sanín 2018; Restrepo Sanín 2020a). Latin America is considered the leader on this phenomenon, with Bolivian women starting to discuss and organize around VAWIP in the late 1990s (Kook 2020, 13). In 2007, Latin American countries—including Mexico—committed to the Quito consensus, which calls on participating countries to adopt legislation and institutional reforms "to prevent, punish and eradicate political and administrative harassment of women" in politics. Like Mexico's domestic reports, regional reports tend to focus on offline violence, though some contributions can be applied to the online space.

The OAS Model Law on Violence against Women in Politics has served as an example for national legislatures in Latin America. The model law does not mention the online space but does recognize intersections of inequality such as "the particular and contextual conditions of some women," including indigenous women (Inter-American Model Law 2017, 14). In a white paper issued in 2019—Combatting Online Violence against Women: A Call for Protection—the organization considers general online violence against women and recognizes that political women—as well as journalists "and other people who live the majority of their lives in the public sphere"—are uniquely targeted (7). The OAS acknowledges that online violence against women in politics is "particularly important" to combat, given that political life and political debates have increasingly moved online. However, the white paper authors also raise a key

challenge: there is not yet an established, agreed-upon definition of online violence against women in the Inter-American system (7).

Similarly, reports and legal instruments in Mexico focus predominately on the offline space, with some applicability to online violence. Government reports on VAWIP within Mexico have largely been produced by the National Electoral Institute (INE) and FEPADE (the Special Prosecutor's Office for Electoral Crimes). One report, "Subordinadas y bellas," specifically focuses on the online space. Other reports (López Hernández 2020; "Ensayos sobre Violencia Política" 2020) include mention of social networks or the internet, but only briefly, as one venue for violence or as a site for reporting.

In an INE report (2020) on online and media violence during the 2018-2019 electoral period— "Subordinadas y bellas," or "subordinate and beautiful"—National Coordination of Social Communication (CNCS) researchers registered 114 messages of VAWIP including 40 on Twitter and 8 on Facebook ("Subordinadas y bellas" 2020). They conducted a comparative study, finding differences by state as well as by candidate or political position. For campaigning women in public office, 20% of all messages contain VAWIP while for non-office holding candidates, 10% of all messages contained gender-based political violence (ibid: 51). Those contesting local offices were especially targeted. Notably, this report differentiates between political violence and VAWIP (ibid, 49).

The report's findings demonstrate that among social media networks, Twitter is the source of a disproportionate amount of violence, despite Facebook's greater market share in Mexico.[177] Furthermore, report authors find evidence of sexism as well as intersecting

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[177] It is worth mentioning that this report does not detail the methods used to attain these figures and that the number of posts under analysis is relatively small. It is possible that the disproportionate abuse on Twitter is the result of Twitter's API more than a true indication of relative quantity.

discriminations. Young women are covered as more inexperienced than young men (ibid 36).

Furthermore, in the media, women are regularly referred to as "sister" or "wife" of someone

else, discrediting their individual attributes. 15% of gender role mentions by traditional media

refer to women as sexual objects. This differs from social media, in which 45% of gender role

mentions refer to women as sexual objects (ibid, 21). LGBTTTIQ candidates, when discussed at

all, are targeted with negative coverage. This coverage has an impact; LGBTTTIQ candidates who

received negative coverage were more likely to be defeated during their electoral campaigns

(ibid, 3).

The report authors also compare levels of violence by state; only six states held local

elections on June 2, 2019, and thus were included in the study. This substate-level analysis can

shed some light on the relationships between online and offline violence. The states analyzed

had the following share of violent messages on social media: 3% in Puebla, 4% in Quintana Roo,

5% in Aguascalientes, 6% in Durango, 10% in Baja California, and 10% in Tamaulipas (ibid, 44).

This data shows that there is some relationship between online and offline violence; Tamaulipas

and Baja California share a border with the U.S. Durango, which holds the next highest level of

social media violence, is part of the "Golden Triangle" of states where the Sinaloa Cartel

operates. Though a limited sample, this data descriptively supports a positive relationship

between offline violence and online VAWIP. However, these data do not statistically correspond

to levels of homicide per state. A paired t-test does not show statistical significance between

these small data samples.[178]

Alongside this and other reports, the INE has also—following legislative requirements—

compiled a national registry (RNPS) for individuals sanctioned for VAWIP. The RNPS can be

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[178] I compared the Subordinadas y bellas figures with state-level homicide data and found no statistically-significant correlation.

accessed via the web, on a user-friendly site with information about sanctioned individuals, including the gender breakdown of offenders and distribution by state. The site also includes information on victims, showing that as of May 2021, 30% of victims were registrars and 16.67% were candidates. FEPADE has also used the online space to raise awareness of VAWIP; in 2018, the office created a website on VAWIP, including how to introduce complaints of violence (#NotTheCost 2021, 59). Although the online space is a location of violence for Mexican women, the internet also enables institutions to better gather and disseminate information.

Laws

VAWIP

Unlike the U.K., Mexico has a law[179] against violence against women in politics, recently passed by the legislature in 2020. The law makes some provisions for indigenous and multiple discriminations. However, despite one mention of "social communication"—legislating against the diffusion of propaganda in any social communication—the law does not include mention of the online space. This omission is consistent with the 2016/2017 protocol, in which the internet was only mentioned as a venue for denouncing and reporting VAWIP, rather than a location of violence in of itself.

The online space is not ignored in all official policies. Government documents from 2020 ("Criteria on Gender-Based Political Violence against Women") identify specific forms of abuse and discrimination on social media networks (62). Furthermore, as I will expand on further,

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[179] Though I use "the law" throughout, this legal change is actually a series of amendments to existing laws.

existing legislation is not limited to offline violence only and can be used prosecute online offences.

In 2016 Mexico's major domestic electoral bodies—the INE, TEPJF, FEPADE, the National Institute for Women (INMUJERES), and several other human rights and women's rights bodies in Mexico—compiled a national protocol on VAWIP (Talamás Salazar and Sánchez de Tagle 2016). The authors of the protocol start the document by describing its necessity, particularly in response to the obstacles faced by women during the 2015 electoral period (ibid, 9). Though the protocol was not legally binding, it aimed to facilitate coordination between the various electoral bodies, respond to political violence at state, federal, and city levels, define VAWIP, and indicate where victim-survivors should go to report offences. In the protocol, VAWIP is presented as a human rights issue and a form of gender-based discrimination preventing women's equality (ibid, 10-11). Prior to the protocol, Mexico had two related protocols in place: the Protocol to judge with a gender perspective (Protocolo para juzgar con perspectiva de género 2020) and the Protocol for the prevention, attention, and sanction of sexual harassment in federal public administration (Protocolo para la Prevención, Atención y Sanción del Hostigamiento y Acoso Sexual en la Administración Pública Federal 2016).

The 2020 legal amendments differ from these protocols as they were passed by the legislature and are legally binding. The 2020 reforms amend and add to the following laws: the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence, the General Law of Electoral Institutions and Procedures, the General Law of Appeal in Electoral Matters, the General Law of Political Parties, the General Law on Electoral Crimes, the Structured Law of the Federal Judiciary, and the General Law of Administrative Responsibilities. The reforms focus primarily on women's unequal access to justice, resources, and positions of power, the expansion of parity, and mechanisms to respond to violations.

Despite the lack of explicit mention of social media or online communication, online violence is not excluded from potential prosecution. Article 20:3 includes threatening or intimidating a woman, directly or indirectly, as a form of VAWIP. Other provisions from Article 20 (provisions 8-11) can also be applied to the online space. These include the publishing of images, messages or private information not related to public life that use gender stereotypes (20:8); performance or distribution of propaganda that defames, insults, or denigrates a candidate based on gender stereotypes aiming to undermine her public image (20: 9); divulging images, messages, or private information of a female candidate to defame, insult, denigrate, or question her capacity for politics based on gender stereotypes (20:10); and threatening or intimidating women or their family members or assistants to encourage their resignation (Article 20:11).

The law also broadly defines violence as physical, sexual, symbolic, psychological, economic, or patrimonial violence against women in exercising of their political rights. In the amendments to the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence, the reform specifies that gender-based political violence against women includes both overt acts as well as omissions, including tolerance, that serves to annul or limit the effective exercise of political and electoral rights of women.

The reforms additionally include references to multiple and intersectional discriminations. For example, Article 7:5 states that women should exercise political-electoral rights free of gender-based violence, without discrimination based on ethnic or national origin, gender, age, disabilities, social condition, health status, religion, opinions, sexual preferences, marital status, and any other discrimination that undermines rights and freedoms.

Party responses and protocols

In Mexico, leading researchers on VAWIP and online VAWIP have called for support

mechanisms within political parties (Barrera and Rodríguez 2017; Redacción Animal Político

2018). By law parties must "prevent, attend to, punish, repair, and eradicate" VAWIP when

violence is an internal party matter ("Guía para la Prevención, Atención, Sanción y Reparación

Integral de la Violencia Política Contra las Mujeres en Razón de Género del Instituto Nacional

Electoral" 2021, 31). Parties can provide several important functions in response to VAWIP:

produce educational resources for members, serve a reporting body to collect data, counsel and

protect women who have reported violence, and provide financial resources to assist target-

survivors of violence (*Model Protocol for Political Parties* 2019, 9).

Each major Mexican party has a protocol on VAWIP. Morena is the only major party to

include online violence in its party protocol, the Protocol for Political Peace. Of the other major

parties—PAN, PRD, and PRI—only PRI does not mention indigenous women, though the

protocol references that women have been subject to multiple discriminations. Party protocols

laid the groundwork for laws against VAWIP. Further, they have symbolic significance,

illustrating to women that their parties are committed to naming violence. However, in practice,

the protocols have had minimal impact in sanctioning perpetrators.

Promotion of Underrepresented Minorities

The legal reforms on VAWIP went into effect in April 2020. Several months later, in

December 2020, the Electoral Tribunal unanimously ordered the National Electoral Institute

(INE) to guarantee candidacies for disabled, Afro-descendent, and LGBTQ+ people for the 2021

electoral cycle. Following this ruling, in January 2021, the general council of the INE unanimously

approved new inclusion mechanisms for these groups. In 21 districts, parties must register

indigenous candidates, 11 of whom must also be women. Mexico previously had a policy for

indigenous representation, which states that 13 of the 28 indigenous districts have to put

forward indigenous representatives. This 2020 policy thus increases the number of districts

which must run indigenous candidates as well as looks to increase indigenous women's

representation. Three and six candidate formulas[180] apply to Afro-Mexican and disabled people,

respectively. In both cases, Afro-Mexican and disabled candidates must be placed within the

first 10 places on the candidate list for proportional representation (PR) seats. Parties must also

nominate two LGBTQ+ candidates, or "persons with sexual diversity" to any of the federal

electoral districts elected by relative majority and one elected by proportional representation

(López Pérez 2021).

In addition to the new candidate guidelines, the INE has also increased penalties for

violence against multiply-marginalized women. INE guidelines establish that sanctions will

increase when gender-motivated political violence is carried out against a woman belonging to

an indigenous, Afro-Mexican, elderly, or LGBT + community or a woman with a disability

(Expansión Política 2021).

Online Violence

In September 2019, Mexico's majority party, Morena, proposed a reform to the penal

code to combat cyber harassment, specifically sexual harassment and intimate violations of

women through photographs and videos (Cruz 2019). The amendment is part of the "Olimpia

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[180] Parties have to register six candidates for a relative majority seats and two for PR lists for those with disabilities; three for a relative majority and one for PR for Afro-Mexicans; and two LGBT+ candidates for relative majority and one for PR.

Law," named after an activist[181] who spearheaded the issue on the national stage. In November

2020, the amendment was approved unanimously by the Senate (Forbes Staff 2020). In April

2021, the Chamber of Deputies approved the law as well (Damián 2019). The law defines "media

violence" broadly, as an act through any means of communication that directly or indirectly

promotes sexist stereotypes, advocates violence against women, or produces sexist hate speech

(Arratia Núñez 2020). Further, it includes both the dissemination of sexual content as well as

harassment, threats, and insults disseminated through the internet, social networks, apps,

emails, and other digital spaces (Latinus 2020). Mexico is a regional leader in passing this legal

reform; Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay are all discussing bills related to revenge porn, but

Mexico appears to be the only country that has thus far passed a law (Neris et al., 2018: 11;

Almargo, et al. 2020).

The law modified the existing General Law for Women's Life free of Violence, part of the

federal penal code. Though recognized as a product of joint work from politicians, activists, and

"luchadoras," female sociopolitical activists, the law does not—in its present incarnation—

specifically refer to the targeting of political actors (Moreno and Arvizu 2020). That said, it does

not exclude politicians and may be used to address online VAWIP in the future.

2021 Election

Mexico held an election on June 6, 2021, for all federal Deputies, 15 governorships, and

local positions. The electoral period was marked by significant violence, including violence

against women candidates, precandidates, public figures, campaign staff, as well as family and

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[181] "Olimpia Law" appears to refer to the initiative broadly, rather than the law itself. This initiative is named for Olimpia Coral Melo who was the victim of revenge porn at the age of 18 and began campaigning for legal reform thereafter.

acquaintances of these individuals. This election was described as the "most violent on record" (Grecko, 2021) and electoral observers expressed their "deepest concerns for the extreme violence affecting Mexican politics" ("Informe Preliminar MVE," 2021).

Though this election occurred after data was collected for this dissertation, the election was noteworthy for several reasons. First, it is the first election in Mexico—and the first known election in the world—to apply the principle of gender parity to the position of governor after a successful campaign for *paridad en todo,* of "parity in everything" (Piscopo 2021). Second, parties had to distribute 40% of funding and advertising time to women candidates in this election (ibid). Third, individuals who have committed violence against women, including VAWIP, are prohibited from running for election; several candidates were removed from candidate lists for this reason.[182] Fourth, in addition to extending parity, inclusion policies for Afro-Mexican, indigenous, and LGBTQ candidates went into effect for this election. And finally, authorities sanctioned parties that violated electoral law in the virtual space, including acts of online VAWIP.

Affirmative action measures contributed to increased candidate diversity. The 2021 election saw over 100 LGBTQ candidates running for office; by one estimate, this amounted to 2% of all candidates (Sánchez 2021; "Comicios en México registran cifra histórica de candidatos LGBT" 2021). Parties were also required to nominate Afro-Mexicans in at least 3 of 300 electoral

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[182] This aspect of the law is challenging to uphold as many cases of violence against women do not end in official conviction. For example, *Mujeres en Plural* raised awareness of rape claims against Felix Salgado Macedonio, a Morena candidate for governor of Guerrero and called for the end of his candidacy (Navarrete Fernández, 2021). Despite allegations of rape from two separate women, there are no official charges against Salgado. President AMLO voiced his support for his party's candidate, saying that it's "such as shame that the feminist movement" was focused on this issue (Abi Habib and Kitroeff, 2021). Morena ratified Salgado's candidacy but his candidacy was ultimately suspended over failure to submit expense reports to the INE. His daughter, Evelyn Salgado Pineda, was selected in his place and won the election, becoming the first woman governor in the history of Guerrero.

districts. Like LGBTQ candidates, parties are not obligated to nominate candidates in specific

districts, allowing parties to nominate candidates to unwinnable seats or to districts with low

proportions of Afro-descendent people. AN INE survey found that of a sample of 7,000

candidates standing in the 2021 election,[183] 104 or 1.49% identify as Afro-descendent (Sirenio,

2021).[184]

Women also ran in unprecedented numbers and in new positions of authority. With this

progress, women were also targeted in increased numbers. Though there were over 100

political murders in the run-up to the election, approximately 36 were candidates ("Elecciones

de 2021 en México son las más violentas para mujeres" 2021).[185] Of those 36 candidates, at

least 21 were women (Rangel 2021). This signifies a shift in electoral political violence, which is

unfortunately common in Mexico. In previous elections, women were targeted and

assassinated, but at lower levels than their male counterparts. Standing for a mayoral position in

Oaxaca, Ivonne Gallegos Carreño was one of the 21 murdered women. She was an indigenous

and women's rights activist, had campaigned for justice for her husband's murder, and the day

before her assassination had filed a political violence complaint (Rojas 2021).

Finally, electoral institutions included more information about online violence as a form

of VAWIP for the 2021 election. In a manual published in February 2021 by Mexico City's

electoral institute, report authors highlighted digital violence, as addressed in the Law of a

Woman's Access to a Life free of Violence in Mexico City. They define digital violence broadly,

including acts carried out with telephone messages, social media, and any technological means

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[183] There were more than 20,000 positions up for election on June 6, 2021 (Sánchez 2021).

[184] Despite this historic achievement, Afro-Mexicans are 2% of the Mexican population and thus, are still underrepresented here.

[185] Official statistics have not yet been published and numbers vary slightly by source as well as date published.

(del Ángel Cruz, et al. 2021, 17). This manual goes further to include digital violence, including denigrating images and words on social media, as forms of VAWIP (ibid, 29). Furthermore, the INE and IIDH (Inter-American Institute of Human Rights) supported the creation of "Ela Alerta," a ChatBot that runs through WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger to allow candidates to easily and quickly report incidents of VAWIP (Camacho, et al. 2021).

Finally, Facebook and Instagram, in conjunction with UN Women, released two Spanish-language guides for political women in April 2021. The Facebook guide is tailored specifically to women politicians in Mexico, though applicable to the broader region, while the Instagram guide is not country-specific. Both manuals discuss harassment and violence. Instagram clarifies that death wishes or threats, doxing, and attacks that use sexual language are not allowed on the platform ("Guía de seguridad para mujeres en la política" 2021, 7). The Facebook guide includes a statement that at Facebook "we do not tolerate harassment" ("#*SheLeads* 2021, 7). The manual further explains that bullying and harassment include calling for violence, intentions to commit violence, attacks using terms related to sexual activities, and stalking (ibid, 8). Both guides offer suggestions for politicians on how to use the platforms as well as how to prevent or respond to violence.

CONCLUSION

Mexico is one of only a few countries that has an established law, or series of laws, on violence against women in politics, referred to as "political violence against women" or "gender-based political violence against women" in public and legal documents. Gender is central to the conception of this form of political violence, with the recognition that VAWIP is gender-motivated, aiming to reduce women's political participation. Multiple marginalization, specifically the vulnerability of women who are also indigenous, Afro-Mexican, elderly, disabled,

and/or LGBTQ, has been a part of laws, policies, and public discussions of violence against

women in politics. In practice, this has also contributed to an emphasis on intersectional parity

and increased punishment for those who engage in violence against multiply-marginalized

women. Despite the increased use of the online space for governance activities, the online

space remains marginal in interviews, laws, and policies on VAWIP. Several state and non-profit

agencies have released reports on online violence and there appeared to be increased emphasis

on online violence in the 2021 election. Ultimately, offline violence remains the emphasis for

VAWIP in Mexico.

Though multiple marginalization is highlighted in discussions of VAWIP, only sexism is

pervasive in the Twitter datasets gathered for Mexico. In the following chapter, I explore these

findings and other results from the big N Twitter analyses for both the U.K. and Mexico.

CHAPTER 7: FINDINGS FROM MACHINE LEARNING AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSES- UNITED KINGDOM

INTRODUCTION

Conducting the big N analysis involved a multistep process, including hand-coding and qualitative analysis, algorithmic generation and deployment, and a further round of qualitative analysis. For each case, I first classified a training set of tweets—5,000 for Mexico and 10,000 for the U.K.—into two categories, "abuse"[186] and "non-abuse." Second, I used these binary training corpora to instruct the big N algorithm, which I directed to classify the remaining 1.3 million, unclassified tweets. Third, I conducted a supervised machine learning analysis and fourth, engaged in qualitative analysis of abusive posts. In this chapter, I present the results from the United Kingdom. In the next chapter, I produce the results for Mexico.

UK TRAINING SET DATA

The training dataset for the U.K. includes posts that were pulled from Twitter between December 2019 and April 2020. The politicians used in this phase of data analysis are visible with many followers, namely Diane Abbott, Priti Patel, Jess Phillips, Layla Moran, and Sayeeda Warsi. Abbott, Phillips, and Moran were members of parliament, Patel was Home Secretary, and Warsi was a member of the House of Lords. Focusing on these prominent political women enabled me to gather hundreds of thousands of posts in a relatively short period of time. I selected a diverse group of politicians, with different salient identities, who have been targeted with online violence previously to ensure that the training set had enough abusive and violent tweets to code, thus allowing the algorithm to distinguish between non-abusive and abusive

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[186] In order to make the algorithm as efficient as possible, I used this binary classification. Abuse here does not cover policy-based rudeness but does include both VAP and VAWIP. In the qualitative analysis, I further disaggregate the "general" abuse, or VAP, and VAWIP.

posts. Of these women, only Layla Moran was randomly selected for inclusion in the subsequent test dataset.

919 of the 10,330 posts coded for the training set were abusive, equivalent 8.9% of the total. Abusive posts include both violence against politicians and violence against women in politics posts. This proportion is higher than in comparable studies of violence, which find around 2-4% of tweets are abusive (i.e., McLoughlin and Ward 2020; Southern and Harmer 2019; Kuperberg 2018), and lower than in studies that use incivility or a broader definition of abuse (Rheault, Rayment, and Musulan 2019; Theocharis, et al. 2020). This discrepancy can be explained by two factors: (i) this dataset focuses on women who are known to receive high amounts of violence online, and (ii) I use a narrower definition of both abuse and VAWIP, excluding posts that were merely profane or contained policy-based or partisan-focused hostility. The resulting data had the following patterns: sexualization; group discrimination; claims of incompetence; claims of disloyalty, including questioning women's presence in the U.K.; and delegitimizing women's experiences of abuse.

Sexualization

Posts in the training set contain both benevolent and hostile sexist rhetoric. This is evident in posts that sexualize women MPs. For example, Priti Patel is tagged in a "supportive" post writing "hottest [future] PM since Maggie [Thatcher]!!!" Ilie (2018), on discourses of sexism in the House of Commons, explains that these appearance-focused "compliments" are forms of sexism as they are "totally inappropriate and serve to distract the attention, while surreptitiously undermining the sense of legitimacy and professional competence of the targeted female MP" (605). Appearance-focused comments also differentiate men and women's

experiences in politics; women are more likely to receive these types of comments and they are more likely to disempower women (ibid).

In most test sample posts, however, sexualization is not benevolent, but hostile. A user writes, "That's probably what your mates were thinking when you showed them naked pictures of Diane Abbott." Another user asks if Jess Phillips, who has advocated for sex workers, has been a prostitute herself. Yet another writes that Phillips has been "banned for shaggin a few brass." These forms of sexism seek to render women MPs incompetent for public office.

Group Discrimination: Racism

The data contains Islamophobic and racist rhetoric, even when it is not directed at Muslim or BAME (Black, Asian, minority ethnic) politicians. Similarly, though there are no Jewish MPs in the sample, antisemitic violence is still present, including one user describing the House of Lords as "full of Zionists who graduated from the freemasons to get easy access" to government. These emphasize that non-targeted posts are not anomalies in the data.

In tweets tagging Priti Patel, for instance, users include Islamophobic and xenophobic rhetoric. In the majority of posts, this discrimination is non-targeted; it is not aimed at Patel directly but instead, includes her in her capacity as Home Secretary. Many of these instances of Islamophobic rhetoric relate to the grooming gangs conspiracy theory. These include offenders writing "They know Muslims rapeing [sic] white under age girls is prolific." In other cases, users establish a "Britain vs. them" dichotomy, writing: "We want Islam banned as a disgusting ideological totalitarian religion incompatible with our secular country."

Another user, tagging Diane Abbott, describes immigrants as "gimmiegrants" and distinguishes between immigrants and "Native British." Some posts echoed racism and xenophobia propagated in the U.S. including #MAGA and discrimination related to Covid-19. One user writes, "It's not racist, "kung flu" came from China." Similar to the U.S., hate crimes against Asian Brits rose 300% from March 2020 to March 2021 (Khan 2021). These perpetrators could be inspired by, or even writing from, the U.S.[187]

In other cases, racism is directly aimed at political women of color, such as this post: "How did @patel4witham get her job? She can't speak English properly and she calls terrorists 'counter-terrorists.'" Another user tweeted, "Send BLACK @pritipatel to Uganda. Her real home." These discourses are used particularly against Sayeeda Warsi and Diane Abbott in the training sample. One user writes, "@SayeedaWarsi- keep fighting the good fight from your mud hut!" Racism also intersects with sexism, with one user writing, perhaps sarcastically, "You've got time to watch telly on Eid?! Aren't you in the kitchen whipping up biryanis and samosas and kebabs? Honestly Baroness what kind of desi wife are you?" A tweet tagging Diane Abbott, invoking misogynoir discrimination, states, "You could put a red rosette on a chimp in Hackney North and it would get elected."

Incorporating both racism and regional or geographic saliency, a significant number of posts critique women MPs or other Twitter users for their English abilities, suggesting that they do not speak English well or negatively commenting on their accents. Accents in the U.K. are a

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[187] Though I did not delve into the geography of users, which is self-reported and thus difficult to verify, there have been several high-profile cases of online violence against British MPs starting in and sponsored by U.S. groups and sites. Violence against Stella Creasy, on and offline, in 2019 came from a campaign started by a U.S. anti-abortion group (Marsh 2019) and the #FilthyJewBitch campaign against Luciana Berger was led by Daily Stormer, a white supremacist website based in the U.S.

signifier of region (i.e., a Northern accent) and place (i.e. an Essex or South London accent), as well as class.

For example, Layla Moran is tagged in a post that states, "We cant help it that you are not intelligent enough to understand basic English." Jess Phillips is described as having a "brummie" accent as she is from Birmingham. Though this, in of itself, is not abusive or violent, this signifier is added to other forms of discrimination. In one post, a user writes, "Shout a lot, with a put on brummie council accent, whilst snarling to an empty chamber," suggesting that Phillips's accent is fake and incorporating an "angry woman" stereotype.

Using Python, I determined the fifty most frequent words in abusive posts in the training sample. Though term frequency is only one measure, it offers a descriptive overview of the data. After removing MP usernames, which were used to gather tweets and thus disproportionately common, "Muslim," "racist," and "Diane" [referring to Diane Abbott] were among the most frequent words in the sample. From these common words, it is already evident that racism is significant in abusive posts. Posts that include "Muslim" are also often Islamophobic in nature. Posts that include "racist" often seek to diminish racism, including by referring to women of color as racists. Finally, Diane Abbott is disproportionately named in the sample, not only through her Twitter handle but also by users including her first name in their abuse. Other studies (Dhrodia 2017) have found that Abbott receives more online abuse than any other MP. It is, therefore, not surprising that Abbott's name—specifically her first name as an additional sign of disrespect (Atir and Ferguson 2018)—is one of the most common words abusive tweets in the training sample.

Transphobia

As mentioned in Chapter 5, public transphobic rhetoric around gender has become increasingly loud over the last decade. Though there are no out trans MPs in Westminster, and thus no trans MPs in the training or testing samples, transphobic discourses are still present in posts mentioning other MPs. In a post tagging Diane Abbott, a user writes, "a female is a female, I'm a scientist so please don't try ideologies and theories on me, the science is binary."

Layla Moran, a pansexual MP, was tagged in a series of transphobic tweets regarding bathrooms, part of the UK "debate" on trans rights. On the surface, and to some in the U.K., these posts would not be considered violent, including asking for sex segregation of bathrooms to prevent male violence and abuse against women. However, in context, these tweets seek to differentiate between transwomen and cis women and assert that the latter is the only "legitimate" category of women.

These ideas are harmful in of themselves (Smythe 2018), reflect the high levels of violence that trans adults experience online (Powell, Scott, and Henry 2018), and have implications for physical violence against trans people (Hunte 2019). A user also tweeted directly at Moran: "You cant even work out which gender you are love, leave the decision making to the grownups." This comment (i) conflates her pansexuality with her gender identity, (ii) uses gendered condescending language such as "love," and (iii) insinuates she is a child, perhaps due to the intersection of her gender, sexuality, and race.

Incompetence, Ableism, and Age

Users regularly demean women in the test dataset, suggesting that they do not have the fitness to serve in politics. One user questions whether Diane Abbott has "early onset dementia" for wearing two left shoes and finishes their tweet writing "she should probably move out of

public view." Another user describes her speech as "blablablablabla…" In yet another post, a user writes, "@HackneyAbbott you're the bright spark go figure shit head lol."

Numerous posts, also falsely suggest that Abbott is only qualified to be in politics because of a romantic relationship with Jeremy Corbyn. Esposito and Zollo (2021), exploring YouTube comments, specifically analyze posts about Abbott's relationship with Corbyn. They find that Abbott is doubly objectified by users utilizing this trope: first, users seek to render Abbott incompetent through sexualization, and second, users describe Abbott as an object in these tropes, using "it" instead of "she" (57, 63).

Posts rendering women MPs incompetent also use age and ageist rhetoric to allege ineptitude. Age is used in a gendered fashion particularly when users suggest that women are children or too young for the work of politics. However, particularly for older women MPs, users allege that women are too old to successfully complete their responsibilities. In the former category, users tell Jess Phillips to "just shut up and let the adults get on with it." Both Phillips and Moran are referred to as "hysterical schoolgirl[s]." In the latter category, Sayeeda Warsi is described as a "sad old woman" and Diane Abbott is "of retirement age and a pensioner so she is entitled to fall asleep [in the chamber]."

Delegitimizing and Invisibilizing Experience

In numerous posts in the test set, users tell MPs to stop talking or "shut up." Though expressing disapproval is not in of itself violence, these users are not interested in debate but instead, in removing women MPs from the conversation entirely and rendering them silent. Jess Phillips receives a lot of these posts, including "Back in your box," "could be thinking and talking too much!" and "pipe down." Layla Moran was tagged in similar posts including "Do shut up"

and "Oh do shut up with you running commentary. You have NOTHING to offer." These posts

occasionally incorporate multiple forms of discrimination. For example, Moran was accused of

using her sexual and religious identities to get attention. A user tweeted: "@LaylaMoran is

frantically trying to get noticed – Ramadan sharing, pan-sexuality (?), EU adherence- how about

doing her MP job?"

In a somewhat different form of online violence, users also seek to delegitimize women

MP's experiences of violence. This is a form of testimonial injustice and, like other forms of

VAWIP, can be better understood with an intersectional lens (Kuperberg 2021). All women in

the dataset experience some delegitimization, but women of color—Diane Abbott and Sayeeda

Warsi in particular—are especially targeted. The denial of racism and misogyny serve to

normalize whiteness and deny intersecting forms of discrimination (Palmer 2019, 518). Through

delegitimization, the "lived experiences of gendered racism in the lives of Black women and

women of colour" are erased (ibid).

In the test dataset, I found patterns of delegitimization throughout. Tagging Sayeeda

Warsi, who has been perhaps the most vocal Tory on issues of Islamophobia within the party, a

user writes, "Define Islamophobia without using another made up word." Another user, tagging

both Warsi and Labour MP Naz Shah, tweeted, "Is this more Islamophobia or is this REAL Islam?

Please tell us infidels."

Diane Abbott was also tagged in numerous tweets casting doubt on her experiences or

belittling her for discussing racism and sexism. One user writes that Abbott "receives more

death threats than the rest of the MPs put together" but justifies this by then writing "it's not

due to the colour of her skin," suggesting it is instead legitimate to threaten to her life. Abbott

was also called a "race-baiting hypocrite" and a "clown" because she and other BAME MPs

"make money off playing the victims." Another user writes, "She might have been bullied…but racially abused? Show some proof? Show an actual racist statement by the press?" This user (i) asks for Abbott and/or her staff to do *additional* work to "prove" their experiences; (ii) suggests that bullying is not in of itself a problem; and (iii) casts doubt on Abbot's experiences.

Descriptive Data on Training Set

In addition to the top 50 most frequent words, I used Python to gain a descriptive understanding of the training set data. In most cases, this confirmed, more or less, what one might assume about the data. For instance, applying a subjectivity score to abusive and non-abusive posts, I find that abusive posts are more likely to be "subjective" while non-abusive posts are more likely to be "objective."[188] See "Subjectivity score in Abuse and Nonabuse," Figure 7.1, below. These are categories built into Python that classify certain English language terms of objective and others as subjective (Resendez 2021). Text that is coded as objective has a higher number of "fact-based" words, while subjective text has a greater number of "opinion-based" words. This overview of subjectivity is not surprising; posts coded as abusive are more likely opinion-based and non-abusive posts are more likely fact-based.

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[188] Though I see measure as far from perfect—words that are not in the system are coded as neutral and sarcasm is not distinguished from non-sarcastic text—it is an efficient and pre-developed means of overviewing one aspect of sentiment in a data sample (Resendez 2021).

Figure 7.1

Subjectivity score in Abuse and NonAbuse
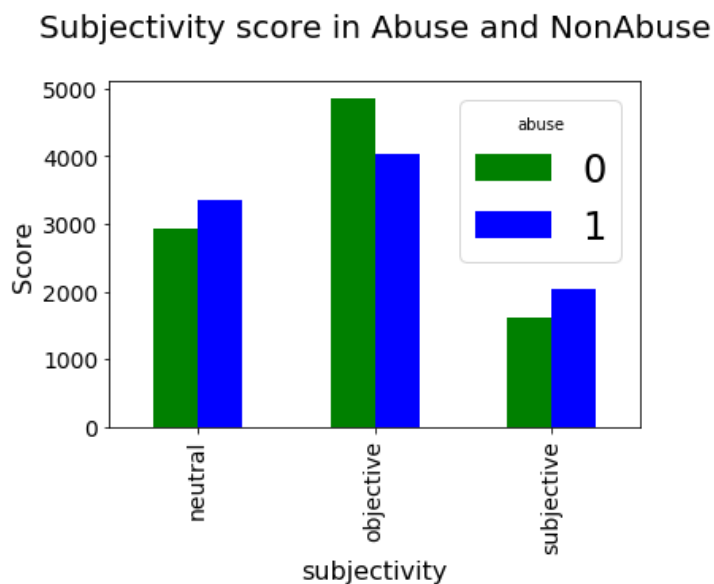
A sentiment analysis, derived from corporate branding, also uses a preset word bank to

determine whether text is positive or negative. For example, if a sentence averages out to

having more positive than negative words, the sentence will be coded as "positive." Similarly to

the subjectivity analysis, though most posts are classified as neutral[189] in a sentiment analysis,

abusive posts are more likely to be classified as negative while non-abusive posts are more likely

to classified as positive (Figure 7.2).

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[189] Sentiment has similar faults as subjectivity: words that are not recognized default to "neutral." Further, each word of a sentence has a sentiment score. When a sentence has both negative and positive words, it can average out to "neutral." This is one reason that sentiment-only approaches are inaccurate for classifying abuse. In addition, "negative sentiment" is not a perfect proxy for abuse (Fuchs and Schäfer 2020, 6). For example, "I hate that you are experiencing this abuse" expresses negative sentiment, but is not abusive. "I am so excited for you to be offed like you deserve" may be coded as positive, because the emotion underlying the post is positive, but is violent.
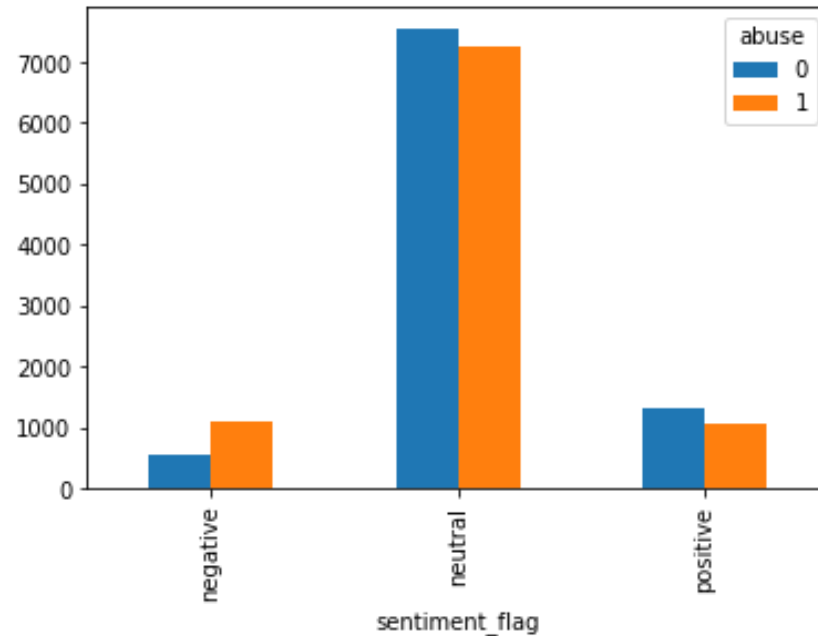
Figure 7.2

TEST SET DATA: BIG DATA ANALYSIS

I next applied the categories from the 10,000 hand-classified posts, discussed above, to

the nearly 1.2 million unclassified tweets collected in summer 2020. 4.73% of all posts in the

corpora—including corpora of both randomly and non-randomly selected MPs—were classified

as abusive by the algorithm. I found, surprisingly, that the random group of MPs received a

higher proportion of abusive tweets[190] than the non-random group, as indicated in the table

below.

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[190]Importantly, the largest numbers of abusive posts in the random sample were sent to women in
leadership positions (namely, Liz Truss) and multiply-marginalized women selected in the random sample.

Figure 7.3: UK: Random and Non-Random Groups
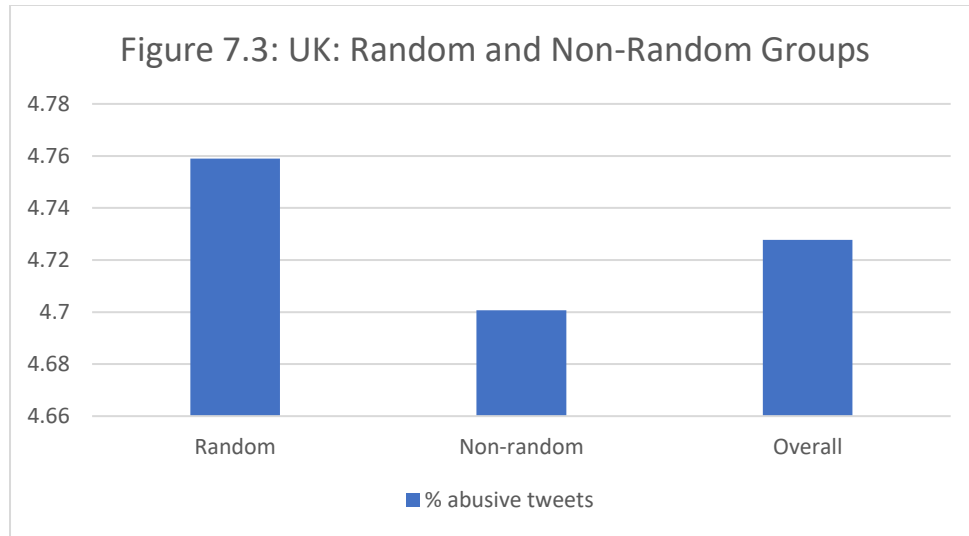
Though I did not conduct a statistical analysis—as I did not want to hold any identities "constant" while identifying the impact of another identity—I did collate descriptive statistics, averaging the percentage of abusive posts for MPs that were members of identity or political groups. I include both numbers of posts and percentages of abuse as these different data illuminate different dimensions of the data. MPs were not equally represented in the data; comparing proportions of abuse allows for uniform comparison across political women. However, it is still noteworthy that some MPs received a much higher number of abusive posts than others, particularly as we consider the online conversation, perception from the public, and potential impact on the MP, their staff, and their acquaintances. As such, I include graphs of both data types here.

As noted in Chapter 4, many MPs hold multiple salient identities simultaneously; the abusive posts of these MPs were included in each of the respective categories. The table below shows the percentage of abusive tweets by salient group.

FIGURE 7.4: UK: SALIENT GROUPS

% abusive tweets

Category	Value
OVERALL AVERAGE	4.73
CONSERV.	4.63
LABOUR	5.32
OTHER PARTY	3.49
BAME	5.42
MUSLIM	4.59
VISIBILITY	5.01
YOUNG	4.92
LGBTQ	3.62
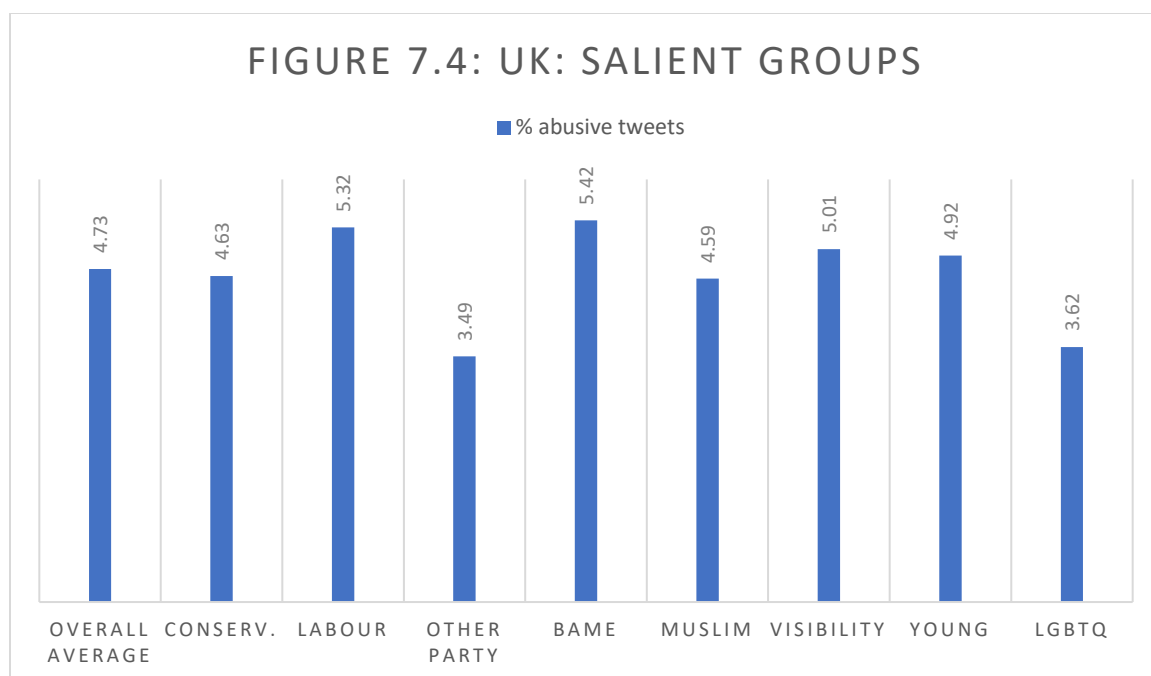
Party membership shows some, though small, difference in the percentage of abuse received. Labour MPs are targeted with a higher percentage of abusive tweets than their Conservative colleagues and even more than their SNP, DUP, and Liberal Democratic colleagues.

Surprisingly again, the percent of abusive tweets does not go up markedly for members of most salient groups. BAME MPs have a slightly higher percentage of abusive tweets directed at them than the overall average, as do visible (MPs in leadership positions), and young MPs. Muslim and LGBTQ MPs, on the other hand, receive a lower percentage of abusive tweets. As I will discuss in the qualitative analysis section, these are particularly surprising data as transphobic and Islamophobic discourses are pervasive in the corpus.

A breakdown of percentages and numbers of abusive tweets by MP offers an explanation for these surprising findings. Across the corpus, there is significant variation in both the number and proportion of abusive tweets directed at each MP. For example, though tweets directed at non-LGBTQ MPs were classified as abusive in higher numbers than those directed at

LGBTQ MPs, three LGBTQ MPs (Black, Moran, and Whittome) stand out for the number and

percentage of abusive tweets they receive. This once again underscores the importance of (i)

deeper analysis of individuals and (ii) qualitative analysis to complement big N data. Data on the

percentage and number of abusive tweets against each MP in the corpus is presented below,

separated by random and non-random sample:

Figure 7.5: % Abusive Tweets: UK Random Sample

Figure 7.6: # Abusive Tweets: UK Random Sample

Figure 7.7: % Abusive Tweets: UK Non-Random Sample

Figure 7.8: # Abusive Tweets: UK Non-Random Sample
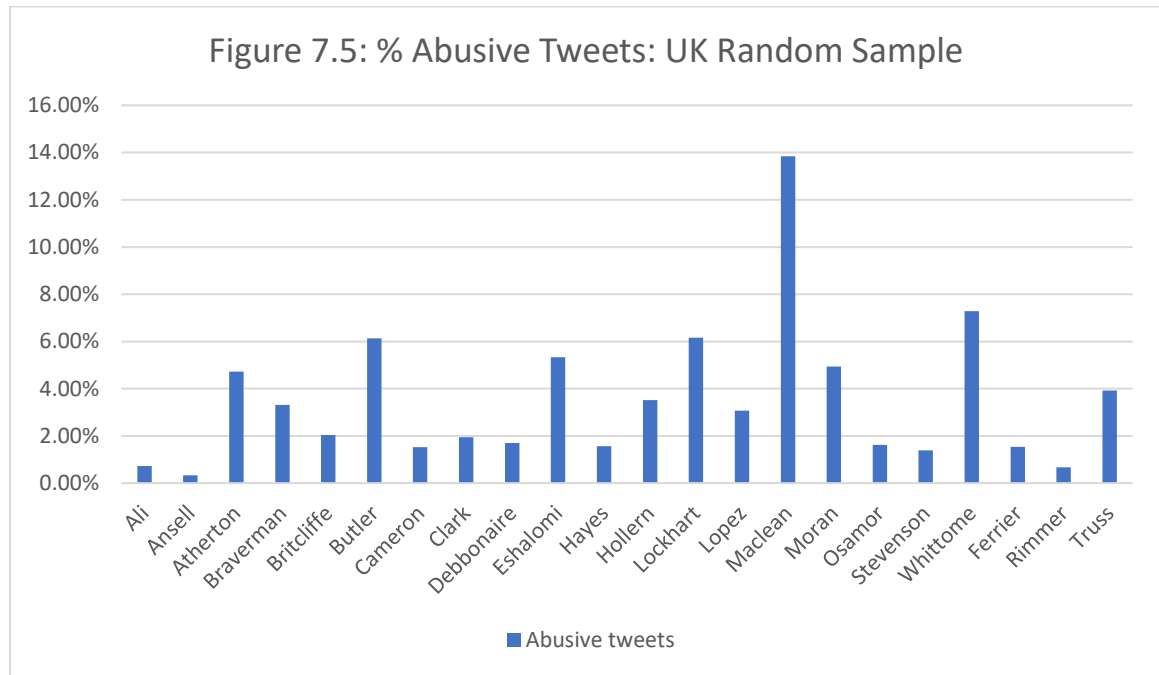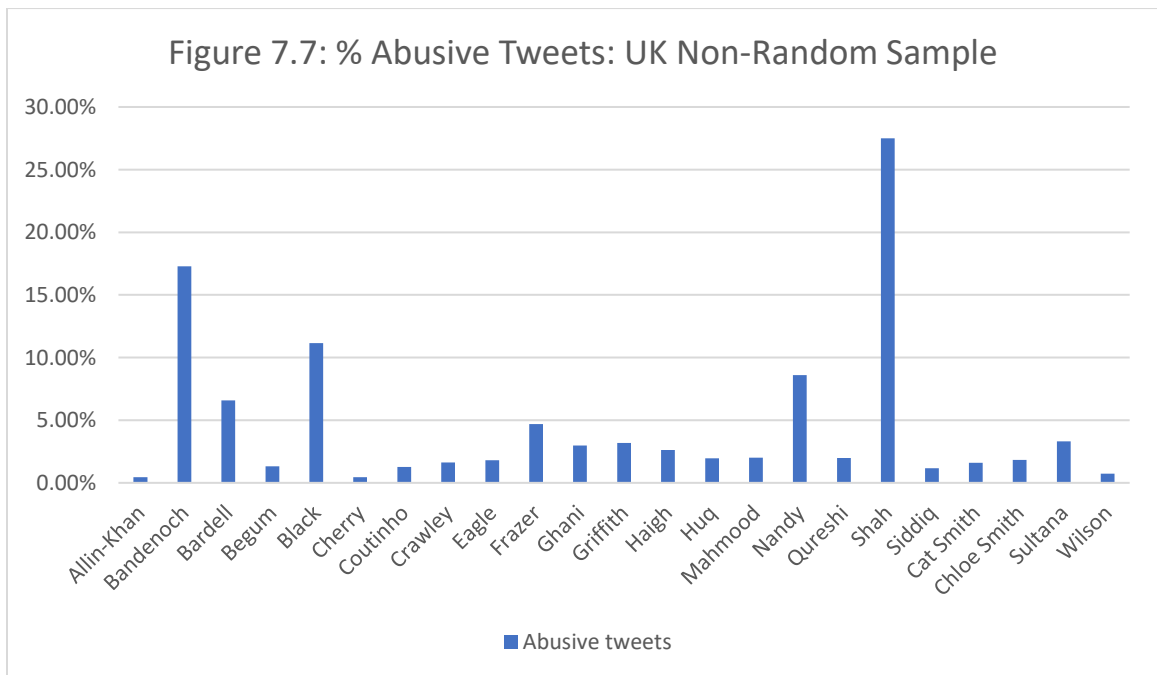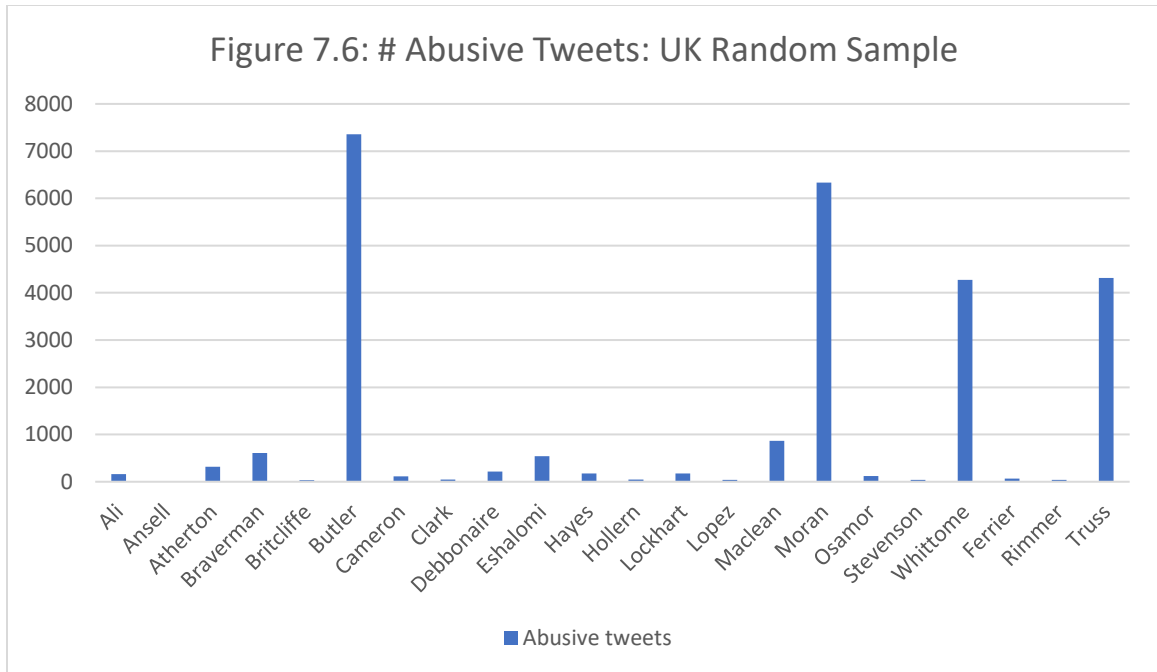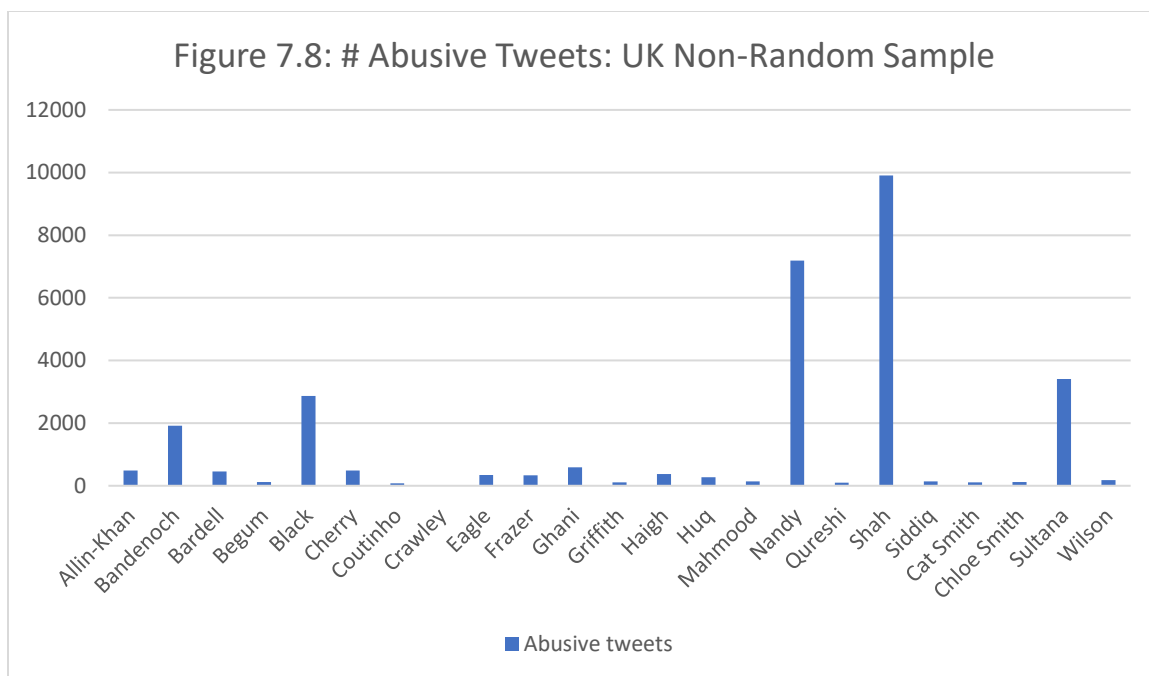
Utilizing these graphs, and the accompanying data, I selected the following MPs for qualitative analysis: Bandenoch, Black, Butler, Nandy, Maclean, Moran, Shah, Sultana, Truss, and Whittome. These MPs had a higher number and/or percentage of abusive tweets directed at them compared to their colleagues. The selected MPs also, though this was not intended in the selection process, represent different political parties and embody a number of the salient identities identified in expert interviews.

For the qualitative analysis, given the large number of posts classified as abusive by the algorithm, I utilized Python to capture a sample of 500 to 1,500 random abusive posts for each MP. Due to the precision error for abusive posts, I went through these samples and identified

700 abusive posts.[191] I then engage in a qualitative, thematic analysis of the discriminatory

discourses present in this sample, explored below.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Some of the same thematic patterns from the training dataset are also present in the

test dataset: transphobic and Islamophobic violence, ageism, efforts to render incompetent, and

efforts to render invisible through silencing. Although multiply-marginalized MPs are not

targeted with greater amounts of abuse across the board, as indicated in the descriptive

statistics above, rhetorics of multiple discrimination—both in individual posts as well as across

the corpus—indicate that online violence against political women is qualitatively intersectional

in nature. I first briefly describe the context, including major policy issues discussed in the

sample. Second, I discuss how abuse is both targeted and non-targeted in the sample. Third, I

delve into the forms of abuse, exploring the following themes: the differences between VAWIP

and other forms of abuse, forms of silencing, forms of rendering incompetent, sexism, and

intersectional violence. Table 7.9, below, indicates the number of qualitative posts studied per

politician as well as an identification of the primary categories of abuse in the test set corpus:

Table 7.9: Qualitative Discursive Themes (UK)		
Politician	**Violence against Politicians**	**Violence against Women in Politics**
Bandenoch - 33 abusive posts	- Policy issues related to role as minister - "Fascist"	- Group discrimination, claiming incompetence: o Racism and reverse racism

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[191] This was not the maximum number of abusive posts in the sample. I planned to qualitatively, thematically analyze the discourses of 700 tweets from the UK corpus and 300 from the Mexico corpus to conduct the qualitative analysis.

	- "Selfish" and "self-centered"	o Intersecting racism and sexism ("token black girl")
		o Sexism ("love")
Black - 77 abusive posts	- An "embarrassment" - Disinformation related to drug use	- Group discrimination: o Transphobic rhetoric related to Black's support of trans rights o Directed homophobia o Homophobia and transphobia
Butler - 101 abusive posts	- "Stupid" - "Vile" and "disgusting" - Relatively low number of VAP posts compared to VAWIP	- Group discrimination, insults, dehumanization: o Racism and claims of reverse racism related to Black Lives Matter o Intersecting racism and sexism ("race baiting cow") o Sexism ("vile woman")
Nandy - 75 abusive posts	- Related to criticism of Jeremy Corbyn - "Hypocrite" - "Lisa Numpty" - More VAP compared to VAWIP - References to leadership role as Shadow Foreign Secretary	- Group discrimination, insults, sexualization: o Sexism ("would bone her"; "slag") o Disinformation around grooming gangs o Transphobia related to support for trans issues (not directed)
Maclean - 75 abusive posts	- "Pathetic" - "Disgrace"	- Group discrimination: o Claims of racism/reverse racism related to her stating that she was

		"especially keen" to receive applications from nontraditional groups in job application

Moran
- 81 abusive posts
	- "Stupid"
	- "Layla Moron"
	- Related to her slapping her former partner during a row at a party conference in 2013
	- Related to Brexit
		- Group discrimination, insults, sexualization:
		  o Homophobia: references to her pansexuality
		  o Transphobia related to trans rights support
		  o Reverse racism

Shah
- 80 abusive posts
	- "Vile"
	- "Disgusting"
	- "Cretin"
		- Group discrimination, claiming incompetence, insults:
		  o Disinformation on grooming gangs
		  o Directed Islamophobia
		  o Intersecting racism and sexism
		  o Sexism ("my dear," "evil woman")

Sultana
- 77 abusive posts
	- "Clueless"
	- "Most stupid MP"
	- "Boneless cretin"
		- Group discrimination, silencing, claiming incompetence:
		  o Islamophobia: "traitor," "not British"
		  o Disinformation on grooming gangs
		  o Transphobia
		  o Reverse racism
		  o Testimonial injustice
		  o Intersecting age and sexism: "stupid little girl"

		o Intersecting racism and sexism: comparing to other BAME MP women
Truss - 76 abusive posts	- Much more general abuse (VAP) than VAWIP - As prominent woman, tagged in many non-directed posts - "Batshit crazy," "hypocrite," "stupid"	- Group discrimination, claiming incompetence: o Transphobic tweets related to trans rights (not directed) o Sexism ("woman talking nonsense," "silly little girl")
Whittome - 80 abusive posts	- "Inept" - "Deluded"	- Purposeful embarrassment, group discrimination, claiming incompetence: o References to youth ("petulant child," "disgusting young student activist") o Combined age and sexism ("little girl out of her depth") o Some references to grooming gangs disinformation and transphobia re: trans rights support

Context

The test dataset discusses similar issues as the training dataset, including both trans rights and the grooming gangs conspiracy, but also more significantly includes Black Lives Matter and Covid-19. Like the training set, the test set posts incorporate transnational tropes and rhetoric.

Trans rights issues, discussed above and in Chapter 5 on the UK, continues to be a prominent topic of discussion online. With this, transphobic posts denying or delegitimizing trans rights make up a significant number of abusive posts. I identified transphobic tweets in all but two samples,[192] those of Maclean and Shah. These posts are not only repeating tropes from the training set but are also responding to new events in 2020. In late spring 2020, the government's intended public response on the Gender Equality Act—set to be published in summer 2020—was leaked (Hunte 2020). Theresa May's previous plan had incorporated self-identification, or the ability for trans people to change government documents without a medical diagnosis. The updated plan removed self-identification as an option. Many of the transphobic posts in this corpus refer to self-identification. I will discuss non-targeted transphobia further in the next subsection.

The test sample also continues to include numerous abusive posts containing Islamophobia, particularly mentioning the grooming gangs conspiracy theory. A December 2020 Home Office report (published after the test data was gathered) finds that "grooming gangs" are not predominately comprised of Pakistani or Muslim men, but instead "most commonly white" (Cockbain and Tufail 2020). Nonetheless, these racist claims have continued to circulate, particularly among far-right groups (ibid).

Black Lives Matter, both the protests and the broader social movement, are mentioned in the training dataset, but feature more prominently in the test dataset. During the data gathering period for the test dataset, June to August 2020, Black Lives Matter protests were held throughout the UK as part of a transnational movement following the death of George

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[192] As a note, these samples do not represent all posts tagged as abusive by the algorithm, but a random sample.

Floyd in the U.S (PA Media 2020). The movement was met with an immediate backlash (Edwards

2020).

In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic was a topic of prominence in the test dataset. The

UK entered its first lockdown in March 2020, and differing levels of local lockdown—dependent

on case numbers—continued through the data gathering period. I classified much of the Covid-

19 related hostility directed at politicians in the dataset as policy disagreement, not abuse.

However, in some cases, the pandemic intersects with other forms of discrimination. For

example, several posts tagging Muslim MPs discriminatorily allege that Muslim Brits are

responsible for local outbreaks due to "poor education and hygiene," among other racist

narratives.

Finally, as with the training dataset, transnational rhetoric is present in the test dataset.

#WhiteLivesMatter, SJW ("social justice warrior"), QAnon, and a reference to "globalist Soros

puppets" indicate that abusive discourse can originate from outside of the UK and/or

incorporate discourses from other contexts.

Target

MPs are tagged in abuse that is both targeted and non-targeted. As discussed in Chapter

3, targeted abuse is directed at *them* specifically, or at a small group. Non-targeted abuse is

abusive towards others, either other individuals or groups. Including non-targeted abuse is

important due to the public nature of online VAWIP, featuring a dynamic relationship between

target, perpetrator, and individual harmed. Because the *audience* of online VAWIP may also see

and be impacted by the abuse, I thus classify posts as abuse even when they are not directed at

the MP in question. I do not classify hostility for policy reasons, or hostility against a political

party, as VAWIP, except where these posts contain threats.

To delve into the targeted nature of online VAWIP, I focus here on three empirical

themes present in the data: references to Diane Abbott, Black Lives Matter, and trans issues. I

find that non-targeted violence tends to cluster in response to public statements and policy

stances of MPs. Non-targeted violence is also not entirely non-targeted; for example, Black MPs

are more likely to be tagged in non-directed violence related to Black Lives Matter.

Diane Abbott

As noted above, Amnesty International (2017) found that Diane Abbott received more

abuse than any other MP in the leadup to the 2017 election (Dhrodia 2017). Though Abbott was

not included in the UK test corpus, multiple abusive posts tagging *other* MPs included violence

directly targeting Abbott. In particular, Labour BAME women were included in posts that either

compared them derogatorily to Abbott, directing violence at both Abbott and the other MP, or

directing violence exclusively at Abbott and simply tagging the other MP. Several posts

mentioning Zarah Sultana, for example, included mention of Abbott, particularly derogating

both MPs' math skills. For example, one user writes: "@zarahsultana Did Diane Abbot give you

that figure, you hard of thinking halfwit?" Several users also drew comparisons between Dawn

Butler and Diane Abbott, both Black MPs. A user writes, "@DawnButlerBrent You're not the

minority, the white British people are un there own country. To say black skinned are

oppressed. Why are you and Abbott in parliament, I'd say that's part of our Equal Rights. The

people born and bred from British blood are not racist. People like you are!!!" This claim of

reverse racism permeates the sample, particularly used to abuse BAME MPs and delegitimize

their experiences and perspectives on racism. In both posts above, users are targeting the MPs

studied in the corpus as well as Diane Abbott, using violence against Abbott to increase the

intensity of their messaging.

Posts referencing Abbott do not always levy violence on both Abbott and the other

tagged MP or MPs. In a post that tags Naz Shah, another user writes: "@NazShahBfd Do tell us,

Naz. Is this more racism or is the Abbott boy a druggie piece of shit. Unlikely "Uncle" Jezza is his

Daddy though. Let us hope it's a 20y sentence for attacking police and NHS staff." This user is

directing the post at Shah but the violence is aimed at Abbott, incorporating tropes seen in the

training sample such as references to Abbott's son and sexually linking Abbott to Jeremy Corbyn.

Diane Abbott and Naz Shah have defended one another in the press and have worked together

on several initiatives. Perhaps, in tagging Naz Shah, the post author was attempting to harm

Shah in attacking Abbott. Here, I classify violence as non-directed, as Shah is not directly

pursued by the violence. However, this remains a violent post and the user appears to be

drawing on the connection between Shah and Abbott to harm one or both MPs, as well as a

broader audience of constituents and supporters.

Black Lives Matter

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, which reached a public height in the UK during

the data gathering period, prompted online backlash, sometimes directed at MPs or at a

broader group of protesters. Like trans rights, explored below, nearly all MPs in the sample—Liz

Truss was an exception—were tagged in racist posts related to Black Lives Matter and racism

more broadly. These posts seek to delegitimize efforts at racial equality to varying degrees. In

some cases, users asserted that white Brits were being discriminated against and that those who

discussed race and racial equality were the racist ones. Other posts were more hostile, including references to the George Floyd case in the U.S. The Black MPs in the sample were disproportionately tagged in posts related to Black Lives Matter, though Rachel Maclean—a white, Conservative MP—was also tagged in posts about the movement, as I will explore below.

Posts invoking Black Lives Matter and related themes were both targeted and non-targeted in the sample. For MPs of color, these posts were more often targeted. For example, a post tagging Dawn Butler states: "@DawnButlerBrent I don't know about a knee, but she puts her foot in it every time she opens her racist mouth." This user is asserting that Butler, for discussing race and racial inequality, is herself racist, a trope prevalent across the corpus. The user's reference to the "knee" likely refers to George Floyd's death but could also refer to the practice of taking a knee to peacefully protest racial inequality, a practice adopted by numerous British and American athletes and activists.

One surprising sample in the corpus was that of Rachel Maclean, a Conservative MP elected in 2017. 88% of the tweets tagging Maclean in the sample referenced Black Lives Matter or racism. These posts were in response to a job ad posted by Maclean in which the MP said that she was "especially keen to receive applications from underrepresented groups." Though many of the posts do not reference Black Lives Matter directly, they draw from similar tropes as the BLM backlash posts. One user describes Maclean as "publicly discriminating against white candidates" and engaging in "anti-white racism." Another describes BAME Brits as "nonindigenous," establishing that white British people are *truly* British and othering BAME Brits. These posts are targeted at Maclean for her initial post, but the discourses of racism and othering are not targeted at Maclean, a white MP, directly. Maclean's sample illustrates the importance of recognizing the potential harm of posts that incorporate discriminations which do not prejudice the tagged MP.

Trans Issues

The trans rights "debate," as described above and in Chapter 5 on the U.K. case, is

dominated by a vocal group of trans-exclusive radical feminists, who problematically assert that

trans equality guarantees a reduction in "women's"—or cis-women's—rights and equality. In

many cases, these transphobic posts are not directed at an MP, but tag MPs due to their public

statements, interpreted as either in support of or against trans rights. Posts regularly refer to

transwomen as men and suggest that men will self-identify as transwomen to take advantage of

women's spaces, particularly restrooms. For example, one user raises concerns that "little girls

should be in the same dressing rooms as naked males […] male pedos should be housed in

female prisons." Other users call trans identities and rights into question entirely, referring to

trans people as "gender hobbyists" or suggesting that transphobia is not real.

This violence, which tags MPs in support of (e.g., Mhairi Black) and less supportive of

(e.g. Liz Truss) trans equality, is almost entirely indirect, not targeting those MPs for their

identities but instead, tagging MPs as a result of their policy positions. That said, there are

differences in the tone and level of directedness, depending on the assumption of policy support

or disagreement as well as the LGBTQ identity of the MP. A user tagging Mhairi Black, for

example, states: "Mhairi doesn't see anything wrong in this, do you @mhairiblack? […] Men

with sexual perversions, being around women/girls, in our private, intimate, public spaces? NO

WAY! How DARE you even THINK about having them near us?!" By contrast, a user tagging Liz

Truss writes: "This is a man, not a woman You're increasingly obscuring facts about paedophiles

and sex offenders @Baroness_Nichol @JackieDP @trussliz @pritipatel @Ofcom this has to stop

Sex does not equal gender and it is important these offences are reported accurately."

First, though Black is tagged in many transphobic posts with other MPs, particularly

other SNP MPs, here she is singled out for her policy support of trans equality. In the latter post,

Liz Truss is one of several higher profile accounts tagged. Further, while the former user is

expressing disapproval of Black's policy agenda, the latter poster appears to be appealing to

Truss, perhaps assuming that Truss is sympathetic to their viewpoint. In both cases, the posts

are transphobic and classified as VAWIP. However, the MPs are not trans and thus not members

of the group most likely to be harmed by this discourse.

Analysis

Users do not merely tag *any* MP in a non-directed post. BAME MPs are primarily tagged

in non-directed or partially-directed racist posts, LGTBQ MPs in transphobic posts, and Muslim

MPs in posts about grooming gangs. Users may be tagging these MPs because they expressed

policy support or because they, their supporters, and/or online audiences will more likely be

harmed by the abusive content. As such, the binary between targeted and non-targeted posts is

not so clear-cut; MPs are tagged in posts that do not directly target their experiences personally,

but still target their broader identity groups or those that they support. Here, the form, target,

and targeted nature of abuse often overlap.

Form

Abuse in the test sample takes a variety of forms, summarized in Table 7.9 above. In

exploring the intersectional dimensions of VAWIP, I will address the following themes:

differentiating between violence against politicians and VAWIP, sexism, intersectional violence,

and incompetence and silencing. Users utilize intersecting discriminations within a politician's

sample, across the corpus, and in single posts. The extent to which users use multiple and

intersecting discriminations, and the forms of discriminatory rhetoric used, differ depending on

the MP targeted. Throughout the test set corpus, users engage in semiotic violence, seeking to

render women invisible and incompetent. The specific tropes they draw from to do so utilize

multiple discriminations and differ based on target.

VAP vs. VAWIP

Not all abuse "correctly" classified by the algorithm is violence against women in

politics. Perhaps not surprisingly—as human coders and platform administrators disagree about

these distinctions—the algorithm had trouble distinguishing between violence against

politicians and VAWIP, as well as between posts *about* abuse and posts that were abusive.

Some posts classified as abusive by the algorithm would be more accurately labeled as

violence against politicians, general hostility that is not identity-based. Some of these posts are

also in the grey area described in Chapter 3's typology. Posts that I classify as general hostility

utilize adjectives that are not inherently gendered but are often used to describe and demean

women specifically. For example, in a post directed at Dawn Butler, a user writes: "why are you

so nasty? Bitter." "Nasty woman" and "bitter" are used to diminish women, particularly women

who transgress gender norms and seek power (Smirnova 2018; Schreindl 2017). Other MPs,

such as Liz Truss, were described in posts as "mad" or "batshit crazy," here referring to mental

illness and possibly seeking to render Truss incompetent in a classically misogynistic trope:

associating women with irrationality and mental illness.

Across the corpus, general and policy-based hostility referred to MPs as hypocrites, stupid, mentally ill, and incompetent. For BAME MPs, general abuse more often used slightly different language, including "disgusting," "vile," and "cretin." Again, though these posts utilize negative language that is not explicitly identity-based, the difference in trope and tone in samples of BAME and white women MPs indicates that this violence is not so "general" or non-differentiated.

Finally, Lisa Nandy and Liz Truss—both white MPs with Shadow Cabinet and Cabinet positions, respectively—had a higher proportion of general or policy-based abuse in their samples than VAWIP, particularly compared to the other MPs under analysis. As I will explore further below, I posit that—as with sexism compared to other identity-based and intersectional discriminatory posts—users seeking to demean and delegitimize MPs have a broader toolbox of hateful rhetoric to utilize against minority politicians. These various tools also delegitimize and demean women in different ways, with distinct effects, depending on their intersectional identities.

Sexism and Intersectional Violence

Numerous posts in the sample incorporate sexist language, both alone and in conjunction with other forms of discrimination. I classified VAWIP posts as sexist if they sexualized an MP ("I would bone her"; "send nudes;" "Don't think any man looks at you sexually at all"), discussed physical appearance both positively and negatively ("you look so beautiful", "find some shampoo you mank"), incorporated "woman" or "women" into their hostility ("stupid woman", "woman talking nonsense", "put on your big girl pants"), or used gendered diminutives ("dear," "sweetheart," "love"). Some posts use just sexism to silence women and

render them incompetent. In emphasizing womanhood, whether sexualizing a woman MP or negatively referring to her appearance, users are emphasizing role incongruity between womanhood and political office (Eagly and Karau 2002).

Sexist rhetoric can also be intersectional in nature, taking different shape when directed at different women. For example, VAWIP directed at Naz Shah includes: "This woman Shah is a danger to society." She is also described as a "treacherous woman" and a "pig of a woman." Though none of these posts include Shah's religion explicitly, they utilize sexism in such a way to render Shah separate and dangerous presumably because of her positionality as a Muslim woman. By contrast, Dawn Butler is described as a "race baiting cow" in a predominately racist post. However, by referring to her as a "cow," the user is relying on misogynoir tropes that dehumanize women of color MPs (Esposito and Zollo 2021, 54).

Still, across the corpus, sexism is but one form of discrimination utilized in online VAWIP. Even in a 280-character tweet, users incorporate multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously. MPs with multiple marginalized identities are more likely to be targeted in this fashion. However, users seem to give greater preference to particular discriminations in their violence against multiply-marginalized MPs. For example, Nadia Whittome, the "baby of the House" as the youngest member of parliament, is a queer, BAME, leftist, young woman. In the sample of 80 abusive posts, she is targeted indirectly with transphobia and Islamophobia, as well as directly with sexism, references to her youth, and racism. However, of these, references to Whittome's youth, often in conjunction with sexism, are most prominent. Whittome stands out from other MPs in the sample for the number of references to her youth and, in particular, efforts to render her incompetent on the basis of her age. Users employ age and gender-based discrimination in posts such as: "please shut up, you silly little girl." "you are the next one for the chop little girl," and "petulant little girl."

Dawn Butler, by contrast, was primarily targeted with racist posts, more so than sexist or multiply-discriminatory posts. One user, targeting Butler incorporated racism and sexism in writing: "@DawnButlerBrent If there was a knee on your thick neck you wouldn't be standing in that house talking sh!t, you bring shame and discomfort to those of us who have made this country our home, you want racism to flourish,shame on you disgusting woman! #AllLivesMatters." This post exemplifies the "reverse racism" that seeks to delegitimize MPs who talk about race and racism, suggesting that Butler "wants racism to flourish" because she stands for racial equality. Linking this violence to transnational events and discourses, the user describes a "knee on your thick neck" drawing a parallel to George Floyd and concludes their post with #AllLivesMatters.

Incompetence and Silencing

Sexism, racism, ageism, and homophobia are used, both together and separately, to render women incompetent and silent as modes of semiotic violence (Krook 2020, 187). Many of the above examples illustrate attempts to establish role incongruity, rendering women incompetent as well as minimizing women's online presence, thereby silencing them. These modes of semiotic violence are present across the corpus, affecting all women under analysis. However, the discursive "tools" employed by internet users to render women incompetent and silent are different depending on politicians' identities.

Some of the clearest efforts by users in the sample to render political women incompetent fall under the general, or violence against politicians, classification. For example, users chastise Layla Moran: "you are not even fit to SHOVEL shit these days no mind being MP." To Dawn Butler, a user writes, "This is what's wrong with politics today. How did she get into

Parliament…?" These posts may not be interpreted as general violence by the MPs or a public

audience, given the landscape of discriminatory, targeted violence the women MPs receive

across platforms, illustrated by the diversity of posts within this corpus. Nonetheless, as

standalone posts, these efforts to render incompetent do not clearly utilize discriminatory

language and as such, cannot be confidentially classified as VAWIP.[193]

However, there are also many ways that abusive users insinuate and attempt to render

incompetent based on identity. Mhairi Black, Nadia Whittome, and Zarah Sultana, all young

MPs, are targeted with violence that aims to render them incompetent as a result of their youth.

Though both Black and Whittome belong to multiple underrepresented groups, their youth is

the primary, non-general tool that users in the sample use to delegitimize their political

positions. One user writes to Black, "Makes you wonder who votes people like her in. The

immaturity in thought is astonishing." To Whittome, a user asserts, "She perhaps recognized a

bolshie little girl, totally out of her depth. We do. No wonder we had a general election before

Westmonster launched their little #plandemic on us. Every MP with even a little experience

went & got replaced with someone with no experience, or clue." This user is describing

Whittome as a "little girl" who is "completely out of her depth," and thus not prepared or

sufficiently experienced for public office. In an even clearer example, a user asserts, "I have said

this before and I'll say it again. NO 23/24 year old is capable of holding the role of an MP and

you repeatedly confirm this every time you open your mouth. You are utterly inept and out of

your depth." Sultana is also referred to as a "silly little girl" who is either "ignorant" or "lacking

an education," "perhaps both." By contrast, Layla Moran, who is not in her 20's but is under 40,

is targeted with different tropes. In her case, her sexuality is the primary tool utilized to render

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[193] Given that they are efforts to silence, I place them in the grey area between violence against politicians and VAWIP.

her both silent and incompetent, as indicated in the following: "this violent pansexual chairing this is a joke."

Efforts to render incompetent also seek to represent MPs as 'others,' who are not British or not British enough. Kemi Bandenoch, one of the only Conservative Black women MPs, was targeted in the following post: "She's the Torys token black woman to promote their agenda on race equality! […] sell out their blackness for timely recognition only to be abandoned or sidelined. @KemiBadenoch is not even British FFS." In this post, the user is attempting to render Bandenoch incompetent as a Black woman by framing her as a "sellout" and a non-authentic representative. Further, the user is alleging Bandenoch's foreignness— Bandendoch was in fact born in London— which is a common discursive trope used against BAME women in the corpora to construct their political activities and positions as illegitimate. This same trope is commonly used against Muslim women MPs (Kuperberg 2021). In the test sample, Naz Shah is targeted with similar rhetoric. One user writes, incorporating the grooming gangs conspiracy theory, "So you Ms Naz Shah wish to continue your campaign to hide the truth from the public. First asking Rotherham rape victims to keep quiet, now this. You are unfit to be an MP. I think most people would like to have you deported. China might suit you." This post aims to delegitimize her Britishness and by extension, her political role.

Online VAWIP posts also regularly seek to silence women MPs, which is another form of invisibilizing. Occasionally, these posts are short and general, such as the concise "shut up!" However, silencing posts also incorporate gendered language as well as discriminatory tropes. Several posts used gendered language, diminutives, or references to an MP's gender. Although intent cannot be definitively determined from a standalone post, I interpret these as intending to silence women MPs on the basis, or partially on the basis, of their gender and political role. One user writes, "Fuck sake Mhairi. Think before you open your mouth. Like you say, listen to

the majority my love!" Diminutives such as "my love" offer a contradictory tone to the aggressiveness of the remainder of the post, but also diminish Black as an MP. "My love" and "sweetheart" are near-universally used for women. Another user writes to Whittome, using a common trope seen throughout the corpus, "Please shut up you silly little girl." By describing Whittome as a "silly little girl," the user both renders incompetent and attempts to silence Whittome based on her age and gender.

Women in the sample are also silenced using other discriminatory tropes. In a reference to the George Floyd case, a user directed the following violence at Dawn Butler: "For someone who purports to not be able to breathe, maybe she should stop talking?" The user is seeking to render Butler silent based on her support for racial equality, but also is directly attacking Butler as a Black woman. In another post, Naz Shah is told to "shut up you racist witch," which both utilizes reverse racism—which I classify as racism in this corpus—as well as the longstanding sexist label of "witch" together.

Finally, as I have explored previously (Kuperberg 2021) and in the training corpus, women MP's claims of abuse are delegitimized in a form of testimonial injustice, aiming to render them and their experiences invisible. This is particularly the case for BAME women. One user, targeting Zarah Sultana, writes, "I haven't seen any racist comments directed at Zarah on this thread […] In fact, Zarah is quite racist herself and not terribly good at her job. Were allowed to criticize those attributes (I criticize white men with the same frequency)." It is possible that Sultana was not targeted with racist comments on the particular thread in question, though I imagine that is not the case. Here, the post author is minimizing the MP by using her first name, seeking to delegitimize her experiences of racism, and calling the MP racist herself, a trope used throughout the corpus to call into question the expertise and experiences of BAME MPs. The delegitimization of women's experiences with violence, echoed in other cases of violence

against women and racist violence, alleges that women of color are not experts of their own experience and do not belong in the public sphere (ibid, 22).

CONCLUSION

The qualitative analysis of the UK corpus test set reveals that online VAWIP incorporates intersectional discrimination as well as multiple forms of discrimination, within a single post, across the posts directed at a single MP, and across the corpus. Just as women MPs cannot be reduced only to their gender, sexism is not the only "tool" at the disposal of online users writing abusive posts to women MPs. Though MPs receive a diversity of forms of discrimination across the posts targeting them, violence in the sample appears to cluster around one or several identities and related forms of discrimination.

I have several theories as to why users choose to use racist tropes against some MPs and homophobic tropes against others. First, these users may use the "lowest hanging fruit," or the most straightforward form of discrimination to package their hostility at a politician. Alternatively, users may go after the most unique identity of an MP, such as Layla Moran's pansexuality, in crafting violent messages. Finally, users are reacting to political context—Black Lives Matter, trans equality debates, etc.—responding to particular posts, and reading messages and discursive tropes used by fellow social media users.

Ultimately, though it is outside of the scope of this project to determine the motivations behind using one or multiple forms of discrimination over others, it remains clear that women in British politics are targeted with VAWIP that incorporates but is not limited to sexism. The discourses used to insult as well as render incompetent and invisible incorporate multiple and intersecting discriminations.

CHAPTER 8: FINDINGS FROM MACHINE LEARNING AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSES- MEXICO

INTRODUCTION

As with the data from the United Kingdom data, the big N analysis contained three distinct parts: coding and qualitative analysis of the training set corpora, supervised machine learning analysis, and qualitative discourse and thematic analysis of the test corpora. In the next chapter, I use these data from both Mexico and the U.K. to engage in cross-case comparison.

MEXICO TRAINING SET DATA

To develop the supervised machine learning algorithm used to classify the nearly 200,000 Twitter posts pulled for the Mexican case, I hand-coded a test set of 5,000 Twitter posts. These training posts included the handles of then-presidents of the Senate and House of Representatives, both women. As with the U.K. training set, I chose highly visible politicians who are more likely to be subject to online abuse to allow for a greater number of abusive posts in the sample. Because Mexican politicians also receive less social media attention than their U.K. counterparts, with the exception of the highest-level politicians,[194] I selected two politicians—notably of different political parties[195]—who had significant online presence to enable a wider collection of posts.

While hand-coding the training data, I found several patterns of sexist rhetoric: undermining the merit of women politicians, particularly in reference to language and quotas;

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[194] For example, Mexico's president, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), has over twice as many Twitter followers as U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson. However, as described in Chapter 4, average Mexican politicians have significantly fewer followers than their British counterparts.

[195] Laura Rojas is a PAN politician; PAN is the conservative (though centrist-conservative) party in Mexico. Mónica Fernández Balboa is from Morena, the majority party when both women were legislative leaders. Morena was registered as a party in 2014 and become the majority party in both houses, as well as elected the president (AMLO) in 2018.

describing women politicians as animals; and using common slurs but feminizing them in ways

that clearly target women. In addition to these patterns, the Mexico dataset shows some

similarities to the U.K. training set, including both benevolent as well as explicitly hostile sexism.

Though benevolent sexism, such as positively referencing a woman's appearance, may

not be classified as abusive in other settings, following the typology developed in Chapter 3, I

consider these posts part of a spectrum of online VAWIP. The following is an example of a

benevolent sexist post: "I hope it's not rude but you are so beautiful- I tuned into the budget

meeting just to hear your voice hehe." Other users less-benevolently call attention to political

women's looks, with posts like "@LauraRojas take care of your lipstick." Users, in emphasizing

the physical appearances of political leaders in a gendered manner, delegitimize women's roles

as political leaders by detracting focus from their capabilities.

In addition to benevolent sexism, users levy hostile sexism at women leaders, in some

cases using tropes present in other global contexts. For instance, one user writes: "We must be

proud [sarcasm] that we are in the top ten for how many *feminazis locas*—crazy 'feminazis'—

destroy, burn, and attack journalists!" The "feminazi" portmanteau, supposedly coined by

Thomas Hazlett, was popularized by Rush Limbaugh in the early 1990s (Moi 2006, 1736;

Williams 2015). Though interestingly and unexpectedly *not* present in the training dataset for

the UK,[196] this slur is commonly used to demean women politicians across the world on the basis

of their gender and feminist political ideologies. Jess Phillips, in January 2018, wrote a tweet

that she is often called a "snowflake or feminazi" prompting even more violent replies, such as

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[196] However, others studying online VAWIP in the U.K. have discussed the use of feminism, including "feminazi." See Esposito and Zollo (2021, 60).

"the mangina has just arrived- well done you just won a pussy pass." The use of "feminazi"

against Mexican women illustrates the transnational dimensions of sexist tropes.

Unlike the U.K. and English-language posts classified in the previous chapters, Spanish is

a "grammatically gendered" language, containing nouns that are grammatically male or female.

Gendered language may actually play a role in women's equality. World Bank economists have

found that gendered languages—spoken by close to 40% of the world's inhabitants—are

associated with "more regressive gender norms" (Ozier 2018). In identifying social media posts

as VAWIP, this gendered language has several unique functions.

First, it can help determine the targeted nature of a post. Many rude and hostile posts in

the test sample were directed at large groups of politicians, expressing disapproval and even

contempt on the basis of their party affiliation. According to my typology, this partisan-based

hostility generally does not qualify as "abuse" or "VAWIP" in this analysis. Posts targeting a

group of politicians often use plural male nouns and adjectives; the plural male is the default

"neutral" plural. Occasionally, however, the Twitter user only directed hostility at a group of

women and, in that case, used plural *female* nouns and adjectives. The gendered nature of

Spanish thus allows for a clearer categorization of target. For the purposes of this project, which

seeks to specifically identify and classify identity-based violence targeting women, these

distinctions are meaningful.

Second, nouns and adjectives can be feminized or masculinized in violent ways. Krook

and Restrepo Sanin (2020) describe the impeachment of Dilma Rousseff as an act of VAWIP,

noting among other pieces of evidence that her detractors often referred to her as *presidente*—

the masculine noun—despite her stated preference for *presidenta,* the feminine noun. Mónica

Fernández Balboa, President of the Mexican Senate during the test dataset period, was tagged

in posts that near-identically used language to undermine her role. One user wrote: "La presidente*, por favor." This user uses "la," the feminine, followed by "presidente" the neutral/masculine, and an asterisk to denote a "correction." This seemingly short and imprecise post manages to indicate a female target with "la"—in this case Fernández Balboa—a correction to the preferred feminine noun (*presidenta*), and a semiotically violent denial with *presidente.*

It is worth noting that common insults in Mexico, like in many countries, are highly gendered. Describing someone a "son/daughter of a bitch," and more extreme variations, is not uncommon. The gendered and highly sexualized nature of common insults underscores the gendered hierarchies and prevalent sexism in society. However, this also complicates classifying abuse as gendered. Similar to the somewhat generic use of "cunt," a highly gendered but relatively acceptable slur in the U.K. (Levey 2018, 150), I avoid classifying insults as VAWIP unless they are both gendered *and* targeted at women in politics. I delve into this grey area further in the qualitative analysis of the test corpus.

However, just as with the feminization of *presidente,* the feminization of slurs allows for a clearer understanding of target. For example, the slur *pendejo,* idiot or asshole, is relatively common. In the test data, women tagged are often targeted with *pendeja*. In one tweet, a user describes Laura Rojas as a *pendeja* with an alien face in the "great position of the *presidenta."* Here, though the referenced political position makes it clear that this post is targeting Rojas, the feminization of the slur also serves to indicate target.

In other cases, this feminization of language is combined with other linguistic devices to turn words into slurs. Fernández Balboa is repeatedly referred to in the sample as a "cenadora" which turns her title, *senadora* or female senator, into a homophonous slur. *Cena,* meaning dinner in Spanish, replaces *sena* in Fernández Balboa's title to imply that the senator is

overweight. Though *cenadora* is a word in Spanish, referring to a pergola-like structure, users are clearly indicating a different meaning along with their intent in their word choice. Several users place the word in quotes, while others add clarifying details including writing posts such as: "we saw the entire video in which the fat *cenadora* from Morena knocked down the old man from PAN." This context clearly indicates that users are utilizing abusive language and not referring to pergolas. "Cenador," the male equivalent, is not present in the sample. Similarly, one user refers to Laura Rojas as "*deputanta"* in place of *diputada,* or deputy. *Diputada* here is combined with *tonta*, or stupid, once again transforming the president's honorific into a slur.

Users also dehumanize the women referenced in the sample by comparing them to animals, most commonly sows and rats. These dehumanizing comparisons have been analyzed in other contexts, including Brazil (Matos 2019) and the U.K. (Esposito and Zollo, 2021).[197] Like the posts targeting women politicians in Mexico, these include combined references to animals and weight, such as "fat pig" (ibid, 54-55). This dehumanization not only serves to "fat shame" women politicians, but also contains added subtext that women are subhuman, unintelligent, disagreeable, and ugly (ibid).

In the Mexico training set, users invoke different animals to achieve different aims. For example, references to rats are often policy-driven hostility, describing all politicians or members of a party as "rats." References to "rat" are thus more commonly used in posts classified as violence against politicians, compared to VAWIP. By contrast, "sow," or *cerda,* is levied near exclusively at women*.* In one post, a user describes Monica Fernández Balboa as a "voracious sow." In another, Fernández Balboa's colleague, Senator Citlalli Hernández Mora, was also described as a sow while being knocked over on the Senate floor. These slurs are

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[197] I, however, did not find patterns of animalization in the U.K. training data for this project.

related to a single event which generated the largest response in the sample: an altercation on the Senate floor over the appointment of C. Rosario Piedra Ibarra as president of the National Human Rights Commission.

Piedra Ibarra is the daughter of Rosario Ibarra, who is an activist, Mexico's first female candidate for president, and a four-time nominee for the Nobel Peace prize (Forbes Staff 2019). Piedra Ibarra's nomination was contested, largely by minority senators from the PAN party, due to a voting discrepancy and concerns that she would compromise the neutrality of the Commission due to her personal, political, and familial connections to President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO). After a day of negotiations and protests, Fernández Balboa was preparing to officially announce Piedra Ibarra's appointment when PAN Senator Gustavo Madero Muñoz pressed to the front of the Senate lectern. What happened next is contested by various sources, but ultimately, several Senators were pushed in a "shoving match" (Russell 2019). Fernández Balboa, in a press release on her website, referred to the event as gender-based political violence against women (Equipo de Comunicación Social 2020). Madero has maintained that he was the victim of the altercation. The event prompted significant social media conversation, referenced in thousands of posts in the sample. Some posts constitute VAWIP, particularly when they dehumanize women Senators, discuss their weight, or otherwise demean them on the basis of identity. Other posts agree that Madero committed gender-based violence and rally support for the women involved.

Finally, violent and abusive posts in the dataset question women's qualifications on gendered grounds. These posts often refer to the broader debates on quotas and parity in Mexico. One user wrote that "there are men better prepared who know much more about women's problems than you." In others, users seek to undermine gender equality as an issue by going after political women. One user tweeted, "THERE ARE NO WOMEN'S HUMAN RIGHTS,

human rights don't have gender and they cannot attend to only women's causes." Other users, invoking global tropes that women's access to power disrupts the meritorious system of politics, write that the gender quota is flawed as positions of power should be filled "by the most capable people, regardless of gender." Though this critique may appear nonviolent and even legitimate political criticism, users are undermining the validity of women's political leadership and democratic mechanisms used to increase descriptive representation.

Descriptive Data on Training Set

The following are among the most common words in abusive posts in the hand-coded training dataset: *mujeres, presidenta, mujer, senora, verguenza, vieja, pinche*, and *diputada*. The plot distribution of the 50 most common words is displayed in figure 7.10 below. *Mujeres*, or "women," and *presidenta*, the feminized form of "president" are also among the most frequent words in the non-abusive data. This indicates that women are frequently discussed as women in the data, but that in of itself does not necessitate an abuse classification. However, *senora,* or ma'am, is only among the top words in the abusive posts, perhaps indicating that users refer to women politicians using this broad term rather than their honorific titles. By contrast, *senadora,* female Senator, is a top word in the non-abusive set but is not a top word in the abusive set. *Vieja,* old or old woman, and *pinche,* fucking, are both top words among abusive posts, indicating patterns of profanity and gendered, derogatory language.
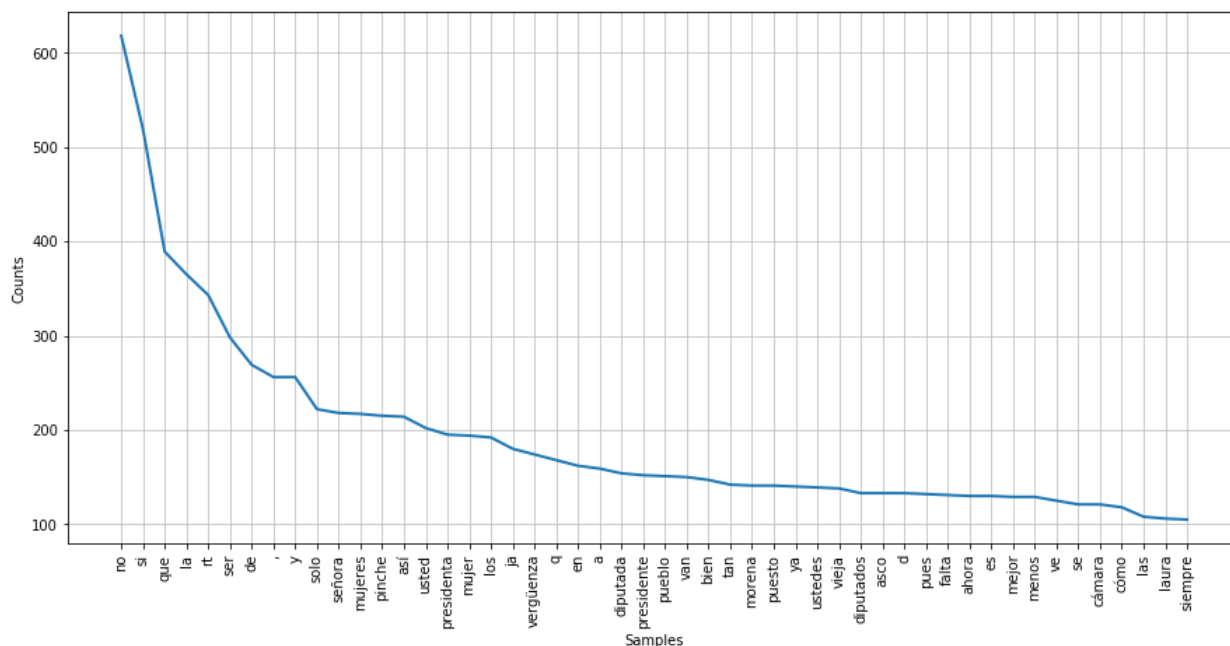
Figure 8.1

Where *diputada,* female Deputy, is a common word in the abusive set, *diputados*, deputies (male or neutral) is one of the twenty most common words in the non-abusive set. This may reflect that many non-abusive posts direct hostility or support at a large group of politicians, namely as members of a particular party, where abusive posts are more likely directed at an individual woman.
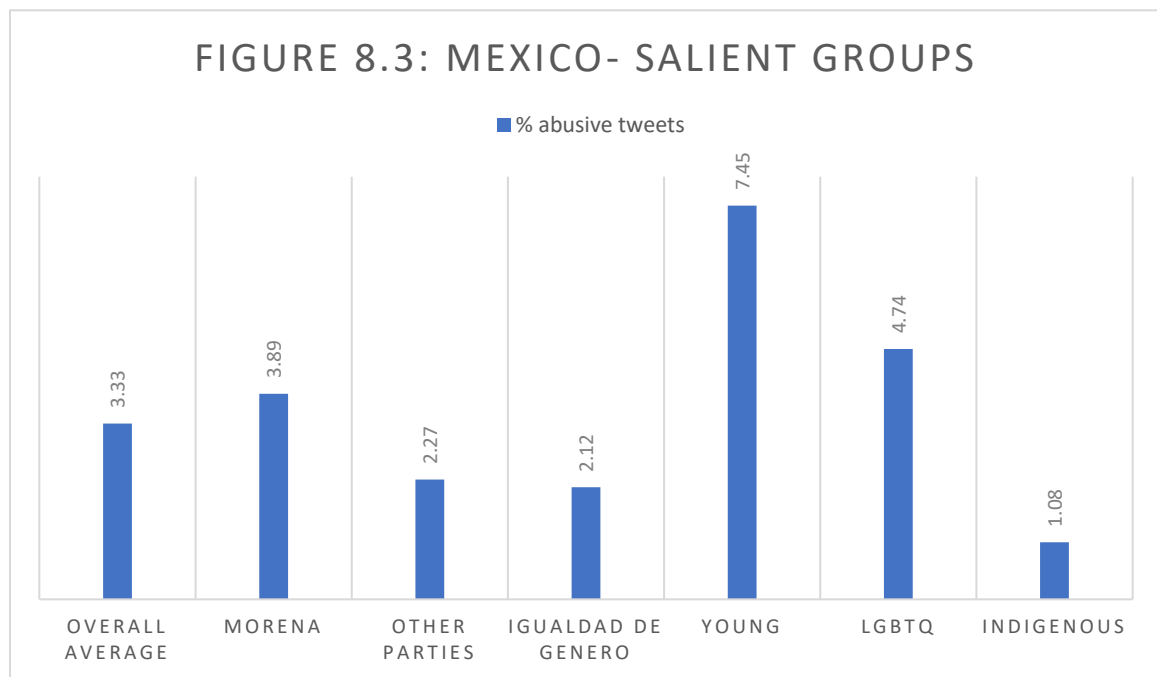
Like with the U.K. training set, there is a statistically significant difference between abusive and non-abusive posts on two measurable factors: capitalization and digit number. Posts with more capital letters, as well as those of a certain length, are more likely to be abusive. However, illustrative of a broader challenge for non-English language analyses, programs for measuring sentiment, polarity, and subjectivity are based on English language use. Thus, limitations in existing platforms means that I was not able to calculate these measures for the Spanish language training data.

TEST SET DATA: BIG DATA ANALYSIS

Of the nearly 1.4 million tweets in both corpora, slightly fewer than 200,000 were from the Mexican case. As such, I hand-coded only 5,000 posts (compared to the 10,000 from the U.K.), and as I did with the UK, I used these 5,000 posts to develop an algorithm for training the 200,000 unclassified posts in the corpus. 3.33% of all posts in the corpus were classified as abusive by a linear regression algorithm, which is less than the 4.73% result for the UK corpus. This difference may be partially explained by two factors: different languages and different assumptions underlying the algorithms. Because natural language processing uses linguistic cues, classification processes are similar, but not identical, across languages. Furthermore, because the training sets in both cases are not identical, the test corpora are not identically classified. Similar to the UK case, however, the randomly selected women politicians in Mexico surprisingly received a higher number of posts classified as abusive than those selected non-randomly, including the "additional" political women in leadership positions and in the Senate.

Figure 8.2: Mexico- Random and Non-Random Groups
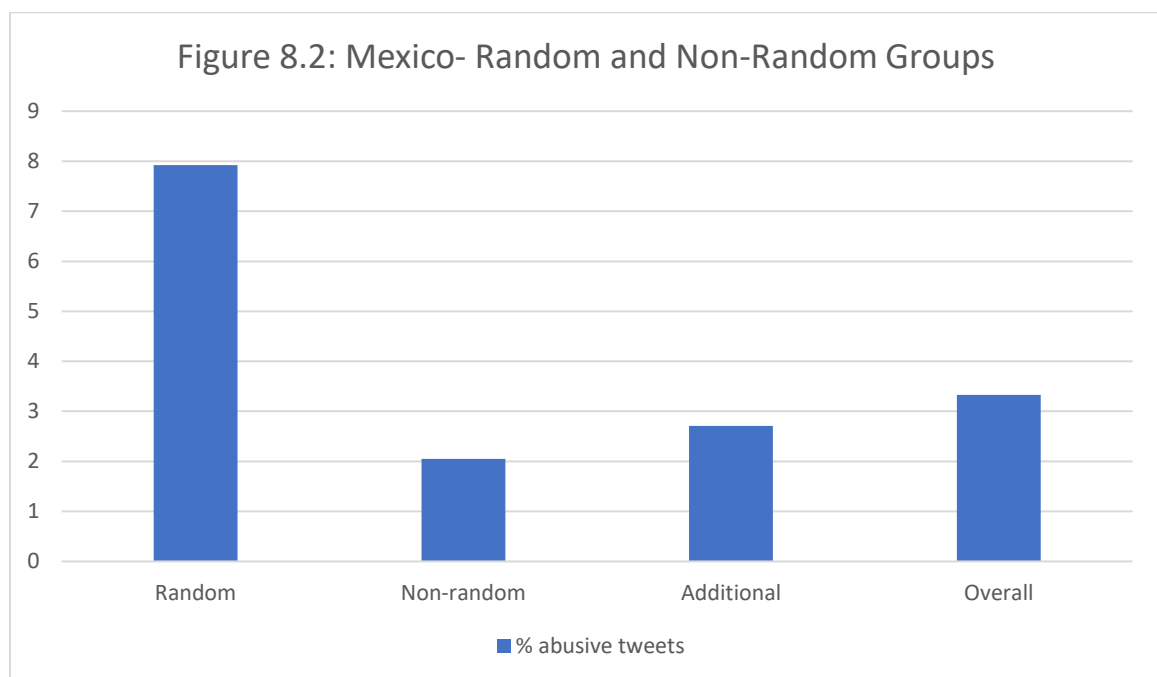
Distinct from the UK, patterns identified through averaging the percentage of abusive posts by salient identities correspond more closely to my interview data. Morena, the ruling party, receives more abuse than other parties, but is also better represented in the sample due to the large number of Morena politicians during the data gathering period. Young and LBGTQ politicians receive more abuse than their colleagues. By contrast, posts directed at indigenous politicians are coded as less abusive than their non- indigenous peers. I identify why this may be the case in the qualitative analysis below.

FIGURE 8.3: MEXICO- SALIENT GROUPS

■ % abusive tweets

Category	% abusive tweets
OVERALL AVERAGE	3.33
MORENA	3.89
OTHER PARTIES	2.27
IGUALDAD DE GENERO	2.12
YOUNG	7.45
LGBTQ	4.74
INDIGENOUS	1.08

The majority of politicians were tagged in a small number of posts and an even smaller number of abusive posts. However, like the UK corpus, there are political women who are outliers, receiving a larger number or greater percentage[198] of abusive posts compared to their colleagues. These include a number of higher profile women, who are either those with

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[198] Even more so than in the U.K., there is a wide discrepancy in the number of posts that tag each political women in the Mexico dataset. I use proportion to compare somewhat uniformly across the sample but also identify the number of abusive posts, to illustrate who in the sample is receiving the greatest amount of abuse.

leadership positions, longer political careers, or a larger social media following. Though higher

visibility women, on average, did not receive significantly more abuse than lower visibility (or

non-leadership women) women, the role of visibility becomes clearer at the individual level.

These disaggregated data also illustrate the levels of abuse against younger and LGBTQ women

in politics, trends I will explore in the qualitative analysis. Data on the percentage and number of

abusive tweets against each politician in the corpus is presented below, separated by sample:

Figure 8.4: % Abusive Tweets- Mexico Random Sample
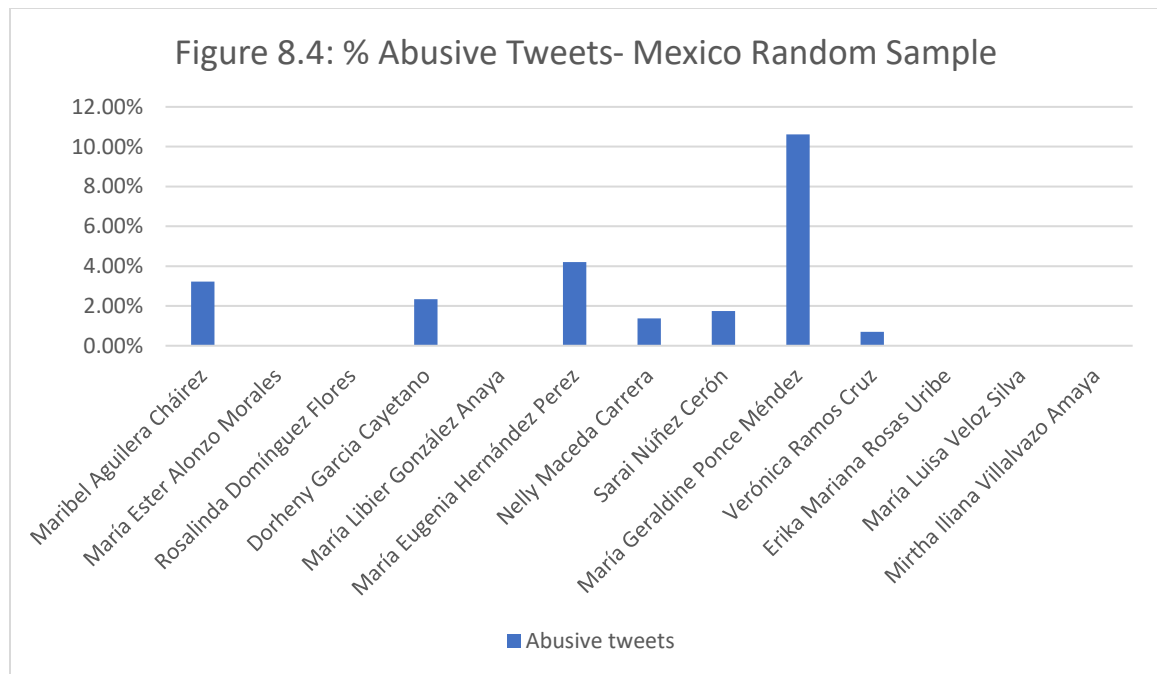
Figure 8.5: # Abusive Tweets- Mexico Random Sample
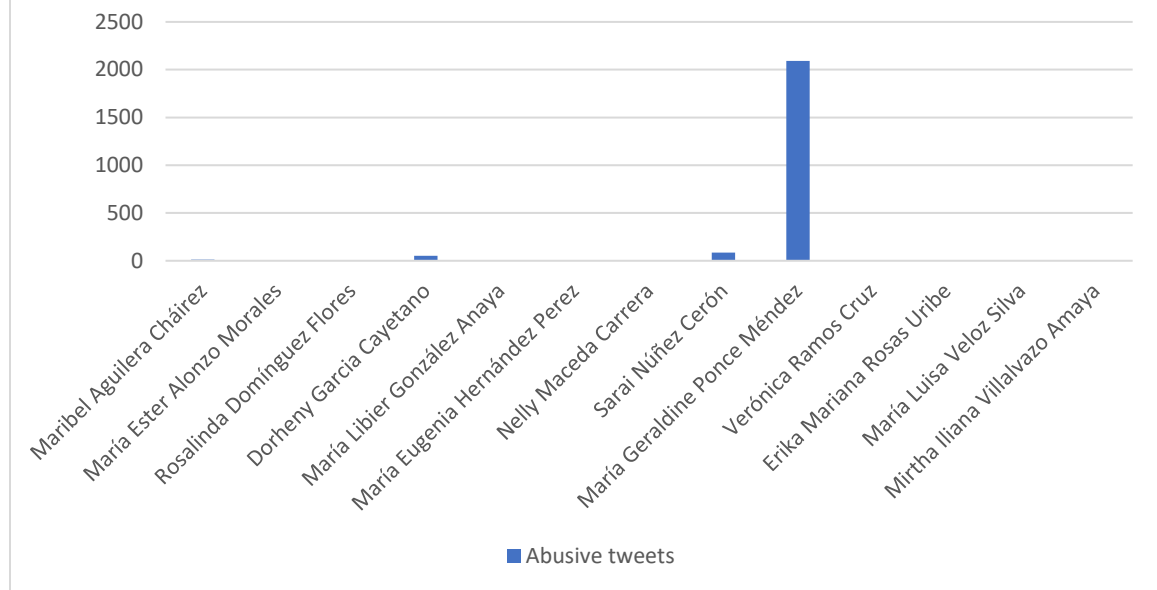
Figure 8.6: % Abusive Tweets- Mexico Non-Random Sample
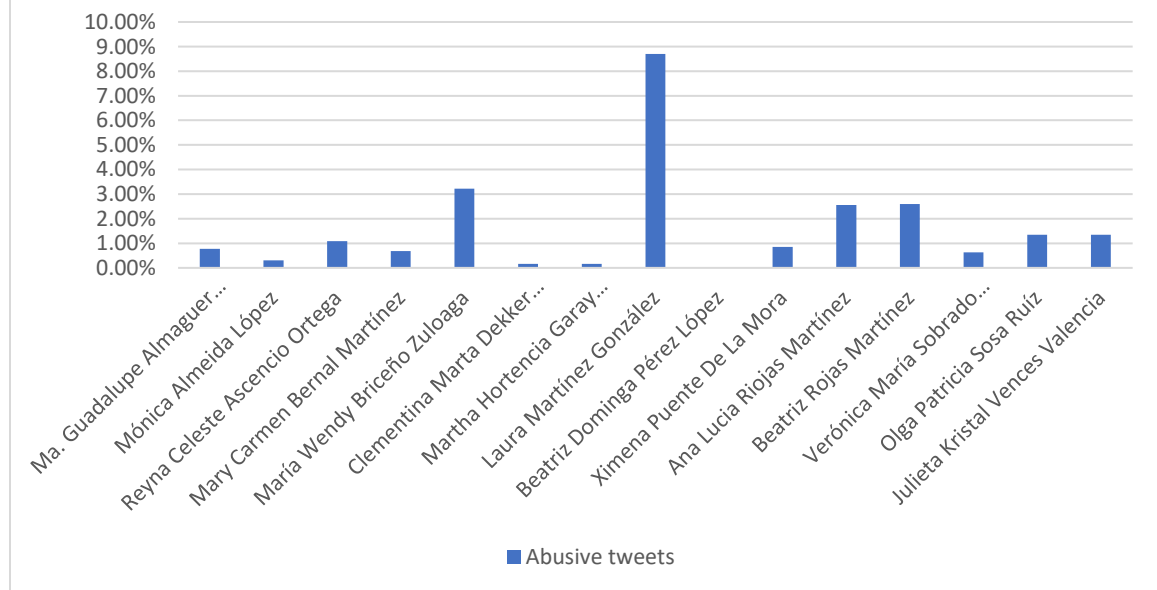
Figure 8.7: # Abusive Tweets- Mexico Non-Random Sample
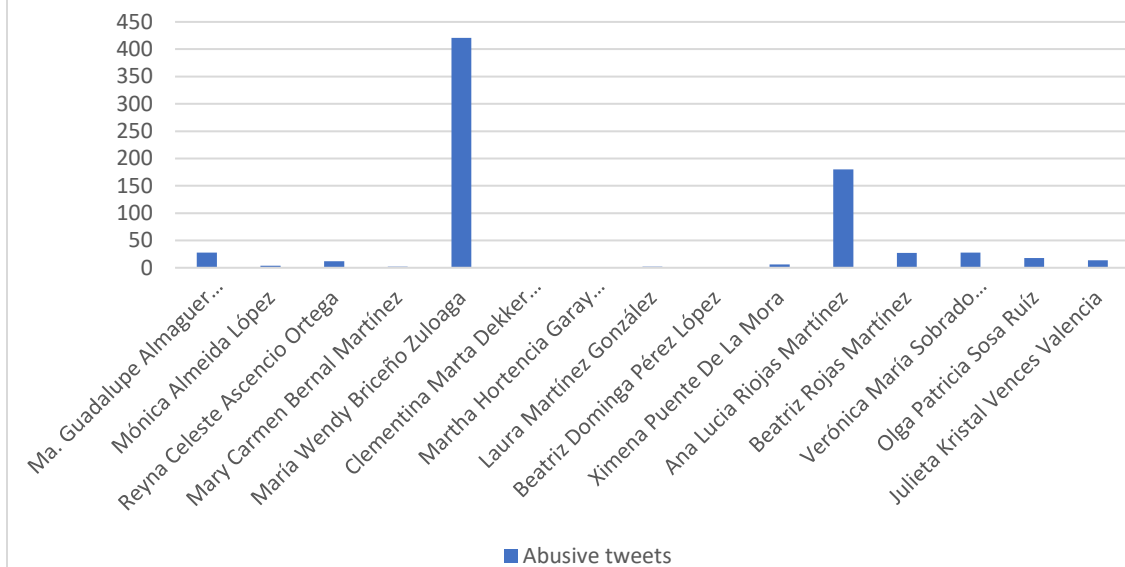
Figure 8.8: % Abusive Tweets- Mexico Additional Sample

Figure 8.9: # Abusive Tweets- Mexico Additional Sample
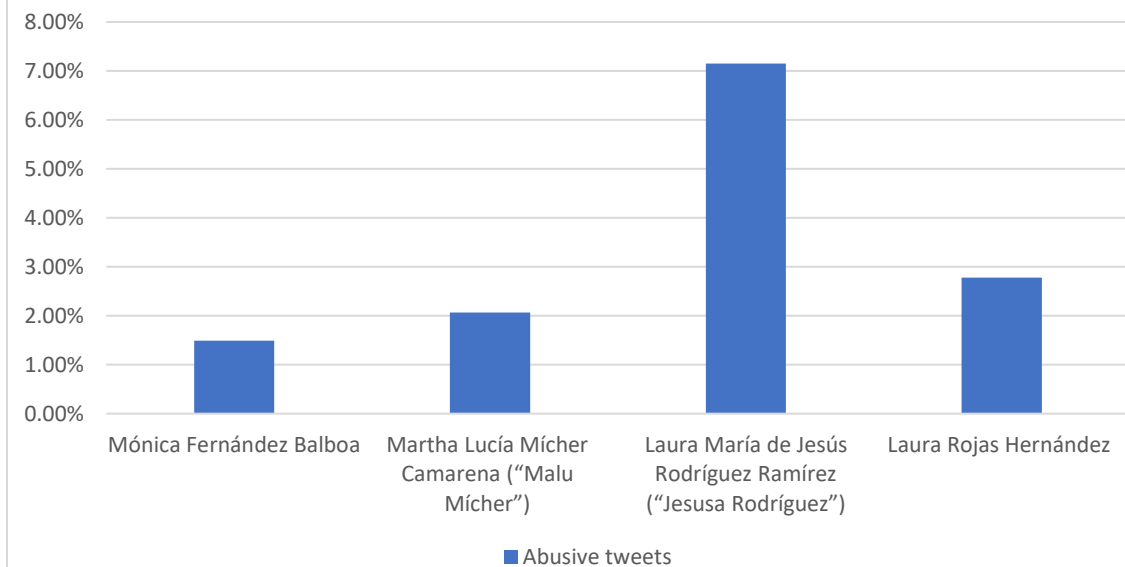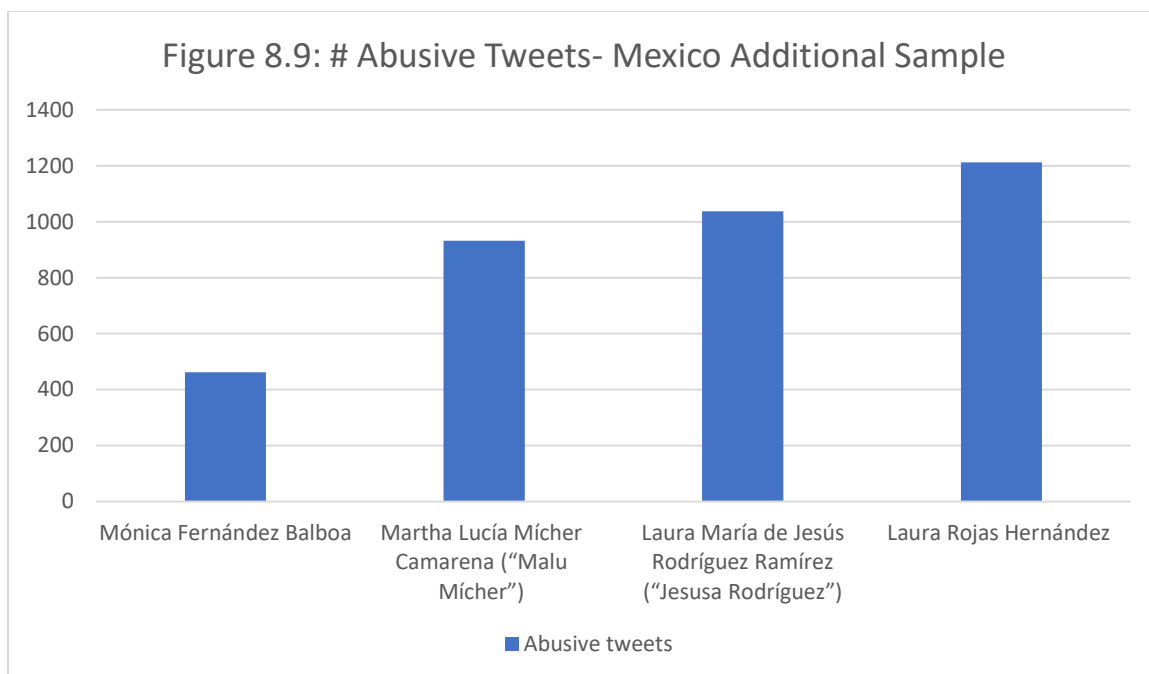
Utilizing these charts and the accompanying data, I selected 15 political women for qualitative analysis. Some of these 15 were women who received a high proportion of abuse, even if they received a low number of posts. However, given the challenges of algorithmic accuracy, some of those selected for qualitative analysis had between 0 and 2 truly abusive posts. Removing these from analysis, I ended up with ten political women for the qualitative analysis. Due to the limited number of posts classified as abusive in Mexico, I aimed to identify 300 truly abusive posts. Rather than utilize random abusive posts per political woman, I read all abusive posts for the majority of those in the sample, only reading randomly-selected posts for Malu Micher, Geraldine Ponce, Jesusa Rodríguez, each of whom were tagged in over 800 posts classified as abusive by the algorithm.

QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

Many of the patterns from the training dataset were also present in the test dataset. For example, sexism was prevalent across the corpus. Some women, particularly LGBTQ as well as

older and younger women, were targeted with intersectional violence that also contained homophobic and ageist discrimination. Feminist women were targeted with posts that incorporated their policy support, such as abuse that critiqued abortion or quota policies.

The abusive posts from the Mexico corpus can be classified into several patterns, some of which correspond to the patterns in the training set. To explore these patterns, I will first explain the context, describing several policies and issues that are common across the corpus. Second, I will consider the targeted nature of posts, many of which include multiple political women together. Third, I will explore several themes related to the form of violence: anti-feminism and anti-quota rhetoric, homophobia and transphobia, and sexism, both benevolent and hostile. Finally, I will offer a potential explanation for why young women received a larger amount of abuse while indigenous women received a lower amount than anticipated. The following table indicates the number of qualitative posts studied as well as an identification of primary VAWIP categories and discursive patterns in the data, separated by politician:

Table 8.10: Qualitative Discursive Themes (Mexico)		
Politician	**Violence against Politicians**	**Violence against Women in Politics**

Ma. Guadalupe Almaguer Pardo
- 8 abusive posts
	- "Speak pure nonsense"
	- "Ignorant"
		- Insults: Sexism
		  o "Fat and ugly"
		  o "Vieja"- Old woman

Reyna Celeste Ascencio Ortega
- 3 abusive posts
		- Group Discrimination: Policy-based
		  o Anti-gender quota, affirmative action
		  o Anti-gay marriage

María Wendy Briceño Zuloaga
 	
 - 65 abusive posts
	- Posts related to her proposal to include sexual and reproductive education in schools
	
	 - "You're a nobody"
	
	 - "Stupid"
		- Insults, Group Discrimination, Claiming Incompetence, Sexualization: Sexism
		
		    o Directed at other women in politics
		
		    o "Vieja"
		
		    o Anti-feminist ("feminazi")
		
		    o Anti-equality, anti-quotas, and anti-abortion
		
		    o "Sow whore"
		
		    o Merit: women only in positions of power because of their "lovers"
		
		 - Homophobia/transphobia

Dorheny Garcia Cayetano
 	
 - 15 abusive posts
	- "Bad"
	
	 - Traitor"
	
	 - Few VAP posts
		- Comments on Physical Appearance, Group discrimination: Sexism
		
		    o Appearance: "beautiful"
		
		    o Vulgar and sexualized
		
		    o Anti-feminist

Martha Lucía Mícher Camarena ("Malu Mícher")
 	
 - 36 posts
	- "Hypocrite"
	
	 - "Liar"
		- Comments on Physical Appearance, Dehumanization, insults, Group Discrimination: Sexism
		
		    o References to Zoom call in which Micher exposed her breasts
		
		    o Fat ("cenadora")
		
		    o "Vieja"
		
		    o Animalization: fat sow, insect

Sarai Núñez Cerón
 	
- 15 abusive posts
	- Profane but not directed, or partisan
	
	 - "Corrupt"
	
	 - "Stupid"
		- Dehumanization, Comments on Physical Appearance, Insults, Sexualization: Sexism
		
		     o dehumanization and appearance based ("vulture")
		
		     o "what a miserable bitch"
		
		     o Sexualized "general" posts ("fuck your mother every time you breathe")

María Geraldine Ponce Méndez
 	
- 50 abusive posts
	- "Stupid"
	
	 - "Inept"
	
	 - Few VAP posts relative to VAWIP
		- Comments on physical appearance, insults, sexualization, group discrimination: Sexism
		
		     o Appearance: "most beautiful woman in Mexico"
		
		     o Sexualized: "slut," "keeps AMLO erect"
		
		     o Posts about how she should be first lady
		
		     o Di- puta- da
		
		 - Youth and sexism: "pretty girl"

Ana Lucia Riojas Martínez
 	
- 46 abusive posts
	- General abuse related to her support/activism in YoSoy132, youth protests
	
	 - "Hypocrite"
	
	 - "Criminal"
	
	 - "Delinquent"
	
	 - "Corrupt"
	
	 - "Rowdy"
		- Insults, group discrimination, comments on physical appearance: Sexism
		
		     o "Slut bitch", "bitch"
		
		     o Appearance
		
		     o Anti-feminist or "fake feminism"
		
		 - Group discrimination: Homophobia and transphobia

		o "Miserable transsexual aborter"
		o "Repent or go to hell"
		o "Identity in your head"

Laura María de Jesús Rodríguez Ramírez ("Jesusa Rodríguez")
 	
 - 54 abusive posts
	- Posts about her being high, related to support of legalization of marijuana
	
	 - Comparing to Stalin, Mao, and Castro for policies
	
	 - Few VAP posts relative to VAWIP
		- Insults, dehumanization, claiming incompetence: Sexism
		
		    o Tied to policy ("crazy vieja" for wanting to reduce Coca Cola contract)
		
		    o "Vieja"
		
		    o Animalization: sow
		
		    o Old, ugly witch
		
		 - Threats, group discrimination: Homophobia
		
		    o Threat: "we better burn lesbians"
		
		    o "Fucking lesbian"

Olga Patricia Sosa Ruíz
 	
 - 9 abusive posts
	- "Incompetent"
	
	 - Corruption
		- Claiming incompetence, group discrimination: Sexism
		
		    o "Indolent and uniformed woman"
		
		    o Questioning merit

Context

Context or policy-based hostility in the Mexico corpus tends to be quite specific, revolving around individual women and individual moments. As such, the events that were important in the training sample were not relevant in the test sample.

For example, Guadalupe Almaguer raised the issue of beauty pageants on behalf of deputies from PRD. The group was seeking the removal of public funding from beauty contests, saying that this funding goes again the state's constitutional commitments to end gender-based violence ("Contradictorio que concursos de belleza se paguen con recursos públicos: PRD" 2020). As a result of this public statement, Almaguer was subject to hostility. One user writes, "You are nobody to take the bread out of the mouth of thousands of people who make a living from the beauty pageant industry. What is your fucking trauma against beauty pageants? Did they tell you from a young age that you were ugly? and that's why you're burning." Though policy disagreement, this post uses personal attacks and sexist, anti-feminist undertones to abuse Almaguer.

Another context and individual-specific event in the sample revolved around Wendy Briceño's support for sexual and reproductive education. Briceño, President of the Chamber of Deputies Gender Equality Commission, put forward a proposal to include sexual and reproductive education in schools. This led to significant pushback and backlash. As with Almaguer, users combined policy disapproval with sexist attacks, writing: "This witch is nobody to tell me what and how to educate my children."

Both contexts of abuse involving Almaguer and Briceño relate to feminist policy proposals and are met with sexist violence. As described in Chapter 3, feminist policy critique and violence against women in politics can overlap, particularly as this policy criticism is not merely political disagreement but has implications for the role of women in public life. This is patterned throughout the Mexico corpus, where anti-feminist and anti-quota sentiments question the political capacities and roles of women as equal political actors.

The Covid-19 pandemic is also part of the contextual background of the Twitter corpus, as it was in the U.K. Finally, as in the U.K., transnational rhetoric is also present in the Mexico corpus. For example, one user connects abortion rights to George Soros. As with the training sample, users also utilize the term "feminazi" to describe women politicians, including Briceño, Jesusa Rodríguez, and Malu Mícher.

Target

Unlike in the U.K. corpus, contextual issues in the Mexico corpus seem to largely affect individuals, rather than a broader group of women. As such, there are fewer non-targeted abusive posts that utilize racism, for example, against a broad group and tag specific political women. However, many posts in the corpus tag multiple Twitter users, including multiple women in politics. Without going back to the original post, and instead just reading a single, standalone post, it can be difficult to determine who the intended target is.

In the general category of violence against politicians, users regularly engage in party-based hostility. As mentioned in the training sample, general abusive language in the corpus is deeply gendered; for example, *chinga tu madre,* translated as "fuck your mother" is one of the most common slurs. As such, though a post may not be targeted at an individual woman or group of women, and may be expressing partisan disapproval, the language used is sexualized, gendered, and vulgar. For example, one user, tagging 12 legislators from the PAN party including Sarai Núñez Cerón, writes: "fuck your bitch and slutty pig mother […]." I do not classify this as VAWIP given the ubiquity of gender-based, general slurs, but recognize that such language impacts the broader landscape of gender-based violence and discourse.

Other posts clearly target an individual woman, but it is not clear who. There are numerous posts in the corpus that tag six or seven women politicians and direct abuse at one, which is clear as the post uses feminine and singular adjectives and nouns. Even without full knowledge of intent or target, these posts bring multiple political women together to render one, and by extension all, incompetent. For example, one post includes: "You don't have any intellect in your face, but you are pretty and powerful and that's what matters." Though directed at a single woman politician, despite tagging several, the user is underlining the notion that beautiful woman may be powerful, but not smart, serving to cast doubt on the quality of the women in politics. Ultimately, even where posts are not clearly targeted at individual women, sexism is pervasive in both "general" violence against politicians as well as in posts classified as VAWIP.

Form

Violence against Politicians vs. VAWIP

The Mexico test dataset underscores that (i) not all hostile posts are VAWIP but also (ii) the grey area between VAWIP and violence against politicians is quite vast. As mentioned, general slurs are often gendered, sexualized, and vulgar. This expands the grey area between violence against politicians and VAWIP in the Mexican case, making it more challenging to confidentially classify posts in either category. For example, a post tagging Sarai Núñez Cerón reads: "Fuck your mom every time you breathe." The vulgar, gendered language of this slur—made more menacing by the "every time you breathe"—is alarming but not unusual.

Other general posts, or those I classified as violence against politicians in the sample rather than VAWIP, include frequent references to women politicians as "hypocrites" and

"corrupt." These include mentions of "fat hypocrite," "instrument of corruption," and

"disastrous hypocrite that we will take to the trash in 2021 [election]." Krook and Restrepo

Sanín (2016, 2019) and Restrepo Sanín (2020) show that false or disproportionate allegations of

corruption have been used across Latin America in attempts to remove women from public

office, or at a minimum delegitimize their political roles. It is possible, therefore, that

"hypocrite" tropes are used against the Mexican women in the test sample in a disproportionate

and gendered manner to constitute VAWIP. However, given the limitations of context in a

standalone post, I cannot make that determination and as a result, consider these posts general

violence against politicians.

Finally, women throughout the sample are dehumanized, specifically referred to as

animals. Jesusa Rodríguez is described as a donkey and Sarai Núñez Cerón as a vulture. In other

cases, women are referred to as sows (Wendy Briceño) and fat sows (Malu Mícher), adding a

clearer gendered element to this dehumanization and more clearly delineating these posts as

VAWIP. In one particularly gendered post, Mícher is told to "Take your udders off you pig." In

another, Briceño is targeted in: "Surely those who promote this initiative are some horrible and

horrible sow whores who are envious of female beauty. You fucking stinky femiorcos, especially

the briceno wendi fucking witch."

Homophobia

Discrimination against LGBTTTIQ people in Mexico, as explored in the previous chapter,

is widespread. Rights for LGBTTTIQ people have expanded over the last decade, but these rights,

notably gay marriage, are not evenly guaranteed across states. Discrimination in the sample

takes two primary forms: (i) non-directed homophobia expressing disapproval of marriage

equality and (ii) identity-based, targeted homophobia. Though interviewees mentioned that "lesbian" is used a slur to target non-LGBTTTIQ women in political leadership, I did not find evidence in the test sample; only LBGTTTIQ political women were referred to as lesbians in abusive posts.

Users tagged women deputies in posts denouncing gay marriage, or asserting marriage as between a man and woman. In one case, several women in the sample, including Wendy Briceño, Celeste Ascencio,[199] and Malu Mícher, were tagged in a post reading: "There is no right to marriage from the state. Marriage is between a man and woman, not because of their rights or sexuality, but because they are complementary." As gay marriage continues to be debated in Mexico, legislatively and in the courts, this type of rhetoric is damaging to LGBTTTIQ community members and to further equality.

Lucia Riojas and Jesusa Rodríguez, two prominent lesbians in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate respectively, were also targeted with directed, homophobic violence. One user wrote to Riojas: "repent or go to hell; your identity is in your head." Riojas was also targeted, along with other LGBTTTIQ activists and networks, in non-directed posts asserting that a trans feminist was not a woman, but a man and therefore a "shame for feminism." This transphobic discourse echoes that of UK trans-exclusive feminists.

Rodríguez was referred to as a lesbian in a number of hostile posts, including those pairing her sexual orientation with policy critique. In these posts, she is referred to as a "fucking lesbian" and a lesbian *vieja,* or an "old lesbian." In one such post, a user writes: "Fucking lesbian, better spend the time serving the country and stop fucking the companies that employ

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[199] For Ascencio, a young, indigenous, and lesbian deputy, this was the only VAWIP post classified by the algorithm

Mexicans," likely in response to her criticism of Coca Cola's operations in Mexico. Despite being

seemingly motivated by policy disagreement, this post is classified as VAWIP due to the

disparaging reference to Rodríguez's sexual orientation. In another, more threatening post

targeting Rodríguez, a user writes: "we should burn lesbians."

Sexism

The most prominent form of discrimination throughout the Mexico corpus was sexism.

These include the tropes described above, including sexist homophobia and animalization.

Sexism is primarily hostile, though in some cases, benevolent. Sexism is also present in anti-

quota, anti-feminist, and anti-abortion rhetoric, which I will cover in the following section.

Many sexist posts in the sample incorporate the words "vieja" and "pandeja." *Vieja* as

an adjective means "old" (feminine). It is sometimes used this way in the sample. It is also used

as a term of endearment in Mexico, to describe a wife or girlfriend. In some cases, *vieja* is

translated simply as "woman." In the sample, users invoke *vieja* to describe Jesusa Rodríguez as

a crazy *vieja* and "ugly witch" *vieja.* Geraldine Ponce is described by a user as a *vieja* whore.

Sarai Núñez Cerón is called a ridiculous *vieja* and Wendy Briceño as an idiot *vieja.* As such, this

term is regularly invoked in a hostile, negative, and gendered manner. *Pandeja* is the feminine

version of *pandejo*, which can be used among friends but also is slang for calling someone an

asshole or bitch. Jesusa Rodríguez, combining both of these sexist terms, was tagged in a post as

a *"vieja pandeja."* Dorheny Cayetano was tagged by a user saying: "you won't fuck it, *pandeja*,"

adding additional sexualization to the sexist term. *Puta,* an even more derogatory term meaning

"bitch" or "whore," is also present in the sample, though less commonly than the other terms.

Lucia Riojas, for example, is tagged in a post with multiple women who are referred to as

"bitches" or *putas.* A user similarly maligns Geraldine Ponce with creative spacing, transforming *diputada* or female deputy into "di-puta-da."

Other posts concentrate on appearance, whether negative—such as referring to Almaguer as "fat and ugly"—or positive. Geraldine Ponce, who was a beauty queen prior to her political career and has a vast social media following, was tagged in many posts that emphasized her beauty. She is described by users as "so beautiful." But she is also tagged in posts that call her "beautiful but stupid."

Finally, corpus posts sexualize women politicians. Ponce is sexualized in numerous posts. One user writes, "Hello/Salutations: not sure I would have sex with you." Another describes Ponce as an "expert on prostitution as well as keeping AMLO [Mexico's President] erect." Several posts center on her relationship with AMLO, particularly as there were rumors about her not getting along with the first lady. Other users in the sample refer to her as "AMLO's whore." Malu Mícher, whose breasts were exposed on a Zoom call, is also subject to sexualization, related to the incident. A user describes her as a *vieja* exhibitionist and another says, "show your chichis on Zoom."

These forms of sexism encompass various categories of online violence against women in politics, as captured in my typology. Women are insulted and called names, dehumanized in their comparisons to animals, purposefully embarrassed (as in the case of Malu Mícher), threatened, and sexualized, all in gendered ways. Women deputies and senators are also subject to group discrimination as well as efforts to render incompetent and silent, modes of online VAWIP which I explore below.

Anti-parity and anti-feminist

VAWIP that takes the form of group discrimination in the test sample, in addition to the homophobia and transphobia described above, is largely gendered. The most common forms of group discrimination posts are anti-feminist and anti-parity posts, with the former including anti-abortion sentiments.

Like gay marriage, access to abortion in Mexico differs by state; only a few states have decriminalized abortion in the first trimester. In a post tagging Dorheny Garcia Cayetano, a user describes feminists as "groups of murderers disguised as humanists […] murderers of innocents in the womb, promoters of gender ideology and pedophilia." Here, the user is calling pro-choice women murderers and is critiquing gender ideology, a "rhetorical device […] to counter gender and sexual equality policy" (Corredor 2019, 616). In another post tagging Wendy Briceño, women who support abortion access are described as "fucking children of Satan" and "murderous pigs."

Women are also broadly abused as feminists, not tied to a particular issue area. Cayetano is tagged in several anti-feminist posts including: "fuck your mother and your feminism" and "feminists are like blowjobs, no problem." In addition, three women in the sample were called "feminazis," incorporating anti-feminist transnational tropes.

Finally, women are attacked on their merit, including on the basis of gender quotas and parity. In one post tagging several women in the sample, a user asks the "What about Men?" question, writing: "There is enough with the defense of women, we are all human beings with the same rights. It's incredible that they talk about gender equality but there are only policies for women." In a post that tags Briceño, a user tweets that "women are not qualified- they are only in politics because of their lovers." This echoes tweets directed at Ponce and her fictional relationship with president AMLO, suggesting that women are only in politics because of their

romantic relationships with men and are thus, inherently unqualified. Another user suggests

that women do not deserve political positions, placing the blame on parity. They write: "gender

parity is literally the imposition of mediocre, inept, tarnished women who are unable to get a

position unless their employer is forced. We citizens hate keeping parasites around." This post,

which tags three women in the sample, exemplifies semiotic violence and group discrimination.

This user is attacking the qualifications and political presence of *all* women, even as they direct

the post at only a few.

Rendering incompetent and invisible

Women politicians are rendered incompetent through many of the tropes described

above. When sexualized, described as "keeping AMLO erect," and portrayed as only in political

office due to their "lovers," users are insinuating that women are not competent on their own

merits and that their political roles hinge on their sexual capabilities. Dehumanizing women by

associating them with animals assumes their incompetence for public life. Women in the sample

are also routinely described as "stupid," "ignorant" and "indolent and uniformed." Claims of

stupidity and lack of knowledge aim to render women incompetent to take on their roles in the

public sphere.

Occasionally, users will directly assert that women are not qualified for politics

specifically. A user tagging Almaguer writes, "What a shame that people like you hold positions

of this type. YOU DO NOT REPRESENT ANYONE." Jesusa Rodríguez is also told "we don't take

you seriously" and "you don't deserve comment" while referred to as a "stupid woman" or

incompetent *vieja.* These posts demonstrate the links between rendering incompetent and

invisible. By suggesting that "you don't deserve comment" a user is both rendering incapable and reducing the politician's visibility.

Women politicians in the sample are also silenced in more direct ways. Rodríguez was told to "sit down woman" and Briceño to "sit down, lady." A post directed at Malu Mícher reads: "go to sleep lady and stop saying shit," once again connecting the modes of semiotic violence by both rendering incompetent and silent/invisible. Finally, Briceño was described as a *chingona,* a slur that has been somewhat reclaimed but has "been used to describe women who are 'too aggressive'" despite the masculinized form used as a compliment for men (Rojas 2018). The user writes, "very *chingona* but there is little shutting up." As a mode of semiotic violence, silencing individual politicians in the sample may be directed at particular women, but makes a statement about women more broadly. The abusive posts in the Mexico corpus suggest that women are not capable of holding political office and should quiet down and let men lead. This violence has a broad impact, harming not only the individual tagged in the post, but the case for women's political equality more broadly.

CONCLUSION

Sexism is rife in the Mexico corpus, taking on a variety of forms from dehumanization to purposeful embarrassment. The violence uses various semiotic means to abuse individual women, groups of women, and by extension, women in the public sphere. Surprisingly, unlike the U.K. sample, other forms of discrimination are relatively limited in the test corpus. Why were more posts directed at young women classified as violence and fewer posts against indigenous women classified as such? I have a theory as to why this is the case.

Unlike women MPs in the U.K. and other cases, many women politicians in Mexico have a limited number of followers and a small online presence, particularly on Twitter. Some political women are tagged in a small number of posts and only a handful of these posts were classified as abusive. As described in interviews, indigenous women may be isolated from some aspects of online violence due to limited internet access in rural communities. Importantly, this does not correlate to a less visible offline presence, particularly in their communities. Young women, by contrast are more "plugged in" to the online space. Twitter may not be the platform of choice, but young people may use multiple platforms more often.

This explanation, however, does not entirely explain differences in the proportion of abusive tweets. The algorithm may be partially at fault here; with limited examples of anti-indigenous or anti-rural discrimination, the algorithm will be less effective at correctly classifying these tweets. Ultimately, although salient discriminations identified through interviews were only partially illustrated in the big N study, this discrepancy should not suggest that indigenous and/or rural women are not especially vulnerable to violence. Online violence is but one form of VAWIP, both complementing and differing from forms of offline VAWIP.

It is evident from the qualitative and big N analyses that online VAWIP does not uniformly affect all women in the U.K. or Mexico samples. Some women, particularly multiply-marginalized women, receive a higher number and/or proportion of abuse. Further, distinct forms and combinations of discriminations are utilized to target different women.

That said, there are significant differences across the Mexico and U.K. corpora. In particular, there are many more abusive posts in the U.K. corpus and more examples of intersectional and multiple discrimination across many salient discriminations. In the relatively fewer posts in the Mexico corpus, sexism is the primary form of discrimination affecting women

in the sample. Nonetheless, there are some interesting similarities between the cases, such as

the inclusion of transnational abusive tropes. The differences and similarities between the cases

illuminate new facets of VAWIP, including the intersectional nature of target and form. I explore

these patterns and distinctions more closely in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 9: COMPARING ONLINE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN POLITICS IN THE UK AND MEXICO

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I ask: how do offline structures of discrimination impact online

violence against women in politics? As seen in the last three chapters, women in politics are

targeted with online violence that incorporates multiple and intersecting discriminations.

Despite some similar threads, the corpora of online posts targeting women from both countries

differ. In addition, political discussions and legal instruments to combat VAWIP have taken

different shapes in Mexico and the U.K. Though I cannot establish a definite causal story, that

higher levels of offline violence, impunity for violent crimes, and credibility of physical threats

contribute to greater public policy focus on offline violence compared to online violence, I

reflect in this chapter on the differences between the data of the two cases. I can demonstrate

with greater certainty that structural violence affects tropes of online violence.

This chapter also asks what patterns exist across these cases. Though not a perfect

"most-different" design, as explored in Chapter 4, Mexico and the U.K. are *mostly* different

cases. Women in politics in both countries may not differ as markedly as the countries they

represent. But, still, finding common patterns, including sexist discourses and modes of violence

can provide insights into the global and transnational elements of sexism, online abuse, the

experiences and obstacles of women in politics, and potential cross-national coalition-building

towards solutions. For example, as French politician Ségolène Royal said, women in politics

across latitudes suffer the same reproaches, including lack of status, presumption of incompetence, and weakness regarding national defense and security (García Beaudoux 2017, 105). Some of these discourses, particularly a presumption of incompetence, were present in violence against both British and Mexican women politicians.

In comparing and contrasting the data from Mexico and the U.K., I qualify this case comparison by summarizing some of the social and structural features that differentiate the cases, including different populations and salient axes of discrimination, unique political systems, and differing social media proliferation. Second, I compare public discussion and legal instruments on, or related to, violence against women in politics. Finally, I compare trends from the big N social media data analyses from the previous chapter.

SOCIAL AND STRUCTURAL FEATURES

A major goal of this research is to compare political women within and across contexts. Without an understanding of context, particularly the differences of context, comparisons are superficial. Below, I explore several key differences, variation relevant to the interpretation of intersectional and online VAWIP across the two countries.

Salient Axes of Discrimination

As mentioned over several chapters, both Mexico and the U.K. have unique, salient axes of discrimination. Experts in both cases described youth and feminist affiliation as relevant factors contributing to increased vulnerability. They also mentioned homophobia as a shared, salient discrimination, though the House of Commons has more out LBGTQ+ MPs than Mexico's Chamber of Deputies. In Mexico, anti-indigenous discrimination, tied to geography, class, and

language, was also described as a key structure influencing VAWIP. In the U.K., racism and anti-religious discrimination, particularly antisemitism and Islamophobia, were identified by expert interviews. These axes of discrimination are not independent, interacting with sexism, other discriminations, and salient factors, including feminist ideology and age.
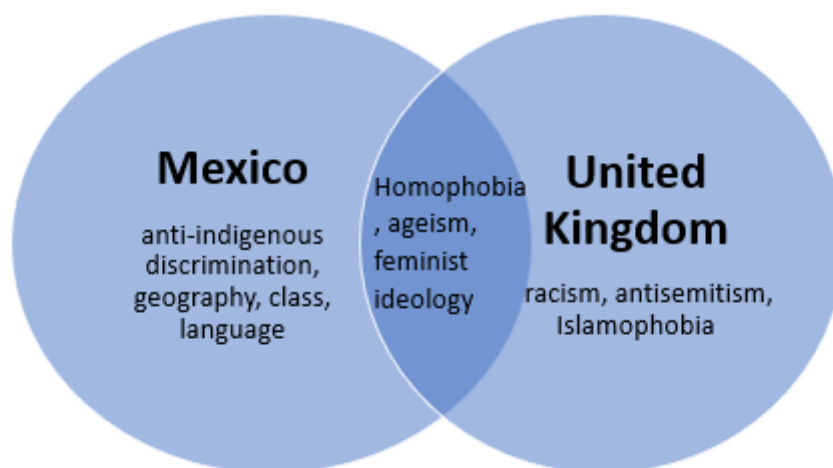
Figure 9.1

In both countries, sources agree that age, visibility, feminism, and contentious or widely-followed events can contribute to an increase in violence. Research on sexual harassment and cyberviolence (Herring, et al. 2002; Hess 2014) in wider populations, both within and beyond Mexico and the UK, suggest that age—particularly youth—contributes to added vulnerability to violence (Duggan 2014). Young women, including in politics, are more likely to be online but are also more likely to be perceived as norm-violating in the political space. For example, in a study requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, the authors found that the risk of online stalking and sexual violence is greatest for young women (van der Wilk 2018, 8). The Pew Research Center, focused on the

U.S., also finds that young people—ages 18-29—are the most likely group to be harassed online" (Duggan 2014, 3).

Similarly, research shows that visibility, both in the form of virality (Gorrell, et al. 2020; #ToxicTwitter 2018) and holding higher-ranking political positions (Håkansson 2020), increases women's exposure to violence. It also seems that women who are "firsts," though highly correlated with more visible and higher-ranking politicians and thus a challenging factor to isolate, face more violence. This factor is perhaps correlated with the fact that women who are "firsts" often violate multiple norms of hegemonic power or do so in significant ways. For example, Diane Abbott—the first Black woman MP in the U.K.—continues to receive significantly more abuse than her colleagues, even after more Black women[200] have been elected as her political colleagues.

Interviewees and reports on VAWIP, across and beyond the cases under investigation here, also note the particular and unique targeting of feminist women. Similar to the categories above, feminist women may be targeted because feminism is particularly norm-violating and threatening to hegemonic, masculinized power. Cyber-feminists, starting with auto and group ethnographies, have explored the targeting of feminist women and ideas online since the early days of the internet (Eckert 2018; Filipovic 2007, 300; Kennedy 2000, 716; Lewis, Rowe, and Wiper 2017, 1469; Mantilla 2015). Many publicly feminist political women report high levels of online violence, particularly sexual violence online (see Gillard and Creasy 2019). Feminist women also report being targeted more viciously and frequently in response to feminist policy support, on issues such as abortion rights and raising the visibility of women.

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[200] There are twelve Black women MPs, including Diane Abbott, as of summer 2020 (Aworo 2020).

Finally, and relatedly, social media studies have confirmed an insight from non-profit reports, existing research, and expert interviews: violence is not static over time, but instead, increases in response to contentious events (Siegel, et al. 2018; Theocharis, et al. 2018, 11). These events, whether domestic or international, can increase polarization and friction, affecting all areas of political life, but can also increase the saliency of key identities and ideologies. For example, debates on abortion or other feminist issues can contribute to an increased focus on, and vulnerability of, vocally feminist politicians. Interestingly, though the effect of domestic contentious events—such as the Brexit vote in the U.K. and the appointment of María Rosario Piedra Ibarra to the National Commission of Human Rights—is clearer in the Twitter data, interviews suggest that international events, even seemingly unrelated international events, can lead to spikes in online abuse. As Jess Phillips explained, "geopolitics, a terrorist incident, […] if anything happens in Gaza, literally it could be anything. […] any big news story […] that always creates a pitch point in the violence and abuse that I suffer" (Interview 2018).

POLITICAL SYSTEMS

The United Kingdom and Mexico have distinct political systems, which have at least two significant impacts on this dissertation's research. Due to the federal structure in Mexico and devolution in the U.K., there are (i) women at different levels of political power and visibility, subject to VAWIP with different levels of attention and protection, and (ii) multiple arenas in which laws can be passed and debates held on VAWIP.

Mexico's federal system contributes to a decentralized structure of political actors. Though women in national politics are likely to be more widely known, and thus were chosen for this study, the experiences of state and local-level actors can offer important insights. Many

practitioners and politicians describe local politics as especially violent (Drenjanin 2020;

Interview with Israeli MK 2017).[201] With a federal structure, Mexican women politicians serve at

the national, state, and local levels, with executive politicians at each level: president,

governors, and mayors. The UK's devolved parliamentary structure offers some similarities, with

accounts of violence and abuse against Members of the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Parliament,

and Northern Irish Assembly, as well as by councilors at the local levels. However, most research

and attention has been focused on Members of the Parliament (MPs) in the House of Commons.

Due to its federal structure, Mexico has multiple levels of executive leadership, including

governors of each state. As of fall 2020, there are only two female governors of 32 federal

entities, Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo of Mexico City[202] and Claudia Artemiza Pavlovich Arellano of

Sonora. Due to women's near-exclusion from this level of governance, in 2020 the National

Electoral Institute (INE) approved criteria to extend parity to gubernatorial elections, aiming to

apply parity laws to these elections for the first time in the 2021 electoral period (INE 2020).

This decision led to criticism from the political parties, particularly PAN and Morena (Morán

Breña 2020). The Electoral Tribunal (TEPJF) postponed and rejected the INE's authority to

extend parity (Irízar 2020) but ultimately shifted course, publishing a sentence in December

2020 mandating that parties put forward women for 7 of their 15 gubernatorial candidates for

the 2021 election. This ruling, which amounts to a legislated candidate quota for governorships,

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[201] Fewer studies survey city and local councillors. In Mexico, for example, social media research on local officials would be hampered by fewer public social media accounts and less online engagement between the representative and public. Research that disaggregates by leadership and visibility, such as Håkansson (2021) finds that exposure to violence increases with visibility. However, local politicians are embedded within their communities, have higher local exposure, and often have less protection than that afforded to national-level politicians. As such, women politicians may experience violence differently in the local setting.

[202] Sheinbaum is the head of the Mexico City government, sometimes referred to as the "mayor." However, she holds a seat at the National Governor's Conference and has the political standing of a state governor. Sheinbaum is the first woman and the first Jew to hold the position. Prior to 1997, Mexico City did not elect its own head of government.

increased women's representation at the state executive level, but has not yet led to gubernatorial parity.

Devolution in the U.K. offers some limited parallels to this federal structure, with separate legislatures and executives in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. However, unlike a federal structure, each of these nations (and the Greater London Area) do not have symmetrical power arrangements (Torrance 2019). As of December 2020, the dual heads of the Northern Irish Assembly (First Minister and deputy First Minister) and the First Minister of Scotland are all women. The First Minister of Wales is a man, though women hold three of five Welsh Parliament leadership positions.

Research on VAWIP in Mexico has included the experience of subnational political women, including local councilors and state-level officials. Research and best practices have also been developed in individual states. For example, Oaxaca released a 2019 report detailing VAWIP in the state, recognizing the federal, state, and municipal responsibilities to prevent VAWIP (*Violencia política contra las mujeres por razón de género* 2019, 3). The report recognizes regional (including the Belém do Pará convention), national (such as the General Law for Women's Access to a Life free from Violence), and state (for example, the law to Respond, Prevent, and Eliminate Discrimination in the State of Oaxaca) laws that can be used to combat VAWIP. State-level policies can address local, specific concerns. However, this is not always realized; the 2019 Oaxaca report does not mention indigenous-specific discrimination, even though Oaxaca has the highest percentage of indigenous Mexicans of any Mexican state.

Finally, states across Mexico have passed various amendments and laws, or leveraged their existing laws, to combat VAWIP. For example, by August 2020, seven states had approved laws disallowing individuals with a history of violence to run for public office. These laws vary to

some degree; in Oaxaca, an election can be nullified if the candidate has committed gender-based political violence (or VAWIP). In Chihuahua, any candidate with a criminal record, including domestic violence. cannot stand as a candidate for governor, deputy, councilor, or municipal president (Rangel 2020).

In the United Kingdom, though devolved parliaments and assemblies have not passed laws on VAWIP or intimidation in public life, the issues have been debated across the separate bodies. In November 2019, the Scottish Parliament held a debate on intimidation in public life, referencing the December 2017 Report on Intimidation in Public Life. Here, MSPs (Members of the Scottish Parliament) discussed their experiences of abuse in both the House of Commons and Holyrood, the Scottish Parliament. This included noting the growth and ubiquity of online violence. At the opening of the debate, Rachael Hamilton described the "misogyny, antisemitism, racism, [and] homophobia" of the 2017 general election. Others mentioned the specific targeting of women, including Elaine Smith who quoted colleague Jenny Mara, stating: "there is no place for violence or threats of violence towards women engaging in public life in Scotland." A recent article by Chris Marshall (2021) explores violence and intimidation against members of the Scottish parliament, including the results of a Holyrood survey to all MSPs on abuse against elected officials. One female MSP describes a "sizable number of females that I work with [who] have received credible death threats—I know of three in just the last couple of weeks." About one-third of women MSPs surveyed noted that they had received a threat of sexual violence. 70% of all MSPs surveyed said that "they had feared for their safety since becoming an MSP, rising to 87 per cent among the female MSPs" (ibid). In the Welsh Parliament, six Members of the Senedd (MSs) gave seven plenary speeches over the course of 2019 and early 2020 that mentioned intimidation in public life. However, in both the Welsh and Scottish

parliaments there have been relatively few references to multiple or intersectional discriminations.

Proliferation and Use of Social Media

Social media use, particularly Twitter use, is not consistent across both cases. As mentioned in Chapter 4, though both the U.K. and Mexico are regional leaders for their Twitter use, the U.K. has a significantly higher per capita rate of Twitter use compared to Mexico. Combined with broader and deeper inequalities, the digital divide is also more pronounced in Mexico, leading to fewer citizens online as well as differences between the social media-using population (particularly the Twitter-using population) and the general population. While 99% of Mexican internet users use Facebook, and 93% use WhatsApp, as of 2019 less than 40% use Twitter (Martínez 2020). For indigenous, non-Spanish speaking, and lower income Mexicans,[203] access to the internet is limited; only 2 of 10 low-income Mexicans were Internet users in 2014, compared to 7 of 10 highest-income Mexicans.

This digital divide, and the accompanying Twitter divide, is present in the data samples. 12 of the 25 Mexican Deputy women randomly selected for analysis did not have a Twitter account. Of those that did, the Deputies had an average of 3,457 Twitter followers. Removing the outlier—Geraldine Ponce with 33,800 followers—the remaining Deputies have an average of only 788 followers. Among the U.K. MPs in the random sample, only one of 23 Members of Parliament did not have a public Twitter account. The remaining 22 MPs average 25,200 Twitter followers, over seven times the number of their Mexican colleagues, despite the fact that the

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[203] Classism, anti-indigenous discrimination, educational discrimination, and language discrimination are correlated.

Mexican population is double that of the U.K. There is another data divide that is relevant here:

differences in content moderation. In the U.S., Spanish-language posts are less moderated, and

less quickly moderated, than English-language posts despite a high number of Spanish language

users and posts (Ryan-Mosley 2020). This pattern likely also impacts countries in which Spanish

is the primary language spoken, such as Mexico.

Despite these differences, research on online abuse in Mexico does regularly

incorporate Twitter and often finds that Twitter is a key site for online violence against

politicians as well as online VAWIP (Barrera and Rodríguez 2017; "Subordinadas y bellas"

2020).[204] Some studies (Barrera and Rodríguez 2017) combine broader Twitter studies with

more limited studies of WhatsApp and Facebook, including data shared by political women

themselves. In the U.K., many studies rely exclusively on Twitter data for studying violence

against politicians, gender-based violence against women online, and VAWIP.

Regional Organizations

The U.K. and Mexico are members of largely different international and regional

organizations. During the time this data was collected, the U.K. was still a member of the

European Union, though in the process of leaving. The U.K. is also a member of NATO, the North

Atlantic Treaty Organization, and belongs to the Commonwealth. The U.K. is one of the founding

members of the United Nations and a permanent member of the Security Council. Mexico, also

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[204] However, researchers reporting more violent messages from Twitter compared to other platforms
could be a result of Twitter's developer API, application programming interface, as well as data access.
Twitter data is more easily and cheaply accessed than Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram (this is not
necessarily the case for Reddit, webpages, and news articles). Unless researchers clearly report their
methods, it is possible that the larger portion of Twitter data in their datasets is not a result of greater
volume or greater amounts of violence but instead, access.

a U.N. member state, participates more significantly in North American and Latin American regional organizations These inter-American organizations include the Organization of American States (OAS) and its affiliated bodies—such as the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the Inter-American Council of Women.

Differences in organizational membership correspond with differences in the influence of regional policies and legislation. The U.K. is a signatory to the Istanbul Convention, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, which does not include political participation but does define violence against women as a violation of human rights, echoing international frameworks. The Convention (Article 4) also includes the protection of rights without discrimination on the grounds of sex, gender, race, language, religion, ideology, national origin, and other factors.

Mexico is party to the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women (the Convention of Belém do Pará), adopted in 1994, that (i) defines violence against women; (ii) establishes that women are entitled to "free and full exercise of her civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights" with the recognition that violence against women stops the exercising of these rights; and (iii) though it does not specifically mention intersectionality, includes recognition of "the vulnerability of women to violence by reason of, among others, their race or ethnic background or their status as migrants, refugees, or displaced persons" as well as violence due to pregnancy, disability, age, socioeconomic status, and conflict context (Article 9). Article 9 has been taken to establish the concept of intersectionality and/or multiple discrimination in regional legal doctrine (Alanis 2020, 15; Sosa 2017, 165).

Shared Ties

Despite these key, and consequential, differences between the U.K. and Mexico, they are not fully separate or separable. Both countries are linked through multiple international organizations and transnational networks. Mexico and the U.K. are G20 members. Organizations with broad membership, such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union and International Monetary Fund, also count both countries as members.

The U.K. and Mexico have some overlap in their international ties as well as joint agreements between the two countries. On December 15, 2020, in anticipation of Britain's withdrawal from the E.U., Mexico and the U.K. signed a temporary trade agreement with plans for a new Free Trade Agreement in 2021 (Jayawardena and Truss 2020). The countries thus have strong diplomatic ties.

Mexico and the U.K. have not worked jointly on violence against women in politics but have worked together on issues of violence against women, particularly in Mexico. The British Embassy in Mexico (la Embajada Británica en México) worked with the UN Office on Drugs on Crime to sponsor events related to gender and corruption (UNODC 2018), and in 2020, the British Embassy raised concerns over increased domestic violence during the Covid-19 pandemic in Mexico.

In addition to formal transnational ties, there are also informal transnational ties. This is particularly evident in online communication as individuals from around the globe participate in shared conversations. Though there are not data on the online networks between the U.K. and Mexico, the big N analyses show some similar language and discursive strategies (e.g., calling feminist women "feminazis").

While on friendly—though asymmetrical—diplomatic ground, both countries have not jointly and publicly discussed VAWIP. Both countries also frame the issue of violence differently, based on distinct legal traditions, regional and international laws, motivations in tackling the problem, and forms of violence emphasized. Mexico's laws and policies use language and inspiration from the Inter-American system and rely on a human rights framework (Albaine 2017, 119), while discussions of violence in the U.K. emphasize the online space.

LAWS AND INSTRUMENTS TO COMBAT VAWIP

The U.K. and Mexico have taken different approaches to tackling violence against women in politics, starting with how the phenomenon has been conceptualized and discussed in each context. In the U.K., violence against politicians, or "intimidation in public life," has been the starting point for public policy and data collection. Intimidation in public life is gender neutral, affecting all those in public life. However, in parliamentary debates and reports, politicians have emphasized the online space and the unique intimidation experienced by women. Intimidation in public life *against women* is not necessarily gender-based, merely intimidation or violence *targeting* women.

By contrast, Mexico uses the terms "gender-based political violence," "political violence against women," and "gender-based political violence against women" to describe VAWIP. This conceptualization has a clear gender focus, understanding this issue as a form of gender-based violence against women and as a part of the constitutional and international responsibilities to guarantee equality and eliminate discrimination against women. In tracking VAWIP cases in Mexico, state officials and politicians recognize that not *all* political violence targeting women is gender-based political violence. The emphasis in this understanding of violence is how violence

is gender-based, gender-differentiated, or gender-motivated, targeting women *as women* in the public sphere.

As a result of these different starting points, Mexican instruments tend to emphasize a broader range of political actors. Though much of the 22 defined behaviors in the 2020 legal reform apply to candidates or those holding political office, several are much broader, including failing to "recognize the full exercise of women's political rights" and any conduct that "harms […] the dignity, integrity, or freedom of women in a political, public, powerful, or decision-making position that affects their political electoral rights" (Alanis 2020: 38-39). This allows for a clearer inclusion of women journalists, judges, electoral officials, and human rights defenders.

By contrast, the discussion in the U.K. on intimidation in public life has centered on formal politicians, primarily those in the House of Commons, though some have considered local councilors and those who work at Westminster more broadly. That said, as I will explain further, the laws used in the U.K. in VAWIP cases are not specific to the political sphere; any individual who receives offensive communication or racially-motivated harassment can receive similar protection under the law.

Some of these differences in conceptualization and application may relate to regional influence. Though Council of Europe recommendations and resolutions have included VAWIP, these recommendations are not discussed in parliamentary debates and do not appear to influence policy or legislation domestically in the U.K. By contrast, Mexico has been a significant participant in regional conversations on violence against women and VAWIP. Mexico's relationship with regional neighbors, such as Bolivia, and regional organizations likely encouraged the development of a unique protocol (2016/2017) and the subsequent set of legal reforms (2020) that define and establish guidelines for VAWIP within federal law.

The primary difference between each country's legal response to VAWIP is as follows: the U.K. uses existing laws and applies them to acts of violence against political women, while Mexico has created a new set of laws. Mexico, as well as Latin American countries more broadly are outliers in establishing laws that address violence against women in politics (Restrepo Sanín 2021). That said, academics and practitioners have raised concerns over the efficacy and enforcement of these laws (Piscopo 2016). As of yet, there are no laws in the U.K. that specifically address the phenomenon, though a series of other laws, most notably on communications offenses, have been used to prosecute offenders of violence against women in politics, including online VAWIP.

There are two other key and relevant differences between the legal and policy-driven responses in both contexts. First, in the law and its application, Mexican cases tend to focus more on political perpetrators. Some of the early publicized cases of VAWIP included women being prevented from registering their candidacies, unable to access funds, prevented from speaking in political fora, and forced to vacate their elected positions. In the Protocol Attending to Gender-Based Political Violence against Women, for instance, the document authors list potential perpetrators of VAWIP as including political party members, aspirants and candidates, public servants, government officials, authorities in electoral institutions, and journalists.

In the U.K., by contrast, policies and public discussions tend to emphasize civilian and public perpetrators. The murders of Jo Cox and David Amess as well as the attempted assassinations of Lord Jones and Stephen Timms—all of which took place during constituency surgeries—were all perpetrated by members of the public, rather than political opponents (Siddique 2016). This likely influenced and continues to influence the U.K.'s focus on violence from members of the public, rather than a primary focus on fellow politicians. The #MeToo movement did bring emphasis to harassment within Westminster and within parties (Krook

2018), though this discussion has taken place somewhat separately from discussions on
intimidation in public life.

Second, laws and policies differ in their emphases on the online space. Mexico's legal
reforms mention the online space as a site for information dissemination. Several agency
documents include social media or the internet as a potential location for violence. However,
online violence is not emphasized, and the unique concerns of social media are not identified.
This is not to say that there are not highly publicized cases of online VAWIP. There have been
recorded attacks on social media, such as that of Morena's Wendy Briceño who filed a
December 2020 complaint describing violent attacks against her through social networks (Yañez
2021). Reforms on VAWIP apply to "any mode of information" including information
technologies, cyberspace, and social networks (ibid). Still, the VAWIP reforms of 2020 do not
include specific mention of the internet or online spaces and Briceño's case has not yet been
adjudicated, perhaps indicating the law's limited efficacy or applicability to the online space. In
the U.K., however, public debates and discussions, primarily those discussing intimidation in
public life, nearly *always* center or mention at length the role of online technologies and social
media. Though new laws have not been passed, the British courts have used existing
communication laws—which have been applied to the internet—to prosecute online VAWIP
crimes committed against women politicians.

Despite these differences, there are similarities across both contexts. Intersectionality,
or least the recognition that multiply-marginalized groups are uniquely targeted with violence,
has been included in legal reform in Mexico and in public debates in the U.K. Court cases in the
U.K. have also used racial and religious harassment laws, which are not specific to political
targets, to charge perpetrators of online violence against religious or racial minority politicians.
Mexican policies and laws further discuss the unique vulnerabilities of certain groups, including

women who are Afro-Mexican, indigenous, disabled, of older age, and/or LGBTQ as well as legislate greater penalties for violence against multiply-marginalized political women.

Finally, in both the U.K. and Mexico, there have been recent efforts to legislate against online harms. Mexico passed Olimpia's Law in 2021, which punishes digital violence, particularly digital violence against women, and the U.K. has been working towards an Online Harms Bill since 2019. While women politicians could receive some protection from these laws, neither law (nor discussions about these laws) includes mention of political women. Instead, these pieces of legislation focus on online harms against members of the general public, particularly minors.

The differences in legal response and policy discussion across both contexts offers some indication of the emphasis legislators place on (i) the role of intersectional discriminations in violence against politicians and VAWIP and (ii) online vs. offline harms. In both cases, legislators recognize the role of structural violence and discriminations on political violence, incorporating the unique experiences and vulnerabilities of multiply-marginalized politicians in reports (UK) and law (Mexico). However, Mexican legislation emphasizes offline violence over online violence while debates and reports in the U.K. often underscore the role of the internet in acts of violence.

SOCIAL MEDIA DATA COMPARISON: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES ACROSS BIG DATA AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSES
Introduction

The U.K. and Mexico Twitter datasets show some clear differences as well as some surprising similarities. In terms of overall numbers, 4.73% of the U.K. test corpus was classified as abusive using a logistic regression, supervised machine learning algorithm. 3.33% of the Mexico corpus was classified as abusive using a linear regression algorithm, and 3.73% of the

corpus was classified as abusive using a logistic regression algorithm.[205] In short, the algorithms

classify about a 20% higher proportion of posts as abusive in the U.K. corpus than in the Mexico

corpus.[206] Therefore, within the scope of this data, higher offline violence and greater impunity

in Mexico does not appear to correlate with higher levels of online violence.

The broad descriptive statistics, or overall percentages of abusive tweets, on salient

identity in Mexico diverge somewhat from the interview data; though younger and LGBTTIQ

women receive a higher proportion of abusive tweets, indigenous women and women who

work on gender issues do not. These descriptive statistics mostly hold for the qualitative

analysis. Age, though primarily *old* age, contributes to abusive rhetoric in the sample.

Homophobia and transphobia are present as well, largely targeting LGBTTTIQ women. However,

anti-feminist rhetoric is present throughout the corpus, which is not shown in an average of

abusive posts directed at women who work on the Gender Equality Commission. Surprisingly,

indigenous women receive a low proportion of abuse and the algorithm did not classify any

abusive posts that had anti-indigenous rhetoric.

For the U.K. corpus, a different pattern emerged. The descriptive statistics differ more

from interview data than in Mexico. Though Black, Asian, and minority ethnic (BAME) women

received a higher overall percentage of abuse, young women only received slightly more abuse

than the average woman in the sample. More surprisingly, on average, Muslim and LGBTQ

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[205] As discussed in Chapter 4, I used the linear regression algorithm on the Mexico corpus as it had a higher accuracy score. To better compare across the corpora, I wanted to include the logistic regression descriptive statistics for Mexico here.

[206] This difference is notable but cannot be extrapolated to generalize with certainty that women in U.K. politics face more online violence than women in Mexican politics writ large. First, this data only comes from one platform, and from a particular period of time. Second, the algorithms, though comparable, are not identical, based on different training data and using unique, language-specific elements. Third, the corpora are very different sizes and women in U.K. politics are tagged in more posts overall than their Mexican counterparts. Finally, not all classified posts are abusive and fewer still were correctly classified at VAWIP.

women received less abuse than their non-Muslim and non-LGBTQ peers. However, the

qualitative data analysis paints a different picture. Islamophobic, homophobic, and transphobic

rhetoric is pervasive in the sample, including directed and non-directed posts tagging Muslim

and LGBTQ MPs. The qualitative analysis also confirms that young and BAME MPs are targeted

with violence that seeks to render them incompetent and invisible with ageist and racist tropes.

The only salient category of discrimination relatively absent from the UK test dataset is

antisemitism, perhaps because no MPs in the qualitative analysis, and only one in the big N

analysis, are Jewish.

Targeted Nature of Violence: Differences and Similarities

Politicians in both cases are tagged in posts that are not directed at them. This makes

sense; someone looking to expand the audience of their message or gain attention from a

powerful figure might tag several—Twitter allows up to 10—politicians in their post. Politicians

are also tagged in posts that are directed at them as a member of a broader group, what I would

classify as "group discrimination" as a sub-category of VAWIP.

In Mexico and the U.K., this trend is especially clear in transphobic posts. There are no

transwomen in either sample. However, LGBTQ politicians in both the U.K. and Mexico—likely

due to their support of trans equality—are tagged in a greater number of transphobic posts than

their non-LGBTQ peers. These include references to gender ideology in Mexico, which bears

some resemblance to anti-trans violence in the U.K., notably the assertion that gender is no

different than biological sex. The number and proportion of transphobic posts is higher in the

U.K. than in Mexico, but still present and similarly targeted.

Forms of Violence: Similarities

The corpora from both Mexico and the U.K. contain all categories of online VAWIP described in my typology: insults and name calling, dehumanization, comments on physical appearance, group discrimination, purposeful embarrassment, threats, sexualization, claiming incompetence, and silencing. Of these, direct and indirect threats are the least common across both corpora.

There are four primary forms of violence that are prominent *and utilize similar tropes* in both cases: transphobic and homophobic group discrimination, dehumanization, and silencing. I touched on transphobic group discrimination above. Homophobic, and gendered homophobic discourses are also utilized across both cases to target LGBTQ political women. They are, however, somewhat different, perhaps in part due to the different levels of legal and social institutionalization of LGBTQ rights between the cases. In Mexico, users express disapproval of gay marriage and use "lesbian" as a slur against LGBTQ politicians. In the UK, Layla Moran's pansexuality is weaponized in abuse and transphobic discourse abounds, but lesphobic rhetoric and disapproval of LGB equality is not clearly present in the sample.

In both corpora, women politicians are compared to animals, including rats, cows, and monkeys (UK) as well as sows, insects, vultures, and rats (Mexico). As Esposito and Zollo (2021) explore in the U.K. case, referring to women as animals can signal depravity and the "collective obsession" with women's size (55-56). The animalization of women politicians is not necessarily *only* gendered, as race (Anderson, et al. 2018) and political factors (such as visibility, feminist identity, and policy support) can contribute to dehumanization. This animalization and objectification also have gendered effects; Rudman and Mescher (2012) find that objectifying women is correlated with sexual victimization.

Women across both corpora are also subject to two identified modes of semiotic violence: rendering women incompetent and invisible. The discourses used to render women incompetent and silent differs somewhat across Mexico and the UK, with multiple marginalization and intersectional discriminations more prevalent in violence against British MPs than Mexican political women. However, efforts to render invisible share more similarities across both cases. In particular, these attempts take the form of silencing. Women in both samples are told to "shut up," "sit down," and "go away" in addition to using other gendered and/or otherwise discriminatory tropes.

Finally, transnational references and tropes are present in both cases. As described in the previous chapter, political women in the Mexican corpus (and as noted in U.K. interviews, British women) are targeted with the "feminazi" insult, a term which originally emerged from the United States. Though small in number, there are references to George Soros in the corpora of both cases, indicating that this antisemitic and anti-internationalist trope has travelled significant distance. In the U.K. test set, Soros is invoked to express dissatisfaction over unspecified "globalist rule," whereas in Mexico, a user alleges that Soros is funding abortion access. Other references, to Donald Trump and QAnon, for example, are also peppered throughout the datasets. Even with linguistic differences and distance, the online space can collapse geographic distance and allow for the rapid travel and dissemination of references and tropes across contexts.

Forms of Violence: Differences

Despite these similarities, there are major differences in the forms of violence across the Mexican and British corpora. More generally abusive and VAWIP posts in the Mexico corpus

utilize exclusively gendered and sexist tropes, in contrast to the U.K. In the Mexico corpus, both qualitative analysis and descriptive statistics illustrate the salience of feminist policy support, age, and LBGTTTIQ identity on levels and types of abuse. Anti-feminist rhetoric and comments on physical appearance are particularly prevalent in the Mexico dataset and relatively rare in the U.K. dataset. Other forms of group discrimination—including classism, linguistic discrimination, and racism against indigenous peoples—are not as clearly present in abusive rhetoric in the Mexico corpus.

By contrast, abuse in the U.K. corpus more often incorporates group discrimination, including sexism but also incorporating racism, Islamophobia, ageism, and intersecting or multiple forms of discrimination. Anti-feminist rhetoric is unusual in the U.K sample, though MPs are described as "fake" feminists for their support of trans equality. As mentioned above, though descriptive statistics do not indicate the salience of Islamophobia and LGBTQ discrimination, nearly all salient discriminations—with the exception of antisemitism—are present and pervasive in abusive rhetoric of the U.K. corpus. In addition, Islamophobic and transphobic group discrimination is pervasive in non-directed posts.

These differences between the corpora are evident in abuse that seeks to render women incompetent. Across both datasets, Twitter posts utilize general abuse to convey personal opinions of incompetence, including incredulity at women's public statements or presence in positions of political power. However, there are distinctions in the non-general forms of rendering incompetent. In the U.K.'s training corpus, abuse aiming to render incompetent utilized ageism and ableism, with implicit racism, in an attempt to demonstrate ineptitude of women MPs. In the test dataset, ageism against young MPs, racism, homophobia, and sexism are utilized as a means of rendering incompetent.

By contrast, in Mexico's test corpus, ageism against older MPs—particularly the gendered term *vieja*—and sexism are primarily utilized as tools to render women politicians incompetent. Sexism more often includes sexualization and "merit" based arguments in the Mexico dataset, attempting to illustrate that women are only in political positions due to their sexual desirability, relationships with men, and quota policies rather than their legitimate merits. Discussions of merit in the U.K., by contrast, emphasize race and violently assert that affirmative action presents an obstacle for white Brits.

These differences have implications, both for how women will continue to be treated and, as I will continue to explore in the next chapter, the political futures of women and multiply-marginalized women in politics. In Mexico, abuse takes on a more typically sexist, violence against women form; this violence targets women *as women* in the public space. Violence seems to underscore that successful measures to achieve parity and to put women in positions of political leadership, including the heads of the major legislative bodies, should be revisited. The sexualization of women in Mexico, in particular, intersects with the online space to raise unique and new concerns for aspiring political women, particularly young women with an existing online presence.

These concerns are not irrelevant in the U.K. case, but violence tends not to attack women only or even predominantly *as women*, though substantial levels of violence against women in the highest leadership positions do indicate a persistent, sexist, notion of role incongruity. More often in the U.K., women are subject to multiple forms of discrimination as a result of their intersecting identities and as a result of supporting policies that extend equality to underrepresented groups. Women can be in politics, the violence seems to suggest, but perhaps not at the highest levels of politics, not while challenging multiple structures of power simultaneously, and not with the goal of expanding political access. As interviews with women

MPs underscores, online abuse can discourage multiply-marginalized women from entering

politics and restrict women politicians from speaking on contentious issues for fear of online

retribution. These implications, in turn, have pressing and concerning implications for the scope

and future of democracy.

CHAPTER 10: THE IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE

Research on the impacts of VAWIP is less developed than research on forms of VAWIP, including both theoretical typologies and empirical classifications of violence. The work that exists paints a complex picture, including women's resilience, empowerment, and disempowerment.

In part, the limited data on impact results from a reluctance to speak about violence, though this has been changing over time. Women in politics raise concerns that discussing their experiences will be construed as weakness, become a focus in media, or lead to even greater abuse in retaliation. In the IPU's 2018 study of women parliamentarians and staff in Europe, for example, respondents shared that they "didn't report the incident because it would have been a sign a weakness" while another said that "reporting sexual harassment further victimizes you" (9).

When they do speak to journalists or on the legislative floor, however, women politicians often use very different language, invoking tropes of strength and resilience. U.S Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, while introducing a House resolution on VAWIP in September 2020, said: "Receiving constant death threats—including against my family—hasn't stopped me from speaking truth to power, but such hate and risk should not be the inherent cost of any woman participating in politics, regardless of her race, creed, sexual or gender identity, or any other defining quality of who she is." Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley echoed this discourse of strength in her statement: "[…] these attempts to intimidate and debase us because of our gender only strengthen our resolve in pursuit of justice." Chair of the Democratic Women's Caucus Jackie Speier recognized that attacks "are meant to silence and intimidate us, and to put us in our place" yet "we're right where we belong and we're not going anywhere."

These competing discourses of vulnerability and strength are echoed in women's actions. Some women have left politics due to their experiences of violence, including 18 women who stood down in the 2019 U.K. election, many due to online and offline abuse (Britton 2019; Specia 2019). However, at the same time, some women appear to be politically mobilized by violence, including online violence. Thus, though some women are leaving politics due to violence, others are entering politics, activated by these same threats.

Ultimately, the impacts of violence, as I will explore in this chapter, are not often so binary as entering or leaving the public space. Some women change their online engagement with constituents in response to violence. Others limit their offline constituency services, hire security, and install panic buttons. And others have increased their public engagement, working with women to expand digital resiliency and offer policy solutions to offline and online violence.

Just as with other themes in this dissertation, the impact of online VAWIP is not uniform. Writing about women subject to online abuse, Sobieraj describes an "impact continuum": "The degree of harm is shaped by the severity and invasiveness of the abuse as well as the status, prestige, and security of the women under fire" (2020, 87). The form, impact, and response (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2019) to abuse, and target of abuse, are related. Discriminations affect the discourses of online violence, which affect its impacts on marginalized women, which shape how, and with what tools, women respond.

DEMOBILIZING EFFECTS
Impact on Political women
Physical Security

As argued throughout this dissertation, the offline and online spaces are not fully separable. Acts of violence from one medium seep into the other. Increasingly, offline violence is accompanied and compounded by online violence (Mueller, et al. 2018). This is also true for women in politics.

Online violence often includes physical threats and references to women's bodies or embodied experiences. Women who are targeted with violence may experience physical effects, including anxiety, panic attacks, and health issues. And, in some cases, online threats of violence precipitate offline acts of physical violence. U.S. Congresswoman Katherine Clark, who introduced legislation against swatting—when perpetrators call in a fake emergency with the goal of sending SWAT teams to an individual's home—was herself swatted in 2016 with her two children at home (Martin and Clark 2018).[207] Gabrielle Giffords, prior to the 2011 shooting that nearly took her life and killed several others, was subject to a series of threats, offline and online. She received threatening emails and phone calls, as well as vandalism to her office (Sullivan 2011).

Online violence also has physical, health impacts for women in politics even when it does not translate into an offline *form* of violence. Luciana Berger said that while "in the depths of trying to contend with antisemitism and the abuse that I got for standing up and speaking out" the "amount of energy that it took to co-ordinate made me physically ill" (Kentish 2019). Here, it was not only the original violence that carried a physical toll, but also the retaliatory abuse in response to Berger coming forward about her experience.

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[207] Though swatting may be classified as psychological violence, causing confusion and fear, it has (i) a primary, offline component and (ii) caused physical harm. In some cases, stress from swatting has led to heart attacks ("The Crime of 'Swatting'" 2013).

In response to online violence and concerns over credible physical threats, some politicians change their offline behavior and increase their personal security. Current and former Labour MPs, including Jess Phillips, Paula Sherriff, Luciana Berger, and Diane Abbott, have all spoken publicly about carrying around portable alarms or installing alarms in their homes (Asthana 2016; Kentish 2019; Mason 2017). Sherriff described her house as "bristling" with security devices (Hinsliff 2017).

There are fewer examples of women in Mexico coming forward about their requirements for security.[208] However, the Protocol and subsequent law against VAWIP do include provisions for protection orders, similar to those for VAW crimes, including police protection if requested by the target-victim (Article 137 of Protocol). It remains to be seen how effective these provisions are and will be.

In other contexts, such as the United States, women have also adopted safety measures in response to violence. This includes women across politics and public life, from political candidates to government employees and human rights defenders (Norwood, Jones, and Bolaji 2021; De Varona 2018). Due to the politicization of the Covid-19 pandemic, Georgia's public health director required personal security after phone and email threats (Pierce 2020). A public health official in Washington, after she was doxed and targeted with death threats on social media, set up surveillance cameras (ibid; Deliso 2020). In Colombia, women human rights defenders have received UNP (National Protection Unit) bodyguards but describe the measures as lacking gender-sensitivity (Cousins and Schmitz 2020). These patterns are reflected around the world. A global survey of women journalists, researchers found that 13% of women

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[208] Wealthier Mexicans may already employ bodyguards prior to entering politics and others may hire security when starting their political career (Hootsen, 2016). As such, women may not feel the need to hire separate or additional security when experiencing online or offline threats.

surveyed increased their physical security in response to online violence threats (Posetti, et al.

2021, 13). Some women even went into hiding (ibid, 34). Where political women are not

provided physical security, they may need to pay for their own, which can incur significant costs

as I will explore below.

Cost and Time

In addition to the physical and psychological costs of violence, responding to violence

has a material cost. First, as described above, women in politics spend resources on their safety.

Men and nonbinary individuals in politics may do so as well. However, anecdotal evidence

suggests that women, and particularly multiply-marginalized women, are concerned about their

safety earlier in the political process, prompting increased spending (Dittmar 2019, 51; Peeler-

Allen 2019). Candidates are not generally afforded the access to protection that is granted to

elected officials and thus, must use personal or campaign funds—where permitted[209]—to

ensure their own security. Future research compiling data on the financial cost of protection for

women in politics will further illuminate this issue.

Second, when women and their staff deal with violence—including erasing emails and

phone messages, lodging complaints of abuse, and presenting testimony—these activities take

time and attention away from other components of governance (see "Intimidation in Public Life

Report," 2017: 40; Cherry 2021: 167). Emily Thornberry, who received significant abuse in the

run up to the 2017 U.K. General Election, explained that "on a practical level, the violent stuff

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[209] In response to the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, the Federal Election Commission allowed members of Congress to utilize campaign funds for threats related to an individual's political position (Stevenson, et al. 2021). This decision affects federal candidates and officeholders. For example, Kentucky representative Attica Scott told reporters that she would feel safer with security, but does not have a way to pay for it (Norwood, Jones, and Bolaji 2021).

and the death threats are just very time-consuming" (Dhrodia 2017- New Statesman). Nadia

Whittome described her staff "trawling" through "hate mail and racist abuse" (Oppenheim

2021). Due to the online abuse, she "no longer looks at her own social media comments" (ibid).

Further, the effort and time required to manage online violence has its own psychological and

physical impacts. As Nina Jankowicz describes, "I think a lot of people don't understand until

they've gone through this sort of thing how much time it takes, how exhausting it is" (Bierman

2021).

There are several democratic costs to these economic consequences of online violence.

If running and holding office costs women more financially, there are additional barriers to

political entry and sustainability. If women and their staff spend more time than their male

colleagues reporting and sifting through abuse, they have less time to represent their

constituents, draft legislation, and the like. Former deputy Alicia Ricalde of Quintana Roo

describes that VAWIP reduces the effectiveness of legislative work as well as inhibits women

from bringing other women into politics (Ricalde 2015).

There are, however, some solutions. First, governments or political parties can provide

security for politicians, presuming legislators feel safe with state-provided forces.[210] This could

alleviate the financial inequities for women and, in particular, multiply-marginalized women.

Second, though legislators are unlikely to give third parties access to their social media and

email accounts for the purpose of deleting and reporting abuse, more effective moderation

policies can reduce the burden on legislators and their staff.

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[210] In authoritarian or quasi-authoritarian regimes, opposition members may be less safe with state-provided security. Even in a democracy, such as the United States, some legislators—particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds—may be, and feel to be, less secure with state-funded and state-provided security. See, for example, AOC's description of her time during the January 2021 Capitol insurrection (Swenson 2021).

There are democratic costs to these consequences of online violence. If running and holding office costs women more financially, there are additional barriers to political entry and sustainability. If women and their staff spend more time than their male colleagues reporting and sifting through abuse, they have less time to represent their constituents, draft legislation, and the like. Former deputy Alicia Ricalde of Quintana Roo describes that VAWIP reduces the effectiveness of legislative work as well as inhibits women from bringing other women into politics (Ricalde 2015). There are, however, some solutions. Governments or political parties can provide security for politicians, presuming legislators feel safe with state-provided forces. This could alleviate the financial inequities for women and, in particular, multiply-marginalized women. Second, though legislators are unlikely to give third parties access to their social media and email accounts for the purpose of deleting and reporting abuse, more effective moderation policies can reduce the burden on legislators and their staff.

Finally, the effort and time required to manage online violence has its own psychological and physical impacts. As Nina Jankowicz describes, "I think a lot of people don't understand until they've gone through this sort of thing how much time it takes, how exhausting it is" (Bierman 2021).

Backlash against Abuse Claims

Many solutions to mitigate online VAWIP require political women to come forward about their experiences to raise awareness and gather more accurate data about the prevalence of online—and offline—violence. Unfortunately, women often face backlash when coming forward about instances of violence and harassment, further disincentivizing them from sharing their experience. For instance, when Hillary Clinton labeled her 2008 treatment as sexism, she

was charged with "playing the gender card" (Sanbonmatsu 2017, 4). Julia Gillard writes about this issue as well, describing how she was "accused of 'playing the gender card,' or starting a gender war, or whining or being self-pitying" after giving her famous "misogyny speech" in 2012 (Gillard and Okonjo-Iweala 2021, 419).

I found Muslim and Jewish women MPs in the U.K. were targeted with violence online that sought to delegitimize their experiences of abuse (Kuperberg 2021). Users questioned women MPs' accounts of violence, including experiencing racism and requiring security protocols. Questioning the veracity of their claims, I argue, is a form of semiotic violence, seeking to render women politicians and their experiences of violence invisible.

In interviews, women politicians share that they receive higher volumes of abuse after coming forward about their experiences. For example, MP Hannah Bardell was subject to death threats, including over email, after seeking justice for homophobic violence directed at her by a Lords peer (Rodger 2020). In Mexico, then-Senator Ana Guevara was subject to social media attacks after holding a press conference about being physically attacked. This backlash often succeeds in its aims: to silence and deter women from coming forward in the future. Efforts to denaturalize and reduce VAWIP, as well as attain justice for target-survivors, will need to contend with this backlash.

Leaving Politics

In Mexico, women have reported leaving politics after experiencing acts of violence and discrimination. According to an interview, several municipal, women presidents and councilors "withdrew from politics" at the end of their terms, rather than continuing to rise through the ranks (Interview 5). As the interviewee noted, "They stop participating because the experience

is very painful, very costly on a personal level" (ibid). Monica Maccise also described this impact of violence. She said that abuse "reduces their participation because many women say: 'it is better not to engage at all'" (Interview Maccise 2018). According to her, for those who stay in political life, violence diminishes women's confidence and changes the way that they govern (ibid).

In the U.K., the particularly large pool of MPs standing down before the December 2019 election made headlines. Though it is not uncommon for several MPs to decide not to run for reelection, the MPs highlighted the "toxic atmosphere in parliament" and online in the aftermath of the 2016 Brexit vote. Compared to their male colleagues, several of the women who stood down in 2019 were doing so not after a long parliamentary career, but after less than a decade (i.e., Heidi Allen and Margot James). Nicky Morgan, who was an MP from 2010-2019, stood down at a high point in her career, having been appointed Culture Secretary in 2019. She explained that the abuse, sacrifices, and impact on her family were behind her decision not to stand for reelection (Britton 2019). According to the Centenary Action Group in the U.K., 65% of female MPs say that VAWIP—especially the lack of progress in tackling online and offline abuses—affected their willingness to remain in politics and stand for re-election (@CentenaryAction 2021).

Though it can be important for MPs to speak out about their experiences of abuse, others raise concerns that doing so risks "putting off future female parliamentary candidates" (Miller 2021, 161). MPs recognize that the realities of parliament can serve as an obstacle for women entering politics. However, not discussing these realities with political aspirants can also have negative impacts. For MPs, keeping their experiences quiet is a form of "uncomplaining labor," (ibid) requiring MPs to do the work of projecting strength. Keeping quiet about abuse can also set inaccurate expectations for political newcomers.

Remaining active online

In other cases, women may choose to stay in politics but alter their political activity. Some women will not vie for leadership positions to reduce their visibility and thus, their likelihood of encountering increased violence (Lehr and Bechrakis 2018). Women may also choose not to publicize events in advance to reduce security risks (Interview Phillips 2018). Other women have reported limiting their online presence or the amount of time they spend online (Erikson, Håkansson, and Josefsson 2019). Both politics and the internet are public, masculinized spaces; the broad goal of online VAWIP is not only to marginalize women, as women, from the political sphere but also from the online space.

The silencing and chilling effect of online violence is echoed in a number of studies and across contexts. For example, in their 2016 report on digital abuse in the general U.S. population, Lenhart, et al. (2016) found 40% of young women (ages 15-29) self-censored to avoid online harassment, compared to 33% of young men and 24% of women ages 30 and older (53). In addition to age, Black and LGBTQ+ online users are more likely to self-censor than white and non-LGBTQ+ individuals (ibid).

Research on gendered disinformation against journalists and political women in the U.S. found that online and offline abuse, particularly for women of color, has a silencing effect (Jankowicz et al. 2021, 40). Focus group participants described locking down their accounts and going offline for days "because you don't feel safe to continue speaking, so you don't speak" (ibid). This is in part because platforms and institutions offer limited support for target-survivors of violence, "rather than pursuing consequences for abusers, women chose to remain silent and instead moderate their own behavior" (ibid).

Similarly, in a UNESCO and International Center for Journalists (ICFJ) study based on a survey of 901 journalists from around the world, researchers found that 30% of respondents who experienced online violence self-censored online and 20% withdrew from the online space entirely (Posetti et al. 2021). The report also finds that Black, Indigenous, Jewish, lesbian, and bisexual women are more likely to experience online violence than their white, heterosexual colleagues. Not only does abuse disproportionately target multiply-marginalized women, but online violence also has unique and uniquely concerning consequences for historically-underrepresented women in politics.

For women in political positions, online violence can also cause self-censorship, from a reduction in posts to leaving platforms entirely. This self-censorship parallels testimonial smothering, women censoring their own speech in response to past and predicted injustice (Dotson 2011). NDI researchers, in the "Tweets that Chill" (2019) report, for example, found that online abuse has a "chilling" effect on women in politics in Indonesia, Kenya, and Colombia. In some cases, women stop posting on Twitter entirely following online harassment (Zeiter et al. 2019, 5). Other women pause or limit posting in the wake of online attacks. Alam (2021) similarly writes that Pakistani activists, including women's march organizers, were subject to online abuse as a response to their activism. March organizers stopped using social media for a period because of this online harassment, which included death threats (15).

Cara Hunter, a young Northern Irish Assemblywoman, described how she has changed her online habits, including not sharing event details and reassessing her "openness online" (Dawson 2020). Scottish MP Amy Callaghan, also in her 20s, echoes these concerns, saying "you sometimes need to take a break" (ibid). Other politicians have relegated social media posting and responding to their staff due to the scope of abuse (Baldwin et al. 2020; Barboni et al. 2018; Brand and Abbott 2020; Britton 2019).

For women politicians, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic, going offline or choosing to close social media accounts is particularly challenging and could prevent reelection. In the UK, several MPs have stopped using social media and spoke publicly about their decision to do so. One, Glyn Davies, is a septuagenarian, white, male, Conservative MP. In an op-ed published by the Guardian, he credits the "cesspit of vileness" produced by anonymous online users for his leaving Twitter (Davies 2019). Another white and male MP, Tory Andrew Percy, left Twitter in 2016 and has since described the abuse he and his family received after the 2015 election as an impetus for deleting his account ("MPs 'being advised to quit Twitter' to avoid online abuse" 2018).[211] Politicians are not the only ones advocating to leave social media platforms; in 2018, the Parliament's Health and Wellbeing Service advised MPs to close their accounts (ibid).

Notably, though multiply-marginalized women receive particularly violent online messaging, very few women MPs have left social media and publicly discussed their decision to do so. Some, like Nickie Aiken—a white, conservative MP elected in 2019—credited misogynistic online abuse, lack of substantive conversation, and Twitter's seeming indifference to the abuse she received for her decision to leave (Le Conte 2020). Many female MPs, however, feel that they cannot leave the platform citing (i) a desire not to let trolls and abusers "win"; (ii) the importance of being able to connect easily and informally with their constituents; and (iii) the role of Twitter as a "center stage of the political bubble" (ibid). For many, having a social media presence is a job requirement (Whelan 2021).

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[211] It is worth mentioning that unlike Davies, Percy still retains a Facebook page.

Impact on Witnesses

Impact on Historically-Underrepresented Groups

Multiply-marginalized groups already "face among the worst forms of online abuse"

(Singh and Roseen 2018). According to the Online Harms White Paper presented to the U.K.

Parliament in April 2019, some groups, including women, religious minorities, and LGBTQ,

BAME, and disabled people experience higher amounts of cyberbullying. Marginalized women

"not only receive more and qualitatively different digital pushback, but the content often feels

(and is) more deeply threatening to them" (Sobieraj 2020, 97). In some instances, extensive

prior abuse may lead to resiliency and strategies to combat online violence. For some multiply-

marginalized women then, viewing online violence against their political may not have as strong

a deterrent effect. For others, however, online violence against public figures and political

leaders may be perceived as even more hostile, contributing to and magnifying violence already

prevalent in their online ecosystems.

Research has not yet uncovered the specific impact of online VAWIP on multiply

marginalized communities who are audiences of abuse, particularly when the political women

targeted directly or descriptively represent them. Nonetheless, interview data suggest that

many marginalized and multiply-marginalized political aspirants are leaving political careers due

to witnessed and experienced online violence. Women of color have also raised specific

concerns about the impact of online abuse on their political futures (Calasanti and Gerrits 2021,

13).

The 2017 Report on Intimidation in Public Life, describing the racist, sexist, homophobic,

transphobic, and antisemitic intimidation experienced by MPs, concludes: "If this issue is not

addressed, we could be left with a political culture that does not reflect the society it should

represent" (29). Because historically-underrepresented and multiple marginalized individuals

are uniquely targeted with violence, and because this violence can prompt targets to leave or reconsider entering politics, violence can lead to the reconstitution of parliaments such that institutions are less diverse and therefore less descriptively representative of constituents.

Members of Parliament have raised similar concerns about the impact of violence on political aspirants from historically-underrepresented groups. Diane Abbott, in an interview with Amnesty International, said: "there are many young women, young women of color, who do not participate online in the way they would want to because they're really repelled by the level of abuse we get" (2018b). She continues, "I think the abuse I get online makes younger women of colour very hesitant about entering the public debate and thinking about going into politics" (#ToxicTwitter 2018, 32). Former MP Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh adds the following:

> If online abusers are not held to account, if they are not reported, if we don't do that, then young women are not going come forward, young women from minority communities are not going to come forward, disabled people are not going to come forward, people from LGBTI communities are not going to come forward, and then what kind of society are we going to be? What will our Parliament look like? (ibid, 52).

Other MPs have shared that they respond to discriminatory violence online because they are aware that their young followers are watching (Davidson 2018).

Interviewees in Mexico also raised concerns about the impact of violence on the political pipeline. A researcher involved in writing Mexico's protocol on VAWIP told me that violence has a particularly strong impact on women in indigenous and/or rural communities who see the mistreatment that results from women "daring to participate in politics" (Interview 5). Women from rural communities have, in particular, been subject to acts of violence in which they are prevented from doing their jobs, including when men physically bar them from entering political bodies or do not allow them to set or make use of the budget (ibid). Such acts of violence can dissuade women from remaining in or entering politics.

Impact on Family

Many women in politics say that when violence targets their families, especially but not limited to their children, it crosses a line. That is not to say that they find abuse acceptable when levied against them or their political colleagues. But, as Jess Phillips told me, "The time it hurts me the most is when people saw awful things about him [her husband] and awful things about my children. It happens much more rarely now but at its worst, people would write me—it was always one step away [from a direct threat]— 'we hope that your children die'" (Interview 2018). She continued that if she believed that being an MP would put her children at risk, she would "stop in a heartbeat" (ibid). Similarly, U.S. Congresswoman Rashida Tlaib, describing threats against her following the January 6th attack on the Capitol building, recounted that some threats mention her children. She stated, "each one paralyzed me, each time" (Snodgrass 2021).

Political women also described how online violence impacts their families, even when the family members themselves are not directly targeted. Beth Rigby, Political editor at Sky News, writes that one British MP who stood down in the 2019 election was doing so "at the behest of her child, who is racked by anxiety that her mother will be harmed at work" (2019). Barbara Ferrer, Los Angeles County's public health director, received a death threat during a Facebook Live session in May 2020. In a statement addressing this and other death threats she faced related to Covid-19, she wrote, "I didn't immediately see the message, but my husband did, my children did, and so did my colleagues" (Deliso 2020).

In other cases, including against public health officials during the COVID-19 crisis, threats include mention of children and family members (Clark 2021). Furthermore, there is a gendered element to violence against staff and family. Harriet Harman—the "mother of parliament"—told MP Rachel Reeves that "children of women are always more exposed than

the children of a man because the mother is regarded as the principal carer by society" (Reeves

2019, 165). Daughters of political women, including those who are not formal politicians, have

received rape threats because of their mother's public work (Piner 2016; Piscopo 2020). It is

thus not surprising that Liz Saville-Roberts, in our interview, shared that some women do not

enter politics with young children, not only due to the challenges of political life as young

parents but also, due to "the impact on their families" (Interview 2018). Sarah Childs (2016)

echoes this in the Good Parliament report, writing that "women's concerns about familial press

intrusion are a frequently cited reason not to participate in politics" (61).

In addition, as interviewees in Mexico described, the spectrum of violence for women

can manifest in divorces, or threats of divorce, for political women. This outcome is not unique

to Mexico; Folke and Rickne (2020) find that marriages of Swedish women promoted to top

jobs, including in politics, are more likely to end in divorce than those of their male

counterparts.[212] Research from Japan also finds that women are threatened with divorce when

they express a desire to run for office (Dalton 2017, 213). As an interviewee in Mexico echoed,

politics is a "masculine environment and women go through it with many difficulties" including

that their political power challenges the men in their lives, causing them to "confront their own

weakness" (Interview 5). As this dissertation has sought to illustrate, there are important

differences between geographic contexts, but even-unexpected settings like family life see

similar patterns of sexism.

Impact on Staff

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[212] This outcome appears to be mediated by couples with a more gender-equal relationship (260).

Parliamentary staff may not be the primary targets of online VAWIP, but they are—in many contexts—the most likely to view and respond to abuse levied at their employers. That said, there are incidents in which staff are specifically targeted with harassment and abuse especially from within parliaments. Following the rise of #MeToo, patterns of sexual harassment and hostile political work environments were made more visible by campaigns such as #MeTooEP and We Said Enough, of the European Parliament and California legislature, respectively. 53% of people working in the U.K. parliament witnessed, experienced, or knew of bullying, harassment, and/or sexual harassment within Westminster (Culhane 2019, 19). Similarly, the IPU's 2018 survey found that half of European, female parliamentary staff had been targeted with sexual comments (2). From the same study, nearly 53% of targeted staff members shared that experiences of abuse and violence impacted their "ability to work normally" (10).

Often, elected and appointed women in politics are the targets of online violence while their staff are tasked with viewing and responding to said violence. In the Intimidation in Public Life Report (2017), Diane Abbott's staff describe that first thing in the morning, "they block and delete online abuse […] porridge with one hand, deleting abuse with the other" (38). Yet, responding to abuse targeting an MP can come with risks of retaliatory abuse. Alun Roberts, an aide for MP Liz Saville Roberts, shared that when he "stepped in to defend the MP" on Facebook, he was directly threatened via private message (Gruffydd-Jones 2018).

Despite their exposure and vulnerability to online and offline[213] violence, staff are not commonly the subjects of academic research on violence against politicians.[214] Violence

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[213] For example, during the attempted assassination of Gabby Giffords. the Congresswoman's community outreach director was shot and killed.

[214] There are some exceptions. See Lowry et al (2015) on Australia.

impacting staff has important implications, not only for the safety of political staff but also for broader democratic processes. Legislative staff are a part of the political pipeline (Baer and Hartmann, 2020). Exposure to violence and harassment, whether directly targeted in the form of sexual harassment or indirectly but regularly subject to violence against their elected employers, could contribute to the "leaky pipeline" for women in politics (Mariani 2008). Failing to protect exposed and vulnerable staff members could thus contribute to longer-term gendered, political inequalities. This effect could be magnified for multiply-marginalized staff. As Diane Abbott described on a podcast, Black women interns that came to work for her office "were shocked at the abuse" (Brand and Abbott 2020). More research is needed on the effects of political abuse on multiply-marginalized staff, including those who share the identities of the politician they work for.

Impact on Political Aspirants

In 2020, the Democratic Women's Caucus[215] sent a letter to Facebook in response to gendered disinformation and misogynistic violence. They wrote, "Make no mistake, these tactics, which are used on your platform for malicious intent, are meant to silence women, and ultimately undermine our democracies. It is no wonder women frequently cite the threat of rapid, widespread, public attacks on personal dignity as a factor deterring them from entering politics" (Speier et al. 2020).

Regarding VAWIP, one of the most often articulated concerns is that violence will put off aspirants—particularly young women—from seeking political office. This concern is supported by anecdotal and survey data. According to a study referenced by the Center for Strategic and

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[215] The letter was also signed by women politicians from around the world.

International Studies by Lehr and Bechrakis, "more than 61.5 percent of women running for office believe that the primary objective of harassment they face is to intimidate and dissuade them from pursuing political leadership positions" (2018). Whether this harassment is successful against those directly targeted, it appears to be successful in putting off others from entering politics. Similarly, 7 of 10 women surveyed by the Fawcett Society's Equal Power Initiative said that they did not want to become politicians because of abuse and harassment online (Centenary Action Group 2021).

In the U.K., in debates and interviews on intimidation in public life, politicians have regularly voiced their concerns that visible abuse, especially online, will cause young women to rethink a future in politics. In many cases, political women have described the conversations they have had with constituents, staff members, and young leaders. LGBTQ MP Peter Kyle said that the "most common question I get asked by young people these days is, 'How do you put up with all the abuse?'" MPs Diane Abbott, Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh, and Nicola Sturgeon have also raised concerns that VAWIP, especially online VAWIP, will put off young women from entering politics (Mason 2017; #ToxicTwitter 2018).

Some reports and statements on VAWIP's deterrent effect consider the role of intersecting and multiple discriminations. Joanna Cherry, SNP and LGBTQ MP, spoke during the 2017 Intimidation in Public Life debate on this issue, stating: "There is a real issue about discrimination against women discouraging young women, women of color, women of religious or ethnic minorities, LBTI women, and women with disabilities from entering politics." Another SNP MP, Tasmina Ahmed-Sheikh, spoke to the Sunday Times in 2016 about the abuse she receives as well as the impact of online and offline abuse on political aspirants. "We already [face] a deficit of women, of people with disabilities, of members of the LGBTI community in

public life," she said. "How are we going to get them to come forward unless we tackle this?"
(Saner 2016).

The concerns articulated by MPs are reflected in broader survey data. In a Fawcett
Society 2017 report, entitled "Does Local Government Work for Women?" the organization
found that "the fear and reality of abuse and harassment, including on social media, deters
women from standing" (Fawcett Society 2017, 22). In their survey of over 2,300 councilors, 46%
of women councilor candidates, compared to 35% of men, experienced "harassment or abuse
from the electorate" (ibid 29). Women in focus groups described social media abuse as an
obstacle preventing women from running for office, particularly when abuse was directed at
their family members (ibid).

It is not only British politicians who have expressed these concerns. The National
Democratic Institute's "Tweets that Chill" report, based on research in Indonesia, Colombia, and
Kenya, recognizes that online violence can drive "politically-active women offline and in some
cases out of the political realm entirely" (Mitchell in Zeiter et al. 2019). Margarita Dalton
similarly finds that when a municipal president is discredited for being a woman, this serves to
"diminish the desires and prospects of other women" ("Violencia política contra mujeres de
comunidades indígenas" 2016, 13).

Impact on Democracy and Gender Equality
As Gillard and Okonjo-Iweala explain: "The case for women's leadership is a moral one.
In a democracy, a population should be able to look at its leaders and see a reflection of the full
diversity of society. What kind of democracy is it that bestows a vote but not a real prospect of
becoming the person voted for?" (2021, 60). Violence and sexism are obstacles to that
democratic goal. The impacts of VAWIP listed above, on political women, particularly those at

the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, on staff members, political aspirants, family members of political women, and the public, all have consequences for democracy. Individual participation in the public sphere should not be restricted based on identity.

Scholars and practitioners often separate VAWIP's impacts on democracy and gender equality; I am certainly guilty of doing so. VAWIP is still underrecognized as a democratic issue (Krook 2020, 89), particularly relative to political violence and violence against politicians, and therefore is often emphasized in VAWIP research. Perhaps, as well, the relationship between gender-based violence and gender equality is more obvious and self-evident. However, as political women, activists, and civil society organizers have made clear, gender equality is necessary for democracy. In addition, the reverse relationship is true; not only is gender equality necessary for a full democracy, but violence that affects democratic strength, by effectively excluding women, "perpetuates [gender] stereotypes and discrimination" (Salazar Ugarte 2017).

Online violence against political women, as one form of VAWIP, threatens both democracy and gender equality. Online harassment enforces traditional gender roles while silencing women's voices and seeking to remove women from the public sphere (Di Meco and Brechenmacher 2020). Akiwowo also recognizes this dual impact of online violence, describing it as a "real stain" and "real threat" to democracy while also unraveling "all the work we are doing around gender equality and 50/50 [parity] representation" (Kusari-Lila and Akiwowo 2020).

Laws and policies to combat VAWIP are necessary, not only to mitigate harm against women in public life but also to protect women's political gains and the democratic process. However, and particularly relevant in contexts where laws suffer from ineffectiveness, simply passing laws will not be enough. Carla Humphrey, the president of Mexico's Gender Equality Commission, stated, for example: "Democracies are robust when they permit equal and parity

participation to women, when the instruments we have are efficient and effective," and when these instruments are "accepted and legitimized by all political actors" (Hernández 2020). Thus, VAWIP presents a threat to democratic sustenance and consolidation but so too does the ineffectiveness of policies aiming to mitigate violence.

Impact on Human Rights

Where British politicians and non-profit practitioners have emphasized VAWIP's impact on democracy, their colleagues in Mexico and more broadly in Latin America have also discussed VAWIP as a human rights violation (Aguilar 2018).[216] Building on existing Inter-American conventions, including Belém do Pará, discussions on VAWIP start from an understanding of violence against women as a human rights violation and seek to both expand and specify these understandings to emphasize the political space. In Mexico's Protocol on political violence against women, the Protocol's authors call for a response to VAWIP from authorities, "to conform to the constitutional mandate and to realize human rights, which make it possible for all to design and live life equally and without violence" (41). Mexico's April 2020 law also includes mentions of human rights (See: Article 6, 30).

This framing, originating in and still predominantly utilized in Latin America, is echoed by the United Nations. Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Dubravka Šimonović, published a 2018 report in which VAWIP is also understood as a violation of human rights. Šimonović describes VAWIP as "a serious violation of women's human rights and an obstacle to achieving gender equality, having an impact not only on the victims but on society as a whole" (17). Other United Nations reports on VAWIP have, in line with the UN system's commitment to

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[216] This is not to say that Mexican researchers do not also describe the impact of VAWIP on democracy and gender equality, as mentioned above.

a human rights framework, emphasized that online violence is a human rights issue. For example, the UN Human Rights Council also recognizes gender-based violence online as an issue with implications for security and with the potential to weaken democracy (Whelan 2021).

The Potential for Positive Response

Despite these documented and considerable negative impacts of VAWIP, researchers have also found an unexpected potential positive impact of online abuse. First, some women have been mobilized in response to sexism in politics, specifically those who experience anger rather than fear (Valentino 2018). Research from the United States shows that feelings of anger and threat encouraged women to run for office (Dittmar 2020). Even more specifically, gender discrimination and harassment "can actually *mobilize* women to become politically engaged," with women being more likely to participate in politics as harassment increases (Gothreau 2019).

Women in the U.K. have also described sexism and violence as catalyzing. Jess Phillips, for instance, described that when she experiences fear because of violence, she uses that fear "as fuel to push me forward" (Thompson and Phillips 2020). In our interview, Christine Jardin echoed this sentiment, telling me that any "intimidation or bullying or harassment makes me more determined" (Interview with Jardin 2018). She continued, "It's kind of a circular argument-that's motivating women, but that means there's more intimidation but that's motivating women as well. Recognition that, perhaps, women's position in society is not quite as secure and safeguarded and equal as we thought it was in the past. It's motivating women to become more involved in politics" (ibid).

Second, women in various parts of the world formed new coalitions in response to VAWIP. Restrepo-Sanin (2020) explores how Bolivia's law on VAWIP, the first in the world, was

passed only after non-indigenous feminists and indigenous groups worked together (15). Other

coalitions, including Members of the European Parliament and their staff, have also been built in

response to sexual harassment; in this case, MEPs and staff collected and shared information to

declare #MeTooEP. These alliances have had some successes. Perhaps, with time, they will

champion new issues or lay the foundations for new, feminist political networks.

Finally, women's experiences with abuse provide a means of connection with

constituents and the public, particularly women and/or minority constituents who have faced

similar experiences. In 2017, Labour MP Yvette Cooper launched "Reclaim the Internet," a cross-

party campaign to tackle online abuse. As the campaign states, "no one should be silenced by

misogyny, racism or intimidation online" ("Reclaim the Internet" 2017). Reclaim the Internet

included the testimonies and support of several politicians but was ultimately focused on

broader gender-based violence online, affecting MPs and constituents alike. Jo Swinson, who

worked with Cooper on Reclaim the Internet, explains that the campaign takes its name from

the 1970s movement, Reclaim the Streets, in which women protested harassment and violence

(Swinson 2018, 231). As Swinson explains, in both cases, the goal is not to isolate women but to

"put a stop to the abusive environment" (ibid), emphasizing structural solutions over personal

responsibility.

Violence should not be the cost of engaging in political life. And speaking out about

violence should also not be met with derision and delegitimization. Still, it would be inaccurate

to suggest that all women respond similarly to violence. More research should be done on why

and when some harassment and discrimination is motivating while some is demobilizing. Why

do threats encourage some to get political involved when similar violence causes others to leave

politics or reconsider their aspirations?

Existing research suggests that partisanship (Bankert 2020), race (DeSipi 2002; Schildkraut 2005), LGBTQ affiliation and group consciousness (Pendragon 2010; Paceley, Oswald, and Hardesty 2014; Page 2018) and feminist ideology (Duncan 1999) may be correlated with political activism and participation following discrimination. The discrimination itself, such as racism in the LBG community (VanDaalen and Santos 2017), intersecting discriminations including heterosexism and racism (Cravens III 2020), and who perpetrates discrimination (Oskooii 2018) may also have an effect.[217] Continued investigations into these questions will strengthen policy responses to VAWIP.

Speaking Up and Speaking Out[218]

In a 2017 video from Women's Media Center, Wendy Davis—a Texan, feminist politician and activist—said that in order to change online VAWIP, "what we need […] is to call it out when we see it happening" (Chemaly et al. 2017). There is an important role for allies and observers to intervene. But advocates and fellow politicians have also noted the importance for women in politics to speak out.

Speaking out helps raise awareness of violence and works to de-normalize it. It can also, relatedly, lead to greater support for MPs due to a better understanding of the "extent of the problem" (Gordon 2021, 17). Yet, sharing one's experiences of abuse comes with numerous challenges. First, target-survivors of abuse are often told not to "feed the trolls" as online attacks often increase in amount and severity after abuse is made public. Second, MPs may be

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[217] Most of these scholars find that discrimination is correlated with political participation or, even more specifically, that incidents of discrimination lead to participation. However, there is a literature from social psychology that disagrees, illustrating instead that discrimination leads to rejection and lower participation (Page 2018, 1013). It is worth mentioning that measures of political participation in these studies, such as voting or donating to a campaign, are less costly than running for office.

[218] Or, as former MP and Liberal Democrat Leader Jo Swinson writes, "speak out and support others" (2018, 347).

concerned that coming forward with abuse experiences makes them vulnerable or appear weak

(Miller 2021, 168). Third, like other forms of violence against women, political women may

blame themselves and feel that the onus is on them, not the perpetrators of abuse, to change

their behavior (Chemaly et al. 2017). Fourth, some research shows that when politicians are

honest about the challenges they face in politics, their honesty can put off women from entering

or continuing in politics[219] (Foos and Gilardi 2019). But, as Gillard and Okonjo-Iweala (2021)

respond: "Our world can only eradicate the gender bias in politics, and leadership generally, if it

is identified, discussed, studied, and challenged, and evidence-based change strategies are

implemented. A 'this is fine, nothing to see here' approach is anathema to working our way

through that process" (402). Finally, as already discussed, women can be accused of "playing the

gender card" or facing backlash for publicly sharing their experiences with abuse (Dalton 2017,

207).

Feminists recognize that despite these challenges, it is important to name and make

visible the invisible. In *Violence against Women in Politics* (2020), Krook underscores the

importance of naming and identifying a "problem with no name." Despite the potential for

backlash, there are numerous reasons why it remains important to make visible experiences of

VAWIP: (i) raise awareness of, and de-normalize, the problem; (ii) build solidarity with others;

(iii) communicate that violence will not be tolerated; (iv) encourage other women to run for

office; (v) heal from personal and collective harms resulting from violence; and (vi) build

confidence among women.

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[219] Evidence from the experiment conducted by Foos and Gilardi (2019) finds no statistically significant effect for the treatment group, those that received the "blunt" rather than "motivational" script from female politicians. Furthermore, the measure of political ambition, responding to a mentoring program, may not accurately measure other forms of political ambition.

Despite extensive campaigning on VAWIP regionally and internationally, women still respond "no" to questions of whether they have experienced violence against women in politics but "yes" to specific questions, such as whether they have ever been bullied, threatened, or sexually propositioned in the public space (Krook 2020, 8; Ravel Cuevas in Martínez de Castro León and Parra Chávez 2020). This can be a vicious cycle: when women do not speak about their experiences with violence, it is normalized, discouraging other women from coming forward (Dalton 2017, 207). In addition to normalization of violence, limited knowledge of VAWIP can limit institutional mechanisms for identifying violence, further invisibilizing and normalizing the issue ("Subordinadas y bellas" 2020, 47). When women come forward about their experiences of violence, especially in public and visible ways, they are working to break this cycle. To combat VAWIP, people need to know what it is, how to identify violence, and how to utilize existing legal mechanisms to respond.

Politicians have also found solidarity, with one another and with a broader community of women, after coming forward with experiences of abuse. UK MPs Apsana Begum and Jess Phillips describe getting support from, and checking in with, other MPs who experienced violence (Dawson 2020; Miller 2021, 169). Journalist Gaby Hinsliff reports that British, Labour women MPs have a WhatsApp group which they use "to send supportive messages to colleagues being hounded" by abuse (Hinsliff 2017). MPs across political parties extended this solidarity to Megan Markle after she experienced online and press abuse (Rentoul 2019). In an open letter, women MPs wrote: "we share an understanding of the abuse and intimidation which is now so often used as a means of disparaging women in the public office from getting on with very important work" (Mackelden 2019). Politicians may also share experiences of violence in memoirs once they have left politics, extending solidarity to women currently in office (Collier and Raney 2019).

Importantly solidarity is not limited to politicians. Thousands of feminist women protested in solidarity with former Brazilian president, Dilma Rousseff, during and following her impeachment (Hao 2016). An activist explained that there was "more than just solidarity toward Dilma;" among women on the left, "there was sorority" (Dos Santos and Jalalzai 2021, 129). This support of Rousseff brought women together across parties, "reinforcing the urgency of having more women in politics" and empowering women to help each other (ibid, 130).

Though remaining quiet or exchanging stories in a private message group may avoid the backlash that often accompanies sharing abuse publicly, many MPs underscore that remaining silent offers a kind of acceptance of VAWIP. Breaking this silence serves to communicate with political aspirants, colleagues, and perpetrators of abuse that violence is not acceptable. As Zarah Sultana said, in an interview:

> I know how hard it is for young women and people from other backgrounds to get to this stage, so (it's sad) when you encounter bullying and harassment. This is a matter that has been used time and time again to push people out of the public space and make them feel like they don't belong, so I feel like I have an obligation to speak up for myself and show that this kind of behaviour is unacceptable and will not be unchallenged (Dawson 2020).

In addition, sharing one's experience can be cathartic and healing, particularly when traditional justice is unlikely to be achieved. "Speak outs" have long been used to educate a broader society about the harms inflicted by sexual violence as well as push back against understandings of violence as individual and isolated (Loney-Howes 2019, 24). The "disruptive potential" in speaking out "lies in its ability to both challenge the silencing of women's experiences of violence and redraw the boundaries that determine what is publicly permissible to say about those experiences" (Mandorossian 2002, 29). After experiencing online abuse, including targeted and sustained disinformation campaigns, Mexican Deputy Wendy Briceño said *no más*, "no more" to women experiencing violence in private and public lives, as well as

"no more" to men who work to undermine and humiliate women in politics ("La diputada de Morena Wendy Briceño denunció a periodistas y columnistas por supuesta violencia política de género" 2020). This statement of "no more" makes it clear that this violence is not acceptable and challenges the silence surrounding acts of VAWIP.

While target-survivors of online violence should be free and encouraged to share their experiences, there are drawbacks. Not all women *want* to speak about online violence; voicing one's experiences can be re-traumatizing, draw additional attention, and, for women in politics, raise concerns about fragility in office. Particularly for multiply-marginalized women, race, gender, class, and nationality shape who can respond and how. Increased visibility of the target-survivor can increase risk and change how individuals are viewed by the public (Sobieraj 2020, 98).

Another potential downside—in addition to backlash, delegitimization, and increased abuse—is that women are made responsible for solving this problem. The issue of responsibility has been especially discussed in response to calls for digital or resiliency training, classes that offer women strategies for avoiding and dealing with online harm. As feminist Moira Whelan writes, increased resiliency training can be useful, but it becomes a burden and additional task for women to complete because of violence they experience. This places the onus on women to resolve the issue, breeding "a narrative whereby women become responsible for preventing the attacks" (Whelan 2021). Asking women to "lean in" to overcome structural issues also homogenizes women as a group, ignoring the unique concerns of multiply-marginalized people, such as women of color (Banet-Weiser and Miltner 2016, 172).

Women are often made responsible for handling their own abuse, beyond digital resiliency trainings, due to ineffective policies and systems. For example, Jess Phillips, in 2016,

penned an op-ed about online messages she received in which men debated whether to rape her. When she reported the messages to Twitter, the platform responded that the content was not in violation of Twitter's policies (Phillips 2016). A former U.K. cabinet minister reported death threats to Twitter only to be told "here are some guidelines on how *you* should have behaved differently" (Miller 2021, 167). This victim-blaming is made worse by an individualized or incident-based approach to combating online abuse. Reporting, or even hiding messages and blocking users, are several imperfect strategies to mitigate online abuse and its harms. For women in politics, constituents' messages get lost in cybermob abuse, requiring politicians to scroll through abusive messages, magnifying the impact of abuse on them even if they otherwise tried to disregard it. As Jo Swinson writes, blocking individuals or advice to "just ignore it" "doesn't really solve the issue" (2018: 334). Ultimately, real online safety demands structural change (Sobieraj 2020, 81).

CHAPTER 11: SOLUTIONS AND PUBLIC POLICY

As Jacqueline Rose writes, "recognizing an injustice, and bringing it to the world's

attention, is no guarantee that the offence will be obliterated and justice prevail" (2021).

Scholars and practitioners have developed policy models and frameworks to "solve" violence

against women in politics. Without exaggerating a glass-half-empty pessimism, I do not expect

that VAWIP or online VAW will be fully solved or cured, such that it ceases to exist. Instead,

policies can decrease virality and public incidents, expedite justice for target-survivors of

violence, and mitigate the effects of violence. The absence of a cure does not imply the absence

of treatment. Policy responses should be focused on social media platforms, broader civil

society and independent regulators, offering clarity through legislation, and encouraging

political parties to sanction abusive members as well as support those experiencing abuse.

LEGAL RESPONSES

Governments, political parties, transnational organizations, and civil society

organizations have developed and implemented policies to combat violence against women,

violence against politicians, and online violence around the world. Where these policies overlap

or have sufficiently wide scope, online violence against women in politics is included. Legal

solutions vary, from criminalization to non-punitive reputation shaming and censure.

It is worth noting some skepticism, on the part of scholars and practitioners, over the

use to legal means to respond to VAWIP. Piscopo (2016) describes the limitations of law,

specifically electoral law, in reducing impunity for VAWIP and assisting victim-survivors in

attaining justice. In the Latin American contexts she profiled, including Bolivia and Mexico, high

levels of violence, state weakness, corruption, and impunity coalesce to create an environment

challenging for effective legal solutions to VAWIP. Brechenmacher (2017) also explores potential

weaknesses in legal reforms, particularly the ineffectiveness of Bolivia Law 243. Legal interventions are "inevitably narrow" and their efficacy is limited by weak enforcement and impunity. Even in contexts with relatively strong rule of law, policies have not been evenly or equally applied (see Raney and Collier 2021). Laws can also be slow to catch up to the rate of technological change. Or as is the case with the U.K.'s Offences against the Persons Act and libel law broadly, legal intervention "in no way protects the group from a technology which has a mass group effect" (Interview with Saville-Roberts 2018).

However, Brechenmacher also recognizes that laws can have significant, positive ramifications even when they do not result in a high conviction rate. Laws raise awareness and visibility of a problem, crucial in the case of VAWIP. Numerous Latin American feminists and activists also emphasize the importance of legal frameworks for addressing VAWIP, even as they recognize limits of legal change. Albaine (2017), for example, describes regulatory frameworks on VAWIP and political harassment as "significant advance[s]," despite their "challenges." These frameworks help "bridge the gaps between the formal rights of women and the exercising of those rights" in order to "move towards the construction of democracies based in substantive parity" (138).

For others, like Olga Jurasz, law is part of the solution, but not the only or exclusive solution to online violence against women and girls. She advocates looking broadly at the law, considering all levels from domestic to international as well as criminal, civil, and human rights (Jurasz in Davis-Roberts et al. 2019). Jurasz particularly highlights the challenges with national solutions over international ones; this creates a patchwork of laws and policies, leading social media companies to operate with different standards in different locations, a challenge to the transnational element of online communication.

Importantly, not all proposed policies, as Jurasz discusses, criminalize acts of VAWIP. Others have proposed internal policy changes for social media companies including updates to terms-of-service agreements. In Mexico, some acts of VAWIP do not result in criminal proceedings for the perpetrator but instead, prevent them from standing for office, share their name publicly as offenders, and fine perpetrators for their offense.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSES

Governments have a responsibility to respond to VAWIP. Many have been reluctant to establish clear guidelines and definitions, in part because women are facing broad forms of violence. In the case of online violence, technology is rapidly changing, many politicians lack technical knowledge, and violence is normalized or seen as "not really violence." However, law—as well as social media companies—require clear definitions (Davis-Roberts et al. 2019).

Central to this issue is *who* should be making decisions about what is appropriate. Since Germany passed the world's "most advanced laws regulating online hate speech" in 2017, critics have raised concerns: "What's troubling is the fact that the new law would give social networks the responsibility (and the power) to decide what might be punishable and what not, a choice which should not be made by a private company" (Guerrini 2020). Human rights activists share this concern; this law allows social media companies to "determine what constitutes legal speech without providing adequate mechanisms for judicial oversight or judicial remedy" (Di Meco and Brechenmacher 2020).

Governments can and should incentivize social media companies to be more proactive about content on their platforms. In the U.S., Section 230 protects platforms from being liable

for content posted by users,[220] but governments can sanction social media companies for failing

to remove threatening and violent posts in a timely fashion. Germany's NetzDG law, which went

into effect in 2018, allows the government to fine technology companies up to 50 million euros

if they do not remove hate speech, insults, and other speech that is in violation of Germany's

criminal code within 24 hours (Eddy and Scott 2017).

Germany's law follows 2016 EU regulations that required Facebook, Twitter, YouTube,

and Microsoft to "review and remove ["the majority of"] hate speech from their platforms"

within 24 hours of notification (Hughes 2016). As of 2020, eight companies have been affected

by the European Commission's Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online,

including Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, and Microsoft (Reynders 2020). However,

with limited enforcement, the EU code of conduct has not been very effective (Di Meco 2019,

53). The U.K.'s Online Safety Bill would seek to fine companies up to 10% of their annual global

turnover for failing to uphold a duty of care, particularly failing to remove content related to

child sexual abuse, terrorism, or suicide promotion (Lomas 2020; Hanna 2021).

The Draft Online Safety Bill, formerly the Online Harms Bill, represents an important

effort, following significant government and civil society pressure, to reduce online violence and

harm in the U.K. Barker notes that in the U.K., lawmakers have been resistant to developing a

clear-cut definition for online violence, instead developing a list of examples (i.e., revenge porn,

deadnaming). Unfortunately, though this was an intended aim of the legislation, the Online

Safety Bill still does not provide clear definitions of online abuse and requires that platforms

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[220] Although, administrations and legislators have indicated a willingness to amend Section 230. Proposed amendments range from allowing the Department of Justice to bring civil cases against social media platforms for platform content and moderation decisions, to carving out exceptions for particular types of content (i.e., sex trafficking as with the FOSTA bill), to requiring greater transparency from platforms on how they moderate content (Mackey 2020; Newton 2020).

juggle competing types of content. The government has also been more proactive on image and video-based online violence compared to text-based violence, where their legal efforts have been prohibitively "narrow" and "ad hoc" (Barker and Jurasz 2021).

In the Draft, published in May 2021, the government calls for platforms to remove "content that is harmful to adults" which includes content "having, or indirectly having, a significant adverse physical or psychological impact on an adult with ordinary sensibilities" (section 46). This extends to content that "may reasonably be assumed to particularly affect people with a certain characteristic (or combination of characteristics), or to particularly affect a certain group of people." Importantly, a "targeted adult" in this case does not only include the direct target, but also adults who are members of a group targeted by the content. The focus on harm is in line with victimological approaches, which prioritize the experience of the victim or target over an "objective" determination. Yet, social media companies will be required to make decisions about what *would* reasonably harm an adult without feedback from said adults.

The proposed bill also requires platforms to protect "content of democratic importance" and it remains unclear how platforms should handle content that is both harmful to an adult with "ordinary sensibilities" and democratically important. As Keller summarizes, this "captures contradictions of the platform speech debate" as "platforms must take down one legally undefined kind of content ("harmful") while leaving up another ("democratically important")" (2021).

Legislators are but one group that can act against online violence and online VAWIP. Within governments, the judiciary and political organizations, especially political parties, play a key role (see "No Party to Violence," 2018). In addition, studies by governments and non-profit

practitioners emphasize several other groups who can take action against online violence, including online VAWIP: social media companies, civil society organizations, and the public.

Despite the numerous stakeholders involved, reports often emphasize the role of social media companies and their responsibilities. I believe that this placement of responsibility has several motivations. First, there are debates over appropriate response; punting accountability to companies prevents legislators from definitively and publicly taking sides on murky debates, such as the boundary between free speech and "grossly offensive" speech, as illustrated in the U.K. case. Second, legislators have expressed an unwillingness to show preference for themselves over their constituents, protecting themselves from online violence that the general public will still need to face.[221] Third, many legislators have limited technological know-how, embarrassingly evidenced in U.S. Congressional hearings on social media.[222] As I will explore below, social media companies undeniably can do more to reduce incivility, hostility, and violence on their platforms. Yet, ceding power to social media companies on these issues comes with serious concerns.

Moira Whelan writes that "there may not be a tech solution to misogyny, but there is a tech solution to misogyny online" (2021). Social media companies can and should do more to foster a positive and healthy social media ecosystem, to remove abuse quickly, to prevent the visibility of harmful speech, and to be accountable for user safety on their platforms.

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[221] See MP Maria Miller's discussion on VAWIP with the Jo Cox Foundation (November 2020).
[222] Including, for example, an April 2018 hearing in which Senator Orrin Hatch did not understand that Facebook's revenue comes from advertisements (Stewart 2018).

Politicians and public figures often offer techno-deterministic explanations for this abuse: because individuals can be anonymous on social media platforms, they are freer to commit violence online. Politicians have thus advocated removing total anonymity online. MP Maria Miller, who has worked significantly on online harms legislation, suggests having two tracks for online users, verified and unverified users. Verified accounts require personal identification and users, particularly those subject to significant abuse, can filter out unverified user posts (Miller 2021). MP Diane Abbott has also called for reduced anonymity, going farther than Miller's proposal. Abbott has suggested that users be able to post anonymously, as with Miller to protect whistleblowers and others whose engagement online requires anonymity, but that platforms should still have access to the identities of all users in case of threats (Brand and Abbott 2020).

Without some limitations to anonymity, it is challenging for police to track down perpetrators of threats and keep users safe (ibid). As Poland writes, "Anonymity makes it easier for cybersexists to act and much harder for women to respond effectively" (2016, 23). However, academic research on the role of anonymity in facilitating abuse is mixed. First, as Miller and Abbott make clear above, whistleblowers, LGBTQ youth, and even women who want to protect themselves against violent online behaviors such as doxing and swatting, benefit from anonymous accounts (ibid). Second, as Katherine Cross reminds us, anonymity contributes to harassment but does not cause it; "blaming anonymity" and seeking to get rid of anonymity altogether "will never tackle the causes of online harassment" (Collins 2015). Finally, in the policies advocated by MPs Miller and Abbott above, social media platforms would be responsible for maintaining data on individuals and releasing that data in particular circumstances. This places whistleblowers and regime critics at considerable risk in authoritarian

regimes where de-anonymizing their profiles could result in regime retaliation.[223] This is not only true for policies around anonymity; as Dr. Dhanaraj Thakur of the Web Foundation notes, laws aimed to prevent abuse and harassment online have also been used to censor political opponents (Davis-Roberts et al. 2019).

The primary means for social media companies to respond to VAWIP involves moderating content. Target-survivors of online violence have shared that moderation and the visibility of online violence impact the magnification and longevity of abuse. Sobieraj (2020), based on interviews with survivors of extensive online violence, writes that women have a clear preference for platforms with "reporting features, comment moderation, and other affordances that provide a buffer between them and those who might lash out" (67). Women identified digital "free-for-all" platforms, like 4Chan, 8Chan (now 8kun), and Reddit as particularly dangerous. These platforms have relatively little, or haphazard, moderation[224] compared to YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. However, abuse still proliferates on the latter social media platforms.

An alternative to removing speech entirely is making it less visible. In my interview with Twitter UK's Public Policy Director, Katy Minshall, Minshall described the efforts Twitter undertakes to make the platform "healthier." She agreed that not all hostile, negative, or unproductive online behavior is violent or violates terms of service agreements. Twitter, as with many social media platforms, is confronting the challenge of this "grey area" in between clearly

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[223] Authoritarian regimes already engage in digital authoritarianism, using digital tools to surveil and censor residents, particularly political opponents (Polyakova and Meserole 2019; Buyon et al. 2020). Additionally, though users are likely at greater risk of offline retaliation in nondemocratic regimes, users in democratic regimes can also be subject to problematic surveillance. For example, the Trump administration's Justice Department obtained journalists' phone records due to reporting on Russian interference in the 2016 election (Barrett 2021). Some of these practices continued into the Biden administration prior to a Justice Department policy change (Tucker 2021).

[224] Reddit has moderators for different subreddits, leading to different levels of moderation.

violent or violative posts and neutral or productive posts (Interview 2018). Within this grey area, as I also explore in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, posts can be hostile, demeaning, rude, or just unhelpful. Though they are not illegal and do not violate terms of service conditions, these abusive posts foster "a climate of intimidation and incivility towards political figures, threatening the democratic debate" (Guerin and Maharasingam-Shah 2020, 21).

Minshall described Twitter's desire to cultivate healthy and productive online conversations while also upholding free speech commitments. Twitter has, or had as of my 2018 interview, managed this tension in several ways. First, they allow users some control over their user experience, by muting or blocking other users whose posts they do not want to see. Minshall mentioned that several feminist and women's organizations in the UK have shared "block lists" with each other, to try to preemptively minimize their exposure to bad actors. Second, rather than remove negative, but non-violative, posts from the platform, Twitter makes them less visible. The platform uses algorithms to place healthy users' posts at the top of the feed so that these posts get retweeted, reinforcing positive and productive engagement. Negative posts, on the other hand, may require the user to get to the bottom of the comments and click on "view more replies." Recently, Twitter has added an additional layer of indiscernibility to algorithmically-designated "bad tweets." Following the "see more reply" function, posts now have an additional prompt to "show additional replies, including those that may contain offensive content." Facebook adopted a similar policy in response to a fake video slowing down Nancy Pelosi's speech to make her seem incompetent in 2019; the platform did not remove the video, but "heavily reduce[d]" its appearance in news feeds and added disclaimers (Harwell 2019).

While a useful idea, the algorithms are imperfect. On a Twitter post about "hide and seek," a reply that merely said "lol" was hidden under these two layers of additional prompts.

That said, this user, who has no followers and is only following 8 individuals, is possibly a bot or a throwaway account, which may have triggered additional security layers from Twitter. In our conversation, Minshall described that users who were engaging in unhealthy ways, such as a user that tweets at many users in a short period of time—not against the terms of service but probably not "a healthy means of engagement"—would be prevented from "having the microphone." Reducing the visibility of this user reduces their control over the conversation.

As with the strategies above, discussions on online violence can get stuck on what to do with individual posts. But, as Institute for Strategic Dialogue researchers clarify, "Instead of focusing on determining the legitimacy or not of individual pieces of content, they [democratic governments] should concentrate on the systems, design choices and decisions […] currently so hospitable to hatred and harassment" (Guerin and Maharasingam-Shah 2020, 4). In their report, Guerin and Maharasingam-Shah (2020) advocate for social media companies to be more transparent about their moderation policies and for moderators to be better trained on detecting abuse against high profile targets, including intersectional violence (5). Governments can push for this transparency and move away from models of platform self-regulation, such as internal and external audits.

In Facebook's 2019 Civil Rights Audit, the team offered several recommendations to better combat hate speech. Two recommendations, which directly impact women in politics, are bulk reporting and particular protection for activists and journalists due frequent harassment (Murphy, 13). The 2020 Civil Rights Audit noted that Facebook had made "less tangible progress" in bulk reporting than on other recommended measures (Murphy, 50). Instagram has a feature that allows users to delete up to 25 comments at one time, but Facebook currently does not. For women in politics, who can receive thousands of comments on a single post, bulk reporting would enable them and their staff to spend less time on their own content

moderation. Similarly, through Facebook has built new tools to detect harassment, including

sexist harassment, the tools have not yet been applied to all groups at a heightened

vulnerability of violence (ibid). Given the U.S. political context in 2020, it is perhaps not

surprising that all mentions of "politician" in the Civil Rights Audit from that year referred to

hate speech propagated by, not directed at, politicians. It is also notable that the 2020 report

was released during the #StopHateForProfit campaign in which over 1,000 businesses paused

ads on the site. Facebook did also create a program, "Facebook Protect," to assist candidates

and elected officials during electoral periods. However, this program is limited to the electoral

period and does not address hate speech or harassment; it monitors accounts for hacking and

adds additional account security protections.[225]

On July 1, 2021, four of the largest tech companies—Facebook, Google, TikTok, and

Twitter—made "unprecedented commitments to tackle the abuse of women on their platforms"

at the UN Generation Equality Forum (Web Foundation, 2021). This pledge was preceded by

nearly one year of consultations, organized by the Web Foundation. The companies committed

to the following changes: enabling users to track reports of abuse, better addressing context,

providing more transparency on abuse, and providing more guidance on reporting (Holt 2021).

Some, such as Dhrodia, called these commitments a "major win," while Di Meco commented

that, while a "good PR opportunity" "these aren't real commitments" (Mohan 2021).

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[225] Though Facebook does not go into detail on their website, these additional security protections do not appear unique to the program; users can opt into securing their account with two-factor authentication and other security measures without enrolling. Monitoring accounts for hacking, however, is a unique benefit Facebook offers with the program.

Overall, social media companies, especially Alphabet,[226] Facebook, and Twitter,[227] have

relayed mixed signals as to their desired role in determining and controlling online speech. Not

all social media companies have the same position on these questions. For example, a 2021

investigation by The Guardian into content moderation policies found that Facebook policies

allow death threats against "high-profile" or public figures (Hern 2021). The definition of public

figures is vague and broad, including politicians, athletes, and those who have a certain number

of followers. According to Facebook, moderators should not take down violence—including

death threats—against public figures "because we want to allow discussion, which often

includes critical commentary of people who are featured in the news" (ibid). This exposé reveals

that social media companies can facilitate, or at least ignore, the most dangerous forms of

online violence. Other platforms appear to be removing threats more consistently, regardless of

the visibility of the target.

There are several additional reasons, relayed by academics and activists, to move away

from models in which social media companies are the primary arbiters of decisions regarding

hate speech and de-platforming. First, run by private companies—a feature that, importantly,

also limits their oversight and accountability in the U.S. context—social media platforms have no

democratic, or other, accountability to their users. As Fowler and Alcantara write, "It's a lot of

power to put into the hands of tech executives who aren't elected or don't necessarily have

experience weighing what's right for society" (2021). Second, though global in scope, a number

of popular social media companies are based in the U.S. and their policies often overemphasize

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[226] Google's parent company, generally involved in these discussions as the owner of YouTube.
[227] With Alphabet's purchase of YouTube and Facebook's acquisition of WhatsApp, these three companies control many, though not all, of the largest social media platforms. As such, they are often deposed together and discussed, from a legislative perspective, as a group. That said, companies (or specific platforms) are occasionally singled out after particularly egregious or visible displays of hate.

U.S. law, such as Section 230, in company policy. Finally, social media company employees are not a reflection of broader society. Even in the U.S., employees, especially engineers and coders, tend to be disproportionately male, despite gains since 2014. The share of Black and Latinx employees is disproportionately low and growing at a glacial pace (Harrison 2019). Civil society actors have called for the diversification of tech companies, recognizing that employees with different life experiences will be attune to a different set of issues, including those disproportionately impacting women and people of color (Di Meco 2019, 46).

CIVIL SOCIETY RESPONSES

Ultimately, social media companies cannot work alone to resolve this issue. They should not be solely responsible for governing themselves and the speech on their platforms. But also, different platforms should work together. Wilson Center researchers suggested creating a venue similar to the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism for platforms to come together to combat online harassment and disinformation (Jankowicz et al. 2021, 46).

There is a continued role for civil society organizations in pushing governments, political parties, and tech companies forward on these issues. The Jo Cox Foundation for example, launched a Joint Statement on Conduct for Political Parties in December 2020 to coincide with the three-year anniversary of the 2017 Intimidation in Public Life Report. Rather than outline abuse and recommend sanctions, the joint statement puts forward "the minimum standard of behavior that can be expected from political party members." The statement has not yet been supported by Labour or the Conservative Party, but has been signed by many other smaller parties, including the Liberal Democrats, the Green Party, Plaid Cymru, and the Scottish National Party ("Announcement: Launching the Joint Statement on Conduct for Political Parties" 2020).

Civil society has also mounted campaigns targeting social media companies. These efforts, including 2020's "Stop Hate for Profit," are not focused on politicians but the strategies discussed would impact VAWIP just as they reduce other forms of identity-based discrimination. This call to action, instigated by a coalition of digital and civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, Anti-Defamation League, Color of Change, and Sleeping Giants called on Facebook to address racism and hate on the platform (Ghaffary 2020). The campaign called for a month-long boycott of Facebook in July 2020 and a "week of action" in September 2020. Through the campaign, over 1,000 businesses paused advertising on Facebook, aiming to put pressure on the platform to meet the coalition's demands (Wong 2020).

In addition to pressuring social media companies to change policies or enforce their terms of service more effectively, civil society organizations and private companies have also circumvented platforms, working to make the internet a healthier and safer space. Apps like "Block Party" allow users to filter messages so that they do not have to see unwanted content on Twitter. These messages are saved in a separate folder so that users can take violent messages to law enforcement, if needed (Dickey 2021). Block Party also, importantly, allows a separate, trusted user to help sort through content on behalf of a targeted individual. Many political women already have trusted staff and friends take over their account when they are experiencing violence from a cybermob.

Constituents, supporters, and allies have also used hashtags, like #NotOk in 2016 and #WeHaveHerBack in 2020, to build solidarity and support targeted women. These digital rallies are not always successful, however, and can be manipulated by counter-movements. Adopting a different strategy, Areto Labs, a Canadian-based technology firm, started ParityBOT to respond to toxicity against women in politics. ParityBOT identifies violent and abusive posts against women candidates online and "counters" with a positive post, supporting a political woman or

simply inserting positivity into the conversation. The founders of ParityBOT recognize that harmful online discourse not only negatively impacts women candidates and politicians, but their staff and women aspiring to public office. Though the bot does not take down or hide negative posts, it works to recalibrate the sentiment of online spaces relating to women politicians.

Finally, journalists and practitioners have underscored the importance of solidarity, recognizing the role of non-governmental organizations at bringing individuals together from diverse sectors and national contexts (Maria Ressa in "National Democratic Institute Marks Fifth Anniversary of #NotTheCost Campaign on Violence Against Women in Politics" 2021). Through cross-national coalition building, targets of violence have found solidarity and support, shared best practices, and pushed for change at the local, national, and transnational level.

CULTURAL AND MULTIDIMENSIONAL CHANGE

Ultimately, as Banet-Weiser and Miltner (2015) argue, technological features like anonymity, legal inefficiencies, and political polarization can only partially explain online VAWIP. Gendered, online violence is also, if not primarily, a result of misogyny (ibid, 171). As this dissertation has argued, following feminist and critical race digital scholars, prejudicial violence online is not distinct from societal, structural discriminations. Misogyny, racism, misogynoir, and other discriminations that originate offline drive online violence and online violence reconstitutes online and offline inequities. Technology has become a medium for, but not necessarily the starting point of, the perpetration of structural discriminations (Esposito 2021, 2; Barker and Jurasz 2019, 5).

The solutions above, and the actors involved in bringing about those solutions, are also not mutually exclusive. As discussed, UK women politicians launched the "Reclaim the Internet"

campaign in 2016. This was an action taken by politicians outside of legislation with the goal of

raising awareness, generating conversation, and changing the culture of the online space. Online

abuse is unlikely to stop, or even decrease, with a single-pronged solution advocated by an

isolated group. Instead, solutions are more likely to be effective if advocates work across

sectors, tackle violence across multiple modes, and simultaneously bring multiple changes to the

fore.

CHAPTER 12: CONCLUSIONS

SUMMARY

In this dissertation, I built on theories of violence and intersectionality as well as research on online misogyny and violence against women in politics (VAWIP) to theorize and analyze online VAWIP. I sought to explore the relationships between online violence against women in politics and offline violence, including how structural violence, discrimination, and offline physical violence impact the online space. To understand how VAWIP operates online and affects multiply-marginalized women in politics, I developed a typology that included multiple marginalization and incorporated the unique features of the online space, such as the potentially disjointed relationship between target, audience, and harm online. The typology emphasizes the role of target, form, and response in relation to online VAWIP.

I applied the typology to an original dataset of 1.3 million tweets, including two corpora, one on the UK and one on Mexico. Using mixed methods, including supervised machine learning and qualitative discourse analysis, I classified the posts in these corpora to gain quantitative and qualitative insights on the online violence against politicians and VAWIP that targets women in formal politics. I found that some, though not all, multiply-marginalized women are targeted with more abuse than their colleagues. Qualitatively, violence incorporates multiple forms of discrimination, within individual posts and across the corpora. I conclude that online violence (i) is not greater in amount or proportion in Mexico, a context with higher levels of offline physical violence and greater impunity, than in the U.K.; (ii) does not uniformly target women with some multiply-marginalized women especially targeted with higher numbers and proportions of abusive posts; (iii) is qualitatively intersectional, incorporating discriminatory discourses; and (iv) differs across individuals and across contexts. Women are rendered invisible and incompetent through semiotic, online VAWIP. However, the discourses perpetrators use to render invisible and incompetent are not static.

In the remainder of this chapter, I first reflect on the methodological takeaways from this project. Second, I revisit the research questions and expectations presented at the start and note which expectations are supported by the data. Finally, I conclude by considering areas for future research.

METHODOLOGICAL TAKEAWAYS

One of the sets of questions guiding this dissertation is: *How can and should we conceptualize online VAWIP? How does it differ from violence against politicians?*

Categorizing, classifying, and analyzing online violence comes with a series of challenges, described throughout this project. I maintain the importance of considering target and form of violence, particularly in the study of intersectional online violence. The consideration of target prevents the reduction of an analysis just to those posts that appear to be most directed at one woman politician—instead, encouraging the consideration of a broader group of individuals, including family members, staff, peers, constituents, and the public audience. Particularly in the U.K., where violence in the corpora often centered on trans equality, Black Lives Matter, and Islamophobic conspiracy theories—even when the politician tagged in the abusive post was not LGBTQ, BAME, or Muslim—an attention to broader audience in non-targeted posts, and the potential for audience harm when viewing public online abuse, is critical.

Furthermore, I maintain that it is necessary to adopt a broader scope in the forms of violence against women in politics, both considering the unique factors of the online space but also, the role of intersecting and multiple discriminations. In Chapter 3, I also identified the role of response to violence, which is more challenging to measure using the methods utilized here. I did find some responses to violence in the training corpora, but as these were not abusive, the

supervised machine learning analysis was not primed to identify these datapoints. Similarly, though tangential to this project, the algorithm did pick up some—though likely not all—posts *about* abuse that were themselves not abusive. Different data sources and unique algorithmic designs could be better suited at understanding the response to online violence, including how those targeted and harmed write about their experiences with violence.

A big data, supervised machine learning analysis is unparalleled in its ability to classify large amounts of data and generate information on broad patterns. Other research projects have recruited volunteer coders ("Troll Patrol" 2019) or employed research assistants (Southern and Harmer 2021) to code hundreds of thousands of tweets to build more accurate supervised machine learning algorithms. This is ideal, but prohibitive for a smaller project. The algorithms generated for this project had over 90% accuracy but were not nearly as effective at correctly classifying abusive posts. It appeared that the inaccuracies were somewhat consistent across the individuals under analysis and thus, the comparisons between political women were not without basis. However, given that correctly classifying posts as abusive was central to this project, and remains central to the broader research agenda, the limited accuracy presents a major obstacle for future research. I stand by the decision not to limit "abuse" or "violence" to a clearly specified set of words or phrases as well as to broaden the scope of violence beyond sexism. Nonetheless, standing by these theoretical choices may have limited the accuracy of the big data analysis.

Big data analysis is also limited due to its requirement for clean categorization, a challenge for feminist research. In many cases, the distinction between violence against politicians and VAWIP is clear: many online users engage aggressively with politicians solely on the basis of their political actions and views and do not bring identity or discrimination into that aggression. This can be classified as rudeness or violence against politicians and, though I do not

advocate unnecessary hostility online, it is important that individuals are able to tag a politician in a post about their policy disapproval. At times, that disapproval is accompanied by anger, sometimes justifiable and necessary anger. Political disagreement, and public political disagreement, is central to democracy. However, when this incorporates identity-based attacks and discriminations, this hostility is no longer democratically productive and further, can fall on the spectrum of violence against women in politics.

Despite these cases of clean distinction, doing qualitative analysis and building the grounded theory typology in Chapter 3 underscored that clear categories are limited. The categories of online violence developed, including defamation and purposeful embarrassment, allow for cross-category classification. But, neatly categorizing posts between rude/non-abusive and abusive or between violence against politicians and VAWIP left many posts in a hazy "grey area." Given the limited amount of contextual data when analyzing a single, standalone tweet, it is challenging if not impossible to move certain posts out of the grey area, into a clearly delineated category. The grey area is further complicated by big data research methods, which require a clear classification for posts in order to conduct supervised machine learning analysis. Ultimately, as I discuss next, the challenges of neat categorization and levels of complexity in the corpora add further support to qualitative analysis, in addition to or even in place of big data analysis.

In addition to the above research questions, I ask: *How can online VAWIP best be measured, given the information gaps and methodological challenges of online research?*

In this project, I utilize multiple methods to better understand women's experiences with online violence. I use qualitative, interviews, participant observation, and discourse analysis, as well as quantitative and automated methods, classifying Twitter posts in Python

using algorithms driven by logistic regression. As I have written previously, though supervised

machine learning is the standard for big data social media analyses, a "one-size-fits-all analysis

does not sufficiently account for nuance, context, and multiple categorization in understanding

online abuse" (Kuperberg 2021, 120). Other researchers of intersectional online violence and

online VAWIP have similarly raised concerns over the validity of analyses that rely exclusively on

machine learning (see Al-Rawi, Chun, and Amer 2021; Levy 2018, 12; Oates, et al. 2019). In

addition, work on algorithmic bias (Broussard 2018; Kim, et al. 2020; Noble 2018; O'Neil 2017;

Tufekci 2016; Viner and Gillard 2020) and Big Data (boyd and Crawford 2011) disrupts the notion

that algorithms, from machine learning analyses to user engagement with social media

platforms, are neutral.

Biases and inequities within artificial intelligence—what Buolamwini terms the "coded

gaze"—impact women, people of color, disabled people, and individuals at these intersections

disproportionately (Buolamwini 2016; Whittaker 2021). This dissertation does not have the

same human impact as biased policing algorithms or software that does not recognize Black

faces with the same accuracy as white faces. Still, for both methodological and ethical rigor, it is

important to be aware of, and where possible correct for, big data biases that can contribute to

inequity and injustice (Hellman 2021).

Artificial intelligence collects data and finds patterns, assuming and reaffirming a

"norm" (Whittaker 2021). Reaffirming a norm can erase, or make invisible, crucial differences.

But *people* are primarily responsible for biases in statistical and algorithmic-based analysis, as

we consciously and unconsciously insert biases into code. Further, our interpretation of data can

contribute to greater inequality. Researchers who have brought attention to discriminatory AI

do not advocate for exclusively qualitative methods; instead, they have developed and championed more equitable algorithmic alternatives.[228]

Qualitative analysis does not entirely resolve these issues; like algorithmic creators, I bring my own biases to qualitative analysis. Nonetheless, qualitative analysis, including interviews and discourse analysis, mitigate some of the shortcomings of quantitative and big data analysis. First, as articulated in Chapter 4, interviews allowed me to elevate the role of in-country political experts in building theory and establishing emphases for the big data analysis, particularly regarding salient identities and common violent phrases. Second, discourse analysis allowed me to move beyond classification models that largely depend on exclusive and exhaustive categories, which are not entirely compatible with an intersectional-type analysis.

This project is not the first or only piece of research that utilizes interviews, focus groups, and/or discourse analysis in conjunction with big data analysis for the study of online abuse. But I hope that an in-depth discussion of methodological norms and best practices in this project and in other work (Kuperberg 2021) encourages future research that considers mixed methods, with an emphasis on qualitative data, to study social media violence and, in particular, intersectional violence.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS, REVISITED

In addition to methodological questions, I asked: How do structures of societal violence impact online VAWIP? How are offline and online VAWIP related? I find support for two expectations presented in Chapter 2.

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[228] This too is debated. Meredith Whittaker (2021) asks who defines "good" when it comes to useful AI and who benefits from these projects, this data?

- Expectation 1*:* Higher offline violence does not correlate with increased online VAWIP. In countries with a greater amount of offline violence (operationalized here using physical violence) and great impunity for violent crimes, online violence will be less prevalent and/or less significant.
- Expectation 3: Offline violence primarily impacts the *forms* of online violence, including discourses of violence. Salient discriminations will be particularly prevalent in online VAWIP.

I find that, according to the big data analysis, in this sample, British women MPs received a higher proportion of abusive posts than Mexican women politicians. British women MPs in the study also received a much higher number of abusive posts than Mexican women politicians under analysis during the same period. This is not a perfect measure, but does cast doubt on the alternative explanation that higher levels of offline violence correlate linearly with higher levels of online violence, at least on Twitter and in this sample. Particularly if using the number of abusive posts classified by the logistic regression, supervised machine learning algorithms—7,423 posts in the Mexico test corpus compared to 55,652 posts in the U.K. test corpus—it is clear that higher levels of physical, offline violence and impunity do not correlate with significantly higher levels of online violence using this data.

From domestic reports and interviews, I find that online and offline VAWIP are related and are not experienced as separate phenomenon by political women. Though women in Mexico focus more closely on offline violence, and those in the U.K. tend to emphasize the online space, many recognize that online violence can occur in response to offline action, such as making a public statement or participating in a protest. Furthermore, online violence can precipitate, or increase fear of, offline violence. Numbers and percentages of violent posts reveal only some of the impacts of offline violence on online violence and the reverse, how online violence shapes and reconstitutes primarily or originally offline structures of violence. To address the impact of structural violence on online VAWIP, it is important to consider how online VAWIP incorporates intersectional discriminations.

To this effect, my final research question was as follows: how does online VAWIP

incorporate intersectional discriminations? I find partial support for Expectations 4 and 5 though

I find more support for each of these expectations in the U.K. than Mexico.

- Expectation 4: Women who identify (or are perceived to identify) with multiple marginalized groups will experience quantitatively and/or qualitatively different violence than their colleagues.
- Expectation 5: Multiple discrimination will be evident not only in individual posts, but across the corpus of tweets.

Women whose identities span multiple marginalized groups do experience different online

violence than their colleagues, as shown in the qualitative analyses used to (i) prepare the

training set and (ii) analyze abusive posts in the test set of both corpora. For example, Mhairi

Black, Layla Moran, Jesusa Rodríguez, and Lucia Riojas all receive targeted and non-targeted

violence as LGBTQ, women politicians. Though other members of the corpora receive non-

targeted transphobic or homophobic violence, no other politicians receive targeted,

homophobic posts classified as abusive in the test sets.

However, this expectation only has partial support in quantitative levels of violence. As

shown in the aggregate, descriptive statistics, not all multiply-marginalized women receive

higher numbers or proportions of abuse. For example, indigenous women in Mexico and Muslim

women in the U.K. were not targeted with more abusive posts than their colleagues on average.

Ultimately, the *most* targeted women in each corpus, including both number and proportion of

abusive posts, included women with multiple, intersecting, marginalized identities. But

intersectional violence does not operate uniformly across women, including across multiply-

marginalized women.

Similarly, some salient discriminations are pervasive in online VAWIP posts, though this

is more evident for the U.K. than for Mexico. In the U.K. corpus, nearly all salient

discriminations—with the exception of antisemitism—are present and widespread in abusive

posts. Anti-feminist violence, though not a form of discrimination in the same manner, is also

relatively limited in the U.K. corpus. However, racism, transphobia, homophobia, Islamophobia,

and discrimination on the basis of age are rife in the corpus, including directed as well as non-

directed violence. In Mexico, by contrast, homophobia, ageism, and anti-feminist violence are

prominent in the corpus, but rhetoric including anti-indigenous discrimination or discrimination

on the basis of geography, class, and language is limited. Individuals looking to target women

politicians with violence have a broader toolbox of discriminatory rhetoric to draw from when

women have multiple, marginalized identities. However, abusers still appear to cluster around

particular tools and ignore others. Furthermore, the use of these varied tools appears to differ

across contexts.

Finally, there is support for expectation 5: multiple discrimination is evident both in

individual posts as well as across the corpus. Again, this is especially evident in the U.K., where

nearly all women in the corpus were targeted with posts that incorporated different forms of

discrimination. Some posts, but particularly those directed at multiply-marginalized MPs,

included intersectional discrimination or multiple forms of discrimination in a single post. In

Mexico, the diversity of discriminations used in abusive posts was more evident across the

entire corpus, as numerous women received few abusive posts or only posts that incorporated

sexist tropes. In considering the implications of online VAWIP, it is important to consider how a

single post is but one of many abusive posts received by a political woman. It is thus important

to understand the broader landscape, which is shaped by other and different violent posts

targeting women in politics.

In conclusion, online violence against women in politics is intersectional, in target and in

form. Yet, it is not uniformly intersectional; women within and across multiply-marginalized

groups, and from distinct geographic contexts, are not targeted with identical forms of abuse. Violence incorporates different, context and target-specific violent tropes. It is clear that violence against women in politics is more thoroughly understood outside of the lens of *just* sexism. By focusing exclusively, or even primarily, on sexism, research is discounting the forms and types of VAWIP experienced by multiply-marginalized women, and viewed by multiply-marginalized audiences. In seeking to better understand the forms of violence used to delegitimize women's access to the public sphere, patterns and shared experiences are illuminative, but so too are differences.

AREAS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

In 2018, I wrote: "The field of violence against women in politics (VAWIP) is so new, it seems unfair to discuss its "gaps"; rather, the study of VAWIP is defined by its uncharted territory" (685). To an extent, this sentiment is still true. Though VAWIP has been discussed in the United Nations, legislated against in countries such as Bolivia and Mexico, and the subject of major transnational campaigns online and offline, there is more to understand and even more to do. Simultaneously, as with all contemporary issues, violence is not static. Growing democratic deficits worldwide, new conflicts, the Covid-19 pandemic, new social media platforms, and the growing presence of women in even-unexpected political spaces transform the forms and impacts of violence. Researchers lament that strategies grow obsolete after months, certainly after several years, particularly those directed at online violence due to the rapid pace of technological change. In addition to staying current amidst these changes, future research should tackle new actors and contexts, uncover mechanisms of impact, continue to clarify the relationships between online violence against women in politics and other phenomena, and contend with the transnational nature of online VAWIP.

Existing academic research on online VAWIP, including this dissertation, tends to focus on formal women in politics, particularly women at the national level, with exceptions such as Håkansson (2021) and Thomas, et al. (2019) on subnational women politicians and Calasanti and Gerrits (2021) on women public health officials. Non-profit reports have helped fill in these gaps, offering data on activists, women human rights defenders, and local political leaders. Still, research is limited on political staff (their role in handling abuse and its impact on them), family members of political women, and less-prominent targets. Women politicians have some degree of privilege, often significant privilege (see Joshi and Och 2014). To understand broader discriminations, researchers should consider the ways that violence manifests against other targets.

Furthermore, research has largely focused on a small number of countries, primarily English-speaking, developed nations. In other contexts, including those with limited or unequal internet penetration, women may not receive significant engagement online. As shown in research on Mexico ("Subordinadas y Bellas" 2019), a lack of data, or a data void, can damage political candidates and facilitate disinformation. Expanding the study of online VAWIP to new contexts, and contend with issues of digital citizenship (Henry, Vasil, and Witt 2021) requires that we negotiate not only with new forms of discrimination but differing levels of online interaction.

Finally, political factors, specifically far-right and anti-government movements, appear to play a significant role in VAWIP (see Fuchs and Schäfer 2020 on right-wing perpetrators of online VAWIP in Japan). The plot to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer began on the internet, where sexism and conservative gender roles informed discourses of violence against her (Goldberg 2021; Ebin 2021, 7-8). Particular forms and contexts of VAWIP will be better

understood with additional research on the role of ultra-nationalism, anti-statism, and far-right groups on violence.

While it may be challenging, if not impossible, to end online VAWIP, it is certainly possible to mitigate its harmful effects. Doing so requires a deeper understanding of impact. Political psychology literature, for example, shows that anger is politically motivating (Valentino 2018). Most likely, some women get angry when they witness online abuse against their political leaders and role models. However, others may experience fear and demobilization, leading them to reconsider political. When, and for whom, does anger mobilize? Which types of online comments mobilize and which deter constituents? Better understanding the mechanisms and contextual differences of impact will help ground public policy and reduce the harmful impacts of VAWIP.

In addition, online VAWIP is one form of violence impacting women in politics. Women may also experience political violence and violence against politicians or be the subject of disinformation (Jankowicz et al. 2021). Some research conflates VAWIP and disinformation, but I understand them as overlapping yet distinct phenomena. A false story spread about a political woman's support of a policy issue is an example of disinformation. An offender threatening to sexually assault a political woman is VAWIP, but not disinformation. These collide in numerous events, such as when the head of a woman politician is photoshopped onto a pornographic image (see Goldberg 2021), constituting both VAWIP and visual disinformation. VAWIP and disinformation can be related in other ways as well, such as when women journalists report on disinformation and experience online violence as a result (Posetti et al. 2021, 7). Because disinformation often occurs online, tackling disinformation requires many of the same tools as tackling online VAWIP. It is practical to discuss these phenomena in tandem. However, they are not identical and conflating them will invisibilize key components of each.

Finally, one key component of disinformation research, that remains under-researched by VAWIP scholars, is transnational networks. Online VAWIP, and online abuse generally, is transnational. Unlike offline violence against women in politics, which is generally limited to domestic actors, the online space enables users from around the world to threaten and harm women politicians outside of their country of residence. Cases from the U.K. show that women politicians receive abuse coordinated by far-right groups outside of Britain, including fascist organizations in Germany and the U.S. (Mayo 2016; Imafidon and Akiwowo 2019). The transnational element of violence adds challenges to VAWIP policy responses. Most notably, courts are limited in their ability to try and convict international perpetrators for online crimes (Kleijssen and Perri 2016). In an increasingly connected world, researches should explore VAWIP's transnational dimensions and work to find resolutions to the resulting challenges.

APPENDIX A: ANONYMIZED LIST OF INTERVIEWS

United Kingdom:

1. Interview with minority party MP

2. Interview with Labour MP'

3. Interview with Labour member of House of Lords

4. Interview with Liberal Democrat MP

5. Interview with parliamentary staff (2)

6. Interview with civil society activist on online violence

7. Interview with civil society activist on women's political participation

8. Interview with Twitter UK

Mexico:

1. Interview with judge and gender-based violence advocate (Costa Rica)

2. Interview with National Electoral Institute (INE) staff member

3. Interview with former judge

4. Interview with researcher who helped draft VAWIP Protocol

5. Interview with civil society activist on online violence

6. Interview with bureaucrat with leadership roles in INMUJERES (National Institute for Women) and INE; works on gender-based violence and VAWIP

7. Interview with electoral judge

8. Interview with international human rights activist

9. Interview with gender consultant

APPENDIX B: SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

My interviews were semi-structured, but this is a sample of some of the questions I regularly

asked. Italicized questions are those that I asked at every interview. Interviews in Mexico were

conducted in Spanish and used deputy (*diputada*) in place of MP.

1) **How is VAWIP different from 'politics as usual' or other forms of political violence?**

   a) **How does VAWIP differ from violence against women in broader society? How do you see these as connected?**

2) *How has social media impacted the forms of violence women face?*

3) **When and where in the political process is VAWIP most likely to emerge?**

4) *What do you think the impact of VAWIP is?*

   a) **For the victim?**

   b) *For women in politics?*

   c) **For women in society in general?**

   d) **For future women in politics?**

   e) *For democracy?*

My research, in particular, is focused on how other identities—in addition to gender—and political

activities impact VAWIP. These can include race and ethnicity, linguistic background, sexuality,

religion- in terms of identity; and political party, constituency, feminist policy support, or activity

in parliament- in terms of political activities.

5) *In your opinion, are there factors, like but not limited to those I mentioned above, that impact women in British parliament and their experiences with violence and harassment?*

   a) **Why do you think that is the case?**

In addition to my dissertation, I am also working on a couple of other projects.

6) **I am also interested in the role of family and VAWIP. Harassment of MP family members appears to be a common tool used to demoralize, harass, and intimidate MPs. Can you speak to this form of intimidation and harassment? How can we better take this into account in our study of VAWIP? How might women and men's experiences in this regard differ?**

7) **Are there particular times at which violence appears to increase or decrease? For example, do you see a spike in violence after a big vote, when something important happens to another MP, etc.?**

APPENDIX C: PYTHON CODE

```python
import warnings
warnings.filterwarnings("ignore",
category=DeprecationWarning)
import numpy as np # linear algebra
import pandas as pd # data processing, CSV file
I/O (e.g. pd.read_csv)
from sklearn.feature_extraction.text import
CountVectorizer
from sklearn.pipeline import Pipeline
from sklearn.model_selection import
train_test_split, GridSearchCV
from sklearn.metrics import
confusion_matrix,f1_score
from sklearn.naive_bayes import
MultinomialNB
from sklearn.ensemble import
RandomForestClassifier
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt

import os
import seaborn as sns
import re
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
import missingno as ms
import seaborn as sns
from wordcloud import WordCloud,
STOPWORDS
import nltk
from nltk.corpus import stopwords
from sklearn.feature_extraction.text import
TfidfVectorizer

from sklearn import metrics
from sklearn.metrics import accuracy_score,
classification_report

from sklearn.tree import DecisionTreeClassifier
from sklearn.naive_bayes import
MultinomialNB
from sklearn.ensemble import
RandomForestClassifier
from sklearn.neighbors import
KNeighborsClassifier
```

```python
from sklearn.linear_model import
LogisticRegression

import warnings
warnings.filterwarnings("ignore")

training_data = pd.read_csv('uktestnew.csv')
#to read and store in panda dataframe
testing_data = pd.read_csv('ali.csv') #to read
and store in panda dataframe
len(testing_data)
len(training_data)
nltk.download('stopwords')
eng_stops = set(stopwords.words("english"))
from nltk.stem import WordNetLemmatizer
lemmatizer = WordNetLemmatizer()
def process_message(review_text):
    # remove all the special characters
    new_review_text = re.sub("[^a-zA-Z]", "
",review_text)
    # convert all letters to lower case
    words = new_review_text.lower().split()
    # remove stop words
    words = [w for w in words if not w in
eng_stops]
    # lemmatizer
    #words = [lemmatizer.lemmatize(word) for
word in words]
    # join all words back to text
    return (" ".join(words))
import os
import pandas as pd
from pandas import read_csv
import re
from bs4 import BeautifulSoup
import glob

def get_breaks(content, length):
    data = ""
    words = content.split(' ')
    total_chars = 0
    for i in range(len(words)):
        total_chars += len(words[i])
```

```python
        if total_chars > length:
            data = data + "<br>" + words[i]
            total_chars = 0
        else:
            data = data + " " + words[i]
    return data
def remove_html(text_data):
    """remove_html takes raw text and removes
html tags from the text.
     ref:
stackoverflow.com/questions/16206380/pytho
n-beautifulsoup-how-to-remove-all-tags-from-
an-element
    """
    soup = BeautifulSoup(text_data)
    return soup.get_text()
def text_cleaner(text):
    text = re.sub(r"\\r\\n", ' ', text)
    text = re.sub('<br>', " ", text)
    text = remove_html(text)

    text = re.sub('&amp;', '', text)


    text = re.sub(r'[^\x00-\x7F]', ' ', text)
    www_pat = r'www.[^ ]+'
    http_pat = r'https?://[^ ]+'
    combined_pat = r'|'.join((www_pat,
http_pat))
    text = re.sub(combined_pat,'',text.strip())
    '''
    text =
re.sub('((www\.[^\s]+)|(https?://[^\s]+))', '',
text)

    text = re.sub(r'#([^\s]+)', r'\1', text)
    text = remove_sig(text)
    text = re.sub('\S*@\S*\s?', '', text)
    #    text = re.sub(r"[^\w\.@-]", " ", text)
    #    text = re.sub(",", " ", text)
    #    text = re.sub("[-_<>]{2,}", " ", text)
    text = re.sub(r"([^a-zA-Z0-9_.#]+)", " ", text)
    text = text.replace(' n ', ' ')
    text = text.replace(' n ', ' ')
    return text
training_data.dropna(inplace=True)
training_data.isnull().sum()

testing_data = testing_data.drop(['abuse'],axis =
1)
testing_data.isnull().sum()
testing_data['clean_tweet']=testing_data['text']
.apply(lambda x: process_message(x))
training_data.abuse.value_counts()
def createPieChartFor(t_df):
    Lst = 100*t_df.value_counts()/len(t_df)
        labels = t_df.value_counts().index.values
    sizes =  Lst
        fig1, ax1 = plt.subplots()
    ax1.pie(sizes, labels=labels,
autopct='%1.2f%%', shadow=True,
startangle=90)
    ax1.axis('equal')  # Equal aspect ratio ensures
that pie is drawn as a circle.
    plt.show()

from sklearn.model_selection import
train_test_split
train_df, test_df =
train_test_split(training_data, test_size = 0.3,
random_state = 42)

vectorizer = TfidfVectorizer()
train_tfidf_model =
vectorizer.fit_transform(train_df.clean_tweet)
test_tfidf_model =
vectorizer.transform(test_df.clean_tweet)

train_tfidf = pd.DataFrame(train_tfidf_model)
train_tfidf

cls = [LogisticRegression(),
    MultinomialNB(),
    DecisionTreeClassifier(),
    RandomForestClassifier(n_estimators=200),
    KNeighborsClassifier(n_neighbors = 5)]

cls_name = []

test_tfidf_model
test_df.abuse.count()

lbl_actual = test_df.abuse
i = 0
accuracy = []
models = []
```

```
for cl in cls:
    model =
cl.fit(train_tfidf_model,train_df.abuse)
    lbl_pred = model.predict(test_tfidf_model)
    a = (100*accuracy_score(lbl_pred, lbl_actual))
    a = round(a,2)
    accuracy.append(a)
    cls_name.append(cl.__class__.__name__)
    print ("{}  Accuracy Score :
{}%".format(cls_name[i],a))
    print ( classification_report(lbl_pred,
lbl_actual))
    models.append(model)
    i +=1

test_tfidf_model.shape
accuracy
np.argmax(accuracy)

model = models[np.argmax(accuracy)]
testing_data
import pickle
with open('vectorizer.pickle', 'wb') as handle:
    pickle.dump(vectorizer, handle)

with open('model.pickle', 'wb') as handle:
    pickle.dump(model, handle)
----
import numpy as np
import pandas as pd
import pickle
import warnings
warnings.filterwarnings("ignore")
from nltk.corpus import stopwords
from sklearn.feature_extraction.text import
TfidfVectorizer
import nltk
nltk.download('stopwords')
from sklearn import metrics
from sklearn.metrics import accuracy_score,
classification_report
from sklearn.tree import DecisionTreeClassifier
from sklearn.naive_bayes import
MultinomialNB
from sklearn.ensemble import
RandomForestClassifier
from sklearn.neighbors import
KNeighborsClassifier

from sklearn.linear_model import
LogisticRegression
import re

import warnings

warnings.filterwarnings("ignore",
category=DeprecationWarning)
import numpy as np # linear algebra
import pandas as pd # data processing, CSV file
I/O (e.g. pd.read_csv)
from sklearn.feature_extraction.text import
CountVectorizer
from sklearn.pipeline import Pipeline
from sklearn.model_selection import
train_test_split, GridSearchCV
from sklearn.metrics import
confusion_matrix,f1_score
from sklearn.naive_bayes import
MultinomialNB
from sklearn.ensemble import
RandomForestClassifier
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
import os
print(os.listdir())
import seaborn as sns
import re
import matplotlib.pyplot as plt
import missingno as ms
import seaborn as sns
from plotly.offline import download_plotlyjs,
init_notebook_mode, plot, iplot
from wordcloud import WordCloud,
STOPWORDS
import nltk
from nltk.corpus import stopwords
from sklearn.feature_extraction.text import
TfidfVectorizer
import nltk
nltk.download('stopwords')
from sklearn import metrics
from sklearn.metrics import accuracy_score,
classification_report
from sklearn.tree import DecisionTreeClassifier
from sklearn.naive_bayes import
MultinomialNB
from sklearn.ensemble import
RandomForestClassifier
```

```
from sklearn.neighbors import
KNeighborsClassifier
from sklearn.linear_model import
LogisticRegression
import warnings
warnings.filterwarnings("ignore")


with open('model.pickle', 'rb') as handle:
    model = pickle.load(handle)

with open('vectorizer.pickle', 'rb') as handle:
    vectorizer = pickle.load(handle)

model
vectorizer
testing_data = pd.read_csv('allinc.csv') #to read
and store in panda dataframe
testing_data = testing_data.drop(['abuse'],axis =
1)
def process_message(review_text):
    # remove all the special characters
    new_review_text = re.sub("[^a-zA-Z]", "
",review_text)
    # convert all letters to lower case
    words = new_review_text.lower().split()
    # remove stop words
    words = [w for w in words if not w in
eng_stops]
    # lemmatizer
    #words = [lemmatizer.lemmatize(word) for
word in words]
    # join all words back to text
    return (" ".join(words))
testing_data.isnull().sum()
nltk.download('stopwords')
eng_stops = set(stopwords.words("english"))
testing_data['clean_tweet']=testing_data['text']
.apply(lambda x: process_message(x))
test_tfidf_model =
vectorizer.transform(testing_data.clean_tweet)
test_tfidf_model.shape
y_pred = model.predict(test_tfidf_model)
y_pred
testing_data['abuse'] = y_pred
testing_data['abuse'].value_counts()
testing_data.to_csv('allin_neighbor.csv',index=F
alse)
```

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