

Are gold hoop earrings and a dab of red lipstick enough to get even Democrats on the offensive?

The case of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

Margaret Rasulo

University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli, Italy

According to news media outlets, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), the newly-elected Democratic representative from New York, has stirred up conflicting feelings among Republicans and Democrats on Capitol Hill, attracting criticism, mockery and disapproval from both parties. The overarching aim of this study is to explore the extent to which these attitudes are acts of verbal aggression often dissimulated as patronizing warnings or manifestations of an opinion (Ramirez and Andreu 2003; Wodak 2015). In particular, by analyzing a corpus of headlines regarding AOC's political persona and activism collected from six major conservative and liberal newspapers circulating in the US, the study aims to detect linguistic markers associated with aggression and verify their level of toxicity (Musolff 2012). To this purpose, both quantitative and qualitative methodological approaches are used with particular reference to Corpus Linguistics (Baker et al. 2008; Kilgariff et al. 2014) and the Discourse-Historical Approach (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 2016). Findings show that biased mediatised political discourse can influence attitudes toward aggressive speech behavior, and, therefore, intensify the devious nature of aggressive acts.

Keywords: mediatised political discourse, headline discourse, language aggression, DHA, sentiment analysis

1. Introduction

This study presents a linguistic study of headlines from six US newspapers regarding Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC), elected in June 2018 to the United States Congress representing New York's 14th congressional district. Since her arrival on

Capitol Hill, AOC, a self-identified democratic socialist, has not only challenged the status quo of establishment politics but has also emerged as a symbol of a younger and more diverse Democratic Party. More importantly, AOC has contributed to the overwhelming victory of a Democratic-controlled House (Nilsen 2018), propelled by the significant presence of Congresswomen who have made it the most diverse political assembly for gender and ethnicity ever seen (*Politico*, November 28, 2018).

Ocasio-Cortez's story begins in her native Bronx, as the daughter of working class Puerto Rican parents. It is partly owing to this personal and cultural identity that she has gained local and national approval, but has also stirred conflicting feelings among both Republican and Democratic leaders (Schwab 2019). Judging by her intensive social media presence (as of May 15, 2020: Twitter: 6.9M followers; Instagram: 4.3M followers), AOC's appeal seems to be the result of her down-to-earth and relatable style of communication which is void of high-level political jargon, but delivered with an activist's confidence. Indeed, alongside the use of strong body language that complements her speaking style, AOC uses short words and final punch lines that leave a mark. Her YouTube campaign video (Ocasio-Cortez 2018), with her now famous line "women like me aren't supposed to run for office," is an explicit example of her political rhetoric which can be confrontational as well as inspirational, especially when she attempts to introduce once-fringe ideas such as universal healthcare, one hundred percent green energy and free college tuition in the mainstream debate.

Quite predictably, challenging reform proposals from a political newcomer are often received with manifestations of fierce criticism or mockery on the part of politically affiliated media outlets (Rancer and Avtgis 2014). In particular, right-wing news media, which support the Republican Party's portrayal of the young Representative as a self-promotional insurgent, are the initiators of the persistent disapproval of AOC's reform ideas. In dozens of stories published every day, AOC has been called a Marxist running for election, a petrifying individual, and a downright scary socialist (Nichols 2018). Disfavor of AOC, according to this coverage, rests on the idea that she does not fit the standard portrayal of how a US Representative should look, act and talk, which means that AOC lacks the moderation, control and political aptitude required for service as a member of Congress (Aiello and Parry 2020; Tarlo 2018). In AOC's own words, the House was a place where "there were so few other people that I felt looked like me or had lived my path and doing what I was doing" (NowThis News 2019).

Receiving criticism from the Republican Party and its media networks is not surprising, but it is perplexing that AOC's own Democratic Party and liberal media coverage have responded with their dose of disapproval, often disguising it as helpful advice such as alerting her of steering the Party too far to the left

(Wehner 2015). It seems that the Democrats' annoyance with AOC reflects intramural divisions that see the Party going into two opposite directions. In other words, while the centrist or moderate members of the Party who hold a view of political culture that is close to corporate interests are holding on to highly competitive districts, the more progressive members campaigning in long-held Democratic areas are adopting a more socialist approach to political activism (Brenan 2018).

Against this background, the study aims to focus on the bipartisan response to AOC's election to the 116th US Congress with the specific purpose of identifying manifestations of aggressive speech in the headlines of mainstream newspapers. In particular, the study intends to unveil not only the more overt and hostile instantiations that appear in right-leaning newspapers, but also the well-concealed and not readily classifiable manifestations of aggression embedded in the headlines of left-leaning newspapers that are equally corrosive and likewise supportive of a long-standing narrative of delegitimation of female politicians. To this purpose, the study is guided by two research questions formulated as follows:

1. With reference to AOC and other female office-holders, to what extent does language aggression in news media coverage vary in the intensity of emotional tone, character, direction and force?
2. How are these different levels of language aggression used in mediatised political discourse to belittle and vilify party opponents or even undermine members of the same party?

2. Context of study

In 2017, endorsed by the political group known as Justice Democrats (Cochrane 2019), AOC accepted to run for the US House of Representatives and became the youngest woman ever elected to Congress. By beating Joe Crowley, a popular and powerful 20-year incumbent of her own party in the New York primary (Goldmacher and Martin 2018), AOC disrupted the bipartisan political scene with her far-left political reform issues (Stickles and Duarte 2019), some of which are still facing strong resistance such as the Green New Deal or the abolishment of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (Cillizza 2019).

AOC is not only a political newcomer, but she is also a woman. According to the National Democratic Institute (2018), hostility against female politicians encompasses all forms of aggression, coercion and intimidation simply because they are women. These vilification practices, even in a representative democracy (Saville Roberts 2018), are usually generated by feelings of resentment and retal-

iation that are particularly menacing when a woman attempts to reach certain levels of the political ranks, thus challenging male traditional roles by demonstrating leadership skills that make them equally good law-makers and administrators (Tremblay 2007). Indeed, as more women enter politics, their increased presence and engagement in spaces traditionally held by men apparently trigger the fear of losing the status quo of the male-dominated power dynamic (American Association of University Women 2017, see also Kuperberg, this issue 2021). According to Jamieson (1995), women are faced with a double hurdle when entering the political arena. On one hand, they must be assertive enough to be taken seriously; while, on the other, they need to keep their femininity so as not to violate expected stereotypical norms of conduct (Carli 2004).

Across party lines, AOC is considered to be ‘out of place’ in the world of high politics (Blommaert 2018) with her former bartender job and Latino background. Even her red lipstick and gold earrings (Chávez and Grim 2018) seem to have prompted aggressive speech behavior from those who are not willing to tolerate lessons coming from a young upstart (Re 2018). Yet, AOC has attempted to turn this outsider image around by using it to her advantage especially on social media. By posting pictures of herself on Twitter and Instagram with members of different ethnic minority groups and Native American communities, AOC is apparently seeking legitimation from those who have often been identified as ‘out-group’ members (Gibson 2006). These images, however, have also attracted intense criticism not only from opponents on both sides of the political spectrum, but also from the community leaders themselves. Clearly, claiming membership in minority communities is not to be taken lightly as this perspective usually carries a long history of persecution, displacement and massacre (Minority Rights Group International 2017), and it is therefore inappropriate to use it for political pandering. AOC has spoken out against her critics in a series of messages denouncing the public insults, humiliating images, and even the daily death threats that she constantly receives. In one of her Tweets, she blamed this mediatized hate on Fox News Channel, a conservative media network: “[i]t happens whenever Fox gets particularly aggressive + hateful, too. Young interns have to constantly hear hateful messages (far beyond disagreement) from ppl we don’t even rep” (Ocasio Cortez 2019).

2.1 Aggressive speech behavior

Defining the meaning of aggression entails recognizing the multifaceted nature of this term that carries a variety of implications depending on contextual associations. For example, AOC calls it some people’s favorite pastime or passive aggression (Wu 2019). A broader meaning of aggressive communication is adopted in

this study which includes the terms language aggression, verbal aggression, linguistic aggression, speech aggression and aggressive speech behavior, and they are used alternatively as their common intended meaning denotes “any kind of verbal communication referring to a personality trait that predisposes persons to attack the self-concepts of other people instead of, or in addition to, their positions on topics of communication” (Infante and Wigley 1986, 21). In fact, as argued in this context, from a discursive point of view, aggressive communication is to be considered a goal-oriented and direct verbal confrontation (Progovac and Benitez-Burraco 2019) whose parameters are determined by conventions that lead to the adoption of a negative attitude towards the interlocutor (Bandura 1983). These conventions comprise destructive speech tactics (Anat and Matamoros-Fernández 2016; Brown 2016; Goffman 1971; Jane 2014; Rego 2018; Wolfson 1986) through which the speaker attempts to transform the communicative space by bringing in personal beliefs, values and judgments (Beck 2009, see also Kopytowska, this issue 2021).

As mentioned, aggressive speech directed at political figures mainly regards their position on certain issues, and employs different types of discursive strategies in the form of disregard, derision, threats, obscenity and falsehoods (Bou-Franch and Garcés-Conejos Blitvich 2016; Coyne and Archer 2004; Infante 1987; Jane 2014; KhosraviNik and Esposito 2018, Esposito, this issue 2021). When the politician is a female, the target of aggression becomes her physical appearance, automatically used to delegitimize the person even through flattering content which is often a show of benevolent sexism (Strachan et al. 2020). Indeed, AOC has been called a “socialist sweetheart” (Taylor 2018), a “liberal darling” (Singman 2018), and “kinda cute” (Kelly 2019), with her “unserious face of an unserious movement” (Cooke 2018).

Yet, it is not only AOC in her capacity as a political representative that worries many Americans, but also her affiliation to democratic socialism, as clearly stated and illustrated by Ben Garrison Cartoons on their Facebook page: “She’s young and perky. She calls herself a ‘democratic socialist.’ She represents the current direction of the Democrat Party. It’s the wrong direction. No matter what modifier is added, socialism is always a disaster” (Ben Garrison Cartoons 2018). The cartoon that accompanies this post is a caricature of her loud looks, voice, and body language which do not inspire thoughts of moderation, agency, intentionality or depth in relation to the policies she is proposing. True enough, she was given the looks of a donkey which is the symbol of the Democratic party, but it is also an animal often stereotyped as being stubborn, stupid, lazy or slow (Bough 2010), evidently in need of a motivational push. Particularly revealing in this caricature are the undercurrents of an off-putting behavior that cannot be reconciled with the “think manager – think male” paradigm (Schein 2001, 683) whose ingrained

bias is not only difficult to dismantle, but also contributes to the failure of attributing leadership qualities to women aspiring to become good leaders.



Figure 1. Ben Garrison Cartoons: The representation of Ocasio-Cortez

3. Data and Methodology

3.1 Corpus

The corpus of the study comprises 6,571 headlines from the online editions of three US left-leaning newspapers and three US right-leaning newspapers selected between June 1, 2018, nearly one month ahead of AOC's primary election on June 26, 2018, to December 31, 2019, one year after she assumed office on January 3, 2019. This larger corpus was then broken down into two subcorpora labelled the *AOC_leftleaning* subcorpus and the *AOC_rightleaning* subcorpus. The newspapers were selected according to their political affiliation and rating level of factual reporting based on the information on the Media Fact Check website (2018). It is important to note that for the purpose of obtaining a more measured perspective on AOC's media coverage, the selected newspapers were positioned left-of-center or right-of-center on the political bias spectrum which implied excluding newspapers positioned too far to the left or too far to the right. The circulation factor is also reported in the table to account for the number of subscribers that each paper has nationwide in relation to the print edition. However, this is a less significant variable as the results are exclusively obtained from the online edition.

The newspapers are listed in Table 1 with their full titles followed by the acronym in parentheses (column 1). The Table also lists the circulation factor (column 2), political affiliation (column 3), number of selected headlines (columns 4), and total word count of the headlines (column 5) obtained from the Corpus Linguistics (CL) software.

Table 1. Newspaper groups and corpus description

| | Circulation (as of 2018) | Political affiliation | Number of headlines | Word count |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| <i>AOC_leftleaning subcorpus</i> | | | | |
| Politico (P) | 32,000 | Left-leaning | 1,715 | 8,085 |
| The New York Times (NYT) | 2,101,611 | Left-leaning | 1,250 | |
| The Washington Post (WP) | 356,768 | Left-leaning | 1,120 | |
| <i>AOC_rightleaning subcorpus</i> | | | | |
| The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (PG) | 188,545 | Right-leaning | 1,203 | 7,659 |
| The New York Post (NYP) | 424,721 | Right-leaning | 1,300 | |
| The Washington Times (WT) | 59,185 | Right-leaning | 1,156 | |

3.2 Methodological framework

The study relies on a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. For the quantitative analysis, a CL approach (Baker et al. 2008) is applied by using two software tools: the Linguistic Inquiry Word Count2015 (LIWC) (Pennebaker et al. 2015) for sentiment analysis, and Sketch Engine (Kilgarrieff et al. 2014) for the extraction of concordance lines. Regarding the qualitative approach, this encompassed not only the analysis of the full set of headline titles (Tables 7–8), but also of the set of concordance lines (Tables 3–6) which were explored by using the functions of the five discursive strategies in the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 2016). These approaches are briefly discussed below.

There are many ways to define sentiment, particularly when it is applied to the task of sentiment analysis (Pennebaker et al. 2005; Reich et al. 2003). On a basic level, this concept has two components: an opinion and a target at which it is directed, suggesting that sentiment is an underlying feeling, attitude, evalua-

tion, or emotion associated with that opinion (Liu 2015; Pang and Lee 2008). In the literature, sentiment analysis is considered “a special type of text mining with the focus on identification of subjective statements and contained opinions and sentiments, particularly in consumer-generated content on the Internet” (Xiang et al. 2015, 121). The focus is, therefore, not on topics, but on positive and negative evaluations conceived as a range of percentages (Pennebaker et al. 2015) and expressed in terms of strength of emotion or sentiment intensity (Liu 2015).

With specific reference to LIWC (Pennebaker et al. 2015), the software adopts the ‘bag-of-words’ approach which consists in the analysis and classification of different ‘bags of words’ (corpus) by matching each word with the different categories, and subsequently identifying the ‘bag’ (psychological dimension) that best reflects the analyzed text (Chung et al. 2008). LIWC’s word classification draws on a default dictionary made up of 6,400 words and word stems organized under 90-word linguistic or psychological categories, and four summary psychological dimensions of language variables which provide a comprehensive description of the text. These dimensions are *Clout*, *Authenticity*, *Analytic* and *Emotional Tone*. The only dimension considered in this study’s analysis is Emotional Tone, as it provides a specific view of polarized sentiment orientation embedded in headline discourse which is directed towards the target entity (Thelwall et al. 2012). The Emotional Tone resources and percentages are integrated with those obtained from five psychological word categories that represent basic emotions (Ekman 1992; Shuman et al. 2015). These are: affect, positive emotions, negative emotions, anxiety and anger (Pennebaker et al. 2015).

Sentiment Analysis, however, also presents some caveats that question its effectiveness (Fersini et al. 2017; Liu 2015; McGarrity 2016), and one of them is an alleged unreliability (Feldman 2013). The argument is that texts in general, and headlines in particular, notoriously contain various authorship cues such as quotations and opinion citations whose sentiment is difficult to discern and attribute. Nevertheless, results obtained from sentiment analysis can be corroborated when triangulated with other approaches (Baker et al. 2008) such as the application of concordance analysis and the DHA strategies in this study.

The concordance application of Sketch Engine, now a leading and mature corpus tool widely explored in lexicography (Kilgarriff et al. 2014), was used to provide a more in-depth view (Baker et al. 2008) of the processes and qualities that potentially indicate aggressive behavior located in the immediacy of AOC’s name and nickname which were used as search words. The analysis of the extracted concordance lines and of the full headline titles was conducted by applying the DHA in critical discourse studies (CDS) or also critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; van Leeuwen 2008), as developed by Ruth Wodak and her colleagues (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 2016; Wodak 2011,

2013). The general aim of all CDS strands is to “develop a critically contextualized approach to linguistics which identifies issues dealing with ideology, power and social inequality” (Flowerdew and Richardson 2017, 1). Context is, therefore, particularly crucial when implementing the DHA, as it focuses on the holistic analysis of the synchronic and diachronic dimensions of discourse, and takes into consideration macro- as well as micro-phenomena, intertextual and interdiscursive relationships, as well as social, historical, political, economic, psychological and other factors relating to the verbal and non-verbal communicative events (Reisigl and Wodak 2016).

With specific reference to the discursive strategies, also described as “systematic ways of using language” (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 44), the DHA identifies five types: nomination (the linguistic identity of the social actors involved as well as the processes and actions), predication (the qualities and characteristics attributed to social actors, processes and actions), argumentation (the arguments employed to question, persuade and justify discursive claims), perspectivization (the viewpoint from which framing and positioning devices emerge), mitigation and intensification (the illocutionary force of the linguistic instantiations).

In this study, nomination and predication strategies are the focus of the analysis as they best capture the referential devices and evaluative attributes used to characterize AOC’s public and private persona as well as her political activism. The full headline analysis especially benefited from the application of argumentation and perspectivization strategies owing to their expanded contextualization that afforded a wider view of allegations and stance taking devices. In particular, the core construct of the argumentation strategy (Reisigl and Wodak 2001, 114), or *topos*, is instrumental in the exploration of the content-related argumentation schemes, or reasonings, underlying instantiations of verbal aggression embedded in the representation of AOC from each newspaper group. Perspectivization resources also expose the formulation of specific framing devices, thus integrating not only the results obtained from the sentiment analysis regarding the degree of involvement in the discursive representation of AOC, but also those obtained from the concordance analysis. Interspersed throughout the analysis are intensification and mitigation resources, detected to gauge the level of severity of the overt or covert toxic expressions deployed in the headlines.

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Sentiment analysis

Table 2. LIWC output – polarized sentiment analysis

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|-----------------------|------------|----------------|--------|---------------|---------------|---------|-------|-----------|---------|
| Filename | Word count | Emotional tone | Affect | Pos_ emotions | Neg_ emotions | Anxiety | Anger | Partial % | Total % |
| AOC_LEFT leaning.txt | 8,085 | 19.47 | 4.94 | 2.26 | 2.68 | 0.46 | 0.76 | 11.10 | 30.57 |
| AOC_RIGHT leaning.txt | 7,659 | 8.31 | 4.71 | 1.62 | 3.09 | 0.29 | 1.76 | 11.47 | 19.78 |

The results of the sentiment analysis are reported in Table 2 as follows: the filename of the newspaper group (column 1), the total word count of the submitted text (column 2), the Emotional Tone percentages (column 3), the percentages of words under the selected psychometric categories of emotion (columns 4–8), and the partial and total sentiment percentages (columns 9–10).

As explained by LIWC's developers (Pennebaker et al. 2015), the percentages obtained under the psychological dimension of Emotional Tone report the overall evaluation of the text in terms of positive/negative polarization; the higher the percentage, the closer it is to a positive rating. Regarding the headline texts of this study, the left-leaning group's Emotional Tone percentage is higher (19.47) than those of the right-leaning group (8.31). In this regard, the polarized parameters of positive/negative sentiment also indicate the degree of emotional involvement and immersion in the coverage of certain issues. It is interesting to note that the overall higher involvement of the left in dealing with AOC, the percentages reported under the single psychological categories of basic emotions (Ekman 1992; Shuman et al. 2015), show a balanced output between positive emotions (2.26), and negative emotions (2.68). This is most likely due to the group's still hesitant opinion of AOC, as confirmed by the higher percentages of words, compared to those of the right-leaning press, related to affect (4.94) and anxiety (0.46) that reveal distress and doubt (Pennebaker et al. 2015).

Regarding the output of the right-leaning press, the Emotional Tone output is noticeably lower (8.31%), which suggests that their coverage is polarized towards the negative. In addition, by comparing the two newspaper groups, this lower percentage does not necessarily mean that this group is less interested in AOC's coverage, as evidenced by a higher level of anger words (1.76), but indicates that

involvement levels remain fixed on a negative sentiment (3.09) rather than on a fluctuating positive/negative polarization which tends to raise levels of involvement, as in the case of the left-leaning newspapers.

It is also interesting to note that while there are similar partial sentiment percentages (column 9) comprising the word categories of affect, positive and negative emotions, anxiety and anger (11.10 left vs. 11.47 right), the total sentiment percentage (column 10) obtained by adding these to the Emotional Tone dimension is definitely higher for the left-leaning group (30.57% left vs. 19.78% right). The analysis suggests that while the conservative media exhibit a more overt manifestation of a negative attitude towards AOC in terms of anger, the liberal media prefer to exhibit an overt cautiously positive attitude towards AOC, while revealing a more covert negativity expressed in terms of anxiety and concern.

4.2 Concordance analysis

The concordance lines listed in Tables 3–6 represent a random selection of the first 20 lines and first 10 lines, corresponding respectively to the criteria ‘search-by-full-name’, *Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez* and/or *Ocasio-Cortez*, and ‘search-by-initials’, AOC. The smaller sample of AOC hits is due to the overall lower number originally retrieved from both subcorpora. Although this sampling affords a more representative view of the corpus rather than a comprehensive one, the combination of methodological approaches, as previously argued, contributes to the reliability of the findings (Baker et al. 2008; Wodak 2009). For ease of reference, the nomination devices are indicated in boldface, while the predication devices are in italics.

Table 3. Concordance lines from left-leaning media group: *Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez* search word

| Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez 201 hits (25,530.29 million) | | | |
|---|---|--|---|
| 1. | 28-year old took out Joe Crowley. How | Alexandria Ocasio- Cortez | <i>broke all the rules</i> of NY politics The impossible |
| 2. | Documentary to her list of accomplishments | Alexandria Ocasio- Cortez | <i>is appealing</i> because she is real. |
| 3. | Game of Thrones finale in new video Rep. | Alexandria Ocasio- Cortez | <i>slams centrist Democrats</i> on the middle of the road approach |

Table 3. (continued)

| Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez 201 hits (25,530.29 million) | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------|---|
| 4. | No, the fact is <i>It's not because you're a woman</i> | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>is sidelining women like me</i> AOC effect |
| 5. | Council's progressive groups align with | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>is no oracle</i> Ocasio-Cortez's chief of staff accusing GOP |
| 6. | Ocasio-Cortez's world – before she became | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>planted a community garden</i> plot. </s><s> |
| 7. | sessions still a factor The Energy 202: | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>is doubling down on Green New Deal...</i> |
| 8. | wins spot on powerful House committee | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's | dance moves nearly triple online streams |
| 9. | A radical, a loaded word in history | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>shouldn't approach her facts</i> the way Trump does |
| 10. | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez? | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>reveals Jewish ancestry</i> at Hanukkah celebrations |
| 11. | Anger about poverty and the environment | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's | \$21 trillion mistake Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez |
| 12. | Idea- and it's not Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's | very bad defense of her falsehoods Ocasio-Cortez |
| 13. | even though she's too young to serve | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>has become a progressive darling,</i> ever since she swept into |
| 14. | and Pelosi clash drags on, <i>threatening Democratic unity (participle clause)</i> | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>accidentally exposes</i> the left's big lie Rep. |
| 15. | Democrats need to have Is it bad that | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>cares more about</i> being 'morally right' than facts? |

Table 3. (continued)

| Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez 201 hits (25,530.29 million) | | | |
|---|--|----------------------------|---|
| 16. | Alexandria Ocasio Cortez <i>dances on rooftop</i> | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | , <i>youngest woman</i> elected to House (opposition) |
| 17. | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez than Steve King | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | is freaking out the news media |
| 18. | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez <i>calling him a racist</i> | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>is a problem</i> the Democrats need to have Is it bad that |
| 19. | Care is among the working class and people | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's | new favorite pastime <i>appears to be trolling</i> |
| 20. | Dino Grandoni power post Jun 7, 2019 | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>is an economic illiterate</i> – and that's a danger to America |

Table 4. The first 10 hits from left-leaning media group: AOC search word

| AOC 23 hits (2,921.38 million) | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|------|--|
| 1. | approach on impeachment <i>It's expensive to be poor</i> ; | AOC | And Sanders <i>unveil consumer protection</i> legislation |
| 2. | Should contraception be sold over counter? | AOC | And Ted Cruz aren't actually allies on this. |
| 3. | A moderate Democrat working to survive in the | AOC | era Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez a popular choice for president |
| 4. | 'If Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez were a conservative' | AOC | <i>sucks!</i> : Crowd attacks Ocasio-Cortez at Trump rally |
| 5. | Ocasio-Cortez <i>shouldn't approach her facts the way Trump</i> does | AOC | <i>wants to fund</i> federal literacy programs. |
| 6. | using the boarder crisis to call President Trump | AOCs | <i>plans to eliminating the entire department of</i> homeland security |
| 7. | Fights against solitary confinement for Manafort | AOC | ,other democrats <i>squeeze big banks</i> on guns |
| 8. | Out of Amazon's plan to locate HQ2 in Queens | AOC | <i>balks at democrat leadership's</i> rebuke of Omar |

Table 4. (continued)

| AOC 23 hits (2,921,38 million) | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|-----|---|
| 9. | <i>she gives 'zero' f--s about pushback from Democrats</i> | AOC | <i>lashes out at Amazon's plan to locate HQ2 in Queens</i> |
| 10. | <i>Green New Deal backlash Why Trump's superfans dig</i> | AOC | <i>Pelosi 2, Ocasio-Cortez o Sanders, Ocasio-Cortez team up in bid to cap credit card rates</i> |

The results in Tables 3 and 4 were retrieved from the *AOC_leftleaning* subcorpus: Table 3 presents the first 20 Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez hits out of 201; Table 4 presents the first 10 AOC hits out of 23.

Beginning with social actor representation (nomination), AOC is referred to as a *28-year old*, *a radical*, and even a possible configuration of an *idea* (Table 3, lines 1, 4, 12). AOC's political ties are also mentioned after her name: *Sanders*, a fellow Socialist Democrat (Table 4, line 1); *Ted Cruz*, a Republican and clearly not her ally (Table 4, line 2); *Pelosi*, an establishment Democrat with whom she seems to be competing: *Pelosi 2, Ocasio-Cortez o* (Table 4, line 10). Appositions (predication) also follow her name which suggest a positive view of AOC such as the *youngest woman elected in the House* (Table 3, line 16), and *a popular choice for president* (Table 4 line 3). In Table 3, line 10, the rhetorical question *Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez?* rather than functioning as a mere repetition of her name, it seems to raise the question about her presence in the political arena. Some adjectival possessive forms of her name also refer to objects and actions such as *Alexandria Ocasio Cortez's world*, *dance moves*, *\$ 21 trillion mistake*, *very bad defense of her falsehoods*, *new favorite pastime* (Table 3, lines 6, 8, 11, 12, 19), and *the AOC era*, *AOC's plans to eliminating the entire department of homeland security* (Table 4, lines 3, 6). Although these references are not exactly derogatory, they tend to focus on what the liberal press considers unusual behavior: she is a young inexperienced woman who is probably too naïve and ill-equipped to serve as a US Representative.

References to AOC are also realized by explicit predicates that convey a more determined AOC such as *broke all the rules of NY politics*, *slams centrist Democrats*, *planted a community garden*, *is doubling down on the Green New Deal*, *accidentally exposes the left's big lie*, *is freaking out the news media* (Table 3, lines 1, 3, 6, 7, 14, 17), *wants to fund, squeeze [s] big banks*, *balks at democrat leadership*, and *lashes out at Amazon's plan* (Table 4, lines 5, 7, 8, 9). Yet, with the exception of the predicate adjective phrase *is appealing because she is real* (Table 3, line 2), negative representation is realized by predicate nouns stating that she *is no oracle*, *has become a progressive darling*, *is a problem*, *appears to be trolling*, *is an economic illiterate* (Table 3, lines 5, 13, 18, 20). Other predication devices such as *shouldn't*

approach her facts the way Trump does, and cares more about being morally right (Table 3, lines 9, 15), *AOC sucks* (Table 4, line 4) and the participle clause claiming that AOC is *threatening Democratic unity* (Table 3, line 14) seem to confirm this negative view. There is also a disclaimer, in line 4, where the phrase *it's not because you're a woman* attributes the negative comments that AOC is receiving to factors other than her gender. Of particular interest is also the verbal process *reveals Jewish ancestry* (Table 3, line 10) which is most likely used as a legitimation strategy on the part of AOC, but has been received as an awkward attempt to solicit approval from the Jewish community.

The above results suggest that, in echoing the Democratic Party's wariness of AOC, the left-leaning newspapers are quite suspicious of the Congresswoman which evidently precludes them from producing a more favorable coverage. Indeed, it seems that this group's portrayal of AOC as an imprudent individual is probably due to the difficulty in predicting the direction that her political influence is aiming to take, particularly in terms of her own party.

Tables 5 and 6 report results from the *AOC_rightleaning* subcorpus. The first 20 hits out of 71 were selected from the results of full name search, and 10 out of 19 hits from the AOC search.

Table 5. Concordance lines from right-leaning media group: *Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez* search word

| Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez 71 hits (7,333.29 million) | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------|---|
| 1. | Gingrich blasts her as a 'cruel' liar in op-ed Behind | Ocasio-Cortez | border-camp theater Ocasio-Cortez's Ignorance Proves |
| 2. | expose AOC's hypocrisy amid Green New Deal pledge | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | again <i>Proves She's Clueless on Economics</i> |
| 3. | AOC, argues most Democrats are not 'way left' Behind | Ocasio-Cortez | <i>pushes Tax Myths That Will Bring Economic Disaster</i> |
| 4. | AOC to task about climate change message | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>likens growing cauliflower to colonialism</i> |
| 5. | freshman lawmaker's was by far the most compelling | Ocasio-Cortez | <i>threatens both Democrats and Republicans</i> |
| 6. | minor league baseball team apologizes for airing a vid calling | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>is an 'enemy of freedom'</i> The Democrats' digital disconnect |

Table 5. (continued)

| Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez 71 hits (7,333.29 million) | | | |
|---|---|----------------------------|--|
| 7. | Progressive cred Meteorologists takes | Ocasio-Cortez | to task about climate change message |
| 8. | left-wing radicals could help re-elect President Trump | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | Rep tweets, then deletes, F-bomb rant about possible challenger |
| 9. | n op-ed Behind Ocasio-Cortez's border-camp theater | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's | ignorance Proves Admissions Fraud Is the Symptom, |
| 10. | She's Clueless on Economics Stuart Varney: | Ocasio-Cortez | <i>is So Far Out of Line</i> That She Must Surely Be a 'Bubble' |
| 11. | benefit from fundraising boom for | Ocasio-Cortez | <i>unknown or unliked</i> by most voters, poll shows: 'Not A-OK for AOC' |
| 12. | Conservatives can't stop obsessing over | Ocasio-Cortez | <i>is Not A-OK With Veterans</i> Ocasio Cortez walked out of a |
| 13. | 'enemy of freedom' of the Democrats' | Ocasio-Cortez | takes heavy fire <i>New blood or old mistake?</i> |
| 14. | AOC repeats 'concentration camp' claim after border visit | Ocasio-Cortez | says she confronted Border Patrol agent over 'stealth selfie' Kellyanne Conway blasts AOC's 'outrageous claim' |
| 15. | Nobel Prize in stupidity': Holocaust survivor wants | Ocasio-Cortez | out of Congress Cuomo rips AOC for 'concentration camp |
| 16. | AOC-backed opponent's lack of experience | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>attacks Amazon with absurd allegations</i> Border chief |
| 17. | Blasio blasts AOC over comments | Ocasio-Cortez | says Dems probably 'gave Bill Clinton a pass on harassment |
| 18. | Liberals are eating their friends as well as their enemies | Ocasio-Cortez | responds after Gingrich blasts her as a 'cruel' liar |
| 19. | critics Is there a double standard for Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | Ocasio-Cortez | <i>gets caught ducking opponent</i> at Puerto Rican Day |
| 20. | grandstanding ignores real cause of the border crisis | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez | <i>continues to slam Border Patrol</i> Ocasio-Cortez presses |

Table 6. Concordance lines from right-leaning media group: AOC search word

| AOC 19 (921.38 million) | | | |
|-------------------------|---|-----|--|
| 1. | Twitter Hashtag Calls For | AOC | <i>to Resign Over Border Misinformation</i> |
| 2. | No, Ilhan Omar And | AOC | Are Not the Real Victims Of 9/11 |
| 3. | Is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Okay? | AOC | <i>Is the Unicorn In A Field Of Fantasy Candidates</i> |
| 4. | <i>Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Is Promising Americans The Same</i> | AOC | <i>Setting Women Back Light Years In Politics</i> |
| 5. | Hugo Chavez Promised Now-Starving Venezuelans Why | AOC | <i>Ocasio-Cortez Could Be the Left's Donald Trump</i> |
| 6. | <i>Ocasio-Cortez's 'Green New Deal' Is Powered By Unicorns</i> | AOC | shameful Ignorance of History |
| 7. | Holocaust survivor wants <i>AOC out of Congress</i> Cuomo rips | AOC | for concentration camps remark US Holocaust museum |
| 8. | ducking opponent at Puerto Rican parade | AOC | Touts 'super bizarre' Ted Cruz alliance |
| 9. | left wing radicals could help re-elect Trump | AOC | Rep tweets then deletes, and takes fire |
| 10. | ratings are highest among the groups she, herself, is part of | AOC | negative ratings generally outweigh positive ones |

The first element of interest in this subcorpus is the frequent reference to the Representative as *Ocasio-Cortez* rather than to her full name. The perception that one gets from this nomination device is that the right-leaning press deliberately aims to establish a certain kind of hierarchical distance by staying on a last-name-only basis. In Table 5 AOC is *a cruel liar*, *a freshman lawmaker*, part of the *left-wing radicals*, *enemy of freedom*, *new blood or old mistake?* and *Nobel prize in stupidity* (lines 1, 5, 8, 13 left/right, 15). Moreover, the adjectival possessive forms of her name are followed by negative nouns such as AOC's *hypocrisy*, *Alexandria Ocasio Cortez's ignorance*, and *AOC-backed opponent's lack of experience* (lines 2, 9, 16). Negative evaluation is also present in Table 6 such as AOC's *shameful ignorance*, and AOC's *negative ratings* (lines 6, 10). Likewise connected to the use of her full name are the predicate adjectives that carry negative references. For example, *AOC is So Far Out of Line*, and is *Not A-OK* (Table 5, lines 10, 11). She is also portrayed as a fantasy character with special powers as she *is the Unicorn in a field of Fantasy Candidates* (Table 6, line 3), her *Green New Deal is powered by Unicorns* (Table 6, line 6) and she *could be the Left's Donald Trump* (Table 6, line 5).

The analysis of the predication devices also identified material processes that are skewed towards the negative. As can be seen on Table 5, it is claimed that AOC

pushes Tax Myths, threatens both Democrats and Republicans, attacks Amazon, gets caught ducking opponent, continues to slam Border Patrol (lines 3, 5, 16, 19, 20). The conservative press also highlights AOC's purported ignorance and ineffectiveness, which are expressed as behavioral processes. For example, *AOC likens growing cauliflower to colonialism* (Table 5, line 4), and *AOC [is] to resign over border misinformation, and is setting women back light years* (Table 6, lines 1, 4).

As argued, AOC's image is vilified especially through her political activity, and not only by Republicans, but also by conservative Democrats (Fredrickson 2020) who believe that she is advocating a sharp change in the policy trajectory of the country which is too close to socialist ideology (Gambino 2019). Beginning with her signature proposals, such as the Green New Deal (United States House of Representatives Proposal 109, 2019) and Medicare for All (United States Senate Proposal 1129, 2019), the general response is that they are exceedingly expensive to sustain or quite likely to fail.

Far more importantly, AOC's cultural identity is also under attack by both parties and their affiliated media outlets. As a young Latina woman, who has made it clear that her loyalty stands with the working people of America, AOC and the other 42 women elected to the 116th US Congress, as previously mentioned, represent a new vision of America whose representatives are from diverse backgrounds. Yet, notwithstanding this record number of women officeholders, the present analysis of AOC's representation shows that the image of a female politician as an incompetent individual still prevails. Indeed, AOC's behavior is not considered suitable to that of US Representative as she is an inexperienced young radical (Table 3, line 9; Table 5, line 8) who often fails to calculate economic consequences (Table 3, lines 11, 20), and who believes that her fellow Democrats are insufficiently progressive, thus showing a lack of deference to democratic seniority and party unity (Table 3, line 14; Table 4, line 8).

4.3 Analysis of full headline titles

In order to corroborate the results obtained from both the sentiment and concordance analyses and exploit the additional insight afforded by perspectivization and argumentation strategies, an exploration of a random selection of a second set of full headlines was carried out. The results shown in Tables 7 and 8 (in bold for a more immediate identification of the data) contain 10 headlines from the left-leaning and right-leaning newspaper groups, respectively. As illustrated in Table 1, the acronym of the newspaper source and the date of the article are in parentheses.

AOC's last name and nickname (nomination) are often accompanied by direct criticism of her behavior such as her attempt to *ban the press*, and *excluding*

Table 7. Analysis of full headlines: *AOC_leftleaning* subcorpus

| <i>AOC_leftleaning</i> subcorpus | |
|----------------------------------|---|
| 1. | <i>Go Ahead Ocasio-Cortez, Ban the Press: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Criticized for Excluding Press From 2 Town Hall Meetings</i> (P Aug 21 2018) |
| 2. | <i>Pelosi: There was never 'any hatchet' to bury with Ocasio-Cortez</i> (P Jul 26 2019) |
| 3. | Ocasio-Cortez's misleading complaint: Trump did not transfer funds for the opioid emergency (WP May 20 2019) |
| 4. | <i>Ocasio-Cortez Went Back to Bartending. Slogans Were Served</i> (NYT June 1 2019) |
| 5. | <i>Yes, We Need a Green New Deal. Just Not the One Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez Is Offering.</i> (NYT March 20 2019) |
| 6. | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez: Jewish, Too? (NYT Dec 10 2018) |
| 7. | Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and the Politics of a \$3,000 Suit (NYT Sept 17 2018) |
| 8. | There are no concentration camps on the border. <i>Months in Congress has not dimmed Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's talent for flippant demagoguery</i> (WP Jun 25, 2019). |
| 9. | <i>I am sick of hearing about Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez from myself, talking about her</i> (WP Mar 6, 2019) |
| 10. | Rep. Abigail Spanberger: A moderate Democrat working to survive in the AOC era (WP May 28 2019) |

the press (predication) from important meetings (headline 1), probably drawing attention to a cowardly attitude. When she *went back to bartending* (headline 4) in a one-hour visit to the Bronx, her activity was seen as *selling slogans*, which is probably an allusion to her lack of political experience. She is hardly ever referred to by her honorific title, and only in headline 8 she is known as *Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez*, but only to portray her political activity as a *talent* consisting in a *flippant demagoguery*, which *has not [been] dimmed* (headline 8) or, in other words, stopped.

Of particular interest is the reference to her *Jewish* ancestry (headline 6), which was previously mentioned in the concordance analysis. Here, however, it is directly questioned by using the intensification device *Too?* which evidently raises doubts regarding AOC's Jewish heritage (Kogan 2019), but also makes the claim sound exceedingly unacceptable. In truth, underlying this claim is a complex and long history of Sephardic heritage in Latin America, but there is also a fundamental misunderstanding of the place of Jewishness among Latinx people. The headline's implied demand of proof imposed on AOC is indicative of gatekeeping rules set by those who are unaware of the unseen expressions of identity among the Jewish diaspora in the Americas. This not only exposes a cultural unfamiliarity of the full complexities of Latin American and Sephardic histories, but also trig-

gers apprehensions and concerns regarding American Jewish ancestry and legacy (Greenberg and Daniel 2019).

An intensification strategy is also used in headline 7 to criticize AOC's political conduct: spending \$3,000 for a suit is out-of-character for someone who professes to be a representative of the working-class.

In lines 2, 5 and 9, AOC is not part of the political in-group. Member of the Democratic Party and Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, mentions that there *never was any hatchet to bury* (headline 2) between them. Yet, the very fact of denying its existence instills a certain level of doubt, particularly considering that Pelosi has also attacked the so-called *Squad*, or group of four newly-elected Congresswomen, consisting of AOC, Ilhan Omar, Rashida Tlaib and Ayanna Pressley. Pelosi has often insinuated that these women are upstarts who "have their public whatever and their Twitter world, but they didn't have any following" (Dowd 2019). The role of the political outsider is also implied in headline 5, where the use of the exclusive *we* refers to the refusal, perhaps on the part of the electorate or the moderate Democrats, to endorse AOC's proposal of the Green New Deal. In headline 9, AOC is likewise snubbed by a very harsh and personal comment in the first person singular: *I am sick of hearing about Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez from myself*.

Table 8. Analysis of full headlines: *AOC_rightleaning* subcorpus

| <i>AOC_rightleaning</i> subcorpus | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1. | <i>Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, queen of annoying</i> (WT March 28 2019) |
| 2. | <i>How do the Democrats solve a problem like Alexandria Ocasio ?</i> (WT Jan 16 2019) |
| 3. | <i>Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is crashing and burning fast</i> (WT Aug 14 2019) |
| 4. | Joe Scarborough: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez shows 'basic ignorance' (WT Feb 15 2019) |
| 5. | Kellyanne Conway <i>blasts AOC's 'outrageous claim'</i> about migrants drinking toilet water (NYP July 2, 2019) |
| 6. | Meteorologist takes AOC to task about climate change message (NYP May 24 2019) |
| 7. | AOC attacks Amazon with 'absurd' allegations (NYP June 22 2019) |
| 8. | Amid tensions with Ocasio-Cortez, Pelosi warns against Twitter outbursts aimed at Dems (PG July 11 2019) |
| 9. | Michael Barone: <i>Why would Democratic hopefuls endorse the Green New Deal?</i> (PG Feb 15 2019) |
| 10. | Dems defend Pelosi after Ocasio-Cortez <i>says she targets 'newly elected women of color'</i> (PG Jul 12 2019) |

The headlines in the *AOC_rightleaning* subcorpus (Table 8) contain an expectedly aggressive representation often expressed through intensification devices. For example, after presenting AOC as the *queen of annoying* in headline 1, the rhetorical question in headline 2 seems to imply that AOC is too big of a *problem* for Democrats to *solve*. In headline 3, *Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is crashing and burning fast*, and in headline 7 *she attacks Amazon with absurd allegations*. A sharp social sanction from several conservative social actors regarding her behavior is also clearly voiced. For example, Scarborough says she *shows basic ignorance* (headline 4), while Conway *blasts AOC's outrageous claim about migrants* (headline 5), and Barone questions *why would Democratic hopefuls endorse the Green New Deal?* (headline 9). Conservatives even use scientific sources to expose her misinformation about important issues: *Meteorologist takes AOC to task about climate change* (line 6).

5. Discussion

This section focuses on the implementation of perspectivization and argumentation strategies in the DHA (Reisigl and Wodak 2016), employed to interpret the results obtained from the analysis of concordance lines and full headlines, and those obtained from sentiment analysis.

Regarding perspectivization, the degree of emotional involvement and the positive and negative positionings of the news media groups provides a better understanding of the levels of bipartisan aggression towards AOC as a political opponent (Gass and Seiter 2014), and that of an entire party system. First, by framing AOC as a difficult, often uninformed, and even *flippant* person (Table 7, headline 8), both media groups convey the main idea that the Congresswoman is a self-destructive individual who needs to cease her direct attacks against the opposition and her own party (Table 8, headline 8). Second, by calling AOC *freshman lawmaker* (Table 5, line 5), *a progressive darling who is too young to serve* (Table 3, line 13), and who *gives zero f---s about pushback from Democrats* (Table 4, line 9), both newsgroups consider AOC to be unprepared to represent the American people.

With reference to the argumentation strategy, the analysis shows that the reasoning embedded in the narratives of both newsgroups is exposed by the content-related *topos* of Threat/Danger, whereby “if there are specific dangers or threats, one should do something against them” (Wodak 2015, 53). Although the left-leaning papers have shown slightly more understanding towards AOC, often describing her as an individual who is in need of advice (Table 8, headline 8), both media groups seem to justify their aggressive remarks by arguing that she

is really more of a problem (Table 3, line 18) than an asset to American politics. Indeed, I would like to argue that the *topos* of Threat/Danger is realized not by an explicit action aimed at stopping AOC, but by a corrosive antagonism aimed at exposing her ineptitude to serve as a Representative of the American people. Thus, the Threat/Danger *topos* is realized by three main argument schemes, the first of which is connected to the threat of political inexperience:

- Argument: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has no experience as a political representative.
- Conclusion rule: if her actions are too radical, and her judgment of political situations is poor, she is a danger to this country's status quo.
- Claim: Ocasio-Cortez cannot serve as this country's political representative.

The second argument scheme is connected to her alarming ignorance of political phenomena:

- Argument: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is a clueless and awkward politician.
- Conclusion rule: if she makes absurd allegations, and cares more about being morally right than facts, she is a threat to this country's political system.
- Claim: AOC is too illiterate and incompetent to securely serve in this country's political system.

The third argument scheme is connected to AOC as a provocative political outsider.

- Argument: Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez is unknown and unliked in the House of Representatives.
- Conclusion rule: if she threatens both Democrats and Republicans, and is an enemy of freedom, she is a danger to her own party.
- Claim: AOC is a danger and a threat to the House of Representatives.

As argued, the *topos* of Threat/Danger is embedded in the criticism of AOC. In her capacity as elected official, she cannot be removed, but her persona can be questioned and delegitimized through aggressive discursive strategies employed by both political parties.

6. Conclusions

Drawing on the results obtained from the concordance, full headline and sentiment analyses, some indications regarding language aggression have emerged that shed light on the points raised by the study's research questions.

The first question introduces the notion of the different intensity levels of language aggression in terms of emotional tone, character, direction and force. These variances, according to the findings, are often indiscernible in the discursive representation of female politicians. As argued, the linguistic instantiations in the headlines of both newspaper groups are not always easily classifiable as acts of speech aggression; therefore, they can go unnoticed, overlooked and unsanctioned. The suggestion underlying this finding is twofold: firstly, mediatized political discourse can readily and effortlessly adapt and comply to language aggression according to a specific political agenda; secondly, audiences become progressively accustomed to the media's stylistically loaded assessments, facts, opinions as they intensify to higher degrees of toxicity.

The second question expands on the notion of escalating levels of mediatized language aggression in political contexts, based on the study's hypothesis that a façade of moderate and controlled critique can hide more hostile vilification practices which are more readily exposed when the investigation concerns a female politician. As argued, aggressive speech directed at women office-holders is usually considered less harmful as it is not always straightforwardly expressed in abusive and misogynistic language, although female figures receive more abuse than their male counterparts (United Nations Women 2018). In short, it is through a woman's discursive representation that the pernicious accommodation of high-intensity aggressive behavior becomes a manifestation of gender inequality which discourages the willingness to fully participate and contribute to a more gender-balanced political debate.

Aggressive communication is an issue which people in politics need to deal with as they are likely to suffer the serious impact it can have on their private and public identities. Yet, as violence against women in politics is not only gender-based, but also a violation of human rights, awareness needs to be raised especially among male politicians. In the words of the Assistant Secretary-General for Human Rights, Andrew Gilmour, "violence against women in politics is deeply damaging not only to women, but to all of us. Every vote that is not cast, every voice that is not heard, takes us farther from realizing our full potential as local and national polities and as a global community" (United Nations Women 2018, 5).

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Address for correspondence

Margaret Rasulo
Department of Humanities and Cultural Heritage
University of Campania Luigi Vanvitelli
Via Raffaele Perla, 21
81055 Santa Maria Capua Vetere CE
Italy
margherita.rasulo@unicampania.it

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