
Violence against Women in Politics: Female Politicians' Experience with Political Violence in Jamaica

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This exploratory study describes the experiences of female politicians with political violence in Jamaica and the effect these encounters have had on them. The findings indicate that female politicians in Jamaica are affected by political violence before, during, and after an election, and even when they are in political office. Most of the violence experienced is of a gendered nature and can be defined as violence against women in politics. This study contributes to the growing body of scholarship on violence against women in politics by presenting and discussing findings from the Anglo Caribbean, an understudied region.

Keywords: female politicians, Jamaica, political violence, violence against women, women, women in politics.

Violence against women is a global phenomenon. It is pervasive and widespread, and it seriously violates women's enjoyment of their human rights. Numerous scholars have documented cases of violence against women in politics (Bardall, 2011; Bjarnegård, 2021; Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg, 2020; Kellow, 2010; Krook, 2017; Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016, 2020; Piscopo, 2015, 2016; Restrepo Sanin, 2018; UN Women, 2018; Valverde, 2011). In recent years, there has been 'a troubling rise in reports of assault, intimidation, and abuse directed at female politicians' (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2020: 740). A 2016 study by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) found that, globally, nearly all female Members of Parliament (MPs) have experienced some form of violence in the course of their parliamentary work, with 81.8 percent having experienced some form of psychological violence (IPU, 2016). Approximately one-third have suffered economic violence; one-quarter have become victims of some type of physical violence; and one-fifth have faced some form of sexual violence (IPU, 2016).

Despite the growing literature on violence against women in politics, very little research has been conducted on the effects of violence on female politicians in the Anglophone Caribbean; even less has been done on Jamaica. This exploratory study addresses this gap in the literature by assessing the experiences of female politicians in Jamaica with political. The objectives of the study are twofold: to describe the experiences of female politicians with political violence in Jamaica, and to assess the effect these encounters have had on them. The study is conducted through surveys with

past and present female politicians from the two major political parties in Jamaica: the Jamaica Labour Party (JLP) and the People's National Party (PNP). Newspaper analysis was used to supplement the survey findings. This article contributes to a growing body of scholarship on violence against women in politics by providing findings from the Anglo Caribbean, an understudied region. An assessment of the forms, motives, and perpetrators of violence against female politicians in Jamaica also underscores how political violence undermines women's right to fully participate in politics or occupy political office.

Literature Review

Understanding Violence against Women in Politics

The line between political violence (generally) and violence against women in politics (VAWIP) is sometimes blurred, making it difficult to determine whether female politicians are targeted because they are women and vulnerable, or whether they are targeted because they are politicians. The normalisation of violence as part of politics (Piscopo, 2016; Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2020) also makes it difficult to differentiate between the two. Emerging research has sought to highlight the differences between violence in politics (VP) and VAWIP. This is amidst a growing awareness that as the number of women in politics increase, so too has gendered attacks aimed at preventing women, as women, from exercising their political rights.

Political violence can be traditionally defined as 'any random or organised act or threat to intimidate, physically harm, blackmail, or abuse a political stakeholder in seeking to determine, delay, or otherwise influence an electoral process' (Fischer, 2002: 3). Moser and Clark defined political violence as 'the commission of violent acts motivated by a desire, conscious or unconscious, to obtain or maintain political power' (Moser and Clark, 2001: 36). Based on these definitions, political violence is driven by the will to acquire and maintain political power through intimidation, economic or social force, and physical and sexual harms, among others. Victims of traditional political violence usually include elected officials, political aspirants, candidates, staffers, party supporters, and appointed officials. Both male and female politicians are affected by political violence.

VAWIP is a subset of political violence (PV). It seeks to violate, repress, deter and/or control women's political rights based on gender identity. It includes 'behaviors that specifically target women as women to leave politics by pressuring them to step down as candidates or resign from a particular political office' (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016: 128). United Nations Women and UNDP (2017) defines violence against women in political life, including in and beyond elections, as:

Any act of, or threat of, gender-based violence, resulting in physical, sexual, psychological harm or suffering to women, that prevents them from exercising and realising their political rights, whether in public or private spaces, including the right to vote and hold public office, to vote in secret and to freely campaign, to associate and assemble, and to enjoy freedom of opinion and expression. (UN Women/UNDP, 2017: 20)

From these definitions, we can identify three distinguishing features of violence against women in politics: it targets women because of their gender; its form can be gendered;

and its impact is to discourage women from being or becoming active in politics to preserve gender roles and undermine democratic institutions (Krook, 2017; National Democratic Institute, 2017). As a result, VAWIP is often interpreted as ‘a form of backlash to women’s greater inclusion in the political sphere, resisting the gains made possible by gender quotas and other mechanisms to empower women in decision-making’ (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016: 137). It is a tool to enforce patriarchal control of democratic institutions (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016; Ballington, 2018) and to prevent women, as women, from exercising their political rights.

Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2016) differentiated between violence in politics and violence against women in politics on the grounds that the former is usually carried out by members of opposing parties and/or criminal gangs; whereas VAWIP is carried out by different actors or bodies, including opponents, criminal gangs, police, and members of their own parties and family, among others. Political violence usually takes place in the public sphere; whereas VAWIP occurs in both the public and private spheres. There is also a difference in when these acts of violence occur, with political violence coinciding with an election; whereas VAWIP tends to happen before, during, and after an election, even when women are in political office.

The form of violence also differs for both categories of violence in politics. Political violence usually entails physical and psychological violence; whereas violence against women includes physical and psychological violence but also economic violence, sexual assaults, character assassination, and harassment (Bardall, 2011; UN Women, 2018; Krook, 2020; Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2020). Violence against women in politics is perpetrated by political actors, societal actors, and state actors. Common perpetrators from these groups include political party leaders, party members, voters, media, and the police. Males are often portrayed as the perpetrators of violence against women, and women as harmless victims, but VAWIP (and violence generally) is perpetrated by both male and female actors – and sometimes by both groups concurrently (Bardall, 2011).

The definitions of VAWIP suggest that gender-based violence normally takes place both during election periods and after women have taken office. Despite the distinctions made between VP and VAWIP, it becomes difficult in a country like Jamaica, with a very high crime rate, to determine when female politicians are experiencing PV, VAWIP, or general acts of violence. This is because there is no standard framework for identifying gendered dimensions of political violence. Scholars writing about VAWIP have captured the multidimensional nature of the acts and perpetrators. By framing VAWIP as a hate crime perpetrated against women by men, Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2016) and Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2020), for example, highlighted the role that gender plays in the motivations of the perpetrators. They challenged the traditional definitions of political violence by shifting focus away from expressed acts and motives behind violence against women. The core of their arguments is that female politicians experience violence because they are women, and the acts and motives need not be explicit or identifiable. Despite their contribution to the VAWIP literature, Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2016) and Krook and Restrepo Sanín (2020) do not provide clear guidelines/a framework on how to distinguish between violence in politics (generally) and violence against women in politics *qua* women.

In their work, *How Is Political Violence Gendered? Disentangling Motives, Forms and Impacts*, Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo (2019) offer a framework through which one can assess violence against women in politics. By comparing the experiences of male and female political actors, they explain that political violence can be gendered in multiple but distinct ways – through *gendered motives*, *gendered forms*, and *gendered*

impacts. By focusing on the motives behind acts of violence, one can identify ‘those attacks aiming to preserve men’s hegemonic power, expanding “violence against women in politics” to include non-hegemonic men, gay, trans, and gender non-conforming individuals, while offering a cleaner statement of motives’ (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo, 2019, p. 931). When looking at VAWIP, gendered motives come into play when violence is perpetrated against female politicians with the aim of preserving ‘hegemonic men’s control of the political system’ (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo, 2019: 918). The category of *gendered forms* of violence is based on the argument that:

[G]ender structures how men and women perpetrate and experience political violence, regardless of whether gender appears in the motive. Both women and men experience violence specifically designed to inhibit their participation. (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo, 2019: 917)

In essence, both men and women are affected by political violence, but gendered norms and roles will determine the form or type of attack. Finally, *gendered impacts* ‘capture how audiences understand the gender dimensions of political violence’ (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo, 2019: 918). They also affect how political actors view themselves, the roles they play, and the risk they are willing to take as politicians.

Drawing on the conceptual framework of violence against women in politics advanced by Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo (2019), this study highlights the experiences of female politicians with political violence in Jamaica. It assesses the extent to which gender is evident in the acts, motives, and impacts of violence against women in politics. VAWIP is taken to mean *behaviours which specifically target female politicians qua women, forcing them to limit their political activities and engagement or to exit political office prematurely*. The motives for and forms of violence need not be explicit for them to be classified as VAWIP. Acts of violence with no observable aspects of gender bias will be categorised as PV. A point of departure from the conceptual framework proposed by Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo (2019) is that this study does not seek to compare the experiences of women and men with political violence. While acknowledging that male politicians do experience political violence, it would be instructive to know more about how male and female politicians differ (as discrete groups) in their experiences of political violence. In a society like Jamaica, where women have been severely underrepresented in politics, a focus on women’s experience with political violence might also explain why so few women enter or remain in politics.

Violence against women in politics is a gross violation of human rights, and even when directed solely towards one woman can affect all women. Whether perpetrated against civil society leaders, Members of Parliament, local councillors, staffers, party supporters, political aspirants, candidates, or appointed officials, VAWIP is designed to restrict the political engagement and participation of women as a group. Studies have shown, however, that although VAWIP affects women as a group, some women are more likely than others to experience violence in politics. High-profile or prominent female politicians, for example, are more likely to experience political violence than other politicians (including their male counterparts) (Rheault, Rayment, and Musulan, 2019; Håkansson, 2021). Younger women and women of colour, including black and Asian women, are also more likely to experience gender-based political violence (IPU, 2016; Dhrodia, 2018; Krook, 2020).

Women's Participation in Politics: Jamaica

Although Jamaica maintains its status as a democratic country, holding free, fair, and frequent elections, the country's political system remains a male-dominated space. The monopolisation of the political process by men in Jamaica dates back to the period of slavery when white males dominated the political sphere and excluded women, blacks, and Jews. It was not until after the granting of Universal Adult Suffrage in 1944 that women of all classes and colour gained the right to vote. Women's roles and participation in politics would see them running for political office, being active participants in trade unions, and forming women's groups. By 1967 and after, more female politicians emerged, asserting themselves as capable leaders and candidates for political office.

Recent years have seen a slow increase in the number of women elected or appointed to political office in Jamaica. In 2006, Portia Simpson-Miller broke the proverbial glass ceiling for women when she became the first female president of the PNP, the first female Prime Minister of Jamaica (2006–2007 and 2011–2016), and the third female prime minister in the Anglophone Caribbean. She retired in 2017 as Leader of the Opposition. Today, female politicians occupy 29 percent of the 63 seats in the House of Representatives (Lower House) and 38 percent of seats in the Senate (Upper House). Most of these women (14) are on the JLP-led government bench. This follows the 3 September 2020 general election, which saw an historic number of women elected to parliament. Before 2020, female politicians comprised no more than 18 percent of the total number of MPs in the Lower House and 5–8 percent in the Upper House. Of the 961 persons elected to Parliament since the country gained Universal Adult Suffrage in 1944, only 47 (5 percent) have been women. At the local level, there are 228 parish councillors, with 44 (19 percent) being women.

Women have entered many domains of the country's public life and served in important roles, but they remain underrepresented in elected bodies such as Parliament and Municipal Councils. Writing in 1987, former female Member of Parliament Maxine Henry-Wilson identified several cultural and historical challenges facing female political aspirants and politicians. These include lack of confidence among women to act as political representatives; women's activities in the home, which leave very little time for public life and office; lack of funding for campaigns and constituency activities; women uniting to exclude other women from politics; the perception that politics is a 'dirty game' – and one in which women will not be able to cope; and finally, the portrayal of politics as a male-dominated area (Henry-Wilson, 1987). Many of these barriers remain today.

Political violence is another barrier to women's entrance into and ability to prosper or remain in politics. Political violence in Jamaica can be attributed to the violent nature of the country and its history of electoral violence. The violence ranges from character assassination and verbal abuse to being shot. These acts of violence usually peak during election campaign periods, especially in communities with a history of violence. Violent politics, patronage, and aggressive partisanship in Jamaica can be attributed to the intense rivalry between the two major political parties (PNP and JLP) in their quest for votes (Sives, 2003; Gray, 2004). By the 1960s, and especially by the 1980s, violence had become institutionalised in modern Jamaican politics. Between 1980 and the present, political violence has become less of a feature of the general elections, but violence itself has become more of a feature of everyday life.

Methodology

Using survey and newspaper analysis, this exploratory analysis takes into consideration the experiences of female politicians with political violence in Jamaica and the effects of these experiences on their political activities or career.

Sample

Using convenience sampling, 30 female politicians who had served or were still actively serving at the national or local level of politics in Jamaica were contacted to be part of the study. They included five Senators (four current and one former), fourteen Members of Parliament (eleven current and three former), and eleven Municipal Councillors. Of the 30 politicians, sixteen were from the PNP and fourteen from the JLP. Of the female MPs targeted, six were in their early careers, having served at least four to five years in Parliament. The remaining eight were in their mid-advanced political career, having served between 9–28 years in Parliament. Of the eleven local councillors targeted for the study, only one was in the early stage of her political career, having served only one term in office. The remaining ten had served at least two-three terms each in office, with at least one serving 23 years in that capacity. Of the 30 female politicians contacted, sixteen responded to the survey. Some of the women contacted refused to participate in the study. A possible explanation is that they might have been fearful that the findings could affect their political progress, especially with an impending general election in 2020. Others agreed to participate in the study but did not complete the survey. When the study was started, there was a general expectation that all or most of the women contacted would participate in the study. This would have resulted in a larger sample size. The survey was sent out in late 2019, and by 2020 the country underwent lockdown because of COVID-19. This made face-to-face contact with the target population difficult. People also lost interest in being surveyed or interviewed. In mid-2020, contact was again made with the targeted women, reminding them to respond to the survey, but most of those emails went unacknowledged.

Data Collection Tools

The online survey instrument consisted of nine questions (a combination of open- and close-ended questions), allowing respondents to select multiple choices in some cases. Respondents were asked to describe their personal experiences with political violence and the prevalence of such acts. They were also asked about the types of violence they or other female politicians had experienced while actively participating in politics; the perpetrators of such acts; and finally, the effect of political violence on their participation or engagement in politics.

Newspaper Reports

Newspaper articles documenting acts of violence against female politicians in Jamaica were extracted from the electronic websites of the two major newspapers in Jamaica: *The Jamaica Gleaner* and *The Jamaica Observer*. Newspaper articles offer deep historical insights into the culture of political violence in Jamaica. They also offer a vivid overview of stories and incidents of political violence that politicians themselves may

not want to discuss openly. There is a paucity of information and research on violence against women in politics in Jamaica; thus, newspaper stories/articles provide valuable additional information on incidents of violence.

In selecting the editorial reports for analysis, a simple search on violence against politicians (male and female) in Jamaica between 1980 and 2020 was conducted. The year 1980 was chosen as the starting point for the analysis as it marks the country's bloodiest election campaign. It was also the first time in Jamaica's history that a government official (Roy McGann) was killed in what was considered a politically motivated act. Next, a search was conducted for acts of violence against politicians in Jamaica using key phrases such as: 'threats against Jamaican politician', 'politician attacked in Jamaica', 'politician killed in Jamaica', 'politician shot in Jamaica', 'Jamaican MP harassed', 'character assassination of politicians, Jamaica', and 'verbal assault against politicians in Jamaica'. Approximately 50 newspaper stories on violence against politicians were uncovered. Some stories were repeated, whereas others were about politicians harmed or killed in personal disputes (often with intimate partners or in accidents), so the sample size was narrowed to 24 newspaper articles – one story on each incident of politically motivated attack or assault on politicians in Jamaica. The search did not include attacks against political activists, political supporters, polling clerks, or Election Day workers. From the selected sample (N = 24), the search was narrowed to highlight only those concerning violence against female politicians. Eleven of the 24 newspaper articles made direct reference to attacks on female parliamentarians, specifically.

Findings

The findings from both the survey and newspaper articles were categorised according to themes and sub-themes. For the survey findings, the voices of the women as they responded to questions about their experiences with political violence were quoted under the relevant themes. The findings from the study suggest that female politicians in Jamaica were victims of gendered violence – what has been defined in this study as VAWIP. The study also shows, as with women elsewhere, VAWIP can act as a deterrent for female political aspirants and women in politics in Jamaica.

Experiences of Female Politicians with Political Violence in Jamaica

Most of the female politicians who completed the survey indicated that they experienced political violence during their political careers. Some respondents knew of female politicians (other than themselves) who experienced acts of political violence. Based on the responses, female politicians experienced all forms of violence identified in the survey (sexual harassment/coercion, physical assault, character assassination, verbal abuse, threat, gun attack, and arson) but were most often victims of physical assaults/attacks, threats, verbal abuse, and character assassination. As Respondent 4 (R4) noted, women in politics experience different kinds of violence, most of which include verbal abuse and attacks on one's character. Physical assaults and death threats were other acts of violence experienced by female politicians. Respondent 1 (R1) noted, for example, that she is aware of a female candidate who, in a local government election, was locked in a polling station by supporters of the opposing party and only released after the police intervened. Others reported being threatened, pushed, or verbally attacked by supporters

of opposing parties or by members of their own party. Respondent 8, for example, noted that:

I was in an area where the opposition was strong, and one man felt the need to push me. A bridge was being repaired in that opposition stronghold and he felt that I was not the one who commissioned the repair, but the past MP did before he left office. Now that MP was gone two years and he felt strongly about it and as I explained that it was my project [but] he wanted to hear nothing I was saying. (Respondent 8)

Respondent 1 was shot at and threatened with violence several times. Character assassination and verbal abuse of prominent female parliamentarians were also evident from the newspaper articles and were most closely associated with three prominent female politicians: Portia Simpson-Miller, Lisa Hanna, and Ann-Marie Vaz. Portia Simpson-Miller, Jamaica's first female Prime Minister and former leader of the People's National Party, faced continued hostility, intense character assassination, and emotional abuse during her time in office. Despite Simpson-Miller's stellar political career, there were those who perceived her as being unsuitable for the office of Prime Minister. In 1992, for example, Simpson-Miller contested the party leadership against Percival Patterson and faced one of the most brutal leadership attacks in the country's history. Most of the attacks came from members of her own political parties, including other women, who viewed her as uncouth and unintelligent. The victimisation of Simpson-Miller also came from members of the opposing party. During the election campaigns of 2011, Generation 2000 (G2K) (young professional arm of the JLP) sought to demean Simpson-Miller in what has been described as 'a vulgar and slanderous attack'. The media were forced to pull some of G2K's campaign ads about Simpson-Miller due to the vitriol they contained.

Attacks against the country's first female PM also took place through the media. Unlike other prime ministers of the country (all men), Simpson-Miller was frequently portrayed in the media as unintelligent, loud, crass, a dunce, vulgar, and erratic. Through editorial cartoons, she was often depicted as a raging lunatic: banging her hands on a podium, pounding her chest, or screaming at someone. Her ability to lead was often placed under a microscope, and her emotional stability questioned. Simpson-Miller often openly claimed that she was targeted because she is a woman in a male-dominated field and because of her working-class background.

Lisa Hanna, former Minister of Youth and Culture in the People's National Party, also experienced character assassination and verbal assaults. After her entrance into politics, Hanna, a former beauty queen (Miss Jamaica and Miss World, 1993), became the victim of sexism and objectification from men in both political parties. In public, she was often criticised and judged based on her physical appearance and personal life. In 2016, during a sitting of the House of Representatives, Hanna was called a 'Jezebel' by fellow parliamentarian Everaldo Warmington. Warmington refused to retract the statement and/or apologise to Hanna. He justified calling her a Jezebel on the grounds that he did not invent the word: it came from the Bible and aptly described Hanna's behavior. In 2017, Hanna was blasted by Father Richard Ho Lung (a Catholic priest), who argued that, as a public figure, Hanna should not post pictures that would evoke passion in people and become a source of temptation. In 2017, Hanna was heavily criticised and labelled an attention-seeker for wearing a sleeveless dress into Parliament. This criticism was primarily from other parliamentarians (including female politicians). She was reprimanded by the Speaker of the House and given a written letter asking her to abide by the rules.

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Jamaica Labour Party Member of Parliament Ann-Marie Vaz faced character assassination as well as classist, racist, and sexist attacks in her bid to enter parliament. In the East Portland by-election campaign against former Member of Parliament Damion Crawford, Vaz was often labelled as uneducated. Vaz, who was born and raised in Jamaica, but is of very light complexion, was described by her opponent as a Caucasian who was not fit to represent East Portland – a constituency, like many others in Jamaica, that is predominantly black. She was labelled an ‘uptown rich girl’ with a ‘beautiful face’ by her opponent, who considered himself the candidate with the ‘beautiful mind’. Crawford also took racist and classist jabs at Vaz arguing, for instance, that ‘because of her colour and her class, they say she is better than me’. Vaz, the wife of a prominent Jamaican Member of Parliament, was also told by Crawford that the furthest she could go in politics would be to be ‘Mrs. Vaz’.

Physical assaults and threats were also evident from the newspaper articles. There were at least two reported incidents of physical assaults against female politicians (councillors) during the period under study. In 2014, Venesha Phillips, PNP Municipal Councillor for the Papine Division in Kingston and St. Andrew, was shot at by a gunman while she held discussions with members of her constituency about the distribution of jobs working on road repair. According to the newspaper reports, Phillips was targeted because she sought to reject partisan political considerations in the distribution of work in the division, giving work to both JLP and PNP supporters. The individual who shot at her was described as a member of her own political party who was displeased that JLP supporters in the constituency were also getting work.

Before the local elections of 2007, Rosie Hamilton, JLP Municipal Councillor for the Rae Town Division in Kingston and St. Andrew, was shot in her chest at point blank range. It was an act she considered politically motivated and which was carried out by a PNP supporter. She explained that her opponents desperately wanted her seat. As is customary in the lead-up to any election in the Kingston Central constituency, tensions between JLP and PNP supporters had intensified. Former PNP Member of Parliament, Heather Robinson (1993–1997) and PNP councillor Keisha Lewis (2007–present) both received death threats during their time in office. Robinson was often threatened during her short tenure in Parliament. During the first year of being elected to Parliament, Robinson complained in the House of Representatives that her life had been threatened. These threats resulted in her having to be assigned two police bodyguards. PNP councillor (Lauriston Division) Keisha Lewis also faced death threats while carrying out her political duties. According to Lewis, ‘I have been working closely with the people in the community but as it relates to my personal safety, I have taken the decision not to physically visit the community because of a threat that I received’.

Perpetrators of Violence against Women in Politics

Recurring themes from the survey responses suggest that the key perpetrators of violence against women in politics are members of opposing political parties, members of their own political party, criminal elements/thugs affiliated with a political party, and party supporters. The statements below highlight some of the responses:

R1. The perpetrators were supporters of the opposing candidate who were acting on alleged instructions. This was done through threats made to one of my candidates as well as threats sent to me using persons associated with me to deliver the message. In one case, threats were made by unknown men

who drove up in a car. On another occasion, it was by way of telephone call [...].

R3. A constituent and other persons on social media carried out verbal attacks.

R5. Supporters of the other party. There were numerous threats. Acts of intimidation and attempts to do physical harm.

R8. Threats and intimidation, by supporters of the political party who believe that criticism of their party or favourite candidate is grave disrespect that they want to defend [...] I was in an area where the opposition was strong, and one man felt the need to push me.

R10: Persons in my own party (2000–2002). I had security assigned to me which numbered 4 at one stage [...].

R16: violent acts were carried out by men who aim to belittle and undermine. They are supported by weak, envious and hateful women. Sisterhood in politics is a farce – in fact, they can be worse than men. Rare is the women who will build another.

Similar results were found for the newspaper articles, with acts of violence committed against female politicians by members of opposing parties, members of their own political parties, and party supporters.

Despite the assumption that acts of political violence were mostly carried out by men, both within the victim's party and by supporters of opposing political parties, there were at least three respondents who reported that the harassment and character assassination they experienced were from other female politicians. Respondent 13 (R13) indicated she never experienced violence from male politicians, whereas Respondent 5 (R5) was harassed and had her character assassinated by both male and female politicians. This is an interesting finding given the gendered assumption and cultural stereotypes about men as likely perpetrators of violence and females as victims.

Effect of Violence against Female Politicians in Jamaica

The survey responses varied as to the effect of political violence on women's electoral and political participation in Jamaica. Most respondents, however, pointed to a negative effect of political violence against women, including themselves. As Responder 16 (R16) explained, 'if there is political violence against women, we will have less women participating which in turn impact the entire society and we need women as decision makers at the table'. This could explain why there are so few women in politics in Jamaica. Other respondents weighed in on the effect of violence against women in politics:

R1. Fewer women go into political representation.

R2. Political violence serves as a deterrent to many females becoming engaged or involved in the political process.

R5: [...] a male face and political violence have deterred women from participating in national and local levels of politics in Jamaica. Gender-based

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violence in general is still a huge problem in the Jamaican society when the political dimension (which is still polarising) is added it becomes an even bigger deterrent for women to engage in the ways they want or could, politically.

R7: It stokes a sense of fear, reducing full and authentic participation. It also diminishes the confidence of female actors and undermines the power of the feminine voice when it is heard.

R8. Political violence serves as a deterrence to many females becoming engaged or involved in the political process.

R10. Having identified character assassination as violence, few women are willing to risk hard earned professional reputation to pursue participation. The potential for negative impact on reputation, self-esteem and ambition is intimidating [...].

R 12: Extremely negative. Women do not wish to suffer abuse verbally or physically.

R16. The threat of political violence is ever present in the Jamaican political landscape. Jamaican history also has very graphic and off-putting examples of political violence which acts as a turn off for women.

It must be noted, however, that not every respondent shared the belief that political violence was a barrier to women entering and remaining in politics. There are those who believe that, although a general fear exists, it is not enough to deter women from entering politics because there is an expectation of protection during campaigns and on Election Day. Respondents 6, 13, and 15 suggested that most women who run for office are the caregivers in their family, and this, they believe, is the biggest deterrent for women entering politics. These women, the respondents noted, want to ensure their families are taken care of and that they are around to watch their children grow up. Respondent 9 (R9) noted that whereas women do have reservations about entering politics, violence is very low in the list of issues they confront.

It proved more difficult to identify the explicit effects of violence against women from the newspaper articles, but the cases covered suggested that, as reported by the survey respondents, violence can have devastating effects on female politicians. Councillor Rosie Hamilton, for example, lives with a bullet still lodged in her chest, a constant reminder of the abuse sometimes directed at female politicians, especially those in vulnerable communities and constituencies. MP Heather Robinson was often too afraid to go home and would sometimes be forced to seek refuge at police stations. She was also afraid to venture into certain areas, even while going to and from her place of residence. By the end of 1996, Robinson had walked away from representational politics.

Discussion

Experiences of Female Politicians with Political Violence

The violence experienced by female politicians in Jamaica can be categorised as *violence against women in politics – gendered violence that targets female politicians*

qua women. Even when both male and female politicians are targeted, the perpetrators may use different forms of violence to achieve their outcome (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo, 2019). Character assassination and verbal abuse were identified as key forms of violence against female politicians in Jamaica. Both acts of violence are an inherent element of the violent political culture in the country, affecting both men and women, but examples of character assassination and verbal attacks against female politicians suggest that they were also gendered both because of the contents and because male politicians did not receive such attacks. This finding supports arguments in the VAWIP literature that the violence perpetrated against women in politics usually includes not only physical and psychological violence, but also economic violence, sexual assaults, character assassination, and harassment (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016; UN Women, 2018; Krook, 2020; Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2020).

The newspaper analysis also suggests that female politicians in Jamaica might have been subjected to more acts of violence during their political career than their male counterparts had. Of the 24 reported cases of violence against politicians in Jamaica, eleven (46 percent) made direct references to attacks on female politicians. This is significant for two reasons: women have never comprised half or nearly half the number of politicians in parliament or at the local level in Jamaica during the period of study (1980–2020). Secondly, violence against women in Jamaica is often undocumented and underreported. Although there is an extensive body of research and media coverage on political violence in Jamaica, especially during elections, few incidents of violence against women get reported or documented. This is due in part to the cultural normalisation of violence against women in Jamaica. Women are also scared of retaliation for speaking out or the stigma that is attached to being a victim of violence, and so they do not report cases of abuse or attacks. Female politicians might be fearful of speaking out against violence and/or the perpetrators because of the detriment to their political career. For some, violence is simply the ‘cost of doing politics’.

Although not always explicit, gendered stereotypes were used to question the competence and credibility of female politicians in Jamaica. Not only are female politicians in Jamaica held to a double standard, but they often face preconceived notions about how they should act, look, and behave. Simpson-Miller, the country’s first female prime minister, was mercilessly criticised by both the media and people from her own party. They questioned her ability to lead and made disparaging comments that sought to attack her character. Hanna and Vaz were judged based on their physical appearance. By placing these women’s leadership abilities and character traits under intense scrutiny, their detractors helped to emphasise their ‘otherness’ in politics. By criticising and dissecting women’s leadership style in ways that are not usually applied to men, the perpetrators of violence against women undermine their abilities in the public’s mind, hindering any likely success at the polls. This level of negativity not only discourages women from remaining in politics but also dissuades female political aspirants from stepping into positions of leadership or entering a space in which the odds are stacked against them and the possibility of success is slim.

Not every act of violence against female politicians could be readily categorised as VAWIP due to the nature of the attacks, when they took place, or why they took place. Responses from the survey and the newspaper analysis indicated, for example, that there were acts of violence against female politicians that coincided with an election or election campaign, suggesting women were targeted as victims of PV. Respondents spoke of political candidates being locked in a polling station or being attacked because they were viewed as potential threats by political opponents and/or party supporters. One female

politician was shot because her opponents wanted her seat; another was shot at because she refused to participate in the partisan distribution of jobs involving road works. At least two others received death threats. None of the media coverage highlighted the possibility of the attacks being motivated, in whole or in part, by gender bias. There is a history of political violence in Jamaica, especially during election campaigns and on Election Day. It is therefore easy to misconstrue VAWIP as political violence, that is, violence aimed at politicians in general. However, when viewed through a gendered lens, it becomes evident that the women were targeted because they are women in a male-dominated space. This supports claims in the VAWIP literature that there need not be explicit motives for an act of violence to be considered gender-motivated (Krook and Restrepo Sanín, 2016; Krook, 2017).

It is also likely that female politicians such as Simpson-Miller, Lisa Hanna, and Ann-Marie Vaz were targeted because they are prominent politicians. This is in line with arguments by Håkansson (2021) and Rheault, Rayment, and Musulan (2019) that high-profile female politicians are more likely to experience political violence than other women. As female politicians rise to prominence and increase their political visibility, they also become more vulnerable to gendered political violence targeted at women (Bardall, 2011). An increased presence of women in politics can also trigger a backlash response among those who view that presence as disruptive to the status quo and as a challenge to gendered power relations.

The perpetrators of VAWIP in Jamaica also points to the gendered nature of and motives for the attacks. The most common perpetrators of violence against female politicians in Jamaica were members of an opposing party, party supporters, and hired thugs (acting on the instructions of an opposing party candidate and/or opponents). One respondent noted, for example, that she was threatened by supporters who were acting on alleged instructions from an opposing candidate. With so few women in politics in Jamaica, it is safe to assume this opposing candidate, like others, was a man. When Ann-Marie Vaz expressed her interest in contesting the local by-election in East Portland, she was ridiculed and verbally attacked by her male opponent. By using racist, classist, and gendered terms to describe Vaz, her opponent sought to undermine her political career, diminish her credibility, and question her competency. One could view this as a direct attempt by a male politician to protect the patriarchal space that is Jamaican politics.

Effect of Political Violence on Female Politicians

Violence against women in politics can emerge in many contexts – as *violence against female politicians* (in general) or as *violence against women qua women* – but the effects are the same. Even when inflicted upon one woman, gendered political violence can affect all women. It silences women and excludes and disempowers them as political actors by discouraging them from voting or it penalises them for participating in the electoral process. On an individual level, it prevents females from running for office. For those who defy the odds and make it into Parliament, their tenure is usually short-lived. By preventing women from entering or remaining in Parliament, policy outcomes also suffer due to the lack of variety in perspectives and the underrepresentation of women at the decision-making table.

Whereas VAWIP can have serious consequences for female politicians, the gendered impact extends beyond the women themselves. It also affects how the public view and treat female politicians (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo, 2019). By casting doubts on

women's ability to lead, or preventing them from running for public office, political violence diverts attention from their policies and achievements. It also sends the message that women do not belong in politics, thus reinforcing the negative stereotypes around the role/place of women in society. This approach is unfair both to female representatives and to the people they seek to serve.

Political violence coupled with a culturally violent political environment also creates vulnerabilities and challenges for the participation or engagement of female politicians. For women who lack the coping mechanisms to withstand the rigours of politics, violent attacks can have a greater impact on stifling their participation or durability. It is understandable, therefore, that many choose to leave office prematurely. Female politicians are also more likely to be bullied or have their character sullied or thrust under a microscope. When a man is harassed or attacked, these threats are usually less about their gender. Female politicians such as those identified in the study have been ridiculed or judged from their entry into politics not because their perpetrators wanted to affect electoral outcome or influence the decision-making process but because they wanted to protect the gendered order of political power and to preserve politics as a male-dominated space.

Conclusion

Violent politics is an offensive barrier to full political participation and success/durability for female politicians in Jamaica. The violence experienced ranged from verbal abuse to character assassination and to being shot. The perpetrators of political violence were members of political parties, criminal elements/thugs affiliated with a political party, and party supporters. The findings indicate that female politicians in Jamaica are affected by political violence before, during, and after an election, and even when they are in political office. Most of the violence experienced is of a gendered nature and can be defined as VAWIP. It is driven by gender-specific motivations aimed at preventing women from pursuing a political career or entering politics. Women politicians are targeted not just because of politics but because they are women. Violence against women in politics demotivates female politicians, making them less likely to stand for elections and more likely to leave office after fewer terms. The violence that women in politics face affects them directly, but it also affects the members of their constituencies and their families. It is understandable, therefore, why some of these women become disgruntled and frustrated at the political system.

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