

NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Civic Engagement as a Political Scientist: Tackling Violence against Women in Politics

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In September 2022, I had the opportunity to organize a roundtable at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association (APSA), connected to my 2021 APSA Distinguished Award for Civic and Community Engagement. First conferred in 2020, the award honors “significant civic or community engagement activity by a political scientist which merges knowledge and practice and has an impact outside of the profession or the academy.” In my case, it recognized work I had been doing since 2015 with the National Democratic Institute and other global practitioners to recognize and combat violence against women in politics as a distinct form of violence aimed at preventing and undermining women’s political participation.

Working on this topic has been one of the most challenging, and exhilarating, periods of my academic career. In my research on gender quotas, I listened to many positive stories about how quotas had created opportunities for women to enter and have a voice in political spaces. However, I also heard deeply disturbing accounts of violence, intimidation, and harassment, pointing to ongoing resistance and rising backlash against women as political actors. Through informal conversations, I learned that practitioner colleagues were observing similar patterns in their work on the ground and, like me, were grappling in search of language and a framework to understand this problem.

Over a series of workshops and collaborative projects, a growing global network—consisting of politicians, activists, democracy practitioners, academics, and journalists—began theorizing and documenting this phenomenon (Krook 2019). Reflecting on what we could add to these debates as scholars, my then graduate student Juliana Restrepo Sanín and I drafted academic papers, but also presented at practitioner events, helped research and write policy reports, gave feedback on civil society toolkits, and wrote opinion pieces for popular audiences. Inspired by the productive nature of these dialogues across

theory and practice, my book *Violence against Women in Politics* (Krook 2020) integrates academic and practitioner insights to develop this concept theoretically, illustrate what it looks like in practice, and catalog emerging solutions.

As a junior scholar, I was actively discouraged from doing public engagement work—but I often did it anyway, because I thought, otherwise, why are we here? I am happy to see that this attitude is changing, as both APSA and the APSA Women, Gender, and Politics Research Section have inaugurated public engagement awards in recent years. To inspire others to think about how they might combine academic analysis with practical work, I did not give a traditional lecture for my APSA award. Instead, I decided to invite several colleagues to participate in a roundtable focused on their own public engagement activities. I asked them to speak to three questions: First, what can political scientists do to address violence against women in politics? Second, what specific activities have you been involved with to combat this problem? And third, based on your experiences, what are the challenges and/or limitations in addressing violence against women in politics?

Their interventions are brought together here as a special collection of Notes from the Field articles, a new article type in *Politics & Gender* centered on public engagement. As a group, the authors provide a range of perspectives on what scholars can contribute to addressing this urgent problem. Tracey Raney argues that, given their skill sets, political scientists are well positioned to tackle both the evidence gap and the policy/legislative gap surrounding violence against women in politics, by collecting and analyzing data on the extent of the problem and by offering decision makers guidance on definitions and best practices. She details how her own work on sexual harassment in the Canadian parliament has fed not only into scholarly publications, but also into collaborations with Equal Voice, a Canadian organization that seeks to promote women in politics, as well as with a former member of Parliament, with whom she co-created Women in the House, a unique experiential learning course for university students on Parliament Hill. Raney also reflects on challenges in getting women's stories "right," providing safe and nontoxic opportunities for students, and responding to potential backlash against your research and activism.

Based on her work in Latin America, Juliana Restrepo Sanín reflects on academic and practical challenges in studying violence against women in politics. In her view, the lack of high-quality data, qualitative and quantitative, poses problems for scholars and activists seeking to document and mobilize against this problem. She suggests that undertaking joint research with practitioners offers enormous potential for doing better research, combining academics' theoretical and methodological expertise with practitioners' deep knowledge of countries' political systems and impressive range of networks and contacts with stakeholders at all levels of government. However, she also identifies a number of competing goals and priorities that may complicate collaboration, including different timelines for publication, ideas about what kind of research is useful, and interest in policy solutions. The structure of academia can also create disincentives for public engagement, with nonacademic work being weighted less heavily in promotion processes.

Catherine N. Wineinger, in turn, shares how she gained firsthand insight into the problem of violence against women in politics while working as an APSA Congressional Fellow in the office of U.S. Representative Rashida Tlaib. She details a number of incidents involving Tlaib and her colleagues that inspired the team to work on a House resolution highlighting violence against women in politics as a global problem, including in the United States, and calling on the U.S. government to take steps to mitigate it. Based on these interactions, Wineinger identifies three challenges to addressing violence against women in politics through congressional policymaking, including policy challenges related to intersectionality and a desire not to reinforce the carceral state; framing challenges linked to raising awareness of the issue but not wanting to deter women, especially women of color, from standing for office; and political challenges connected to working on this issue in a highly polarized partisan environment.

In the final contribution, Sandra Pepera and I detail our collaboration on the #NotTheCost campaign to stop violence against women in politics, a global initiative launched by the National Democratic Institute in March 2016. Our work together involved conceptualizing the problem, finding a persuasive way of framing the issue, and developing a list of interventions to help make politics safer for women. Based on these experiences, we make five observations about the successful bridging of theory and practice: working principles are good, in terms of agreeing on an approach and establishing broader goals; the best partners are equally strong, with each bringing vital skills and insights to the table; make something new, in the sense of advancing debates and knowledge through a combination of skillsets and perspectives; synchronize watches, by finding moments when it is possible to overcome the distinct time orientations of academia and the policy world to work together; and ask what is in it for all parties, in terms of what each partner can bring to, as well as benefit from, in the course of the collaboration. The potential gains can be personal, as well as professional, joining kindred spirits in the fight for greater gender equality and stronger and more resilient democracy.

References

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