

BOOK REVIEW

**Gender and Violence Against Political Actors. Elin Bjarnegård and Pär Zetterberg. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2023. 312 pp.**

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In recent years, there has been a notable trend toward heightened hostility and aggression within the political arena, accompanied by increasing levels of violence targeting political actors. The phenomenon has attracted considerable academic attention from various angles. Scholars in international relations have predominantly focused on conflict-related acts of political violence during wartime and are increasingly paying attention to the role of gender in shaping this violence. Departing from a gender perspective, gender and politics scholars, on the other hand, have primarily examined violence occurring in the formal political sphere. The literature on gendered political violence, for instance, brought attention to the gendered nature of violence by comparing the experiences of female and male political actors, whereas studies on violence against women in politics pointed toward specific forms of violence female politicians encounter. Elin Bjarnegård and Pär Zetterberg address this expansive body of literature and consolidate its various strands in their work, *Gender and Violence against Political Actors*. By doing so, the book makes a significant contribution to the field of gender, politics, and violence. It not only connects different (sub)fields, perspectives, and methods, but also highlights cross-disciplinary insights and their potential to broaden our comprehension of the multifaceted issue of gender and violence against political actors.

The book begins with a theoretical section that outlines the central concepts and different theoretical approaches. A core concept that is presented in the book is the notion of a continuum of violence. As convincingly argued by Bjarnegård and Zetterberg, conceptualizing violence along a continuous spectrum – from physical to psychological violence and everything in between – offers multiple advantages. First, this approach results in a more inclusive definition of violence, moving beyond the exclusive focus on the physical form often found in traditional literature on political violence. Secondly, thinking in terms of a continuum makes explicit how the diverse forms of violence are related. The conceptualization of violence put forward by the authors in the book

makes a substantial addition to the field, as it contributes to a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of how political actors experience violence.

The added value of adopting the perspective of a continuum of violence is demonstrated through a rich collection of case studies following the extensive theoretical section. Bjarnegård and Zetterberg bring together six diverse cases that encompass various contexts (including countries from the Global North and Global South, both democratic and non-democratic systems, as well as peace and [post-]conflict settings) and focus on different political actors and forms of violence along the continuum. In this way, both the multifaceted nature of the issue, as well as its global scope, are clearly illustrated. An important asset of the book lies not only in the new empirical evidence it offers, but also in the thoughtful discussion of the methodological aspects. The chapters draw on a variety of research methods and data stemming from different traditions. In this regard, the book brings forth important insights. By juxtaposing these methodologies, the authors underscore the strengths and limitations of each method and highlight best practices to capture the gendered dimensions of violence.

In the final part of the book, the authors elaborate on potential responses to acts of violence against political actors. Various measures to address diverse types of violence at international, national, and institutional levels are assessed. By engaging in a discussion on how these issues can be addressed, the book not only connects diverse strands of literature, but also takes the extra step of bridging scholars and practitioners, which is particularly valuable given the highly societal and political relevance of the topic.

An additional strength of the book, as promised in the title, is that it provides an extensive gender analysis of issues related to violence against political actors. Unlike previous studies, which sometimes tend to equate gender with a focus on women, the book genuinely encompasses a variety of perspectives. It includes chapters that delve into the distinct experiences of women, sections that compare women and men, and studies that focus on men, not only as perpetrators but also as victims of gendered forms of violence. While the gender analysis is thoroughly developed, the intersectional analysis is explored to a lesser extent (with an exception in chapter 15, which specifically focuses on intersectional online violence). The authors acknowledge and emphasize the importance of studying these issues from an intersectional perspective, but, due to challenges in data collection, the incorporation of a truly intersectional approach is still in its nascent stages in this literature. The book, however, could have made a more substantial contribution in this respect by reflecting more deeply on potential methodological best practices to bring these intersectional dimensions to the surface, as it did excellently concerning the gendered characteristics of violence.

Overall, the authors successfully achieve their objective of bringing together various traditions in *Gender and Violence against Political Actors* and initiating a conversation among them. The integration of the different literatures yields novel and thought-provoking insights into the complex and multifaceted issue of violence against political actors and the ways gender gives shape to it. The book not only provides substantial theoretical and conceptual elucidation but is also richly illustrated by empirical case studies. The result is a comprehensive work

that is indispensable for anyone working on or interested in issues on gender, politics, and violence.

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