

Nanma Okeani

UGA Libraries Undergraduate Research Awards Application - Abstract

Sticks and Stones: How Violence against Women in Politics Impacts Representation

My research involves discovering the response to the question: how does violence against women in politics affect the descriptive and substantive representation of women in elected office? I hypothesize that countries with laws prohibiting violence against women in politics will show good rates of women's descriptive and substantive representation, while states without those laws will show poor rates of women's descriptive and substantive representation. My hypothesis will allow me to argue that violence against women in politics significantly deters potential female candidates from participating in politics. I also theorize that the harassment and abuse of women in politics is a method utilized as a strategic tool to undermine the agency and political rights of women in society. I will test my hypothesis from a comparativist approach, utilizing case studies in order to discern whether my hypothesis is generally true. I plan to study the cases of Peru and Bolivia, two nations that have higher rates of violence against women in politics. However, one of these states, Bolivia, has enacted specific policy to address the issue of violence against women in politics while Peru has not. Violence against women in politics is a direct undermining of the democratic process, and demeans the rights of a large portion of the global population. As an international community, now more than ever, it is so important to address and solve this issue for the fate of future female politicians, voters, and members of civil society.

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Sticks and Stones: How Violence against Women in Politics Impacts Representation

As a self-identifying feminist, and a scholar of political science, I've been a longtime supporter of women as leaders in politics. I wanted to learn more about women's issues internationally, so I fashioned my international affairs coursework to align with my interests. Fortunately, SPIA makes this accessible by offering courses like "War & Gender" and "Women in World Politics". I enrolled in the latter, and spent a semester delving into the woman's role in the international community. Although I initially expected to learn about women in politics specifically, I was taught on a comprehensive scale, and explored women's diversified roles in conflict and community. The daunting aspect of the course was the individual research paper each student must produce at the close of the semester. The paper would be the longest piece of writing I had done for a class, and would require the utilization of research skills I did not have at the start of the term. I sought to challenge myself by enrolling in the course, because I recognized the necessity of the research abilities and investigative strategies I would gain from such a class. I was not disappointed; Dr. Gallagher's course helped me develop technical investigative skills, improve my writing, and gain confidence in my abilities as a researcher.

My research journey began with our initial assignment to submit a topic proposal to Dr. Gallagher for her approval. The class had introduced me to the dichotomy of descriptive versus substantive representation, along with pre-existing literature regarding violence against women as a political tool. I decided to inculcate both representation and violence against women into my research project, but had difficulty settling on an idea. The subject of violence against women *in politics* (VAWIP) stood out to me, and seemed especially topical due to the presence of female candidates in the 2016 U.S. Presidential elections, all of whom ran relatively un-harassed by their opponents. The fact that these fear-inducing, intimidation tactics persisted in nations around the world was astonishing to me.

I began my research by conducting initial searches of "violence against women in politics" on Google Scholar and the UGA Library's Multi-Search resource. After gaining approval of my topic from Dr. Gallagher, the next step was figuring out a hypothesis to explore.

My hypothesis argued that VAWIP significantly diminishes the substantive and descriptive representation of women in politics. I decided case studies would best depict the findings of my research, and sought to employ a “most-similar systems” approach, which consists of analyzing very similar cases that differ in terms of the dependent variable. The subsequent issue emerged when I discovered I had no prior experience conducting a comparative analysis, and didn’t have an idea which countries to use as case studies. Dr. Gallagher provided one of my most valued sources: the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s annual “Women in Parliament” reports. The IPU publishes reports regarding the percentage of women in the lower house of Parliament in each country, and ranked them from highest percentage to lowest. With this comparativist tool, I formulated methodology to measure descriptive representation. Additionally, the country selected as a case study needed to have a proposed policy addressing violence against women in politics to appropriately measure substantive representation under my created research model. I traversed the globe through my research, attempting to find two states that could arguably be considered similar in enough ways to satisfy the most-similar analysis conditions. I tried multiple iterations of the analysis to no avail.

My research experience changed when Ms. Elizabeth White, the SPIA librarian from the university’s library system, presented in our class. The results of my futile Google searches paled in comparison to the amount of information that could be gained from the databases within the INTL 4780H course resource page on the library’s website. Although I initially found the library’s “Multi-Search” tool helpful, I found that it is the tip of the iceberg of the university’s research capability. Ms. White encouraged us to utilize region-specific databases like the International African Institute’s Africa Bibliography, country-information databases like Europa World, or subject-specific databases like Women’s Studies International. I used Europa World and the Africa Bibliography to explore the countries I considered for case studies. These region-specific databases reinvigorated my search for case studies, and introduced an interesting regional direction to my research. Ms. White advised us to not only read sources we thought would be helpful to our research, but also to peruse the references from the sources we liked to find an even greater wealth of literature to consider. Utilizing this advice, I found several of the sources that were significant to my research.

During one of my periodic meetings with Dr. Gallagher to discuss the progression of my research project, she mentioned a Facebook group she belonged to that pertained to my topic. The “Violence against Women in Politics” Facebook group was a closed group primarily made up of professors, researchers, and preeminent scholars of women in international relations, like Mona Lena Krook and Juliana Restrepo Sanin. The group’s discussion page was a treasure trove of anecdotal resources as well as helpful, data-rich reports and the newest literature on the subject. As I was not a university professor, or even an experienced researcher, I believed the Facebook group was barred to the likes of me: a second-year undergraduate student completing coursework. However, the real-life application the sources from that group would lend my research was too tempting to dismiss. I requested to join, simply in the hopes that the group administrator (whom I later learned was Mona Lena Krook herself) would possibly mistake me for a learned scholar on the subject and admit me into the group. Advantageously, I was accepted, and immediately launched into an outbreak of research activity; I used Facebook’s group search tool, read the recent posts of specific scholars, and followed each link shared on the page.

Useful sources wrote of recent cases of VAWIP occurring around the world, or included valuable information regarding relevant policy solutions that were proposed in many countries to address the issue. Through my examination of the Facebook group, I noted that Latin America seemed to have a large amount of VAWIP occurrences. Many of the group’s posts, and a large amount of the sources shared, were in Spanish. I had a limited proficiency in Spanish, but I knew this realization was important so I decided to pursue it. My decision to explore the prevalence of VAWIP in Latin America, despite the language barrier, led to the discovery of my case studies: Bolivia and Peru. Despite their geographical similarities, the two countries also shared high amounts of VAWIP. The countries satisfied my previous methodology; each had readily available data regarding the number of women in legislature and had policy to address VAWIP somewhere in the pipeline.

While I found many sources in English, I continuously encountered Spanish that I could not translate. These sources were of particular significance, because many of them contained information from the Bolivian or Peruvian government that could be useful for my case analyses. Through consultation with Ms. White, I was informed that Google Translate could translate

whole pages online. This tool provided access to previously unreachable information, like the actual language of VAWIP legislation or direct quotes from women in politics who were victims of VAWIP.

At the conclusion of my research process, I had gained sources from diversified fields: multimedia sources, academic journals, mass media, government legislation, and books. Equipped with the information gained from these references, I contributed to existing literature about violence against women in politics in a new and exciting way. I brought the authors in conversation with each other in my literature review. I questioned the status quo regarding what constitutes VAWIP, descriptive representation, or substantive representation. I contemplated the meaning of “women’s issue”, and implanted relevant literature to flesh out my definitions for all these terms. I wrote a comprehensive, scholarly essay, but still sought to make the paper accessible to students like myself who are interested in women’s issues at an international level. Accordingly, I gathered existing data into easily-understood graphs that depicted the percentage of women in legislature for both Peru and Bolivia, clearly representing the evidence underlying my conclusion.

Upon completion of my research paper, I had around three pages of references. By applying numerous sources, I illustrated real-life applications of VAWIP and its detrimental effects on women’s substantive and descriptive representation. The unparalleled access gained from the plethora of databases available to INTL 4780H students through the course resource page, the Inter-Parliamentary Union’s comprehensive annual reports on Women in Parliament, the “Violence against Women in Politics” Facebook group, and the advice and knowledge of UGA librarians were valuable resources that helped me produce a powerful paper on a pressing global issue.

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