

The Consequences of Violence for Women's Candidacy in Legislative Elections: Insights from a Global Analysis

RESEARCH NOTE

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Explaining persistent gender asymmetry in women's descriptive representation necessitates identifying the barriers to women's opportunities and willingness to contest elections. I extend recent scholarship examining the gendered consequences of political violence for women's political participation and descriptive representation. I specifically argue that political violence observed in the months preceding an election introduces distortions into the candidate selection process, thereby reducing women's share of the pool of candidates competing for seats in the legislature. I empirically evaluate this hypothesis by combining a new cross-national dataset on women's candidacy rates in 555 multiparty national legislative elections held in 136 countries between 1990 and 2022 with temporally fine-grained violent events data. Even after accounting for multiple confounding factors and addressing unobserved heterogeneity, the results demonstrate a robust negative association between political violence occurring during the candidate selection process and the rate at which women contest national legislative elections. Additional exploratory analyses suggest that these effects are driven principally by violent events occurring within the context of civil conflicts.

Con el fin de explicar la persistente asimetría de género en la representación descriptiva de las mujeres, es necesario identificar las barreras a las oportunidades y la disposición de las mujeres con respecto a presentarse a las elecciones. Ampliamos la investigación reciente que estudia las consecuencias en materia de género que tiene la violencia política sobre la participación política de las mujeres y su representación descriptiva. En concreto, argumentamos que la violencia política observada en los meses previos a unas elecciones introduce distorsiones en el proceso de selección de candidatos y reduce, de esta forma, la proporción de mujeres en el grupo de candidatas que compiten por los escaños en la legislatura. Analizamos esta hipótesis de forma empírica mediante la combinación de un nuevo conjunto de datos transnacional referente a la proporción de candidaturas por parte de mujeres en 555 elecciones legislativas nacionales multipartidistas celebradas en 136 países entre 1990 y 2022 con datos relativos a eventos violentos con alta resolución temporal. Incluso después de tener en cuenta múltiples factores de confusión y de abordar la heterogeneidad no observada, los resultados demuestran una asociación negativa sólida entre la violencia política que ocurre durante el proceso de selección de candidatos y la proporción de mujeres que participan en las elecciones legislativas nacionales. Realizamos análisis exploratorios adicionales que sugieren que estos efectos están impulsados, principalmente, por eventos violentos que ocurren en el contexto de conflictos civiles.

Pour expliquer la persistance de l'asymétrie genrée dans la représentation descriptive des femmes, il faut identifier les freins pour les femmes, concernant tant les occasions que la volonté, quand il s'agit de se présenter aux élections. Je prolonge de récents travaux de recherche qui examinent les conséquences genrées de la violence politique pour la participation politique et la représentation descriptive des femmes. J'affirme en particulier que la violence politique observée dans les mois qui précèdent une élection introduit des déformations dans le processus de sélection du candidat, et donc réduit la part des femmes dans le vivier de candidats à un siège législatif. Sur le plan empirique, j'évalue cette hypothèse en combinant un nouvel ensemble de données transnational sur les taux de candidature des femmes dans 555 élections législatives nationales multipartistes organisées dans 136 pays entre 1990 et 2022 à des données à la temporalité détaillée sur des événements violents. Même en prenant en compte de multiples facteurs de confusion et en traitant l'hétérogénéité non observée, les résultats démontrent une solide association négative entre la violence politique intervenant lors du processus de sélection du candidat et le taux de candidature des femmes aux élections législatives nationales. Des analyses d'exploration complémentaires suggèrent que ces effets sont d'abord favorisés par des événements violents intervenant dans le contexte de conflits civils.

Introduction

Elections in many countries take place within a precarious and unstable political landscape characterized by so-

cial unrest and the threat of violence. Whether occurring on election day or in the weeks and months leading up to it, political violence has the potential to shape the preferences and behaviors of both political elites and voters, thereby determining both who runs for office and who wins elections (Birch, Daxecker, and Höglund 2020; Höglund 2009). Emerging evidence further suggests that these effects may be highly gendered (Stratton, Wright, and Hinojosa 2025; Wood 2024). Yet, these potential relationships re-

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main under-scrutinized, and current scholarship provides only limited insights into the effects of recent (or ongoing) episodes of violence on gender differences in political ambition, candidate selection, campaign strategy, or election outcomes. By contrast, numerous studies have linked large-scale conflict to gains in women's political empowerment (e.g., [Tripp 2015](#)). Several recent single-case studies likewise suggest that, at least in some contexts, conflict violence contributes to higher rates of women's candidacy and women's electoral success in subsequent decades ([Basnet and Ishiyama 2024](#); [Gaikwad, Lin, and Zucker 2023](#); [Hadzic and Tavits 2021](#)). However, as I elaborate below, there is reason to believe that the more immediate gendered implications of violence—particularly its short-term effects on women's candidacy rates—differ substantially from those that arise from its historical legacy.

I further probe these relationships by specifically examining the effects of political violence on the rate at which women compete in national legislative elections relative to men. While recognizing both the prevalence and severity of gender-based violence targeting women candidates and politicians,¹ I focus on the consequences of more general manifestations of political violence. Following the theoretical framework introduced by [Wood \(2024\)](#), I contend that lethal, politically motivated violence observed in the months leading up to the election (specifically during the candidate selection period) reduces women's share of the candidate pool competing in national legislative elections. This occurs via two interrelated mechanisms. First, politically motivated violence reduces women's political ambition and thus constrains the supply of women candidates. Second, it decreases the demand for women candidates among (predominantly male) party elites.

While [Wood \(2024\)](#) elucidated the linkages between pre-election violence, political recruitment, and women's descriptive representation, the empirical analysis therein was limited to examining the effects of election-related violence on women's descriptive representation and was therefore unable to assess any potentially gendered influence of violence on candidate selection. Similarly, because most existing studies (e.g., [Kang and Kim 2020](#); [Schroeder 2017](#)) overlook the potential influence of violence on the stages of the electoral process that precede the election, they have paid inadequate attention to the underlying mechanisms through which violence detrimentally affects women's descriptive representation. I address these empirical shortcomings by combining a new cross-national dataset on the gender composition of the candidate pools for 555 multiparty national legislative elections in 136 countries with temporarily fine-grained violent events data. The temporal granularity of these data permits me to explicitly analyze the relationship between violence observed in the window of time during which candidate selection processes unfold, and the gender balance of the candidate pools those processes subsequently produce. Results from a series of regression analyses provide robust support for the central hypothesis and suggest that such violence is indeed associated with lower rates of women's candidacy. Supplementary analyses disaggregating violence by subtype further imply that this relationship is driven principally by civil conflict-related violence rather than by violence associated with other forms of armed conflict.

¹See [Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo \(2020\)](#) and [Håkansson \(2024\)](#) among others.

War, Security, and Women's Political Participation

Previous research highlights the potential for war to disrupt embedded social hierarchies and gender norms, thus creating new opportunities for women and other historically marginalized and disempowered groups to participate in electoral politics ([Bakken and Buhaug 2021](#); [Brannon 2025](#); [Tripp 2015](#)). Studies examining the spatial relationship between historical legacies of large-scale conflict violence and subsequent women's descriptive representation in Cambodia ([Gaikwad, Lin, and Zucker 2023](#)) and Nepal ([Basnet and Ishiyama 2024](#)) document similar dynamics. Thus, evidence from both cross-national and geographically disaggregated single-case quantitative studies suggests that large-scale violence may propel women's political participation in the decades following its cessation.

Conversely, gender theorists have long asserted that war and political violence increase the salience of gender among the public and reify gender stereotypes, thus exacerbating entrenched biases that exclude women from political authority ([Elshtain 1985](#); [Sjoberg 2013](#)). Empirical research examining the influence of security threats on voters' preferences over leaders' gender characteristics and public attitudes toward female leaders reaches similar conclusions. Specifically, threat perception interacts with the pre-existing gender biases that predispose respondents to associate political leadership with male-typical agentic traits such as power, assertiveness, and dominance ([Eagly and Karau 2002](#); [Schneider and Bos 2019](#)), which in turn leads them to perceive men as more competent at addressing security-related policy issues ([Huddy and Terkildsen 1993](#)). Results from single-country experiments ([Falk and Kenski 2006](#); [Holman, Merolla, and Zechmeister 2022](#)) and cross-national survey evidence ([Kim and Kang 2022](#)) additionally suggest that security threats reduce respondents' willingness to endorse women candidates and reduce support for female leadership more broadly.

Other analyses have shown that armed conflict and security threats adversely influence women's descriptive representation. Contrary to the patterns observed in Cambodia and Nepal, studies examining the gendered legacies of violence in Croatia ([Glaudić and Lesschaeve 2023](#)) and Bosnia ([Hadzic and Tavits 2021](#)) find that constituencies that experienced more frequent atrocities subsequently elected fewer women to the national legislature. [Kang and Kim \(2020\)](#) and [Schroeder \(2017\)](#) similarly find that women's descriptive representation is lower in states that experience persistent territorial threats and those engaged in international rivalries. [Wood's \(2024\)](#) analysis likewise suggests that election-related violence is associated with women subsequently holding a lower share of seats in the national legislature. Lastly, [Jacobs et al. \(2013\)](#) find that fewer women were elected to the United States Congress from districts that experienced higher rates of criminal violence (e.g., homicides). Consequently, while war may create political opportunities for women in the long term, there is compelling evidence that different forms of security threats and political and social violence may suppress women's representation in the short term.

Few studies have explicitly analyzed the effects of political violence on women's candidacy. As with women's representation, case-specific examinations of the historical legacy of violence produce conflicting results. While [Gaikwad, Lin, and Zucker \(2023\)](#) and [Hadzic and Tavits \(2021\)](#), respectively, find that wartime violence in Cambodia and Bosnia is positively associated with women's candidacy rates in subsequent decades, [Basnet and Ishiyama \(2024\)](#) find the op-

posite relationship in post-war Nepal. By contrast, emerging evidence from recent studies examining the more immediate effects of violence is somewhat more consistent. Stratton, Wright, and Hinojoa (2025), for example, find that fewer women competed in Afghan legislative elections in provinces that experienced higher rates of civilian deaths (but not battlefield deaths). Rivera, Ortiz, and Koos (2025) similarly find that violent pre-election attacks against women activists subsequently decreased the number of women running in Colombian local elections. These results accord with the broader observation that women's political engagement is consistently lower where violence is a routine feature of the political landscape (Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022). However, given the limited scrutiny it has received, the relationship between political violence immediately preceding the election and women's political recruitment remains unclear.

Violence and Gendered Political Recruitment

To further explore this relationship, I adopt the theoretical model proposed by Wood (2024). This model, originally developed by Krook (2010) to elucidate the causes of persistently low rates of women's descriptive representation, describes a multi-stage process that encompasses the decisions of prospective candidates to pursue elected office (aspiration), the processes through which parties select candidates (nomination), and ultimately the electorate's endorsement of specific candidates or parties (election). By disaggregating the recruitment process, the model helps disentangle the factors that influence the *supply* of women candidates from those that shape parties' *demand* for them. Utilizing this framework, I contend that political violence creates additional barriers to women's entry into politics, both by reducing women's willingness to pursue candidacy (supply) and by diminishing party elites' desire to select aspirant women as candidates (demand).

Effects on the Supply of Prospective Candidates

Candidate supply reflects the pool of individuals willing to run for office (if provided the opportunity). In making this decision, prospective candidates consider the benefits of running versus the costs of candidacy weighted by their subjective assessment of their odds of victory (e.g., Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Krook 2010). While the overall benefits of running for office are presumably similar for men and women, previous studies illustrate that the baseline costs of campaigning are often distributed in a gender unequal manner. For example, women are more likely to have family obligations that conflict with campaigning, face greater challenges mustering financial resources, and are less well embedded in influential networks of support (Bernhard, Shames, and Teele 2021; Norris and Lovenduski 1995). They also experience more frequent threats and harassment (Bardall, Bjarnegård, and Piscopo 2020; Håkansson 2024). These (real or perceived) costs represent barriers to women's entry into politics. Increasing these costs further diminishes women's political ambition and thus lowers the rate at which they contest elections.

The threat of violence represents an additional barrier to women's pursuit of candidacy. While violence may deter both men and women from seeking elected office, women often perceive greater risks, feel more vulnerable to threats, and may therefore anticipate higher costs. Interviews with candidates and political activists as well as other anecdotal evidence collected across multiple countries suggest that

violence and insecurity accompanying elections disproportionately deters women prospective candidates and helps ensure male dominance in politics (Khan and Ara 2023; Olatunji and Ojatorotu 2022; UN Women 2014). Recent survey evidence likewise suggests that violence more negatively affected the political ambitions of women politicians in Ireland and Sweden compared to their male counterparts, even among women who are not directly exposed to it (Buckley, Keenan, and Mariani 2025; Håkansson 2024). Similarly, rising violence against female activists in Colombia led to a decline in the share of women competing in Colombian elections (Rivera, Ortiz, and Koos 2025), thus suggesting that risk perception strongly influences candidacy decisions. Other studies demonstrate that concerns about violence are more likely to suppress women's political engagement compared to men's (Dim and Aboubakar 2025; Hadzic and Tavits 2019). However, some studies have reported that women politicians are neither more likely than men to experience physical violence nor more likely to be deterred by it (Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022).² Thus, while risk perception likely represents a significant barrier to women's candidacy, it may not serve as the principal mechanism through which violence suppresses the rate at which women contest elections.

Political violence also exacerbates existing gender inequalities associated with candidacy. For instance, in many countries where violence routinely accompanies elections, the ability to hire private actors to provide security (for the candidate and supporters) and threaten opponents is viewed as an essential part of campaigning and advantageous in securing the party's nomination. Yet, because women candidates often face greater resources constraints, they are less able to engage in physically aggressive (often violent) politics to the same degree as men, making them both more vulnerable to violence from opponents and less likely to secure the elite support necessary to contest the election (Bouka, Berry, and Kamuru 2019; Khan and Ara 2023). In this sense, violence asymmetrically raises the costs of candidacy for prospective women candidates because it interacts with preexisting gender-based disparities in candidate resources.

Alongside (but distinct from) the costs it imposes, violence also differentially shapes candidates' subjective assessments of their odds of victory. Compared to men, women are typically less optimistic about their likelihood of political success (Lawless and Fox 2005). This reflects women's accumulated life experiences and gendered socialization patterns that lead women (and men) to believe that political success favors individuals with masculine traits (Bos et al. 2022; Lawless and Fox 2005). Parties foster these beliefs by actively encouraging aspirant male candidates to run while ignoring equally (or better) qualified women (Kenny and Verge 2016; Lawless and Fox 2005). Violence interacts with these perceptions to reinforce the belief among prospective candidates (and parties) that the public favors masculine (men) candidates (Håkansson 2024; Rivera, Ortiz, and Koos 2025). To the extent that violence exacerbates this perception, it diminishes women's assessment of their likelihood of both nomination and electoral victory. Additionally, the expectation of intense electoral competition has been shown to more broadly discourage women's political aspirations relative to men (Preece and Stoddard 2015). Because violence often reflects the intensity of electoral competition (Birch, Daxecker, and Höglund 2020, 8), it may there-

²However, women consistently report more frequent sexual violence (e.g., Bjarnegård, Håkansson, and Zetterberg 2022).

fore deter women prospective candidates at comparatively higher rates. Together, these arguments imply that violence depresses women's political ambition and thus reduces the supply of women candidates.

Implications for Candidate Selection

Parties are the principal gatekeepers of elected office and exert tremendous control over candidate recruitment and selection (Kenny and Verge 2016; Norris and Lovenduski 1995).³ They therefore play a central role in determining the gender composition of the candidate pool contesting an election and, by extension, women's representation thereafter (Kenny and Verge 2012). Despite this influence, surprisingly little scholarship investigates these processes (particularly in a comparative manner), and thus the internal politics of candidate nomination remain a "black box" (Bjarnegård and Kenny 2016; Kenny and Verge 2016). Broad cross-national and cross-party variations in nomination processes are nonetheless well-documented, principally in terms of the level of centralization. However, the relationship between national party dominance (i.e., centralization) of candidate selection and women's nomination rates remains ambiguous and likely depends on numerous contextual factors (see Kenny and Verge 2012, 2016; Kittilson 2006).

Official candidate nomination deadlines typically fall within a few months of the election; however, the process often unfolds over several preceding months. During this process, party elites evaluate prospective candidates and ultimately select nominees through a pre-determined endorsement system.⁴ Thus, the preferences of elites significantly influence the slate of candidates (or party list) that appears on the ballot. Gender biases held by these (typically male) actors represent significant barriers to women's advancement in politics (Kenny and Verge 2016; Krook 2010). The leadership of political parties has routinely based their assessment of potential nominees partly on traditional stereotypes, often prioritizing candidates from within their own (gendered) networks and those whose characteristics and backgrounds mirror their own (Lawless and Fox 2005; Niven 1998). This tends to produce nominees with traditionally masculine career portfolios (business, military, etc.) and those that exhibit stereotypically masculine leadership traits (Kenny and Verge 2016).

As strategic organizations, parties select the candidates they believe have the highest likelihood of electoral success given the context. Typically, party elites' gender-biased perspectives about candidate competitiveness lead them to favor male candidates over female candidates (Norris and Lovenduski 1995; Sanbonmatsu 2006). However, the decision environment influences parties' perceptions of which candidate characteristics—and thus which candidates—are most desirable. The social and economic conditions that characterize this environment interact with the gender stereotypes/biases held by elites to influence candidate selection. Specifically, parties tend to nominate women when they perceive an advantage to highlighting stereotypically feminine traits and (further) disregard women when they perceive benefits to showcasing masculine attributes. Valdini (2019), for example, finds that party leaders nominate more women candidates following corruption scandals because

they perceive it will signal the party's commitment to honesty and help mend its damaged credibility. Advancing similar arguments, Funk, Hinojosa, and Piscopo (2017) find that Latin American party elites nominate more women when public trust in parties is low and nominate fewer women during periods of economic uncertainty.

Violence is likely to interact with elites' pre-existing gender beliefs (and those they impute to the electorate) in similar ways. Rising violence increases the salience of security issues among voters, which as discussed above can adversely influence public support for women candidates. The combination of extant gender biases and elites' perceptions of the effects of gender stereotyping on voters' attitudes amplifies parties' preference for candidates that exhibit traditionally masculine traits. Barnes and O'Brien (2018) identify a similar dynamic in the context of ministerial appointments, where international security threats are negatively associated with the appointment of female defense ministers. In the context of legislative elections, recent violence may reinforce elites' perspective that women candidates are electorally disadvantageous and strengthen their preference for candidates with male-typical traits.

Expectations about the dynamics of the forthcoming campaign period also influence nomination decisions. Nomination processes sometimes witness substantial intraparty violence as rival factions attempt to physically assert control over the party (Seeberg, Wahman, and Skaaning 2018). Such violence entrenches among party leaders the perception that politics is analogous to war. Where party leaders equate campaigning with violence and anticipate violent threats or attacks against (or between) candidates, they may perceive incentives to nominate "tough" candidates they believe are capable of successfully navigating this turbulent landscape. Consequently, the observation of recent violence or the expectation of it during the campaign is likely to exacerbate elites' skepticism of women candidates and strengthen their preference for nominating men.

Empirical Expectation

The preceding discussion suggests that violence occurring within the candidate selection period interacts with pre-existing gender biases held by party elites and/or women prospective candidates to distort the processes of political recruitment. Specifically, the theory posits that such violence deters women political aspirants who would otherwise consider competing in the election and discourages party elites from selecting women as candidates. This produces the central hypothesis: *More frequent political violence during the candidate selection period is associated with lower rates of women's candidacy in national legislative elections.*

Data and Empirical Approach

To empirically evaluate the validity of the hypothesis states above, I combine newly compiled data on the gender composition of the candidate pools in national legislative elections and temporally fine-grained violent events data. I draw the sample of elections from the National Elections across Democracy and Autocracy (NELDA) dataset (Hyde and Marinov 2012), which includes all elections in which the legislature was chosen by direct election or by an electoral college elected by the people.⁵ Because the argument presented above assumes parties make strategic choices in

³Independent candidates represent only a small minority of viable candidates in most systems.

⁴Nomination authority is devolved to party membership through primaries in a small number of systems. Even then, the national party often holds significant influence over candidate selection.

⁵NELDA is incorporated into the Varieties of Democracy dataset (V-Dem[V13]) (Coppedge et al. 2023).

tended to maximize vote share, I exclude cases where no multiparty competition existed.⁶ Data constraints restrict the temporal domain of the analysis to the post-Cold War period.⁷ After merging this sample of legislative elections with the data on women's candidacy described below, the analyzed sample includes 555 legislative elections in 136 countries between 1990 and 2022.⁸ While incomplete because of missing values in the candidacy data, the sample demonstrates no systematic regional biases.⁹ However, there is a positive temporal bias because the availability of information on candidacy increases over time.¹⁰

To construct the measure of women's candidacy, I rely on two different information sources: (1) aggregate data reported in the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU) Parline database and through other authoritative published sources;¹¹ (2) candidate-level data extracted from the Constituency-Level Elections Archive (CLEA; Kollman et al. 2020). The former sources provide estimated percentages of women candidates in each election or counts of women and total candidates, from which percentages can be easily calculated. The latter provides candidate-level information, which requires additional processing and coding.

CLEA comprises hundreds of discrete constituency-level election datasets for scores of countries.¹² Alongside information such as the constituency name, party affiliation, and candidate (or party) vote share, these datasets often (but do not always) contain the names of the candidates. Because candidate sex is not reported in these datasets, I rely on the candidates' name(s) to predict their sex using an online gender detection tool (Gender-API).¹³ This algorithmic tool estimates the likelihood that a name is male or female by matching it with entries from country-specific name dictionaries.¹⁴ I use the given ("first") name for this process because it carries the gender signifier in most cultures.¹⁵ While still novel in social science research,¹⁶ scholars across multiple disciplines have employed similar algorithmic detection tools to collect and code information on the gender of research subjects based on given name where subject sex or gender identification is not explicitly provided (e.g., Pinho-Gomez, Hockham, and Woodward 2023; Squazzoni et al. 2021).¹⁷ After excluding cases where candidate name is not recorded and removing redundancies, the CLEA sample

includes codable information for more than 400,000 candidates in seventy-two countries.

Using these sources, I construct the measure *Women's Candidacy Rate*, which is operationalized as the percentage of candidates identified as women competing in a given legislative election.¹⁸ I exclude from this measure women candidates competing in single-sex reserved seat races because the argument assumes that nomination is zero-sum with respect to sex.¹⁹ Data from the IPU or other official sources were available for 393 elections (131 countries); by contrast, data extracted from the CLEA datasets yielded information for 268 elections (seventy-one countries). The samples of coded cases overlapped for 105 elections (fifty-eight countries). Where data from both sources were available, I relied on the IPU-derived measure because it reduces the likelihood of errors resulting from the algorithmic classification process. In the following analyses, the IPU-derived measure accounts for approximately 70 percent of the observations, while the API-derived measure accounts for 30 percent.

The set of overlapping cases allows for comparison of the reporting across the sources and thus permits a rough gauge of the accuracy of the API-coded sample (assuming accuracy in the alternative source data). Measures based on the two sources correlate at 0.96 with an absolute mean difference of 1.7 percent. Figure 1 illustrates the similarity of the scores across the sources. The density plot (left) depicts the distribution of the values of the differences between the two measures, while the scatterplot (right) visualizes the location of the scores relative to one another on the respective axes. These descriptive statistics provide confidence in the reliability of the measures originating from automated coding of the CLEA data.

Figure 2 shows country-level averages for *Women's Candidacy Rate*. For illustrative purposes, I restrict the temporal range to more recent elections (2005–2022). I do this because of the positive temporal bias in data availability and because of the uneven growth in women's candidacy across countries, which would complicate comparisons. Across the entire sample, the average rate of female candidacy ranges from <1 percent (Yemen) to 55 percent (Rwanda). As the map illustrates, candidacy rates cluster geographically with the highest rates in Western Europe (particularly Scandinavia and Mediterranean Europe) and the lowest across many parts of sub-Saharan and North Africa as well as in South Asia. However, there are significant intra-regional variations, indicating that country-specific factors likely have substantial explanatory power.

Figure 3 plots the 3-year moving average of *Women's Candidacy Rate* (line) and *Women's Descriptive Representation* (bars) for the sample. Women's share of seats in the legislature increases over time, rising from approximately 8 percent at the start of the series to more than 25 percent in recent elections, while the share of women candidates increases from roughly 13 to 27 percent. Notably, the two measures increasingly converge as the series progresses, implying that women's rate of electoral success has increased over time. This may reflect the success of quotas at promoting women's

⁶I exclude cases coded "not competitive" or "single party" elections according to V-Dem's "Elections Multiparty" measure.

⁷Data on women's candidacy is extremely limited before the 1990s, and the violent events data begins in 1989.

⁸This represents 45 percent of all relevant elections during the analysis period.

⁹See the Online Appendix for an analysis of patterns of missingness in the dataset.

¹⁰Data are available for only 25 percent of pre-2001 elections; however, this figure rises to 58 percent post-2000 and to 71 percent post-2010. See Online Appendix for robustness checks.

¹¹<https://data.ipu.org/>. Additional sources include documents from national election commissions, election monitoring groups, government reports, and published academic articles.

¹²Despite its scope, CLEA does not represent a comprehensive set of all elections.

¹³Gender-API supports name classification for 191 countries. See <https://gender-api.com/en/frequently-asked-questions>.

¹⁴Dictionaries rely on a range of open source data (published name dictionaries, government data, census information, etc.). I use a cut-off value of 50 percent to determine name gender. Increasing the threshold to 70 percent reduces the proportion of female names by 1–2 percent in most cases.

¹⁵Using full names reduces missing cases but reduces accuracy because many surnames are also given names.

¹⁶Though see Kikuta (2025).

¹⁷Performance assessments validate the accuracy of these tools for non-Western names (Sebo 2021).

¹⁸Several previous studies utilize data on women's candidacy in specific elections or by specific parties (Funk, Hinojosa, and Piscopo 2017; Hadzic and Tavits 2021; Shair-Rosenfield 2012). However, this represents the first cross-national dataset on women's candidacy.

¹⁹Reserved seat races where women compete against other women (e.g., County Woman Representative seats in Kenya or women's district representatives in Uganda) are excluded from the measure. However, cases where women compete directly against men for the same seats are included, even if a parallel reserved seat system also exists.

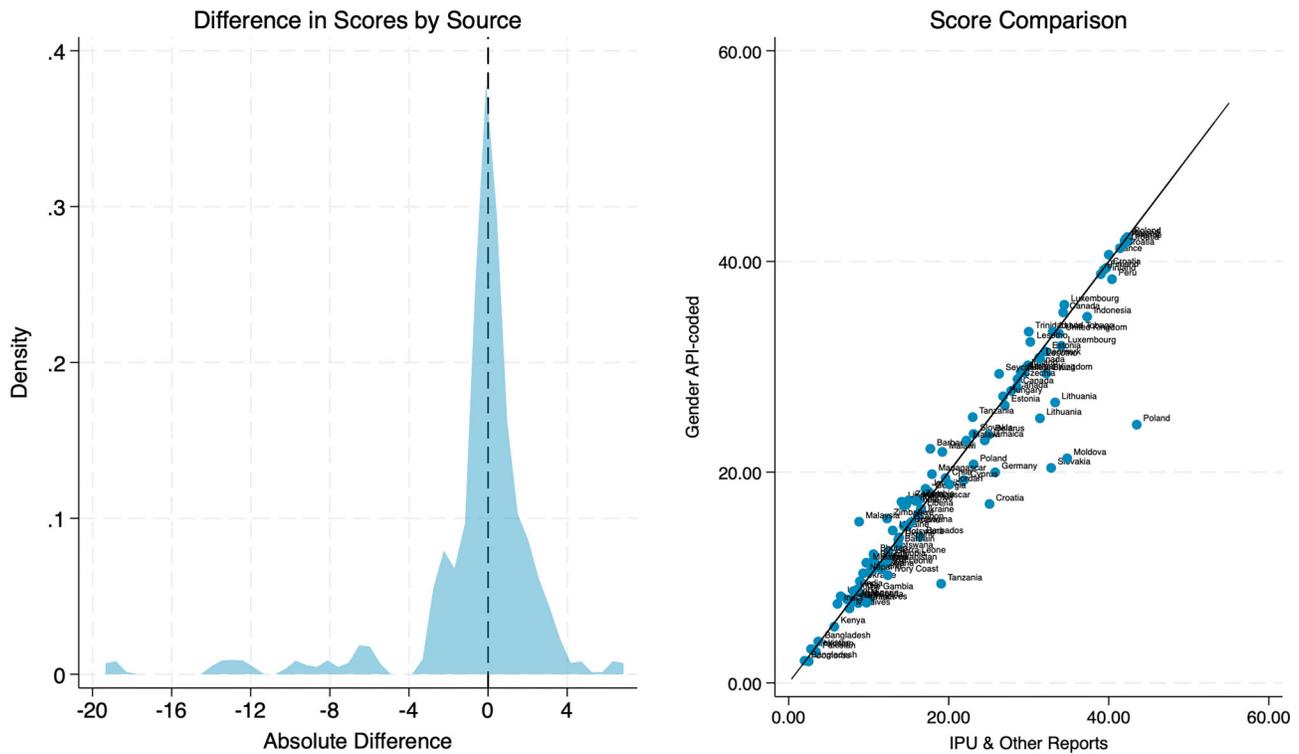


Figure 1. Inter-source comparability of women’s candidacy rates. Distribution of absolute difference between scores based on respective sources (left); scatter plot depicting relationship between scores based on respective sources (right).

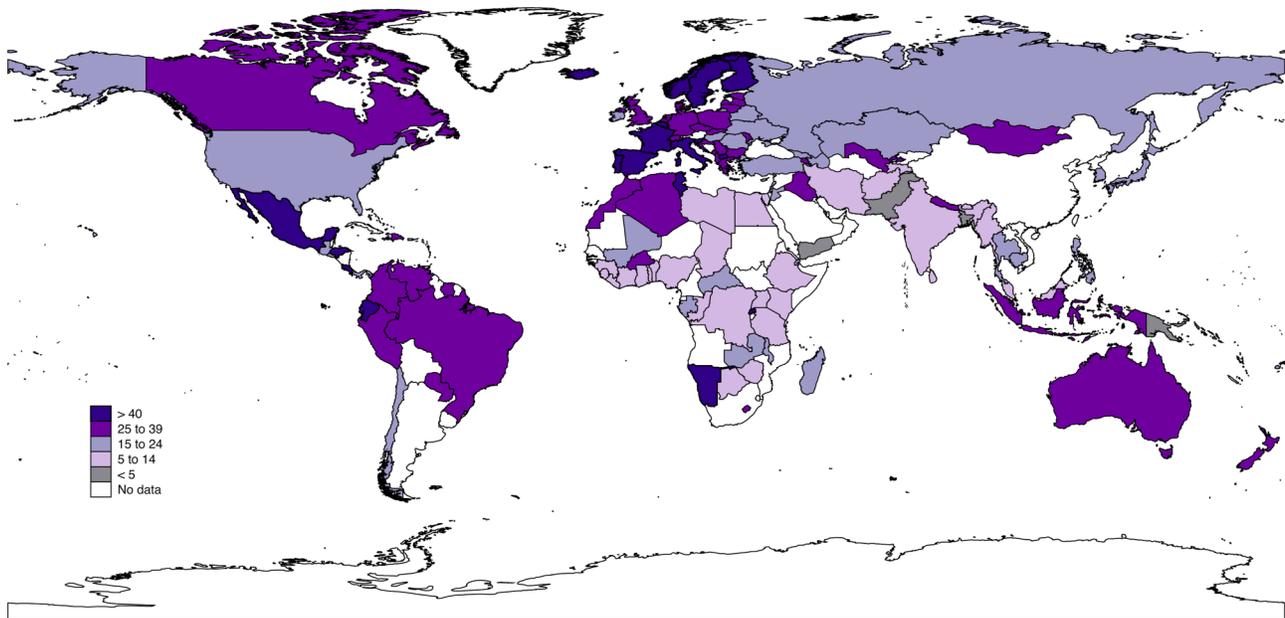


Figure 2. Women’s Candidacy rates, 2005–2022. Average share of candidates identified as women in national lower or unicameral house legislative elections (2005–2022). Measure excludes women competing explicitly for reserved seats in single-sex contests. Countries in white represent missing data or excluded cases.

descriptive representation (e.g., Paxton and Hughes 2015). It might also suggest that the electorate has become more supportive of women candidates over time—at least when parties choose to nominate them.

I construct the violence measures using event-level data on lethal political violence available from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program’s (UCDP) Georeferenced Event Dataset (GED) (V24.1) (Sundberg and Melander 2013). In line with the literature summarized above, which has

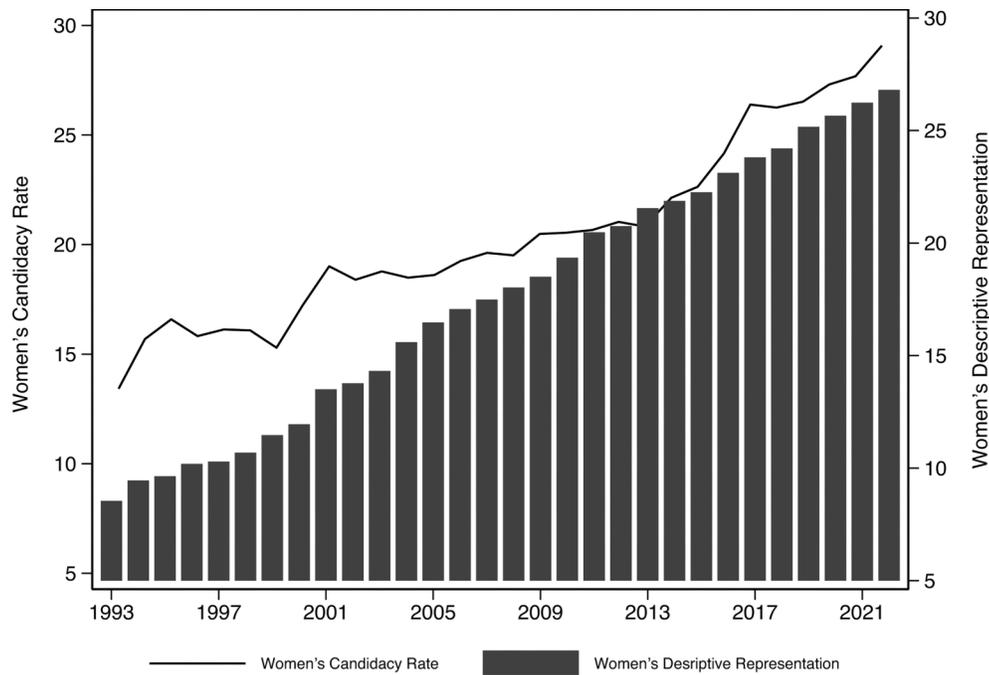


Figure 3. Change in women's candidacy rates and descriptive representation. Three-year moving average of share of candidates identified as women in legislative elections and share of seats held by women in the national legislature.

found that various forms of security threats and violence negatively influence women's political representation and participation, the argument presented here conceptualizes political violence in broad terms and makes no specific assumptions about the distinct effects of specific forms of violence. Consequently, the primary measure constructed for the analyses includes political violence perpetrated in a variety of different contexts. However, I return to this issue below and explore the relationship for violence associated with different conflict types.

The GED records violent events occurring in the context of a range of different types of armed conflicts, including interstate conflicts, intrastate political conflicts, and non-state actor conflicts (e.g., inter-party violence, gang warfare, and clan violence) that produced at least one death. Because the GED includes the estimated date of the event, I am able to restrict the events included in the violence measures to only those occurring within the approximate window of time during which political aspirants are most likely to make concrete decisions about pursuing candidacy and party elites evaluate and select among prospective candidates.

Lethal Events and *Deaths*, respectively, reflect the (log-transformed) sum of all lethal events and deaths that occurred within a 6-month window of time beginning 8 months before the election date and ending 2 months before the election date.²⁰ As an example, for an election date of September 1, 2025, the relevant temporal window includes the 6-month period beginning June 2025 ($t - 2$) and extending back through January 2025 ($t - 8$). Therefore, for this hypothetical election, all lethal events observed between January 2025 and June 2025 (inclusive) are included in the measures; events preceding that period and events following it are excluded. This window reflects a reasonable

estimate of the selection period based on a survey of published candidate registration/nomination deadlines for the countries included in the analysis.²¹ Results using alternative windows are presented in the Online Appendix.²²

With respect to confounders, I first include a measure of non-violent mobilization to account for broader patterns of political and social unrest. This indicator facilitates comparison of the influence of violent events occurring in the context of the election and non-violent forms of political contestation, which might likewise produce a downward shift in women's candidacy that is unrelated to the use of violence. *Mass Mobilization* is a continuous indicator reflecting the intensity of events such as protests, strikes, and sit-ins and comes from the V-Dem Dataset. I include the binary indicator *Gender Quotas* because placement and candidate quota rules robustly promote women's representation and candidacy (e.g., Paxton and Hughes 2015). I likewise include the variable *Reserved Seats* to account for systems requiring that women occupy a specific number of seats in the legislature. I account for each individually owing to the different mechanisms through which they influence recruitment and because the measure of women's candidacy I construct excludes women candidates competing for explicitly reserved seats. I also control for the quality of democratic institutions and practices by including the continuous measure of *Electoral Democracy* and for proportional representation systems (*PR System*), which previous studies suggest create more opportunities for women candidates than other systems. I control for the centralization of the candidate nomination process with the binary indicator *National Party Selection*. This

²¹This research produced information for sixty-nine countries. In 75 percent of these, the deadline fell within 2 months of the election. See the Online Appendix for details.

²²This includes a measure adjusting the temporal window based on published candidate selection deadlines. However, data for this measure are incomplete. I therefore include it as a robustness check.

²⁰In multi-round systems, I use the date of the first round.

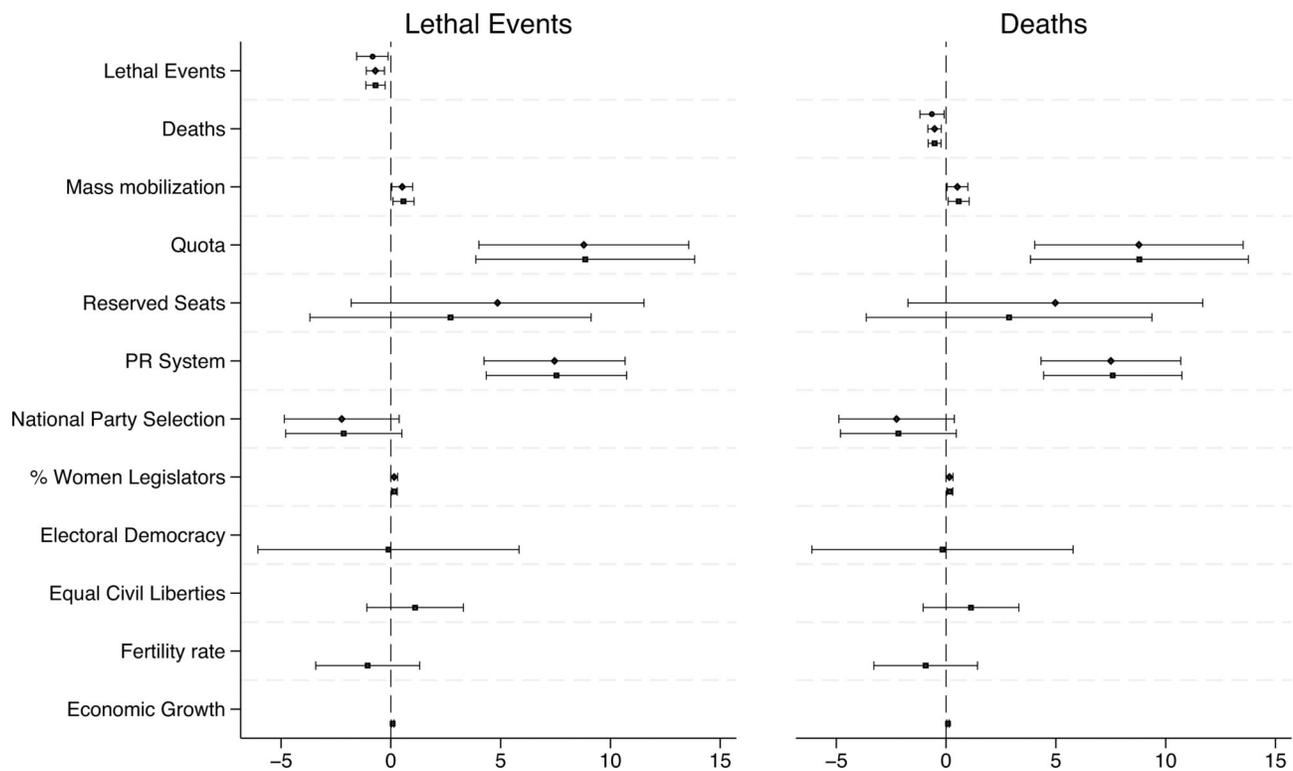


Figure 4. Effect of political violence on women's candidacy rates. Coefficients and 95 percent CIs from OLS models including two-way fixed effects. $N = 554$ (Models 1 and 4 [circles]); $N = 530$ (Models 2 and 5 [diamonds]); $N = 522$ (Models 3 and 6 [squares]).

measure indicates that candidate selection is controlled exclusively by or dominated by the national party apparatus. Each of these measures is taken from the V-Dem dataset.

Prevailing societal gender norms as well as legal protections on women's rights and freedoms could also influence women's access to political office and affect their electoral success. *Gender-equal Civil Liberties* capture the extent to which men and women in the country enjoyed equal civil rights. Because this measure represents a comparison of women's rights relative to men's, it is better able to capture gender equality than a measure that simply accounts for the level of rights women enjoyed in a country. *Fertility Rate* serves as a very rough proxy for the status and roles of women in the country. Because women's prior electoral success promotes women's candidacy (Shair-Rosenfield 2012), I also control for the share of women-held seats in the most recent legislature. These measures are available from the V-Dem dataset. Finally, because economic crises and uncertainty adversely influence women's candidacy (Funk, Hinojosa, and Piscopo 2017), I account for *Economic Growth* based on year-on-year change in national GDP (World Bank 2025).

Results and Discussion

To evaluate the principal hypothesis, I examine the results of a series of ordinary least squares (OLS) models utilizing a two-way fixed effects estimator (time and unit).²³ This estimator isolates the effects of the treatment (violence) on the outcome (candidacy) within panels while accounting for unobserved time-specific (election year) and unit-

specific (country) heterogeneity. Across the models presented in figure 4, the coefficients on the violence measures are negative and significant. Thus, regardless of the specific violence measure or the specification, the results indicate that an increase in political violence within the specified temporal window is significantly associated with a reduction in the proportion of women candidates competing in the election. These results provide robust support for the central hypothesis.

The indicators used in the preceding analyses encompass violent events associated with multiple different types of conflict. However, it is likely that some forms of violence may be more relevant for understanding variations in women's political recruitment than others. Violence related to internal civil conflicts, such as rebellions and insurgencies, is perhaps most likely to exert the hypothesized influence on women's candidacy because they share two features that directly impinge upon the conduct of elections and internal political decision-making. First, such conflicts are explicit manifestations of intense (often violent) political competition between the state and internal rivals, which fundamentally focus on stark disagreements over domestic politics. These conflicts therefore enhance the perception that elections are combative, aggressive, and male-dominated environments. Second, civil conflict violence is highly disruptive, not only to the lives of citizens but also to domestic institutions and political processes throughout the country.

Other forms of conflict may plausibly produce similar effects, but there is reason to believe the association might be much weaker. International conflicts can be destabilizing and have the potential to influence internal politics. However, because such conflicts are less often directly linked to

²³Models using alternative estimators are included in the Online Appendix.

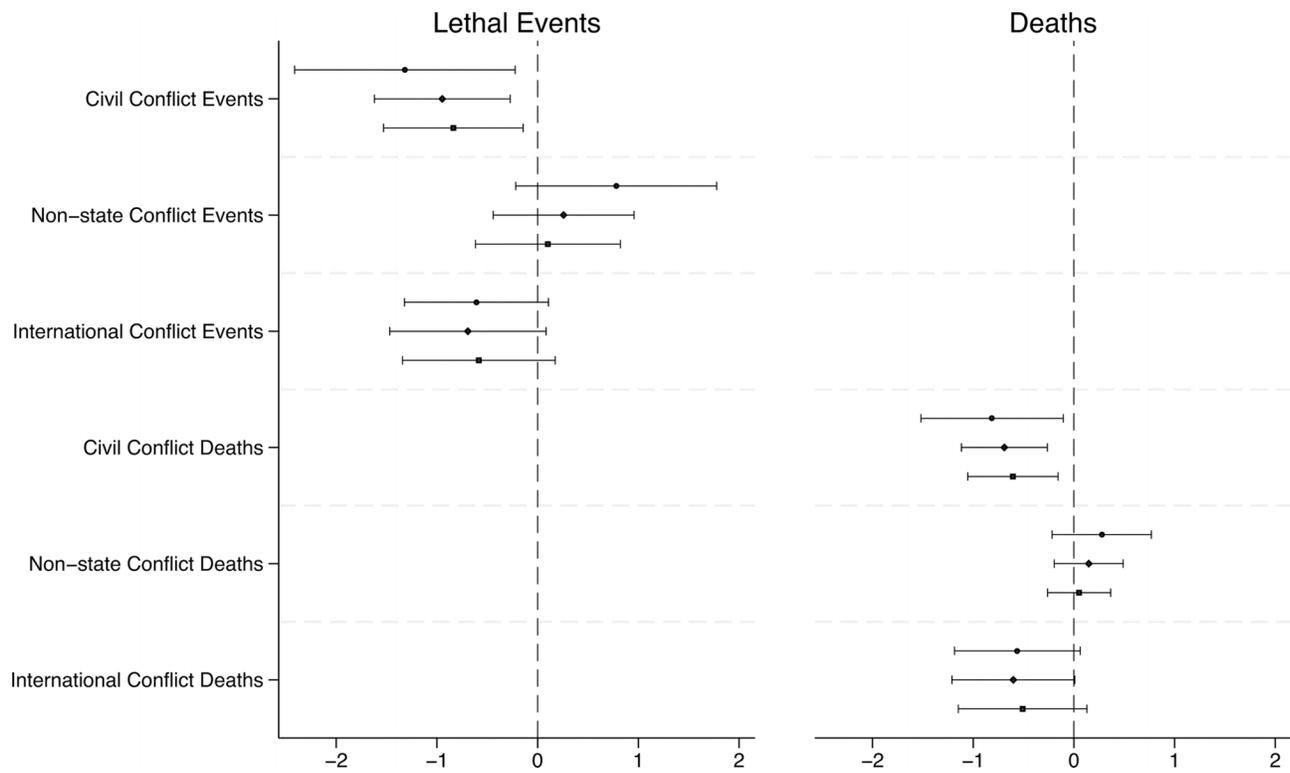


Figure 5. Effects of violence disaggregated by type. Coefficients and 95 percent CIs from OLS models including two-way fixed effects. $N = 555$ (Models 1 and 4 [circles]); $N = 531$ (Models 2 and 5 [diamonds]); $N = 522$ (Models 3 and 6 [squares]). Covariates excluded for presentation.

internal political contests, they are less likely to profoundly shape perceptions about the nature of the election. Indeed, as evidenced by the rally-round-the-flag phenomenon, external threats can temporarily decrease inter-party animosity and rivalry. International conflicts are also much rarer during the time frame of this study. Lastly, violence resulting from conflicts exclusively between non-state actors is frequently highly localized, and the disagreements and grievances that drive them are often peripheral to broader politics and electoral competition within the state.²⁴ While such events often influence local political decision-making, their impact on the beliefs of elites leading nationally competitive parties will likely be more limited. They may therefore exert comparatively less influence on national patterns of women's political recruitment.

While I do not develop formal hypotheses regarding these differences, I present the results of a series of exploratory analyses in figure 5. In these models, I disaggregate the violence indicator by conflict type based on information included in the GED: *Civil Conflict*, *Non-state Conflict*, and *International Conflict*. According to these results, only violence associated with civil conflicts consistently attains statistical significance, suggesting that the negative effect of violence on women's candidacy is largely driven by instances of violence committed by rebels, insurgents, and terrorist groups during campaigns against the incumbent regime. Violence associated with non-state actor conflicts (that do not directly involve a state party) is positive but fails to achieve signifi-

cance. However, due to the diversity of actors within this category, further exploration of this relationship is warranted. Finally, the coefficients for international conflict violence are negative and achieve at least marginal significance levels ($P < .10$). This result therefore dovetails with the broader expectations of the previous literature that has linked external security threats to women's representation.

In substantive terms, the results from figure 5 imply that increasing the number of lethal *Civil Conflict Events* from the sample mean (0.7) to one standard deviation above the mean (2.3) is associated with a 1.5 percent reduction in *Women's Candidacy Rate*, whereas a two standard deviation increase (3.7) is expected to reduce the share of women candidates by 2.8 percent.²⁵ Increasing *Civil Conflict Deaths* by one standard deviation (from 0.9 to 3) similarly reduces the share of women candidates by 1.1 percent, and a two standard deviation increase in lethal events (5) reduces *Women's Candidacy Rate* by 2.5 percent.²⁶ Put slightly differently, all else equal, a hypothetical election with 1,000 candidates competing for legislative seats would, on average, include roughly 220 women (22 percent [the sample mean]). However, political violence preceding the nomination deadline that produced 150 deaths would be associated with 25 (–2.5 percent) fewer women (relative to men) running for office. Thus, the effect is modest but non-trivial.

Turning to the controls, *Mass Mobilization* is consistently positive and significant in each model, implying that violent and non-violent unrest exert opposing influences on

²⁴Within UCDP GED (Sundberg and Melander 2013), "non-state conflict" includes violent conflicts (not involving the state) between a range of different actors: rebel factions, political parties, pastoral groups, criminal gangs, self-defense groups, ethnic militias, etc.

²⁵All predictions based on results from fully specified models. Logged values equivalent to 2, 10, and 41 events.

²⁶Equivalent to approximately 3, 20, and 148 deaths.

women's political recruitment.²⁷ This result offers assurance that the negative relationship between violence and women's candidacy is not simply driven by the intensity of competition. As anticipated, the prevalence of female candidates is higher in countries with *Gender Quotas* and those with *PR System*. The presence of *Reserved Seats* is not significantly associated with women's candidacy, perhaps due to the exclusion of candidates competing for many of those seats from the dependent variable. *National Party Selection* is consistently negative, suggesting that fewer women candidates compete in counties where nominations are highly centralized and dominated by the national party. However, the coefficient only attains marginal significance ($P < .1$).

Unsurprisingly, the *Percentage of Women Legislators* in the previous legislature is positively associated with women's candidacy, and it attains at least marginal significance across the models. This may suggest important demonstration effects, wherein women's electoral success promotes women's ambition or, alternatively, signals to parties that women can win elections (e.g., *Shair-Rosenfield 2012*). Neither *Gender-equal Civil Rights* nor *Fertility Rate* is significantly associated with women's candidacy rate. This could be because other factors included in the model indirectly account for the gender biases and attitudes present in society. Similarly, the extent of *Electoral Democracy* does not appear to influence women's candidacy rates. Finally, *Economic Growth* is positive and significant, suggesting that economic decline and uncertainty adversely impact women's political recruitment (*Funk, Hinojosa, and Piscopo 2017*).

Conclusion

While the effects of violence on women's political participation and representation remain understudied, this article sheds much needed additional light on these potential relationships. Building on the small number of existing studies examining the gendered electoral implications of violence and security threats (*Kang and Kim 2020; Schroeder 2017; Stratton, Wright, and Hinojosa 2025*), it explicitly examined the potential short-term negative consequences of civil conflict violence observed in the months preceding the election on the rate at which women run for legislative office and their subsequent electoral success. In particular, it further develops *Wood's (2024)* theoretical framework and empirically scrutinizes his (untested) claims regarding the negative impact of pre-election violence on women's candidacy rates.

Analyses using a newly constructed cross-national dataset on gender imbalances within pools of national legislative candidates and temporally fine-grained violent events data provide empirical support for the hypothesis that pre-election violence negatively affects women's candidacy rates. Exploratory analyses disaggregating violence by conflict type reveal that this relationship is driven principally by political violence occurring within the context of intrastate armed conflicts. Whereas *Wood (2024)* found evidence suggesting that explicitly election-related violence adversely influenced women's representation, the results presented above suggest that civil conflict-related political violence influences women's candidacy in gendered ways even when it is not necessarily directly related to the election. Interestingly, these findings also imply that the immediate effects of conflict violence may differ markedly from the effects of historical patterns of violence, which previous studies suggest may promote women's political participation and representation (*Gaikwad, Lin, and Zucker*

2023; Hadzic and Tavits 2021). These apparently temporally contingent effects deserve greater attention in future research.

The novel candidacy dataset introduced here represents an important contribution to the broader research agenda investigating the effects of violence on women's political participation, recruitment, and representation. These data will allow scholars to empirically examine a range of questions on these topics. For example, comparing the effects of violence on women's recruitment versus women's representation represents a logical extension of the research presented above. While these analyses have demonstrated the effects of violence on women's candidacy, scholars should also assess the effects across the different stages of the processes and consider how women's candidacy mediates any relationship between violence and women's descriptive representation. This would help scholars identify the locus of gender biases in these processes by permitting comparisons of the effects of violence on the candidate preferences of party elites versus those of the broader public.

While the analysis highlights the effects on women's candidacy as distinct from its effects on the outcome of the election, it is unable to disentangle the impact of violence on women's political ambition versus the effect on party elites' gendered preferences over candidates. Additionally, the analysis is unable to evaluate spatial variations in violence and candidacy. Recognizing that violence and election dynamics are driven by local factors, geographic disaggregation of these data represents an important extension of this research. Finally, the dataset suffers from numerous missing observations, which could introduce bias if the missingness is non-random. While there is no evidence of systematic missingness that would bias the results, it is impossible to rule out the non-random exclusion of cases. Owing to these limitations, it is important to expand and refine the dataset.

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Supplementary material

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Data availability

The data underlying this article are available on the ISQ Dataverse at <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/isq>.

²⁷The controls perform similarly regardless of the violence measures used.

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