Opposition to Women's Participation in Politics and Civil Society

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Widespread agreement exists among scholars and activists that women's civic and political participation is crucial as a matter of justice. Yet, women's civic and political participation is rarely equal to that of men, whether in numbers or in the exercise of power. For example, out of 193 ranked countries, only two countries in the world—Rwanda and Bolivia—have more than 50 percent women in their legislatures and only nine have 40 percent or more (IPU 2017). Even in civil society, where women participate in larger numbers, many organizations are male-dominated, especially the most influential ones, such as labor unions and political parties (e.g., Walsh 2010). This paper examines one reason for women's lower levels of participation in civic and political society: opposition. To date, evidence-based research on opposition to women's participation in politics and civil society has been ad hoc. This paper draws on the existing literature in political science, anthropology, sociology, and history to i) distinguish opposition from structural obstacles, ii) to explain why the term opposition is preferable and distinct from resistance or backlash, iii) to define and classify opposition, and iv) to parse the life cycle of opposition.

Resistance, Obstacles, Backlash and Opposition

In the feminist literature, resistance commonly refers to the actions that women take to challenge their subordination, including but not limited to gender subordination (Chawla, Dennis Ochs, Sen, Vallejo and Walsh 2017). Those who resist the gender status quo may be moderates who endorse women's increased participation elsewhere for instrumental reasons (e.g., Arat

2015), progressives who are committed to a more democratic form of politics that they believe must include women (e.g., Baldez 2003), or revolutionaries who take up arms to overthrow the regime and advance women's rights (e.g., Molyneux 2001). Hence, we suggest that scholars reserve the term resistance for action in *support* of feminist goals; we propose that action *against* feminist goals be termed opposition. In what follows we develop the logic and tools for scholars to describe and analyse "opposition," newly construed.

Opposition to women's participation is distinct from structural obstacles and from actions that inadvertently undermine feminist goals. Structural obstacles, such as the sexual division of labor and heternormativity, reproduce patriarchal gender norms. The barriers to women's participation in politics and civil society that these obstacles generate, such as women's double burden that deprives them of the time to engage in politics, do not actively oppose feminist goals, but instead constitute the grounds for feminist resistance. Actions that do not deliberately counter feminism can also function as obstacles. For example, scholars have found that when skilled feminists leave the women's movement and enter formal politics, this may lead to the demobilization of the women's movement and make it difficult for feminists in the state to advance their agenda (e.g., Burnet 2008; Geisler 2000).[1] Although obstacles such as these present significant roadblocks to women's emancipation, they either are invisible to most observers absent critical analysis or their negative effects on feminist goals are not intentional.

In contrast, opposition to women's participation is readily manifest given that it involves physical violence, intimidation, marginalization and procedural roadblocks, and that its intended

[1] In Peru, President Fujimori deliberately pursued this strategy to undercut the women's movement (e.g., Blondet 2002). In this case Fujimori's action was not an obstacle to feminist goals but a form of procedural opposition, as discussed below.

purpose is to contain or reverse feminist goals.[2] We thus define opposition as deliberate action (including words, behavior and symbols), by individuals, groups or institutions, to limit feminist goals.

Opposition, including opposition to women's equal participation in politics and civil society, is popularly referred to as backlash (e.g., Faludi 1991). Social scientists and historians also use the term when discussing conservative reactions to racial progress and immigrant rights in the United States (e.g., Abrajano and Hajnal 2015; Anderson 2016; Kimmel 2013). Despite its popularity, however, the concept has not been fully theorized (e.g., Bishin, Hayes, Incantalupo and Smith 2016). Backlash generally refers to attitudes and actions among those who feel threatened by changes in the status quo and who take action to secure or reinstate that status quo. Mansbridge and Shames (2008) argue that partisans of backlash do not reject all change, but instead selectively label some change as going too far; proponents of backlash thus validate select aspects of the feminist project even as they reject others. Further, advocates of backlash are unlikely to endorse violence (e.g., Anderson 2016; Kanthak and Krause 2012; Mansbridge and Shames 2008).

The existing literature on women's participation in politics and civil society, however, indicates that violence against women occurs in response to that participation, that some opponents to women's participation reject the feminist project *in toto*, and that some believe that what has been accomplished is sufficient, meaning that they oppose a continuation of the feminist project. We thus argue that backlash is one among several orientations toward feminism, and that at least two additional orientations exist: entrenched opposition and

[2] The distinction between obstacles and opposition are readily apparent in sources that discuss both, e.g., Panday 2008.

maintenance of the status quo. We suggest that backlash is rooted in traditionalism.[3] While traditionalism is evident in most societies at any given moment, it can fuel backlash when it responds to advances in women's rights by selectively attacking several but not all of those advances. In the contemporary US, Donald Trump is an exemplary gender traditionalist as his words and actions signal a rejection of current definitions of sexual assault that make it possible for him to abjure violence against women; he also engages in backlash as indicated by his reversal of several existing feminist policies, including the Equal Pay Initiative.

Entrenched opposition to feminism has its roots in a reactionary ideology. Reactionaries hold more extreme views on gender norms than traditionalists, as they reject feminism entirely. We refer to this form of opposition as entrenched because reactionaries refuse to countenance the idea of women's equality. The gender norms that they endorse and the opposition that they enact are more likely to result in physical violence, including violence against women, than other orientations opposing the feminist project. For example, many elite clan leaders seek to maintain control over female sexuality and group reproduction through child marriage and honor-based violence against women (Hudson, Bowen and Nielsen 2015).

Unlike reactionaries and traditionalists, conservatives attack few if any women's rights that have been established in their society; instead, they endorse their gender status quo. In the contemporary U.S. and the U.K., some scholars have labeled what we are calling a conservative position as postfeminism (e.g., Jordan 2016). Postfeminists believe that sufficient action has been taken to secure women's equality and that nothing further remains to be done. Jordan (2016, 37-

[3] This is not to suggest that individuals from across the political spectrum do not engage in backlash behavior. On the contrary, research confirms that individual backlash behavior is widespread among women and men (e.g., Rudman, Moss-Racusin, Glick, and Phelan, 2012). Here, we simply agree with Rudman et al. that this behavior is closely aligned with traditional gender norms and values, and add that it is most explicitly endorsed by traditionalists.

39) finds, for instance, that the transnational fathers' rights group, Fathers 4 Justice, adopts some feminist ideas and supports the idea of caring fathers, but ignores structural obstacles to women's equality. Members attribute different parenting and life outcomes to individual choice rather than gender injustice. Fathers 4 Justice does not aim to reverse feminist achievements or deny women's right to equality, but advocates for "gender-neutral" laws and issues like children's rights (39). The political ideology of Fathers 4 Justice is thus distinct from many clan leaders as well as Donald Trump. In short, the existence of reactionary, traditionalist and conservative ideological positions toward the feminist project indicate that backlash is too narrow a term to capture the full range and goals of those who do not support feminism.

We believe these distinctions are important not only for understanding the political logic underpinning the beliefs of everyday citizens and policy actors, but also for understanding a range of outcomes related to opposition, such as individual behavior, public opinion, voting and public policy. Specification of which outcome is being assessed is crucial as, for example, a backlash in public opinion is likely to involve different mechanisms and is distinct from a backlash in public policy. Although the need to distinguish among outcomes may appear obvious, Bishin, Hayes, Incantalupo and Smith (2016) note that too often scholars refer to a backlash without carefully analyzing the causal pathway that leads to a specific result; instead, they loosely link backlash to an array of outcomes. In addition, the different ideological positions and orientations toward gender norms distinguished above may play different roles in producing these varied outcomes and may require different types of feminist resistance. We therefore urge scholars, whenever possible, to adopt the term opposition when discussing action taken against feminist goals, to identify which ideological position and orientation they are assessing, to

specify the outcome that they are analyzing, and to clearly delineate the causal pathway between opposition and outcome.

Manifestations of Opposition

Although a spectrum of ideological positions and orientations is helpful in detailing different types of political opposition, we believe that it is essential to also distinguish among various expressions of opposition to better understand how ideological positions and orientations to feminist goals are manifested and might be resisted. We thus propose the following classification based on our research of the multidisciplinary literature that discusses opposition to women's participation in politics and civil society: violence, intimidation, marginalization and formal procedure (Table 1). Violence refers to individual, group and institutional use of physical force or power directed against a woman, group or community of women that often leads to physical injury, maldevelopment, deprivation or death (adapted from WHO). Examples include homicide, vigilante violence, sexual assault, strip searches, unwanted physical sexual advances, malnutrition, and the withholding of access to goods and services necessary for physical well-being.

Table 1. Types of Opposition

Type	Definition	Examples
Violence	Individual, group, institutional use of physical force or power that often leads to physical injury, maldevelopment, deprivation or death	· Vigilante violence · Intentional physical injury such as IPV · Sexual assault and unwanted physical sexual advances · Trauma and torture · Malnutrition · Impoverishment · Withholding of access to goods and services necessary for physical well-being · Homicide

Intimidation	Individual, group and institutional action (meaning deeds, words and symbols) that aim to deter, compel, prohibit, or castigate, but do not physically harm or otherwise enact these threats	· Armed vigilantes occupying public spaces · Verbal and emotional abuse · Hostility and stalking · Physically blocking women's access to a space · Threats to ostracize or deny a woman or women access to the home · Obscene remarks directed at a woman or group of women
Marginalization	Individual, group and institutional action that indirectly targets a woman, group or community of women by challenging women's epistemic authority and legitimacy, but does not physically harm anyone and is not an explicit threat	· Pitting women against each other · General obscene remarks · Mansplaining and manterrupting · Gossip · Ostracization, exclusion and noncompliance · Guilt discourses and other forms of manipulation · Silences, stereotypes, stigmatization, invisibility,
Procedure	Individual, group and institutional action directed at a woman, group or community of women or at feminist interventions that uses bureaucratic or legal power to undermine, impede or reverse the ability of women or interventions to fulfill their role/function	· Following the letter but not the spirit of the quota law; deliberately misunderstanding the law, fraudulent implementation of the law · Using bureaucratic red tape to minimize, ignore or neglect quota laws or women participants · Questioning the legitimacy of the intervention or women's participation by appealing to the rules of the game · Legal challenges to quotas

Intimidation refers to individual, group and institutional action (meaning deeds, words and symbols) directed at a woman, group or community of women to deter, compel, prohibit, or castigate, but that does not physically harm or otherwise enact these threats. Examples include armed vigilantes occupying public spaces, verbal and emotional abuse, hostility, stalking, physically blocking women's access to a room, threats of ostracization and obscene remarks.

Marginalization refers to individual, group and institutional action (meaning deeds, words and symbols) that indirectly target a woman, group or community of women through tactics such as silences, stereotypes, stigmatization, invisibility and exclusion—often by challenging a woman or women's epistemic authority (adapted from Hawkesworth 2003). Examples include tokenism, topic extinctions, *pendejo* game, Catch 22s, pitting women against each other, general

obscenities (e.g., pictures of pornography on the wall), mansplaining, gossip, ostracization, and guilt discourses.

Procedure refers to individual, group, and institutional action (meaning deeds, words and symbols) intended to undermine, impede or reverse women's participation *and interventions*, such as quotas, that increase women's participation in politics and civil society. Examples of procedural roadblocks to quotas include legal challenges that hinder or impede quota implementation; minimizing, ignoring or neglecting the quota; following the letter but not the spirit of the quota law; and fraudulent implementation (Krook 2015, 14). Procedural roadblocks are not limited to quotas. Madhok and Rai (2012), for instance, find that the Indian government denied women community workers who they sponsored the benefits of formal state employment, such as a salary. At the same time, the government insisted that women community workers could not claim the benefits to which a community worker is entitled, which include unionizing. The government thus used bureaucratic red tape to oppose women community workers' formal participation in the state and their participation in civil society (unions). The result was to leave these women with no support when faced with community opposition, including sexual violence and harassment. Having set out these various forms of opposition, we suggest that the next step is to identify where these different forms of opposition occur, as the latter is crucial for informing feminist strategies of resistance and can also contribute to scholarly understanding of the life cycle of opposition.

Life Cycles of Opposition

What is the life cycle of opposition to women's political and civic participation? Some scholars have found that opposition to women's participation in politics and civil society declines over time (e.g., Ochs 2007, Carreiras 2006, Duncanson and Woodward 2016). In the

case of Israel, for example, women's participation is now routine, even though it was initially opposed on the grounds that this participation either was of a foreign source, having been "imported" from the United States, or was perceived to be incompatible with religious law (Ochs 2007).

However, gender scholars in comparative politics looking across an array of cases find that women's participation and opposition to it ebbs and flows over time. In this research, the factors that affect women's participation are regime type, type of electoral institutions, the strength of the women's movement, and masculinist norms in institutional bodies such as legislatures, trade unions, and social movements (e.g., Walsh 2010, Waylen 2007). While the first set of case studies suggest that opposition to women's participation diminishes in intensity as women become routine participants, the latter body of research suggests that while opposition may diminish over time within each cycle, it can reemerge with renewed intensity during a new cycle, as is evident in Rwanda (Burnet 2008, Berry 2015).

A third body of research offers insights as to how the above two trends might work in tandem (or that at least three trends are possible under a range of circumstances). In some cases, improvements to women's civic and political participation in one site can prompt opposition in another. Consider women's political participation at the village level in much of South Asia (Bhatla and Rajan 2003). In response to increases in women's political participation, *khap panchayats* (all-male, unelected village councils) have emerged to punish women for putative gender transgressions in the social sphere, such as owning cell phones and listening to music (Bharadwaj 2012, Kaur 2010, Yadav 2010). This trade-off, where participation in formal politics is offset by greater gender policing in the community, is not isolated to South Asia (e.g., Burnet 2008). The concept of a "vicious spiral" illuminates how opposition might not only diminish or

ebb and flow throughout a cycle, but that it might also move across sites (Chawla, Dennis, Ochs, Sen, Vallejo and Walsh 2017).

To better empirically evaluate the life cycle of opposition, we propose a four-fold classification to study sites where opposition occurs: the private sphere, public sphere, state and market. This classification draws on theories about civil society (e.g., Chambers and Kymlicka 2002). By private sphere, we mean the site where identity formation, social integration, physical and cultural reproduction occur, such as within the family, among friends, and in the home. The public sphere, in contrast, refers to where discussion and talk coordinate action, such as political campaigning, social media, social movements, and within political parties.[4] Political parties straddle the public sphere and the state, but the state is nonetheless a unique site as it is where hierarchical, coercive power and written rules coordinate action, as bureaucratic red tape and the security apparatus attest. Finally, the market is the site where the profit motive, prices, and efficiency coordinate action, such as many microfinance organizations, corporations, and the for-profit media. Using this four-fold classification to identify the sites where opposition occurs, we believe, will enable scholars to investigate the life cycle of opposition in future research, tracking where and how opposition moves.

Conclusion

Opposition to women's participation in politics and civil society requires further research. We highlight here some key areas of interest that could be further developed. A future research agenda would treat opposition as both an independent and dependent variable and undertake

[4] This classification does not ignore the feminist critique of the public-private binary. Instead, we argue that the public sphere is one site where the personal gets politicized, meaning that it is the place where collective problems can be identified and where people can speak out and address oppression that has been hidden, ignored, and denied. Because the power of social change is located in sites like the public sphere, women need to enter it if they are going to successfully challenge the public-private binary (Walsh 2010, 43).

careful causal analysis to assess what triggers various types of opposition and outcomes, and what types of resistance to it are most successful. We also recommend more attention to women's participation in civil society as opposed to formal politics (where most of the research focuses on quotas), because this arena is crucial for the passage of sex equality policies (Htun and Weldon 2016) and is where ordinary women are most likely to participate. Little research exists on the role of the media (including social media) in enhancing or limiting opposition to women's political and civic participation (Lean, Eckert, Gerring, Jun, Lacouture, Liu and Walter 2017). Studies that investigate cases where opposition was lacking, was mitigated relatively easily, or dissipated quickly also would be important to better understand the dynamics of opposition.

Further, scholarly research on opposition is needed that disaggregates women by multiple categories of disadvantage and privilege and that investigates whether (and how) opposition reproduces and entrenches these inequalities. Additionally, the literature does not sufficiently explain how and why women's participation persists over time despite opposition, or why positive spillover effects associated with women's participation can occur even in the absence of opposition, as in Afghanistan, where we might most expect it (Beath et al. 2013).

Finally, as the literature neglects several regions, we recommend focusing on regions where analysis is sparse, such as Latin America or Pacific Island countries. We also are convinced that multidisciplinary and multimethod studies are needed to address these gaps, including in-depth case studies attentive to context and comparative studies within and across countries and regions that seek generalizable findings. While this research agenda is by no means exhaustive, it demonstrates the substantial work that remains to be done if we are to better

understand opposition to women's civic and political participation and how to overcome it

(Chawla, Dennis, Ochs, Sen, Vallejo and Walsh 2017).

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